

La Pépinière: Girl Participation Principles¹²

The aim of this document is to support La Pépinière and its partners to create and expand opportunities for adolescent girls' participation, including research and capacity building activities.

We recognize that the category **'adolescent girl'** as conceived in other contexts or internationally (e.g. age 10-19 or 12-19) is not particularly meaningful in DRC, where a girl becomes a woman when she marries³ and unmarried girls in their early 20s can also be considered as 'girls'. Our initial exploratory work with girls and young women in Kinshasa suggests that the most pertinent term for the girls and young women La Pépinière will work with is *Elombe Mwasi* (female youth in lingala) which is generally used to refer to girls and young women from around age 12 to 25.

La Pépinière believes that all children have equal rights to safety and protection. However, this framework and these principles refer to girls and young women, as they are the principal focus of our work. Nonetheless, it should be understood that the values, beliefs, principles and practices described in this document, apply equally to all children.

Participation Principles

Meaningfully engaging girls. Our girl-centred approach will ensure that girls are engaged meaningfully throughout the research process and in our capacity building activities with various local and international stakeholders. Our approach will be rooted in girls' perspectives and local notions of girlhood and transitions through this phase of adolescence. Rather than simply being consulted about the research, we will genuinely involve and support girls to undertake a range of research activities including informing the research agenda, developing research methods and tools, designing locally appropriate ethical guidelines, carrying out research within their social networks, analysing data and validating research findings. In doing so, they will shed a unique light on the research because they will have access to information, events, experiences and understandings that external researchers can't possibly have.

Examples of practices

We will ensure that girl researchers participate in generating research and interview questions that are pertinent for their lives and concerns.

We will ensure that questions and activities (in all consultations and interviews with girls) are well designed to allow girls to express themselves fully and in their own words.

We will involve girls in helping to deliver La Pépinière capacity building and research dissemination events (e.g. girl-led journeys, telling their stories, leadings sessions in workshops)

Reflecting the diversity of adolescent girls. We recognize the right of all girls to equal participation and safety. This principle refers to all girls regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, marital status,

¹ The principles below have been developed based on best practice internationally (e.g. the work of Global Child Protection Services, Keeping Children Safe Coalition, the Girl Hub, DFID GEC, the Population Council, and subject matter experts such as Corinne Davey and Ruth Edmonds) Christensen, P & Prout, A (2002) "Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children", *Childhood*, 9 (4) pp.477-497; Mahon, A & Glendinning, C et al. (1996) "Researching Children: Methods and Ethics", *Children & Society*, 10 pp.145-154; Punch, S (2002) "Research with children: The same or different from research with adults?", *Childhood*, 9 (3) pp.321-341; Thomas, N & O'Kane, C (1998) "The Ethics of Participatory Research with Children", *Children & Society*, 12 pp.336-348

² Knowing Children (2009) *The right to be properly researched: how to do rights-based, scientific research with children* (Bangkok: Black on White Publications, Norwegian Centre of Child Research and World Vision International)

³ See for example Davis, L. (2014) "Social Norms influencing the economic empowerment of adolescent girls in Kinshasa, DRC"

religion or other defining characteristics. Furthermore, we will embed a strategic focus on including the poorest and most vulnerable girls⁴

Examples of practices

We will collect quantitative and qualitative data on all categories of girls including those with low or no literacy, out-of-school girls, young mothers, and those girls not living in regular household structures.

We will select a range of girls as researchers in the Girl-Led Research Unit (GLRU), including those with lower literacy skills and education levels, those living in different neighbourhoods and types of household.

We will look for curiosity, engagement and potential to learn rather than formal will adapt and tailor our training and capacity building activities for girl researchers to ensure equal participation and inclusion – for example through use of visual materials and exercises, multiple languages and one-on-one and small group mentoring in response to individual needs

Valuing girls' time and their contributions. We will ensure that we organise activities at times that are convenient for girls and do not compete with their other commitments such as schooling or income generation. We will work with the girls to develop an appropriate remuneration package for their involvement.

Examples of practices

The planned interview and mentoring schedule will involve no more than 8 hours per week per girl researcher and be organised at times that suit her schedule (work, school, family commitments)

We have agreed a remuneration package with the girl researchers and transport costs when they need to travel for the project.

Providing information to girls and obtaining informed consent. We will ensure that girls participating as researchers or as informants are provided with all the relevant information on their expected involvement in the programme, including any benefits and incentives as well as risks so that meaningful informed consent can be obtained from all those who wish to take part. We will obtain informed verbal and written⁵ consent from the girls and their parent(s)/caregivers and check in periodically to renew this consent.

Examples of practices

We will produce an information and consent form that is translated into the local language and read out by enumerators and researchers to explain the objectives of the study, implications of girls participation, how data will be used, principles and limits of confidentiality and anonymity etc.

Building girls' capacities and skills. Our approach will contribute to the development of capacities and skills amongst girls. These include not only research skills but also other life skills, such as building confidence, developing social networks and opening conversations between girls and their peers and other family and community members, which are not normally possible.

⁴ This category roughly overlaps with the lowest 20% in terms of income poverty. These girls may be: out-of-school' affected by FGM/C; working in exploitative circumstances, including domestic work; living on the street; affected by HIV/AIDS; marrying early and have children before the age of 18; sexually exploited; living with disabilities; lacking reliable adult care; lacking friends; displaced or in humanitarian settings; living in institutions (orphanages, juvenile care, prisons etc.); or living in circumstances which combine any of the above vulnerabilities.

⁵ Informed verbal consent is preferred if/when there are realities such as low literacy or illiteracy.

Examples of practices

In the first phase, girl researchers will receive training in research, interviewing, social mapping and analysis using a variety of participatory methods in workshops and small group settings.

Girls will be mentored on location in their own neighbourhoods once a week during the initial research period to provide them with ongoing coaching, feedback and skills building.

Working in empowering and transformative ways: A strong gender lens will be applied to the work of the programme. We will ensure that our research with girls is empowering, rather than extractive, and that research and outputs are scrutinised from a gender perspective with particular consideration for how gender norms are measured and data gathered.

Examples of practices

Our research and programme designs will pre-empt and avoid backlash by ensuring a detailed understanding of the context (social norms, codes, rules) and specific risks for girls.

We will also encourage girls to examine the status quo of their position in society and support them to engage with other community stakeholders including community leaders, men and boys, as well as policy makers and programme managers.