COLORS OF CONNECTION

TUNAWEZA PORTRAITS' PROJECT

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Final Report
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Painting in progress of the Woman as Artist Mural in Goma, DRC, March 2019.

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ABOUT
COLORS OF
CONNECTION

Colors of Connection is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization pioneering the innovative work of arts-based programming for youth and communities in areas affected by conflict. Founded in 2011, our mission is to engage conflict-affected youth and communities worldwide in collaborative art-making to nurture hope, cultivate well-being, and promote self-determination. Through a collaborative mural making process, we invest in building knowledge, skill sets and resources that strengthen people's mental and emotional capacities and allow them to move beyond the mindset of basic survival brought on by living through conflict. CC is supported by the NoVo Foundation and past partner collaborations have included the International Rescue Committee, the Danish Refugee Council and Save the Children International. CC has successfully completed seven projects located in refugee camps and post-war areas in Sub-Saharan Africa directly benefiting 205 young people and reaching an estimated 200,000 residents through a public mural-making process. Our projects have addressed the important issues of sexual violence, health promotion, peaceful cohabitation between ethnic groups, education for girls, and human rights. Our regional experience includes West and Central Africa, specifically Liberia, Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the refugee populations of the Ivory Coast and Mali.

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List of Abbreviations

AICER	**A**rts-**I**nformed **C**ommunity-**E**ngaged **R**esearch
CAMME	**C**entre d'**A**ppui en Faveur des **M**ineurs **M**arginalisés et **E**xploités
CC	**C**olors of **C**onnection
CPDQ	**C**ellule de **p**aïx et de **d**éveloppement de **q**uartier
DRC	**D**emocratic **R**epublic of **C**ongo
HIV	**H**uman **I**mmunodeficiency **V**irus
M&E	**M**onitoring **and** **E**valuation
IRC	**I**nternational **R**escue **C**ommittee
SGBV	**S**exual and **G**ender-**B**ased **V**iolence
STIs	**S**exually **T**ransmitted **I**nfections
UJADP	**U**nion des **j**eunes **a**rtistes, **d**essinateurs et **p**eintres

The *Tunaweza Portraits* project was implemented by *Colors of Connection* (CC) from January to April 2019 in Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By working with adolescent girls and young women, community leaders and local partners, the project aimed to address gender dynamics and socio-cultural practices that contribute to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The project focused on adolescent girls and young women as a specific sub-group of the population impacted by SGBV.[1] Existing responses to SGBV issues in eastern Congo have excluded some of its critical socio-cultural dimensions, focusing more narrowly on conflict-related sexual violence. One unintentional yet harmful consequence of current SGBV prevention and response interventions in the region is the creation of a virtual and physical landscape populated by negative and violent imagery. In these representations, survivors, almost always depicted as women and girls cast as victims, powerless and without agency to address their own issues. These findings are based on CC's observations, community dialogue, and research.[2][3]

To bridge this gap, the project focused instead on the civilian aspects of SGBV: its prevalence and pervasiveness in day-to-day life; and, the stark reality for survivors that the vast majority of perpetrators are not armed actors in the ongoing conflict, but rather members of their own families and communities. Founded on the concept of public and collaborative mural-making, the project aimed to redress the prevailing representation of women and girls through local advocacy, community sensi-tisation, and media exposure. In Kiswahili, "*tunaweza*" means "we are able/capable" and, as such, the project was inspired by the knowledge and capacity that communities and youth have the ability to make change for themselves. *Tunaweza Portraits* provided opportunities for women, girls and community leaders to create positive change by challenging stereotypes and representing women and girls as powerful agents of change.

The project builds on the foundations of a community-driven approach developed and refined during the 2016 Courage in Congo project. Implemented by CC in 2016, in collaboration with local community leaders, the Congolese non-profit CAMME (*Centre d'Appui en Faveur des Mineurs Marginalisés et Exploités*), and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the project targeted 32 female adolescents and young women (aged 15-20, out-of-school, survivors, or at high risk, of SGBV). The ultimate goal of the project was to improve community perceptions of girls and their role in society. This project was assets-focused, as it was invested in identifying and developing capacities of existing resources in the community. It culminated in the creation of two public murals created by participants in two neighborhoods in Goma, reaching an estimated 100,000 community members. The murals portrayed positive and solution-based imagery, representing an empowering approach to the prevention of sexual violence.[4]

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[1] Colors of Connection recognizes that boys and men are also survivors of SGBV, and that including them in the definition is important to understanding and addressing its true nature and causes. Because of scale and objectives of this project, SGBV are analysed, and engaged with specifically as it concerns women and girls.

[2] Freedman, J. (2016). Gender, Violence & Politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo. New York: Routledge.

[3] Fazal, N. (2016). Courage in Congo Final Report (unpublished).

[4] For more information about the Courage in Congo project, see also: www.colorsofconnection.org.

Informed by the learning and insights gained from the previous project, *Tunaweza Portraits* aimed to capitalize on these outcomes to reach a wider audience, facilitating leadership and empowerment opportunities for participants, and engaging a greater number of community leaders. The main goal was to improve perceptions of girls and women, particularly in relation to their role in society across four communities across Goma. It is envisaged that this shift in perceptions could lay the foundations for long-term positive change for women, girls and their communities. This work is grounded in the demonstrable success of art as a therapeutic and transformative agent of change for individuals and communities in distress[5] [6] and in the ability of community arts projects to shift perceptions and inspire further positive actions by the community.[7] [8]

All project participants of *Tunaweza Portraits* were adolescent girls and young women who had previously benefitted from the *Courage in Congo* project. Spanning a 15-week period between January and April 2019, the project consisted of bi-weekly sessions including the following interventions:

- Art activities that build artistic expression skills in portraiture;
- Activities that build assets in leadership skills;
- Activities that develop the critical capacity to identify positive and negative imagery of women and girls.

Through their unconventional position in the project as leaders and agents of change, these young women challenged personal and communal perceptions about their role in society. Participants engaged with their community about issues related to the representation and capacity of women and girls to build their own skills as leaders.

It was envisaged from the outset that direct community engagement activities would include:

- Community-wide forums reaching 80 community members;
- Interviews with 8 women in leadership positions;
- Final presentations of the public portraits to approximately 200 community members.

Indirect community engagement occurred in parallel through the natural process of community members in the target areas (approximately 50% of 225,000 people) engaging with the murals and posters, both during their creation and following their completion.

In addition, selected community leaders - as crucial stakeholders in the community and social norm generators - acted as ambassadors to promote a vision of women and girls to their respective constituents that encourages an expanded and empowered role for women and girls. To this end, a Community Arts Council composed of 27 leaders reflecting the local diversity of leadership in the community was put in place. Members originated from and represented a variety of backgrounds and issue areas, including:

- Visual arts;
- Visual culture and ethics;
- Academic community;
- Religious community;

[5] Lander, D. A., & Graham-Pole, J. R. (2008). Art as a Determinant of Health. Antigonish, Nova Scotia: National Collaborating Centre, Determinants of Health.
[6] MacNaughton, J., White, M., & Stacy, R. (2005). Researching the benefits of arts in health. Health Education.
[7] Barone, T. (1995). The purposes of arts-based educational research. International Journal of Education Research.
[8] Wheeler, J. (2012). Using participatory video to engage in policy processes: Representation, power, and knowledge in public screenings. In Milne, E. J., Mitchell, C., & De Lange, N. (Eds.) Handbook of Participatory Video. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Community engagement assistant Gracy Kiese pictured center, facilitates a community forum with participants in Goma, DRC, April 2019.

- Religious community;
- Local governance and line ministries;
- Civil society representatives, including youth and/or women and girls.

The Community Arts Council gathered three times over the course of the project to review and give input into the general scope of activities, providing recommendations for the content of portraiture and messaging under development. They were also able to raise any concerns or questions regarding the final outputs. Led by a CC facilitator, the meetings were an opportunity for these leaders to engage with each other during in-depth discussions on the subjects of SGBV, social norms and the role of women and girls in society. As crucial stakeholders in the community and social norm generators, the intention was that they share group learnings with their respective organizations and community constituents.

In order to increase sustainability and appreciation of the arts, CC collaborated with a local community-based organisation called Children's Voice. Moreover, five young women from within the community were selected and trained to co-lead activities and work as project assistants, providing mentorship and acting as role models for participants. This was an important component of sustainability in terms of social support and arts training after the project's conclusion.

1.1 LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

GOAL

Improve the perceptions of girls and their role in society in 110,000 citizens in four communities in Goma over 4 months.

Outcome 1: 25 adolescent girl participants are empowered and have a voice in their communities.

- **Output 1.1:** 25 adolescent girl participants have increased abilities in creative expression on an individual and group level.

  → **Activity 1.1.1:** 16 sessions with 25 adolescent girl participants that include art activities that build artistic expression skills in portraiture.

- **Output 1.2:** 25 adolescent girl participants have leadership skills and engage as agents of change in their community.

  → **Activity 1.2.1:** 16 sessions with 25 adolescent girl participants that include art activities that build assets in leadership skills.

  → **Activity 1.2.2:** 8 community-based activities such as interviews of community members that build assets in leadership skills.

- **Output 1.3:** 25 adolescent girl participants have strengthened social networks in the community (including among peers and mentors).

  → **Activity 1.3.1:** 16 sessions with 25 adolescent girl participants that include art and other group activities that build social bonds among peers and mentors and connections with other community members.

- **Output 1.4:** 28 posters and 4 murals promoting positive, solution-focused representation of women and girls, created by the adolescent girl participants, installed in 4 neighborhoods.

  → **Activity 1.4.1:** 16 sessions with 25 adolescent girl participants that facilitate the process of creating 28 posters and 4 murals in public spaces.

Chance presents her version of "what you can do with a wrapper" to the group. This activity recognizes and celebrates the levels of creativity and capability that these young women already possess. It contributes to achieving Output 1.2, March 2019.

Outcome 2: 25 participants, 30 community leaders and 280 community members engage in assets-focused thinking for the development of women and girls.

- **Output 2.1:** 25 participants, 30 community leaders and 280 community members have increased capacity to critically reflect, discuss and understand forms of representation of women and girls.

  → **Activity 2.1.1:** 16 sessions with 25 adolescent girl participants that include art activities that develop the critical capacity to identify positive and negative imagery of women and girls.

  → **Activity 2.1.2:** 3 meetings with 30 community leaders with facilitated in-depth discussions on the subjects of SGBV, social norms and the role of women and girls in society and the SGBV sensitization response.

  → **Activity 2.1.3:** 8 forums with 80 community members (20 per forum) with facilitated discussions on the subjects of SGBV, social norms and the role of women and girls in society.

  → **Activity 2.1.4:** One final community presentation of the public artwork and its content to 200 community members.

Outcome 3: 110,000 community members in 4 neighborhoods exposed to positive and alternative forms of representation of women and girls that challenge harmful gender stereotypes.

- **Output 3.1:** 110,000 community members in 4 neighborhoods view the public artworks.

  → **Activity 3.1.1:** 110,000 community members will engage indirectly with the public artwork through observation of the murals and posters both as they are being created and following their completion.

Project director Christina Mallie engages participants in discussion on gender roles through a self-portrait activity. This activity encouraged participants to express situations and relationships that enable and prevent women and girls from feeling empowered, contributing to Output 2.1, March 2019.

2. MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

2.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The methodological approach adopted for the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of *Tunaweza Portraits* is focused on a qualitative analysis grounded in Arts-Informed Community-Engaged Research (AICER). The selected methodology is in line with CC's organisational mission and mandate, as well as the specific objectives of the *Tunaweza Portraits* project as an arts-based model of intervention.

Arts-informed research is designed to enhance understanding through alternative processes and representational modalities. It offers a framework of inquiry with expansive possibilities, infusing literary, visual and performing arts in various linguistic forms and processes, rendering it more accessible to multiple audiences. Combined with a community-engaged approach, this methodology facilitates progress towards equitable participation and decision-making processes. Research participants are enabled to identify problem areas or lines of inquiry themselves, fundamentally altering and redefining the conventional authority and power of the researcher to pre-empt or pre-determine the parameters of the study in question. Throughout the course of the monitoring and evaluation of *Tunaweza Portraits*, inputs from project participants as well as members of their families, households and wider communities were actively solicited at various phases of the research design and implementation.

A comprehensive toolkit including operational and methodological guidelines was prepared by an external consultant (Nadia Fazal) before the start of project activities.[9] The M&E itself was conducted in three distinct phases by another external consultant (Nidhi Kapur) with logistical and linguistic support from CC staff in Goma:

Phase 1 (20.02.19): baseline in-depth consultations with six selected project participants using arts-informed semi-structured interviews;

Phase 2 (14/15.03.19): mid-term consultations with the same six selected project participants using arts-informed semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion with the Community Arts Council;

Phase 3 (15-19.04.19): final evaluation consultations with the same six selected project participants using arts-informed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with the remaining project participants as well as the Community Arts Council, family members, local authorities and community members, and individual semi-structured interviews with CC project staff. Site visits were also conducted at each of the four neighbourhoods of Goma (Mapendo, Murara, Kyeshero, Mugunga) where public murals had been installed during the course of the project.

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[9] See Fazal, N. (2019) The 'Tunaweza Portraits Project' Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit: Taking a Qualitative Arts-Informed Community-Engaged Approach to Program Monitoring & Evaluation.

Questionnaires for the focus group discussions, arts-informed and other semi-structured interviews are available in the M&E Toolkit.[10] In addition, a desk-based review of relevant past and present project literature was undertaken prior to field-based monitoring and evaluation. Interviews and focus group discussions took place in a variety of locations across Goma, including the Children's Voice centre, the IRC office, the *Maison de la Femme*, neighbourhood offices for local authorities, and home visits. The six participants who were pre-selected for in-depth monitoring throughout all three phases were chosen based for their collective diversity of age, educational, economic and personal backgrounds, residential neighbourhoods and project grouping (since the project participants attended twice weekly sessions in two separate groups for scheduling reasons).

Due consideration was given to ethical guidelines, including written consent from participants in the M&E consultations. Consent forms were distributed prior to activities and were translated into local language and explained by project staff prior to completion in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding by all stakeholders including those with limited literacy skills. Verbal assent was also sought at the beginning of any interview or focus group discussion. At all times, the voluntary nature of participation was underscored as well as the ways in which any information collected would be used, including any photographs or videos. Data collected during M&E activities are anonymised throughout this report in order to protect the identity of individuals, as well as to promote a free exchange of ideas and information without fear of reprisal or backlash.

Whenever necessary, focus groups and interviews were conducted in local language to facilitate communication. Simultaneous translation from French to KiSwahili was provided by a CC staff member (Grace Mush'ayuma). Although independent translation would have been ideal, care was taken to select a staff member who did not interface with project participants on a regular basis nor had any prior history with the them during the previous project, and who would therefore be perceived as more neutral and independent than other personnel.

Preliminary M&E findings were shared prior to finalisation of this report, in order to allow key stakeholders the opportunity to review and eventually validate analysis and recommendations. Specific operational or technical feedback was shared with the CC Project Director immediately following each phase of monitoring to allow for any necessary lessons learned or new orientations to be introduced in a timely manner. It is envisaged that this final report will also be shared with evaluation and project participants for the purposes of transparency.

The arts-based approach to both programming and monitoring and evaluation for the project has meant that arts activities are able to also serve as entry points to engage participants during qualitative interviews, February 2019.

[10] Fazal, N. (2019) The 'Tunaweza Portraits Project' Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit: Taking a Qualitative Arts-Informed Community-Engaged Approach to Program Monitoring & Evaluation.

2.2 LIMITATIONS

One of the methodological limitations of the evaluation design is its capacity to assess any longitudinal or long-term impact in relation to changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices amongst project participants and other key stakeholders. Although this was outside the scope of the present assignment, it is an aspect that could possibly be taken into consideration should CC decide to introduce any further interventions in Goma in the future.

Other challenges were related to participation in the evaluation activities. Of the six project participants who were pre-selected for in-depth individual interviews during all three phases, one decided not to continue during phases 2 and 3. Upon further inquiry, this decision was ostensibly not related to the evaluation methodology nor implementation, but rather due to prevailing personal circumstances.

Soliciting comprehensive participation of parents and guardians was another source of difficulty. It was initially envisaged that there would be multiple focus groups in order to allow for discussions with at least one representative of each of the 27 project participants. However, this was not possible due to time constraints on the part of parents/guardians, and instead one single focus group was conducted with a sampling of parents/guardians.

Similarly, there were variable levels of attendance for focus groups with local authorities and community members, as well as the Community Arts Council during Phase 3. This may in part be explained by a public holiday on one of the evaluation days (Good Friday) which could have contributed to poor attendance on that day. Another reason could have been the scheduling of certain meetings where women participants faced more difficulties in attending morning sessions (when they often havedomestic duties) compared to their male counterparts.

Aziza, a mother of two, is pictured here with her youngest at the mural painting site portraying a female construction worker, March 2019.

3. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

As a result of ongoing conflict in eastern DRC, more than five million people are estimated to have been killed since 1998.[11] The current crisis is sustained by the presence of over a dozen militia and extremist groups – of both foreign and Congolese origin - in eastern DRC, and the failure to fully implement peace agreements signed by the various parties. Massive population displacements due to the conflict have left huge numbers of people without access to clean water, food, sources of income, or the protection of a cohesive family or community. DRC has consistently ranked as the worst conflict zone in the world for women and children.[12] The international press and a wide range of advocacy and humanitarian organisations have written at length about sexual violence in eastern DRC. Such intense media attention on the country as the 'rape capital of the world' has been partly responsible for the reductionist approaches towards the root causes of sexual violence which continue to plague the region.

Today, just as local communities emerge from active and widespread violence to transitional peace and a fragile post-electoral state, so too has the phenomenon of sexual violence and – more broadly – gender-based violence experienced a parallel evolution. Decades of conflict has left lasting reverberations across a Congolese society which was already historically rooted in a kinship system with pre-existing gender inequalities. The normalisation of violence which has come with such sustained conflict has only aggravated traditional socio-cultural norms and beliefs around gender roles. The exceptionally high levels of ongoing conflict have served to further entrench the duality of males and females within society.

Protracted conflict has also taken its toll on social cohesion. As families have become fractured due to conflict and displacement, compounded by limited educational and economic opportunities, children and youth are increasingly likely to live without physical or pastoral parental or extended family support. Affected communities such as the population of Goma – a city founded on the ever-growing presence of internally displaced Congolese – bear the brunt of societal breakdown. In the process, sexual violence has migrated from a conflict-related issue to one which is increasingly commonplace. Incidents of a civilian nature – not necessarily tied to the conflict itself – but rather representative of the normalisation of violence in everyday life and the exacerbation of gender inequalities. Perpetrators are no longer solely military personnel, but also family members, teachers, health care workers, religious figures and other civilian actors.

Underreporting of sexual violence is endemic across various conflict and non-conflict contexts, including in eastern DRC. Consequently, the sheer prevalence of sexual violence is widely underestimated. While the lack of data makes it difficult to ascertain the exact scope or scale of the problem in Goma and surrounding areas, it is clear that sexual violence disproportionately affects women and girls. Survivors face a plethora of debilitating effects or life-threatening conditions. Adolescent girls and young women are particularly impacted. They may be subject to an increased risk of death or disability due to pregnancy-related causes; and increased vulnerability to sexually-transmitted infections (STIs)

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[11] Mail and Guardian Online (September 2010), UN Reports Over 500 Rapes in DRC'
[12] Save the Children (2003). State of the world's mothers: Protecting women and children in war and conflict. Connecticut.

A girl transports goods in the Mabanga North neighborhood in Goma, DRC, 2016.

including HIV. Rape survivors experience physical and emotional trauma and have little support or assistance from within the community, and often face huge challenges in terms of family and societal reintegration. Alongside additional child care responsibilities impacting future educational and employment opportunities, young mothers also struggle with social isolation, stigmatisation and discrimination[13] against any children born subsequent to rape. Although boys and men can be targeted for sexual violence, and their needs should certainly be analysed and addressed, females remain the primary targets.

Adolescent girls and young women face particular challenges in relation to the intersection of both their gender and age. More than 60% of girls have had sex by age 18. Of girls and young women aged 15-24, some 44% have experienced forced sex in their marriage at some point by their spouse, while another 45% who were not married have experienced forced sex during their first sexual encounter.[14] Socio-cultural norms and beliefs in DRC dictate that once females have undergone puberty, pregnancy or marriage, they are viewed as adults no matter what their actual age. Transitions to adulthood therefore can be abrupt, and are not necessarily supported by appropriate cognitive, psychological and social interventions by peers, family or community members. Those that are out of school face additional challenges in terms of social isolation, as well as increased risk of exposure to STIs such as HIV, early child marriage, pre-marital sex, and reproductive health issues.[15] Their lack of or limited schooling also has long-term impacts on their future economic opportunities and options.

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[13] See Carpenter, R. (2010) "Chapter 2 - Particularly Vulnerable: Children Born of Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-conflict Zones" in Forgetting Children Born of War: Setting the Human Rights Agenda in Bosnia and Beyond. New York: Columbia University Press.

[14] Population Council & UNFPA. (2009). The Adolescent Experience In-Depth: Using data to identify and reach the most vulnerable young people, Democratic Republic of Congo 2007. Population Council & UNFPA. New York, NY.

[15] Population Council & UNFPA. (2009). The Adolescent Experience In-Depth: Using data to identify and reach the most vulnerable young people, Democratic Republic of Congo 2007. Population Council & UNFPA. New York, NY.

It is within this context and its related challenges that Colors of Connection aimed to intervene. CC has been specifically interested in working with adolescent girls, particularly those that were 'off-track' and out of school. During the Courage in Congo project, the identification strategy for potential participants was grounded in a contextually adapted approach inspired by the Population Council's Girl Roster. This was done with a view to avoid a so-called 'elite capture' process. Specific efforts were undertaken, such as door-to-door canvassing as well as consultation with a multitude and wide variety of local stakeholders. It was inherently acknowledged that those individuals who were at most risk were also those that would be the hardest to identify and reach. The final selection of participants was based on their specific vulnerabilities in relation to their age, gender, social status, educational background and personal circumstances. Because of the operational necessity to be able to reach the CAMME centre for project activities by foot, only girls from neighbouring areas of Goma were targeted, largely to ensure feasibility and avoid incurring additional transport costs.

Of the 36 adolescent girls who participated in the Courage in Congo project, 27 were successfully contacted and agreed to participate in the subsequent Tunaweza Portraits project. All the participants for Tunaweza Portraits therefore had previously participated past programming and were originally selected using the identification criteria and strategy outlined above. However, given the time between the two projects, the majority of participants were no longer adolescent girls, but now young women aged 19-24.

Salima (right) assists Florence (left) in a drawing activity. Florence now 20 years old was 17 at the time of the Courage in Congo project. In 2016 she was out-of-school, was not engaged in any other programs, and a single mother of one child, March 2019.

[16] Smiles, D. & Blake, S. (2015) The Girl Roster Training: Introducing the Girl Roster & Community Resource Scan [Powerpoint Slide Presentation]. Presentation given during the Girl Roster Training, Washington DC.

Tunaweza Portraits aimed to work in four different neighborhoods in Goma in order to expand the reach of the *Courage in Congo* project which had previously targeted just two neighborhoods. In accordance with the project's inception and planning, the four neighborhoods were selected by the Community Arts Council. In order to facilitate discussion and decision-making around selection, CC staff members provided some key information to members of the Community Arts Council. Specifically, the facilitator suggested two questions for consideration: (1) which neighborhoods could benefit most from the project's objectives? and, (2) which locations would be the most visible and therefore potentially reach the widest audience?

Council members discussed which neighborhoods faced particular challenges in relation to gender disparities and sexual violence. Members also proposed to select neighborhoods that represented different areas of the city of Goma which is administratively bifurcated into two communes. By focusing on highly populated and less wealthy neighborhoods, as well as more remote areas of the city where communities might be more vulnerable and have limited access to services, members of the Community Arts Council were able to collectively select the neighborhoods of Mapendo and Murura in the Commune of Goma, and Kyeshero and Mugunga in the Commune of Karisimbi.

Once this had been decided, CC invited local community leaders from the four selected neighborhoods, as well as, the *bourgmestres* from the two communes, to become members of the Community Arts Council. Their inclusion in the Community Arts Council was important, particularly because they could provide specific advice in relation to the selection of buildings where it would be both possible and preferable to install the paintings and posters. These members were able to capitalize on their grassroots knowledge and existing relationships with property owners in the area in order to help guide the process of site selection.

In addition, CC worked closely with the *chef de quartier* of each neighborhood with the consent of the *bourgmestres* to identify locations and to secure authorization of the use of these spaces. In most cases the *chef de quartier* or one of his colleagues made initial contact with individual property owners and negotiated for authorization to use the space for the CC artwork. In almost all sites, the selected spaces were privately owned and granted free-of-charge for CC to use. In only one case – for the mural installation in Mapendo – CC paid the property owner for the use of their space as it had been previously used as a paid advertising space which was common practice in the heavily commercial zones of Mapendo neighborhood. Permission was also granted by the Division of Arts and Culture and a tax was paid to the Division by CC - as is required for installation of artwork in public spaces, including advertising.

To secure and protect the longevity of the murals and posters, the four *chef de quartiers* have made efforts to communicate the value of the project to property owners and the surrounding communities. In addition, community engagement forums led by the project participants were held in each of the four neighborhoods to further sensitize communities as to the value of the artworks.
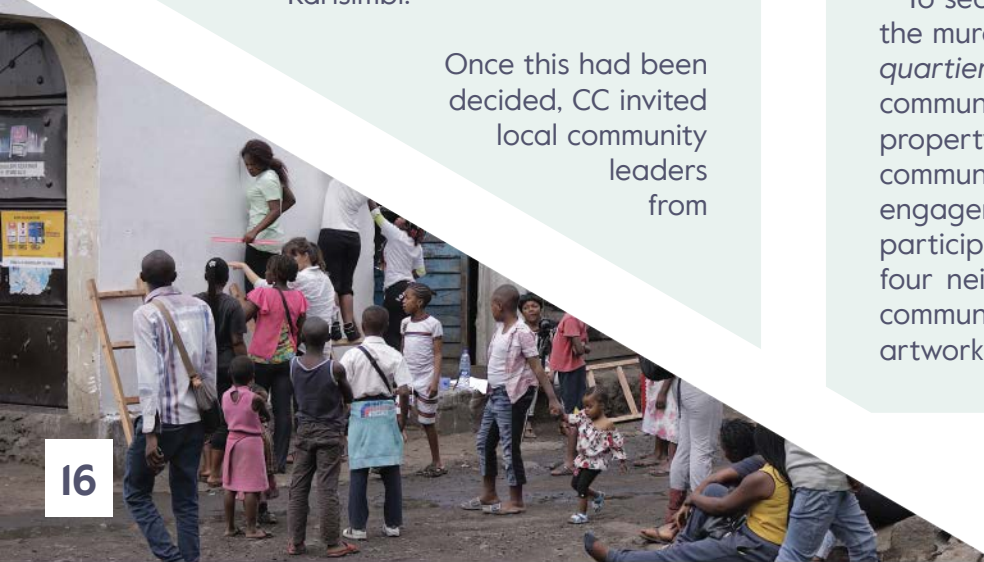
Community engagement lead Grace assists the young women to install one of 28 posters they created. This one is titled "Women are the Pillars of Education in Society" April 2019.

4. PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The principal findings of this evaluation study can be broadly categorised into two main groups: successes and challenges. While certain challenges point to potential areas for improvement, the project was on the whole widely appreciated by both the participants themselves as well as the various community stakeholders for the art-inspired innovations and new perspectives it brought to the existing programming around SGBV issues in eastern DRC.

4.1 PROJECT SUCCESSES

Improved social inclusion and socio-emotional development: Participants consistently identified social isolation as one of the key challenges in their daily life prior to the project. By virtue of participation in twice weekly sessions and the joint mural-making activities, participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with having more opportunities to interact socially and make new friends. The project brought together young women from disparate backgrounds who faced common challenges. Facilitating peer-to-peer interaction via project activities was a key positive outcome, and indeed many of them were able to form lasting connections that will likely outlive the project itself. Many sought to multiply opportunities to meet and learn more from each other, further solidifying their friendships.

> "My fellow participants have become more like my sisters than just my friends. Before starting the course, I only had two friends. Now I have so many."
>
> - Participant

For certain individuals, the social side of the project was in fact more impactful than its artistic side. They greatly appreciated the classroom ambiance, the ability to engage with others and share their problems, experiences and questions in a group setting. Participants cited numerous cultural and financial constraints they typically face in terms of their freedom of movement within restrictive family settings, particularly for those who were not living with their biological parents. In addition, those that were already young mothers were able to bring their babies and children with them to project activities. CC's decision to provide a childcare facility during all activities greatly facilitated their ability to fully participate despite their additional childcare responsibilities.

> "I am so happy with *Tunaweza Portraits*. I can't refuse to come to class when I am called."
>
> - Participant

Moreover, the design and implementation of *Tunaweza Portraits* underlined the psychosocial dimensions at play by introducing relevant activities such as team-building exercises during classroom activities. These interventions were led by one of the CC staff members who was dedicated to psychosocial support, including conducting home visits and individual follow up for participants in formal schooling. The four community-based forums towards the end of the project were an opportunity for the participants to practice the interpersonal, critical thinking and communication skills they had been

developing throughout. Participants were able to successfully present their work and respond to diverse questions from the community. Even those individuals who had difficulty expressing themselves, particularly in group or public settings, in the beginning were able to develop their skills further and gain confidence as a result.

> **"I would like to be President one day, running the country and putting order. Even though men are usually more considered, when I will be President, people will listen to me too."**
>
> - Participant

> **"Women can do any occupation they please. Work is not dependent on gender."**
>
> - Participant

Many also reported taking great pride in their work and feeling like leaders. Participants cited being better able to approach different and difficult situations in their professional and personal lives, as well as talking with a range of people, with less inhibitions and more self-confidence. These so-called 'soft skills' are transferable and are likely to serve the participants well into the future, constituting a lasting impact long after the end of the project itself. Many were inspired to recommence their formal schooling and see it through completion, while others were motivated to improve their financial prospects through work-related opportunities.

Upskilling and related economic opportunities: Participants were not only able to improve their socio-emotional development, but they were also able to learn and practice a range of arts-related skills and techniques in various mediums. The curriculum was diverse enough to allow participants to learn many different aspects of art, including drawing people

and forms, different styles of representation, how to work with different materials including painting, printmaking, and collage, and how to mix colors, amongst others. While the participants are amateur – rather than professional – artists, they were able to hone their skills to produce eye-catching and thought-provoking visual representations. Certain individuals within the wider group have been able to transfer the skills learnt during Tunaweza Portraits into viable income-earning opportunities. Individuals reported that they had been hired by family members, neighbors and small business owners in their community to paint their homes, offices and commercial buildings such as shops and hair salons.

While a sustained livelihood through art has not yet been established for any single individual, it was evident that certain participants were strongly inspired to take the initiative to transform their skills and experience into an economic opportunity. Coupled with the small stipends they received for transport, participants reported being able to cover some of the basic needs for themselves and their children or other family members such as purchasing medicines, clothes and food. Participants expressed a strong interest in taking financial responsibility for themselves in the future, and many viewed the learning, visibility and credibility gained during Tunaweza Portraits as an instrumental and motivational factor.

Female-focused interventions: While certain local leaders and community members expressed regret over the lack of implication of male participants in the project, the exclusive female-focus of *Tunaweza Portraits* was also a source of strength. It promoted the establishment of a safe space and positive environment in which female participants were able to express themselves and participate more fully. Free of the societal boundaries and power dynamics which often lead to

Jolie (left) and Esther (right) sew individually crocheted squares together for the activity "Stronger Together," a team building exercise. This activity designed by an art therapist, is a way to build connections between group members, establishing a safe space and reinforcing the sense that each individual is stronger when she is part of a group. February 2019.

male domination of discussions and decision-making, female participants were able to have more in-depth discussions on subjects of particular sensitivity such as the place and potential of girls and women in Congolese society.

This provided a natural entry point into examinations of the meaning of female leadership and the identification of women role models in Congolese society from which to draw inspiration. Arts-based activities focusing on certain aspects of the female experience formed a core part of the classroom curriculum of *Tunaweza Portraits*. For example, a collage activity, in which participants were asked to choose from a variety of imagery from magazines and newspapers to create an image of the power of women in society, led to discussions amongst participants around the rights and societal expectations of women and girls. Furthermore, a series of photographs portraying women and girls in Congo from historic sculptures to modern-day portraits taken by female photographers initiated a discussion amongst participants about how the role of women in society has changed and expanded over time despite the persistence of traditional customs. Movement activities that focused on different types of body language enabled participants to explore and experiment with large and small movements and sounds. These were intended to help participants reflect on different forms of expression and ways of communicating that further challenged pre-conceived gender roles. A self-portrait activity invited participants to portray themselves in different representations in which they felt less and more empowered, leading to discussions about which situations, relationships, and issues were related to varying degrees of empowerment.

Over the course of this evaluation, it was evident that participants were able to use such exercises to critically reflect on this subject from various angles, including emotional impacts, societal expectations, cultural beliefs, family pressure, male-female gender dynamics, amongst others. Because the evaluation took place in three distinct phases (baseline, mid-term and final), it was possible to follow the evolution of thinking amongst the participants selected for individual interviews at all three phases. It was clear that their level of knowledge had incrementally increased, while their capacity to reflect more deeply on the issues was further developed. What were once relatively superficial perspectives on gender dynamics, for example, had transformed into much more profound and nuanced reflections, and accompanying determination to put their new-found ideas and beliefs into practice.

> **"In each household, papa's voice is always stronger than mama's voice. But women are capable too."**
>
> - Participant

In addition, participants' sense of self and leadership skills, including non-violent communication, were greatly improved over the course of the project.

Breaking boundaries: Another success of *Tunaweza Portraits* for both participants and community-based stakeholders was the way in which the project broke with traditional boundaries and gender-informed rigid barriers within Congolese society. The widely held perception that painting as a commercial enterprise was solely within the purview of men was re-conceptualized. Both the product and process of public mural-making offered opportunities to challenge prevailing beliefs and attitudes about women in the workplace. The vast majority of passers-by were surprised and impressed to see first-hand young women working together as a team, using ladders and surmounting many environmental and operational challenges over a sustained period.

> **"Both the process and the final product are important in showing what girls are really capable of."**
>
> - Community Stakeholder

For many community members, the participants constituted pioneers in their field given how atypical it is to see young women doing such work in the local context of Goma.

Moreover, the murals themselves consolidated these efforts, through visual imagery and key messaging specifically designed to question the role of women. The four murals covered a broad range of potential occupations that are commonly believed to be reserved for men, including:

1. **A female painter**, with the message: "*Kubali Ujuzi Wangu*" (i.e. "Consider my talents");
2. **A female magistrate,** with the message: "*Mwanamke katika ngazi zote za sharia*" (i.e. "Women belong at all levels of the justice system");
3. **A female construction worker**, with the message: "*Ndio na weza jenga*" *(i.e. "Yes I can build");*
4. **A female doctor**, with the message: "*Mwanamke msingi wa maadibisho*" (i.e. "Women are the pillars of education in society").

The carefully considered combination of image and message had a powerful impact on local communities who have become accustomed to more traditional representations of girls and women. In the past and present, residents of Goma have been exposed to a multitude of negative, sexualized or stereotypical images of females. The murals themselves successfully provide a much needed counter-balance, inciting community members to rethink their individual perceptions and beliefs. This was further consolidated by the implementation of the community-based

forums in which participants were invited to discuss and debate the role of girls and women within their communities.

Arts-informed programming: Community members and local leaders, in particular, expressed appreciation for *Tunaweza Portraits'* methodological approach, instrumentalizing the arts. The project's high visibility showcased the ability of arts-inspired activities to incite and inspire people, particularly in a context in which the visual arts are not typically given much value (relative to musical and movement-related arts which are more commonplace and popular in the DRC). Over the course of the project, it was understood that the visual arts could offer a voice to adolescent girls and young women who would otherwise remain on the margins of society.

> **"These murals and messages, they help make sure that girls are listened to when they don't have sufficient voice within society. They make people think twice about what they think they know about girls and what they are capable of doing."**
>
> - Community Stakeholder

> **"I feel good in my skin when I am doing art."**
>
> - Participant

Members of the Comunity Arts Council also recognized the capacity of art as means to de-stress, particularly for participants who were facing a multitude of challenges in their personal lives.

Staff profiling and selection: Many stakeholders, especially the project participants, underlined the degree to which they were positively influenced by the CC staff themselves. As previously mentioned, *Tunaweza Portraits* was implemented with the support of 5

locally recruited project assistants with oversight from an expatriate project director. As dynamic young women working in the arts and community development, all one age bracket above the participants themselves, these project assistants were uniquely qualified role models. Many participants cited how they drew inspiration from CC staff, benefiting from their guidance and pastoral support throughout the project – both formally and informally. Project assistants provided a living example of alternative representations of women in Congolese society, enabling participants to examine and question socio-culturally ascribed roles and responsibilities.
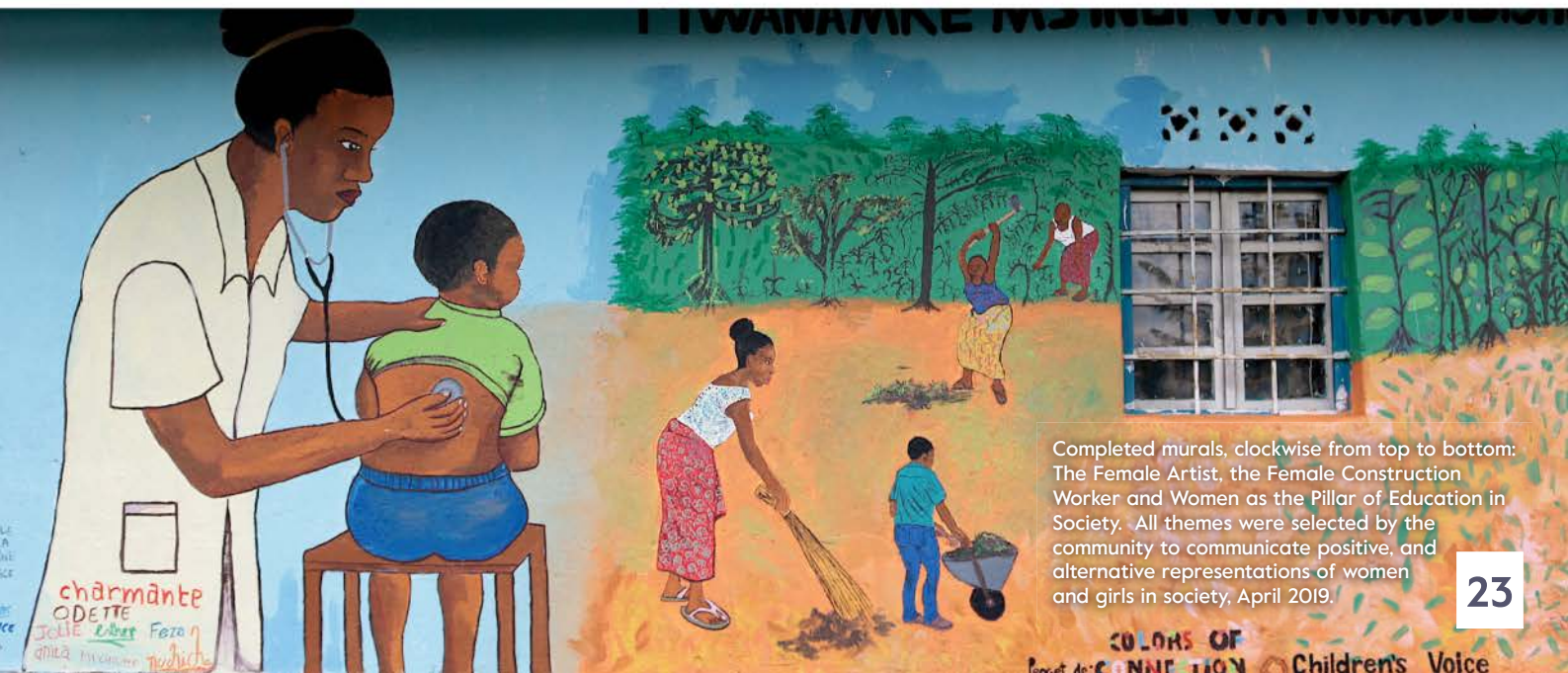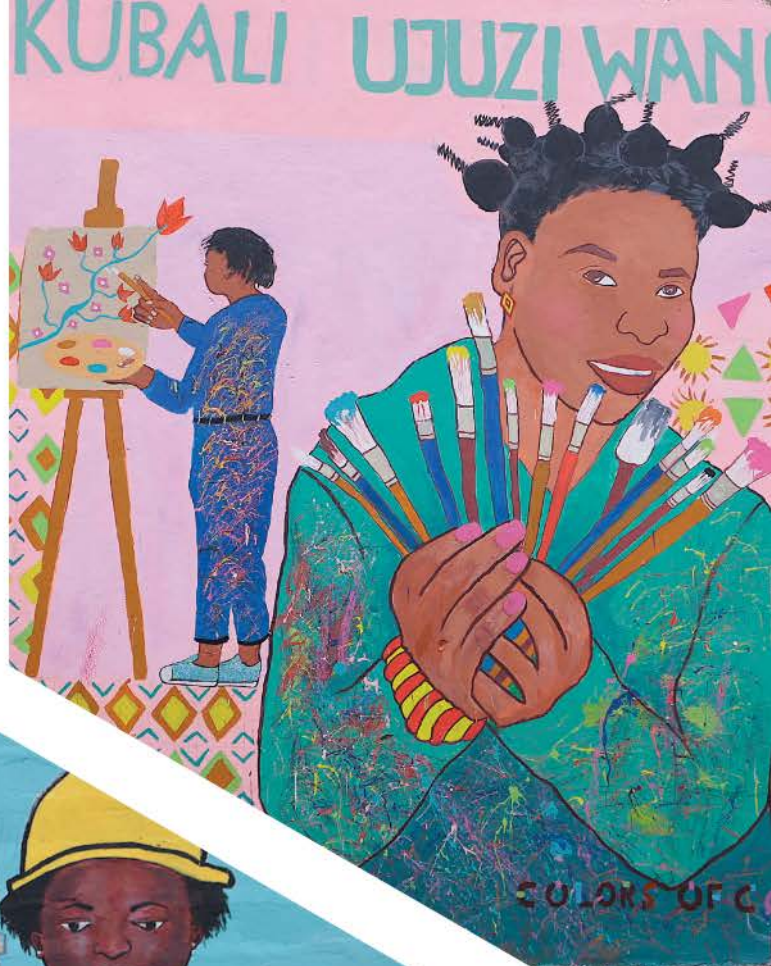
Completed murals, clockwise from top to bottom: The Female Artist, the Female Construction Worker and Women as the Pillar of Education in Society. All themes were selected by the community to communicate positive, and alternative representations of women and girls in society, April 2019.

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4.2 PROJECT CHALLENGES

Planning vs Implementation:
While the curriculum for *Tunaweza Portraits* was co-created with an American-based professional art therapist, it was felt that not every activity could successfully connect with the participants on the ground. When certain activities were found to be too conceptual or contextually inappropriate, the Project Director was proactive and responsive in changing tack as necessary. This was in line with CC's broader organizational approach to project methodology - in which adaptation of programming is both anticipated and appreciated, as and when dictated by local context and culture.

During the course of project implementation, therefore, some activities which were planned from the outset were modified or abandoned altogether. This was partly due to operational challenges such as scheduling issues. One example was the activity to conduct interviews with 8 women in leadership positions. It was felt by the Project Director that at that particular stage in implementation, the project participants were already fully occupied with other activities especially the public mural-making. Similarly, the 28 posters that were supposed to be individually hand-drawn were instead achieved by having participants create one original version of each of the final four posters. These were then reproduced with a printer. Also unplanned was the use of Photoshop to combine elements of the posters for the end product. This was largely influenced by both scheduling constraints, as well as the less-advanced skill level of participants which made the process much more time-consuming. This meant that the process was not as hands-on as originally intended.

CC faced similar challenges in the implementation of the community-based forums which were envisaged as taking place on site at the mural. However, due to logistical constraints, this was not possible in any of the locations except for in Mugunga neighborhood. While the forum did still take place within the relevant neighborhood, the absence of proximity with the mural itself meant that there was a certain degree of disconnect during the debates and discussions. It was evident that not all of the forum participants had been able to visit the mural prior to the event, which further compounded the feeling that participants were speaking in the abstract.

Conceptualisation vs Contextualisation:
In the same vein, a level of disconnect was also noted between the purpose of the project at the outset vis-à-vis the way in which the project was perceived, presented and internalized by both project participants and wider community stakeholders. In many ways, this was not necessarily problematic as the end result was one and the same – i.e. the perceptions around the societal roles of girls and women were improved. Part of the reason why the project may have been viewed differently is that *Tunaweza Portraits* was originally intended to be implemented within one year of the conclusion of *Courage in Congo*. Due to various funding and staffing constraints, the project was actually implemented only 3 years later. The long duration between the two projects may have influenced how *Tunaweza Portraits* was perceived by both participants and community stakeholders.

It is well worth noting the project was designed and implemented by CC with a view to using creative expressions within the broader domain of art to achieve the end goal of shifts in perceptions. In contrast, participants and community members largely tended to view the project through the lens of vocational training and subsequent economic

opportunities. This may be in large part be influenced by the long-standing history and presence of INGO actors that rely on this kind of livelihood-focused programming, and the population of Goma is therefore primed to view external interventions in this light. However, part of this interpretation of the project is also linked with the overwhelming poverty and widespread youth unemployment that characterizes the local context. Given the perception of the project as a formal vocational training, there were at times expectations that the participants could be employed as professional painters or experts. This was at odds with the fact that this level and scope of skillset in drawing and painting requires development over a long period of time, whereas the majority of participants started from a beginner level. As such, they were not able to achieve a professional level by the end of the project.

The fact that some of the project participants will go on to use their learning and skills to become professional painters of private and commercial buildings, and secure income as a result, is something to be celebrated. It is indeed a positive by-product of individual participants exercising their leadership skills and making active decisions to work in an otherwise male-dominated role. Nevertheless, this project orientation was not necessarily anticipated from the outset. Expectations of both participants and community members could therefore have perhaps been better managed given the prevailing context and probability that the project would be viewed as such.

Limited scope of work: For both participants and community stakeholders, one of the common frustrations with Tunaweza Portraits was its limited scope of work. On the one hand, participants expressed a strong interest in engaging with a longer and/or more intensive curriculum in

order to further refine and perfect their artistic skills and techniques such as proportional drawing, painting, etc. Some participants suggested that they would have liked to eventually expand into other areas such as jewelry making and sculpture. Some dreamed of eventually obtaining an academic qualification in the arts, yet lacked information and orientation on how to do so. Many were doubtful of the quality of their individual work and their ability to continue independently without additional training and guidance. Without access to relevant materials, participants did not generally have opportunities to practice their skills outside of the classroom setting.

On the other hand, community stakeholders including members of the Community Arts Council expressed regret over the short-term nature of the project. It was hoped that the lessons learnt and good practices developed during *Tunaweza Portraits* could be built on in the future. The project's limitations in terms of geographic scope and number of participants were also noted as key challenges to achieving wider impact and sustainability. Local authorities and community representatives expressed a desire to amplify activities through the installation of similar murals at multiple sites within their one neighborhood as well as an intensification of sensitization efforts with larger and more numerous posters. They also noted the need to have greater numbers of participants in the future as well as more representivity across Goma.

Much of this feedback is a proxy indicator of the budgetary constraints with which *Tunaweza Portraits* was launched – such financial limitations were the primary determining factor in limiting the project's scope of work. Further investments on resource mobilization and fundraising are critical to securing a broader programming and geographic remit in the future. On the one hand, this general feedback is perhaps indicative

of the broader interest and willingness within the community to engage further with arts-informed interventions of this nature, as well as a clear need amongst the targeted sub-group. On the other hand, however, it is important to be mindful that such feedback may also be symptomatic of the ways in which communities and local leaders in Goma, and eastern DRC more generally, are habitually used to engaging with international NGOs, whereby there is often a stock response to continue or further expand the scope of work.

Group cohesion and communication: Given pre-existing disparities between project participants, combined with the wide-ranging personalities between them, it is not surprising that certain tensions developed between individuals over the course of the project. It was evident during the course of the evaluation that certain participants, often those who were more educated and expressive, had a tendency to dominate discussions and subsequent decisions. Those who were naturally more timid or less confident in their critical thinking and communication skills found themselves marginalized at times. Socio-economic, educational and personality factors also came into play during the parceling out of cleaning responsi-bilities,

whereby participants rebuffed certain tasks which were perceived to be inferior (mopping, for example) despite the implementation of a rotating chore schedule. This was a source of frustration and discontent for those participants who were repeatedly left behind to pick up the slack.

Another divisive factor for some was the fact that the larger group was split into two smaller groups for the purposes of scheduling of classroom activities and mural-making. This was echoed during the closing ceremony in which participants from one group all wore matching uniforms to receive their certificates, while the other participants were not invited or informed to do so. While there were many efforts to promote positive group dynamics and unity amongst the participants, there is perhaps a need for further thinking around this.

Participants in a session exploring body language. The young women came from a wide variety of backgrounds and educational levels, February 2019.

Riziki, among other participants showed increased confidence and leadership capacities as the project progressed, February 2019.

5. CONCLUSIONS & PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the monitoring and evaluation of *Tunaweza Portraits* has demonstrated that the project has made significant strides in positively impacting the lives of the 27 participants, as well as, the communities in which the public arts murals have been installed. The expected results were largely realized, even if specific activities were necessarily modified along the way. According to a broad range of key stakeholders consulted during the evaluation, real and positive change was achieved for those involved directly and indirectly in the project. The arts-informed community-engaged approach adopted by the project represents an important contribution to SGBV prevention and response efforts in eastern DRC. The innovations introduced by *Tunaweza Portraits* begin to address the drivers of structural and societal gender inequalities by turning conventional perceptions and interventions on their head, using the arts as inspiration to shed new light on the long-standing and extreme vulnerabilities of young women in Congolese society.

The learning which has emerged from this evaluation, if applied, could lead to more comprehensive outcomes in the future should this approach be taken to scale. Below are a number of recommendations that derive from the evaluation. They are informed by the experience and expertise of the wide range of participants and stakeholders who were consulted during the course of this study. The following recommendations are made, therefore, with a view to further strengthening future programming by CC in the DRC and elsewhere:

Maximize potential positive impacts: A number of positive effects related to the project have been noted above, however, there are perhaps further entry points to maximizing the overall positive impact of *Tunaweza Portraits*. The potential expansion of the project's scope and geographic remit is one such avenue, in order to increase the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries across a wider area.

Another critical point of entry is in relation to expanding the psychosocial, practical and pastoral aspects of the project to provide a more holistic package of support to project participants. It is remarkable that in the approximate three-year gap between *Courage in Congo* and T*unaweza Portraits*, the vast majority of participants became pregnant and gave birth to their first or subsequent child. It was felt that without sustained support and accompaniment between the two projects, combined with day-to-day challenges such as social isolation, limited financial means, and lack of occupation, many participants were once again vulnerable.

Given the relatively young age of participants, and the hugely influential impact of being a young – and often single - mother on individual educational, economic and social outcomes, there was perhaps a missed opportunity to sensitize and accompany participants around their sexual and reproductive health options. This is further compounded by the reality that participants were initially selected partly based on their individual vulnerability or direct experience of sexual and gender-based violence, coupled with the fact that they were not aware or accessing appropriate services such as formal schooling or state/NGO programming. A more one-on-one approach may be necessary in order to consolidate learning and put it into practice. This could be part of a broader remit for CC staff members to offer individualized support to project participants, including tailored advice, referrals and accompaniment, depending on their personal circumstances.

While an initial mapping of referral services was conducted during *Courage in Congo*, there was no complementary or sustained accompaniment of project participants to ensure adequate follow up. Incorporating these elements into a future intervention could offer a significant value added to the adolescent girls and young women who might participate.

Ensure a greater degree of parental and/or familial engagement: Because of the selection criteria used for participant selection – in which personal circumstances were a factor - many of the young women within the group were no longer residing with their biological parents but rather living in alternative family or friend settings. Although participants did generally confirm that their parents, friends and families were supportive of their implication in *Tunaweza Portraits*, their regular and substantive engagement could be further promoted. This could be achieved by sharing art works and assignments throughout the project lifecycle, and not just at the end. Of the parents and family members consulted during the course of this evaluation, none had yet seen any final work products such as the poster or mural. Individual progress reports or development plans could also be considered to establish and maintain regular communication channels, particularly if a future project works with a younger age bracket once again. Sustained parental and family engagement would be of significant added value in a future intervention, particularly given the pre-existing vulnerabilities faced by participants.

Odette (participant) and Wisline (artist assistant) work together to position a ladder on site in Kyeshero neighborhood, March 2019.

Promote local ownership: Several community-level local authorities noted that they were not included in the project elaboration or planning phase. Many reclaimed their implication at the end and not at the beginning of project execution, particularly those based in the four neighborhoods selected for the murals. They felt that their involvement was centered around the installation of the murals, the hosting of the community-based forum and other sensitization efforts – all of which were indeed accelerated or implemented only towards the conclusion of *Tunaweza Portraits*. Although CC had attempted to engage with each neighborhood via the head representative known as the '*chef du quartier*' through their participation in the Community Arts Council, not all of these representatives were able to attend every meeting. Moreover, information discussed and decided during these meetings was not necessarily passed on further down the line to their local counterparts. This led to communication gaps and, at times, frustrations from community members.

It is recommended that a significant amount of time is invested at the beginning of the project to ensure that local voices and perspectives are incorporated into the project approach and activities. Engagement with the *Cellule de païx et de développement de quartier* (CPDQ) will also help trickle down information without over-relying on the *chef du quartier* who may be overburdened with other pressing priorities. The Community Arts Council could also provide a platform for community-led monitoring and evaluation should their role be expanded in the future to include more interaction with the project participants from the beginning. Members certainly expressed a strong interest in becoming more involved in various aspects of the project, including providing support and guidance to project participants based on their individual circumstances and aspirations, as well as participating in ongoing monitoring, evaluation and sustainability efforts.

Another way to promote local ownership is to ensure project participants in the future originate from the neighborhoods targeted for murals. Because *Tunaweza Portraits* exclusively engaged only past participants from the *Courage in Congo* project – for which proximity to the CAMME training center was a key criterion of selection – none of the participants lived, studied or worked in any of the four neighborhoods where murals were installed during the project. This contributed to an absence of local appropriation of the project. Future interventions could consider the feasibility of including participants from across Goma. In this case, local authorities at grassroots level should be consulted to appropriately identify potential participants.

Consider from the outset how to support sustainability: A recurrent critique from stakeholders at all levels of the project – both direct and indirect – was the short-term nature of the project. With just 15 weeks from beginning to end, *Tunaweza Portraits* bore much resemblance to a pilot initiative or inception phase of a longer intervention in the minds of many participants and stakeholders. As previously mentioned, the unintentionally long lapse in time between the end of *Courage in Congo* and the beginning of *Tunaweza Portraits* may have partly influenced this perception. Nevertheless, it was felt by many that the project ended abruptly, and that no substantive measures to ensure sustainability had been formally put in place. Indeed, an exit strategy (in the event of no future funding) or a bridging strategy (in the event of a gap in funding before the beginning of the next phase of intervention) should have been considered at the project's inception in consultation with project participants and stakeholders.

While some specific measures have been considered or attempted in the aftermath of the *Courage in Congo* project, these have not been adequate according to various stakeholders including the participants themselves. For example, it was envisaged that periodic practice sessions under the supervision of locally-based professional artists sourced from the *Union des jeunes artistes, dessinateurs et peintres* (UJADP), a well-established art center in Goma, could provide some degree of continuity. However, commitments were not fully met. While the

full extent of reasons behind this would require investigation, it was noted that there may have been a lack of engagement on the specific challenges faced by women and girls in the otherwise male-dominated artistic sector in Goma. More recent attempts to identify a more suitable local arts-based organization with which to partner were met with other challenges. In some cases, such partners were located too far away for participants to access regularly without incurring transportation costs. In other cases, there was insufficient funding to operationalize partnership arrangements.

In the absence of an overarching formal strategy, Goma-based CC staff members and participants have taken on a certain degree of initiative themselves by forming a 'Girl's Club'[17] as a means to continue meeting and learning regularly. Although additional measures could have further bolstered the long-term sustainability of the project, these small-scale initiatives do support localized efforts to continue developing their skill sets and social networks.

Another potential avenue is the donation of materials to participants as a tangible contribution to their ability to take their learning forward. Measures to ensure the long-term protection of the murals from rain or other inclement weather, graffiti or erasure may also benefit from further consideration. Moreover, promoting local ownership – as noted above – could also help consolidate the impacts of the project over a longer period by implication grassroots community members to continue sensitization efforts using the existing murals as a point of entry. In reality, any effective exit or bridging strategy would concurrently consider interventions such as these, amongst others, at multiple levels.

[17] See: https://blog.colorsofconnection.org/post/184768315915/field-update-may-9-2019-next-steps-many-people

LETTER FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

Since we completed our last project Courage in Congo in 2016, I dreamt of being able to come back and work with this dynamic and courageous group of young women in Goma, DRC. I wanted other parts of the city, the DRC and the broader international community to see what these young women are capable of.

Happily, we were able to return to Goma in January of 2019 to implement the project. It has been a unique opportunity to share images of women and girls that are not frequently seen in everyday public spaces in Goma, or in the media on an international level. What was remarkable was seeing young women and girls at the center of creating and communicating about gender issues, exchanging with each other, their community leadership, and people in public spaces. I think it is invaluable to have those most affected by issues be able to affect change. And, it was fun to be part of such a joyous, energetic project with young women making art on the streets!

I have seen how over the course of the project, people's perceptions and gender biases have shifted for the better, including those of the girls themselves. This is powerful as it will open up more opportunities and greater protection for women and girls. It has made all the effort, the energy and the support our donors, staff and partners more than worthwhile. I am grateful particularly for the support from our partners, staff, community leaders, Children's Voice, the NoVo Foundation and the International Rescue Committee who helped us realize this project.

With gratitude,

Christina Mallie
Project Director & Co-Founder