

WORK PLACE ROLE MODELS: THE IMPACT OF ROLE MODELS IN ADVANCING THE PROFESSIONAL AMBITIONS OF WOMEN IN THE DRC.

HANNAH CUNNEEN, HOLLY KRUEGER AND BRIDIE LAPLACE

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A role model is a person whose behaviour, example or success is or can be emulated by others, especially by younger people

The representation of women working in the private sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), regardless of role and sector, is important because it ensures that diverse perspectives are brought to the table, considered and integrated into business decisions which directly and indirectly impact the lives of millions of poor women and men in the DRC. It also influences social norms and shapes what younger generations (particularly adolescent girls) imagine to be possible.

To better understand the potential impact of role models on the career ambition of younger women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Elan and Essor, FCDO's private sector development programmes conducted participatory research examining the three questions below with young women and their role models in the agriculture, finance and renewable energy sectors across Kivu region and in Kinshasa.



Who are professional role models?

- Both women and men are professional role models for younger women in the agriculture, energy and finance sectors but there is a stronger narrative and recognition for women role models in the agriculture and finance sectors
- Most younger women see themselves as role models to other young women
- The profiles of professional role models vary depending on sector
- Though role models are selected for different reasons depending on sector, role models were seen as frequently demonstrating courage and proactively provided feedback as well as positive reinforcement.
- Soft-skills such as ways of working with others, collaboration, and listening were also identified as characteristics of role models
- Role models are admired for their success and ways of working both inside and outside of the workplace



What is the impact of professional role models?

- Role models have positive impact on the voice and career advancement of younger women by boosting their confidence, encouraging them to reinforce or upgrade their skills or seize new a new position or opportunity.
- They also have positive impact on professional performance and ambition
- Young, professional women often found themselves replicating the behaviour of their role models



How can the positive impact of professional role models be amplified?

- Recognize, reward and support workplace role models. Most role models were uninformed of their important position.
- Raise the profile and create opportunities for role models to share their experiences. Most respondents said that their workplace did not offer initiatives or programs to support workplace role models
- Create a conducive environment for professional advancement of young women.
- Challenge restrictive and or harmful social norms.

The study findings confirmed the research hypothesis that role models have a positive impact on the representation of women and specifically on the career aspirations of younger Congolese women. The study also suggests that in the current context of the global pandemic and in consideration of the widespread and devastating impact of the pandemic on the Congolese economy, the burden of which disproportionately falls on the shoulder of women, the influence and encouragement of professional role models may be even more important in helping young women navigate this unprecedented time and remain in the workforce. These insights are intended to help the DRC private sector and private sector development programmes better understand the diverse range and sources of role models, and their contribution to changes in perception of young Congolese women and their business potential and career ambition. Actionable recommendations for both audiences are included at the end of the study.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUSINESS AND PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The table below summarises recommendations for businesses and institutions and development programs. The recommendations draw upon the study findings and the researchers' experience in advancing gender equality in the DRC.

Recommendations	Businesses/institutions	Development programmes
<p>Recognize, reward and support workplace role models.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider introducing initiative to formally acknowledge and support workplace role models • Conduct staff survey to determine how best to design the initiative and support existing role models • If already have an initiative, conduct survey to assess strengths and weakness of current initiative • Develop indicators and collect data to track impact of investments in supporting role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage partners to introduce formal role model/mentorship programs • Communicate business advantages of recognizing and supporting workplace role models • Make resources available to businesses via local business associations on the basics of how to identify a role model, and then support them to further promote others through mentorship programmes • Make resources available to businesses via local business associations on how to develop and track SMART indicators
<p>Raise the profile and create opportunities for role models to share their experiences and skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally raise the profile of self-identified and nominated workplace role models • Incentivize role models to share experiences with younger employees • Plan time in meetings, events, etc. for role models to share experience including experience with balancing home and work life and overcoming restrictive social norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the different activities and platforms supported or created through the program and consider which are most useful to raise the profile of sector role models • Look for everyday opportunities to raise the profile of role models and have them share their experiences • Ensure the representation of a diversity of role models at programme sponsored events, activities, meetings, etc.

Create a conducive environment for professional advancement of young women.

- Conduct a gender audit and address identified areas of improvement through a measurable action plan
- Listen to employees, women and men, and be responsive (where possible) to their concerns
- Engage men and women employees in advancing gender equality including creating formal GESI champions

- Provide technical assistance to businesses/institutions seeking to conduct gender audit and improve weaknesses through a measurable action plan
- Support national and local campaigns on engaging men (and women) in advancing gender quality
- Conduct and make available research on how DRC businesses/institutions can improve the work environment for the professional advancement of young women

Challenge restrictive or harmful social norms.

- Investigate how restrictive or harmful social norms are impacting the lives of women and men employees
- Prioritise the norms which are feasible within the scope of the business, have high potential for impact but low risk of sanctions (particularly for women)
- Ask development programmes for support in tackling the restrictive social norms

- Provide technical assistance to businesses/institutions seeking to tackle restrictive social norms
- Conduct and make available research on restrictive and harmful social norms in the DRC and how they negatively impact the performance of businesses and institutions

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