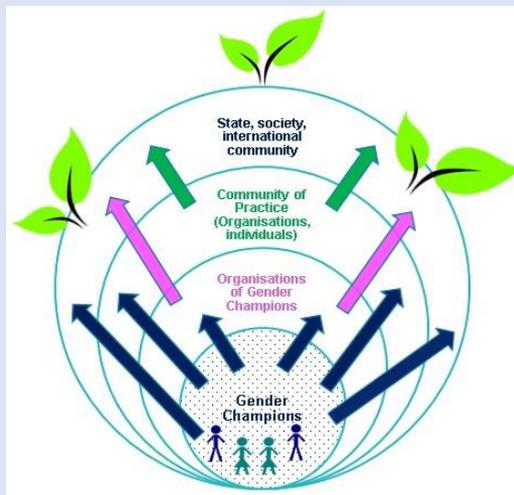


Gender Champion Case Study 3: Strengthening child protection practices for adolescent girls and young women

This pamphlet is the third in our Case Study series documenting the work of the Gender Champions. It highlights the importance of child protection to all organisations working with adolescent girls, and the great potential of capacity building support – provided by the Gender Champions in this case - to begin to shift practices around child and vulnerable adult protection, and to build the knowledge of local organisations to identify, mitigate, manage, and respond to risks. It demonstrates how increased understanding of child protection risks and policies can result in shifts in implementation of activities, particularly when staff have real ownership and enthusiasm for the process.

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 other state/ society/ international entities beyond.

Background note on context and methodology

Changes in policy and practice within the target organisations have been captured throughout the process of engagement through documenting reflections of the organisations involved and the Gender Champions. Selection surveys were undertaken at the beginning of the process to identify the organisations involved, and to understand their current child protection practices and key gaps. After the intensive training workshop, workshop reports were developed by the individual organisations, as well as by the workshop facilitators. During the process, each organisation developed a child protection policy, a code of conduct, an action plan and a risk analysis. Thereafter, the Gender Champions held weekly meetings and feedback sessions with each other to discuss progress and troubleshoot any problems, which were recorded in informal reports. At the end of the

process, focus groups were held with staff from each organisation in order to evaluate their experience of the process, and any resulting changes. A sample of six AGYW engaged with three of the organisations were also consulted to explore their perceptions of changes in the organisations since the development and implementation of child protection policies.

In a context where there are numerous protection risks facing adolescent girls and young women...

Amongst organisations working with adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), child protection risks and gaps in policy and practices are widespread and commonly overlooked. Few organisations in DRC have an explicit child protection policy, despite the generally fragile context and high prevalence of violence against children. Even organisations explicitly dedicated to working with AGYW frequently lack institutional mechanisms, agreed protocols and procedures or pathways of accountability around child protection, leaving both their target groups (AGYW themselves) as well as the organisations exposed to very serious risks.

In 2017, La Pépinière's team and the Gender Champions (GCs) identified a significant opportunity for their support and expertise to begin to shift practices around child and vulnerable adult protection, and build the capacity and knowledge of local organisations to mitigate, manage, and respond to risks. In particular, the team identified the need to support local organisation's capacity to identify and mitigate context and age specific risks for adolescent girls and young women and respond to them appropriately. Adolescent girls face a range of risks in late adolescence, and some types of risk may even increase as they move through puberty into being young women.

...identifying strategic organisations with a real desire for change was critical.

In order to maximise the impact of their intervention, and have the **potential to spark a process of systemic change**, the GCs identified a number of target organisations that were judged to be both strategic and to have high level buy-in and motivation for the process. To ensure transparency and reduce the risk of conflict amongst organisations, the selection of target organisations was a two-part process led by the Gender Champions. The GCs first identified a long-list of potential organisations working with AGYW that they felt were strategic. This long-list was then reduced to the final selected organisations using a screening questionnaire, assessing the organisation's level of engagement with AGYW, awareness of capacity needs, ambition to improve, and the commitment of the organisation's management to participation in the process, amongst other areas. The GCs undertook a visit to the site of activities of all six of the organisations to have a greater understanding of the child protection gaps and the current context.

The final selection represented a range of organisations of different sizes, working and engaging with AGYW in different capacities. The organisations include those working with particularly vulnerable groups of AGYW, particularly with 'filles-meres' and AGYW who have little or no contact or support from family. The selected six organisations were as follows:

- Comite d'Appui au Travail Social de Rue (CATSR) – working to address exclusion and social protection of adolescents living on the street, targeting young women, children and families
- Afia Mama – focusing on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and young women's leadership development
- Lizadeel: 'African Zone League for the right of the child and student' – focusing on the protection and promotion of women and children's rights, including running a social home

- CFPD: 'Women's Coalition for peace and development' – working to protect human rights, particularly women's, including a project to tackle sexual violence and support to young women's economic empowerment
- Paysannat – a agriculture cooperative for rice production, which is also working to promote children's education through teaching and coaching
- Action pour la Participation de la Femme au Développement (AFPD) – targeting children and young women living in the street and supports their community reintegration

Starting with the basics: what are the risks and where are the gaps?

The selection process for the organisations prompted staff to consider the risks to which AGYW are exposed in their activities, key child protection gaps, and what they needed to be able to address these risks more effectively. The completed selection surveys bring out a variety of protection concerns, some general and some specific to the context and groups of AGYW with which each individual organisation is working.

Certain gaps were common across the organisations, notably that **none of the organisations had a child protection policy or code of conduct**. A number of the surveys highlight an awareness that child protection concerns may have been neglected considering the highly sensitive areas in which they are working, for instance CFPD relayed to the GCs during their field visit that they are working to combat sexual violence without any policy or protocol to monitor or manage the safety of the young women involved. The selection surveys asked organisations to identify their own capacity needs to better address the risks faced by AGYW with whom they work – with common responses being the need for a child protection policy, improved staff capacity, and greater resources to invest in strengthening child protection capacity.

However, the responses from the staff members involved also demonstrate a very varied capacity in identifying risks, as well as in self-reflection and in understanding how child protection risks relate to their own organisational activities. A number of the survey responses only identify very generalised risks to AGYW (for instance, poverty, all forms of violence, unwanted pregnancy – all of which are important and valid), rather than those that may result from their own activities or organisational practices.

For instance, AFPD was particularly insightful in identifying protection risks, and risky situations, faced by young women through their own project activities. They were the only organisation to raise the fact that the interaction between staff and young women poses potential risks and, although everyone 'knows the limits', they had no written code of conduct to mitigate these risks. Further, they acknowledged the potential risky situations that the street children might face when reintegrating into families, without an organizational consensus or protocol around how to assess or mitigate the risks.

Another critical concern raised was the ability to monitor, follow up and appropriately respond to instances of abuse or violence when they became aware of them:

« L'absence de notre équipe, souvent, dans les lieux où se passent les abus ou violences. Nous recevons des rapports et c'est difficile d'assurer le suivi. » (AFPD)

Tailored Gender Champion support and capacity building...

The GCs selected all had an in-depth knowledge of the Kinshasa context, gender concerns and particular risks faced by AGYW. Their child protection expertise was supplemented through an initial training organised by La Pepiniere and, subsequently, by engaging with a child protection expert from the Social Development Direct team.

An intensive two-day child protection training workshop was held for two focal points from the management and operational teams of each of the selected organisations, which contributed to an overall deeper understanding of child protection, as well as being tailored to address particular risks and capacity needs that had been flagged as gaps in the original selection surveys. The subsequent capacity building support given by GCs to individual organisations reinforced this two-pronged approach.

Each organisation involved completed a training report on their experience and understanding of the material. Overall, the training reports demonstrate positive responses to the workshop, with organisations stating their own increased understanding of child protection. One participant said:

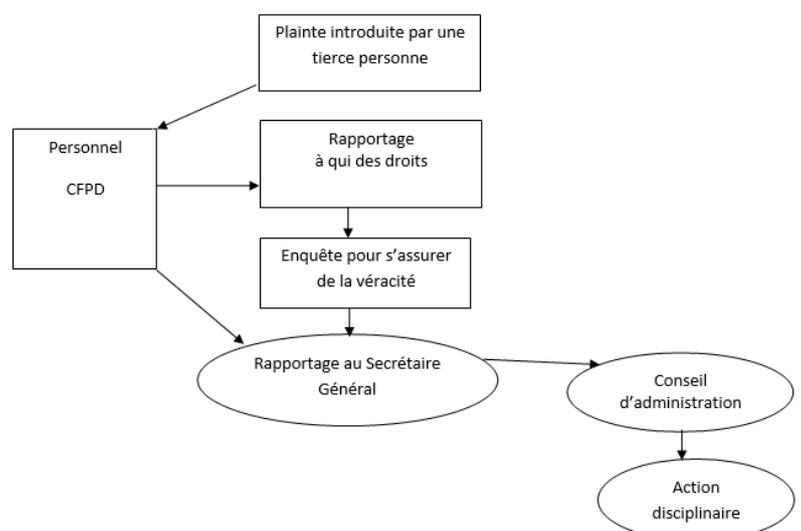
« Cette formation nous a permis de nous rendre compte que, pendant très longtemps, nous avons été dans une sorte de lacunes dans la gestion organisationnelle de notre structure. Ainsi, nous sommes formellement engagés à élaborer notre politique de protection des enfants qui nous permettra de prévenir les risques » (Paysannat)

When asked what the most valuable thing they learned during the training, the responses included – the importance of a code of conduct; safe recruitment practices; the definition of a vulnerable adult; risk analysis; and, critically, the fact that **child protection is ‘everyone’s responsibility’**. Three of the organisations mentioned that the concept of **‘vulnerable adult’** was a particularly interesting learning point to emerge from the trainings: this is very significant given the range of actors and ages with which the organisations work, and the contexts in which they work where young people’s vulnerability may be overlooked given their age or perceived level of autonomy.

Workshop feedback identified appetite for those involved to stay in touch for **peer learning**, support for **monitoring the implementation of the training**, and further related training.

... led to participatory development of child protection policies and further dissemination of learning

Following the initial child protection workshop, each organisation was provided with tailored support from identified GCs one day a week over a five-week period, during which they were supported to undertake a risk analysis, develop an action plan for implementation, develop a child protection policy and code of conduct, and engage in an ongoing process of reflection and analysis of their own processes. All this was facilitated and supported by the Gender Champions.



Internal complaint and disciplinary process developed by CFPD as part of its child protection policy

A clear consensus amongst the organisations was that **the support provided by the Gender Champions played a major role facilitating the process**, sustaining the interest and engagement of the staff involved. Organisations rated the support provided by the GCs as excellent, and commended their involvement, energy and commitment. Responses also flagged the significance of both the physical provisions and space provided to staff by La Pépinière during the intensive training to enable them to think about their practices and have the tools available to develop their policy, and the **supportive attitude and expertise of the GCs** when guiding organisations through the process, bringing new ideas, and integrating learning into the organisation's systems and processes. CFPD stated that the most useful aspect of the engagement was:

« La volonté et la disponibilité du CG car on ne lui donnait rien. Et cela nous a motivé de bien travailler car on voyait le CG qu'il venait de Lemba sans rien recevoir; cela nous a motivé de nous impliquer davantage. Et cette motivation a permis à ce que les gens participant à la restitution sans rien attendre en retour car ils ont compris l'importance de cette politique » (CFPD)

None of the six organisations interviewed had a child protection policy in place prior to the support and training provided by the Gender Champions and La Pépinière. By the end of the support provided, all of them had successfully developed a CP policy and had disseminated it to their staff, and all but one had shared the policy with beneficiaries and/or other members. The **participatory style of engagement enabled the organisations to take ownership of the process**, with each organisation describing during the final focus groups how they identified a few key people to participate in the drafting of the policy and own the process, which appears to have been an effective and efficient way to ensure that the policy was drafted. On the other hand, two organisations would have liked to have involved more or different people, but were unable to either through financial constraints or holidays.

However, further than the development of the policy itself, the training and process enabled increased knowledge of child protection concerns, and an awareness of what their new policy involves, to **be cascaded down to others within the organisations**. During the final focus group discussions, all six organisations described how the learning from the child protection training workshop had been passed down to other colleagues. Notably, a couple of the organisations mentioned that they planned to continue to provide this type of training for their members, particularly AFD, although also noting that they would appreciate continued support to enable them to do this.

At least two of the organisations (CASTR and AFD), underlined **the appetite and motivation** that they believed this process had provided to their staff.

CASTR spoke of their difficulties in prioritising staff members to be involved in the process, because of the enormous interest and motivation that the process had sparked in their staff:

« Un autre élément est que nous avons eu des difficultés pour sélectionner le comité de rédaction de notre CP car après la restitution, c'est pratiquement tout le monde qui voulait faire partie de ce comité. Tout ceci prouve d'une part l'intérêt suscité par la formation et d'autre part, le bénéfice que tous les staffs ont tiré de cette formation. »

Changes in practice and mitigation of risk in some organisations were evident...

Beyond the development of new child protection policies and codes of conduct, the six organisations involved also described a range of changes in practice, reflecting the broad range of risks they face and their varied capacity in risk identification and mitigation.

Despite the short time frames, some interesting changes are emerging to illustrate how this increased understanding of child protection risks and policies is resulting in changes or shifts in implementation of activities. For instance, CASTR mentioned that they have established separate toilets for girls and boys who participate in their activities, as a result of their increased awareness of child protection. There were also some indications of increased knowledge of how to respond appropriately to risks or concerns, with Paysannat stating that one of the most important things it had taken from the process was a new understanding of which specialist agencies to refer problems to and how to do so.

Other organisations related shifts in their internal processes and policies related to their own staff, in particular through the development of the code of conducts and the increased understanding of each individual staff member's responsibility. Afia Mama explained how its recruitment practices have changed, and a code of conduct is now in place with all staff and volunteers being required to sign an act of commitment : *“La prise en compte dans le processus de recrutement de critères de moralité, la signature de l'acte d'engagement à travailler dans l'esprit de la politique de protection et le respect strict du code de conduite.”*

The interviews with AGYW engaged with the organisations demonstrate their knowledge of and positive reactions to the introduction of the protection policies, despite short timeframes limiting the evidence of impact on their day-to-day interactions. All six interviewed AGYW (engaged with Paysannat, CATSR and CFPD), stated that they had been informed of the introduction of the protection policy by the respective NGOs; that they thought the introduction of the policy benefits them; and that they have noted positive changes in the way they are treated by the NGO since the introduction of the policy. An 18-year old engaged with CFPD stated that since the introduction of the policy, *“les enfants qui ont été négligé ont été récupérés et respectés”*. Another 18-year old involved in CATSR's work explained that before the introduction of the policy she felt unsafe when taking part in activities in open areas and on the street – *“Quand j'étais dans la rue, je ne me sentais pas en sécurité”*. She now feels better protected during her involvement with the organisation's activities.

...although the extent to which new policies had begun to change practices varied significantly

The evidence on how the new policy has been implemented, and the real changes in practice that have stemmed from this, do vary considerably between the organisations, along with the level of insight and self-reflection evident in the final focus groups. Given the short timeframe of this intervention, this is perhaps inevitable, and over a longer period more significant patterns of change might be discernible.

In particular, AFPD and CATSR provided a particularly high level of insight and illustrate a deeper shift in understanding of the role child protection plays in both mitigating risks for the young people with whom they work and their staff, and the organisation's responsibility in controlling and managing this risk.

*For example, AFPD underline the impact that the implementation of their new child protection policy has had on the ground when running activities, as they no longer send out young women alone and no longer allow children of the opposite sex from interviewers to be interviewed alone: "Par exemple, il nous arrivait d'interviewer les enfants même de sexe opposé, alors que on était seul; ce qui n'est plus le cas après la formation. Et comme les filles qui sont membres de notre organisation, se font maintenant accompagner au lieu de les laisser seules sur le terrain au risque de se faire violenter. Avant cette formation, on s'en foutait dans le sens où, on pouvait envoyer quelqu'un seul sur le terrain ; même aux heures tardives. On pouvait aussi écouter seul un enfant; mais après la formation on a compris qu'on ne pouvait pas agir ainsi. **Donc, la formation nous a beaucoup aider pour nous protéger aussi, en plus de protéger les enfants** »*

Conclusions

Despite the short timeframes (which do not permit a wider assessment of *impact* on child rights and safety overall), the support provided by the Gender Champions appears to have strengthened the child protection practices of all the organisations involved. At the least, all six organisations developed new child protection policies and codes of conduct, where none had existed before, and they all responded very positively to the support that had been provided by the GCs in guiding them through this process. The staff members involved clearly appreciated the patience and expertise of the GCs over a period of time: coupling the intensive training sessions with on-going mentoring and support over a number of weeks was critical to the successful outcome.

Moreover, beyond policy development, by the end of the engagement some of the organisations were beginning to show significant shifts in practice in how they mitigate, manage and respond to any potential risks posed to the young women (and young men) with whom they work, in particular relaying a deeper understanding of how these risks may stem from their own project activities. Given the indications of the engagement and enthusiastic response of staff in some of the organisations to participation in the process, it looks likely that changes in practice will continue to emerge.