



JAMAA GRANDS LACS

Un engagement pour le bien vivre-ensemble

Civic engagement and democratic participation of women in the DRC



Mumbere Sivihwa

**First phase of the Citizens' University Program
in the DRC**

About JAMAA Grands Lacs

JAMAA Grands Lacs is a non-profit organization created in 2016 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the aim to foster the emergence of new young leaders who are carriers of social, economic and political causes in their communities. JAMAA Grands Lacs mainly focuses on peacebuilding process, constructive conflict management, reduction of community violence in a collaborative approach within the Great Lakes sub-region and more particularly in Eastern DRC, characterized for nearly two decades by bloody wars and interethnic conflicts.

In a humanity dialogue approach, we value the cultural, philosophical, symbolic, and material potentials of local communities to find solutions from the bottom-up with ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, policy makers, academics, practitioners, media and private sector actors.



Vision

We want a united, peaceful and prosperous Great Lakes region and Africa, where opportunities for happiness and fulfillment are offered to all people without distinction.



Mission

To unite youth of the African Great Lakes sub-region around a common ideal of promoting true solidarity and an active brotherhood that transcends our tribal and regional particularities. To achieve its objectives, the organization bases its action on the following areas:

1. Peace, good governance and elections ;
2. Constructive conflict management ;
3. Human Rights and Gender ;
4. Social and solidarity economy ;
5. Ecological humanism ;
6. Research-Action.

For more information, kindly visit our website : www.jamaa-grands-lacs.org

Foreword

After decades of exclusion of women from effective participation in the life of nations, after decades of building a culture of inferiorization of women and infringement of their freedoms, the need to commit to women's rights and education is becoming more and more a necessity for this generation. The creation of an equitable world and a better future for humanity will not be built without the true participation of women. In regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia, women have suffered heavy tributes with civil wars, bloody conflicts, warlike deprivation of their freedom, etc. And as is customary, the rights of women and girls are always the first to be affected in times of conflict and crisis. In some of these countries, such as the DRC, sexual violence during conflicts has been used as a weapon of war, which has contributed to increasing women's vulnerability and making their economic autonomy precarious. From one refugee camp to another, she would have to move with her family, making access to education, housing, security and food difficult.

While some women have managed to rise above and stand out, many have seen these events contribute greatly to their level of vulnerability, making them powerless to make courageous decisions about their own lives, or to take on leadership roles in their communities. Most look innocently and passively at society without having the audacity to engage with it to drive decisive changes that take their rights into account. It is in response to this that the JAMAA Grands Lacs organization, through its Citizen's University program, proposes to work on resilience and the rehabilitation of the inner strength of these women through its famous curative pedagogy and its developed method known as the 6 Powers; whose aim is to contribute to the construction of strong personalities who participate effectively in creating another future for their communities. A future that is more egalitarian and more inclusive. These powers include:

Communicative power : This is about building an opinion that one embodies as an identity that one must communicate to others. It is no longer a question of presenting women only according to their distinctive biological traits (sex-specific indices), but according to the causes that they carry and defend in society. This dimension of communicative power also refers to a strength of conviction and speech with which one spreads one's mobilizing ideas within the community. Basically, it is a useful and precious word that favors the weaving of human links with one's fellow human beings, that raises and lifts up, that gives faith in life and in the future.

The power of dreams : This is a call to young women to dare to dream, to dare to project themselves into the future by seeing the role they can play. This breaks the logic of simple personal ambitions to open up to the immensity of great dreams, visions and utopias of grandeur in which societies, communities and peoples have a place. This great vision is, in essence, the power to make a society happy by assuming, in human relations, the power of sentinel, watchman, watcher and impetus, so to speak, of the energies of good against the powers of evil (Jean-Blaise Kenmogne, 2014). The new Congolese civilization of women of stature, it is especially that of women with big dreams, big ambitions, big utopias that reason in the collective imagination as a force for mobilizing all social strata to break with the songs of misery, in order to build a new common destiny, prosperous and happy. For as the Congolese thinker Kä Mana makes known, in the search for solutions to the great problems of human existence, everything begins with this capacity to dream big, to dream high, to dream far, to see far and to aim for all the possible and even the impossible to change reality in depth (Kä Mana, 2013). Thus, the acquisition of the power of dreaming is essential today for Congolese women in their struggle to remake the future; a future where they will no longer be the periphery, but the beating heart of all the great societal dynamics.

The power of action : It is a question at this level of taming the creative genius of the woman, and her integration in initiatives which allow her to think with others while being herself, to give her point of view, and to fertilize an action which carries in it the promise of the change of the order of things in the society. In this perspective, we leave the logic of wait-and-see and lament towards a perspective of creative power which makes women impose themselves by their strength of organization and initiative. Several spaces are thus offered to young women. Spaces that they must learn to invest deeply with their ideas of action. The field of civil society remains fertile; women's collectives and networks, non-governmental organizations, associations, citizen movements, churches, positive action groups, political parties, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), etc. The conquest also of the political space with another idea of power, not as a place of expression of the warlike logic of men with the impulses of a dominating masculinity, but with the maternal logic, that of protection of life and preservation of the humanity of each other at all times.

Relational power : The art of building quality relationships with others, in order to build a vast network of human relationships with which to transform society. As the Hunde proverb says: «Amwami, bandu», in other words «the king is the people», as if to say that one is a true leader when one thinks and acts with others and for others; when one is in an approach of openness and not of enclosure, of building a bridge to go towards the other and the others and not to cut them off. A man of openness adds in this regard the Cameroonian thinker, Jean-Blaise Kenmogne, knows what human relationships are worth as a capacity of enrichment and treasure of life. He knows that the being of the human person is these links in their fecundity (Jean-Blaise Kenmogne, 2014).

The power of intelligence : this dimension is related to the construction of a critical mass of women of reflection whose strategic and organizational intelligence contributes to imagine and build the future. As the Hunde queen Bernadette Muongo reminds us, not without reason, in a traditional account of the fate of one of their kings who was beheaded by rebels on the border of his kingdom, whose fertility and influence he wanted to recover, «it is essential to invest in the energy of our heads to regain the power to build the future» (Bernadette Muongo, 2016). It is a matter of always thinking...thinking...thinking before acting so that the action we impulse really contributes to change the society in a new order of peace, common prosperity and sustainable development.

The power of the heart : this dimension is about the strength to look after the good of others, the willingness to carry the sufferings and joys of other human beings with you when it comes to action, an altruistic strength in short. The American philosopher Thomas Nagel says it best when he states that altruism is an «inclination to act with the interests of others in mind and without ulterior motives.» (Thomas Nagel quoted by Mathieu Ricard, 2013). It is about moving beyond selfishness and individualism to carry within oneself the humanity of others. Dr. Denis Mukwege says it with luminescence when he affirms that «one ceases to be a man when one no longer suffers from the suffering of the other». The feminine leadership of the renewal is that of the heart, where every action precedes a prior reflection on the part of others and the other, as well as the preservation of their own humanity.

The work focused in its first phase on the issue of social and political participation of women. The results are already attractive, as you will see in the testimonies of the targeted young women. In its second phase, it focuses on the issue of economic participation, with the objective of contributing to a real economic empowerment of women in the DRC and more particularly in the North Kivu province, a province that has experienced years of tensions that have significantly affected the being and the overall living conditions of women.

MUMBERE SIVIHWA,
Executive Director of JAMAA Gands Lacs

General Introduction

Several instruments at the international level describe the need for women to have political integration and a place in the governance of nations. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, adopted in Maputo in 2003, provides in Article 9 for «the right to participate in the political process and in decision-making». States shall undertake specific positive actions to promote participatory governance and equal participation of women in the political life of their countries, through affirmative action and national legislation and other measures to ensure that :

- a) women participate in all elections without discrimination;*
- b) women are represented equally with men at all levels in electoral processes;*
- c) women are equal partners with men at all levels in the formulation and implementation of state development policies and programs.*

For its part, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted in 2011 the resolution No. A/RES/66/130, which calls on member states to strengthen the participation of women in political life, to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in all situations, including in times of political transition, and to promote and protect the human right of women. Women's participation in politics is also mentioned in target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): «Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal access to leadership roles at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

However, despite these instruments, the under-representation of women at all levels of governance is still a tangible reality in sub-Saharan countries and more particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The country's demographics are composed of a 52% female majority, which means that women are a pillar of Congolese society in terms of their numerical superiority. However, they are not fully involved in the country's decision-making bodies. In the national assembly, for example, they represent only 12%; in the provincial assemblies, they represent only 10% to 12%. Their presence is even less felt in local governance structures, in the territories, communes, neighborhoods, avenues, etc. Male dominance has managed to gain the upper hand at all levels

According to the latest data from the 2017 SADC Gender Protocol Barometer estimate that unlike in primary education where parity is almost achieved, girls represented only 41% of secondary school students compared to 59% for boys, with the completion rate for girls at 34%. Only 9 percent of women were reported to be landowners, placing the country last among SADC countries in this area. Gender-based violence also remains a reality, despite significant progress in the country's crackdown on rape. Indeed, 64% of Congolese believe that husbands have the right to punish their wives for misconduct (according to the 2017 Barometer). The demanding role of wife and duties as a mother and the very limited range of opportunities reinforce women's difficulties in being active in the labor market (Jonas Kibala Kuma, 2020) and even more so in the political arena.

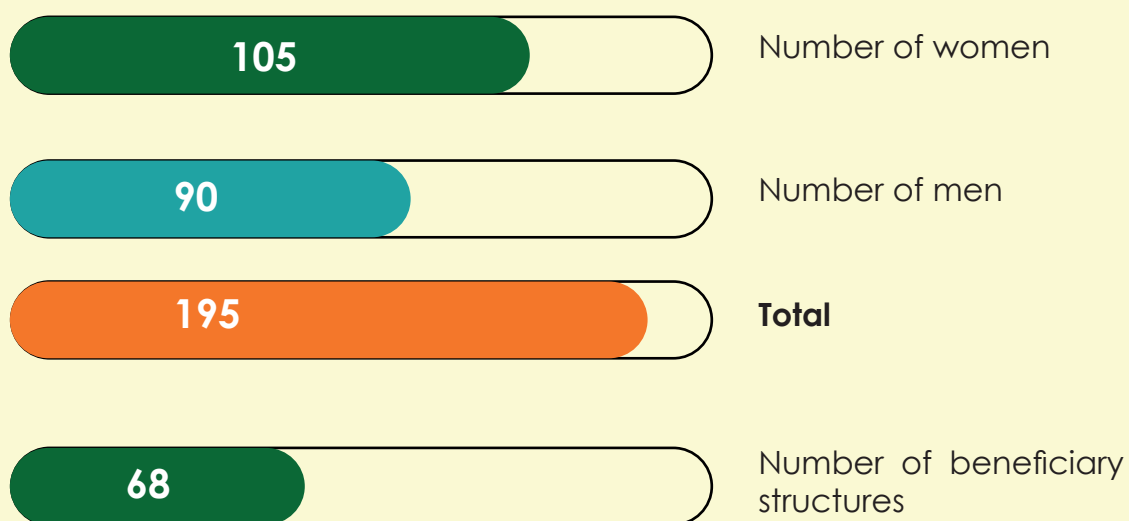
There are several reasons for this. Studies point to two major barriers to women's participation in politics. On the one hand, there are structural barriers caused by discriminatory laws and institutions that reduce their opportunities to vote or run for political office. On the other hand, women are generally less likely than men to have the training, contacts, and resources necessary to become successful leaders. In a recent workshop held by JAMAA Grands Lacs with women from the Village Savings and Credit Associations/AVEC in Goma (DRC), many women felt that the lack of information and training was one of the main reasons for the under-representation of women in the political life of the country.

It is to meet these challenges that JAMAA Grands Lacs has developed a program to support the social, political and economic participation of youth and women since April 2022. In its first phase (April - July) focused on the social and political aspect, the program succeeded in working with 105 young women and 90 young boys from 68 civil society structures in the province of North Kivu/DRC. Among them are vulnerable young women, academics, young men and women from the media, leaders of associations, non-governmental organizations, churches, members of political parties, etc. The sessions host an average of 25 people each week, the majority of whom are young women under the age of 35.

All sessions are done in an interactive and participatory approach leading to a democratic debate, where citizens regain their role as citizens and get involved. All the session facilitators come from governmental and non-governmental structures. They are essentially administrative and non-administrative authorities (ministers, political party leaders, university professors, directors of NGOs and associations). This choice of senior facilitators to reflect and talk with youth contributes to the strengthening of the intergenerational dialogue that has been so lacking in Congolese society, creating a rift between the authorities and youth.

The results are exciting; young women who have regained their self-confidence after being shattered by their unfavorable life situations, young women who have joined political parties to exercise their leadership and use it as a way to enter decision-making bodies, the re-establishment of bonds of trust between youth and authorities, networking between youth initiatives, the breaking of stereotypes between young people from different cultural and social backgrounds, thus promoting the celebration of diversity, the culture of living together and social peace.

Number of Beneficiaries





Theme : Launch of the Citizen's University program in the DRC

Date : Saturday, April 16, 2022

Speaker : Mr MUMBERE SIVIHWA, *Coordonnateur de JAMAA Grands Lacs*

On the occasion of the launch of the program of the Citizen's University in the DRC on Saturday, April 16, 2022, it was a question of presenting JAMAA Great Lakes to the participants, the basic philosophy of the program of the Citizen's University in DR Congo, the expected results, as well as collecting the expectations of the participants in this program. The coordinator of the organization JAMAA Great Lakes Mumbere Sivihwa said that this program is intended to be a meeting space, democratic debate on the commitment of Congolese women, and social, economic and political participation of youth in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The development of the space in question was linked to four major needs, namely:

1. The need to highlight the socio-economic and political initiatives of young women in order to make them a source of inspiration for others. These women in whom the community can easily identify by the causes they embody, by their sense of courage and determination to change the order of things in their communities;
2. The need to break with the logic of complexes and the crisis of confidence that has become a barrier to engagement for many Congolese women, as a result of social prejudices about them;
3. The need for a culture of competences (i.e. the spirit and the culture of knowledge, the know-how, the knowledge to be and the knowledge to become) necessary for the young people, in view of the construction of the new social, economic, and political realities in DR Congo with the youth at the base;
4. The need to work on strategies for the economic empowerment of Congolese women.

The program wants to create a community of women leaders who are concerned about being part of the solution to the world's, Africa's and the DR Congo's problems and who are driven by a real will to act and a concern for impact. To achieve these expectations, the program is based on three major pillars, namely

1. The promotion of the debate on democratic governance, sustainable development with at its core the support to the creation of an economic system that produces more just, inclusive and responsible results integrating the needs of youth and women;
2. The promotion of peace, security and constructive conflict management in a spirit of dialogue, participatory and strategic advocacy;
3. Supporting the process of women's resilience after decades of tensions against them;
4. Strengthen intergenerational dialogue and female leadership in the youth community.

The working sessions are held 4 times a month, one session per week, and the themes and guests are chosen according to the needs of the group.

After the presentation of the coordinator of the organization on the program, on the reasons for the development of the Citizen's University in DRC and the collection of the expectations of the participants, the session closed while giving appointment the following Saturday.





Theme : The socio-economic commitment of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Date : Saturday, April 23, 2022

Speaker : Mrs. Marie KARENGANE and Clévine KAVIRA.

The second working session within the program of the citizen's university in DRC focused on the socio-economic commitment of women under the guidance of Ms. Marie KARENGANE, social entrepreneur and Ms. Clévine KAVIRA Deputy Spokesperson of the Catholic University La Sapientia of Goma and young ambassador of female leadership. After their presentations on the major challenges faced by women in their social and economic commitment, three major suggestions emerged from the session, namely

- The need for women to develop their skills, that is to say their knowledge, their practical know-how, their know-how to be, as well as their know-how to become. The knowledge allows the woman to stand out, being at the forefront of her time by the fact that she has the necessary information on the dynamics of her time. The know-how proves to the entourage what the woman is able to do in her sphere of intervention, political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, etc. It is a significant asset to break the myth that women are incapable, at the bottom of the human scale. Knowing how to be refers to a lifestyle that reflects a certain number of strong values, the sense of honesty, the courage to go against the grain, the humility to be open to others, etc. Knowing how to become allows a woman to have a vision of the future, to project herself in the long term to enable her to structure her action in the present and to ensure that she has an impact on society. Finally, the Know-How to do, alludes to the strength of mobilization of the other layers of society according to what we think is the ideal of a renewed society. It is a matter of showing leadership in order to get one's ideas across and to get others to adhere to them.

- **The second approach is the audacity of action** : At this level, the knowledge thus acquired finds its validity by becoming a source of actions that transform the society on a limited or extended scale. At this stage, the woman is no longer a being who passively observes society, but a being who is interested in the great currents that run through her society, who asks questions, and who finds her place by proposing orientations of actions that change the order of things. In this way, volunteering finds its meaning.

The session ended with a question and answer session and a debate. The participants showed their sustained interest in the session. Some of them felt that the session had added to their knowledge and triggered in them the desire to improve. For Esther, a student at the University of Kivu, this session was an opportunity for her to see where her need for personal development lies, in order to unleash her potential and contribute to the development of her society. She began to see clearly her dream of investing in agribusiness and cultivate the determination to go there.





Theme : The social commitment of women and women's leadership in the context of the DR Congo

Date : April 30, 2022

Speaker : Mrs. Edden MAKANGILA

In this session we worked on the social commitment of women and female leadership in the context of the DRC with the speaker Mrs. Edden MAKANGILA, social activist, humanitarian and coordinator of the structure WASE Africa. Based on her field experience, she was able to develop what she considered fundamental to increase the level of commitment of women and their level of leadership impact. Some strong elements emerged from the session:

- The sense of projection of oneself towards desired realities taken as a factor of determination to act and hope: At this level, according to the speaker, it is a matter of the woman not being a prisoner of her present, but of building a vision of the future, to which she focuses her actions. The vision allows to have a reason to live, to have a motivation to engage in the process of social transformation and to embody causes in society;
- The culture of work well done as a basis for the construction of one's social image: it is a question of betting on excellence in any company, so that the identity that one carries is one of excellence. This requires a lot of hard work, but at the same time, the desire for perfection is always present;
- The feeding of faith in oneself as a guarantee of elevation: working on oneself is not enough, it also requires a conviction in one's own potential, a confidence in one's power of action and a faith in the equality of human beings as regards the possibility of self-fulfillment. Her secret formula remains the famous phrase of Saint Benedict «Ora et labora», in French «Prie et travaille», everything comes from faith and effort she says.

With regard to the multiple obstacles that women face, the speaker proposes the path of resilience, this sense of selfexceeding to go beyond the limits and build a life according to its ambitions and that against all odds. In addition, the culture of self-confidence must be a permanent work for the woman, in order to get rid of inferiority complexes or sinking in a toxic masculinity foggy with superiority complexes constantly seeking to crush the woman.

Carried by the communicative strength of the speaker, the audience had a moment of intense and enriching discussions, each one questioning her own responsibility in the process of self-transformation and that of her community. For Merveille Assani, one of the participants, the session greatly strengthened her self-confidence, knowing that being a woman is in no way an obstacle, but everything depends on how one determines to be an agent of transformation in the experience of her community, starting with herself.





Theme : The social commitment of women and women's leadership in the context of the DR Congo.

Date : Saturday May 07, 2022

Speaker: Mr. MUMBERE SIVIHWA.

During this session it was a question of working with young women coming from various socio-political and cultural backgrounds on the fundamentals of the socio-political commitment of women. Several points were developed by the coordinator of JAMAA Grands Lacs and social educator, among which

- The understanding and mastery of the socio-political, economic and cultural context in which one lives before any commitment: According to the speaker, any successful commitment in favor of freedom and human development results from a deep analysis of the context in which one lives, to know the subjacent articulations of the events and the factors which come into play (coalesce) to perpetuate what is visible within the society To change or develop a society is to understand above all its underlying dynamics;

- **To prepare oneself accordingly:** That is to say to train and inform oneself permanently on the society in which one lives. This requires listening to the news, reading, paying for training in the field in which you want to develop and intervene;

- **To find a cause (problem) to appropriate and to devote oneself fully to it:** At this level the woman is called to find the why of her existence to which she must commit, fight and create a name for herself. The more inspiring this reason is, the more she finds motivation to act and meaning to her existence. Without this why, the person becomes restless and lets his or her potentials fade away;

- **To be a force with others :** Since change is basically an integrated and community-based process, it is a commitment to build one's network at the local, national and/or international level. It is not a matter of going it alone, or in a scattered fashion, but of organizing into a formidable social force capable of imposing reforms in the social, political and economic sphere of the country;

- **To act with precision and with an eye on the long term** : it is a question at this level of getting out of the imprisonment of the short term to look at the future, so that any action we take is an action that strategically and positively impacts the present generation and those that come after;

- **Knowing how to endure in action** : this is a matter of persistence in the actions in which we invest our energy to drive the great dynamics of change in society.

Then followed the session of exchange and debate, each of the participants trying to find her part, trying to discover the dimension where to work on her being, on her restricted environment, on her society. For Sifa Namwetsi, spokesperson of the students of the University of Kivu, the working session was a chance to discover again the necessity to build a network of safe relationships with which to change society. Referring to the struggle she led within her university to change the conditions of the students, the aspect of trusting relationships was the missing piece; which ultimately resulted in a huge failure. Decidedly, she resolved to work on it.





Theme : The economic commitment of women in DR Congo: what challenges and what prospects.

Date : Saturday, May 14, 2022

Speaker : *Rachelle MOLO, CEO of Dolce Vita, a company working in the field of professional cleaning in the province of North Kivu/DRC.*

During this session, the focus was on the economic commitment of women. After the enriching sharing of the experience on her life of the young woman entrepreneur, tracing her hard beginnings, her daily challenges, her doubts, her anxieties, but especially her hopes and her determination; Rachel Molo, CEO of Sturt Up La Dolce Vita opened the debate with the participants.

This was followed by an inter-enriching discussion on the mechanisms and strategies to initiate the improvement of the socio-economic living conditions of women in the DRC. Three main orientations emerged, namely

- The need to initiate a process to get out of complexes of all kinds: For Rachel Molo, her beginnings as a woman worker in the household have taught her that as long as one believes in her dreams, that one is proud of her work and that one gets up every morning with the idea of giving the best of oneself, success becomes an undeniable asset;

- For her, complaining about women will not solve anything, but the commitment of each one of them to be able to force destiny, to rise above social prejudices and stereotypes of any kind, by defining a project for her life, by accepting small victories every day will do the trick;

- For her, nothing is predefined, it depends on the way each one of us plans to leave a mark in this world. When we know why we live and we spend all our physical and mental energy to follow its direction, life finds a higher meaning, we get up every day with a goal that motivates and inspires, and thus we impact others, she said;

- The construction of its brand image: she called the participants to learn to put on their side the advantages that the New Technologies of Information and Communication offer, which are becoming more and more an enormous opportunity for this generation, although many misuse it, unfortunately. Already one of the young women very followed on the social network LinkedIn, she has not ceased to show the value of using positively the social networks to succeed in the rapid growth of his business.

The working session ended in a strong atmosphere, with each of the participants wanting to give a standing ovation to the speaker of the day and share their experience in light of the one received. For Linah Luanda, one of the participants in the session, it was a question of questioning herself on what is blocking her definitive commitment to the launching of her business that she has always dreamed of setting up in the field of language training. Her determination had just reached another level.





Theme : The effective participation of women in governance in the DRC

Date : Saturday, May 21, 2022

Speaker : Ms. Zaina Basangi, young political activist and socially committed leader.

After sharing her experience, her perspectives for women's political participation, her passion for a new Congo, her commitment as a determined woman, her challenges in a world populated by men and which offers no gift to anyone; she insisted on the fundamentals that women participants should take into consideration in the process of developing their leadership, including:

- The knowledge of oneself, one's passions, strengths, weaknesses, and listening to one's vital aspirations: For the speaker it is when one has understood what one is worth as a woman, and especially as a human being that one does not let one's potentials wither. We cultivate them, we value them;
- Knowing how to break through, insisting and being constant in one's choices and commitments: This perspective refers to a sense of always making the effort and being patient with the results, since sometimes things turn out contrary to one's expectations in the commitment one has made. The fruits are slow to appear. This is not the right reason to admit defeat. Like a warrior, you have to work at it, always working at it until you reach the results;
- Learning to be true and fair to oneself and going against the grain when necessary: The speaker called on the participants to cultivate authenticity within themselves, this coherence between what they think, say and do. For her, this authenticity is also the refusal to appear in the light of what others (society) would like us to be, sometimes even in betrayal to our values and convictions. To be a woman leader for the speaker is to be able to influence her community according to what she believes and to let herself be influenced less and less by the often unfounded public opinions;
- Cultivating strategic intelligence: For the woman, it is a matter of giving all her actions sufficient time for reflection in order to ensure the impact that will follow the action taken;

- Knowing how to be surrounded: Everyone is born a leader, she insisted, but some make the light that is in them shine, others consciously or unconsciously stifle its manifestation. Hence the importance of having people around you who can encourage, strengthen and guide you if you need to go to the next level.

After the presentation, there was a moment of exchange between the speaker and the participants. Many of them confessed their inadequacies in terms of their sense of leadership within society, while promising to continue to develop themselves to raise their level of social commitment. For Clémence, a young student at the University of Kivu, her dream of becoming governor of her native province of South Kivu should no longer be a subject of mockery by her brothers and sisters, but an opportunity to prove to everyone that she can do it through her skills and determination.





Theme : Socio-political and economic participation of Congolese women: challenges and approaches for action.

Date : Saturday May 28, 2022

Speaker : Mrs. Solange GASANGA-NIRWA, Head of Gendre Program of the organization Pole Institute.

The speaker of the day began the session by showing two videos illustrating the socialization of gender in various socio-political and economic environments. After these screenings, a discussion followed on the participants' understanding, their opinions and considerations, and their experiences in relation to socialization as a motor for the creation of self-identity, i.e., the vision of oneself, the vision of the other, the fields one hopes to be possible or impossible for oneself, the visible and invisible limits one imposes on oneself according to what one thinks and/or believes one is.

It quickly emerged from the participants' interventions a reflection orientation highlighting the fact that the gender equality problematic turns out to be an emanation of the educational structures and cultural data, which shape the woman's being since her young age, in an approach of self depreciation, minimization of her potentials, degradation of her self esteem, stifling of the expression of her freedoms etc. Therefore, in her orientation of the debate, the speaker of the day made an association between this socialization and the obstacle to the commitment and the socio-political and economic participation of women in DR Congo; while calling the participants to enter in a new process of overcoming the mental configuration which was imposed to them, while daring to express themselves, while daring to act, while daring to educate the children differently, with an underlying comprehension that there is no under-being when the intelligent engagement and the determination of self-exceeding prevail over the complexes and the excuses.

After a reasoned discussion, the presenter centralized the different points of view in her conclusion by calling on the women present in the session to continuously educate (build) themselves, while overcoming limiting social norms. According to the speaker, this would require young women to cultivate and maintain their ambitions, and to have the audacity to pursue them regardless of the sacrifices that this requires and despite the various obstacles that they face. The men present at the activity were also called to learn to act with women, to appropriate their fight to make of the Congolese society a true space of social justice and equity where the energies of the ones and the others are put in value and channeled in the construction of the country.

For Amina Murhebwa, young woman activist of women's rights and one of the participants, the session served to listen to the experiences of other women in what limits them in action. She hopes to use it in her work as a social educator.





Theme : Women's leadership: Bases and major orientations for the socio-political and economic transformation in DRC

Date : Saturday, 04 June 2022

Speaker : Ms. Juliette BWIRA BULENDA, coordinator of Women and Youth Empowerment Association/WEA Asbl.

In this working session it was a question of working on the strong lines of the female leadership in the political and social field. During this work, some orientations had a particular resonance, namely :

- The capitalization of the time we have in front of us: It is about knowing how to value the time we have in front of us, while knowing that the right time to commit is the one we have, and not the one we could wait. For the speaker, many women are in a wait-and-see attitude, hoping for the right moment, the right day to find what they are committed to in society. Unfortunately, she believes, this is a waste of time.
- The predisposition to always prove oneself: the principle here is to always prove oneself through small things that end up with big responsibilities in society. Knowing that the society has a fixed look for each step of those who aspire to assume great responsibilities.
- Never let yourself be disappointed: For the speaker, there will be times when the leader will receive hard blows, when he will be unfairly judged and/or slandered, sometimes by his close circle, but the main thing is to know how to keep his vision, stick to his principles and his determination to go forward. If he admits defeat, he loses his confidence and his status as a leader.
- The choice of a team and especially a life partner: given that the environment in which we live ends up defining us, sharpening or crushing our dreams, the choice of those around us is all the more fundamental to hope for success in his field.

After the end of her presentation, the audience had an inter-enriching exchange, each one trying to express their feelings, their fears, their convictions, their hopes for the recovery of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For Nicole Holliness, a young mother in her twenties, the session allowed her to regain a dose of self-confidence, and to rebuild her leadership starting in her home.





Theme : Women's impact leadership in the DRC: methods and goals

Date : Saturday, June 11, 2022

Speaker : Ms. SIFA Assani Merveille, one of the facilitators of the Citizens' University program.

During this session it was a question of analyzing the style of leadership that women propose and opening new perspectives of reflection and actions to ensure an impact in their actions on the ground. This goes against the current trend that attributes to women a simple figurative and aesthetic role in organizations to make people believe that they are respecting the current gender trend without which they lose the chances of accessing donor funds. For the speaker, the new leadership that women must embody requires them to have a sharp mind and a culture of creativity of new paths to follow, essential values to promote, utopias to nourish and a sense of action that completely changes the field in which they intervene. Thus, the need to have new spaces for women's education outside the official spaces is a necessity. These spaces will have as attribute to :

- Develop women's capacities so that they are able to create strong personalities that their communities can trust, and that these communities can easily identify with;
 - Raise women's confidence in their own potential so that they are able to engage in and succeed in initiatives;
 - Promote the renewal of social values and life norms that have long worked against women by thinking of them as inferior to men, and by muzzling them;
 - To create a dynamic of cooperation between women to intensify their impact within their communities where they act.

Afterwards, there was an intense moment of exchange between participants with the question of possible strategies to consider in order to succeed in leadership and to impose oneself as a personality that counts in society and in which one can rely on. For Diavy KUBUYA, one of the young participants, this session was an opportunity to become aware of the need to engage with women for the success of their struggle.





Theme : Gender-based violence in the DRC: state of play and perspectives

Date : Saturday, June 18, 2022

Speaker : Ms. Bénite KABEZA, coordinator of the organization Youth for gender.

In her speech, the speaker made a global analysis of the Congolese society showing the level of reduction of the woman in the society to the roles of simple cook, of the one who must imperatively follow the ambitions of the man while burying his own, of the one who has a word to say on family, social, political questions, even on questions concerning her only at the limit of her husband's will. This was followed by an identification with the participants of the types of violence that women face in society. From conjugal violence to structural violence, the one established as a social norm of exclusion of women within social institutions, the elements of proof were given by the participants, while evoking their lived stories of violence. From this deprivation of freedom and minimization of the potential of the woman, the speaker posed a triple orientation to hope for a change of course in the collective conscience, it was for her:

- Of the urgency to work on women to deconstruct these false stereotypes that are embedded in them, creating convictions of incapacity in them. And that unfortunately, by dint of believing in them, they have ended up being what they want to be by setting themselves psychological limits;
- To educate men for a positive masculinity. According to her, this battle against gender-based violence can only be won when the whole society commits itself, men and women alike. Men have the responsibility to stand by women to help them engage with confidence in society;
- To ensure a wide dissemination of the laws related to the promotion of women's rights, as well as the family code to ensure harmony in the consideration of women in society.

After the interactive exchanges with the participants, the questions and answers game followed and the debate whose main point was the capacity for the Congolese woman to overcome the stereotypes erected as obstacles to her blossoming in order to finally prove that she can succeed where men have failed. Especially in the management of the country's institutions. For Marie Bulanga, this session was an opportunity to further strengthen the fight she leads for the promotion of women as faculty president of the Faculty of Medicine at the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs in Goma.





Theme : Civic Engagement and participation of women in the development process of the DRC

Date : Saturday, June 25, 2022

Speaker : Mrs. Grace MALAIKA MA-ROY, women's rights activist, coordinator of the organization MWANAMKE KESHO Bukavu.

This session focused on a critical analysis of the obstacles that hinder the effective engagement and participation of women in the DRC. For the activist, after the great fights of other feminists, Simone de Beauvoir, Abena Busia, Leymah Gbowee, Amina Mama, Aisha Ibrahim Fofana, etc., the time has come for the emergence of women who will bring back the fight for freedom and effective participation of women. She is indignant in her speech about the fact that until today the man has the full freedom to use his rights to make the choice of the partner with whom to be, to decide on his state and his sexual status; which is not the case for the woman in the major part of the situations. There are violations at all levels of women's bodily autonomy (non-respect of sexual and reproductive rights and sexual violence), women's political autonomy (closure of the space for organization and mobilization, conflicts and insecurity) and economic autonomy (corruption that deprives women of the economic and social security they so desperately need. She notes with desolation that this social injustice has had roots in the soil of the Congolese society and with the conscious and/or unconscious approval of the society unfortunately. Faced with this, she believes there is a need to know:

- To educate the young woman on her rights as a human being upstream and as a woman downstream. So that she is in turn able to transmit this heritage of the knowledge of her freedoms to her children, that is to say to the future generation;
- The culture of refusal for women of all the injustices of which they are victims. For the speaker, it is the silence and the trivialization of the evil which kills. Women must rebel positively by using their strength of expression to express their ideas, their feelings, their indignation with regard to the treatments they receive in society. It is only in this way that communities will become aware that women are beings on the same level as all others and that they deserve to be heard and to enjoy the rights attributable to all human beings.

- To work to empower women, giving them material and immaterial means to support this process of their empowerment so that they finally have the economic power that they lack so much and that makes them feel unjustly called to submit to unjust orders against their will.

The meeting ended with the sharing of interesting experiences of the young women present in the room. For Jonathan, an activist of the online media «Débout RDC» participating in the session, these kinds of meetings should be extended over the country to ensure that they reach a larger number of women in order to create a critical mass of women committed to the promotion of their rights, while rallying men.





Theme : Effective interpersonal communication for women's leadership impact in the DRC: Prerequisites and tactics

Date : Saturday, July 02, 2022

Speaker : Mr. Hilaire MAHESHE, initiator and director of the communication agency «LION Communication Agency

During this session, the participants were reminded of the need to develop this fundamental capacity for any leader. The speaker began his speech by asking the participants to introduce themselves in full, as well as to give the meaning of their names. The purpose of this exercise was to allow each participant to evaluate their own communication. This was followed by a rich presentation on communication and persuasion techniques. Some prerequisites were set, notably :

- On the physical aspect: this dimension refers to the physical presentation (dress, presence), the gestures, the facial expression, the energy with which one communicates, the acoustics of the voice, as well as its rhythmic;
- On the psychological aspect: it is a reflection of self-confidence, an expression of self-confidence when it is a question of putting across one's ideas. It is by being convinced of what you say that others become convinced too. The real communicators for the speaker are those who give off a great deal of energy and confidence.
- On the mental aspect: this refers to the mastery of the content of his communication.

The facilitator never ceased to emphasize the control of one's inner speech, the way one communicates with oneself first, what one constantly says to oneself about oneself. When this speech is positive and constructive, it becomes a source of consolidation of the positive image of oneself, of self-confidence and self-esteem. When this discourse becomes negative, it suffocates the interior and affects the person's self-esteem and spoils the external communication. For the facilitator, external communication is basically a result of true internal communication. We can only communicate well with others if we have harmonious communication with ourselves.

Communication thus becomes an effective tool for creating human relationships and opening networks of trust that lead to actions that change the conditions of society. The idea behind it is that no society can welcome its development without a first-rate community solidarity that communication favors, i.e., links that are woven around a common vision and a commitment to social transformation.

After the speaker's presentation, a game of questions and answers followed and an interesting debate in which the participants had to mention their shortcomings while receiving guidance from the speaker. For Linda Bisimwa, the facilitator of the Citizen University program, this was an opportunity to give back to women one of the most important aspects of their development, and she hopes to use it in her commitment to the development of her country, the DR Congo.





Theme : The challenges of good governance in the DRC: responsibility, accountability, transparency and participation of women

Date : Saturday, July 09, 2022

Speaker: Professor Véronique KAHINDO

Under the auspices of the JAMAA Great Lakes Organization, on July 9, 2022, a citizen awareness session was held in Goma, North Kivu, DRC. The conference room of this organization served as a framework for this activity. Good governance was at the heart of the session of the Citizen University facilitated by Professor Veronique Kahindo. About twenty young people, mostly girls, took part in this activity aiming not only at awareness but also and especially at citizen commitment.

For the facilitator of the day, for there to be good governance and by ricochet the development in the country, it will be necessary to work on four pillars. These include accountability, participation, responsibility and transparency.

Enthused by her audience, which was mostly composed of young girls, Ms. Véronique said she was confident that women can change. That is why she encouraged them to get involved in political parties, «You should not be followers. You are capable, you can contribute to the development of this country. Certainly, men have failed but not us,» she said.

In a participatory methodology, the speaker detected a bitter observation of her audience, it is the disappointment that young people feel after the elections. «We vote for the deputies, president of the republic but unfortunately, nothing changes afterwards» said a young participant in despair.

Speaking of awareness, Veronique indicates that in society, there are different categories of youth. Those who are indifferent to what is wrong, those who are indignant but engage in criticism and debate, and finally, those who understand the evil, become aware, indignant and commit themselves to change. She invited the young people present to be part of this last category.

The year 2023 is an election year in the DRC. An invitation was made to the youth not to let themselves be manipulated. The elections are being prepared, hammered the Facilitator of the session. The young people are invited to choose among them the people who have the political vocation, who will be able to represent them. These will have to be taken to the School of Leadership as it is the case in the Citizen's University to be cut and where they will know what they will do with the power. Thus, they will have the responsibility to be accountable while working in transparency.

Questioned after the activity, the participant Clémence Umande, coordinator of the students of the Free University of the Great Lakes Countries believes that the news has fallen on the right ground which is the youth, the one that constitutes the largest layer of the Congolese population. This participant committed herself to remain vigilant in order to avoid being a victim of manipulation and promised to be actively involved in the next elections.





Theme : DRC, which mechanisms of socio-political integration for the youth? A view on the young woman

Date : Saturday, July 16, 2022

Speaker : Gracias KIBANJA

During this 14th session of the citizen's university in DRC of JAMAA Great Lakes it was a question of exchanging with the youth on the question of the mechanisms of socio-political integration of the youth in DRC under the facilitation of Mrs. Gracias Kibanja, president of WAHDi Asbl and woman leader of the province of North Kivu.

Many obstacles that hinder the integration of youth in the DRC were noted by the participants, including the non-dissemination of texts related to national youth policies, inter-generational conflict, the expression of tribal tendencies in the country's institutions, the crisis of development of the potential of youth, etc. As far as women are concerned, the strategy of insertion of women in the collective conscience is less and less based on their skills and their degree of contribution to the development of practical ways of elevating the nation, but more on their capacity to offer their body easily. In addition, cultural constraints make marriage a possibility of immobilization of the woman and sometimes of total annihilation of her other life perspectives.

Based on these obstacles, the facilitator invited the participants to reflect on what needs to be done so that Congolese youth become the leitmotiv of the emergence of another possible Congo.

Four orientations emerged from this common reflection, namely

- The determination to build a dream, to nourish it daily and to pursue it against all odds. It is not a question of waiting for everything outside oneself, but of knowing how to enter into a system of development of one's potential as a young person in order to bring one's share of contribution to the construction of a new Congolese society;

- The spirit of permanent research of practical knowledge that opens to more innovative and wider perspectives of action. Given that in today's world knowledge remains a factor of power par excellence allowing to open the most unexpected doors at the beginning;
- The need to ensure a transition from a dominant and toxic masculinity to a positive and collaborative masculinity. A masculinity that finds its validation not in the trampling of the woman, but in her accompaniment to climb the socio-political, economic, cultural, scientific, etc. ladders according to her passion;
- The positive use of the internet to search and seize opportunities available in the world and capitalize on them to build a society where young people are the heart of the action of social transformation in DRC.

For the young participant Nicole Holiness, this initiative should be extended to other young people in the country to achieve the creation of a critical mass of young people aware of their essential role to change the order of things in the country, without being mere spectators.





Theme : DRC, the engagement of young women in the process of socio-political transformation in a context of conflict: state of play and major orientations

Date : Saturday, July 23, 2022

Speaker : Sarah TAMBWE, coordinator of the organization CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

During this exchange it was a question of situating the responsibilities of the woman in the social and political dynamics in progress in the country. For the speaker it becomes urgent for the Congolese woman to make her leadership shine, to prove that she is capable of proposing to the DRC a plan of exit in front of various crises that it crosses. For that, certain strong elements must be the characteristics of the Congolese woman today, in particular:

- The fact of having a vision in life and of being ready to endorse the sacrifices that go with it. The speaker considers that it is only in this direction that the myth of woman being incapable will give way to an image of woman capable and able to assume social, political and economic responsibilities in the country;
- In addition, the culture of work (hard work): this goes against the sense of ease that has become a vice for many women who expect to receive everything from men. Work gives value and meaning to the life of those who do it and those who benefit from it. When women understand this and prove what they are capable of in their daily work, the doors to great responsibilities open. Otherwise they remain under the heel of someone else..
- The conviction that nothing is impossible: From the moment one knows why one lives, from the moment one cultivates in all humility a strong conviction in one's person, one realizes that unexpected horizons open up by themselves. This is the necessary inner predisposition that women must have. Other people's opinions only have an impact on you if you accept them as such, but once you have managed to build strong convictions about yourself and stick to them against all odds, your whole life changes. You become someone who inspires, who puts his or her footprints on every step and thus you become a real force for change.

- The culture of human values forces: Among these values that we must internalize, we find the sense of honor, which is this disposition to always take care of its personality in every act that we make, in every word that we say, in every thought that we maintain. It is when this value withers that the life of men and women enters the sphere of insignificance and disorder. One is a woman leader of the renewal when one knows how to be a woman of honor, who does not let herself go by the way of foolishness.

The session ended with a rather heated exchange between the participants and the speaker. For Jovani, a young woman involved in civil society and one of the participants, believes that this session helped her to raise her level of faith in herself, her determination to engage even more in society to transform it positively. While serving as a model for other women.





Theme : Women and effective participation in elections in DRC: challenges and assets

Date : Saturday, July 30, 2022

Speaker : *Dr. Fatouma Hassan Sheilla, provincial minister on leave of the province of North Kivu.*

During this session, the Minister discussed the analysis of the level of women's involvement in politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo. With sources of recent research on the political participation of women in the DRC, she believes that despite some progress, much work remains to be done. The Congolese population is essentially composed of 52% women, most of whom are still young. But paradoxically, the Congolese National Assembly has only about 12% of women elected and the provincial assemblies between 10 and 12%. The DRC is still far from being a country where the representation of women in political institutions is effective. For the speaker, several factors come into play to justify this. These are internal factors specific to women and external factors that society maintains. Among which :

- Many women say that the political issue is an area reserved for men, since it is a complicated field that requires strong nerves, which slows down their commitment;
- Many women are under-informed about the country's issues because they do not follow the news, which means that they do not have the opportunity to get involved because they do not know what is at stake;
- They do not want to enter political parties and impose their leadership in order to have the possibility of being selected as a candidate for deputy, senator, etc. at the appropriate time;
- They do not want to support each other when it comes to elections, which makes men in their male solidarity find advantage over women;
- The refusal of husbands to see their wives in politics, for fear that they will become friends of their political peers, with conditioned access to positions and night meetings that punctuate the life of politicians;

- Social prejudices regarding women's management capacities. This makes many people, including women, hope that those who are supposed to manage the country better are men, because they are rational and less and less emotional as women are supposed to be.

Faced with this state of affairs, the speaker believes that there is a need to consider possible solutions to this problem in order to hope for an egalitarian Congolese society. Among these tracks, we have:

- The setting up of independent spaces of political education of the woman to build in them a political culture, to deconstruct in her the prejudices of which she is victim and to sharpen her sense of leadership. It is in this that the space of the citizen's university here finds all its merit, she hammered;

- The culture of the habit to inform and to form on the political dynamics in progress in the country in order to be in the vanguard in the political fight. The one who has the information, has the power, he reminded the speaker.

- The adhesion in political parties, not to remain simple spectators, but those who participate in the definition of the strategies of conquest of the power, and those who must be priority in its management;

- The creation of a solidarity between women, so that they help each other to propel themselves mutually in order to have a good representation of the woman in the political sphere of the country.

After the presentation of the speaker, a debate followed with the participants around the possibility for women having already felt the meanders of the political power to be used as mentor to other women, so that these last ones also have the determination to launch out. For Anitha BWIRUKA, this session made her understand that being a woman is not an obstacle when one wants to. The presence and the sharing of experience of Mrs. Minister proved to me that I can also enter politics and make a name for myself by giving service to my society.



**Some testimonies from the participants of the
Citizens' University program.**

Testimony of Merveille Assani



I am Merveille Assani, one of the participants of the Citizen's University program of Jamaa Great Lakes.

This Citizens' University program in the DRC has helped me become aware of who I really am and what society expects of me as a woman. I became aware of the fears that I had and that prevented me from moving forward and blocked my commitment to the implementation of my life project.

With this program I understood that as a woman we have a duty to train ourselves, but not only; we must also know how to take action to contribute to the advancement of our society. Nothing and no one should limit us as long as we know what we want, what we are worth, and what we can do well. And the Citizen's University program has opened me up to that.

I don't know how to describe this beautiful and fruitful initiative, but I believe that my actions will reflect this.

Testimony of Jovanny Nguma



I am JOVA MASUMBUKO Jovanny Nguma, a young girl who has visions and goals, with many ideas for the realization of these goals, but which unfortunately did not have the necessary strategies to be put into practice until I met JAMAA Grands Lacs in his program of the citizen university. This program has become a major asset to my personal development in almost every aspect of my life.

My first session was directly the beginning of the change in my personality when I was edified by the teachings of Mr. Sivihwa, the coordinator on the six powers that we must cultivate to be women of importance in which society. The six powers are as follows :

- *Communicative Power*
- *Dream power*
- *Action power*
- *Relational power*
- *Intelligence power and*
- *Power of the heart.*

After the edifying explanations of all these powers, he underlined a very important element that I now always keep with me: learning to think to act, and act to change, which had pushed me to think all evening and to take action the next day; the results are already visible.

In the financial education we learned a lot about how to be financially independent as a young woman and how to manage what we earn. The tips learned in the financial education with Mrs. Chantal FAIDA I quote:

- *Know how to set goals today to better achieve them tomorrow;*
- *AHave personal budget forecasts that you must learn to respect;*
- *Don't spend more than you earn and always think about savings;*
- *Know the difference between need and desire.*

All these tips help me today to realize my small projects and to satisfy my needs. This allows me to be progressively independent on certain things, and I am sure that with this pace and with time I will end up being autonomous and not totally dependent on others.

In the end, we learned a lot in this program, about entrepreneurship, about how to manage conflicts, about how to participate in the change in our country and be an actor of peace. This program also allowed us to meet and exchange with great personalities active in the political, social and economic world of our country.

Each time we come out so enriched and ready to make big decisions about our own lives and our communities. I cannot detail everything since the richness of this program is immense, and I still hope to receive more as the program continues, to be reassured now to have the necessary to contribute to the sustainable development of my Congolese society. Thank you very much to JAMAA Grands Lacs for this beautiful initiative.

Testimony of Linah Luanda



The Citizen's University has helped me enormously. Before I met her, yes, I had talents, I had abilities, but I had a hard time expressing them and putting them to good use in my community. I had a hard time believing that I was capable of doing something important in my society. When I arrived at the Citizen's University, I quickly understood that I had power within myself, that I could have a life project and carry it out effectively.

Thanks to the experiences of other women and young ladies, I understood that nothing is impossible when you believe in it. One must learn to try, to have faith in oneself and in one's ability to reach the end. Through their shared experiences, they speak to us in all authenticity about their failures, their challenges, their difficulties, and above all, the way in which they have overcome them. These are often encounters of truth without camouflage, where one discovers oneself in the face of the other, in one's truest life experiences. And you quickly realize that just as others have succeeded, so can you.

Previously, I had fewer ideas to undertake anything, in addition to the doubt and fear that crunched me from the inside, I was under the influence of the prejudices (woman being incapable, condemned to silence, always subject to the whims of fate in its absurdity, etc.) that surround women in our society. But I learned to overcome myself gradually.

Thanks to this space, I have been able to create projects and put my heart into them. I feel very proud to have launched myself despite the multiple obstacles. My recently developed company is called Nguvu ya Vijana (The strength of youth) and it works in the field of language learning. Apart from the creation of this company, we are currently developing other projects in the agricultural field. And all of this is thanks to what the Citizen's University in DRC has invested in us.

This space has been so beneficial to me. We learn new things every week. The speakers do not only talk to us about theoretical aspects as in the classic academic system, but they are in a practical dynamic. We thank JAMAA Grands Lacs for this very beneficial initiative.

Testimony of Amina MURHEBWA



My name is AMINA MURHEBWA, a young playwright and language trainer living in the city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is at the beginning of the year 2022 that I integrated the structure JAMAA Great Lakes.

I received in a WhatsApp group a link that concerned the training of 50 women from the city of Goma in the framework of the citizen university, I was able to apply via Google forms and subsequently I was contacted by mail to participate in the said training. The citizen's university program was very useful to me as I continued to get to know different inspiring women from my city, I learned from their experiences and how they face the daily challenges of our society.

Thanks to the Citizen's University I learned a lot about the different ways to facilitate exchange sessions around the themes related to the social and political participation of young women. I also had an opportunity to share my thoughts on the challenges and major orientations of cultural and artistic entrepreneurship of women in the DRC.

All this allows me to broaden my knowledge on certain sensitive issues, to expand my network and to apply for other opportunities outside the city as recently I was admitted in a training on the electoral process in Kinshasa as a young woman animator and facilitator within the citizen university.

For me, the citizen university of JAMAA Grands Lacs is a crossroads of knowledge, a school with many facets and a family.

Testimony of Marie GITWENGE BULANGA



My name is Marie GITWENGE BULANGA, I am a student at the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs/Goma and one of the participants in the weekly sessions of the Citizens' University in DRC of JAMAA Grands Lacs.

I met the Citizens' University when it was already in its seventh session. I got the poster of the seminar on a Whatsapp status whose theme seemed very interesting «Socio-political and economic participation of Congolese women: challenges and strategic approaches». My curiosity was intense. I finally decided to take part. I was amazed by the methodological approach of the training and the content received. I made it a habit because I quickly found a richness that I could feed myself with. I started to invite my friends. This is why every Saturday I am at JAMAA Grands Lacs from 2:00 pm for the program of the Citizen University; not only to listen to the speakers of the day, but also to exchange with other young people on our mutual commitments and responsibilities as young people for the inclusive development of our country.

JAMAA Grands Lacs is a very good framework for reflection that allows young people from different cultural backgrounds to meet, express themselves and exchange their experiences in a democratic spirit. For me, each session is always an opportunity to learn something new.

Several important themes are addressed, such as leadership, democratic governance, citizen participation, gender and women's empowerment, youth entrepreneurship, savings, etc. This allows young people and especially women to become aware of the need to engage and participate effectively in the process of change and socio-political and economic development of their country, the DRC.

Testimony of Mireille IKUZWE



We learn everywhere» is what is commonly said and I think that everyone understands it in his own way.

For my part, JAMAA Grands Lacs has allowed me to learn from others and from myself. At each session I learned different subjects related to women from different speakers until I was given an opportunity to present. This was a great opportunity because it allowed me to go inside myself to know who I am, before presenting it to others.

Each contact with the audience of the Citizen's University is an opportunity par excellence to nourish more reflections and to build a network of interesting relations, a network of women leaders.

It is always a great joy to see the majority of speakers who are women, which is an opportunity for us women to know that as others have succeeded, we too can succeed. But behind this, there is a network that is built and consolidated progressively between women. We hope that it will lead to decisive common actions to change the order of things in our country, the DRC, and in the Great Lakes sub-region. JAMAA Grands Lacs is a door to change. I remain positive about the outcome of the work that is being done. My joy is great to be part of the vanguard team of this great community that is being born.

Conclusion

Faced with the socio-political integration of women in the world, the recent studies of the UN Women show that women will have to wait another 140 years to hope to find their true place in the management of the institutions of nations. Equal access to opportunities is still a major challenge for our humanity, far from being met. Everywhere in the world, women are still marginalized and struggling to find their true place in society. Several obstacles make up for the perpetuation of this imbalance. Among them, the lack of a liberating education allowing women everywhere to blossom their potential and to play a useful role in society; an education that rebuilds their confidence and self-esteem.

It is to address this that JAMAA Grands Lacs, through its Citizen's University program in the DRC, works with young women in order to increase their level of resilience and their sense of commitment to society. This is a bold undertaking when the program focuses on the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, an area that has been characterized for more than two decades by armed conflicts that have significantly affected the conditions of women in every sense.

The partial results of this Citizen's University program are already inspiring as we see young women who came to JAMAA Grands Lacs devastated, lacking self-confidence, deprived of the courage to dream, but who overnight recover their inner strength, their faith in life and in their own abilities. Some of them have already managed to launch commendable initiatives to positively impact their societies. This is the case of Linah LUANDA, a young lady who started the program by groping, but who today sees clearly. She has regained her self-confidence and is now the initiator and CEO of the company «Ngunvu ya Vijana» which provides home-based language training.

With this program, women are no longer mere spectators, but major players in society, each seeking to give the best of herself in the field of her passion. All the sessions are designed so that each of the participants can find their own way. With these young girls we have learned to strive for excellence, to aim higher, to raise the bar of our dreams, and to act in a spirit of solidarity and intelligence, knowing that we do not need 140 years to make our voices heard. We hope that this is the approach that our country needs today to ensure its long-term inclusive development.

But this work is by no means easy. It is not done without difficulty. The organization makes a lot of sacrifices with its team of volunteer facilitators who follow the sessions closely and in great detail. And without any support. The material possibilities remain a necessity to implement this program in different territories and different provinces of the country, as well as in the Great Lakes region.

Linda BISIMWA,
Animator of the Citizens' University program and program director.



JAMAA GRANDS LACS

Un engagement pour le bien vivre-ensemble

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