

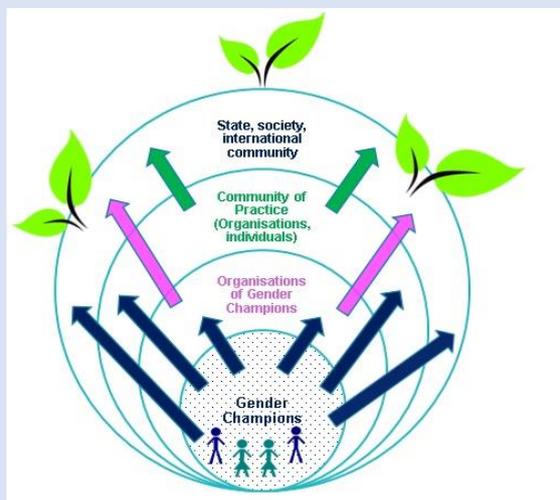
Working Together for Better Results

Gender Champions model: Case Study 1

This pamphlet is the first in our Case Study series documenting the work of the Gender Champions. As well as a personal story of empowerment, the case study highlights how research and evidence about adolescent girls and young women can be successfully shared with communities using an innovative peer-led approach, serving as an entry point for both organisational and attitudinal change.

Who are the Gender Champions?

The Gender Champions are a group of well-respected, well-connected thought leaders in the area of gender in DRC. They have been selected to represent a diverse range of expertise and profiles. All of them have deep knowledge of local dynamics; the socio-cultural environment; gender programming; and girls' and women's empowerment in the DRC. Influential within their organisations, these women and men come from within the civil society sector, public and private sector, and are interested to collaborate and to network.



The Gender Champions work to build capacity within the GoDRC and civil society. By identifying opportunities for change in key sectors and at different levels, they *work together* to implement strategic approaches through *complementary* activities. They might focus on their own organisations; organisations in the wider community of practice around adolescent girls and young women (AGYW); and other state/ society/ international entities beyond.

Background note on context and methodology

This case study concerns the work of « Coalition des Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement » (CFPD), a national civil society organisation working for women's economic empowerment in Kimbanseke, a neighbourhood in Kinshasa. CFPD played an active role in the identification of members for La Pépinière's Girl Led Research Unit (GLRU), consisting of 15 adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), and one of the current members originates from Kimbanseke.

This case study is based on material drawn from a focus group discussion (FGD) with staff from « Coalition des Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement » (CFPD), as well as in-depth interviews with key informants (a Gender Champion; two adolescent girls who have participated in CFPD's economic empowerment activities; parents of young women involved in the activities; the police commandant of Kimbanseke, a community leader and a member of [La Pépinière's Girl Led Research Unit](#)).¹

A story of personal development...

Serge Ndongo Malela is a Programme Manager at « Coalition des Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement » (CFPD). Serge learned about La Pépinière after his organisation was invited to a presentation about the programme along with other women's rights organisations, and he was selected as a Gender Champion in 2016.

Serge believes that belonging to the Gender Champion network has supported his professional skills development - in particular how to mentor adolescent girls. The network has provided opportunities for contact with different kinds of professionals, experts and stakeholders – including the mentors that work with the Girl Led Research Unit. Serge's experience underpins his belief that belonging to such a heterogeneous and multi-disciplinary network, who all nevertheless have a common interest in the empowerment of adolescent girls/ young women, provides a unique opportunity for peer learning and teamwork.

"It has linked up different kinds of actors; it is very rare to find similar networks in DRC... We complement each other."
Serge, Gender Champion, CFPD

... that can drive meaningful organisational change...

As a result of Serge's role in the Gender Champion group, and influenced by the research of the GLRU of La Pépinière, Serge has been a catalyst in changing CFPD's approach to adolescent girls and young women (AGYW). Participating in the outreach activity in Kimbanseke to disseminate the GLRU's research on AGYW in Kinshasa was a real turning point: he describes how this stimulated an internal process of discussion and debate within CFPD on the organisation's approach to AGYW economic empowerment and their focus on AGYW within their interventions. A key factor in this was the CFPD team seeing the GLRU researchers standing up and presenting the research they have conducted

"CFPD began to view adolescent girls as actors with all of their faculties, rather than as victims."
Serge, Gender Champion, CFPD

themselves. CFPD had previously only worked with AGYW as part of their programme with girl-mothers and survivors of sexual abuse and, as Serge explained, had predominantly viewed AGYW as 'victims'. The presentation of research by GLRU began a process of internal debate on whether, and how, they should shift to working with AGYW as actors with their own agency and ambitions for their own lives. Serge found little resistance from his colleagues in his championing of this shift because, on top of the powerful presentation, they could also read the GLRU's robust research reports containing solid data and evidence on the realities of AGYW's lives, a further testimony to AGYW's agency.

The organisation has now adapted its approach to explicitly include AGYW in its economic empowerment work. Through their programming, CFPD now supports AGYW to form self-sustainable loans and savings groups, where members contribute their own funds. CFPD has provided training to the adolescent girls and young women on how to organise themselves and manage savings. The donor supporting CFPD (Affaires Mondiales, Canada) has responded positively to the idea of CFPD's inclusion of AGYW.

These changes have begun to make a real difference to AGYW. Two AGYW involved in CFPD's new groups described how they have helped them to start successful businesses and as a result are now able to financially support themselves and their families. They reported that there had been several examples in the community of girls increasing their economic independence and their ability to contribute to their family as a result of their involvement in the group, for instance through business

activity in the food or transport industries. The young women believed that the support provided by CFPD has made them better at managing their money, and has helped them to pay their own school fees. As a result, more girls are now asking to be part of CFPD's economic empowerment work. This great opportunity is not without risk: the AGYW also mentioned that involvement in the groups can result in pressure to share all of their income with the family, rather than save anything for themselves. The challenge will be to promote girls' involvement within a framework of empowerment that keeps the protection and safety of AGYW at the forefront.

Serge's involvement with the Gender Champions has also provided new opportunities to expand their economic empowerment work with AGYW and test out CFPD's new approach. Through the Gender Champions, Serge participated in '16 days of activism against all forms of violence against women' in November 2016, and through this involvement forged a connection with another organisation, Women in Media, who became aware of CFPD's shifting focus on AGYW's economic empowerment. When Women in Media were approached by a group of businessmen who wished to support adolescent girls, under a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, they linked the business men up with CFPD. Through this newly forged connection, CFPD are piloting support to 20 AGYW to enable them to enter the working world and find valuable economic activity. Initially, CFPD planned to provide the 20 AGYW with different types of vocational training, through the support of the CSR initiative. However, when five of the AGYW argued that a start-up business loan would be of more use to them at this stage, CFPD responded to their preferences and negotiated loan support instead. Serge believes that previously CFPD would not have listened so carefully to the AGYW's priorities or respected their agency in deciding the next steps in their own economic empowerment. Serge has been charged by his colleagues with developing this pilot further, and seeking further funding and collaborations to support a greater number of AGYW.

[..and empower girls themselves to bring the community on board.](#)

Change can often be challenging, and the new approaches involving AGYW were not welcomed by everyone. As their approach shifted, CFPD identified a lack of support and confidence from local leaders, parents and community members in Kimbansenke with regards to adolescent girls' empowerment. Increased community engagement was clearly required to ensure that the immediate environment was more supportive.

Through Serge's involvement in the Gender Champions group, he was able to seek advice and active collaboration from other Gender Champions and from La Pépinière's girl researchers. First, Serge invited members of the Girl Led Research Unit to share the results of their research with the community in Kimbansenke through a 'tribune d'expression populaire' – a moment he describes as an important turning point for altering views of AGYW in the community – as well as within the staff of CFPD. The 'tribune d'expression populaire' was very well attended, with over 100 community members. Next, fellow Gender Champions supported Serge to talk with local leaders (chef de rue, chef de quartier and others), parents and community members about the possibilities offered by adolescent girls' economic empowerment, building on the earlier presentation by the GLRU.

Serge described the positive responses to this increased engagement – including a demand for more such exchanges. The engagement and authority of the Gender Champions appears to have opened up a space for greater dialogue in the community on AGYW's economic empowerment, the benefits of which will hopefully continue to emerge.

Serge has identified two key factors in his approach to successfully beginning to shift community attitudes towards AGYW and support programmes working with AGYW as agents in their own economic empowerment. He believes that the involvement of Agathe Makasi, the youngest of the

GLRU from Kimbanseke was crucial. At a focus group held by CFPD with members of the community, the authorities and the police, Agathe was the central speaker, presenting her own experiences of participating in the GLRU and her views on AGYW's economic empowerment. As the youngest member of the GLRU, and one who Serge believes was previously 'overlooked' in her community, hearing her experiences and seeing the respect given to her, played a key role in opening parents' minds regarding their own daughters' involvement in economic empowerment activities. Amongst those who attended the discussion were some of the parents of the 20 AGYW involved in the pilot discussed above, catalysing their support for their daughters' involvement. Agathe's visibility within the community - for instance undertaking research activities using the technology with which she had been provided - had a significant positive impact. However, Serge has noticed that her visibility and the promotion of her work and her role with the GLRU caused some tensions and expressions of jealousy amongst young men in the community, who felt that they had been overlooked. Such child protection issues need to be handled carefully.



Agathe, GLRU member from Kimbanseke involved in the 'tribune d'expression populaire'

"When the GLRU came to give feedback, everything kick-started!...The interventions of the Gender Champions have made it easier for us to work with AGYW in this environment"
Serge, Gender Champion, CFPD

The other key factor in CFPD's successful approach to bringing the community on board is the embedded nature of the organisation in Kimbanseke, and the mutual trust that has developed over the years. Serge highlighted that the in-depth understanding of and years of engagement with the community and, on the other hand, the familiarity of the community with the work of CFPD, were vital in bringing the community on board. The mutual trust and understanding that already existed with the community provided an entry point for CFPD to begin to shift attitudes, backed up by the research, support and engagement of the GLRU and Gender Champions.

Result? Real change is beginning to be felt by AGYW.

There are indications that increased community dialogue on AGYW as a result of the involvement of Gender Champions and CFPD has started to change attitudes and raise the profile of AGYW. Those

“I have witnessed girls...transforming into positive role models for other girls”
Police commandant, Kimbanseke

involved in the CFPD-led focus group discussion (FGD) all testified to improvements in community perceptions with regards to AGYW’s empowerment. The police commandant reported referring several ‘cases’ involving AGYW to CFPD, including AGYW involved in prostitution, suggesting that CFPD’s profile and work with AGYW has become known and appreciated. The police commandant believed that many AGYW working with CFPD were re-establishing themselves in the community and starting to contribute positively to their families and communities.

Improved dialogue and understanding between parents and girls was also reported as an important result. CFPD staff reported parents becoming more engaged in their daughter’s development as a result of Gender Champion engagement and CFPD programming. The parents involved in the FGD described how their participation in activities organised by CFPD (GLRU presentation and meeting with Gender Champions), and seeing their own daughters building their capacities through CFPD activities, has increased the value awarded to girls within the family. They reflected on their emerging understanding of how girls can play a positive role within the family, as well as boys, which makes them proud. This is a particularly positive development as AGYW in Kimbanseke have previously identified as a major challenge the fact that they are not listened to or valued in their families.

The positive results of CFPD work have led to increased demand for support from girls and parents – but CFPD capacity is limited. Although the donor behind CFPD has been supportive of the shifting scope of their work, CFPD still face a lack of funding to work in a systematic manner to empower AGYW. New ways of working require change at multiple levels, including within the donor community. Serge will need to keep tapping into the Gender Champion network to influence that enabling environment.

Conclusion: cultivating change at a personal, organisational and community level

Networks have been the key to success in this case study. The Gender Champion model has not only provided a nurturing environment for Serge, providing him with access to increased professional resources and learning in relation to AGYW, it has also given him a diverse network of peers (including the trained girl researchers) with whom to collaborate. He has been able to use the trust already established between CFPD and the community as an entry point, to then leverage the support of the Gender Champions and GLRU to engage further with the community. His involvement as a Gender Champion in La Pépinière has impacted his organisation, which has, as a result, altered the direction of programming to explicitly target AGYW in its economic empowerment activities and to support AGYW’s agency. The apparent success of these activities – and consequent increased demand - is clear from positive impacts on the AGYW involved and on the profile of AGYW within the community.

The Gender Champions and GLRU also have valuable learning from this experience. Many of them aspire to bring about change within their own organisations, and the CFPD example (and Serge’s insights) provide a helpful demonstration of what can be achieved, and how. Thus the network activities become mutually re-enforcing, helping to generate more systemic change for AGYW.

ⁱ <http://www.lapep.org/propos>