

THE REALITIES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN KINSHASA: RESEARCH ABOUT GIRLS, BY GIRLS

Lyndsay McLean Hilker, Jessica Jacobson and Anny Modi

February 2016



LA PÉPINIÈRE
DFID DRC'S PROGRAMME
FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS
AND YOUNG WOMEN



La Pépinière is a flagship DFID programme focused on adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 12-24 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The long-term vision of La Pépinière is to improve the situation of women and girls in the DRC through supporting DFID, its partners, others donors and actors to develop policies and programmes which achieve better results for women and girls.

Cover: La Pepiniere Girl Researchers, Mentors, Girls Engagement Advisor and Logistician at October 2015 Research Analysis Workshop in Kinshasa. Photo by Jessica Jacobson.

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Abbreviations

ABYM	Adolescent Boys and Young Men
AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
DFID	Department for international Development (United Kingdom)
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health

Glossary of key French and Lingala terms

<i>Djo</i>	Guy, boyfriend, someone who might engage in transactional sex
<i>Ecurie</i>	Group of sex workers
<i>Elombe mwasi</i>	A dynamic, capable and powerful (including physically) woman, but who does not necessarily act in conformity with social norms and may not be necessarily praised and valued
<i>Femme-homme</i>	“Woman-man”, i.e. a woman who takes on male traits or behaviour
<i>Fille-mère</i>	Girl-mother, i.e. a girl who has given birth before she is married
<i>Grande Dame</i>	A woman with high status and profile, is seen as capable and is admired and valued.
<i>Jodar</i>	Boyfriend
<i>Kaluna</i>	Street gang, sometimes engaged in theft
<i>Légère</i>	Someone of loose morals, who is considered “easy”
<i>Likelemba</i>	A savings and loans group
<i>Mwasi amikoka</i>	A woman who is capable, independent and self-sufficient economically.
<i>Mwasi elombe</i>	A capable, ambitious and autonomous woman who is self-sufficient who supports herself and others.
<i>Mwasi malonga</i>	A woman who is valued and respected in society because she has succeeded economically and socially, supports herself and others in conformity with predominant social norms.
<i>Quartier</i>	Neighbourhood
<i>Ristourne</i>	This word is used to describe two systems. The first is when a wholesaler gives a discount to traders who buy wholesale. The second is to describe a savings and loans group. When this term was used by respondents, it was used to describe a savings and loans group.
<i>Savoir-vivre</i>	Knowing how to live life (wisely)
<i>Soumise</i>	Submissive
<i>Tontine</i>	A savings and loans group



ABOUT LA PÉPINIÈRE

In 2015, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) launched **La Pépinière, a programme focused on adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 12-24 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**. AGYW have specific needs and face particular challenges and opportunities. Yet, they have often been excluded from mainstream policy and programming that focuses either on younger children, male youth or women in general.¹

The long-term vision of La Pépinière is to improve the situation of women and girls in the DRC through supporting DFID, its partners, other donors and actors to develop policies and programmes which achieve better results for women and girls. The programme has a particular focus on AGYW's economic empowerment, and is based on the premise that this is a foundation for wider empowerment and improvements in the status and wellbeing of women and girls.

However, the evidence base on AGYW in DRC, what works to empower them, and the impacts of their empowerment is currently very limited. It is therefore difficult for development actors to make the case to focus explicitly on and to design effective interventions for this target group.

In the first phase of the programme (April 2015 – September 2017), **La Pépinière aims to address this evidence gap by conducting and sharing high quality, contextualized research** on the situation of AGYW in the DRC and what kinds of interventions work to empower them economically and more widely. During this phase, the focus is on AGYW in DRC's capital Kinshasa.

In addition to conducting research, *La Pépinière* also engages with key stakeholders - the DRC government, civil society actors, international NGOs and donors - to support them to improve their capacities to better use this research and evidence and to design effective policies and programmes for AGYW.

Commitment to the Participation of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

At the heart of the *La Pépinière* programme is a commitment to create and expand opportunities for the participation of AGYW in the programme itself, including in *La Pépinière's* research and capacity building activities. To this end, *La Pépinière* has developed a set of **Girl Participation Principles (GPP)**, which guides the work of the programme. These have been discussed and agreed with a group of 25 AGYW from a diversity of social backgrounds in an initial 'agenda-setting' workshop held in Kinshasa in May 2015.

La Pépinière's Girl Participation Principles

- Meaningfully engaging girls
- Reflecting the diversity of adolescent girls
- Valuing girls' time and their contributions
- Providing information to girls and obtaining informed consent
- Building girls' capacities and skills
- Working in empowering and transformative ways

¹ Girl Hub. The Simple Case for Investing in Girls (accessed 4 October 2014): <http://www.girleffect.org/why-girls/#&panel1-1>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to **improve understanding of the situation and everyday realities of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Kinshasa**. It draws on qualitative research conducted in mid-2015 by a team of fifteen Congolese girl researchers recruited, trained and mentored by the *La Pépinière* programme. It focuses on their experiences, perceptions and aspirations with respect to their economic and social empowerment. The report also draws on analysis conducted of national survey data and wider literature on AGYW in the DRC.

The report is written for all government, donors, civil society and private actors whose policies and programmes affect – whether directly or indirectly – the lives of adolescent girls and young women in Kinshasa, and more widely in the DRC. It aims to provide evidence to support these stakeholders to ensure that their policies and programmes are developed in line with the priorities expressed by AGYW themselves, and that they address the most important factors which facilitate or impede the empowerment of and positive outcomes for AGYW.

The report firstly describes the **girl-led approach and methodology** used and then gives background data on AGYW in Kinshasa and the profile of those interviewed for this study. It then summarises key findings in the following areas before presenting conclusions and recommendations: (i) perceptions and norms around adolescent girls and young women; (ii) the economic lives of AGYW; (iii) the decision-making power of AGYW; (iv) the social lives of AGYW; (v) what empowerment means for AGYW; and (vi) their aspirations and dreams for the future.

Girl-led approach and methodology

The study methodology included training and capacity building for the fifteen girl researchers, piloting of the in-depth interview guides, four weeks of mentored fieldwork and a participatory process of data analysis. Each girl researcher (all aged 16-24) undertook interviews with younger adolescent girls, with peers of a similar age and with adult men or women that they considered influential in the lives of AGYW in their communities and social networks. **In total, 177 interviews were conducted, 117 with adolescent girls and young women and 60 with influential adults.**

Although the sample was purposive, it includes **a diversity of AGYW with different social backgrounds**, including those in education, working, combining the two, or struggling to earn an income; those living with their parents, other family members or in other household situations; and those stigmatised and rejected, for example because they engage in sex work² or are *filles-mères* ('girl-mothers').

The girl researchers were very motivated and experienced a positive transformation in personal and professional capacities during the research. The quality of the data collection was good and the consistency of findings across interviews and with other studies gives confidence in the results.

Perceptions and norms around adolescent girls and young women

The transition from childhood to adulthood for girls tends to be a moment rather than a process, still marked, to a large extent, by the onset of puberty. At this point, changes

² Note that this report uses the terms 'sex work' and 'sex worker' to describe the range of ways in which AGYW engage in sex work and transactional sex.

can be rapid, and girls can suddenly be expected to bring income into the household and many will receive sexual advances. This contrasts with boys, where the transition to adulthood is generally seen as a gradual process, largely marked by their increasing economic autonomy.

There are high, sometimes conflicting, expectations of adolescent girls and young women- by themselves and the society around them. Many AGYW are preoccupied with protecting their reputation and being “*bien vu*” (well-viewed) in society, being seen as a “good girl”. It can be very stressful for AGYW to navigate the often-contradictory values from Congolese traditions, religious edicts and modern ideas, and AGYW are often closely monitored and harshly judged by many people around them.

Adolescent girls and young women tend to get categorised into one of two binary positions: as “good girls” or “bad girls”. According to predominant social norms, “**good girls**” are polite, respectful, “serious” and **soumise (submissive)** to family and community members. They dress appropriately (i.e. conservatively) and they spend their time productively, being “useful”, in study, working (decent work) or praying. They follow their parents’ advice, refrain from hanging out with their peers, who might be a “bad influence”, do not frequent boys and do not engage in pre-marital sex. Later, “good girls” are expected to marry well, be good wives and mothers, but also support their family economically and contribute to society.

If a girl slips up in her behaviour, she can very quickly get a reputation as a “bad girl”. This might simply be because she dresses in tight clothes, is seen with a boy or speaks her mind. “**Bad girls**” are frequently categorised as **impolite, disrespectful and légère (easy)**. It is assumed – whether true or not – that a “bad girl” is having sexual relationships with many men is using this to earn money, that she spends her time unproductively, and is “useless”. “If a girl then has a child and becomes a *fille-mère* (unmarried girl mother) or is known to have had an abortion (which is common, in this context with limited access to family planning services and contraceptives), then her reputation as a “bad girl” is cemented and she suffers stigma.

The responsibility or blame for (not) meeting these expectations is placed almost entirely on the girl or young woman herself, her character and behaviour. There is a significant gap between the high expectations and realities, and little understanding – often even from AGYW themselves – of why these expectations are so difficult to achieve. The blame for not meeting these expectations is placed almost entirely on the AGYW herself, her character and behaviour. There is little recognition of the huge challenges she might face, of how others might abuse or exploit her and of how her surrounding social and economic environment impedes her. There also seems to be no ‘plan B’ for these girls, and once categorised as a “bad girl”, it seems very difficult to escape this categorisation thereafter.

The Economic Lives of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

The majority of the adolescent girls and young women interviewed had someone who provided for them, usually giving them shelter and food, sometimes paying school fees or giving ‘pocket money’. In most cases, this was their parents (or step-parents), in some cases other family members, and occasionally community members or boyfriends. A minority of girls had no one to support them economically and said that they had to manage themselves.

Many AGYW proactively seek to combine sums of money from different people and oftentimes they generate through their own economic activities. Most AGYW interviewed were in full-time education. Many were studying only and supported economically by family members, but several girls and young women combined their studies and economic activities to generate income.

The predominant economic activity is small trading in the informal sector, mainly foodstuffs, and, sometimes, personal items. Around half of the AGYW interviewed engaged in small trading, most often street or market selling or via social networks and at school. Several AGYW receive support for their trading activities, with most relying significantly on their family and social networks – mainly mothers and aunts – for access to clients or markets. The next most significant economic activity of AGYW was hairdressing (braiding). A few AGYW also combine different economic activities, usually the sale of different kinds of goods, either simultaneously, or by season, or combining selling and hairdressing for example.

There is a significant lack of salaried employment opportunities in the formal sector for girls and young women. A small minority of AGYW had any kind of formal work – these included jobs such as a cashier, a bank teller, and shop assistant. Analysis of secondary data confirms this and suggests that, whilst more boys and young men are in formal employment, this is still a very small proportion of the overall population.

A minority of girls and young women said that they earned income by engaging in sex work. These AGYW appear to engage in sex work because they have no family or others to give them economic support, or when their own parents expect them to bring money into the household to contribute to household costs. Many AGYW and adult interviewees reported that engagement in sex work to earn an income is more common than our interviewee numbers suggest. However, without a quantitative survey, it is difficult to confirm this, or whether their views are simply an expression of prevalent stereotypes about AGYW.

The majority of girls and young women produce a small profit or retain some income, whether from their own economic activity or from saving from money received from others. AGYW mostly used this to pay their own school fees and/or pay for personal items like beauty products and clothing. Many AGYW contributed to their families, for example by buying food for the household, paying their own school fees or for their brothers and sisters.

Some girls and young women save small amounts of money, mainly using informal savings mechanisms in their neighbourhoods (saving by card or the *likelemba* savings and loans system) or via the mobile money services offered by mobile telephone companies (e.g. Tigo cash, Vodacom M-Pesa). Whilst there are some risks of loss of money with these mechanisms, this can help an AGYW manage frequent requests for money from others, such as family members or boyfriends. There are few examples of girls thinking of future investments; many dream about becoming successful businesswomen but have few concrete plans.

Many girls and young women who earn their own money say that it gives them some 'independence' and that they feel 'useful'. Other terms used included 'autonomy', 'dignity' and 'freedom'. These less tangible benefits of economic activities are around how a girl herself feels, but also influence how she is perceived within the household and community.

In both the formal and informal sectors, girls and young women mentioned various risks they were exposed to because of their economic activities. For some AGYW, there

were constraints placed on them by boyfriends, fiancés or parents, for example around their mobility or whether and how they worked or sold goods. Selling on credit is common in Kinshasa and there are risks of clients not paying. There are also stories of stealing, jealousy and mockery.

A key risk for girls and young women working in both informal and formal employment is sexual harassment or assault. For those who sell goods in public spaces and have to move around for their work, there is an ongoing risk of harassment - ranging from sexual comments and advances to being assaulted or raped. In formal workplaces, women can be bullied, intimidated, asked for sex in return for jobs or promotions and assaulted by managers or employees. Beyond the workplace, there are also risks of sexual exploitation by family members, pressures from boyfriends and older men, and other men who might 'help' AGYW.

The Decision-Making Power of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Whilst most AGYW have some decision-making power in some areas of their personal lives, there are areas where they could not decide independently, had to engage in significant negotiations or had no say.

In the domain of education, there appears to be some negotiation between parents / carers and daughters in terms of decisions about whether to continue studying and/or which subjects to study – if the resources for school fees are available. Some parents or carers will impose decisions; in some cases AGYW work to pay or contribute to school fees.

The majority of AGYW say they can decide themselves what work they do. Most say that they can control their own income, although some say others control their income, mainly their parents or, in one case, a boyfriend. However, there appear to be cases where parents choose or impose choices over work for their daughters, such as asking them to sell certain products.

AGYW generally say that their choice of boyfriend or husband is their own. Nonetheless, none of those interviewed were married and only a few reported having boyfriends. Several AGYW say they would accept advice from family members in choosing the right husband. There are suggestions, however, that some parents use the dowry payment system to impose decisions on whom their daughter will marry. By contrast, adolescent boys and young men (ABYM) can decide when they want to get married and are expected to make the marriage proposal.

The majority of girls and young women say that they can make decisions about sex. However, most AGYW say that sex is a risk and that they have decided to choose abstinence before marriage. However, given that sex is such a taboo subject and girls police their reputations around sex, it is difficult to know to what extent AGYW are being open about this. It is clear however that there are often significant social and economic pressures on girls to have sexual relations with boys and men, despite the predominant norms.

Many parents and family members try to exert control over the mobility of AGYW, to control where and with whom they go out, but also to protect them from the risk of sexual violence. AGYW who go out without "legitimate" reason (e.g. school, work or church) can also be stigmatised, as 'good girls' are expected to stay at home and be watched and protected. By contrast, ABYM do not face constraints to their mobility. ABYM can decide when to leave their parents house to rent / buy a house or land. Yet, AGYW who leave the

parental home before marriage are stigmatised and often assumed prostitutes.

Most AGYW say they participate in some decisions within the household, but are rarely able to do this within the larger family, or within the *quartier*. However, whilst many AGYW seem to be able to express their views on many issues in the household, it seems to only be minor decisions where they have a say, and the wishes of brothers are often prioritised. A critical relationship worthy of further investigation is that between fathers and daughters. Several AGYW lamented the fact that they had limited dialogue with their fathers, especially in comparison to their brothers.

AGYW expressed different views on whether they would like to change the way decisions are made. Many AGYW would like to see changes in order to give girls more decision-making power—in general—and also within specific domains, particularly regarding mobility, their studies, and decisions around marriage and sexuality. However, a minority of girls did not want to change the way decisions are made.

The Social Lives of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

The majority of AGYW say that they spend most of their time with their families - mainly their parents and siblings, but also their cousins, aunts and uncles and grandparents. This includes time at home, working with family members and sometimes in family meetings. Many AGYW say that family members have a positive influence on their lives, giving them 'good advice' (with the exception of sex and sexual health, too sensitive to discuss with parents, although often discussed with older sisters and friends), helping them resolve personal problems, and supporting girls with their education and economic activities through advice, encouragement, and, sometimes, financial contributions.

Many AGYW also spend significant time at church praying and participating in choirs, prayer groups and church youth groups. A significant number of AGYW belonged to church groups, which appear to be a social space that AGYW can engage in with the approbation of their families and communities. AGYW express mixed views about the role of the church and its members; some talk about the guidance they receive through sermons and one-to-one counsel, hope and friendship, but others mention the constant pressure to contribute financially to the church, and the harsh exclusion of some AGYW, such as sex workers and *filles-mères*.

AGYW also spend time with school and neighbourhood friends of a similar age, mainly girls - most stressing that they only spent time with 'close friends' who give 'good advice' and that they avoided 'bad influences' of other girls - something talked about frequently by AGYW and adults. Some AGYW spend time with young men and boys, as friends and boyfriends, but most were reluctant to talk about this, likely fearing being labelled as a 'bad girl' or *légère*.

Many girls and young women are still at school and spend significant time there. Whilst most talk about the positive influence of school as a place of learning and interaction with friends; several AGYW interviewed told stories of teachers who asked for money or sex from students, which seems to be a significant problem in Kinshasa.

Nearly all AGYW regularly use at least one media source, and many combine different media for different purposes including for information and entertainment. TV is the main and preferred source, but it is not always clear where girls access TV, and to what extent they can control what programmes they watch. They mainly like to watch soap

opera series and Nigerian films. Contrary to assumptions, some AGYW do also listen to the news, especially about events in DRC. Some AGYW also listen to the radio, which is more accessible than TV.

AGYW are quite divided when it comes to access to the Internet and use of social media.

Many AGYW say that they do not use the Internet, because they do not think it is useful, or they do not have access or because it presents risks. Whilst many AGYW use social media to keep in touch with friends and meet new people—these networks are also seen as risky to AGYW's safety and reputation. The social media AGYW primarily use are Facebook and WhatsApp.

What Empowerment means for Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Interpretations of 'empowerment' amongst AGYW in Kinshasa are multi-faceted and not necessarily aligned with external definitions:

The English word "empowerment" and the French word "*autonomisation*" mean slightly different things and neither translate directly into Lingala. The girl researchers discussed among themselves as well as with interviewees ideas around autonomy, agency, independence, capability and so on, and identified five different terms in Lingala which might be variously used to signify an 'empowered woman':

For most AGYW an 'empowered woman' is someone who can support herself and others by her own revenue, is "useful" to society and hence is valued and seen as successful.

AGYW interviewed generally used the term *mwasi malonga* or *mwasi elombe*. Most stressed that a woman should not be economically self-sufficient purely for her own personal gain, but is expected to support and invest in her family and those around her. Hence, empowerment is conceived of as for the collective via the individual and an empowered woman is integrated in society. Some, but not all, AGYW also stressed the importance of a woman conforming to society's expectations in terms of her behaviour (e.g. being polite, respectful and *soumise*).

AGYW's varied understandings of an "empowered woman"

Mwasi malonga, a woman valued and respected in society as she has succeeded economically and socially, supports herself and others and conforms with predominant social norms.

Mwasi amikoka, a woman who is capable, independent and self-sufficient economically.

Grande dame, a woman with high status and profile, is capable and is admired and valued.

Mwasi elombe, a capable, ambitious and autonomous woman who is self-sufficient who supports herself and others.

Elombe mwasi, a dynamic, capable and powerful (including physically) woman, but who does not necessarily act in conformity with social norms and is not necessarily praised.

Most AGYW said ‘empowered women’ had usually studied, they worked and they were generally, but not necessarily, married. Other characteristics mentioned were wisdom, entrepreneurialism, an ability to express herself and *savoir-vivre*. A few AGYM emphasised that the successful empowered woman’s journey involves hard work and surpassing difficulties.

In terms of role models and women who inspired them, AGYW talked about their family members and neighbours, as well as women with a public profile. AGYW commonly talked about their mothers, aunts and older sisters who they describe as *mwasi malonga* or *mwasi elombe*. Girls and young women are also often inspired by other women in their quartier, particularly *maman pasteurs* (women pastors), women who help others and women who have significant business activities. AGYW also see role models and empowered women outside of their community, including national and international politicians (and wives of politicians like Olive Kabila) and celebrities—particularly Christian singers and well-known fashion designers.

The majority of girls and young women said that they and other AGYW would become a mwasi elombe or mwasi malonga primarily through their own efforts. This means finishing their studies, earning and saving money. It also implies a strong character and good behaviour - attributes such as discipline, determination, courage, faith, being “serious”. Many AGYW also say that they must avoid pregnancy before marriage and protect their reputation. The obstacles to empowerment cited were an AGYW’s own character and behaviour and the bad influences of her social group, rather than structural factors in her wider environment.

The circumstances in which marriage can be empowering or disempowering warrant further study. For many AGYW, marriage is a necessary ingredient to become a *mwasi malonga*. Some AGYW also think that their future husbands could help them with economic activities, giving them start up money and advice. However, some AGYW talked about some husbands constraining their wives, stopping them from working or limiting their mobility.

The Aspirations of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

The majority of girls and young women aspire to become respected, well known, and valued in their communities, to become ‘mwasi malonga’. The majority of AGYW have aspirations to work and to also marry and have a family, implying they felt that it was possible to balance all three. Only a minority of AGYW said that they do not want to work, and aspire to marriage alone, and these were all above 20 years of age.

In terms of work aspirations, the majority of girls are ambitious. Some girls simply aspire to find a “good job” and be “useful”, but the majority aspire to particular professions, to become a doctor, businesswoman, lawyer, seamstress or journalist. Many AGYW have work aspirations linked to their desires to help others. A few AGYW spoke in general terms about becoming rich, becoming famous and becoming a “*grande dame*”, who is powerful, wealthy, able to travel, well-known and respected in the community.

Recommendations for policymakers, practitioners and researchers

This report is written for all government, donor, civil society and private actors whose policies, programmes and research affect – whether directly or indirectly – the lives of adolescent girls and young women in Kinshasa, and more widely in DRC. Some key recommendations:

Ensure an inclusive and participatory approach. AGYW interventions should be inclusive, understanding the range of experiences of different AGYW, and that whilst some experiences cut across lines such as age and class, and others are particular to certain groups, such as *filles-mères*. Any practitioner, policymaker or researcher must bear in mind these differences in order to establish inclusive programmes, policies and research, including through ensuring that M&E data are disaggregated by key factors such as socio-economic states.

The experiences of La Pépinière in setting up the Girl-Led Research Unit (GLRU) clearly shows the value of including AGYW in the development and implementation of quality, locally-relevant research, and calls for further inclusion in the implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes. It is recommended that practitioners, policymakers and researchers build on this experience to include AGYW in their planning and ensure they have a voice in research about them and decisions made on their behalf. In similar vein, interventions should **nurture AGYW's own aspirations for empowerment and align programmes with these.**

This study demonstrates the need for a non-discriminatory policy environment that will support the needs and aspirations of specific groups of AGYW for economic empowerment through developing **a more equitable family code**; establishing **safe, protected educational and working environments**; and access to **regulated financial services.**

Interventions to economically empower AGYW should take a holistic approach, combining work with individual AGYW themselves to build their social, economic and psychological assets and resources, with work that ensures the individuals and institutions in their wider environment support and facilitate their empowerment (e.g. through shifting social norms around the status and value of AGYW). Priority interventions include: **supporting individual AGYW** to build business and entrepreneurship skills, improved loans and savings mechanisms, and improved sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services; fostering **positive relationships within and outside the family**, through encouraging family dialogue and supportive familial relationships, and through developing safe social spaces for AGYW outside the home; and **developing a supportive environment for AGYW empowerment**, through campaigns that portray more realistic and varied images of AGYW, and working with the institutions (e.g. formal and informal education, religious institutions) with which AGYW engage, to ensure they are supportive, inclusive and safe.

This study has given important insights into the realities of adolescent girls and young women, but it has also inevitably identified a number of areas where follow up research would be useful. In all cases, it is recommended that AGYW participate in the design of the research and in many cases AGYW could play a key role in the research team. Key areas identified for further research include gaining a better understanding of: intra-household dynamics; improving understanding of AGYW's trade networks; AGYW's participation in the formal sector; AGYW's participation in sex work; the dynamics of sexual violence; the role of marriage in AGYW's economic empowerment; and the potential to improve AGYW's empowerment through schools.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Adolescent Girls and Young Women in DRC

The DRC is a poor, fragile country, which is currently ranked 176 of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI 2014).³ **It is also a young country, with 37% of the population under 10 years old, and 30.8% of the population aged 10-24 years old.**⁴ **Data show that girls and women in DRC suffer persistent discrimination and are unable to realise their full potential.** DRC ranks 149 out of 155 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (2014)⁵ and did not achieve MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women) and regressed on MDG 5 (improve maternal health). Indicators on maternal health, educational attainment and decision-making power for women and girls are all poor (see table 1 below). Women and girls suffer high rates of violence and acceptance of intimate partner violence is high amongst men and women.

This aggregate data, however, disguises important variations across the DRC in terms of the situation of women and girls of different ages and social status and the specific factors that underpin the discrimination and disempowerment they endure. There are also **very few studies which look in detail at the realities of adolescent girls and young women from their own perspective** and seek to understand their lived experiences, their perceptions of their own realities, and their aspirations for their lives.

Figure 1: Key data on Women and Girls in DRC

Indicator	Data	Source and Date
Maternal Mortality Rate	730 (per 100,000 live births)	UNDP (2015) HDR.
Adolescent Birth Rate (age 15-19)	135.3 (per 1,000 women)	UNDP (2015) HDR.
% women aged 15-19 who have commenced their reproductive lives (pregnant or given birth to one child)	27.2%	DHS (2013)
% girls and women aged 15-24 with one or more children	43%	DHS (2013)
% women and men aged 25+ with some secondary education	12.8% women 32.4% men	UNDP (2015) HDR.
% women and men aged 13-24 who have completed secondary of higher education*	9% AGYW (women) 11% ABYM (men)	DHS (2013)

³ UNDP (2015) Human Development Report. United Nations

⁴ Democratic Republic of Congo (2014) Demographic and Health Survey 2013-2014. Ministère du Plan et Suivi et Ministère de la Santé Publique, MEASURE DHS, ICF International Rockville, Maryland, U.S.A

⁵ A composite measure of: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio & adolescent birth rates), empowerment (% parliamentary seats occupied by females & % adult females and males aged 25+ with at least some secondary education), and economic status (labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15+).

Indicator	Data	Source and Date
% Adolescents aged 13-24 who are illiterate	26% AGYW (women) 8% of ABYM (men)	DHS (2013)
% seats in parliament held by women	8.2%	UNDP (2015) HDR.
% women in a union whose husband/ partner has sole decision over revenue she earns	30% (women aged 15-49)	DHS (2013)
% women in a union whose husband/ partner has sole decision over whether she accesses health care	53.0% (women aged 15-49) 66.1% (women aged 15-19) 58.3% (women aged 20-24)	DHS (2013)
% all women who have suffered physical violence since age 15	51.8% (women aged 15-49) 38.2% (women age 15-19) 51.2% (women age 20-24)	DHS (2013)
% women who think that a man was justified in beating his wife for one or more reasons	74.8% (women aged 15-49) 75.1% (women aged 15-19) 77.5% (women aged 20-24)	DHS (2013)

* Although some 13-24 year olds were still in secondary education at the time of the survey. See DHS 2013-2014.

1.2 La Pépinière's Research Agenda

The objectives of La Pépinière's research during the preliminary phase of the programme are:

- To improve understanding of the situation and everyday realities of adolescent girls in the DRC, with in-depth focus on Kinshasa.
- To summarise the existing evidence base on the economic empowerment of adolescent girls.
- To generate initial evidence about what might work to economically empower adolescent girls in the context of the DRC through at least one small pilot project in Kinshasa.
- To communicate the evidence and learning effectively to different stakeholders to ensure it influences wider policy and programming on gender (e.g. of DFID, other donors, the government and NGOs).
- To ensure that adolescent girls participate in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of the research and evidence generation.

Based on these objectives, *La Pépinière* has developed the **following research questions**, which have also been agreed with a group of 25 adolescent girls and young women in an initial agenda-setting workshop in Kinshasa.

***La Pépinière*: Research questions**

1. What is the current situation of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in comparison with adolescent boys and young men (ABYM) in Kinshasa (and DRC)?
2. What are the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) themselves in Kinshasa with respect to their economic and social empowerment?
3. What are the main factors at an individual and a collective level that contribute to economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW)?
4. What are the main factors in the wider environment that have an impact on the economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW)?
5. What is the relation between economic empowerment and other forms of empowerment?
6. "What works" to improve the economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in the context of Kinshasa (and DRC)?

In order to answer these questions, the team planned a series of studies during the first 30-month phase.

- I. Review of evidence on the economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women⁶
- II. Secondary data analysis of data from the DHS (2013) and the Survey-123 (2013)⁷
- III. Review of the literature on adolescent girls and young women in DRC⁸
- IV. Qualitative research carried out by girl researchers on the situation of AGYW in Kinshasa
- V. Media and Communications Landscape Study⁹
- VI. Quantitative survey with AGYW, ABYM aged 12-24 and women and men age 25+ in Kinshasa
- VII. Follow-up in-depth studies in 2016 and 2017

- 6 Jacobson, Jessica, with Baden, Sally and Bucyana, Nicole, 2015, "Evidence Review: What works to Economically Empower Adolescent Girls", Social Development Direct, London, July
- 7 La Pépinière (2015) Secondary Data Analysis on Adolescent Girls and Young Women. CERED-GL and M&C Saatchi
- 8 Hejman, J. (2015) What is known about the socioeconomic stats of adolescent girls and young women in DRC?
- 9 Myers, M. and Kipendo, R. (2015) Media and Landscape Communications Study

1.3 About this report

This report is based primarily on the findings of study iv), a qualitative research study undertaken by a team of girl researchers on the realities of AGYW in Kinshasa. However, it also draws on findings from studies ii), iii) and v) where pertinent. It is primarily focused on the second research question above: What are the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) themselves in Kinshasa with respect to their economic and social empowerment? The report firstly describes the girl-led approach and methodology used and then gives background data on AGYW in Kinshasa and the profile of those interviewed for this study. It then summarises key findings in the following areas before presenting conclusions and recommendations: (i) perceptions and norms around adolescent girls and young women; (ii) the economic lives of AGYW; (iii) the decision-making power of AGYW; (iv) the social lives of AGYW; (v) what empowerment means for AGYW; and (vi) their aspirations for the future.

GIRL-LED APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 La Pépinière's Girl Led Research Unit (GLRU)

La Pépinière's Girl-Led Research Unit (GLRU) was established to realise the programme's commitment to the participation of AGYW in determining the programme's priorities and activities. Specifically, **the aim of the GLRU is to ensure that AGYW participate in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of the research and evidence.**



Photo: Agenda Setting Workshop, May 2015

The GLRU was established in May 2015 and **currently comprises 15 'girl researchers' aged 16-24 from different socio-economic backgrounds and neighbourhoods in Kinshasa.** The girl researchers were recruited with the support of local community-based organisations (CBOs) working with women and youth in four districts of Kinshasa province: Tshangu (Kimbanseke), Lukunga (Gombe) Funa (Bandalungwa), and Mont-Amba (Kinseso). A set of criteria was used to ensure the inclusion of a diversity of adolescent girls and young women, including those in and out of education, those working and not working, those literate, semi-literate and illiterate, and those living in different family situations – with parents, with others and with their own children.

Following initial pre-selection days in early May, 25 girls were invited to an “agenda setting” workshop in late May 2015. **This workshop engaged these adolescent girls and young women in the development and shaping of La Pépinière's research themes and questions** and served as a mechanism to select the team of 15 girl researchers.¹⁰

2.2 Capacity Building of the Girl Researchers

An initial assessment of the capacities of the selected adolescent girls and young women was undertaken as the basis for **the development of a capacity building strategy for the GLRU.**¹¹ This was also informed by key principles and approaches participatory, youth-, child-, and peer-led research and ethnography to engage and empower girls as researchers in their own communities.

¹⁰ There were initially 16 girl researchers, but unfortunately one dropped out due to personal circumstances.

¹¹ La Pépinière (2015) Capacity Building Strategy for Girl Researchers

The girl-led peer approach to research adopted by *La Pépinière* has involved four key stages to build the capacities of girl researchers to play an active and leading role in the research process and generate useful insights about the situation of girls in the DRC:

- **Agenda setting:** An initial workshop in late May 2015 to engage girls in the development and shaping of key research themes and questions.
- **Research training:** An initial workshop in June 2015, followed by intensive piloting of the research tools and ongoing training during the research to ensure the girl researchers had the capabilities and confidence to lead the research process in their local contexts.
- **Supported fieldwork / mentoring:** A team of four Congolese researchers (a girls' engagement expert, three research mentors) mentored the girl researchers throughout the research (weekly group sessions and on-call support) to ensure they were supported personally and professionally to undertake their research and develop their research skills.
- **Analysis and validation:** A series of workshops to involve girls in data analysis and verification of findings to ensure their perspectives were included.
- **Individual monitoring:** This was undertaken throughout the training, research and analysis phases to assess the progress of each girl and tailor support accordingly.

The mentoring team also developed **a system of individual monitoring** to assess the development of each girl researchers' personal and research skills and capacities and give tailored and additional support as needed. This system has assessed each girl's progress against the criteria below, using both a quantitative score (scale 1-5, with a total possible score of 30) and qualitative comments. The research mentors assessed the capacities of each girl researcher prior to the research training, following the research training and piloting, at the end of each week during the four-week research period and following their participation in the data analysis phase.

GLRU: Capacity Building Criteria

Organisational skills: e.g. Ability to plan interviews and manage time well, attendance and good participation at the agreed training sessions and mentoring meetings.

Problem-solving abilities: e.g. Ability to manage unexpected circumstances, adapt to ground realities.

Qualitative research skills 1: Interviewing e.g. Capacity to lead a semi-structured interview including introducing the research, asking open questions, probing for information, keeping the focus on the key themes in the interview guide, self-evaluation.

Qualitative research skills 2: Ethics e.g. understanding and application of the ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, safety.

Qualitative research skills 3: Data Analysis e.g. quality of 'data forms' filled each week, contribution to the discussions during mentoring sessions, contribution to analysis sessions after the fieldwork.

Communication and social skills: Capacity to communicate well and maintain good relationships with research participants, the mentoring team and fellow girl researchers.

The final capacity assessment shows that each one of the girl researchers developed their capacities considerably during the three-month research period. On average across the 15 girl researchers, the girls' capacities increased by almost 11 points (scores out of 30), with a range of improvement of 4 – 17 points on the above criteria. Almost all girl researchers improved on all the criteria above and the qualitative assessments by the mentors and the girls themselves indicate some of the following changes in capacities experienced by the girl researchers:

Girl researcher testimonies

"I have learned such a lot and I am developing as a person through this research."

"The project has helped me to understand the situation of girls... I did not know how they earn money, how they live, their every day realities... I also learned how to ask good questions, how to put people at ease."

"The research has allowed me to know about the lives of other girls...I might have had my own ideas, but now I understand their own ideas, their ways of thinking...this helps me to learn and grow."

"I am curious and I love to learn... I really want to work in science and put this to the service of my society... I want to go far... I have learned how to ask good questions, how to probe... I didn't know how to do this... how to put people at ease."

- Improved time management and organisational skills
- Increased self-awareness (e.g. of own capacities, strengths and weaknesses)
- Improved listening skills and ability to accept the view of others
- Improved ability to absorb and act on feedback
- Improved confidence to participate in group discussions
- Improved confidence in approaching people and putting them at ease
- Improved skills in conducting interviews, including keeping on topic and probing
- Improved team-working and collaborative skills
- Increased open-mindedness towards others of different backgrounds and views
- Improved relationship-building skills

Examples of projects / investments developed by girl researchers

Paying secondary school fees for self and/or siblings

Selling omelettes in front of sister's boutique and saving in a likelemba

Selling sandals and perfumes

Sold uniforms and then sarongs

Selling bags, shoes and jewellery

Selling telephone credit

We also conducted a series of short video interviews with girl researchers during the research process to gather their testimonies on their motivations, experiences and what they had learned. **A few of their testimonies are given above.**

Finally, **we encouraged and supported each girl researcher to develop a project to invest the money they earned from working as girl researchers** with La Pépinière. Some examples of their activities and projects are given below. Some girls have succeeded in increasing their capital; a few have lost this money to problems of unexpected deaths, illness and theft. The research mentors have given advice to many girls on their projects and savings and this will continue.

The long-term vision is for the GLRU to operate sustainably by providing research services to other organisations as well as career opportunities for the girl researchers. It is envisaged that the team of girl researchers will participate in at least one other piece of research for *La Pépinière* in 2016 during the preliminary phase of the programme. In the longer-term, *La Pépinière* will develop a strategy, in consultation with the girl researchers, for the longer-term sustainability of the GLRU.

2.3 Methodology for the ‘Situation of Girls’ study

La Pépinière’s first girl-led study aimed to better understand the realities of the lives of adolescent girls and young women in Kinshasa from their own perspectives. The study was undertaken between June and October 2015. During initial consultations about the research, the mentoring team and girl researchers jointly decided that **the girl researchers should seek to interview three categories of respondents:**

- Adolescent girls younger than the girl researchers, aiming for some girls aged 12-15
- Adolescent girls of the same age as the girl researcher i.e. in the 16-24 age group
- Adult members of the girl researchers’ local communities and social networks that they feel are influential in the lives of adolescent girls and young women

Each girl researcher conducted four interviews with each category of respondent: 12 interviews each. Girl researchers identified respondents through their existing social networks in their communities, churches, schools and trading networks, making an effort **to include a diversity of adolescent girls and young women of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds** including: those in education, those working, those struggling to earn a living; those living with their parents, other family members and in other situations; and those who are stigmatised and rejected, for example because they engage in sex work or are unmarried ‘girl-mothers’ (*filles-mères*).

During the three-day research training workshop held in late June, the girl researchers worked with *La Pépinière’s* research mentors and specialists to develop two semi-structured interview guides for use with adolescent girls and young women and with influential adults. These were translated into Lingala by the research mentors working with the girl researchers and also converted into an audio version so that the semi-literate and illiterate girl researchers could listen to them using an MP3 device. The guides outlined questions and sub-questions in six key areas:

- Economic activities of adolescent girls and young women
- Decision-making power of adolescent girls and young women
- People and organisations who are influential in adolescent girls and young women
- The everyday lives and social status of adolescent girls and young women
- Adolescent girls and young women perspectives on empowerment
- The aspirations of adolescent girls and young women for the future

Each girl researcher was given a smartphone and trained to use it to record interviews.

The girl researchers and the mentoring team also worked together to develop an ethical protocol and process for gaining informed consent. Following interviewing practice during the research training workshop, the girl researchers undertook two rounds of piloting in July, accompanied by the research mentors and followed by feedback and reflection sessions.

The girl researchers conducted the interviews during the month of August 2015. They each conducted three interviews a week and then **a weekly mentoring session was held at each research site**, attended by the three or four girl researchers from that site, their research mentor and the girls engagement advisor. During the weekly mentoring session, the interview recordings were downloaded, and then the girl researchers and their research

mentor engaged in a process of reflection on the interviews. This included listening to interviews, encouraging self-reflection and discussion, coaching to improve interviewing skills, and collective problem solving by the group.

The girls also reflected on the content of interviews and each girl researcher completed a form (using words and pictures) on the key findings of each interview and shared what they felt was an important story from their interviews with the rest of the team in a group discussion. The aim of this process was to encourage girls to develop their skills in analysis. In addition, the research mentors wrote a short report each week on the mentoring sessions, including the content of the discussion and analysis as well as the progress of each girl researcher against the capacity building criteria.



Photo: A weekly mentoring session

In total, the girl researchers conducted 177 interviews across the four research sites, 117 with adolescent girls and young women and 60 with influential adults. More details on the profile of adolescent girls and young women interviewed is given in section 3.3. The influential adults interviewed included roughly equal amounts of men and women, with their ages ranging from 20s to 50s. They included pastors, NGO workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, businesspeople, state employees, tradespeople and housewives.

Following completion of the interview phase, in September the interviews were translated into French and transcribed by the team of researcher mentors. The data analysis process was multi-faceted and including the following inter-related processes:

- Systematic coding and preliminary analysis of the transcripts by the research team;
- A data analysis workshop with the girl researchers in early October when they reviewed their own analysis forms, discussed key findings in their research teams and then discussed these and the preliminary analysis from the formal coding process; More in-depth data analysis on the basis of the coded transcripts, including disaggregating findings by factors such as location, age, education and family situation of respondent;
- Writing up analysis for each key thematic area drawing on the coded transcripts, results of the data analysis workshop, mentors' analysis of the girls' forms and the weekly mentoring records;
- A workshop where the girl researchers discussed and validated the analysis, then

produced posters of key findings to present to La Pépinière's research team in a Research Analysis and Validation workshop in late October 2015, which looked the results from several studies.

2.4 Study Limitations

Overall, **the quality of research conducted by the girl researchers was high**. The majority of interviews were well conducted and the girl researchers asked questions in a non-biased way and probed well for further detail. In the analysis, any data potentially compromised was excluded, and the thorough, participatory nature of the analysis process gives confidence in the key findings.

The research includes the perspectives of a wide range of adolescent girls from different socio-economic backgrounds and in different social and economic situations.

The sample of girls is not representative of the profile of adolescent girls and young women in Kinshasa and thus, this study does not make statistical claims to representativeness. Nonetheless, it is possible to triangulate and corroborate certain findings across many different interviewees and reach what is known as 'saturation' in qualitative research, which gives confidence in the robustness of the findings for a particular group of interviewees. In the summary of findings in this report, care is taken with the way key findings and claims are presented, making it clear what these findings represent and to which adolescent girls and young women they refer.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN KINSHASA

3.1 Existing data on AGYW in Kinshasa

As discussed above, there is very limited research and literature focused specifically on adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in DRC overall, or in Kinshasa specifically. Nonetheless, analyses undertaken by *La Pépinière* of nationally representative survey data (DHS 2013, Enquete-123, 2013),¹² as well as the Media and Communications Landscape Study¹³ and the wider review of literature¹⁴ reveal that, while many overall trends in the situation of AGYW in the capital are similar to the DRC as a whole, there are important differences and some specific factors in the context of Kinshasa that affect the opportunities and challenges that AGYW face.

(i) Family and household status

In Kinshasa, **a significantly lower proportion (16%) of AGYW aged 15-24 are or have been married** than in DRC nationally (44%). Of AGYW aged 23-24, 64% are married in DRC nationally, compared to only 30% in Kinshasa. Similarly, **in Kinshasa, one in four (23%) of AGYW aged 15-24 have a child, compared to almost one in two (43%) in DRC nationally.** The data also show that women in Kinshasa desire to have fewer children than average. However, we also know that the proportion of AGYW who have children outside of marriage is relatively high in Kinshasa.

In Kinshasa, **half (49%) of AGYW are the daughter of the Head of Household, and 42% of AGYW live with other family members** who are the head of household (e.g. uncle or aunt, grandparent, sister, in-laws). Only 8% are the wife of the Head of Household.

97% of AGYW aged 13-24 in Kinshasa (compared to only 25% AGYW in DRC nationally) live in households belonging to the richest quintile.¹⁵ However, costs of living are high in Kinshasa, and studies reveal significant disparities between neighbourhoods and households, and **many people live in very precarious and difficult conditions**, unable to escape basic survival mode.

(ii) Education and work status

In Kinshasa, educational attainment levels are higher than national levels and similar for AGYW and ABYM with 34% ABYM and 31% AGYW aged 13-24 having completed secondary and at least started higher education (compared to 11% and 9% in DRC as a

¹² La Pépinière (2015) Secondary Data Analysis on Adolescent Girls and Young Women. CERED-GL and M&C Saatchi

¹³ Myers, M. and Kipendo, R. (2015) Media and Communications Landscape Study. M&C Saatchi

¹⁴ Hejman, J. (2015) Review of Literature on Adolescent Girls and Young Women in DRC and their Empowerment. Hejman, J. for Social Development Direct

¹⁵ Measured by the Wealth Index* in the DHS, a composite measure of a household's cumulative living standard. It is calculated using data on household ownership of selected assets (e.g. televisions, bicycles), materials used for housing construction, and access to water and sanitation facilities. Using principal components analysis, the Wealth Index places individual households on a continuous scale of relative wealth. All interviewed households are then placed into five wealth quintiles.

whole). Illiteracy rates are also lower in Kinshasa and there is less of a gender gap with 6% of AGYW aged 13-24 vs. 3% of ABYM in Kinshasa unable to read at all (compared to 26% AGYW and 8% ABYM nationally).

In poorer families, a lower proportion of girls than boys enrol in school and rates of dropout are higher, especially among adolescent girls. **Studies suggest that several factors contribute to dropout rates:** household poverty, pregnancy, sexual harassment by teachers, underperformance and pressures on girls to fulfil domestic roles and get married.¹⁶

In Kinshasa a significant proportion of AGYW and ABYM are working¹⁷ (but at a lower level than in DRC nationally). Analysis of the DHS data shows that 29.1% of AGYW aged 12-15 work (compared to 28.5% of ABYM) and 58.3% of AGYW aged 16-24 work (compared to 57.4% ABYM). The main reason given for those not working is still being in education.

Small trading (petite commerce) is the most common economic activity of AGYW aged 10-24 in Kinshasa, compared to 'self-employed agriculture' nationally. In Kinshasa, of those who work, 66.4% of AGYW aged 10-24 (cf. 43% of ABYM) are engaged in selling, most commonly street trading. 20.1% of AGYW aged 10-24 (cf. 32.3% ABYM) are in the service sector, mostly focused in informal services such as shoe shining, hairdressing and working as beauticians. **There is a lack of opportunities in the formal sector** in DRC, including in Kinshasa, especially for first-time job seekers, and the provision of professional training is poor.

Whether working or not working, **98% of AGYW and ABYM aged 10-24 in Kinshasa say that they receive some financial support from their families** to meet their needs.

(iii) Social Status

The transition between childhood and adulthood is heavily gendered. For a boy, the transition to adulthood is generally seen as a gradual process, largely marked by his increasing economic autonomy. For a girl, her transition to adulthood has traditionally been marked by puberty and is a moment rather than a process. At this point, changes can be rapid and girls can suddenly be expected to bring income into the household and many will receive sexual advances. In areas of rapid social change, such as Kinshasa, girls and young women have to negotiate contradictions between traditional ideas, religious norms (where marriage marks the transition to womanhood) and 'modern' influences around gender and relationships.

In Kinshasa, married 15-24 year old AGYW have more say in household decision making than married AGYW in DRC overall – especially in the domains of household purchases (76% have some say in Kinshasa, compared to 55% in DRC) and how their husband's earnings are used (80% have some say in Kinshasa, compared to 55% in DRC). However, 51% of married AGYW in Kinshasa do not have any say over their access to healthcare. Overall, participation in decision making for married AGYW appears to increase with age. **The majority of married AGYW in Kinshasa take decisions over the use of their own money** with 85% of married 15-19 years olds and 67% of married 20-24

¹⁶ UIS/UNICEF (2013). Rapport de l'enquête nationale sur les enfants et adolescents en dehors de l'école RDC Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés.

¹⁷ In the DHS, respondents were considered to be 'working' if they reported having undertaken paid or unpaid work in the past 12 months, outside of household work.

year olds saying use of their own money is solely their decision.¹⁸

The limited evidence on civil participation of AGYW suggests that while their political participation is weak, **AGYW engage in various civic and social networks** around economic, religious and social activities, and that bonds with family members and intimate partners are important.

The consumption of television among AGYW and ABYM in Kinshasa is high, with 75% of AGYW and 81% of ABYM aged 15-24 watching TV at least once a week. 27% AGYW and 36% of ABYM in Kinshasa listen to the radio at least once a week.

(iv) Violence against AGYW

A significant proportion of AGYW in Kinshasa has experienced violence: 40% of 15-19 year olds and 59% of 20-24 years old AGYW (married & unmarried) have experienced physical violence during their lifetime; 9% of 15-19 year olds and 18% of 20-24 years old AGYW have experienced sexual violence. The predominant perpetrators are intimate partners and other family members.

Acceptance of violence against women is high: Nearly half (49%) AGYW think the husband is justified in beating his wife if she has neglected the children (cf. 39% of ABYM); 45% of AGYW aged 15-24 (cf. 41% ABYM) think the husband is justified in beating his wife if she argues with him; over a third of AGYW aged 15-24 (37%) (cf. 32% ABYM) think it is justified for the husband to beat his wife if she leaves without informing him.

3.2 Profile of the AGYW interviewed by the girl researchers

In total, our girl researchers interviewed 117 adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), of which 114 are included in this analysis.¹⁹ During the agenda-setting workshop in May 2015, it was agreed that the **main target group for this research would be elenge mwasi** (*bilenge basi* in plural). This roughly translates as 'female youth' and the different ways in which the girls and young women participants described this group are captured below.

Descriptions of an *elenge mwasi*

- A girl or woman aged about 12 to 25/30 years
- A girl going through adolescence
- A female youth
- A girl who does not yet have the experience of the life of a woman
- A girl in the stage of learning as an individual, who is learning how to live in her society
- A girl with a future

¹⁸ 26% of 20-24 year old AGYW say the decision is joint with their partner

¹⁹ One interviewee was excluded because she was older than our age category (32). Her interview is not included in the overall analysis for girls/young women. Another two interviews (from Bandalungwa) were excluded because there were some issues with the transcription process that made the data unreliable.

Geography: The AGYW interviewed were accessed by our girl researchers via our four research sites: 32 girls interviewed by the Bandalungwa team; 26 girls by the Gombe team; 32 girls interviewed by the Kinseso team; and 24 girls by the Kimbanseke team. However, the girls interviewed were drawn from the girl researchers' social networks, which extended beyond the commune where they live. Thus, AGYW interviewees lived across 17 of Kinshasa's 24 communes. However, as the table below shows, the majority of AGYW interviewed lived in Masina, Limete and Mont Ngafula communes (see map in annex A).

Bandalungwa (1)	Kintambo (1)	Mont Ngafula (13)
Barumbu (3)	Lemba (10)	Ndjili (3)
Gombe (4)	Limete (17)	Ngaba (1)
Kalamu (6)	Linguala (1)	Ngaliema (1)
Kimbanseke (6)	Masina (19)	Selembao (8)
Kinseso (7)	Matete (9)	

Age: The 114 adolescent girls and young women included in our analysis were aged 11 to 29 years, but the majority were in *La Pépinière's* target age of 12-24 years. We split the AGYW into three broad age groups: young adolescents (11-15), older adolescents (16-19), and young women (20-29). The table below shows the breakdown of AGYW interviewees by age group. This shows that the girl researchers interviewed slightly fewer girls in the youngest age group (< 16 years), which partly reflected their own ages (16-24 years) and the relative ease of accessing peers compared to younger girls.

Age category	Number of interviews	% of total (total = 114)
Younger adolescents (11-15)	20	18%
Older adolescents (16-19)	51	45%
Young women (20-29)	40	35%
No information available	3	3%

Education: The 114 interviewees included AGYW with a range of educational backgrounds. The table below gives the proportion of AGYW that have reached each education level, whether they are still in school or have left. This shows that our sample of AGYW are overall more educated than average in Kinshasa (see data above from the DHS).

Education level	Number of interviews	% of total (total = 114)
No education	2	2%
Completed primary	3	3%
Some primary	3	3%
Some secondary	41	36%
Completed secondary	36	32%
Some tertiary	26	23%
No information / not clear	3	3%

Household and family situation: The AGYW interviewed reported living in households with a range of different people.²⁰ The majority of the 114 AGYW said that they lived with two parents, whether their two biological parents or one biological parent and one step-parent. The second most common living situation among the AGYW interviewed was living with other family members, including older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. It is worth noting that some of these girls were also in touch with, and receiving support from, their parents, but no longer lived with them. A smaller proportion of girls in our sample lived with just one parent, and this was for a range of reasons including divorce, death, and parents who live and work outside of Kinshasa (examples of both mothers and fathers doing this). The least common living situation among our sample was 'other'. Only three young women lived by themselves or in other situations.²¹

Who AGYW lives with	Number of interviews	% of total (total = 114)
Both parents (2 biological, or 1 biological + 1 step)	83	73%
Mother only	7	6%
Father only	2	2%
Other relatives	19	17%
Other living arrangements	3	3%

At a broad level, these household and family situations reflect those of AGYW across Kinshasa (see DHS data above), with the exception that our sample did not include any girls who were married. Our sample, however, include several adolescent girls and young women who were mothers, called *filles-mères*, because they are unmarried. Our sample also included a minority of AGYW living in more irregular situations linked to gangs or as sex workers.

²⁰ This summary is as accurate as possible given that girl researchers asked for the occupation of the head of household and that of his/her partner and how many people in the household. Some girl researchers did not probe about the relation of the head of household to the AGYW, but in most cases, it was possible to determine this from analysis of the rest of the interview script.

²¹ However, given the stigma associated with AGYW living outside of their families before marriage, it may be that more AGYW in our sample lived in 'other' household arrangements, but did not admit this.

PERCEPTIONS AND NORMS AROUND ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

4.1 The high and often conflicting expectations of girls

How a girl or young woman is expected to behave towards others

“Good behaviour – respect for her parents and for people in her neighbourhood... Good reputation – not to be with men here and there, risking soiling her reputation”

(Man, age 43, pastor, Selembao Commune).

“Model behaviour... models of society” (Male pastor, 51 years, Kimbanseke Commune)

“Girls are expected to prove that that they should not be dismissed and that they are capable of doing things just like boys... [But] the reality is that girls grow up thinking that they cannot do certain things... Then suddenly those that have these expectations of her are disappointed because these girls can't achieve them. For example, there are girls who tell themselves that they can't do typical professions like architecture or become an engineer, that these are for men...” (Young woman, age 19, Gombe Commune)

During the interviews, both AGYW and influential adults were asked about how others in their families and neighbourhoods viewed adolescent girls and young women, how they were expected to behave and how they actually behaved. These two groups' responses confirmed **the high expectations placed on AGYW in order for them to be valued and viewed well in society.**

Firstly, **there is a strong focus on a girl's appearance and behaviour toward others:** she must be polite and respectful to family and community members, dress appropriately (conservative, but also she needs to be clean, well-presented and 'feminine'), attend church and pray regularly, greet people in the neighbourhood, avoid cavorting with men and boys, and be *soumise* (submissive) with adults and eventually with her husband.²²

Secondly, there is **an emphasis on the importance of a girl or young women being productive and 'useful' to her family and society.** The list of expectations in this respect is long, slightly **contradictory and hence difficult to navigate for girls and young women.** On the one hand, many people stress that a young woman is expected to marry, to look after her husband and children, and undertake the domestic work. For some people, this is the primary expectation of a young woman. Yet, at the same time, most people expect an AGYW to be educated, knowledgeable, a role model for other girls and young women, and to work to contribute economically to her household and to society as a whole.

Several AGYW and adults spoke about the gap between what is expected of AGYW and what they are able to achieve in reality. Some said that the norms of society often made it impossible for AGYW to meet such expectations. Many discussed the **clash between contradictory values emanating from Congolese traditions, religious norms and modern ideas.** For example, on the one hand, women are encouraged to earn a living, sometimes doing similar work to men. Yet, at the same time, an AGYW must be careful to avoid work traditionally reserved for men – otherwise she might be judged as a “*femme-homme*” (woman-man).

²² The term 'soumise' is used very often to refer to how women are expected to behave in DRC. It is a term that is at once associated with the bible (women should be submissive to men) and the Code de la Famille (which names men as the head of the household and says that women are expected to be submissive to men). However, a long discussion with our girl researchers showed that not everyone understands the meaning of this term in precisely the same way. Some felt it was about being polite and respectful, whereas some others felt it was about submitting to the will of others (husbands and society) and putting aside your own needs and wishes. Whilst most girls felt it was a positive term, some girls said it could also be negative for this latter reason.

4.2 “Good girls” vs. “Bad girls”

Both AGYW and adults interviewed report that **the behaviour of AGYW is often closely monitored in their families and neighbourhoods** and that they are judged on the grounds of how they behave, dress, do and do not do. This judgment, in turn, affects how an AGYW is treated by those around her, whether she is rejected or accepted and what is expected for her life.

Overall, there is a **predominant generalised negative perception of AGYW**. AGYW and adults interviewed spoke of how girls and young women are often seen as ‘not serious’, as ‘useless’ to society because they are preoccupied with their appearance, with boys and with social media.

Negative perceptions of adolescent girls and young women

“They always think badly of girls. If they see you chatting with boys, they expect you to get pregnant and stop your studies.... It is the people in the quartier that think like this. Even in my family. My paternal uncle can come to the house and if he sees me in shorts or a mini-skirt, he thinks that I have started love affairs with men.” (Adolescent girl, age 14, Masina Commune)

“In my family, I have a good reputation, but in the quartier, they think I am not a serious girl simply because I wear sexy, tight clothes... Whereas in fact I am not less serious because of this.” (Young woman, age 19, Gombe Commune)

“The general opinion is that girls are not serious. That a girl often has five men on the go at the same time... she has five telephone numbers and when she is with one boy, she has the other numbers on silent mode...” (Man, aged 33, priest, Mont Ngafula Commune).

Indeed, both AGYW and adult interviewees said **that AGYW tend to be categorised to one extreme or the other as a “good girl” or a “bad girl”²³** and that once an AGYW is labelled as a “bad girl”, it becomes difficult to change the way she is viewed.

“Good girls” and “bad girls”

“If a girl behaves well, people think well of her. They will say, ‘this girl behaves well, may God help her to get a good husband’. But if you behave badly, people will think badly of you, ‘this girl is impolite, she will become a girl-mother soon, she won’t marry.” (Female small trader, no age, Kinseso Commune).

“A woman who has studied, who works, everyone respects her... You will find another woman who is very easy, who is a prostitute, who has relations with many boyfriends... So each girl is judged by the manner in which she behaves” (Female NGO trainer, age 38, Ndjili Commune).

“People expect success for girls who behave well, and pregnancy, illness, infections and death for those who behave badly (Young woman, age 18, Kinseso site)

²³ See also Laura Davies et al (2014) who reported similar findings.

An adolescent girl or young woman may be labelled as a “bad girl” for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, and most often, an **AGYW is judged on the basis of her sexual behaviour.** If it is known or assumed that she is engaging in sexual relations with men or boys outside of marriage, she will be judged harshly as being a girl of loose morals, as “easy” (*légère*), or as a “prostitute”. In many cases, this judgement can be made simply by how she dresses. Girls who wear “sexy” clothing (e.g. short skirts, tight trousers, tight shirts) are assumed to be sexually active, and are rejected. In other cases, it may be simply because she is seen talking to men or boys or has a boyfriend.

If an AGYW then becomes pregnant and either becomes a *fille-mère* (unmarried girl mother) or terminates the pregnancy with an illegal abortion, her reputation is ruined and she is stigmatised by mainstream society. Furthermore, although few AGYW referred to this, there appears to also be a stigma around survivors of sexual violence, whereas even girls who are raped will be blamed.

The second category of AGYW who are rejected that were mentioned the most often by both girls and influential adults are those who are “not serious”, who are seen as impolite, disrespectful, who do not listen to or follow the advice of their parents, elders or husbands. This idea of ‘seriousness’ is linked to ideas around ‘usefulness’, wherein girls who are serious not only listen to good advice, but also study and/or have respectable economic activities. In some cases, a girl can be judged as not serious because she **transgresses gender norms and expectations** by not being submissive, by being confident and outspoken.

Thirdly, **AGYW who engage in or are assumed to engage in illegal or morally suspect activities can also be rejected and labelled as ‘bad girls’.** This can include girls that hang around with **kaluna (street gangs), sex workers,** and those that engage in **begging or theft.** It can also include girls assumed to engage in **fetishism or sorcery.** These kinds of practices are rejected by the church and mainstream society, so these girls are stigmatised and rejected, and, in some cases, subjected to violent punishment or exorcism rituals.²⁴

Finally, **several AGYW and adults also spoke about how very disadvantaged girls, including those who are illiterate, impoverished, perceived to be LGBT, and those who are living with disabilities are rejected and can be seen as “bad”.** In particular, several adults said that disability can bring shame to the family and thus lead to families rejecting disabled girls.

“Bad girls” who are rejected

“Those. [who are] dirty, unclean, do not care for their bodies...who had children without fathers, prostitutes...those who make silly mistakes, are impolite” (Young woman, age 22, Lemba Commune)

“Girls that are said to be less serious include “Mitu etoka nzinzi” (those with flies in their heads), “bana boyo toli” (those who refuse advice), “likolo likolo” (in the air, in the air). Those who dress badly – short dress, bare back, belly button on the outside... transparent neckline, underwear showing, bad characters, impolite... no men (papa) or women (mama) in the neighbourhood will value you... If you pass by, people will mock you” (Man, age 34, Kinseso Commune).

“Girls living with a disability, illiterate girls, those who are very marginalised because they are rejected by their families, and considered as bad luck, a source of shame...” (Man, age 27, Lemba Commune).

²⁴ For specific research on children and youth accused of witchcraft, see Save the Children (2006) “The Invention of Child Witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and APPG (2012) “Child witches, child soldiers, child poverty and violence: Street Children in Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo”.

The responses of AGYW interviewed suggested that the **girls that are valued are those who adhere to the predominant social norms around how a girl or young woman should behave.** Whilst many simply said that girls that are valued are those that “behave well”, many elaborated on this in terms of the ideals around sexuality, seriousness, usefulness and respect discussed above. Most adults agreed, but also spoke of AGYW who were calm, self-confident and have poise.

The most common response is that girls who are valued, “good girls”, are those who are seen to be serious, useful and respectful. A key component of this is that girls are supposed to listen to the good advice their parents and other elders give them. Other components include politeness, likeability, greeting people in the quartier, and being seen to spend their time usefully and simply, in study or work (inside or outside the home) or at church and in prayer, rather than wasting time with frivolities and “ambiance” (trendy social life). A key element of their behaviour is that they **model good behaviour for others, and are therefore seen as role models.**

Another important attribute is how AGYW they present themselves, not only through their behaviour, but also their dress. Both AGYW and adults interviewed talked about how a “good” girl dresses conservatively. Nonetheless, there were also a couple of girls who said they did not agree, and that clothes are not a good indication of the behaviour or value of a girl.

“Good girls” that are valued

“Those that are role models on the avenue... she sells, she is polite, she serves God. People in the neighbourhood tell you to follow her example... I really agree... and I would like to become like these role models” (Adolescent girl, age 17, Kinseso site)

“[P]eople admire young girls who like their studies, are humble, polite. Young girls who help their parents in domestic tasks and have a true life of prayer. They are seen as role models by other parents for the young girls of their generation... I like being in the category of girls that are admired and valued...And I totally share the disapproval accorded to easy girls and sympathy for girls who are serious” (Adolescent girl, age 15 Masina Commune).

4.3 Girls and young women are largely to blame

A common theme in the majority of interviews was that **it is AGYW themselves who are seen as responsible for meeting societal expectations**. If they fall short, the blame tends to be placed on them for being unable or unwilling to meet these expectations.

Nonetheless, a few interviewees said that if a girl transgresses norms or is seen to behave badly, this may also be seen as **the fault of those who did not teach her well enough** or invest in her education – usually her parents. Many respondents—both adults and AGYW—reported that girls from “good families” are valorised, which often appears to be families with the means and will to invest in their daughters’ education, and where families teach and reinforce traditional social norms (e.g. that AGYW should be *soumise*) at home.

Finally, a small minority of interviewees mentioned **structural barriers** to girls’ empowerment such as gender norms, inheritance systems, a lack of economic opportunities and poverty.

Who is responsible for AGYW not meeting expectations?

“Girls who are arrogant and live a carefree life and run after married men or those who hang out with “kaluna”^{*} boys, I would not say that this behaviour is linked to the poverty of their family. Because there are also girls that have almost everything (to eat, to wear, pocket money) who behave very badly... they copy the ‘easy’ morals of their friend, steal and fall into this pitiful life. In contrast, there are girls from poor families, some have good behaviour, some have bad behaviour because they want to be like others and fall into the trap of sex work... I would say that certain parents are also to blame for this situation, because they think that their children’s needs are only limited to eating; whereas.. girls have other needs such as dressing well, changing their hairstyle.” (Adolescent girl, age 18, Masina Commune)

“It’s poverty. For example, if a girl has the ambition to study all the way through, but she starts the penultimate year of primary school and lacks the money for the fees. After some time, she starts to find a way to get by, to dress like her other friends in the neighbourhood... Also, some parents encourage their daughters into prostitution citing “article 15, boso bokoli, boluka pe”,[#] you are already grown up, get by yourself to satisfy your needs.” (Adolescent girl, age 17, Masina Commune,).

^{*} “Kaluna” is the Lingala word used to refer to ‘street kids’ who are often accused of thieving, crime and violence.

[#] This is a well known phrase in Lingala citing an imaginary “article 15” of the constitution which basically says that people needs to “get by” or “make ends meet” themselves.

THE ECONOMIC LIVES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

5.1 Who gives AGYW economic support?

The girl researchers asked respondents about who provides economic support to AGYW—who, how, to what extent, and how girls supplement this support through their own income generating activities. **The majority of the AGYW interviewed had someone who provided for them**, though *who* provided for them, the *level of support*, and *how the support functioned* varied.

In the majority of cases, it is parents (and step parents) who provide most support to girls and young women. This is consistent with findings from the Enquete-123 discussed above. In addition to food and shelter, the main support given by parents is payment of school fees. Some parents also gave ‘pocket money’ for girls to meet their other costs. However, **many other family members such as grand-parents, uncles, aunts, older brothers and sisters** also support AGYW in line with Congolese traditional values of providing for close and extended family members if the financial means are available.

In several cases, parents or other family members live and work in other provinces of DRC or abroad (e.g. Congo Brazzaville, Angola, Gabon, in Europe) **and send either money or goods to be sold back to family members including girls and young women.**

However, **third persons are also important** and in various cases, boyfriends, friends, fiancés, religious and community leaders also provide economic support to girls, instead of or alongside family members. **Many AGYW had several different people who supported them simultaneously** – perhaps parents who provide housing and food, an uncle who pays school fees and then others who give ‘pocket money’ or money to invest in trading.

The influential adults interviewed agreed that most AGYW receive economic support from their families, as well as from others in the community. Many of the adults interviewed added that they themselves look after AGYW, including their own daughters and others. This support, they say, includes financial support, but also access to work, advice and ‘orientation’, or advice.

Economic support provided by other community members

“I give support myself. I advise and support girls based on the potential they have to support themselves economically. To give work to someone is to give someone a powerful weapon against the mistakes that can accompany idleness. A girl that has no means will engage in prostitution, beg, become a “Sopeka”* (Male tailor, age 51, Ngiri Ngiri Commune).

* Sombela Ngai, Pesa ngai, Kabela ngai = buy me, give me, share with me (i.e. someone who engages in sex work)

In this unstable context, **many AGYW proactively combine money received from different people**, and often also generated through small trading. Indeed, in several

cases, especially among those not studying, AGYW worked to increase their income and satisfy their needs. The data suggest that AGYW combine sources of income, regardless of whether they live with both of their parents, one parent, other family members, or in other household situations. Nonetheless, the cases of a few AGYW interviewed suggest that **those who live with a parent and a step-parent may have less access to resources than other girls**; there are a few cases where step-parents cut their non-biological daughters off from support, something reported in other research.²⁵

Combining different sources of economic support and income

"I live only with my mother. My father is not here; he is in Gabon... Papa sometimes sends us money via a money transfer agency... On my mother's side, it is my grandfather who helps me for my studies. On my father's side, it is my Aunt in Masina who often helps me for my studies. Often, I only have to pay half the regular school fees as she is a teacher there... She helps sometimes with food; she adds to my mother's revenue when there is a gap..." (Young woman, age 20, Kimbanseke Commune).

There may be risks for AGYW who receive help from family members. Several adults interviewed spoke of cases where male family members offer support to a girl, but have 'bad intentions' and ask for sexual favours in exchange. There is insufficient information to know how widespread this is, but, given the high dependency of AGYW on adult family members, and the high rates of sexual violence reported, this is an area that warrants further exploration.

A minority of AGYW interviewed said that they had no one to support them economically and had to support themselves. In practice many of these girls and young women also find ways of getting income and economic support from others. Some interviewees were members of *écuries* (bands of girls, often sex workers) or *kuluna* (street gangs) and said that other sex workers, *djos* or leaders of their groups gave them money and sometimes emotional support. The interviews suggest that sometimes these relationships are complex and can comprise a mixture of support and exploitation. This is also an area for further research.

5.2 The principal economic activities of AGYW

The girl researchers asked AGYW, as well as the adults interviewed, about the economic activities of girls and young women. **Most AGYW interviewed were in full-time education. Many were studying only and supported economically by family members; but several girls and young women combined their studies and economic activities.** This was most common for older adolescent girls (16-19 years) and young women (20+); in this latter group it was almost as common to combine study and economic activities as it was to just study. Around a third of AGYW interviewed were not studying at all and engaged in one or more economic activities. **Overall, around 60% of the 114 AGYW interviewees were engaged in some form of economic activity** to earn money, whether they were also in education and/or receiving family support.

²⁵ See, for example, WarChild (2015) "Longitudinal ethnographic study on the factors surrounding the socio-economic empowerment of (former) street girls in Tshangu District"

The predominance of small trading

The predominant activity (just under half of working AGYW) was small trading in the informal sector, which is consistent with the survey findings above. The most common products traded were food and drink products such as: waffles, bread, rice, donuts (*beignets*), peanuts, sausages (*charcuterie*), spaghetti, omelettes, cassava, fruit, vegetables, soft drinks and beer. Only a small minority of girls were engaged in any degree of production or processing of foodstuffs themselves: some girls prepared donuts from scratch; others put peanut butter on the bread they sold. Beyond this, there were **no examples of girls strategically adding value to their products to fill gaps in the market, or to raise their profits**. A minority of girls were selling non-food products such as sandals, shoes, perfumes and beauty accessories.

In terms of where and how girls and young women engage in small trading, some engaged in street or market selling (usually alongside other family members), but many sold through their social networks, including at school, to schoolmates.

For both the food and non-food items girls sell, there was limited information on how girls access these goods or the raw materials for these goods. In a couple of cases, AGYW said they accessed goods through relatives working abroad; a couple of girls worked for a bakery and either received a monthly 'salary' at the end or retained the residual profit on a daily basis. There is a need for further research to look into the trading networks of AGYW: how and from where they access their goods to sell, whether they have opportunities to buy in bulk, whether they have to pay up front or after they have sold, etc. Also some AGYW say that they sell "on credit" and there is a need to better understand how this works, and the levels of revenue and risk involved.

Many girls and young women receive support for their selling activities, with most relying significantly on their family and social networks for access to clients or markets. Girls and young women mainly spoke about the role of mothers and aunts in giving them access to markets (e.g. a space to sell on their table or outside a boutique). However, a few said that their boyfriends and friends brought them clients and that sometimes they collaborated with ABYM, to e.g. transport goods for them, especially travelling from afar which entails risks for AGYW.

Some also spoke of family and community members who gave them advice and encouragement on how to run their business and occasionally a little financial support when business was not good. A few influential adults interviewed said that they themselves sometimes gave girls and young women in their neighbourhood advice and financial support.

Girls and young women engaged in small trading

"I help my grandmother sell donuts. When I am at school, even if it is not allowed, I sell sweets on credit" (Adolescent girl, age 16, Matete Commune).

"I sell small beauty products for girls... in front of the salon of my aunt. My maternal aunt is the owner of the salon and she gave me the idea, as well as the finance to start my activity." (Adolescent girl, age 21, Limete Commune).

"In my neighbourhood, there are also some people willing to help young women, especially with small amounts of finance... One is an intelligent girl that got pregnant by an irresponsible boy. Because the boy did not take responsibility, someone gave her \$150 to get her started selling donuts... I think today she has evolved, she is pretty much able to support herself and her daughter." (Male priest, age 33, Combe Commune)

The next most significant economic activity that the girls and young women interviewed were engaging in was hairdressing (braiding), which is again consistent with the survey data on “services” being the next most important economic activity for AGYW. **A few AGYW also combine different economic activities**, usually the sale of different kinds of goods, either simultaneously, or by season, or combining selling and hairdressing for example. It is mostly older AGYW (age 16 and over) who say they juggle multiple economic activities; whereas younger girls (under 16) tend to engage in petty trading alongside school. Many AGYW, especially those still at school, work irregularly, fitting their economic activities around other commitments – for example, selling their goods at school during breaks, and increasing their economic activities during the school holidays.

Combining different economic activities or school and economic activities

“I manage with the profession that I have learned [beautician]. I often braid for girls and for women, which permits me to earn something for my personal needs... When it is the [school] holidays, I braid more children’s hair and I manage to earn about 5000 Fc a day.”

(Young women, age 22, Bandalungwa site).

“My hairdressing work depends on when my clients call me. In the mornings, I get up, go get some bread, return to sell it and then I relax. A client might call me and I will go to do her braids. Braiding gives me a revenue of 2000 Fc each head. For the bread...I get a salary at the end of the month depending on how much I have sold. I deliver bread to my clients in the morning, and in the evenings, I get my money. I also sometimes do sewing.” (Adolescent girl, age 18, Matete Commune).

There is a significant lack of salaried employment opportunities in the formal sector for girls and young women. A small minority of AGYW had any kind of formal work – these included jobs such as a cashier, a bank teller, work in a shop, in a factory, in a cyber-café and at a university. Two girls were doing internships – one in a bank, one in an enterprise – but in both cases through family connections. These were mostly young women in their early 20s with secondary education and some with tertiary education. Many other young women of this age and with education spoke about the lack of formal or skilled employment opportunities.

A minority of girls and young women said that they earned income by engaging in sex work. These were all young women in their 20s and all had at least some secondary education. However, whilst very few AGYW interviewed reported that they themselves engage in sex work (only three in total), there is clearly a perception that many AGYW engage in sex work, including younger adolescent girls. It is difficult to determine to what extent this perception is true, but other research suggests that sex work is an economic activity for a significant minority of girls.²⁶

Girls and young women become sex workers for two main reasons. Firstly, when they have no family or others to give them economic support. Secondly, when their own parents or family members expect them to bring money into the household to pay for their own food and other needs and contribute to household costs. Sometimes parents and carers do not know how their daughters are making money, sometimes they turn a blind eye and sometimes they proactively encourage the girls to earn money in this way.

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See WarChild (2015) and Davies (2015) opcit.

There was one example of a girl who used to engage in sex work, but was able to leave and now works selling slippers. More research is needed to understand these cases as some sex workers interviewed say they would like to quit sex work. Equally, more research is needed on how girls start to engage in sex work and how AGYW juggle this alongside other activities.

Girls and young women engaged in sex work

“Mothers exploit their daughters, send them into prostitution. They collaborate and plot with them. These concubines are called “Chida”. Mothers support their daughters because they bring money into the household” (Man, Mason and musician, age 45, Kinseso site).

“I belonged to a group of a woman who supported us and pushed us to engage in prostitution and bring back the money to her. The tough thing was that when we gave her the money, she barely gave us any percentage. Even if I sometimes decided not to give her all the daily income, I could not always do this. I almost couldn't leave the group; it was as if I was completely bewitched. But thanks to God I left... I found God.... Now I sell slippers instead.” (Adolescent girl, age 18, Selembao Commune, site Bandalungwa).

Finally, some interviewees – both AGYW and adults – spoke about the risks of AGYW becoming involved with a **kaluna** (street gang sometimes engaged in petty crime). Only one girl spoke openly about her participation in a *kaluna* as a way of earning income.

A sole case of a young woman engaged in theft

“I have my own work, a cooperation. My work is “Kezo” (thief)... It's how I procure money. It is my profession... they call us « Bato ya maboko » (people of hands)... I take everything that I lay my eyes on and use my hands if someone is distracted... If we go to the bar... we have products that we put in drinks if you are distracted. When I drug you, when you fall asleep, I rob you...We commit crimes at night after prospecting by day” (Young woman, age 22, Kinseso Commune).

5.3 The benefits of economic activities

The majority of AGYW said that they manage to produce some profit or retain some income, whether from their own economic activity or from saving a little here and there from the money received from others. The girl researchers did not collect information on the precise income earned or profits retained, but most girls and young women interviewed said that **the primary benefit of their economic activities was that they just about managed to meet their basic personal needs**, such as school fees and buying personal items such as beauty products.

For some girls, **another benefit cited of their economic activities is that it enables them to contribute to the needs of their families**, for example by buying food, or paying their

own or their siblings' school fees. However, **it is not clear whether girls who make these financial contributions to their families enjoy more decision-making at the household level**—there are examples of AGYW who make financial contributions who do and do not also participate in household-level decisions. No AGYW explicitly said that she thought this financial contribution might lead to increased decision-making power (see also section 6.0).

However, many girls and young women who earn their own money say that this can give them some 'independence' and that they feel 'useful'. Other words they used included 'autonomy', 'dignity' and 'freedom'. These less tangible benefits of economic activities are around how a girl herself feels, but also influence how she is perceived within the household and community – as someone 'good' and 'useful' in line with expectations of AGYW. The reality is that not many of those interviewed were fully 'independent', as they continued to depend on their parents and third parties for economic support; nonetheless earning money gave them a degree of autonomy, the ability to generate and control some money and enjoy a positive image (if they were engaged in legitimate, acceptable economic activities).

5.4 The challenges and risks of economic activities

In both the formal and informal sectors, **AGYW talked about various challenges and risks to which they were exposed as a result of their economic activities.** For some AGYW, there was a challenge due to constraints placed on them by their boyfriends, fiancés or other family members, around their mobility, or whether and how the AGYW was able to work or sell.

For those in the informal sector, **the main risk described was around clients who do not pay at all or on time.** In these cases, it is common to offer goods or services on credit, but irregular or non-payments can lead to instability in income levels and problems with suppliers.

Some AGYW also spoke of problems such as **jealousy, sabotaging and stealing by others** in the community if their activities succeeded, including through the use of magic. Some said that they are mocked by others, especially by older women, the '*mamans du quartier*'. A minority of AGYW also reported stress due to the insecurity of their income, fatigue and the risk of injury.

One of the key risks, mentioned by girls and young women working in both informal and formal employment was sexual harassment and assault. For those who sell goods in public spaces and have to move around for their work, there is an ongoing risk of harassment from sexual comments and advances to being assaulted or raped. It seems that there are also significant risks in formal employment too where women can be bullied, intimidated, harassed, asked for sex in return for jobs or promotions and assaulted by managers or colleagues.

The risks that AGYW face of sexual harassment and violence whilst at work are one element of **the fairly generalised threat of sexual violence in their lives**, a risk discussed by girls from many different communes, and from different age groups. AGYW and the adults interviewed talk about risks of sexual exploitation by male family members, and pressures from boyfriends and older men.

The risks of economic activities

“Having problems with friends when they don’t pay... I had already planned the payments for the sausages and they tell stories that annoy me... and there is severe punishment at school in you are caught, as it is forbidden to sell things at school.” (Young woman, age 20, Limete Commune).

“Some young girls aren’t old enough to engage in selling... Like those who work on the Matete Bridge. These young girls are used by men there who see that the young girl needs money, call them over and do what they want to them. Parents who send their young daughters to sell don’t see the way they are destroying their children. (Woman, housewife, age 49, N’Djili Commune)

In a couple of cases, AGYW recalled specific incidences of sexual violence in the community, such as one case cited where a girl was gang raped because she was considered to have transgressed gender norms, in rejecting a young man’s advances. As discussed above (Section 4.0), however, both girls and adults sometimes suggest that girls who dress in a ‘sexy’ way are inviting rape, and that the solution is to sensitise girls to dress more conservatively. **The risk of sexual violence also seems to be compounded by a lack of reproductive health knowledge and services**, which might help girls to navigate their sexual lives, avoid situations of high risk and protect themselves. There is a particular lack of access to contraceptives, and thus the widespread use of illegal abortion, and the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and *filles-mères*.

5.5 How girls and young women spend or save the income they earn

The majority of AGYW interviewed said that they spend the money they earn their “personal needs”, which include sanitary pads, beauty products and services, clothing and shoes, and phone credit. This is consistent with data from the DHS (2013), which suggests that most, especially older, AGYW exercise decision-making power over the income they earn.

Several AGYW also make contributions to their households, including paying for school fees for themselves and their brothers and sisters. In some cases, especially among younger girls, they give all or most of their money earned to their mother or other carer who determines how the money is spent. A small minority of girls spend money on going out. For AGYW who go to church (especially to revivalist churches), they are often pressured to make financial contributions.

One example of how a young woman spends her income

[Each month I earn] an average of \$50, but last month I earned \$70. I spent \$20 on doing my hair (\$10 for the braids, \$10 for labour). I had no clothes left so I bought some shoes and second hand clothes. I am also a woman who uses sanitary pads... So I spend around \$45 like that and with the \$5, I buy telephone credit... if I earn anything extra from selling wood, I save in my account.” (Young woman, age 23, Limete Commune)

There are limited examples of girls thinking of future projects or investments, but some girls do save small amounts of money. To save these small amounts, **AGYW mainly use the informal savings mechanisms in their neighbourhoods.** Only one girl had a formal bank account, many quarters have no formal banks and you usually have to be 18 to get a bank account and obtain a man's signature.



Photo: A saving card (Kinseso)

The most common informal savings mechanism used by girls and young women interviewed is saving by “card”. This involves depositing a small daily amount of money at a boutique, with an agent or community organisation in the neighbourhood. The savings card has a box for each day of the month and the amount deposited is recorded on the card (see image). The boutique or organisation then takes the equivalent of one day's savings per month as profit for keeping the money for the saver.

The second system is informal savings and loans groups, referred to as *likelemba*, *ristournes* or *tontines*. AGYW can join these groups at school or in their neighbourhood. However, only a minority of AGYW interviewed reported that they were members of these savings groups. Some felt that the system was really beneficial for them, but others said they did not like these mechanisms as there were often disputes and problems, such as theft.

Thirdly, some girls and young women – especially those who are older – said they used mobile money services offered by mobile telephone companies (e.g. Tigo cash, Vodacom M-Pesa), as this is considered safer than saving at home if they have a mobile. Finally, a few AGYW save their money at home, hiding it in the house or giving it to parents or carers for safe keeping.

Girls and young women who save some income

“Here in Kinseso, there aren't any banks. We don't even have big enough amounts to save in a bank. We save with the card.” (Young woman, sex worker, age 22, Kinseso Commune).

“At school, we have a ristourne amongst a group of boys and girls... each Saturday, one person takes the money contributed by everyone – 500 FC per day per person during a week. It is a way of us helping each other mutually...” (Adolescent girl, age 16, Matete Commune)

“[My savings] help me with lots of things – buying medicine or other needs. Sometimes my mother needs money, so I go to M-Pesa and withdraw some of my money” (Young woman, age 24, Kinseso Commune).

A few interviews suggest that there are also downsides and risks for girls and young women who save. If her family or boyfriend learns that she is saving, they might ask her for money. This is why several girls think it is more secure to save by card or mobile money, but there can be problems with saving by card as well as girls and young women depend on the agent or can lose the card or have it stolen.

The risks of saving

"If everyone knows you are saving, this is not good as if someone needs money and papa is not there, they will search for me and ask me for money. This sets me back." (Adolescent girl, age 17, Lemba Commune).

"At home, they steal my money... [but] the keeper of the card can also travel without paying you back... and if you lose the card, they don't give you your money as you have no proof. Another person can steal or get your card and take out the money on the card." (Adolescent girl, age 18, site Kinseso).

AGYW were asked whether they would like to increase their economic activities or their profits, and how they could do this. Most AGYW affirmed they would like to do this and some dreamed of becoming '*grandes dames d'affaires*' (renowned business women). However, few AGYW had any specific plans or projects to realise their ambitions. Nonetheless, several influential adults interviewed had specific ideas on how girls and young women could grow their economic activities, seeing that AGYW required increased knowledge, skills and support. This indicates some potential for mentorship with adults who have business experience and acumen.

Limited support for girls and young women to grow their economic activities

"There are some young women who run beauty salons in a group and need some financing to progress... and also those who engage in petty trading want to progress. Really there is a strong wish to progress, but.. In this country, there is no financing, no social fund that they can apply to for support... There is nothing but their own efforts and work performance." » (man, pastor, age 52, Masina Commune)

"I train girls and women... on organisational skills and how to manage an income generating activity. We show them how to make a profit, starting with those that sell peanuts... for example, women who sell chikwangue* will know that when they bought a certain number of chikwangue, they can make so much profit." (Woman, NGO worker, age 38, N'djili Commune)

* A sausage shaped product made from cassava paste smoked in a banana leaf

THE DECISION-MAKING POWER OF AGYW

6.1 Personal decisions

In order to understand AGYW's decision-making power, **AGYW were asked in what domains of their life they are able to make decisions themselves.** Areas discussed included studies, work, control of income, time management, boyfriends, sex and choice of husband. Influential adults were similarly asked about AGYW's decision-making power. At the start of an interview, an AGYW often insisted that she could decide for herself in all areas of her life. However, step-by-step when prompted, it became clear that her parents and others decide for them in many areas of life, indicating a **gap between their discourse and daily realities.**

Whilst most girls had decision-making power in some areas of their lives, there were always areas where they could not decide independently, or had no say. Decision-making around many important areas, such as education, choice of boyfriends and husbands, sex, time use, work and control of income, and mobility, was often complex and contested. Some AGYW were able to make decisions themselves, sometimes the decisions were taken by parents, boyfriends or others, and sometimes the decisions negotiated between girls and young women and others. It appears that older AGYW and those living on their own have substantially more say in decisions.

Education

Girls often began by saying that they can decide for themselves, but later report that their parents or guardians actually determine whether or not they go to school, because they can decide whether to continue paying girls' school fees. **Nonetheless, this is a domain where there is room for discussion and negotiation between parents and daughters** in terms of decisions about whether to continue studying and/or which subjects to study. **The influential adults interviewed felt that education should be a domain of shared decision-making.** Many said that responsible parents should not impose educational choices on their children, but take time to discuss their children's studies with them, and 'orient' them to study in an area that suits their skills.

Decision-making about education

"My father wanted me to do biochemistry. I wanted to do sewing. Papa opposed this and said that we would see who would be paying the fees. I then explained why I had made that choice. In the end, he accepted and bought me a sewing machine... so yes, if my father takes a decision for me, I can challenge it." (Adolescent girl, age 17, Commune de Kinseso, Commune de Kinseso).

"When I gave birth, my father decided to stop me studying, but my big brother decided to send me back to school. Papa decided not to see me any more." (Young woman, age 22, Kinseso Commune)

"Regarding my studies, I had free choice to choose my option, because I have my dreams and I know my capabilities. In life, we don't do a job to please someone else. Even my little activity, I manage it alone without interference from my parents." (Adolescent girl, age 18, Selembao Commune)

As girls get older, the kinds of decisions that take place around education change. For younger girls, the main decisions are around whether they should stay in school. But, as girls get older and progress from primary to secondary school, there are more decisions: Should she continue her studies? In what should she specialise? Should she move from academic to vocational training? Should she plan for and attend tertiary education?

Work and control of income

The majority of AGYW, of all three age groups, say they themselves can decide themselves what work they do. Most of these AGYW also say that they can control their own income, although some say others control their income, mainly their parents or, in one case, a boyfriend. However, for girls who do control their own income, many choose to contribute to their households, paying school fees for themselves and/or younger siblings and food costs (see section 5.5).

Many influential adults interviewed, however, suggest that parents may play a greater role in these decisions than girls admit. Several adults interviewed report that parents can choose the work for their daughters, and even “impose” it against the girl’s wishes.

Boyfriends, sex and marriage

AGYW generally say that their choice of boyfriend or husband is their own. Nonetheless, none of those interviewed were married and only a few had boyfriends; thus, their answers were largely speculative. It would be interesting to conduct research with young women who are already married, to understand to what extent they did end up participating in the process—and who else played a role. The sex workers interviewed said that marriage was difficult for them due to stigma.

Several AGYW report that they have already or would in future accept advice from family members, in choosing the right husband, to ensure they choose someone who is ‘good’, responsible, intellectual, and able to support her. Unsurprisingly, older girls and young women appear to think about marriage in a more concrete way than younger girls and are more likely to admit that others will also participate in the process of deciding whom to marry. One girl mentioned the key financial element to this decision as well, as parents can ‘decide’ by deciding the dowry.

The majority of influential adults interviewed paint a different picture, emphasising the role of parents in orientating and advising their daughters in the process of marriage and saying that parents—and even pastors—can make the decision for a girl on who she will marry.

Decision-making around boyfriends and marriage

“I [take the decision] as it is a personal subject. I cannot see anyone else deciding for me. It is true that we get lots of advice from mothers, our brothers in the church, but the final decision is our own and I can say that I manage that.” (Young woman, age 20, Limete Commune).

“We see certain parents choosing a husband for their daughter.. the husband is in Europe and the daughter in Kinshasa and they have never seen each other, but the parents make them marry. In the church, a pastor can have a vision of a marriage between a boy and a girl, but the latter does not agree...as it is the vision of a servant of God, they are married.” (Male technician, age 34, Kinseso Commune).

The majority of girls, of all age groups, say that they can make decisions about sex.

However, most girls say that they have decided to choose abstinence before marriage, and are not yet engaging in sexual activities—whether they are in relationships or not. **Most girls insist that sex is a risk**, something that can only begin after marriage. They stress the importance of adhering to social norms around what a good girl does, and to avoid early pregnancy. **Given that sex is such a sensitive, taboo subject, and most girls do not discuss with their parents** or others (except friends and older sisters), it is difficult to know to what extent girls are reporting their sexual activities or decisions honestly. Indeed, interviews with several girls and young women suggest that AGYW perceive that many others do have sex before marriage and that there is significant pressure on girls to have sexual relations with boys and men.

Decision-making around sex

“I am the only one who can manage my sexuality. But at the moment, I am in 3rd grade and I cannot love. My decision is that when I get into 5th grade, I will look for a “jodar” (boyfriend) who will be at my side as my love. All the same, when he wants us to make love, I am capable of running to protect myself as my body belongs to me.” (Adolescent girl, age 13, Kimbanseke Commune)

“Regarding sexual relations, I have already known five men. The three first ones obliged me to have sexual relations with them before giving me money or meeting my needs. I did it because I don’t have a choice. The fourth behaved very badly, dressed badly, brutality ...It is with my current boyfriend that I find that there is compatibility and understanding” (Adolescent girl, age 17, Mont-Ngafula Commune)

Decision-making around sex is also complicated for sex workers, who are negotiating their choices over their profession with the risk of exploitation by many people: their families, their pimps, the men with whom they sleep. For example, one sex worker described how she has a “papa” (an older married man who pays her for sex) who she loves, but ultimately it is he who holds the power (e.g. when he returns home to his wife; whether she must have an abortion). Similarly, a girl who is a member of a *kaluna* gang and also a sex worker reports that the leader of her gang insists the group have orgies (to protect them before they do a big theft), and he has decided that they will not use condoms—she says that this is a risk because if one of them has an STI, they will all catch it. These examples show some of the limitations of sex workers’ decision-making power around sex.

Further research could explore AGYW’s sexual lives, to what extent and how they explore their sexuality with their peers; whether AGYW have the space to discuss sexuality in terms of positive experiences and pleasure and the experiences of AGYWs, who are homosexual or bisexual.

Mobility

The most common domain where others decide for AGYW is around their mobility.

In most cases, it is AGYW’s parents or guardians who decide when girls can leave the house, limiting their mobility at night, and with certain people (friends and boys who are considered to be a bad influence or to pose risks).

AGYW who go out and about without an apparently “legitimate” reason (e.g. going to school, work or church) can also be stigmatised, because ‘good girls’ are expected to stay at home where their parents can watch and protect them. This is also related to the discussion in section 4.0 about the kinds of girls who are rejected and valorised within the community, with a sense that girls who are out and about without good reason must be lazy, and perhaps also of ‘loose morals’. Nonetheless, this is also related to a desire to protect girls—as there are real risks, particularly of sexual violence, in Kinshasa.

There are a couple of examples of girls reporting they disobey the restrictions their parents put on their mobility, but the majority of girls appear to obey these rules. However, this is one area where girls express desire to change the way decisions are made, and would like to have more choice.

How does this compare to the decision-making power of adolescent boys and young men?

Girls and young women and influential adults alike were asked what kinds of decisions ABYM can take that AGYW are not able to take. The two main areas mentioned were the decision to marry and the decision to leave the parental home; these areas are sometimes linked and discussed together. The majority of girls and young women – as well as several adults - agreed that **ABYM can decide when they want to get married** and that society and the church expect young men to be the ones to ask young women to marry them. Equally, **young men can decide when to leave their parents house** to rent or buy a house or piece of land. In comparison, AGYW who leave the parental home before they are married are stigmatised and usually assumed to be prostitutes. It would be very useful to conduct further research with unmarried girls who live alone or with friends to understand their specific experiences.

Decisions that boys can generally take but not girls

“At a certain age, a boy decides to leave home and go to look for a job and a house to rent. The boy can decide to marry or refuse to marry. The girl does not leave the parental home before marriage. She would become free and could become a prostitute, her life gets ruined... parents don’t like to let their daughter go.” (Adolescent girl, age 14, Selembao Commune).

“Boys can go out when they want and return when they want. Not a girl. If you dare, people think your have gone to find boyfriends.” (Adolescent girl, age 13, site Kinseso)

6.2 The participation of girls and young women in household and community decisions

To understand AGYW's wider decision-making power, interviewees were asked if AGYW participate in certain decisions in the household, in the wider family and in the neighbourhood—and which decisions in particular. **Most AGYW report being able to participate in some decisions within the household, but are rarely able to do this within the larger family, or within the quartier.** However, the extent of participation of girls and young women in household decisions and the types of decisions varies.

Many AGYW can participate in relatively minor decisions in the household, for example around the menu or food they eat and around disciplining younger sisters (interestingly none mentioned little brothers). Several AGYW interviewed also reported other areas where they express their opinions and can participate in decision making including: how household labour is divided, and whether parents should continue to pay for younger siblings' school fees. **Only a minority of AGYW, however, say they participate in bigger decisions**, for example on large household purchases, whether the family should sell their land, or which parent the girls will live with in the event of separation, but they feel they have limited influence over the final decision.

It is difficult to determine how girls and young women participate in these decisions, and to what extent their participation affects the final decision. Many AGYW refer to “family meetings”, where different family members can discuss and participate in household-level decisions. It appears that girls can express themselves in such meetings and this can be a space where they are heard. However, it is not clear what influence they really have and in several cases, girls say that their brothers have more decision-making power than them. Furthermore, **many AGYW—including some older than 18—said that they cannot and do not participate in household decisions**, usually because they are considered too young to participate.

Participation in household decisions

“Yes...regarding my little sisters. If they behave badly, my grandmother calls me and I go to tell them off. My grandmother listens to me; my sisters are scared of me.” (Young woman, age 22, Lemba Commune)

“I can also intervene in decision making at home, when I realise things are going the wrong way. For example, one day my Mum decided to send us to go and live with Papa. I really opposed this because men don't know how to look after girls. I made her understand and she respected my decision.” (Adolescent girl, age 16, Kimbanseke site)

“Not really, at home...I am not really interested because they consider me to be a child. I am the youngest. They only tell me “we have decided this and that and you do that.” (Adolescent girl, age 16, site Gombe).

AGYW do not generally participate in decision-making in their communities

"In my family and in the neighbourhood, I don't participate in decisions that are taken because I am not yet ready to participate. The age to participate in decision-making in the family or quartier is 18 years. Also, there are older people who do not listen to the voices and opinions of the young. So you can't participate until you quit adolescence and obtain the age of an adult." (Adolescent girl, age 16, Masina Commune)

"I don't take care of issues in the neighbourhood, as I am afraid of having problems myself. I avoid gossip... which happens when we are together with other girls in the neighbourhood." (Young woman, age 22, Masina Commune).

In terms of participation in decisions beyond the household level, almost all AGYW say that they do not do this. Many say that they are too young to do so, some lack the interest and others fear gossip and getting a bad reputation by being outspoken. Only two young women interviewed spoke about their engagement at community level – one helped organise others to clean up the quartier regularly; another worked with other youth in the quartier to hold meetings about issues such as insecurity, hygiene and sanitation.

In general, **AGYW are reluctant to divulge much information about time they spend with people outside of their families and churches for fear of inviting gossip.** It also appears that there are few or no spaces for girls to engage in discussions and decisions in their communities.

How girls and young women would like their roles in decision-making to change

"Yes, [I would like to change] where I am able to go. So I am able to go and walk around, even not far from the house. I would sit [my parents] down and ask them to allow me to go and breathe the air..." (Adolescent girl, age 16, Mont Ngafula Commune).

"I would like to have more "punch". In other words to decide and see the decision implemented. But this is not possible unless I have role models... that I see women who have gone further than me... If I hear them talking and spend time with them, I will start to have more "punch" and energy." (Young woman, early 20s, Linguala Commune).

"No, I don't want to see decision-making change. I would like those decisions which are for men to stay with men and those which are for women to stay with women... I don't want the women to become men." (Young woman, age 21, Selembao Commune).

6.3 How girls feel about their participation in decision-making

To understand the extent to which AGYW are satisfied with the way that decision-making currently operates, they were asked how they felt about this and what they would like to change. **AGYW expressed very different views on whether and to what extent they**

would like to change the way decisions are made. On the one hand, **many girls and young women who would like to see changes in order to give girls more decision-making power**—in general—and also within specific domains, such as their mobility, studies, and decisions around marriage and sexuality.

Many AGYW called for changes so that girls can better participate in these decisions, but generally admitted they did not know what they themselves could do to change it. Quite a few AGYW spoke about **the need for wider systemic change, to give AGYW more decision-making power**, and some spoke about the need for **role models** to model and incite desire for positive change.

Whilst they were in the minority, there were also a significant number of AGYW (about 30% of those interviewed) who said they did not want to change the way decisions are made. There was no particular pattern here by age or education. It is not always clear why they think this, but there are suggestions that these girls do not want to challenge the status quo or gender norms that exist. Some also consider themselves still too young to participate in decision-making and defer to the wisdom and experience of their elders. There is a sense from AGYW that they should concede decision-making power to their parents as long as they live under their roof.

THE SOCIAL LIVES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

7.1 With whom girls spend their time and the influence on their lives

Family

The majority of AGYW say that they spend most of their time with their families, mainly their parents and siblings, but also their cousins, aunts and uncles and grandparents. This includes time at home, time working with family members and sometimes in family meetings. For many AGYW, family members have a positive influence on their lives, giving them 'good advice', helping them resolve problems, and supporting them with education and economic activities.

It is clear that sisters also spend time talking to and advising each other, particularly on more sensitive subjects that girls are ashamed to discuss with their parents. However, there is more limited discussion of how girls spend time with brothers—beyond reporting that there are limits to what brothers and sisters can do together, with strong taboos around bathing or sleeping together, and seeing each other naked, linked to fears around incest, should these taboos be broken.

Church

Many AGYW also spoke about time they spent at church praying, supporting the work of the church and participating in church groups such as choirs, prayer groups and church youth groups. A significant number of AGYW reported membership of these groups, which appear to be a social space that most AGYW can engage in without problem and with the approbation of their families and community members. It is not always clear what happens in these groups, although some AGYW speak of them as spaces where they learn good behaviour, which seems to mean learning to be "good girls" reinforcing predominant gender norms.

The influence of the church and church groups

"It with my friends in the religious groups that I develop. I work with the youth group as assistant secretary.... I tell myself that I need to be dignified. I am also member of a religious group in which I learn. All these friends influence me positively." (Adolescent girl, age 18, Matete Commune)

"I don't even have too much confidence in the pastor. If I confess that there is an old papa.. with whom I have sexual relations... the pastor might say that this little one know a lot, perhaps I will also try. He might rape me or propose sexual relations with me. If I refuse, he might lie and divulge the secret I have told him to catch me again." (Adolescent girl, age 18, Kinseso Commune)

AGYW express mixed views about the role of the church and its members. Some AGYW say that the church, its members (especially pastors, priests and *mamans de l'église*) and groups have a positive influence in their lives, giving them guidance through sermons and one-to-one counsel, hope and friendship. However, not all AGYW agree, mentioning the constant pressure to contribute financially to the church and how certain AGYW such as sex workers and *filles-mères* are excluded by the church. One sex worker also talked about the church as a possible site of abuse.

Friends, peers and boyfriends

AGYW also spend time with their school and neighbourhood girlfriends of a similar age. However, most stressed that they only spent time with 'close friends' who give 'good advice' and support them. Some were reluctant to speak too much about this time they spend with friends and tended to downplay this. Interviews with both AGYW and adults suggest that girls must choose their friends wisely as there are 'risks' associated with many female peers. This is because there is **strong discourse around the 'bad influences' of other girls** and an assumption that when AGYW spend times with friends, they are doing 'useless' or 'bad' things such as gossiping, spending time drinking, stealing or sharing information on things like sex and abortion.

The adults interviewed were more likely than AGYW to say that that AGYW spend some of their time with young men/boys, as friends and boyfriends. In some case, they also linked this to assumptions about girls having 'loose morals' and spending their time in unproductive, useless or even dangerous ways such as going to bars, thieving and engaging in premarital sexual relations (See section 4.0).

The “bad influences” of other girls and peers

“I don't like spending time with these neighbourhood girls who refuse advise, don't listen to their parents. A girl needs to listen because we have three types of education: the family, school and the church. These are girls who have missed their education in all three places.” (Adolescent girl, age 14, Kinseso Commune)

“A girlfriend, perhaps she has started to love. When a boy comes to propose love to you, your friend will encourage you to love him, but we are not old enough yet. In this way, your friend disorients you... It is like for example, a friend that is already a girl mother and you are still a girl. She will try to influence you so you are on the same rung.”(Adolescent girl, age 11, Kimbanseke Commune)

School

Many AGYW interviewed are still at school and spend significant time there. Whilst most talk about the positive influence of school as a place of learning, several AGYW interviewed told stories of teachers who asked for money or sex from students, in exchange for good marks. This seems to be quite a significant problem in Kinshasa and something that warrants further research as well as being a priority area for intervention.

The influences of school

“It is another world... initiation into occult sciences, dating. Our teachers give us marks and diseases. There are gangs of friends that spoke pot, who rape girls. New students are taken in as they do not yet know how to manage it. If you fail a course, the teacher obliges you to sleep with him to pass and because you don't have any money, you accept... The day of graduation, you finish your studies, already contaminated.” (Young women, age 24, Kalamu Commune)

“At our school, one of the teachers always wants to go out with me against my will. There is also our disciplinary director who sometimes excludes me from school because I don't give him any money.” (Adolescent girl, age 17, Selembao Commune)

Other groups and associations

Finally, a minority of AGYW mentioned other groups that they belong to including a secular youth group, dance, arts and cultural groups, membership of NGOs or local political groups and online Facebook Groups. However, there is a general lack of information about what these groups do, what AGYW do in their roles as group members, or the influence these groups have on girls' lives. Furthermore, some AGYW say they avoid any such social groups or associations as they can bring problems of infighting, peer pressure or gossip.

7.2 Where girls and young women can get support and advice

Interviewees were asked from whom girls can ask for help/advice, or in whom they can confide, and in which domains of their life. **Most girls and young women said that there are many people they can confide in or ask for help** and that they generally choose different people for different issues. Many girls juggle multiple sources of advice depending on the issue and its sensitivity, and the position and knowledge of each person. It is most common, however, for girls to **seek advice from their mothers across several domains of their lives**, and also their older sisters. Girls who do not live with their mothers sometimes seek advice from other adult women—e.g. aunts, grandmothers, in on case, and *mamans du quartier*.

A few AGYW said that they have no one—or perhaps only God—in whom to confide or seek advice. This is often related to their fears that most people cannot be trusted with sensitive information, and thus have the power to spoil girls' reputations if they are entrusted with secrets.

The most sensitive and difficult area for AGYW in terms of seeking advice is around romantic relationships and sex, perhaps unsurprising given the taboos and the immense pressure on girls not to engage in premarital sex. The majority of AGYW report that this is something they are too ashamed to discuss with their parents and instead they talk to their older sisters and friends, including about how to have sexual relations, sexual health, pregnancy and abortion). Only a small minority of AGYW say they can speak to their mother about this.

The challenges of getting advice about sex and relationships

“For problems to do with love, I ask my friends for help as here it is like a taboo to raise this subject with your parents.” (Young woman, age 20, Mont Ngafula Commune).

“For example, a girl who finds herself pregnant cannot tell her parents. She will ask advice from friends or older sisters in the family to see whether she should have an abortion or have the child.” (young woman, age 21, Limete Commune)

7.3 Girls and young women and the media

Nearly all AGYW consume at least one media source, and many combine different media for different purposes, including to inform themselves, and for entertainment. For both purposes, **TV is the main and preferred source**, but it is not always clear where AGYW access TV, and to what extent they can control what programmes they watch. A couple of interviews suggest that some girls are obliged to defer to what their brothers or fathers choose to watch at home.

Entertainment is the main reason why AGYW consume media. AGYW watch TV – mostly soap opera series, popular theatre and Nigerian films – and use social media to talk to their friends, and to meet new people. Whilst some girls report using media purely for entertainment or distraction, many say they see series and films as a source of information and advice, and are able to learn lessons from many of the storylines about families and relationships. This is generally consistent with the findings of the Media and Landscape Study (MCLS) commissioned by *La Pépinière*.

Some AGYW interviewed do also follow the news, although interestingly few adults interviewed thought girls were interested in the news and fewer girls interviewed in the Media Study said they followed the news. Many AGYW describe how **they find following the news educational, edifying, and that it gives a sense of connection**—to other parts of the country, and abroad. They spoke about following issues such as the upcoming 2016 elections in DRC, accidents, gang-related incidences and the 2015 demonstrations in Kinshasa, and the war in eastern DRC. **To access the news, the majority of AGYW rely on the TV or a combination of TV and radio.** It seems that the radio is used more often to follow local news and news on the church. In fact, whilst girls prefer to watch TV, they tend to have greater access to the radio, and because the radio works during power cuts.

AGYW are quite divided when it comes to access to the Internet and use of social media. Many AGYW say that they do not use the Internet, because they see it as not useful, because they do not have access, or because it presents risks. Many AGYW use social media (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) to keep in touch with friends and meet new people, and these are seen as ways to keep in touch, in a less expensive way than paying for phone credit to talk on the phone. However, these networks are also seen as risky to girls' safety and reputation.

Overall, it appears that as girls get older, they are more and more likely to use the Internet, perhaps because they are more likely to own a smartphone and also need to use the Internet for 'research' and information. Over three-quarters of the AGYW age 16+ interviewed used the Internet, whereas fewer than half of those interviewed who were 11-15 used the Internet.

Accessing and using the Internet and Social Media

"I watch TV a lot, series and music. If my father and brothers are watching the news and matches, when I am with them I sometimes connect to Facebook with the telephone of my Dad or my brothers because the one I have does not access the Internet." (Adolescent girls, age 15, site Gombe)

"I don't surf the Internet. Girls engage in lots of relationships on the Internet, on social media, accepting a boyfriend that they don't know and have not seen." (woman, age 32, Mont Ngafula Commune)

WHAT EMPOWERMENT MEANS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

8.1 Defining empowerment through the eyes of girls and young women in Kinshasa

La Pépinière's vision is to support the economic empowerment of AGYW in Kinshasa, but in order to do this, **it is essential to understand how AGYW in Kinshasa themselves understand the meaning and process of empowerment** and not to impose external ideas.

One of the challenges in research is around translation – to what extent terms and concepts can be translated between languages and what specific meanings are attributed to particular concepts and ideas. For example, the English term ‘empowerment’ and the French term ‘autonomisation’ have subtly different meanings with the latter term understood much more as an individual process and more likely to be understood to relate to the economic domain. In Lingala, there is not a direct translation for either term.

The research team therefore undertook a participatory exercise with the girl researchers to brainstorm and unpack terms in French and Lingala related to ideas of autonomy, independence, decision-making power, capability, respect, and value. The results of this exercise are summarised in the table below (see figure 2).



Photo: Girl researchers acting out examples of empowerment and disempowerment in their research

During the interviews, the girl researchers asked both AGYW and adults about which characteristics would mean that a young woman (*elenge mwasi*) would become an ‘empowered woman’ - a ‘*mwasi malonga*’ or a ‘*mwasi elombe*’. Given the subtle differences in meaning between these terms, the responses were carefully analysed depending on how the question was asked.

The responses from AGYW confirmed much of what is in the table above. **The main ingredients of being an ‘empowered woman’ were someone who could support herself, live from her own revenue, who was seen as successful and valued in society because she was “useful”.** Most agyw said that ‘empowered women’ had studied, they worked and they were generally married. The responses reflected some of the nuances above, for

example the differences between a *mwasi malonga*, *elombe* and *amikoka*. Some AGYW discussed other characteristics listed above such as wisdom, *savoir-vivre*, ability to reason, and a few said that a woman did not necessarily have to have studied to possess these characteristics.

Figure 2. Analysis of Lingala and French terms to describe empowerment

Term	Characteristics all agreed were associated with the term	Characteristics that may be associated with the term	Comments
Mwasi Malonga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Woman of value (mwasi ya motuya) · Polite (mwasi botosi) · Soumise (submissive) · Respectful · Decent dress · Entrepreneurial · Responsible · Wise · Leader (Kokamba) · Supports herself and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Autonomous · Expresses her opinions · Obedient · Most are married 	<p>A 'mwasi malonga' is first a foremost a woman who is valued in society. She is a woman who is respected because she has succeeded economically and socially.</p> <p>She is the ideal woman according to predominant social norms. She lives in conformity with the social norms / expectations, dresses appropriately, is polite and 'soumise' (see footnote 1).</p> <p>She is integrated in society and looks after those around her as well as herself.</p>
Mwasi Amikoka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Capable · Independent · Autonomous · Supports herself · Woman of value (mwasi ya motuya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Serious · Respectful · Decent dress · Wise · Supports others · Half are married 	<p>A 'mwasi amikoka' is the closest translation to a women that is autonomous in the sense of self-sufficiency and being independent economically.</p> <p>She is also valued and seen in a positive light – because of her economic success</p> <p>She is someone who is also seen as being integrated in society who often also looks after others.</p> <p>This term is not loaded with all the expectations about her social behaviour and living in line with social norms, yet she is still viewed positively.</p>

Term	Characteristics all agreed were associated with the term	Characteristics that may be associated with the term	Comments
Grande Dame / Mwasi ya tina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Woman of value (mwasi ya motuya) · Respected · Capable · Wise · Entrepreneurial · Dynamic · Ambitious · Responsible · Serious · Leader (Kokamba) · Autonomous · Supports herself · Expresses her opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Humility · Respectful (mwasi ya botobi) · Powerful · Most are married 	<p>The term 'grande dame' came up often during interviews with AGYW to describe women like Olive Lembe, first lady of DRC</p> <p>Overall this term is about a women who has achieved a high status and profile and is seen as capable. However, her economic empowerment is not necessarily at the core (e.g. Olive Lemba, the President's wife)</p> <p>The term 'mwasi ya tina' is the closest Lingala translation. It is similar, but the girls agreed it was more achievable.</p> <p>One girl said that in her (poor crowded) neighbourhood, Kimbanseke, 'grande dame' can also imply someone proud.</p>
Mwasi Elombe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Capable · Dynamic · Ambitious · Autonomous · Self-sufficient (Komikoka) · Supports herself · Supports others · Expresses her opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Responsible · Serious · Powerful · Leader · Respectful · Wise · Most are married 	<p>A 'mwasi elombe' is seen first and foremost as a capable, ambitious and autonomous woman who is self-sufficient but also looks after others.</p> <p>She expresses her opinions and is seen by most as powerful (sometime also physically)</p> <p>However, there is a sense in which a 'mwasi elombe' is seen as challenging social norms by being forthright; hence may be rejected.</p>

A few AGYW stressed **the journey of an 'empowered woman' and the fact that to succeed she had to work hard and surpass difficulties**. A minority of girls spoke of women's capacities to express herself well. Finally, for some girls it was only possible to become as *mwasi malonga* or *mwasi elombe* once a woman had passed puberty and was capable of becoming a mother. Some also said that an 'empowered woman' did not necessarily have to be married, although most are.

Term	Characteristics all agreed were associated with the term	Characteristics that may be associated with the term	Comments
Elombe Mwasi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dynamic (Bopikilika) · Entrepreneurial · Powerful · Strong woman (mwasi yanguya) · Physical force · Cunning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Self-sufficient (Komikoka) · Supports herself · Minority are married 	<p>Putting 'elombe' in front of the word 'mwasi' (woman) put even more emphasis on power and physical force.</p> <p>Although an 'elombe mwasi' is seen as strong and powerful, the girls generally saw her negatively as someone acting in defiance of social norms and all said categorically that they did not aspire to be an elombe mwasi'</p>

What do AGYW think are the characteristics of an 'empowered woman' ?

[mwasi malonga] 'When she has studied, works and is married. Because she has value, no individual can mess with her.' (Young woman, age 22, Masina Commune, site Kinseso).

[mwasi elombe] "When a young woman discovers herself, gets through difficult periods and finds that she has succeeded nonetheless, then she can say that she is a mwasi elombe.. " (Adolescent girl, age 17, Lemba Terminus Commune, site Kimbanseke).

In general the adults interviewed agreed with the AGYW, but they sometimes had a tendency to put more stress on the behaviour of an AGYW – for example being virtuous, self-aware and looking after her family, as well as ideas of her giving and receiving support to and from her husband. **This is more in line with the traditional view of a 'mwasi malonga' who conforms with social norms and expectations.** A number of adults also lamented that it was more difficult for AGYW today to become empowered women.

What do influential adults think are the characteristics of an 'empowered woman'?

[mwasi malonga] "When she lives off the income from her own activity... for me, women who do not work are not 'malonga'... as soon as the husband is away, everything stops. She lives a life of total dependency on men. In what way is she useful? We say that men and women must help each other." (Female NGO worker, age 38, Ndjili Commune, site Kimbanseke).

[mwasi malonga] "It is a process. She must study and behave with dignity." (Male teacher, age 26, Limete Commune, site Bandalungwa).

8.2 Role models and examples of empowered women

AGYW were asked about women who inspired them and their role models whether within or outside of their family or community. Several AGYW report being inspired by their family members (mostly mothers, aunts and older sisters), the same kinds of people who are seen to have a positive influence. They also report being inspired by other women in their *quartier*, particularly successful business women, and women who have overcome challenges.

AGYW also say that they are inspired by women from outside of their community, including national and international politicians (and wives of politicians) and celebrities—particularly Christian singers and well known fashion designers. In terms of politicians, several girls mention female members of parliament and ministers who have inspired them, as well as a couple of foreign politicians, past and present, including Angela Merkel and Nelson Mandela.

Overall, though, the **‘political actor’ mentioned the most often is the wife of the current Congolese president, “Maman” Olive Kabila,** who is considered by many girls to be an inspiration, because she has power, but also because she is seen to help vulnerable people.

Role models and inspirational women

“I have lots of role models. Firstly, my parents and my sisters as I am the youngest. Women who have worked hard in their lives like Angela Merkel. Here in Congo, there are entrepreneurial women, directors general in public enterprises that I admire a lot.” (Young woman, early 20s, Limete Commune.)

“I would like to be like Maman Olive, Congo’s first lady, because she is an exemplary person. She has the heart to help others and put herself in the place of others. I know I am still young, but I know that I will get there with time.” (Adolescent girl, age 15, Kalamu Commune)

Later in the interview, **AGYW were asked to cite examples of women who they considered to be ‘mwasi malonga’ or ‘mwasi elombe’.** Unsurprisingly there was great overlap with those they also considered roles models and who inspired them. **Most AGYW firstly talked about members of their families** (mainly mothers, big sisters and cousins), who supported themselves economically, as well as **women in the neighbourhood** including *maman pasteurs* (women pastors), women who help others and women who have significant business activities. Some AGYW also spoke about **well-known women** including Christian singers, women who run NGOs, politicians such as members of parliament and the ex-Minister of Gender (Geneviève Inagossi).

In many cases, AGYW interviewed related stories about young women who started off in a difficult situation, lived through many difficult periods and yet still succeeded thanks to their courage and determination. They also often cite the voluntary work and courageous, altruistic actions of these women. These ideas very much stress the **aspirational element of becoming an ‘empowered’ and ‘valued’ woman and the realisation that it takes courage and hard work.**

The adults interviewed tended to mostly cite examples of women in their neighbourhoods who have supported their families, helped others, and managed NGOs, speaking about their capabilities and also their respectful behaviour. Nonetheless, a few adults also spoke of well known women politicians and journalists.

Examples of 'empowered women' (mwasi malonga or mwasi elombe)

"My aunt, for example. She studies; she followed the advice of her parents. Her husband abandoned her with two children, both girls. Today, these two girls have finished their studies and she sent one of them to the US. In the meantime, she is finishing the construction of her house alone." (Adolescent girl, age 17, Masina Commune).

"Maman G enevi ve Inagosi, the minister of gender and children. She educated girls, helped them to be useful, valued rejected girls... I understood that one day it might be possible for me to deserve this post, to take her place. She taught me to be serious and become a useful girl." (Young woman, age 25, Limete Commune).

8.3 Which factors facilitate the empowerment of girls and women?

The majority of girls and young women said that they and other girls would become a **mwasi elombe or mwasi malonga primarily through their own efforts**. They think they should finish their studies, earn and save money. Specifically, almost all AGYW interviewed mentioned the importance of An AGYW having her own income generating activity.

AGYW also say that the character and behaviour of a girl is really important and they mentioned attributes such as discipline, determination, courage, faith, and, as mentioned in previous sections, the importance of being "serious", and listening to good advice from parents.

AGYW also say that, in order to meet their aspirations, they must avoid pregnancy before marriage and protect their reputation and standing. Some AGYW say that they need to find a husband and marry, but, for many girls, marriage is a necessary ingredient to become a *mwasi malonga*.

The importance of girls own efforts and hard work

"I need to work hard at my studies so tomorrow I can be counted among the women of the world." (Adolescent girl, age 16, Matete Commune).

"Firstly, it is something intrinsic in her... her way of seeing things, her psychology, that she is open to the world, that she is capable of daring to take the first steps... (AGYW, age 24, Linguala Commune).

Many AGYW also said that specific other people could help them to become empowered

– mainly their parents and future husband, but sometimes also other family members and women in their neighbourhood. They talked about financial help (e.g. for school fees or to start an economic activity) as well as advice and other material support (e.g. equipment such as sewing machines, to start a new business). A few girls talked about **more general support from the church** (for advice, networks and occasionally financial support), and more generally about the support of God and the importance of prayer. Others talk more generally about society needing to allow girls to express themselves and to encourage them.

In general, the adults interviewed agree that AGYW must play a lead role in their own empowerment

and that studying, working, and saving are key elements of this. However, adults also stress that AGYW must know themselves and their own capabilities, respect themselves, be determined, follow the 'good' advice they are given, be humble and "behave well", as well as be ambitious and creative.

How others can help girls to become a mwasi malonga or mwasi elombe

"Parents, people in the quartier. They encourage girls to study to become useful in life. They can help me with my farming activities, my trading, to become a mwasi elombe. God helps me too." (Adolescent girl, age 16, Mont Ngafula Commune).

"First of all, it is God who helps me, then my parents and my brothers and sisters in my family, the church, the pastor, the wife of the pastor" (adolescent girl, age 14, site Kinseso).

8.4 Which factors impede the empowerment of girls and women?

Again, when this question was asked, it was striking that the majority of AGYW, as well as adults, interviewed firstly **stressed the character and behaviour of the AGYW herself and her social group**, rather than larger, structural factors relating to her wider environment. As before, these traits include: not listening to advice, laziness, being 'easy' with boys, use of social media, and neglecting her studies. Equally, there were many responses about the **'bad influences'** of the other young people around her and how AGYW need to avoid these bad influences.

Other key factors mentioned were **unplanned pregnancies** with interviewees stressing that *filles-mères* as well as those known to have had an abortion, are stigmatised and have ruined their chances of finding a husband and creating a family. A few girls talked about the problem of early marriage. **A small minority spoke about wider environmental factors** such as gender norms, unemployment and how husbands can control and impede their wives, for example from working.

The factors which impede girls and young women from becoming empowered

“Neglecting studies, giving birth too young... for example, one of my aunts interrupted her studies to get married and now she no longer manages to combine her studies and domestic work.” (Young woman, age 20, Limete Commune, site Gombe).

“We can also have friends who initiate us into bad habits. If you are not strong, you will be carried away... for example, girls who have already given birth, they never like to walk with girls who have not given birth. As they are friends, they also try to influence others into the same errors, so they can also give birth like them.. they push others to love any man, and when they are pregnant, mission accomplished.” (Young woman, age 20, Kimbanseke Commune).

“The society, and above all the man. He is not the enemy of the woman, he is a brake... It is the possessive man... the man who sees the woman as a baby-maker, a housewife... not someone who can look him in the eyes and say ‘not this.’ My Aunt, for example, has a car and wants to learn to drive, but her husband insists on taking a chauffeur as he does not want to see her at the wheel... why? Her husband did not explain... He does not want to see an emancipated woman who can take the steering wheel and go anywhere without him knowing... it is men who are a brake on women’s emancipation” (AGYW, age 24, Linguala Commune, site Gombe).

THE ASPIRATIONS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Finally, the AGYW interviewed were asked about their aspirations and dreams for their future. The overriding response was that the **majority of AGYW aspire to become respected, well known, and valued in their communities**. AGYW were then more specific about their aspirations to further study, to particular kinds of work and to marriage. These aspirations are linked to ideas of honour and dignity, for herself and for her family, **to become 'mwasi malonga'**.

Girls' aspirations to be valued, useful and honour their families

"To finish my studies, work and get married to honour my family. To help my family so my mother sees she did not send me to study in vain... marriage, God's will" (Adolescent girl, age 16, Mont-Ngafula Commune).

"I would like a radiant future, to be a strong woman, useful in society, with a good life, who others would like to be like." (Young woman, age 23, Limite Commune)

The majority of girls have aspirations to work and to also marry and have a family. It appears that most AGYW see work, marriage, and motherhood as compatible, in spite of some of the concerns raised around the potential negative effects of work, and a few AGYW's reporting that some husbands can prevent their wives from working.

Combining work and marriage

"To have a good life... to work and have a good husband" (young woman, age 18, site Kinseso).

"In a household, the guy can forbid the woman to work, to go for walks, to have friends" (young woman, age 23, Bandalungwa Commune).

In terms of work, some AGYW simply aspire to work, find a "good job" and become "useful", but did not specify a particular profession (mainly those aged 16-19). Nonetheless, **the majority of AGYW aspire to particular professions,** for example to become a doctor, a businesswoman, a lawyer, or journalist. A few younger girls talked about many different dreams and aspirations they had, and some dreamed big despite their difficult circumstances.

Work and career aspirations

I would like to have staff and manage the Hospital of Mama Bena" (Young woman, age 22, Kinseso Commune).

"To become a business woman. To travel the world, to Europe. To have a clothing store, because I have done business studies. I like business." (Young woman, age 23, Bandalungwa Commune).

"My aspiration is to become a strong, elite woman through being a lawyer." (Young woman, age 21 Barumbu Commune).

"I would love to be a minister, a doctor or a business woman who has a big clothing store." (Adolescent girls, age 11, not in school, parents unemployed, Kimbanseke Commune).

Figure 3: Aspirations of adolescent girls and young women²⁷

Professional aspirations	11 to 15	16 to 19	20 to 29	Total
To work and "be useful"	2	12	3	17
Lawyer or magistrate	2	8	4	14
Business woman	2	5	6	13
Doctor or nurse	4	6	2	12
Seamstress	1	3	4	8
Journalist	4	4	0	8
Politician or Minister	2	2	2	6
Singer or Actress (Performing arts)	1	3	1	5
Work for an NGO / for social causes	0	1	3	4
Accountant	1	2	0	3
Economist or bank job	1	2	0	3
Office job	0	1	1	2
Engineer	0	0	1	1
Air hostess	0	0	1	1
Beautician	0	0	1	1
A 'big' prostitute	0	0	1	1

²⁷ Not all girls interviewed answered this question and some gave two examples of professions. Nonetheless, this table is useful to get a sense of the kinds of professional aspirations of AGYW.

For many girls and young women, their work aspirations are linked to their desires to help others. Again, this seems to be linked to the sentiments expressed that empowered women and their role models are strongly integrated in society and look after others in their families and communities, not only themselves.

The desire to help others

“To be a “grande dame” in society. Get married, open an NGO to help those who steal, shegues, kaluna* and orphans.” (Young woman, age 20, Mont Ngafula Commune).

“Like Maman Olive Kabila, but not because she is the wife of the President of the Republic. Because she has the heart to come and help those who suffer. I would like to open schools, churches, hospitals. Also become a fashion designer. People help me and I would like to do the same for others, as when I am ill, people care for me.” (Adolescent girl, age 15, Masina Commune).

* “Shegue” is the term used to refer to street children. It is derogatory and often associated with criminal and delinquent behaviour. “Kaluna” is the term used for streets gangs, that often include many “shegue”.

A few AGYW also spoke in general terms about becoming rich, famous and becoming a “grande dame”, who is powerful, wealthy, able to travel, well known and respected in the community.

Aspirations to become a “grande dame”

“A girl who has a house, a workshop, is well known. Like Carine, a fashion designer. She sews clothes that are exhibited... I would like to follow her example, her way, export clothing overseas.” (Young woman, age 22, Mont Ngafula Commune).

“Like L’or Mbongo, Marie Misambu,* because they sing, adore and please God” (Young woman, age 21, Selembao Commune).

* Well-known Congolese religious singers.

Some AGYW have aspirations linked to studies, working and trading, or marriage abroad, in Europe, North America (for education, employment, husbands), to Asia and the Middle East (for trade), and also within the region (largely for trade). Whilst it does appear that the ability to travel abroad, or just connections abroad more generally, provide a certain status, for most girls these aspirations are linked to economic plans—to access better markets for goods to buy, or to sell.

Aspirations linked to connections overseas

“To become a business woman, travel to Kenya, Turkey. Because I am the oldest in the family, I should help my younger brother and sisters, my parents.” (Young woman, age 23, Kalamu Commune).

“I think about studying, finishing my studies, having a job also. I dream of becoming an accountant. Until now, I don’t know in which company as I am think that when I finish my diploma, I will no longer study here. I will go to study in the US.” (Adolescent girl, age 14, Masina Commune).

Whilst the majority of AGYW aspire to balance work, marriage and motherhood, a minority of AGYW said that they do not want to work, and aspire to marriage alone (around 5% of the girls we interviewed). All of these girls were age 20+, which may reflect a shift of aspirations among some girls at this age to conform with gender norms and expectations.

A minority of girls who aspire to marriage alone

“My dreams are that I will be valued one day. That I will be a married woman, not a single woman. That I will have children and know how to put my hand in the flour to raise a family” (Young woman, age 25, Limete Commune).

Many of the influential adults interviewed had big aspirations for AGYW. Whilst few discussed specific professions they think AGYW should pursue, they instead called for girls to lead ‘better’ lives; to aspire to jobs that give them some power; and for society to help in these efforts. **Many influential adults also said that they hope girls will be valued in their lives.** Similarly to what AGYW say, for most of these adults, this involves AGYW finishing their studies and working. For some adult interviewees, this life of value includes marriage and motherhood with some saying they hope girls can work *and* marry.

There were also many adults who stressed that girls needed to know themselves, recognise their own capacities and potential, and aspire to more than they currently do. For several interviewees, this meant aspiring to positions of power, such as President, or being a minister. For a few interviewees, this meant establishing a career before marrying or having children.

Many adults said that Congolese society should do more to support AGYW in these efforts—parents, the state and civil society - though recognising some of the challenges - for example inadequate salaries, which prevent parents from being able to pay school fees.

Influential adults’ aspirations for girls and for society to help them

“We aspire to a just society which gives equal chances to girls and boys, because we are starting to realise that there are women who are more responsible than men.” (Male doctor, age 49, Selembao Commune).

“I wish God would transform the hearts of our leaders so that they pay a decent salary to parents, which allows them to afford their children’s basic needs, especially girls. Because there are children who want to progress but are handicapped by their parents’ poverty.” (Female housewife, age 32, site Gombe).

When we asked 14 of our girl researchers what kind of woman they personally aspired to become, they all without exception aspired to be a **mwasi malonga**. Nonetheless, the girl researchers agreed that this was not the right term for *La Pépinière* as it does not have (economic) empowerment at its heart. They agreed that **mwasi amikoka** would be the more appropriate to describe an economically empowered woman and 13 of 14 of them said that they would be very happy to be called a ‘mwasi amikoka’ (the 14th was agnostic). In fact, **“Komikoka ya mwasi” can be used as the phrase “to empower women”** – some girls preferred this term to ‘mwasi amikoka’ as it puts the emphasis on the process of becoming economically empowered.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is written for all government, donor, civil society and private actors whose policies, programmes and research affect – whether directly or indirectly – the lives of AGYW in Kinshasa, and more widely in DRC. This section outlines key conclusions and recommendations to support these stakeholders to ensure that their policies, programmes and research are developed in line with the priorities expressed by AGYW themselves, and that they address the most important factors which facilitate or impede the empowerment of and positive outcomes for AGYW.

10.1 Overall approaches to women and girls

This research suggests some overall recommendations regarding how government, donors, civil society and private actors approach their work and engagement with AGYW.

Develop inclusive programmes based on an understanding of the diversity of AGYW:

It is important for practitioners, policymakers and researchers to understand the range of experiences of different AGYW in the target region. Some experiences cut across lines such as age and class, whilst others are particular to certain groups, such as *filles-mères*, sex workers or AGYW living with disability or perceived to be lesbian. Any practitioner, policymaker or researcher must bear in mind these differences in order to establish inclusive programmes, policies and research. With limited information on these populations and the discrimination they face, further research should seek to further understand these groups' experiences. Equally, it is critical that M&E of projects and policies disaggregate data by sex, age and other key factors such as socio-economic status, civil status, and disability.

Include AGYW in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes:

The experiences of La Pépinière in setting up the Girl-Led Research Unit (GLRU) clearly demonstrate the potential and capabilities of AGYW to participate in research and programme activities and some practical approaches to girls' participation. It also demonstrates that ensuring the participations of AGYW can improve the quality and relevance of research and the resulting programming. It is recommended that practitioners, policymakers and researchers build on this experience to include AGYW in their planning and ensure they have a voice in research about them and decisions made on their behalf.

Nurture AGYW's own aspirations for empowerment and align programmes with these:

This research demonstrates that AGYW understand empowerment as both an individual and collective process, where a girl or woman becomes both self-sufficient and self-confident and integrated and respected in her social environment. Rather than applying an external definition of what empowerment is and how it should be measured, an essential stage in programming is to work with beneficiaries to explore their own aspirations for empowerment. Whilst a programme might work to shift the aspirations of women and girls over time, it needs to align with AGYW's own priorities, both because this is likely to be more effective in terms of positive outcomes for women and girls, and because it is more likely to ensure no harm is done (e.g. focusing too much on individual empowerment, such that an AGYW might be rejected in her family or community).

10.2 Priorities for policies to empower AGYW

This study demonstrates the need for a non-discriminatory policy environment that will support the needs and aspirations of specific groups of AGYW for economic empowerment through developing a more equitable family code; establishing safe, protected educational and working environments; and access to regulated financial services.

Ensure that gender policies and strategies contain specific and differentiated commitments on AGYW and well as those in different situations and groups: This research demonstrated that the experiences of girls and young women can be very different from those of older women, especially married women. It also demonstrates the diversity of situations of girls with different backgrounds and in various vulnerable situations. It is critical that higher-level policies and strategies reflect this.

Continue to advocate for reform of the Family Code and associated laws: There are key provisions of the family code, which impose considerable constraints on AGYW's economic empowerment. Key areas for urgent reform through revision to the Family Code and other legal reforms include:

- Changing provisions that define the man as the head of the household and the key decision-maker.
- Equal inheritance rights for women and men so women and girls can also secure access to land and property.
- Ensuring women are able to buy and own land and property in their own right, without the permission of husbands or male family members.
- Ensuring women are able to open bank accounts, access credit and other financial services, without the permission of husbands or male family members.

Improve implementation of existing legislation such as the laws on violence against women and girls: In particular, there is a need for sectoral ministries to develop strategies, protocols, implementation plans and budgets and to reduce violence in institutional contexts such as school and workplaces so these become safe spaces for girls and women.

Put in place policies to improve access to financial services for women and adolescent girls: At present very few AGYW are able to access formal financial services such as bank accounts and loans and have to rely on informal mechanisms which often carry greater risks. AGYW would benefit from access to formal banking services, and, where these do not exist, more secure informal banking services.

Put in place policies on adolescent employment, including specifically of adolescent girls: This research confirms wider data on the low levels of AGYW's formal sector employment. It is important for policymaking on employment and the labour market to include specific objectives and initiatives on employment opportunities for adolescents, and to include provisions on placements, internships, the school to employment transition.

10.3 Priorities for programmes and interventions to empower AGYW

Firstly, these findings demonstrate that it is critical to design and **combine interventions to work with individual adolescent girls and young women themselves** to build their social, economic and psychological assets and resources, with interventions that ensure **the individuals and institutions in their wider environment support and facilitate their empowerment** (in line with La Pépinière's existing Theory of Change). The latter implies work to shift the predominant social norms around the status and value of AGYW, where their capabilities are often not recognised and they are subjected to high expectations and harsh judgement.

There are a number of specific recommendations for priority interventions and programmes at an individual, relational and societal level that can be made on the basis of this research. These are particularly aimed at donors, NGOs and civil society organisations working with women and girls:

(i) Supporting individual girls and young women themselves

Business / entrepreneurship skills training and mentoring: AGYW are ambitious, especially for their working lives, and in spite of their often very difficult situations. However, they seem to lack the knowledge, skills, networks and resources to plan and grow their economic activities. At the same time, AGYW are very inspired by successful women who have 'made it', often against the odds. This suggests scope for mentoring programmes to support AGYW in developing their skills and businesses. This would also build on an existing expectation that AGYW should be or become role models for peers and younger women in their societies—this suggests that the role of 'mentor' would fit with existing expectations of women, and thus be an appealing opportunity for women.

Improved loans and savings mechanisms for AGYW: The obstacle to establishing or growing economic activities for some AGYW appears to be a lack of start-up capital for their trading activities, as AGYW have limited access to safe savings and loans groups or formal banks, and rely on ad hoc support from family and community members. For some AGYW, finding a secure saving mechanism is difficult. There are mechanisms that clearly already 'work' to a certain extent for girls such as savings cards, savings and loans groups, and mobile money services. It would be useful to look at the accessibility, opportunities and challenges of these mechanisms, how more AGYW can access them, and how they could be improved to become safer and more trusted services. Then to design programmes to improve the accessibility of savings and loans mechanisms.

Improved sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for AGYW: The sexual lives of AGYW is a sensitive, often taboo subject and there is an unrealistic expectation that AGYW will abstain from sexual relationships until marriage. Many AGYW are clearly engaging in sexual relations before marriage for a variety of reasons and the unwanted pregnancy rate and adolescent fertility rates are high. A lack of SRH knowledge and services also leads to a high use of illegal abortion services as a key contraceptive method. Once a girl or young woman becomes pregnant outside wedlock, whether she gives birth and becomes a *filles-mère* or terminates the pregnancy, she can be stigmatised as a "bad girl" and her opportunities (marital, economic, educational) reduce. There is therefore an urgent need for access to better, trusted SRH information and better SRH services for AGYW, and also

adolescent boys and young men (ABYM), to provide accurate, timely advice and resources. There is also a need for outreach work with parents to encourage dialogue and support around SRH decisions.

(ii) Fostering positive relationships within and outside the family

Include family members in programming and encourage family dialogue and supportive relationships: The majority of AGYW spend a lot of time in the family home and with family members. In some cases there are examples of including girls in family dialogue and in positive family relationships; but there are also examples of parents that are extremely restrictive, that reinforce discriminatory gender norms, that do not consult their daughters about their lives (especially fathers seem to have very little engagement with their daughters), or recognise their capabilities. Interventions should include AGYW's families, understanding that these may not always look like a typical nuclear family, and can include aunts, uncles, grandparents and others; that AGYW may have more difficult relationships with some family members, such as step-parents; and seek to develop family relationships and decision-making structures that support and include AGYW.

Develop safe social spaces for AGYW outside the home: This research suggests there is a dearth of safe spaces where AGYW can meet, exchange and access information, grow networks, and learn skills. The exceptions are church groups, which provide an important space of support, advice and friendship for some AGYW, but which exclude others, such as filles-mères and sex workers. Interventions working with AGYW in Kinshasa could establish new, or build on these existing, safe spaces, which can work with AGYW through concrete activities such as sports and skills training, as well as promoting dialogue between AGYW, and between AGYW and ABYM. These could be linked to existing local community based organisations or women's groups.²⁸ It is essential that these spaces be inclusive and safe; this could be done through establishing these spaces with the AGYW who will use them.

(iii) Developing a supportive environment for AGYW empowerment

As mentioned above, AGYW interventions in Kinshasa must engage AGYW's broader environment, including their families, peers, communities, and the institutions with which AGYW engage, and which set the narrative about AGYW. Key recommendations include:

Media / social communications campaigns / platform to develop and portray more realistic and varied images of AGYW. This kind of intervention could disrupt the "bad girl" versus "good girl" dialectic that currently exists, which creates stress and pressure for girls and acts as a significant constraint on their abilities to grow and flourish as individuals. This kind of intervention would need to understand the kinds of media different stakeholders access and trust, and target its messages to different audiences. These kinds of communications interventions should be linked to, complement and reinforce on-the-ground interventions. One way to do this would be, given how much AGYW and adults engage with aspirational stories and discuss role models, to use media such as a TV series or popular theatre to tell stories of real girls, portraying examples of mothers, fathers and community members who have positive relationships with AGYW. This could be combined with some campaign work on social media and some face-to-face group work.

²⁸ See, for example, International Rescue Committee's COMPASS Programme in Eastern DRC (Creating Opportunities through Mentoring, Parental Involvement and Safe Spaces) <http://www.cpcnetwork.org/resource/compass-brief/>

Working with the institutions with which AGYW engage, to ensure they are supportive, inclusive and safe:

This research highlights opportunities to do this within the church and educational settings in particular. Given how important religious institutions are in many AGYW's lives, these actors could be engaged as agents of change. Any intervention that harnessed these actors would need to first work with them to focus on their own personal attitudes and behaviours, to ensure that they were prepared to act as these agents of change.²⁹

Ensuring safe, empowering formal and informal education for AGYW: This research demonstrates how important education is and is considered to be in the process of empowerment. This research has not looked specifically at schools or other educational spaces, but it has identified some significant risks for AGYW, in particular sexual abuse at school. There is scope for interventions to work with teachers and other stakeholders (such as headmasters, parent-teacher committees etc.) to ensure that educational spaces are safe, and that they are spaces that challenge rather than reinforce discriminatory social norms, including through the inclusion of filles-mères. There is a reasonable level of experience in sub-Saharan Africa of implementing school-based approaches to tackle gender discrimination and gender-based violence, including some recent work in DRC³⁰, on which this could build.

10.4 Areas for further research

This study has given important insights into the realities of adolescent girls and young women, but it has also inevitably identified **a number of areas where follow up research would be useful**. In all cases it is recommended that AGYW participate in the design of the research, and in many cases AGYW could play a key role on the research team. This could include the engagement of La Pépinière's Girl-Led Research Unit Girl Researchers, who are available to support research and programming conducted by other organisations. Key areas identified for further research include:

Better understanding intra-household dynamics: Looking more closely at the dynamics, relationships and negotiations inside households and how this influences opportunities for and constraints to AGYWs empowerment.

Improving our understanding of AGYW trading networks: This study shows how AGYW sometimes rely on family and community relationships to access inputs and markets. However, there remain gaps in this understanding: Who supports their trading activities and why? How do they source inputs and what opportunities for diversification or efficiencies are there here? How do the key value chains work? How can value be added to increase profitability? How can products be commercialised? What risks and constraints are there, e.g. around mobility and security, and how can these be managed? It would be useful to conduct some case studies of pathways of women who have succeeded in their economic activities.

²⁹ See, for example, some of the work done with faith leaders by Tearfund in Eastern DRC. Tearfund (2014) "Silent No More: The Untapped Potential of the Church in Addressing Sexual Violence" <http://www.wewillspeakout.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Silent-no-more-FINAL.pdf>

³⁰ See for example USAID's Safe Schhols Program in Katanga province under the C-Change programme. <https://c-changeprogram.org/where-we-work/drcongo>

Looking at the participation of AGYW in the formal sector: What opportunities are there, and what skills are needed to access those existing formal sector jobs (is there a skill gap)? Why are opportunities so limited? What are the potential areas for growth? Could new industries employing AGYW be opened up? How can organisational environments be improved to support recruitment, retention and promotion of young women?

Better understanding AGYW's engagement in sex work: Very few AGYW say they themselves engage in sex work, and yet the majority of girls and adults think that other girls are engaging in sex work. This research reveals some of the different ways in which girls and young women may be engaging in sex work (e.g. groups of sex workers living and working together vs. members of kuluna gangs engaging in sex work as part of the broader 'life of crime', blurred relationships with djos, where the men pay, but there is also a relationship, sex work for some girls living with family). It would be useful to better understand the types, dynamics and economy of sex work and how various AGYW perceive this; this would help identify how those who wish to engage in alternative economic activities might be able to do so.

Dynamics of sexual violence: This is an area that warrants further research, to understand in more detail how sexual violence is seen as an acceptable response to, or punishment for, AGYW who transgress social norms, in terms of their mobility, how they dress, or engage with boys in their neighbourhood. This is important for any economic empowerment programme to understand, to mitigate risk of sexual violence as backlash to changes in girls' economic empowerment.

The role of marriage in the economic empowerment of AGYW: This research has raised questions about whether and when marriage can support or impede the empowerment of AGYW. How does this depend of the relative ages of the spouses? The relative education and income levels? Under what circumstances do husbands decide to support the education and economic activities or their spouses rather than impede these? Under what circumstances and why is decision-making more equitable and negotiated?

The potential to improve AGYW's empowerment through schools: This research demonstrates the high emphasis placed by AGYW on educational achievement and the importance of schools as places to acquire key knowledge and skills for their empowerment. At the same time, it also shows that schools are sites of discrimination and violence for AGYW and where discriminatory gender norms can be reinforced. It is important to analyse the school environment and determine what kinds of school-based interventions can work to enhance the economic empowerment of AGYW.



Photo: La Pépinière girl researchers, mentors and logistics team

ANNEX A: MAP OF KINSHASA





