

# COLORS OF CONNECTION



## COURAGE IN CONGO

Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo

Executive Summary of Final Report

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By Nadia Fazal with contributions from Christina Mallie

Colors of Connection C/o UGA Institute for Nonprofit Organizations  
279 Williams Street Athens, GA 30602, USA, Tel: +1 707-869-1269  
E-mail: [info@colorsofconnection.org](mailto:info@colorsofconnection.org) Website: [colorsofconnection.org](http://colorsofconnection.org)

Photo: Participant Riziki using primer for the first time, February 2016, Pamela Tulizo Kamale/Colors of Connection

## Executive Summary of Final Report

*Courage in Congo*, a Colors of Connection (CC) community-based art project located in Goma, North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), began on November 11, 2015 and was completed on April 15, 2016. The mission of this project under the direction of Christina Mallie (an arts educator) and Nadia Fazal (a specialist in social and behavioural health sciences) was to engage adolescent girls in Goma in a psychosocial arts-based program; specifically, this project aimed to work with adolescent girls who were out-of school and those who were at a great risk of – or who were survivors of – sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). **The ultimate goals of this project were to improve the community’s perceptions of girls and their role in society, and for community leaders and participants to engage in assets-focused thinking about women and girls.** CC worked for the duration of the project in partnership with a local organization Centre d’Appui en Faveur des Mineurs Marginalisés et Exploités (CAMME), and with a logistical implementing partner, the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

### Values/Assumptions

This project was grounded in the understanding of the therapeutic and transformative power of art for individuals and communities in distress (Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008; MacNaughton, White & Stacy, 2005), and in the ability of community arts projects to shift perceptions and inspire further positive actions by the community (Barone, 1995; Wheeler, 2012). The project was rooted in an assets-focused and value-based framework (Babalola, Neetu & Dana, 2011; Douma & Hilhorst, 2012), and the program model developed by CC took a community-formulated approach to programming. Many aspects of the structure of the program and curriculum were informed by the Population Council’s girl-centered programming.

### Context and Participants

CC focused on a group of out-of-school girls aged 15-24<sup>1</sup> in a neighborhood called North Mabanga that is located just outside of Goma proper and consequently isolated from many resources and services. **CC was interested in working specifically with adolescent girls due to the potential benefits of working with this sub-group of the population. This group may be one**

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<sup>1</sup> When recruited, each of the participants self-identified as being within the 15-19 age bracket, (original target age bracket) and this was further verified by their respective parents/guardians. However, during project implementation we became aware that some participants fell outside of this 15-19 year-old age bracket.

of the most adversely affected by contextual instability, and cultural and gender norms which contribute to the existence of SGBV, and yet simultaneously are at an age at which introducing preventative measures can be effective in promoting their well-being. Research on this age group in Eastern DRC showed that their potential vulnerabilities could be high, that they have particularly limited opportunities for education, protection, and support around issues of SGBV, and few resources available to facilitate their transition into adulthood (Population Council & UNFPA, 2009).

The vast majority of imagery in relationship to SGBV in Goma casts women and girls as victims, powerless and without agency to address the issues that affect them (Freeman, 2016). This information about the context affirmed the validity of our efforts to work with a community-formulated approach and to directly engage women and girls in the creation and public dissemination of positive imagery relating to issues of SGBV. Existing SGBV narratives also helped to shape the development of the project in terms of community engagement and curriculum, and ultimately led to adjustments and additions to the results framework.

## Implementation

Recruitment processes of project staff and participants drew on contextually adapted resources from the Population Council's girl-centered programming. These resources helped CC to recruit and effectively engage with the target population. To avoid an elite capture of participants, we drew on a recruitment process adapted from the Girl Roster that helped us to select vulnerable individuals typically more isolated from resources as opposed to participants who are easier to find in the community. Another significant component was the recruitment of local project assistants who were females aged between 20-24 (just one age bracket above the young women participants). **In addition to serving their roles as assistants, these individuals were able to act as positive young role models for the participants, providing perspective into plausible next life steps for the young women participants.**

The selected girls (35 total who completed the project) participated in a fourteen-week psychosocial arts-based program that included therapeutic art activities, and art activities that built artistic skills. A component of the program included activities that built assets to shield against the risks associated with SGBV and to expand opportunities in their lives. These activities focused on building social, cognitive, human and health assets (as defined by the participants themselves).

During the program fourteen community leaders who represented the local diversity of leadership in the community as well as the main focus areas of the project, were

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brought together in the form of a Community Arts Council (CAC) to guide and advise the project and principally to provide two themes for two murals that the participants would create. The objective of these murals was to transform public spaces into positive visualizations of a community-formulated approach to promoting girls' rights, preventing SGBV and supporting survivors. The leaders worked with local governance, visual arts, visual ethics, the local intellectual community, the religious community, youth, and/or women/girls. This combination of leaders had never been brought together for discussions on SGBV and representation of women and girls. CAC meetings and discussions led to the decision to promote positive qualities of women and girls through solution-driven and assets-focused imagery, and the themes for two murals became: "women in the workforce" and "the development and promotion of women leadership."

The program culminated in the participants' design and painting of two murals on two prominent walls in two neighborhoods in Goma and an unveiling ceremony in which 35 participants received certificates of completion. One of the participants' reflections on the impact that the murals could have for other girls in the community:

*"We wrote 'mwanamke shujaa' meaning 'women leaders' on our mural painting. There are girls that discredit themselves, thinking that they can't paint or draw. But if they pass by this painting, even though they may neglect their own talents now they can start to think differently and they can think that if they wanted, they could do this too." (Participant Interview, Post-Project Evaluation)*

### Monitoring and Evaluation Methods and Findings

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools for the project were developed by a consultant from Social Impact and by CC's Research Liaison, Nadia Fazal, who led the project M&E activities. All of the M&E activities for this project received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board at the Université Libre de Pays des Grands Lacs (ULPGL) based locally in Goma. Oral and/or written consent was obtained from all interviewees, according to the ethical standards enforced by the ULPGL.

The M&E methodology used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess both process and impact of the project. Evaluation research tools included: semi structured interviews with various (community members, participants, parents of participants, community leaders) a participant observation rating tool, and a participant interactive oral survey.

Overall the evaluation findings supported the results framework of the Courage in Congo Project, and the ultimate goals of the project: to improve a select community in Goma's perceptions of women and girls in society, and for community leaders and participants to engage in assets-focused thinking about women and girls. A full discussion of the findings can be found in the final report. While several excerpts

from qualitative interviews capture the success of the project, the following one is particularly elucidating:

*“These images can allow the community to have a different understanding of women in the community. They can understand that women are capable. This can help a lot with community development and the development of the country.” (CAC Member Interview, Post-Project Evaluation)*

## Results

This was rare opportunity for out-of-school adolescent girls and community leaders to come together on the issue of girls’ and women’s rights, SGBV prevention, and support for survivors.

### The following results of the project are notable:

- A therapeutic and transformational change was observable in the participants and community members who participated in the project affirming the positive impact of community arts projects for communities in distress. These observations are captured in the final evaluation findings and discussion available in the full report.
- The tools and methods developed for the project contribute to the emerging field of community arts-based interventions in conflict-affected communities and will help to guide CC’s future projects.
- The CAC meetings provided a forum for community leaders to look critically at visual representation of women and girls in Goma and the region of Eastern Congo, and to identify types of visual representation of women and girls that they wished to see publically expressed. The result was a fresh approach to the campaigns for SGBV prevention and support of women and girls.
- The project achieved sustainability and appreciation on a local level. Appreciation was evident in the overwhelmingly positive reception of the project by community members, family of the participants and the participants themselves as evidenced in post-project qualitative interviews (available in the full report). Several post-project initiatives function independently of CC and continue to support the participants and attest to the positive reception and relevancy of CC’s approach, values and ideas for this community. Included in these activities are: a volunteer run arts class, a psychosocial support currently offered free of charge to the participants, and funding and supervision for twenty-nine of the participants to re-enroll in primary and secondary education. We are extremely pleased that these post-project initiatives will continue to support the participants on their path forward in more opportunity and development.

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