

“We Are Congolese”

FFC’S MISSION TO STRENGTHEN THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

A 2012 American Political Science Review study analyzing data over 40 years and across 70 countries revealed that mobilization of women’s movements has a stronger correlation to change for women and girls than country wealth, existence of progressive policies, or number of women in parliament. International donors often struggle to fund local women’s movements and grassroots organizations. Funding regulations, reporting requirements, and knowledge of local landscapes, among other factors, limit donors’ abilities to make grants to small or informal organizations and to individual activists. It also takes time and resources to learn the landscape, find the right grantee(s), and build trust.



Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises (FFC) was established in 2007 to bridge the gap between international donors and local women’s movements in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). FFC—which in French means *funds for Congolese women*—was the first non-governmental Congolese fund mobilizing financial and technical resources to support grassroots organizations, networks, and groups of women and girls working to promote women’s rights. Local funds offer the added advantage of already being a part of the landscape, which provides local insight and pre-existing ties to communities and stakeholders in-country. “We are Congolese; we know the country; we live alongside our beneficiaries, and our staff members are affected by the same conflict and atrocities that have been ongoing in our country,” shares FFC fundraising and communications manager Nyota Babunga.

Key Info

-  **COUNTRY**
Democratic Republic of Congo
-  **TARGET POPULATION**
Women
-  **INTERVENTION AREA**
Financial inclusion, Business & entrepreneurship, Interpersonal training & networking

FFC was established by Julienne Lusenge and a group of Congolese women to fund movements and organizations that were not able to access funding through other sources. Based in DRC's capital, Kinshasa, FFC funds national non-governmental and civil society organizations, as well as informal grassroots movements and groups. FFC has the added advantage of being able to support organizations working in remote areas that are

“When women’s funds groups are properly supported, with long-term funding that provides flexibility and stability, they are able to create relationships that will build a movement and will create lasting change.” — Katharina Samara-Wickrama, Oak Foundation

hard to reach for external actors due to insecurity and difficult terrain. Access and communication both present challenges across the DRC and can discourage donors who are not able to closely monitor their investments. FFC leverages local knowledge and access to strengthen local women’s movements through grantmaking, capacity building, and advocacy.

In the DRC, women and girls face multiple vulnerabilities due to general insecurity, prevalence of sexual and domestic violence, high rates of poverty, and limited availability of and access to services. Women are disproportionately affected by these challenges due to inequality, and social, cultural, and political marginalization. FFC has seen the impact of grassroots organizations, regardless of their legal status, in effectively promoting women’s rights and women’s access to economic opportunities. Nyota explains, “We fund organizations that have a proven track-record and are not necessarily registered non-governmental organizations due to lengthy and expensive bureaucratic processes in the DRC.” FFC provides grants to organizations that have not been able to garner funding, but despite limited support and resources, are working to diligently help women in their communities.

“FFC plays a key role as an intermediary between international funders who are driven to support women in the DRC, and women’s groups working in the most marginalized areas that cannot access international funds,”



explains Nyota. FFC works through focal points in different provinces that provide an on-the-ground presence, and monitor and provide support to grantees. Grants are accompanied by capacity building around project planning and management, budgeting, activity implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and resource mobilization. FFC provides trainings to build technical and operational capacity and offer ongoing support, even after a grant has closed, to ensure sustainability of investments. This partnership and follow up is critical to FFC's vision of a successful grantmaking model. Nyota shares, "We believe in the potential and sheer determination of Congolese women to propose effective solutions to sustainably address problems within their communities, contributing to the development of the DRC."

Part of FFC's grantmaking and partnership model is to allow women receiving funds to drive their own strategy. One woman received a grant to start a fish selling business. After getting the business started, she

Meet Julienne Lusenge

The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo officially ended in 2002, but violence and conflict continues to be an ongoing reality. High levels of violence against women, and in particular sexual violence, earned the DRC the title 'rape capital of the world'. Julienne Lusenge started documenting acts of violence in 1998 and speaking out publicly condemning them. Julienne saw the need for an organization that responds to all the needs of women affected by this violence. She established Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI)—meaning female solidarity for integrated peace and development in French—a coalition of 40 grassroots women's organizations in eastern DRC. SOFEPADI protects and promotes women's rights, and provides direct support to survivors of sexual violence and reintegrates them

into communities. SOFEPADI was established to build the capacity of its activists and strengthen the Congolese women's movement. As president of SOFEPADI, Julienne struggled to garner funding and experienced first-hand donors' reluctance to fund grassroots initiatives due to lack of financial and monitoring systems and limited reporting capacity. In response, in November 2007, Julienne established FFC, giving international donors a bridge to fund grassroots initiatives, and a grantee with the ability to meet stringent financial and reporting requirements.



was making \$80 a month, and the business didn't go as well as planned because she learned that there were already many people selling fish. After more research, she pivoted and started selling chairs instead because she observed a demand.

She sent FFC a request to change her business strategy and focus, which was approved. Using the same material to make baskets, she began to make chairs. Her business grew and she is now happily making approximately \$500 a month. FFC helps grantees like her, too, by selling their goods at different events they host. By supporting independent decision-making, promoting products, and providing seed money to get started, FFC helps women to empower themselves.

FFC further promotes movement building by bringing grantees together to share experiences and to promote collaboration. In October 2012, FFC brought 25 women activists to Kinshasa during the fourteenth meeting of La Francophonie, a biannual summit of 77 French-speaking states and governments, to share ideas and best practices based on their day-to-day work. The women met with representatives of various embassies, as well as the French president. "This was an incredible opportunity for women working in small, remote communities, to address the same issues that international stakeholders were convening to discuss," highlights Nyota.



"We fight every day. We have no resources but ourselves to support

other women." — Julienne Lusenge, Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises

As of December 2015, FFC receives funding from three different embassies. As part of building a movement, FFC also encourages and supports more women participating in the political process. Shares Nyota, "We help bring potential political candidates from every DRC province together. We teach them how to communicate better. We teach them about politics, campaigns, and strategy so they can run for office. We discovered through doing this that many women did not know each other, even the ones in the same province. So, we discussed how they might ally with and support one another. If two candidates are from the same province and they can tell one

is more likely to win than the other, we discuss how they can band together. We put resources toward these kinds of activities because we want to see more women participating in policy.”

Beyond grantmaking and providing support to possible political candidates, FFC also invests in advocacy and policy level interventions. For example, in 2015 FFC is working with the Ministry of Gender to amend two laws that impact women’s ability to express their full rights and potential in the DRC. “We will not stop at anything when it comes to defending women’s rights and peace in our country,” proclaims Nyota. “With our philanthropy, we aim to be a vehicle, an intermediary on the ground, to get resources into the hands of Congolese women, as they are the drivers of their own change. Progress for women and girls in the DRC is not achievable if Congolese women aren’t leading the process and informing the strategy.”

AFEDER

FFC funded a small women’s organization working in Orientale Province called Action Féminin pour le Développement Rural (AFEDER).

AFEDER works in the Dungu territory in the Haut-Uele district in the northeastern corner of the DRC, near the border with South Sudan.

This area has been affected by long-term conflict, leaving many women as widows and single mothers without support or livelihoods. AFEDER provided 25 women with access to micro-credit and savings. The women were trained in credit management, marketing and simple business skills. One woman from the group generated income by selling food in the market. Through the group rotary micro-credit, she received \$80, which allowed her to buy more food to sell. Her increased income allowed her to learn a new trade: making chairs. She was able to stop selling food and now earns \$500 a year by making and selling chairs, which has improved her ability to provide for herself and her family and send her children to school.



A local women's fund creates a bridge between international donors and local grassroots movements

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This case study was written by Virginia Zuco and developed for Foundation Center's Equal Footing project.

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