Photo: Supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence to heal and work again. Barbara Minishi, EU, 2018.

The importance of gender norms in promoting social accountability for women in DRC

Lessons for policy-makers

Policy paper February 2019

The importance of gender norms in promoting social accountability for women in DRC

‘Gender change is often elusive and painstakingly slow, and there is therefore a clear need to use a gender lens in order to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual drivers of social accountability.’

This image shows the National Ministry of Education (Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel: EPSP) in Kinshasa, where the female head of the Direction of Education for Life and Population and the male head of the division in charge of Documentation and Publications can be seen working together. Credit: Kyamusugulwa, 2018.

Study overview

■ Efforts to achieve social accountability from below for women in DRC have encountered obstacles related to traditional gender norms.

■ It is important to create an enabling environment for social gender accountability by disseminating and enacting existing gender laws and regulations and by promoting women's inclusion in public institutions, particularly in ministries of health and education.

■ Although positive gender change at the local level has been slow and sporadic, there is qualitative evidence of gender change at the individual level, where some women have gained influence and effectively used social accountability channels. Positive gender change is a long process that will continue to require sustained attention and efforts.

Introduction

This policy paper presents the findings from a research project on social accountability and gender in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).[1] The Tuungane project is its main case study.[2] As documented on the International Rescue Committee (IRC) site, the IRC and its partners 'implemented a large-scale community-driven reconstruction (CDR)

programme called Tuungane ('Let's unite' in the local Kiswahili language) from 2007 to 2016'. This had three phases: TI, TII and TII+. This programme was funded by the UK Government and took place in more than 1,900 conflict-affected communities of the eastern DRC, with a budget of approximately 103.7 million GBP.

Actions included Tuungane staff training 170,201 community members in the use of Community Score Cards (CSCs). These cards are qualitative monitoring tools used for local level monitoring and performance evaluation of services by the communities themselves. They aim to exact social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers, and include so-called 'interface meetings' between service providers and the community (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015: 295).

In the case of Tuungane, 70% of indicators used in the CSCs and created by the communities reflected the priorities of local women. Women also occupied 49% of the key positions in the Village Development Committees (VDCs), given the gender parity requirement. Besides implementing community trainings on CSCs, the Tuungane programme supported the rehabilitation or construction of 1,448 classrooms, 1,514 WASH facilities (latrines, springs, reservoirs, wells and pumps), 33 market places, 118 health facilities, 495 metres

of bridges and 275 km of roads. The Tuungane programme also established 540 Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) during its second phase. These groups, mostly comprised of women, allowed women to access credit and a solidarity fund for household emergencies.

While the programme's achievements have been and are still being evaluated (Flynn, 2014: 4; Humphreys et al., 2012), evaluation exercises of the first phases of Tuungane have found 'no evidence of positive changes in attitudes towards the roles and responsibilities of women as a result of the gender parity requirement [in the VDCs]' and that 'this evidence does not suggest that the imposition of gender parity requirements is an effective way to strengthen the position of women in this context' (both quotes in Humphreys et al., 2012: 8).

Our findings at the local level corroborated the view that gender parity in these committees does not usually lead to changes in traditional gender roles. Women's roles in the committees is usually secondary, submissive and focused on 'domestic' duties in the committees (Kyamusugulwa et al., forthcoming). Nonetheless, we also found evidence of individual women who had gained influence and used the channels of accountability to raise women's concerns for example about (domestic) violence, abandonment or inheritance issues. Women of influence derive their position from different factors. These include education, being closely related to men with power, being perceived to have integrity and character or by combining different positions in village committees (Kyamusugulwa et al., forthcoming; Hilhorst and Bashwira, 2012).

Even though some positive changes have been found, a major finding of this study remains that gender change is often elusive and painstakingly slow, and there is therefore a clear need to use a gender lens in order to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual drivers of social accountability. This policy paper, then, focuses on the contextual factors that help explain the so-far mitigated success of social accountability at the local level.

The importance of social accountability

Donors have invested a lot in social accountability to improve service provision because its lack is seen as one of the root causes of conflict and the absence of democracy. Social accountability has been defined as 'the extent and capability of citizens to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs' (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015, citing World Bank, 2012: 30–31). This definition does not clarify who decides on what these needs are. We therefore complement this definition with Ackerman's (2004) interpretation of social accountability. This emphasises the ability of citizens to hold their leaders or service providers

accountable and eventually sanction them if/when they fail to deliver actions that are appropriate to their duties and responsibilities. Yet, definitions of social accountability rarely take into account the roles, duties and responsibilities that are culturally or socially ascribed to women, men, girls and boys – gender for short – which are a key factor in the practices of social accountability.

Refining the concept of social accountability for gender means first examining whether the capabilities of women differ from those of men in terms of holding the state accountable. Second, it means asking whether authorities, in turn, respond differently to the (partly socially constructed) needs of women and men.

A third dimension opens up if we de-reify 'the state' and understand it to be composed of various stakeholders, including civil servants and service providers, who also act according to gender roles. In other words, we can study the capacity of 'state' representatives at various levels (sub-national and national) to respond to the needs of female and male citizens. This should keep in mind that many of these 'needs' are actually entitlements that have been determined by legal and policy frameworks. Gender and social accountability thereby intersect at various points. In this paper, we focus on the first and third dimensions in order to answer the research question. We do this against the background of cultural and social gender norms and national regulations in the DRC.

A key aspect to consider here is the extent to which it is possible to achieve a gender balance in leadership positions. This applies both to the 'demand' side of social accountability, in terms of women's leadership of Village Development and other local committees (Parents Committees known under their French acronym, COPA[3]), Health Facility Committees (HFCs – also known under their French acronym, CODESA[4]) and savings and micro-credit associations (VSLAs). This also applies to the 'supply' side: among representatives of the state.

The underlying assumption is that such gender balance would address the needs of women and girls in equal measure to those of men and boys. Given the importance of integrating gender issues for sustainable development (see Southern African Development Community (SADC) 2008 and the Sustainable Development Goal Number 5), it is striking that there is little literature on how women can access leadership positions, when compared to men, thereby allowing them to exercise social accountability in reconstruction and development interventions by the DRC.

The main question addressed in this paper is thus: How do national gender norms and regulations, along with women's inclusion in public institutions, influence the potential for social accountability exercised by and for women?

3   The Comité de parents (COPA) is an elected body in charge of co-managing a school along with the school's director.

4   The Comité de Santé et de Développement (CODESA) is an elected body in charge of co-managing a health centre in collaboration with its head nurse.

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Methodology

This research is based on qualitative data collected during the 2017–2018 period, using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with:

- local committee members;
- women leaders;
- men and women, both in and outside the Tuungane project;
- service providers (education and health);
- local chiefs;
- church leaders;
- youth.

The first author conducted a total of 50 interviews in four villages in Kalehe and six in Mwenga territory, both in the South-Kivu province in eastern DRC. In addition, he conducted six with civil servants at the National Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender (including in the Secretariat implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, below), the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health, all in Kinshasa. A review of the key documents and reports about the international and national instruments of social accountability and gender over the last 10 years complemented the fieldwork at the national-provincial and territorial-chiefdom levels.

Key findings

Our findings are organised as follows. First, we share our assessment of the international instruments and national level regulations and their implementing structures. Second, we present data on women in leadership positions and explain their limited number by referring mainly to local gender norms.

International and national regulation to protect women and foster women leadership

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the Government of the DRC ratified numerous international instruments to promote social accountability and gender equality. Among these are the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (Cedaw), the UNSCR 1325, the Maputo and SADC protocols and the Sustainable Development Goals agreement (UN, 1979; AU, 2003; SADC, 2008; UN, 2000; Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) Femmes, 2015; Willet, 2010).

Table 1: International instruments to promote social accountability and gender in the DRC

No	Name	Year	Main objectives
1	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw)	UN resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, entry into force 3 September 1981	To promote the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields, by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.
2	United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325	Adopted 31 October 2000	To increase representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.
3	Maputo protocol or protocol to the African Charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa	African Union, adopted by the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly, 11 July 2003	Reaffirmation of women's rights in Africa: rights to food, to health, to education, to dignity, to peace, to inheritance and rights to control reproductive functions.
4	SADC protocol on gender and development	SADC community, 2008	To harmonise national legislations, policies, strategies and programmes with relevant regional and international instruments related to girls' and women's empowerment.
5	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): commitment to 17 SDGs by 2030	United Nations, 2015; the 5th SDG is about gender equality	To achieve gender equality and empower all girls/women: addressing structural issues such as unfair social norms and attitudes, and establishing progressive legal frameworks that promote equality between women and men.

Source: Authors own.

Table 2 presents the laws and decrees to promote social accountability and gender at the national and sub-national levels, especially those related to:

- women's rights for equitable representation in national, provincial and local institutions;

- education of girls and boys;

- criminalising sexual violence and rape;

- women's employment rights;

- integrating gender in all development domains;

- implementing the UNSCR 1325 (ONU Femmes, 2015, Ministère EPSP, 2017 – see Table 2).

The final column presents observations from the Ministry of Education regarding the level of implementation. These observations resonate with the evidence we found through our interviews: that all these laws and regulations suffer from weak awareness-raising across the country. As we can see from this table, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Family holds great responsibility for implementing and enforcing these policies and laws. Yet, during the previous two decades (i.e. through the 1990s and 2000s to today), the Ministry was often omitted from the List of Ministries and, when it appeared, it was labelled 'Ministry of Public Health, Social Affairs and Families' (11 April to 20 May 1997). Under the Congolese government of Transition (from 2003-2006), it was called 'Ministère de la condition féminine' ('the Ministry of [the] Feminine Condition'). Indeed, it was only on 26 October 2008. under Aldophe Muzito's government, that this ministry began to appear under the label of the 'Ministry of Gender and Family'. In February 2010, the name was further altered to become the 'Ministère du genre, de la famille et de l'enfant' (the Ministry of Gender, the Family and the Child). Deliberately or not, the name of this ministry conveys a message that gender is primarily seen in relation to family affairs, thereby prominently positioning women in their roles as mothers and wives.

At the national government level, a special Secretariat in charge of implementing the UNSCR 1325 has been established. This was led by a woman director, along with three other permanent members of staff, two of whom were women. Also, the office collaborates with 12 other non-permanent sectorial ministries members, who participate in meetings by invitation. The office has representations in 21 out of 25 provinces (excluding Kinshasa).

Despite this attempt to coordinate government action in the area of UNSCR 1325, both at the central and local level, the Secretariat seems to be more accountable to donors and the United Nations Security Council than it is to the Congolese people, with it hardly in touch at all with territories and chiefdoms. This point is illustrated in the following interview quote with an official working at the permanent Secretariat department implementing the UNSCR 1325:

'The assessment report [on violence in DRC 2015] was sent to New York, since then, we report to New York and the government also sponsors participation of our team in international meetings at the regional level, such as the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale (CEEAC)'[5,6]

The need for upward accountability to donors is also explained by the Secretariat's funding structure. It has received funding from the Belgium Government through UN Women, to implement the resolution in terms of capacity building and set up a mechanism of an earlier alert for preventing violence and participating in negotiation actions to end conflicts. Other donors, such as *Diaconia* and *Cordaid* have contributed by setting up offices to represent the permanent Secretariat UNSCR 1325 in the 21 provinces of the country. At the same time, the Congolese Government pays salaries of the Secretariat staff. Through its Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, it can in some cases fund Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) partners to care for victims of gender-based violence.[7] However, despite this support, the permanent Secretariat has experienced difficulties in getting core funding for its activities. Explaining why there is little collaboration between Kinshasa and chiefdoms and localities in rural areas, the member of Secretariat staff told us:

'The biggest problem is resources; we don't have sufficient resources to reach there. These days, the Secretariat is not aligned [for any assistance from outside].'[8]

'If we have been operating, it is because of the [UN Women] project.'[9]

Apart from the UNSCR 1325 Secretariat, there are 26 provincial directorates of ministries. At this level, ministries may be combined. In South Kivu, for example, this concerns the Ministry of Health, Gender, Family and Humanitarian Affairs.[10] As part of these directorates, the Division of Gender administratively represents the Ministry of Gender in terms of reporting, participating in trainings and workshops, and collaborating with both national and international actors operating in the gender

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5   Economic Community of Central African States in English.

6   Individual interview with Jadeau, permanent staff at the Secretariat UNSCR 1325, Kinshasa, 8 August 2018.

7   Individual interview with Jadeau.

8   Individual interview with Cleophas, Director of Studies and Planning at the General Secretariat, Ministry of Gender, Kinshasa, 7 August 2018.

9   Individual interview with Jadeau.

10 Individual interview with Mathilde, Expert at the South-Kivu Provincial Ministry of Health, Gender, Family and Humanitarian Affairs, Bukavu, 15 June 2018.

Table 2: National and provincial instruments to promote social accountability

No	Name	Organisational embedding	Main objectives	Assessment by the Ministry of Education
1	Constitution of the DRC of 8 February 2006, modified by Law No 11/002 of 20 January 2011, with revision of some articles of the Constitution	National: current Constitution of the DRC, with emphasis on gender equality in Article 14: a woman's right to equitable representation in national, provincial and local institutions	For gender equality in terms of the law, enjoying the same rights and chances. To eliminate all forms of violence towards women in public, private life and in schools.	Weak popularisation, poor application of parity; low representation of women
2	Loi-Cadre No 14/004 of 11 February 2014 (for the National Education)	National: Ministry of Education, with article 33 related to recruitment, academic and scholarly organisations and methods of education and evaluation	To ban negative discrimination and promote positive discrimination in favour of girls and women, orphans, displaced people, pygmies, vulnerable people, children who are coming of age and people with disabilities.	Weak popularisation; mostly male personnel in the education sector
3	Law No 09/001 of 10 January 2009 (child protection)	National: Ministry of Education, with article 68 allowing for the readmission of school-age mothers in the schools of their choices, according to their individual aptitudes	Equal treatment of girls and boys, the right to education for all.	Popularisation of some articles of this law, but with persistent violation of children's rights in the family, community and at school
4	Law No 06/018 of 20 July 2006 (Congolese Penal Code) and Law No 06/019 of 20 July 2006 (Congolese Penal Procedure)	National: Ministry of Justice, with article 170 considering rape and other forms of sexual violence	For rape to be severely sanctioned by law.	Weak popularisation, especially in schools
5	Law No 15/013 of 1st August 2015 (application of women's rights modalities and parity)	National: The Ministry of Gender, Children and Family and other ministries, promoting gender equity and equal rights and opportunities in all areas	Behaviour change in the state administration and integration of the content of the law in training modules for state agents, to enable the equitable participation of men and women in public affairs.	Weak popularisation
6	Law No 16/013 of 15 July 2016 (status of career agents of the state public services)	National: The Ministry of Public Function and other ministries, with article 30 stating the right for women civil servants to consecutive maternity leave of 14 weeks (with at least eight weeks after delivery)	To end the legal requirement of marital authorisation for women applying for jobs and for women to have an equal right to compete in the recruitment and promotion of agents.	Weak popularisation in different ministries
7	Law No 16/008 of 15 July 2016, modifying and completing the Law No 87-010 of 1 August 1987 related to the Family Code	National: The Ministry of Gender, Children and Family (plus others), with article 448 stating that spouses should agree upon all legal acts in which they oblige each other of their duties	For women's value in family life to be recognised and the regime of marital authorisation to no longer be applied.	Weak popularisation
8	National Policy of gender integration, family promotion and child protection, 2008	National: The Ministry of Gender, Children and Family (plus others), with the final objective of harmonious and integral development of each person so that (s)he can be useful to her/himself and realise his/her integration in society	Raised consciousness on gender integration in all development domains.	Weak popularisation
9	National Action Plan to end marriage of children, 2017–2021	National: The Ministry of Gender (plus others), with a reference to child protection for planning programmes and sectorial projects, to accelerate the end of children's marriages in the DRC	A reduction in cases of sexual violence towards children.	Insufficient popularisation
10	National strategy to combat gender-based violence, 2009	National: The Ministry of Gender (plus others), geared towards free primary education, with support to awareness raising programmes related to legal texts protecting women and education on women's rights	For public services to have mechanisms for monitoring that are judicial and ensure the elimination of all discrimination towards women and assure the promotion and protection of their rights.	Weak popularisation and lacking translation into national languages
11	Ministerial decree N°008/CAB/MIN.GEFAE /GIBI/13, of 5 June 2013	National, Provincial and local: The Ministry of Gender, Children and Family	The creation, organisation and functioning of the steering committee at local, provincial and national levels of the security council resolution 1325.	
12	Provincial decree N° 13/036/GP/SK, of 7 December 2013	Provincial (South-Kivu province)	The creation, organisation and functioning of the local and provincial steering committee of the UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security.	

Source: Authors own - except for data in the last column which is from Ministry of Education (EPSP) (Ministère EPSP 2017).

sector in the province. Discussing how the Division of Gender works in South-Kivu, the Chef de Bureau in charge of general services and human resources management explained to us:

> 'We collaborate with the division of Justice in mediation, [with] Health in sensitisation of family planning, [with] Education/EPSP through sessions of *promo scolaire*[11] and [with] the Division of Interior about registration of marriages and children at the civil-state office.'[12]

Along with the above, the Congolese State administration has created a position of a woman in charge of tackling gender issues, known as '*Mama genre*' at the territory or chiefdom level, at least in the South-Kivu province. This woman generally has a secondary school level of education and is placed in charge of raising awareness of gender equality based on the current Congolese constitution, with special reference to article 14 (Kyamusugulwa *et al.,* forthcoming). This awareness-raising is also based on the current Family Code promulgated in 2016 that replaced the previous one of 1987. Talking about her experience of the old Family Code, one such *mama genre* said:

> 'We raise awareness of legal texts that protect women and children. [There is] ignorance of laws; even many men are not aware of the current Family Code.'[13]

A key element in this awareness-raising is the organisation of events for International Women's Day on 8 March each year. In the DRC, this day takes the form of the entire March month being dedicated to women and girls through a public event, the posting of public messages and, where possible, holding debates and conferences on girls' and women's rights.

Though information about UNSCR 1325 has been disseminated to all provinces, provincial authorities do not know the Secretariat's objectives and rarely allocate the necessary funding for awareness-raising and concrete actions in rural areas.[14] This is partly due to language barriers, as UNSCR 1325 has not been translated into the four national languages. Most importantly, the funding system at the central level seems to have been reproduced at the provincial one. In the South-Kivu province, the main donors are UN Women, Save the Children, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Cordaid. While UNICEF supports the sensitisation of parents in gender matters so that they send both their girls and boys to school, most donors only support the activities of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Family that directly assist victims of

sexual and gender-based violence, as well as raising awareness about it. There are other ministry priorities that do not attract the attention of donors, due to them being direct responsibility of the Congolese Government. These include educating women and men (particularly young people and decision-makers) about the National Policy of Gender and promoting women leaders.[15] This partly explains our overall disappointing findings in the next section on women in leadership positions.

Women in leadership positions

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, even though the Congolese Government has attempted to ratify international and regional judicial instruments and to promulgate national laws promoting gender equality, there are still huge disparities between men's and women's leadership positions in the DRC (see Table 3). Exceptions nonetheless exist in domains that specifically relate to gender. For example, as mentioned earlier, we found three women among the four permanent members in the permanent Secretariat of UNSCR 1325. This impact stems from those involved in this resolution having more contact with international agencies and regulations that promote gender equality and women's involvement in decision-making.

We found a few women in leading positions in many ministries. However, while there are many more women employed than men at the Ministry of Social Affairs, there are fewer of them in leading positions. Here, a key informant acknowledged:

> 'I would say this ministry started with teaching activities that are feminine, such as sewing and household tasks. I would estimate [that] 80% of personnel are women, while only 20% are men, but they are in managerial positions."[16]

Similarly, a local civil servant recognised:

> 'In Bukavu and eight territories, we have 94 agents. Women are more than men. I can estimate [that], in Bukavu, out of 10 [agents], [there are] six women and four men; in territories, out of 10, [there are] seven women and three men.'[17]

The high representation of women in this ministry can be explained by the fact that social affairs are considered as consisting of activities usually carried out by women rather than by men. However, because most of these women are less educated, the leading positions are mostly occupied by men. Hence, educational disadvantages as well as gender norms

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11   *Promo scolaire* is a French concept to refer to a competition exercise in which students from different schools respond to the same questions, enabling students to help their schools achieve a higher classification for teaching quality.

12   Group interview with Adelard and Rachel, South-Kivu-Provincial Division of Gender, Bukavu, 22 June 2018.

13   Individual interview with Justine, Mama genre, Kalehe Territory in the South-Kivu province, 12 September 2018.

14   Individual interview with Jadeau.

15   Group interview with Adelard and Rachel.

16   Individual interview with Christophe, Head of Division in charge of Personnel, General Secretariat, National Ministry of Social Affairs, Kinshasa, 6 August 2018.

17   Individual interview with Brigitte, Head of the Division of Social Affairs in the South-Kivu province, Bukavu, 23 June 2018.

Table 3: Women leadership positions in state and non-state services in the DRC

No	Institution	Percentage of women in leadership positions
1	The National Commission for Human Rights	44.4
2	The National Independent Electoral Commission	23.1
3	The Economic and Social Council	20.6
4	Leading positions in the Congolese media	19.0
5	The Judiciary (Femmes dans la Magistrature) [No woman in the Constitutional Court]	18.1
6	Ambassadors	16.7
7	Director Generals	10.8
8	Public Administration: women General Secretaries in ministries	10.6
9	The National General Assembly	10.4
10	Professors and Lecturers at private Universities and University Colleges	10.3
11	The Central Government	10.2
12	Provincial governments	9.0
13	Professors and Lecturers at Public Universities and University Colleges	8.2
14	Presidents of Steering Committees (Présidentes des Conseils d'Administration)	8.1
15	The National Police	6.7
16	The Senate	4.6
17	Military Officers in the Congolese Army	2.1

Source: Ministère du genre, enfant et famille (2017).

explain why women are underrepresented in public sector jobs. The labour market is only open for women in jobs that are considered compatible with the social division of labour, where women are responsible for family and social affairs.

Our research has confirmed these findings at the local level, except in the administration of the national and provincial ministries in charge of the Gender division where we found five women out of 11 staff altogether. We also found that, when women are among staff in the administration of a specific ministry or division, they often occupy less important positions. For instance, women in the Kalehe territory administration represent 7%, while women in the Mwenga territorial administration represent only 2% and women in the HFC in the Kalehe Health Zone stand at 13%. Finally, women vice-presidents of the HFC in the Mwenga Health Zone represent 11%.[18]

The importance of local gender norms

These figures can be explained by the dominance of traditional gender norms and low levels of education, especially that of women and girls, in rural areas. The traditional social order dominates, giving women less exposure to modern norms because of lower levels of schooling, lack of access to media and a heavy farming and household workload, compared to men. For example, married men are not allowed to cook or harvest and will be publicly shamed if they do so. Meanwhile, married women are expected to not speak up publicly. Traditional norms also dictate that only a man can become a counsellor of a locality, or a *groupement*[19] or paramount chief (the chiefdom chief). In the *Havu* culture, it is only when a *groupement* chief or the *Mwami* dies without having a son to inherit his role that his wife can act as interim chief until her son becomes an adult and is therefore able to be inaugurated as the new chief.[20] We have therefore found that compared to men, women are likely to become trapped in a cycle where they are deemed unable to engage in leadership positions, even at the local or village level (with the possible exception of women's associations or women's church choirs). As a civil servant in the gender ministry told us, deviating from such norms would betray a patriarchal mindset:

'**I must say, leadership positions are not a gift that men will leave or give to women because they are women; they should battle to deserve these positions.**'[21]

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18 Individual interview with Justine, individual interview with Seraphin, the Mwenga Territory Administrator, 3 May 2018, Mwenga; focus group discussion with the Kalehe Health Zone team, 30 May 2018, Kalehe; and individual interview, David, Head of the Mwenga Health Zone, 3 May 2018, Mwenga.

19 *Groupement* is the intermediate level between a locality (big village or set of villages) and the chiefdom.

20 *Mwami* is another name for the chiefdom chief.

21 Individual Interview with Jacob, Head of Unique Division, General Secretariat, National Ministry of Gender, Children and Family, Kinshasa, 3 August 2018.

We found that women occupying leadership positions on local committees in the context of the Tuungane programme were mostly already endowed with a certain degree of education and would therefore benefit most from such empowerment opportunities. These women occupied positions under the female president of VDC, who had learned to transparently share their house resources, hiring and supervising people working in their farms and paying them for agriculture production so they themselves could enjoy more economic independence. Also, these women avoided discriminating against their daughters in comparison to their sons in terms of household tasks and sending both to school.[22]

However, even these women experienced limitations in terms of demanding accountability from local leaders, as such accountability 'travelled' through the (male) chiefs' counsellors or chiefs' family members, or through the church council, from which women were typically excluded. This is an important finding in light of the observation that church and traditional leaders often have control over schools, along with health posts/centres and their service providers (Kyamusugulwa and Hilhorst, 2015).

In summary, since women rarely occupy leading positions in existing institutions (i.e. chieftaincy and churches), the space for women to exercise their downward accountability and responsiveness to their constituency is obstructed. Equally, as chiefs and church leaders influence service providers' decisions, user committees are marginalised. This means that, even if they include women leaders, they are not likely to demand social accountability.

Conclusions and recommendations

To conclude, despite the greater visibility of gender in government laws and institutions, we have found four limitations. First, the name of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Family, conveys that gender is primarily seen in relation to family affairs, thereby primarily positioning women in their roles as mothers and wives. Second, the existence of this Ministry has led to weak integration of the gender dimension in other ministries. Third, given the emphasis in the legal framework on gender-based violence (as seen in Table 2), interventions by international and national actors have been focusing more on direct assistance for victims of sexual violence and rape than they have on promoting gender balance in leadership positions, when the latter could strengthen social accountability. Fourth, entrenched gender norms at the local level constrain women's agency to either demand or exercise accountability.

We offer three recommendations for decision-makers and development practitioners:

1 **The Congolese Government and other actors should do more work to educate people on social accountability and gender and translate regulations into practice.**

Actors need to develop strategies and approaches for raising further awareness on gender regulations bringing about change in women's representation in leadership positions. These strategies range from short and long-term education from diverse actors, at both the governmental and non-governmental level. For example, while sensitisation in the form of social mobilisation, workshops, formal trainings and exchange experiences among different bodies should continue, long-term strategies should focus on incorporating the key messages of social accountability and gender in courses of civic learning at all levels in the education system. This would offer a way to move from gender integration to gender transformation. In addition, political, church and traditional leaders need to incorporate key messages promoting equal gender relations in their discourses.

2 **We need to identify hybrid gender norms that promote social accountability and gender equality, and integrate them into all ministries.**

One of the crucial tasks here is to identify a set of social accountability and gender norms that are accepted in Congolese society via international and national instruments, as well as those based on traditional and religious norms. There needs to be an establishment of mechanisms to integrate these hybrid norms in ministries other than those related to Gender, Children and Family, especially in the ministries of health and education. This would help stop the widespread belief among civil servants that gender is only a matter of women in the Ministry of Gender. It would also break up routine meetings about gender, as staff of other ministries would contribute their experiences of integrating the gender dimension into their own ministries.

3 **Instead of focusing on the average treatment effect, we should pay more attention to changes that occur at the individual level for women involved in community-driven reconstruction programmes such as Tuungane.**

Following quantitative studies that have shown no difference between Tuungane Communities and Non-Tuungane Communities in terms of attitudes towards the roles and responsibilities of women (the gender-parity requirement), our research shows that this finding reflects the situation in the community and society at large. However, we have found that these quantitative studies, to some extent, do not reflect reality at an individual level, as we found cases of women who experienced changes in terms of their social accountability and capacity for leadership positions after being exposed to Tuungane. This finding suggests that international agencies and development practitioners engaged in promoting gender equality need to do more in the area of girls' and women's empowerment, as the process here is longer.

22 Individual interview with Adele, woman leader of Masasu village, Mwenga, 30 August 2017; individual interview with Anne, mama genre, Kasika, Mwenga, 15 October 2017.

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