



MINISTÈRE DU GENRE,
FAMILLE ET
ENFANT

FORUM DU MOUVEMENT
ASSOCIATIF FÉMININ
EN RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

IN BRIEF

THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIVE MOVEMENT IN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DRC



Photo: UN Women/ Carlos Ngeleka

Context

Women's civil society organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are essential stakeholders, financial and implementing partners for several organizations. They have organizational, technical and institutional capacity, and contribute, through citizen participation, to improving governance management and accountability, and advancing the gender equality agenda in the country.

To understand how to better support women's organizations in civil society, the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children has made it its duty to map the quintessence of the women's movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and thus launched, with the support of UN Women and AWLN, a mapping exercise in the 145 territories of the 26 provinces of the DRC.

Following the mapping, which was achieved through an online questionnaire to all the territories, a National Forum of Women's Civil Society Organizations and Associations (OFSCs) took place in September 2023, and brought together key actors in the gender sector, namely: technical and financial partners, the SNU and the national party as well as experts in the field of gender.

This Policy Brief will explore the results of the mapping of the women's movement, and the weaknesses, strengths and recommendations of the current civil-society movement as identified during the National Forum and analysis of the mapping.

Mapping of OFSCs and National Forum

The mapping of the OFSC movement in the DRC began in July 2023 due to the need for an up to date, nation-wide database of women's organizations. It is an inclusive and reliable geographic and thematic mapping exercise across the 145 territories and 26 provinces of the DRC that as built and disseminated with the support of the Ministry of gender, family and children and its provincial divisions. At its date of closing, 1027 organizations had been registered nation-wide.

As a response to the mapping's results, the National Forum on the Women's Associative Movement took place from September 21st-23rd 2023 in Lubumbashi, Haut Katanga, and had per objective to strengthen the functional synergy of women's organizations for a consolidated women's movement, and to lead organizations to shift from a state of simple beneficiaries of development actions towards that of actors of sustainable development. The forum was notably rooted in all other past initiatives aimed at promoting collective action for a sustainable world and on the existing sectoral documents, strategies and policies at international, regional and national level, such as the National Gender Policy, the Strategic Note and the UN Women Action Plan, Resolution 1325, Resolution 2250 etc.

This Forum offered an opportunity, after more than 20 years since the last forum organized in this sense, to come together and give voice to the OFSCs. It also made it possible to share experiences between provinces in the implementation of certain programs and projects. 190 people including 146 women and 44 men from the 26 provinces of the DRC took part in this event, placed under the high patronage of the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, through the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children, with the support technical and financial from several partners, notably the agencies of the United Nations System (UN Women, UNFPA, UNJHRO, UNDP and UNHCR) and the Embassy of Sweden in the DRC.



Results of the OFSC mapping

Key statistics from the 2023 nation-wide DRC mapping of OFSCs show:

1050 ORGANIZATIONS: There is a total of 1050 women’s civil society organizations in the DRC, established within 25 of the 26 provinces (95,15%) and 94 of the 145 territories (64,83%).

THEMATICALLY (figure 1): The greatest number of organizations work in women’s economic empowerment (899) and the elimination of violence against women and girls (820), whilst the smallest proportion are dedicated to women living with a disability (207) or the mining industry (172).

TARGET AUDIENCE (figure 2): Women and girls, broadly, remain the most targetted audience among Congolese OFSCs’ impact (980 and 945, respectively), while the private sector (62), universities and academic institutions (176), refugees (154) and SMEs (167) remain the least addressed.

DONOR PARTNERSHIPS (figure 3): The majority of OFSCs continue to rely on their own funds (489), rather than a donating partner. While international NGOs are the most popular among external donors (276), the National groups (the DRC Government (106), Cooperation (70) and National NGOs (133), continue to be the least represented in OFSCs funding sources.

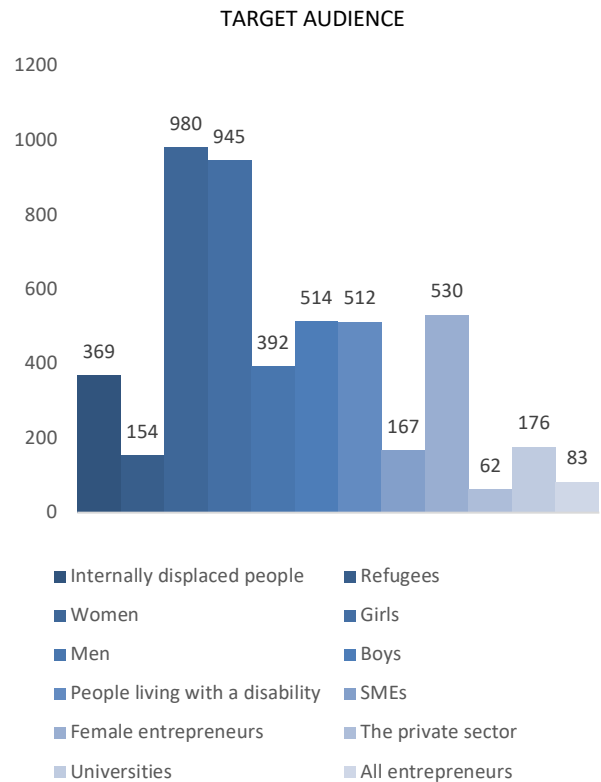
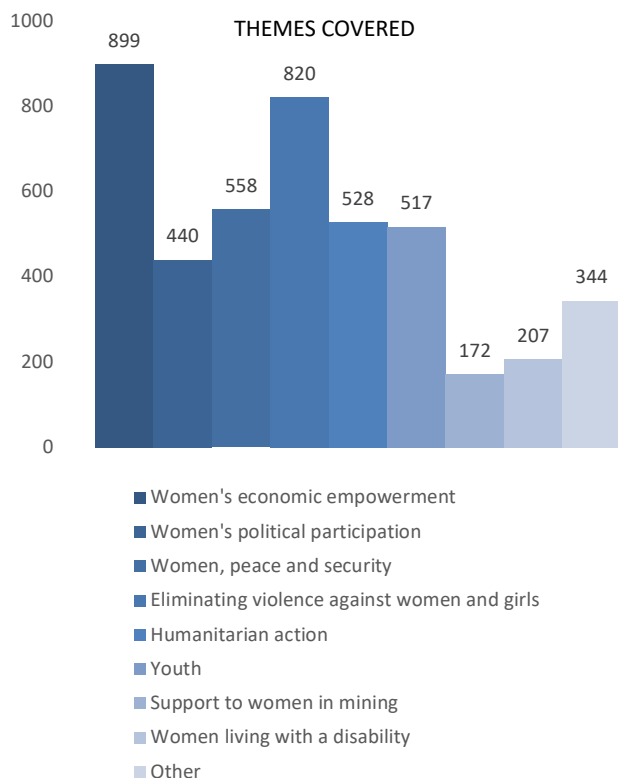


Figure 2



BOX 1

Key facts about the mapping and forum

- The forum, attended by 190 people, was the first event of its sort to be organized in 20 years ;
- It had per objective to strengthen the functional synergy of women's organizations for a consolidated women's movement, and to lead organizations to shift from a state of simple beneficiaries towards that of actors of sustainable development;
- The forum and mapping were supported and promoted by the DRC Ministry of gender, family and children;
- 1050 women organizations registered themselves through the mapping ;
- 25 of the 26 provinces (95,15%) and 94 of the 145 territories (64,83%) were represented in the mapping;
- An array of recommendations highlighted the joint commitment of the Government, UN organizations and OFSCs to advance gender equality in the DRC.

YEARS ACTIVE (figure 4) : 33% of OFSCs in the DRC are less than 5 years old, with only 12% having been active for over 20 years.

LEVEL OF NATIONAL TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIPS: Most organizations have partnerships at provincial and local level (550 and 565 respectively), while a vast amount have partners at a national level. Less OFSCs are involved in regional partnerships (156).

DOCUMENT USED FOR LEGAL EXISTENCE OF THE ORGANISATION: A majority (609) of the organizations function with a F92 document, which allows the holder of this document to create their NGO or non-profit organization and operate in the associative world in the country. 223 organizations have instead provincial authorization, while 215 use other documents.

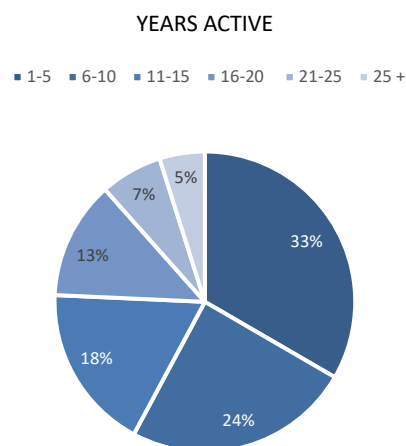


Figure 4

Analysis of results

This mapping allows us to understand the trends and gaps in the women’s associative movement of the DRC. While a lot of OFSCs focus on broader topics and target audiences, minority groups, such as women living with a disability or women in mining, remain under-represented, even within women organizations. Foreign refugees and students also form part of the least supported groups.

Partnership trends show us that there is a need to reinforce the involvement of, and opportunities offered by national funding sources to OFSCs, and may point to lack of coordination between organizations and potential partners at national level. Regarding legal documents, while many OFSCs have their papers up to date, there is still a significant need to push for the formalization of OFSCs across all provinces. The young age of most women’s organizations present in the DRC speaks to the recent surge of the gender equality movement in the country. Nevertheless, this sudden growth also speaks to the weak synergy among the organizations, and the need for formal structures to connect them.

When linking the findings to the objectives of the Forum, the need for a gathering that brings all key actors of the women’s associative movement in the DRC together to discuss challenges, strengths, and common strategies, becomes apparent. Following quantitative confirmation of the request for better functional synergy among women’s organizations for a consolidated impact, the Forum proved the ideal next step to discuss collective needs and confirm next steps. As UN Women DRC’s resident representative stated during the key event: “The most important thing is to develop the networking and functional synergy while taking into account different core levels, to find solutions either at the national level or at the provincial level. Always keeping in mind that professionalization is continuous. The question that requires continued consideration is how to support the dynamic and confirm that this platform has given us an opportunity to assess the needs in order to have a strong associative movement.” The next sections will discuss the challenges, next steps and takeaways established during the forum.

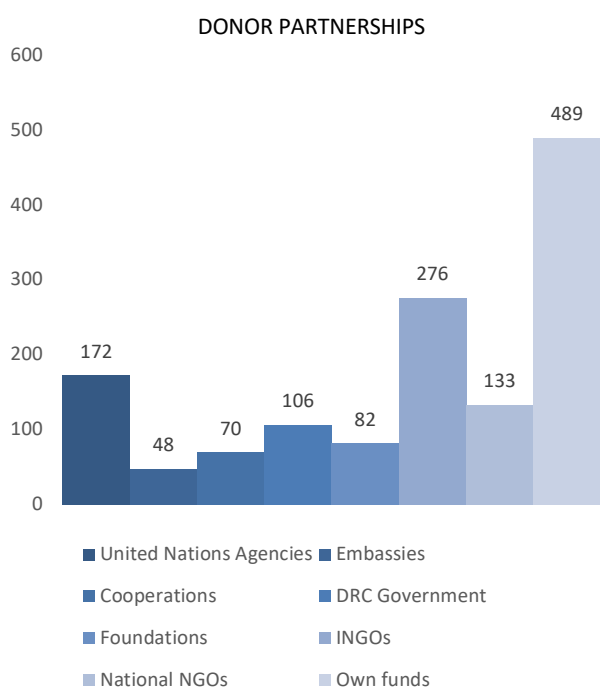


Figure 3

“ The most important thing is to develop the networking and functional synergy while taking into account different core levels, to find solutions either at the national level or at the provincial level. Always keeping in mind that professionalization is continuous. The question that requires continued consideration is how to support the dynamic and confirm that this platform has given us an opportunity to assess the needs in order have a strong associative movement.” - Adama Moussa, Resident Representative of UN Women DRC

Challenges of the Associative Mouvement

During the mapping process, as well as throughout the various discussions of the Forum, several weaknesses regarding the shortcomings of OFSCs in the DRC arose. These can be grouped into three pillars:

LIMITATIONS DUE TO RECURRING INSECURITY IN THE

VARIOUS PROVINCES: The ongoing conflict in several provinces of the country creates a strain for project implementation. Several areas remain isolated and inaccessible, notably rural areas, while the voices of displaced women and girls remain unheard regarding the identification of needs.

LIMITATIONS DUE TO SOCIOCULTURAL CONSTRAINTS AND STEREOTYPES:

Gender norms and stereotypes negatively affect the implementation of projects, namely due to harmful habits and customs, violence against women and girls, and a discouragement of girls and young women to join decision-making bodies. There is a low recognition and valuation of the work and expertise of local structures, especially women's organizations.

LIMITATIONS DUE TO SCARCE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND LACK OF COORDINATION:

A perceived lack of access to funding from the provincial and national government, as well as larger organizations, and an absence of donors, especially in certain provinces, leads to limited resources and implementation power. The interventions are uncoordinated and unsupported, and there is a weak associative spirit among organizations. Furthermore, the heavy imposition of fees for the formalization of organizational documents, as well as weak administrative management, leads to the illegibility of many smaller organizations when applying for subsidies.

Next Steps and Takeaways

Several points regarding how to ameliorate the presence, functionality, and results of OFSCs in the DRC were raised both by participants and interveners. These mostly referred to the need for a better synergy among women organizations, the urgency to position women in decision-making spheres, as well as the desired existence of formal structures and platforms to share information about women's movements across all OFSCs registered country-wide. In detail, the following were the recommendations, divided in two distinct pillars:

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:

- Reinforce the involvement of women in the development of OFSCs in the DRC;
- Strengthen the influence of women in building lasting peace: prevention; conflict management and resolution;
- Highlight and promote the importance of women's political participation and women's leadership, especially in the run up to the 2023 Presidential election;
- Facilitate trainings on the importance of Resolutions 1325, 2250, as well as the elimination of economic violence and harmful practices;
- Ensure the inclusion of marginalized and remote populations to the OFSC movement in the country, notably displaced women and girls, rural women and girls, and women and girls living with disabilities, in order leave no one behind.

FUNCTIONING OF OFSCS:

- Consolidate the collaboration between the Provincial Divisions and OFSCs;
- Establish a standard strategy and training to promote the professionalization of OFSCs in the DRC, with special focus on marginalized provinces, and provinces with low OFSC presence;
- Ensure the transparency and simplicity of selection criteria for funding opportunities;
- Encourage joint initiatives between different OFSCs, as well as with external partners, in favor of the rights and protection of women and girls in the DRC;
- Define a national strategic plan to strengthen the women's associative movement;
- Utilize the existing mapping platform for the dissemination of information and in particular information on ECOSOC and CSW.

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