

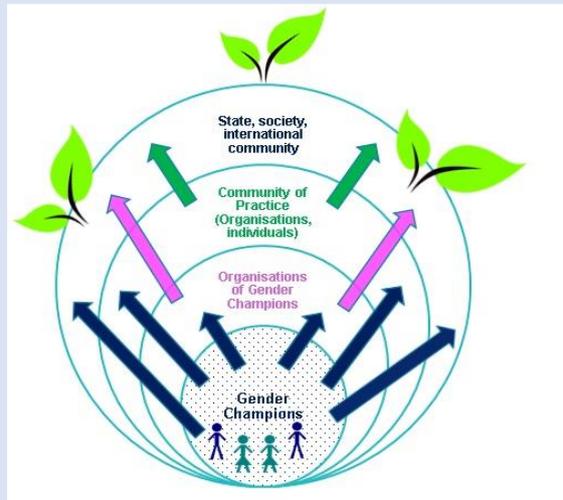
Working Together for Better Results

Putting Girls Front and Centre: Case Study 4

This pamphlet is the fourth in our Case Study series documenting the work of the Gender Champions. It highlights how La Pepinière's rich resource of tools and learning on how to increase the number of opportunities for adolescent girl and young women's (AGYW) participation can support the work of other organisations who wish to facilitate greater AGYW inclusion. The engagement of Gender Champions with four strategic organisations prompted staff to begin a process of reflection on how they work with AGYW and to challenge their own perceptions of AGYW as mere 'beneficiaries' in their projects. As a result, changes in practice have begun to emerge, which can continue to spread if the organisations and their AGYW partners facilitate real community dialogue on the need to ensure greater AGYW participation.

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

This case study describes how La Pepinière's Gender Champions engaged in capacity building of four target organisations in Kinshasa, working with adolescent girls and young women. Surveys were undertaken at the beginning of the process to inform the selection of organisations, and to understand their current ways of working with adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), any capacity gaps, and where the appetite for change was strongest. Changes in thinking and practice within the target organisations were captured throughout the process of engagement by documenting reflections of the staff involved as well as AGYW with whom they work. Throughout the process, the Gender Champions held informal meetings and feedback sessions with each other

to discuss progress and troubleshoot any problems. At the end of the engagement, interviews were undertaken with two members of staff and three AGYW from two of the target organisations to evaluate their experience of the process, and any resulting changes.

At the heart of La Pepiniere is a commitment to increasing opportunities for the active participation of adolescent girls and young women.

La Pepiniere programme has generated a range of opportunities for AGYW participation in the programme itself, in particular via the Girl-Led Research Unit (GLRU). Girls in the GLRU have participated in research; monitoring of project activities; capacity building partners; and advising and advocating on policies to support AGYW. Through this experience, the AGYW have developed a range of skills and capacities, and in parallel the La Pepiniere team have improved and refined their approach to girls' participation.

In order to capture and share the learning generated through this experience, as well as supporting and equipping the girls to do their work, La Pepiniere team developed a series of principles, methods, tools and guides. These resources are based on research theories and approaches conducted by young people, on ethnographic approaches, on peer-to-peer research methods and participatory techniques to engage girls and young people as researchers and actors in their own communities and societies. They include a set of principles for the participation of adolescent girls to guide the work of the programme, which were discussed and validated by the GLRU.

La Pepiniere team also aimed to start a real dialogue on the challenges and risks involved in ensuring the participation of AGYW in research and programming. Although resources and tools are very valuable in helping organisations to integrate active AGYW participation in their programmes, in reality challenges and risks will need to be mitigated along the way – this has certainly been the case for La Pepiniere and its partners over the last few years. In discussion with the GRLU, Gender Champions and other organisations engaged on AGYW programming, La Pepiniere's team have developed and adapted the toolkit throughout this process of lesson learning.

During the final months of the programme, an opportunity was identified for the GCs to share the toolkit and relevant lessons from La Pepiniere with other organisations working on AGYW programming. There was clear appetite from some organisations working with AGYW to facilitate increased participation of AGYW in their own programming and the GCs were well-placed to identify and support the capacity building of these organisations to deepen their understanding of the needs and priorities of AGYW, and support them in operationalising this understanding with tools, instruments and mentoring. The La Pepiniere team led a workshop with the Gender Champions to ensure that each individual GC was well-sighted on the different elements of the GLRU toolkit. Combined with their own in-depth knowledge, this understanding of the various principles, tools and guidance in the toolkit was to form the basis of their capacity building work.

The Gender Champions helped identify promising entry points for sharing learning and resources with partners working at the 'frontline' to make a difference for AGYW...

The organisations were selected through a two-part process, designed to maximise the opportunity for AGYW participation principles to be cascaded across the wider DRC stakeholder community. Firstly, the GCs identified a long list of strategic organisations. They then selected the final four based on a screening questionnaire evaluating their level of engagement with AGYW; capacity to reflect on their current methods of engaging with AGYW and any capacity gaps; desire to

improve and strengthen their approaches to incorporating AGYW; and the commitment of their leadership to the process. Four organisations were selected as a result:

- Réseau d'Education Civique au Congo (RECIC) – a grouping of specialised associations working in the field of civic education, civic participation and the defence of human rights.
- Cadre de récupération et d'encadrement pour l'épanouissement intégral des jeunes (CREEIJ) – which works on supporting the political participation of young people, youth entrepreneurship, and youth access to justice.
- Si Jeunesse Savait (SJS) – supports youth leadership, promotes sexual and health rights, and encourages youth entrepreneurship.
- Comité National Femme et Développement (CONAFED)- advocates for the protection of women and girls.

Although principles and tools can be shared, one size does not fit all. The La Pepiniere team and GCs needed to combine efficiency and coherence on the one hand, with tailoring and specific problem-solving on the other. During the selection process, interviews were undertaken with the selected organisations to identify the most important gaps and challenges that each one faced, and to understand where the appetite for change was strongest.

Capacity building involved both mentoring and peer-support. During an initial training session, the toolkit was shared and discussed with staff members of the organisations involved. This was followed by ongoing support and mentoring from individual GCs to each organisation, responding to the particular challenges that each individual organisation wanted to address. For instance, a workshop was facilitated for RECIC by the Gender Champion, including members of the RECIC executive committee, AGYW with whom they work, community leaders, members of organisations working on citizen and political participation, and members of the La Pepiniere team. The discussions, recorded in the workshop report, analysed the particular barriers to AGYW's increased civic engagement, and proposed a plan of actions to address these, including tackling negative community attitudes, advocating to reduce AGYW's household workloads, and promoting positive messages around civic education through diverse media. A second 'trouble-shooting' workshop for all of the target organisations focused on the real-life challenges and questions that the organisations were facing as they attempted to progress their approaches to working with AGYW.

...who developed an increasing awareness of AGYW as actors 'in their own right'.

All the key staff members interviewed from each organisation involved in the original training and continued engagement provided positive feedback on their experiences. The majority of interviewees expressed that the key messages coming out of their engagement were around the significance and value of AGYW as actors in their own rights, rather than merely as 'beneficiaries' of projects. A staff member from RECIC noted that the key lesson gained from the training is around the value of taking AGYW's voice into account in everything that affects them, and a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the concept of empowerment.

"Les AJs ont un mot à dire par rapport à tout ce qui se passe dans la société [...] J'ai appris la notion de l'autonomisation, qui autrefois était liée aux finances mais actuellement la notion a évolué puisqu'elle permet à une personne de faire un choix responsable et être capable de prendre une décision".

RECIC programme officer involved in capacity building

Partners' thinking is evolving. When asked about the implications of this learning on their work, interviewed staff members gave a variety of responses on how they are increasingly considering to include young people as active participants in their work. One RECIC staff member explained that he would increasingly like to use peer-to-peer methods in the organisation's work. Before the engagement, he explained how the organisation had a general approach that treated women and girls as one group, and he is now considering how this can be revised to take the particular needs and concerns of AGYW into account.

“Au départ, dans nos programmes, l’approche AFJ n’était pas prise en compte de manière particulière, mais avec cet accompagnement des GC, l’AJF sera elle-même actrice et cible à la fois”.

RECIC programme officer involved in capacity building

Knowledge is being cascaded onwards. Staff members from both RECIC and CONAFED explained how they shared learning from the training and GC engagement with their colleagues through meetings, sharing of guidance from the toolkit, and follow-up discussions. RECIC also transmitted learning from the initiative to AGYW they work with via a Whatsapp group.

“En tant qu’animatrice, j’ai fait la restitution auprès des autres AJFs au niveau de l’église, au quartier et avec les collègues à l’université.”

An AGYW ‘animatrice’ interviewed explaining how she had shared her learning with her peers

Changes in perception are leading to changes in practice too...

As some principles have begun to be integrated into project work, AGYW are detecting changes in practice within the organisations with which they work. An AGYW ‘animatrice’ working with RECIC explained her changing opinions and experiences throughout the engagement, from both the perspective of a RECIC team member and as a young woman with whom the programme works. She explained how her opinion on the capacity of AGYW to participate in decision making processes in the organisation has changed, and how she feels there have been concrete changes in how her views and opinions are taken into account in the planning and implementation of activities in the organisation. Before engaging with the GCs, she believed that a low self-belief affected AGYW’s confidence to speak up and be involved in decision-making. After the engagement she felt her own opinions on this have begun to change.

To give a specific example, this AGYW described how she had a concern that AGYW were asked to cover their own transport costs when participating in project activities, putting a financial strain on them and restricting some from participating. After the GC engagement, she feels her concerns over this have been recognised and the organisation has begun to cover transport costs, in the process valuing the time and contribution of the AGYW participants. She also noted that these beginning of changes in how the organisation approaches and works with AGYW has seen increased youth presence and engagement in recent meetings.

“La perception même des AJFs par certains ne permettait pas à les impliquer dans le processus de prise de décisions. Aussi le manque d’estime et la peur de l’échec par les AJFs ne favorisent-ils pas leur participation au processus de prise de décision [...]. Maintenant je comprends que les AJFs ont aussi un mot à dire et que leur opinion doit être prise en compte. Moi-même en tant que AJF, mon opinion est prise en compte dans notre organisation [...] Oui il y en a [un changement], nous avons donné nos avis sur un projet qui n’avait pas pris en compte un aspect financier des animateurs sur terrain, cela a été pris en compte et le bailleur est revenu sur nos avis. Il y a toujours des commentaires fournis par les AJFs sur nos activités par rapport au programme et à la suite y réservée. »

Animatrice from RECIC

“L’accompagnement a permis aux paires éducateurs de raffermir les relations entre eux, se dynamiser avec les activités et nous font le rapportage [...] L’implication des filles permet la dissémination facile entre les paires. Elles sont nombreuses et elles permettent de toucher toute la communauté, selon l’adage “éduquer une femme, c’est éduquer toute une nation”.

CONAFED staff member

A team member from CONAFED found the most valuable aspect of the engagement was learning focused on strengthening the capacity of peer educators. A significant part of this came from learning about the experiences and successes of the GLRU. Alongside recognising the capacity of the AGYW with whom they work with, the interviewee explained how through the engagement they began to see AGYW participation as a way to reach out to others and root messages in their community.

One of the key principles of AGYW participation included in the toolkit is to ‘reflect the diversity of adolescents and young women’. An ‘animatrice’ from RECIC explained how changes in staff members’ opinions and attitudes has not only affected the way they work with their current project participants, but also encouraged the inclusion of a greater number of AGYW from more vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds. In their project working on promoting young people’s civic education and civic participation, she explained that their target beneficiaries had been students and AGYW with a high level of education. After the engagement with the GCs, she feels as though the organisation is more open and able to engage with AGYW from all backgrounds and with all levels of education. She believes the organisation now has an awareness and the tools to be able to do so, thanks in particular to the workshop facilitated by the GCs and GLRU, and the discussions this prompted around the capacities of all AGYW.

“D’abord, l’attention était plus aux jeunes filles intellectuelles, mais après la formation nous a donné une méthodologie pour aborder même celles qui ne vont pas à l’école. Et aujourd’hui je suis disposée à travailler avec toute les catégories de jeunes filles, car toute jeune fille est utile et a quelque chose à donner ».

Animatrice from RECIC

The two AGYW 'animatrice' working for RECIC both rated their level of participation in the implementation of project activities as 'partial' before the engagement with GCs. After the initiative, both rated their participation as 'total' because now *"j'ai participé depuis la planification jusqu'à la réalisation des activités"*.

...although real and sustainable change takes time and commitment.

It is too early to know whether this capacity building will make a difference in the medium or long term. Positive changes in the staff members' thinking and approaches to working with AGYW were evident in the final interviews and, as outlined above, both staff and AGYW noted that this has begun to translate into concrete changes in practice. However, not all of the interviews at the end of the process with AGYW express experiences of change and their own greater participation in project activities.

One AGYW interviewed noted the wider challenges in her environment that constrain her and did not feel that there had been changes in how she participated in decision making in the organisation or how her views were taken into account.

This variation in responses is understandable given the slow process of organisational change. It should be acknowledged that integrating participation principles into an organisation's work, particularly when ways of working may be very entrenched, is an ongoing, non-linear process and may take time for change to be felt by all participants.

A number of the interviewees, both staff and AGYW whom they work with, underlined that the wider environment around AGYW often poses barriers to their greater engagement in activities, particularly attitudes of family and other opinion leaders in the community. Nevertheless, the 'animatrice' from RECIC

acknowledged that, whilst this can be a significant barrier, there is also a great opportunity to engage with the wider community on the messages around AGYW's participation. She believes that changes will continue to be seen if the evolving thinking is cascaded further than the organisations themselves to the wider environment around the girl - her family, school and community.

"Ce qui m'a plus interpellé, ce sont les conseils sur l'autonomisation économique. Mais, seulement des théories sans appui concret. Mes parents sont pauvres, je vais m'autonomiser comment?"

AGYW working with partner organisation involved in capacity building.

"Il y a des opportunités des changements dans le futur parce que la méthodologie a changé, après la formation par les GCs ; le langage devient maintenant adapté...Aussi nous avons inclus dans l'approche ou la méthodologie, la sensibilisation des parents, des leaders d'opinions qui ont de l'influence parfois négatives sur les AJFs à comprendre et à être au courant de ce que nous avons à dire aux AJFs"

Animatrice from RECIC

Conclusions

La Pepiniere has developed a rich resource of learning and tools on how to create and increase the number of opportunities for AGYW participation in programming and policy that affect them.

Central to this is the toolkit, developed alongside and validated by the Girl-Led Research Unit, and

the principles of empowerment and participation which are set out therein. When combined with their own individual knowledge and skills on AGYW, the Gender Champions were equipped to cascade this pool of learning to other stakeholders in Kinshasa. The engagement with the four strategic organisations prompted staff to begin a process of reflection on how they work with AGYW and to challenge their own perceptions of AGYW as mere ‘beneficiaries’ in their projects. As a result, specific changes in practice have begun to emerge, in line with the principles in the toolkit. Although still nascent, these changes reflect a shift towards engaging with AGYW in a meaningful way, valuing their time and contributions, reflecting the diversity of AGYW in their work, and working together to strengthen AGYW’s capacities and abilities.

Changes are likely to continue to emerge. The senior leadership in at least the two organisations interviewed at the end of the process articulated their plans to do more to include AGYW in their programming. The Head of Programmes at RECIC expressed his desire for continued change and efforts to facilitate the participation of young women. He noted the changes that have already been made, with AGYW now making up around 40% of those working on their campaigns and awareness raising activities, and expressed his desire for this to continue to increase.

However, the organisations and their AGYW partners need to have an external focus, in addition to looking inwards as their own systems. Although the evidence clearly shows that the current path of change is positive, the organisation staff and the AGYW involved noted that in order for these changes to continue to spread and really take root, this process of learning needs to spread beyond the organisations to include those in the AGYW’s wider environment - families, schools and other influential community figures. It is through facilitation of real community dialogue on the need to ensure greater participation of AGYW that barriers to AGYW participation may begin to break down.