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USAID/DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC) INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY FOR MISSION SUPPORT (IDAMS)

MARCH 2024

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ACRONYMS

CARPE	Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment
CDCS	Country Development and Cooperation Strategy
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission
CBO	Community-based organization
CSO	Civil society organization
C-TIP	Countering Trafficking in Persons
DGPA	Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRG	Democracy, human rights, and governance
DUNS	Data Universal Numbering System
FBO	Faith-based organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
ID	Inclusive development
IDA	Inclusive development analysis
IDAMS	Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IGA	Income generating activity
INS	Institut National de la Statistique
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key informant interview
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, other sexual orientation or gender identity
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
NPI	New Partnerships Initiative
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBA	Rights-based approach
RFZ	Resilience Focus Zone
SAM	System for Award Management
TIP	Trafficking in persons
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/DRC	USAID/Mission to DRC
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support (IDAMS) task order (October 2022–September 2027) engages diverse perspectives to help expand awareness of power dynamics; foster inclusive mindsets; and embed practices that combat stigma and discrimination, promoting empowerment and improving the lives of those who have been traditionally marginalized in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) partner countries. From April to October 2023, the IDAMS team carried out an inclusive development analysis (IDA) to support the USAID Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (USAID/DRC) in its efforts to engage one of the world’s most diverse populations across their portfolio of integrated development programming.

This report presents key findings and recommendations resulting from the IDA.

IDA DESIGN AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The IDA included two phases. The design phase (April–May 2023) focused on documenting current approaches to inclusive development (ID) across USAID/DRC’s activities and framing an ID learning agenda through a series of qualitative interviews with USAID/DRC Mission staff. The second phase (June–October 2023) entailed mixed-methods data collection and analysis to answer the following research questions IDAMS identified in partnership with USAID/DRC:

1. What are the key issues, barriers, or inequalities affecting women, youth, Indigenous Pygmy People, and marginalized sub-groups of these populations that could influence USAID’s development outcomes?
2. What are the cross-cutting barriers to ID from a partner (or potential partner) organization’s perspective, including USAID implementing partners and Congolese civil society organizations (CSOs)?
3. How might USAID/DRC programming improve inclusion of women and youth—particularly marginalized subgroups of those populations—in the civic, political, and economic sectors?
4. What engagement strategies are the most effective to improve inclusion of Indigenous populations in USAID/DRC’s programming?

The IDA took place in urban and peri-urban areas across six provinces of the DRC, including Kinshasa (various communes), Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi), Tshopo (Kisangani and Bafwasende), Haut-Uélé (Isiro), Mai-Ndombe (Inongo), and Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi).

The IDAMS team conducted 73 key informant interviews (KIs) and 22 focus group discussions (FGDs) with women, youth, Indigenous Pygmy People, and other marginalized subgroups of these populations identified during the design phase. Our sample also included USAID implementing partners, sub-awardees, and Congolese CSOs that support traditionally marginalized groups. To capture community perspectives on issues pertaining to ID, we implemented a community survey (n=1,446) of men, women, youth, and non-youth across the six provinces.

MAIN FINDINGS

This report presents main findings in three parts: (1) perceived barriers to inclusion, (2) organizational experiences with ID, and (3) opportunities and engagement strategies to advance inclusion through USAID programming.

PART I: BARRIERS TO INCLUSION IN CIVIC, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC SPHERES

Patterns of power and decision-making. *Lack of reliable information about democratic processes and the electoral cycle emerges as the most significant barrier to the political participation of women and*

youth. Traditionally underrepresented groups are often unaware of their civil liberties—including the right to political participation, protected under Congolese law—and view decision-making as reserved for the political elite. Other barriers to civic participation include lack of self-esteem, limited financial resources to fund political organization, and gender- and age-based discrimination that impose prescriptive societal roles upon women and youth. These barriers disproportionately affect Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons, and those with other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQI+), exacerbating their exclusion from community decision-making processes and local leadership structures.

Cultural norms and beliefs. *While many urban and peri-urban survey respondents support inclusive social and economic practices in principle, all categories of IDA respondents cite deeply ingrained cultural norms and stereotypes that continue to prevent marginalized groups from integrating in civic and economic spaces.* In particular, homophobia and ethnic discrimination against Indigenous communities are widespread across geographies and most demographic groups. Marginalization commonly begins from a young age, within the family structure, when parents and guardians prioritize the education of boys, non-disabled, and heteronormative children, which negatively affects the socioeconomic prospects of the DRC's most vulnerable youth.

Access to and control over resources. *Factors such as identity-based discrimination, geographic inaccessibility, and language barriers contribute to inequitable health, education, and legal service provision, and can prevent marginalized groups from practicing income-generating activities.* The intersection of ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, urbanity, and other identity factors can amplify experiences of marginalization. For example, the IDA highlights the socio-economic vulnerability of Indigenous women relative to Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women, as well as insufficient social and legal services for survivors of gender-based violence outside of the more developed metropolitan areas. In terms of land ownership, traditional practices override legal protection of land rights in some geographic contexts, with customary law prevailing over national-level legal instruments designed to protect the land rights of women and Indigenous Pygmy People. Women outside of Kinshasa have limited control over household financial resources due to traditional gender norms, which perpetuate economic disempowerment.

Personal safety and security. *Among the marginalized groups considered for the IDA, women and girls, people who identify as LGBTQI+, and Indigenous Pygmy People are the most susceptible to identity-based violence.* Experiences of rejection, discrimination, humiliation, or trauma can have devastating effects on the psycho-social development of marginalized youth and long-term consequences on civic and economic outcomes. Many survivors of violence (from any background, including traditionally marginalized groups) are unaware of legal mechanisms that can help secure their safety and security through protection or prosecution, while others are hesitant to report cases for fear of perpetrator retaliation or discrimination in the justice system.

Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices. *From a policy perspective, numerous Congolese institutions and legal instruments exist to promote inclusive governance, equitable access to public services, and legal protection of marginalized groups.* However, the public is largely unaware of legal texts due to education disparity, illiteracy, and restricted access to reliable information channels. Limited local government capacity and local actors' and institutions' poor understanding of legal frameworks inhibit the enforcement of policies designed to protect the marginalized groups' rights.

PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Experiences of Congolese CSOs. *The main challenge Congolese CSOs face in improving the well-being of marginalized groups centers around their internal capacity to obtain funding and manage donor*

resources. Despite USAID's Agency-wide efforts to increase access to funding for local organizations, many Congolese CSOs remain unaware of the platforms that opportunities circulate on. In addition, complex administrative processes and compliance requirements inhibit local partners that lack grant management capacity or experienced staff to navigate USAID's processes. Disparities in formal education and training, and limited exposure to the principles of organizational management amplify capacity constraints among many CSOs that represent marginalized groups, leading to calls for more equitable partnership practices. In addition, some CSOs believe that information about funding opportunities is less accessible to partners who lack English-language proficiency.

Experiences of USAID implementing partners. *Implementing partners have few incentives to foster partnerships with Congolese organizations that have never received USAID funding.* Deterrents include lengthy vetting and sub-awarding processes for new sub-awardees, concerns over internal grant management capacity, and limited human resources to provide intensive capacity support. While implementers view partnerships with local actors as key to engaging traditionally marginalized groups, working with new or non-traditional partner organizations can compromise their ability to implement against a strict timeline.

PART III: OPPORTUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Opportunities to engage women and youth. *Civic participation among women and youth begins with (1) access to credible information about political processes and the electoral cycle, (2) participation in inclusive leadership platforms, and (3) educational opportunities.* Partners have used participatory consultation frameworks ("cadre officiel de concertation") and accessible communication channels (e.g., community radios and sign-language communications for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing) to address information gaps. In addition, partners note that the inclusion of underrepresented groups in formal or informal leadership structures can both increase their influence in the short term and build leadership capacity to prepare them for public service in the long term. IDA participants widely believe that access to education—be it traditional, vocational or lifelong learning—can reduce fundamental inequities that hinder participation in civic and economic spheres. USAID's several ongoing investments in inclusive education demonstrate alignment with perceived needs and can help make sure that high-quality education services address disparities, not entrench them.

Opportunities to engage Indigenous communities. *Use of existing legal frameworks and sensitivity to gender norms can help USAID address barriers that affect Indigenous communities.* Rights-based approaches (RBA) implemented in partnership with Indigenous-led organizations show promise in protecting land rights and traditional livelihoods by responding to reports of land expropriation and ethnic discrimination in the civil justice system. Similarly, respecting the principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) through the mainstreaming of community consultation processes can help build trust among Indigenous Pygmy People with historical experiences of conservation displacement or associated human rights violations. Finally, gender-transformative approaches are necessary to balance the differential needs of Indigenous women and men, mitigating perceptions that development activities favor women's interests at the expense of men.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, the DRC's policy environment has become increasingly conducive to USAID's inclusive development objectives. The principles of gender equality are inscribed in the country's 2006 Constitution and several comprehensive legal instruments were adopted to advance the rights of women, Indigenous Pygmy People, and persons with disability since 2015. Against this backdrop, there is great potential for USAID/DRC to continue supporting national and decentralized institutions to expand awareness, application, and enforcement of inclusive policies. Moreover, USAID/DRC's strong network of Congolese civil society partners—typically seen as the key entry

point for promoting the rights of marginalized groups, often by way of USAID implementers—creates numerous opportunities to advance the Mission’s commitment to inclusive, locally led development. The principles of participatory engagement and co-creation are essential change facilitators, offering viable pathways to address the significant structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate marginalization at all levels of society.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support (IDAMS) task order (October 2022–September 2027) engages diverse perspectives to help expand awareness of power dynamics; foster inclusive mindsets; and embed practices that combat stigma and discrimination, promote empowerment, and improve the lives of those who have been marginalized in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) partner countries. IDAMS aims to:

1. Increase USAID’s capacity to pursue an inclusive development (ID) approach by expanding knowledge of the needs of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups and/or people in vulnerable situations (hereby referred to as “marginalized groups”) and ID topics
2. Reduce the barriers to developing and managing ID projects, such as integration of ID principles and efforts into broad development activities
3. Expand the general knowledge base of programming for marginalized groups

From April to October 2023, the IDAMS team carried out an inclusive development analysis (IDA) to support USAID Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (USAID/DRC) in its efforts to engage one of the world’s most diverse population across their portfolio of integrated development programming. The design phase of the IDA (April–May 2023) focused on documenting current approaches to ID across USAID/DRC’s activities and identifying learning key questions based on a series of qualitative interviews with USAID/DRC Mission staff. The second phase (June–October 2023) entailed mixed-methods data collection and analysis to answer the key research questions.

BACKGROUND

The DRC is a central African country with a population of approximately 98.3 million people. Its population is one of the most diverse in the world, with an estimated 250 ethnic groups speaking more than 700 languages. USAID/DRC’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2020–2025 highlights the disparities in rights, access to services, and agency, particularly among women and youth. The USAID activities developed since the release of the most recent CDCS have focused on the importance of inclusion of women and youth, as well as other marginalized groups. Much of the literature on marginalization in the DRC is out of date, and few resources identify the critical areas of intersectionality between sex/gender, age, and other identities or characteristics that can compound vulnerability.¹

Below are descriptions of the populations of interest and key concepts referenced throughout this report, in addition to contextual information to situate the status of marginalized groups in DRC.

Women and gender-based violence (GBV). GBV refers to any form of violence, abuse, or discrimination inflicted on individuals because of their gender, which often disproportionately affects women and girls. This violence can take many forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence, and forced marriage, among others. In 2018, 35.6 percent of women in the DRC aged 15–49 reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months (UN Women 2023). Women in the DRC face significant challenges beyond vulnerability to GBV, including political and economic inequities. Congolese

¹ Intersectionality can be defined as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, which is observed to create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

women are susceptible to early marriage, with nearly one in three women aged 20–24 reporting being married or in a union before the age of 18. In terms of political representation, women hold only 13 percent of seats in parliament (UN Women 2023). As of 2022, only 62 percent of women in the DRC participated in the labor market and only 6 percent in wage employment compared to 24 percent of men (Donald 2022).

Youth. USAID’s *Youth in Development Policy* defines youth as people aged from 10 to 29 years, based on distinct stages of development: 10–14 (early adolescence), 15–19 (late adolescence), 20–24 (early adulthood), and 25–29 (transition to adulthood). USAID advocates for a constructive approach to youth development, striving to involve young individuals with their families, communities, and governments to enable them to reach their full potential (USAID 2022a). According to the current CDCS, about 60 percent of DRC’s population is under the age of 20. This percentage will only expand, because the DRC is projected to attain a population of 120 million by 2030.

Indigenous Pygmy People. The ethnic communities referred to as Indigenous Pygmy People are considered Indigenous Peoples in the DRC, as well as in international designations. Indigenous Pygmy People communities go by many local names, such as BaMbuti (Mbuti), BaTwa (Twa), BaAka (Baka), and Efe. Although the Indigenous Pygmy People of the Congo Basin have distinct ethnic identities, their cultures and livelihoods are closely linked to other ethnic groups descended from the Bantu or Sudanese peoples who migrated into the region over millennia from the northwest (Bantu language group) or the northeast (Sudanese language group). In Bantu oral traditions, the Indigenous Pygmy People of Central Africa are depicted as the “first inhabitants of the forest,” having inhabited the region for thousands of years (Moïse n.d.). Population estimates of Indigenous Pygmy People in the DRC vary from 250,000 to 2 million (US Department of State 2020). In July 2022, the DRC adopted the *Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples*, formalizing and safeguarding the rights of Indigenous Pygmy People.

People with disabilities. People with disabilities are individuals with physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, can hinder their full and effective participation in society. The main categories include developmental, sensory, physical, and psychosocial disabilities. Disability prevalence statistics are not readily available for DRC, but some sources cite an estimated rate of 11 percent (Scolesea et al. 2020). Disability has many causes in the DRC, including lack of hygiene, poor access to vaccinations and medications, lack of knowledge about common diseases and their treatment, landmines, armed conflict, psychological trauma from armed conflict, and motor vehicle accidents (SIDA 2014).

LGBTQI+ people. This acronym refers to “people with different sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual characteristics. The acronym includes letters for lesbian, a woman who is attracted to other women; gay, a man who is attracted to other men; bisexual, a person who is attracted to people of more than one gender; transgender, a generic term for anyone whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth; and intersex, a generic term for anyone whose sexual characteristics do not all correspond to a single sex. Some variants of the acronym may include “Q” for queer or “+” to respect and honor identities not represented in the acronym.”² Estimates of the number of LGBTQI+ people in the DRC are not available. LGBTQI+ people lack equal standing under Congolese law as their heterosexual, cisgendered peers; the DRC has no anti-discrimination or hate crime legislation that protects LGBTQI+ people from harassment or violence based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. While same-sex relationships are not criminalized, there have been two recent attempts to outlaw them (2010 and 2013).

² This definition is taken from USAID’s e-learning module on Inclusive Development: <https://www.usaid.gov/e-learning/drgcenter/inclusive-development/>.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs). The long-term insecurity in DRC, and particularly in the eastern part of the country, has produced millions of IDPs in recent decades (White 2014). The international organization for Migration (IOM) has tracked more than 6.9 million internally displaced individuals through October 2023 (IOM 2023). Most IDPs resettle in other villages, urban areas, or forests, and displacement is used as a survival mechanism. IDPs often try to remain close to home, but protracted conflict and changing frontlines in North and South Kivu and Ituri have forced people to flee greater distances (Jacobs and Paviotti 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

The IDAMS team used a mixed-methods approach to conduct an IDA across six provinces of the DRC, where USAID programming is planned or currently takes place: Kinshasa (various communes), Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi), Tshopo (Kisangani and Bafwasende), Haut-Uélé (Isiro), Mai-Ndombe (Inongo), and Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi). This section outlines the research questions, analytic framework, data collection methods, and assessment limitations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From April 17 to May 1, 2023, the team conducted an extensive document review and preliminary round of key informant interviews (KIIs) with USAID/DRC Mission staff to define the IDA's scope and objectives. Participants interviewed included representatives of the (1) Program Office; (2) offices of democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG); economic growth; education; and acquisition and assistance; (3) the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance; and (4) the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). The preliminary round of KIIs elicited input on perceived entry points and continued challenges to incorporating the principles of ID across USAID/DRC's portfolio of integrated development programming. KII and document review results informed the development of two key research questions for the IDA (questions 3 and 4).

During the IDA design phase, the IDAMS team consulted USAID's formal guidance on *Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations* to complement input from USAID/DRC and refine the ID learning agenda (USAID 2018).³ This resulted in the addition of two research questions (questions 1 and 2).

Research questions are listed below:

1. What are the key issues, barriers, or inequalities affecting women, youth, Indigenous Pygmy People, and marginalized subgroups of these populations that could influence USAID's development outcomes in the target domains?
2. What are the cross-cutting barriers to ID from a partner (or potential partner) organization's perspective, including USAID implementing partners, Congolese civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs)?
3. How might USAID/DRC programming improve inclusion of women and youth (particularly marginalized subgroups of those populations) in the civic, political, and economic sectors?
4. What engagement strategies are the most effective to improve inclusion of Indigenous populations in USAID/DRC's programming?

³ See: DCHA/DRG/HR. 2018. "Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations – Additional Help for ADS 201."

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

IDA is an analytic tool that examines the socioeconomic landscape in which marginalized individuals and communities exist, generating actionable recommendations to promote collective empowerment and integration into development programming. IDA emphasizes the importance of local knowledge and lived experience of communities that face marginalization, thus serving as a vital step in inclusive program design. IDA can be conducted as a standalone assessment or an integral component of broader analyses such as gender analysis, political economy analysis, or 5Rs (results, resources, roles, relationships, rules) analysis (USAID 2018).

This IDA relies on USAID’s *Six Domains of Inclusive Development* analytic framework, which is used to “identify [and respond to] questions that will reveal areas in which marginalized groups are disadvantaged or disempowered, as well as opportunities for partnering with marginalized populations or entry points for empowerment” (USAID 2018).⁴

Descriptions of the Six Domains are provided in *Table 1*.⁵

Table 1. The Six Domains of Inclusive Development

DOMAINS OF INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT	DOMAIN CHARACTERISTICS
Domain 1: Laws, Policies Regulations, and Institutional Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examines differential impacts of laws and regulations on traditionally marginalized groups.• Identifies biases in legal systems, policies, and practices affecting these groups.
Domain 2: Cultural Norms and Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explores societal norms, beliefs, and stereotypes toward marginalized groups or individuals.• Considers cultural practices and their relevance to development objectives.
Domain 3: Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigates how social identities affect social roles and time allocation.• Considers how roles affect participation in development activities and potential partnerships.
Domain 4: Patterns of Power and Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assesses the ability of marginalized individuals to make decisions and control resources.• Identifies ways in which they may be disempowered, seeking entry points for empowerment.
Domain 5: Access to and Control over Assets and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focuses on ownership and access to productive resources, income, public services, and technology.• Examines disparities in asset control between marginalized and included groups.
Domain 6: Personal Safety and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assesses freedom from discrimination, violence, and threats based on personal identity.• Evaluates government, civil society, and community efforts to prevent and respond to identity-based violence.

⁴ IDAMS currently supports USAID’s Inclusive Development Hub to refine the Six Domains framework. Its use for this study sets the stage for potential recommended changes to the approach for future IDAs.

⁵ USAID’s guidance suggests incorporating “as many of these domains as possible” into the IDA (USAID 2018). This assessment prioritizes five of the six domains based on IDAMS’ preliminary document review and KII with USAID/DRC Mission staff.

The results presented in Main Findings, Part I are framed applying the *Six Domains of Inclusive Development* and used primarily to answer research question I (see above), followed by an overview of organizational experiences and engagement strategies.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The IDAMS team carried out qualitative and quantitative data collection in urban and peri-urban areas across six provinces of the DRC. Below is a description of the assessment’s data collection approaches.

QUALITATIVE

The team conducted 73 KIIs with affected communities and community actors identified in Phase I, including representatives of the LGBTQI+ community, people living with various types of disability, survivors of trafficking in persons (TIP) or GBV, IDPs, and influential community gatekeepers familiar with local social dynamics (“community leaders”). We also interviewed a number of USAID implementing partners and sub-awardees, as well as several Congolese CBOs and CSOs that support traditionally marginalized groups.

The team used a snowball sampling approach to achieve the KII sample, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in qualitative research to engage hard-to reach populations. *Table 2* summarizes the KII sample by respondent group and data collection site location.

Table 2. Achieved qualitative sample by respondent group and province (KII)

KIIS	KINSHASA (VARIOUS COMMUNES)	TSHOPO (KISANGANI, BAFWASENDE)	HAUT- UÉLÉ (ISIRO)	MAI- NDOMBE (INONGO)	KASAI ORIENTAL (MBUJI- MAYI)	HAUT- KATANGA (LUBUMBASHI)	TOTAL
Community leaders	2	2	3	3	2	2	14
CSOs, CBOs, and service providers*	7*	2	4	3	4	6	26
Persons with disability	3	2	-	2	2	2	11
LGBTQI+	4	-	-		2	2	8
IDPs	-	3	-	1	1	-	5
GBV or TIP survivors	3	-	2	-	2	2	9
Total	19	8	8	8	13	14	73

*Includes seven USAID implementing partners/sub-awardees

The team also conducted 22 focus group discussions (FGDs) in the target provinces, stratified by age group and sex.⁶ In all communities other than Kinshasa, the team organized four FGDs in each—one

⁶ Individuals who identify as non-binary were interviewed as part of the LGBTQI+ KII sub-sample to (1) secure personal safety and security, and (2) make sure participants would be able to speak openly about sensitive issues or lived experiences.

with adult women, one with adult men, one with female youth, and one with male youth—to minimize any inhibitions participants may have due to age difference or gendered social norms. FGDs in the provinces of Haut-Uélé, Mai-Ndombe, and Tshopo were composed exclusively of participants who identified as Indigenous. FGDs were semi-structured, small-group discussions of approximately 90 minutes with groups of 5 to 10 participants. The discussions focused on stakeholder experiences of engagement and perceptions of current and future integration of ID practices, both within USAID and across the broader development community. *Table 3* summarizes FGD allocation by respondent group and province. *Annex 1* includes a comprehensive list of qualitative data sources.

Table 3. Achieved qualitative sample by respondent group and province (FGD)

FGDS	KINSHASA (VARIOUS COMMUNES)	TSHOPO* (KISANGANI, BAFWASENDE)	HAUT- UÉLÉ* (ISIRO)	MAI- NDOMBE* (INONGO)	KASAI ORIENTAL (MBUJI- MAYI)	HAUT- KATANGA (LUBUMBASHI)	TOTALS
Non-youth women (age 30+)	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
Non-youth men (age 30+)	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
Young women (age 18–29)	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Young men (age 18–29)	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Total	2	4	4	4	4	4	22

**Indicates FGD with members of Indigenous Pygmy People communities*

QUANTITATIVE

The IDAMS team deployed a short survey to assess perceptions of inclusion across a diverse range of viewpoints, geographies, and civic, political, and economic contexts (achieved sample size: n=1,446). The survey assesses behaviors and attitudes around inclusion, as well as perceived engagement strategies to improve the inclusion of marginalized groups in donor-funded programming. Survey measures are inspired by the Six Domains framework; a hyperlink to the instrument can be found in

Annex 2, along with the qualitative interview guides.

The IDA team employed a proportional quota sampling approach for the survey design, a sampling methodology used in contexts where probability sampling is difficult or unfeasible. This method establishes quotas based on relevant demographic or characteristic variables, allowing us to achieve adequate representation of target subgroups and draw insights about differences and similarities between them. We began by dividing the target sample of 1,440 equally across the six selected provinces (n=240 per province), then allocated the sample in each of these areas to four mutually exclusive subgroups: (1) non-youth women (age 30+), (2) non-youth men (age 30+), (3) female youth (age 18–29), and (4) male youth (age 18–29). The IDA team determined the proportions of individuals within each subgroup based on their representation in the population of interest across the selected provinces. In this case, the team used the DRC *Annuaire Statistique* published by the Congolese government’s Institut National de la Statistique (INS) to determine population proportions representative at the provincial level (INS 2019). Our definition of youth is based on the USAID *Youth in Development Policy*, whereby adults aged 18–29 fall within the adolescent, emerging adulthood, or transition to adulthood phases of development (USAID 2022a).

Table 4 depicts the achieved sample size; Annex 3 provides technical notes pertaining to the survey sample weights.

Table 4. Achieved quantitative sample by respondent group and province

DATA COLLECTION SITE LOCATIONS	KINSHASA (VARIOUS COMMUNES)	TSHOPO (KISANGANI)	HAUT-UELE (ISIRO)	MAI-NDOMBE (INONGO)	KASAI ORIENTAL (MBUJI-MAYI)	HAUT-KATANGA (LUBUMBASHI)	TOTALS
Non-youth women (age 30+)	68	57	66	41	51	60	343
Non-youth men (age 30+)	70	66	64	63	47	61	371
Young women (age 15–29)	88	52	57	43	47	64	351
Young men (age 15–29)	85	65	61	48	54	68	381
Total	311	240	248	195	199	253	1446

IDA LIMITATIONS

The IDA assessment faces some limitations that potentially affect the interpretation of results.

Regional focus. The Eastern DRC has been the predominant area of focus for USAID programs under the current CDCS. This includes the provinces of Haut-Uélé, Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika, and Maniema. USAID/DRC places particular focus on the Resilience Focus Zone (RFZ) of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika due to DRC’s designation as a USAID Resilience Focus Country (see “USAID Development Activities in the DRC, Feb. 2023”). However, several Mission staff noted during our preliminary KIs that USAID’s focus will shift to underserved Western regions due to deterioration of the security situation in the East and as part of its shift to align with USAID’s new resilience strategy. We intentionally concentrated qualitative and quantitative data collection in geographies that would be safe and secure for the research team, and most of the

Eastern provinces were omitted in an abundance of caution and in line with USAID’s do-no-harm principles. This report highlights findings and recommendations with cross-cutting implications for Mission-level ID strategies, but readers should note that community contexts and experiences may vary in areas that are not covered.

Representativeness. With few exceptions, the IDAMS team collected qualitative and quantitative data in urban and peri-urban areas of the provincial capitals of interest. We made this decision to secure the safety and security of data collection teams and increase operational efficiency, because DRC’s poor road infrastructure makes travel between geographies—even within a given province—challenging. To this end, we are careful not to generalize attitudes or opinions urban and peri-urban residents expressed, which may not be relevant to rural communities and caveat our findings as necessary. *Annex 4* includes broad regional overviews as a means to capture geographic diversity, but these provincial snapshots are based on fairly small sub-samples and may not be representative of the broad spectrum of lived experiences.

Scope. As noted in USAID’s formal ID guidance, the scope of an IDA may be as broad or narrow as needed to achieve the assessment’s objectives (USAID 2018). Rather than focusing on a specific programmatic sector, the IDAMS team deliberately cast its net wide in hopes of identifying cross-cutting strategies that can serve various technical and administrative offices at USAID/DRC. Many of the sector- or population-specific findings highlighted in this report could be explored in more depth in future assessments, as has been done in the past.⁷

MAIN FINDINGS

The IDA findings cover three broad areas. In the first section (Part I), we begin by identifying barriers to the inclusion of women, youth, Indigenous Pygmy People, and marginalized subgroups of these populations in civic, political, and economic spaces. Then, we present the experiences and challenges of Congolese CSOs and USAID implementing partners in integrating the principles of inclusive development in their project activities (Part II). Finally, we present an overview of opportunities and engagement strategies USAID/DRC may adopt to address the issues, barriers, and inequalities identified, with an emphasis on strategies to engage women, youth, and Indigenous Pygmy People in civic and economic spaces (Part III).

PART I: BARRIERS TO INCLUSION IN CIVIC, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC SPACES

In this section, we identify the key issues, barriers, and inequalities affecting development outcomes for women, youth, Indigenous Pygmy People, and marginalized subgroups of these populations. This section organizes findings in accordance with the *Six Domains of Inclusive Development* analytic framework and responds to research question I (see *above*).

PATTERNS OF POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Lack of reliable information about the electoral process and the right to political participation emerges as a critical barrier to the civic engagement of traditionally marginalized groups, accompanied by lack of self-esteem, lack of financial resources, and gender- and age-based discrimination. These barriers contribute to the exclusion of

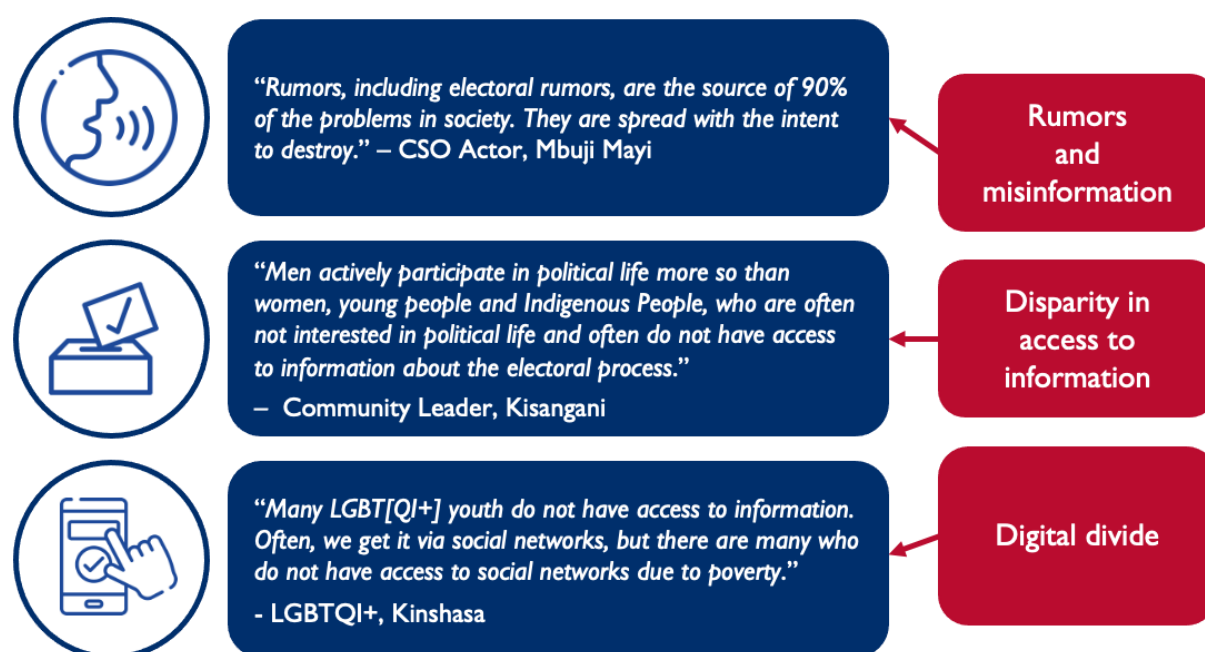
⁷ For instance, USAID/DRC commissioned the *DRC Countering Trafficking in Persons (C-TIP) Assessment* (August 2022) to address specific learning questions on the types, prevalence, drivers, and enabling conditions of human trafficking in DRC, providing recommendations on how to better serve survivors.

traditionally marginalized groups from decision-making processes, especially Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

To identify patterns of power and decision-making, the team asked KII, FGD, and survey respondents about their perceptions of barriers to civic and political participation for marginalized groups. Lack of reliable information emerges as the most discussed barrier. For instance, many respondents report that a lack of access to timely and accurate information about the electoral process prevents young people, women, and Indigenous communities from getting involved in politics. Rural, under-resourced, and Indigenous communities, in particular, reportedly lack access to media channels that disseminate information on the electoral calendar and election results. Some IDA participants have insufficient information about the political establishment more broadly, noting that they have a poor understanding of decentralized government structures and how decisions are made. In many cases, women and youth lack awareness of their right to political participation (*“gestion de la chose publique”*) writ large, accompanied by perceptions that decision-making is reserved for the political elite. IDA participants across groups and geographies mentioned lack of reliable information about civic and political processes as a barrier, especially in Inongo, Lubumbashi, and Kisangani, and to a lesser extent in Kinshasa (see Annex 4, **Figure 14**).

Socioeconomic disparities across demographic groups and subgroups, rumors and misinformation, and limited access to information technology amplify information gaps, although IDA participants recognize that social networks can be a source of both reliable information and misinformation about the electoral process (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Respondents' reporting of factors that contribute to civic information and awareness gaps



Capturing several of the most discussed issues young women face, a Kinshasa-based civil society leader stresses the importance of community-led civic education in addressing information gaps:

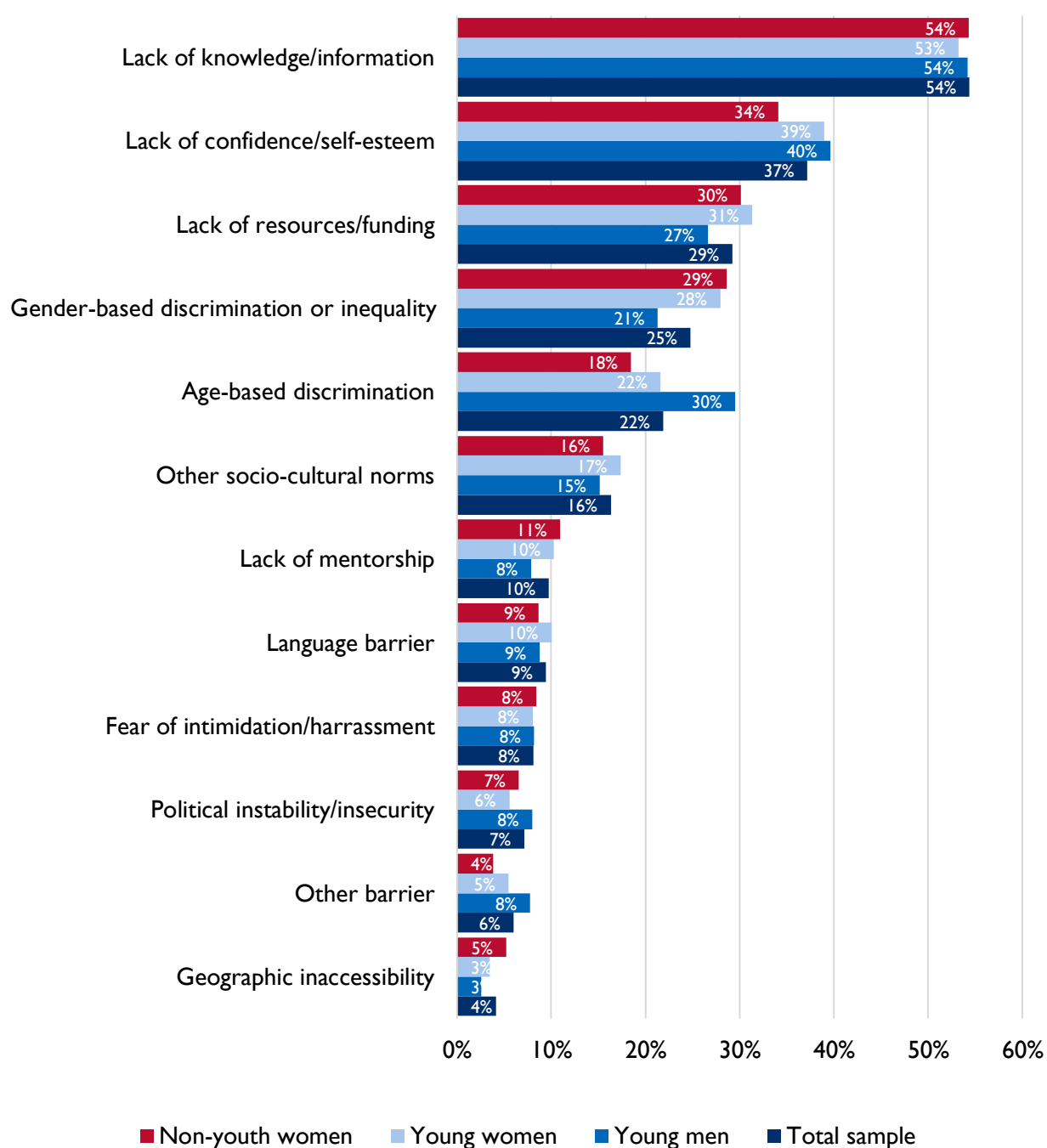
“[Young women] do not know their rights. They have the political right to participate in the management of public affairs, but if they have not been made aware of their political rights, the electoral process, the electoral calendar, that causes ignorance. [...] We must inform, speak up, so that there is this permanent contact between the base and the decision-makers; this social contract between communities and leaders must be established. We

must encourage partners to work with associations that are in contact with local communities to reduce marginalization and narrow the gap.” (CSO Actor, Kinshasa)

Beyond information gaps, survey respondents report lack of confidence or self-esteem (37 percent) and lack of financial resources (29 percent) as the top barriers to the participation of marginalized groups in civic activities such as voting, political organization, and running for political office. Perceived barriers also vary by age and sex. Higher proportions of all women (both young women and non-youth women) report gender-based discrimination as a notable barrier than young men. On the contrary, young men are more inclined to report age-based discrimination than other age/sex groups (Figure 2).

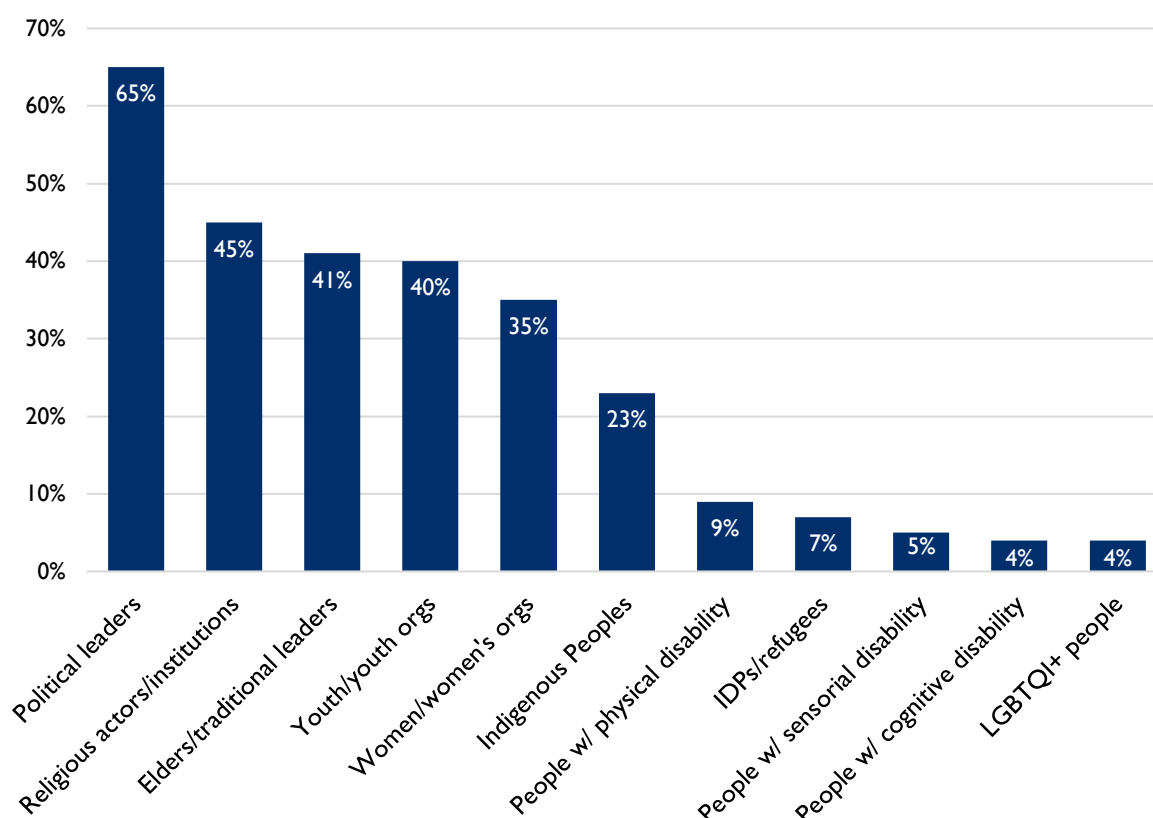
These barriers contribute to a significant disparity in the perceived involvement of marginalized community groups in decision-making processes and platforms. People living with physical, cognitive, and sensorial disabilities figure among the least engaged community groups, while displaced persons and members of the LGBTQI+ community also face extreme levels of exclusion. The public widely perceives decision-making as reserved for the political elite, followed by religious actors and traditional authorities—a finding arising in both the survey data and qualitative interviews (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Respondents' perceived barriers to civic engagement for marginalized groups, by age group and sex



Plots percentage of cases indicating each item (multiple response) (n=1,446)

Figure 3. Perceived participation of community actors in decision-making processes



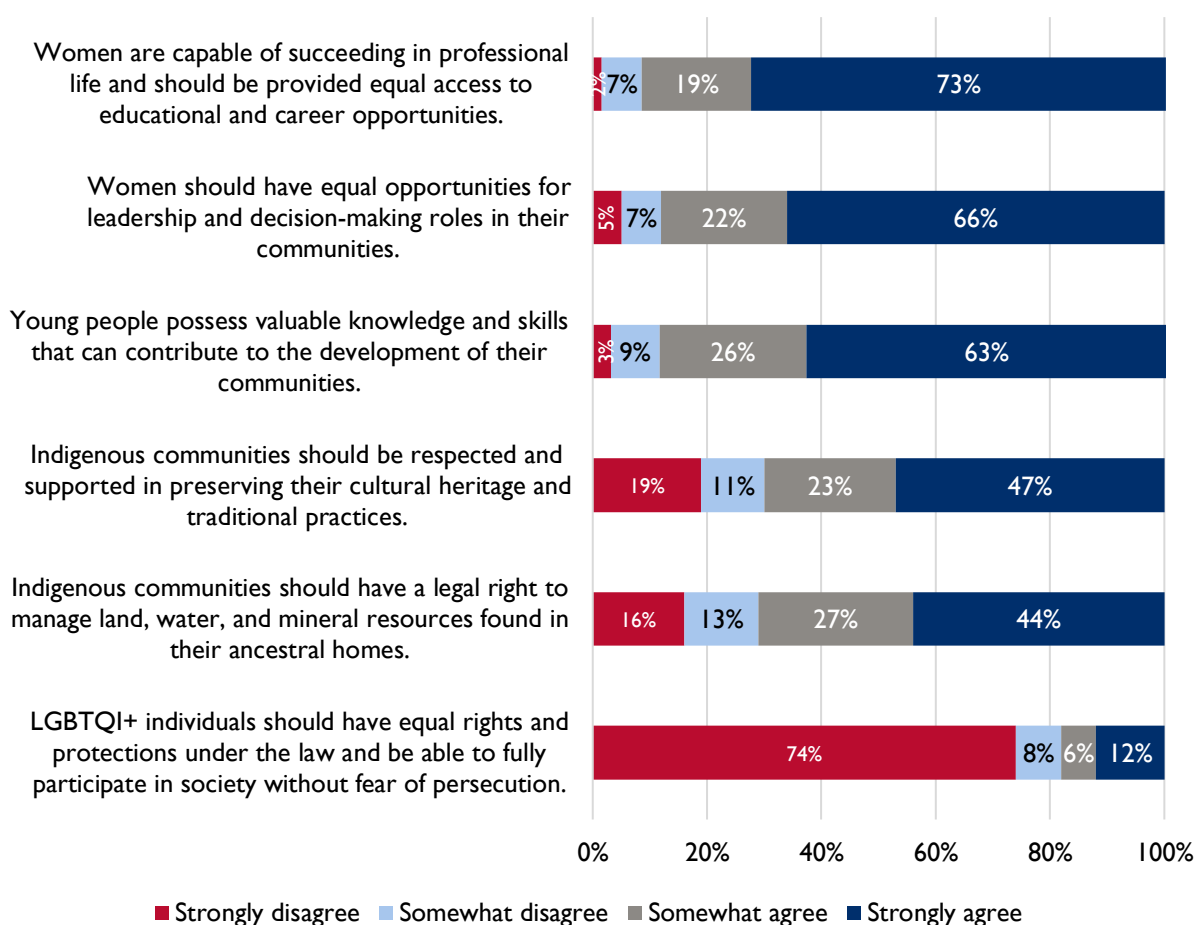
Plots percentage of sample reporting each community actor as somewhat or very engaged.
Values of "Don't know" and "Refuse" imputed as missing (n=1,446)

CULTURAL NORMS AND BELIEFS

While many urban and peri-urban residents agree with inclusive social and economic practices in principle, deeply ingrained cultural norms continue to prevent marginalized groups from integrating in social and economic spaces. Homophobia and ethnic discrimination against Indigenous communities are the most rampant. Measures of social inclusion tend to be substantially higher among the well-educated.

Survey findings show that urban and peri-urban residents are generally favorable of women's inclusion in formal education, professional life, and decision-making mechanisms—more than two-thirds of respondents express support for women in civic and economic spaces. Respondents are much less accepting of Indigenous communities—fewer than half strongly support the preservation of Indigenous heritage and land rights. Across demographic groups and geographies, there is very little support for the rights and legal protection of people who identify as LGBTQI+ (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Community attitudes toward traditionally marginalized groups



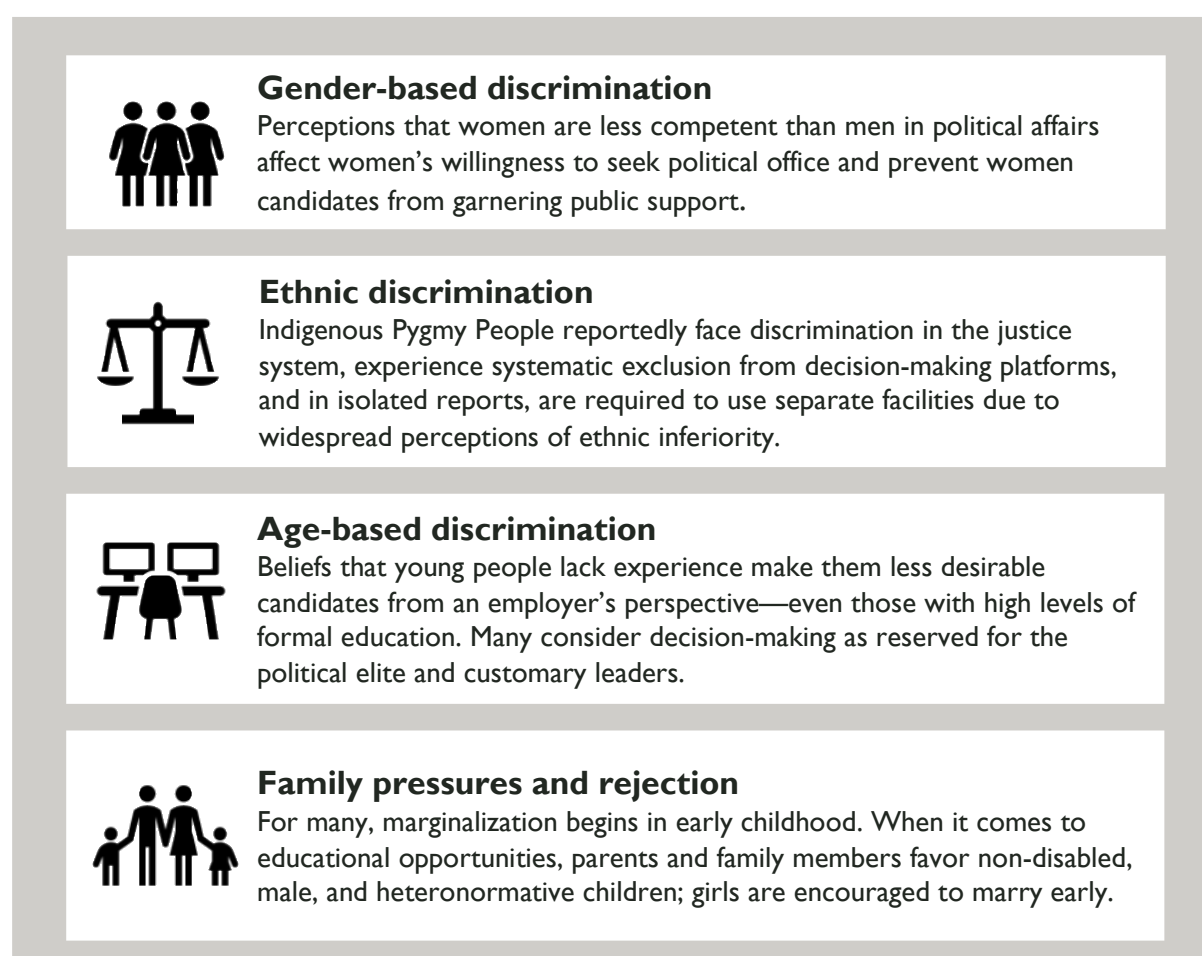
Values of "Don't know" and "Refuse" imputed as missing (n=1,446)

The survey data also reveal differences in attitudes among respondent groups. For example, young people tend to be less supportive of Indigenous land rights (41% in strong support) and cultural preservation (44% in strong support) than non-youth (47 and 51%, respectively); while women are more supportive of women's participation in education, decision-making, and political life than men.

In terms of geographic differences, measures of social inclusion are much lower in Tshopo (Kisangani) and Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi) than other surveyed sites. Survey respondents in both provinces are substantially (1) less likely to support equal leadership, professional, and educational opportunities for women; (2) less likely to value the contributions of young people to community development; and (3) less supportive of Indigenous rights and cultural preservation (see Annex 4 for more detailed regional overviews).

Qualitative testimonies shed light on how gender- and age-based discrimination serve as major barriers to women of all ages and young men when it comes to participation in civic life and employment prospects. Figure 5 provides examples of the reported impacts of discrimination on the participation of marginalized groups in civic, political, and economic spaces.

Figure 5. Perceived impact of discrimination on participation in civic, political, and economic spaces



Experiences of rejection, discrimination, humiliation, or trauma can have devastating effects on the psycho-social development of marginalized youth and long-term consequences on their political and economic prospects.

Paralleling survey findings, KIs and FGDs reveal lack of confidence or self-esteem as a major barrier to participation in civic and economic life among specific marginalized and/or underrepresented groups. In many cases, this is a result of psychological distress or emotional abuse. Indigenous Pygmy People, individuals who identify as LGBTQI+, GBV survivors, and persons with disabilities commonly report experiences of public shaming or humiliation related to their lived experiences or identity factors. Community leaders and civil society actors describe the psychological state of the vulnerable as deeply alienated, using expressions such as, “They see themselves as inferior to others,” “They are morally estranged,” or “They undervalue themselves.” A member of the LGBTQI+ community in Kinshasa tells of a peer who committed suicide due to persistent feelings of self-deprecation and rejection, noting that suicidal ideation is not uncommon within the community.

However, it is not clear whether the challenges to exercising agency and feeling self-worth are intrinsic. Experiences of trauma or rejection largely drive these feelings, which can make individuals reluctant to pursue formal employment or participate in civic affairs. Thus, they seek alternate arenas for engagement, where they feel safer. A young woman living in Kinshasa, who identifies as lesbian, noted that she preferred to look for opportunities within the few structures that are allies to the LGBTQI+ community than risk exposing her sexual orientation to unknown employers.

“Working in our own structures, I find that we’re better off than elsewhere, where you have to hide your sexual orientation, you have to hide your identity from people, you have to live as they want for you to be accepted and work well.” (LGBTQI+ youth, Kinshasa)

In many cases, Indigenous Pygmy People avoid interactions with service providers, potential employers, and the political establishment altogether due to fear of discrimination or abuse. Young male FGD participants in Bafwasende, Tshopo call for separate educational facilities for the Batwa⁸ people to avoid interactions with the Bali (Bantu) ethnic majority, with whom the Batwa share a long history of conflict. Likewise, Batwa participants note that many of their peers prefer to pursue traditional livelihoods on forestland than formal employment opportunities in town, because Bali employers are known to withhold salaries and compensate Indigenous laborers with alcohol—an issue USAID implementing partners observed in other provinces as well. Indigenous Pygmy People who do attempt to participate in formal decision-making processes make efforts to hide their identity. A leader from an Indigenous Pygmy People community in Isiro, Haut-Uélé tells of a Mbuti⁹ candidate for political office who concealed their ethnic identity while campaigning for fear of losing votes. He goes on to note that the Indigenous Pygmy People are “typically not interested in political affairs” due to years of political exclusion and a resulting sense of defeatism.

Reflecting on his youth, a university-educated man living with a physical disability notes that the combination of formal education and mentorship enabled him to overcome his “complexes” and embrace a sense of “pride” in his identity.¹⁰ “[Persons with disabilities] who have received an education behave in a completely different way from those who have not learned,” he notes. Following guidance from the head of division of social affairs in Mbuji-Mayi that he should use his talents to accompany the less educated, he pursued a career as a disability advocate and now occupies a leadership position within a local organization that creates jobs for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Among the marginalized groups included in the IDA, women and girls, LGBTQI+ people, and Indigenous Pygmy People are the most susceptible to personal safety and security threats as a result of their identity. Fear of violence and persecution threaten social and economic well-being, discouraging participation in civic affairs.

LGBTQI+ PEOPLE. Reports of physical violence against members of the LGBTQI+ community are common, with transgender people reportedly being the most at-risk. Numerous LGBTQI+ representatives in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Mbuji-Mayi recount anecdotes of either experiencing physical violence or knowing peers who have. An interviewee who identifies as a “man who has sex with men” tells of a recent incident in Lubumbashi, where local security forces restrained, beat, and imprisoned a group of transgender individuals without a trial for several days prior to their release.¹¹ Others mention instances of police harassment, including arbitrary arrest and verbal abuse that amount to human rights violations. Participants are generally unaware of legal mechanisms that can help ensure the safety and security of survivors through protection or prosecution, although those

⁸ The Batwa, Mbuti, and Baka peoples comprise the Indigenous Pygmy People of the DRC.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Household socioeconomic status is a well-documented determinant of educational achievement in the DRC (Bollag 2015). It is worth noting that, while we lack information on this participant’s upbringing, his family’s background is likely to have played a role in his successful education and career outcomes.

¹¹ The IDAMS team was unable to verify this report of potential security force abuses against the transgender community, but it is consistent with recently verified reports documented in the [U.S. Department of State’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2019](#).

based in larger metropolitan areas laud the role of civil society in providing “safe spaces” with legal advocacy and psychological support services.

WOMEN AND GIRLS. Sexual violence and GBV constitute major security risks for women and girls and contribute to their exclusion from social and political life. GBV survivors are at increased risk of trauma, sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancy—all factors that cause or exacerbate socioeconomic precarity, stigmatization, and health risks. Single mothers (pejoratively referred to as “*fille-mères*”) who have survived sexual violence or GBV are particularly vulnerable, because they tend to lack formal education and financial resources to provide for their families. In Kasai Oriental, young women focus group participants report that they avoid walking or traveling to remote areas alone for fear of rape. A civil society leader and advocate for gender equality in Mbuji-Mayi notes that conjugal violence is so commonplace, most women are resigned to accepting it as the status-quo. Qualitative evidence of sexual violence and GBV in Kasai Oriental parallel survey findings from Mbuji-Mayi, where respondents are significantly less supportive of equal leadership, professional, and educational opportunities for women (see Annex 4).

“Personally, I’m convinced that there must be legal instruments [to protect survivors of violence]: our constitution says this, and other legal texts say that. But is it popularized? Not really as it should be.” (Non-youth woman, Lubumbashi)

In a similar vein, a USAID implementing partner familiar with issues facing TIP survivors notes that women who escape from situations of forced prostitution are often rejected by their families and social circles, leaving them in a state of acute vulnerability. Other IDA participants report that social isolation, fear of repeated violence, and psychosocial distress stemming from past traumas make it difficult for TIP and GBV survivors to effectively exercise agency in civic and economic spheres.

Similarly to members of the LGBTQI+ community, survivors of GBV are often unaware of legal instruments they can leverage to prevent or respond to GBV, or support services that offer pathways to socioeconomic reintegration. Civil society actors play a key role in referring survivors to support services, but challenges remain. Because most services are located in towns and cities, a GBV case manager notes that geographic barriers make identification and registration of survivors difficult. They also lament the reticence of some survivors to report cases for fear of stigmatization or aggressor retaliation. Men who have sex with men and are survivors of sexual violence are reportedly barred from police protection and legal support by virtue of their sexual orientation.

INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLE. In light of the pervasive ethnic discrimination described above, Indigenous Pygmy People commonly report safety concerns and security incidents when interacting with the Bantu majority. Intermarriage of Indigenous Pygmy People and non-Indigenous people is either discouraged or strictly forbidden in most local contexts; there are several reports of young men being assaulted for engaging in romantic relationships with Bantu women in Mai-Ndombe. There are isolated reports of disputes over natural resources leading to violence. An Indigenous man accused of cutting wood on contested land outside of Inongo was reportedly arrested, abused, and died in prison, paralleling media reports of anti-Batwa violence in Mai-Ndombe (Media Congo 2017). In Bafwasende (Tshopo), Indigenous women say they suffered extortion and physical and verbal abuse at the hands of the police when traveling between villages and towns.

While the IDA is not designed to quantify the prevalence of violence against Indigenous communities in the target provinces, Indigenous Pygmy People describe living in a state of constant fear and precarity, and they lack faith in the justice system to protect their rights. Fear of abuse and perceived discrimination within the justice system contribute to the voluntary distancing of Indigenous Pygmy People from Bantu people and civic affairs.

“When an [Indigenous Pygmy Person] has a problem with a Bali, they’re not treated legally or fairly. It’s the Bali who’s always right in front of the [Indigenous Pygmy People]. They know how to express themselves in French to the authorities, but as we [Indigenous Pygmy People] don’t understand, we don’t know how to defend ourselves, and in the end, we are fined.” (Young man, Bafwasende)

LAWS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

Numerous Congolese institutions and legal instruments exist to promote inclusive governance, equitable access to public services, and protection of marginalized groups. However, legal texts are largely unknown or inaccessible to the general public.

IDA participants—civil society actors and advocates, in particular—allude to numerous legal frameworks, instruments, and policies designed to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups in civic and economic spaces. Some of the most discussed policies are described below. *Annex 1* provides a more comprehensive overview of major policy initiatives that affect marginalized groups.

- **LAW NO. 15/013 OF AUGUST 1, 2015, ON THE APPLICATION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND PARITY.** This sweeping law calls for the elimination of discrimination against women in politics, administration, institutions, and public services; “equal representation” in political and administrative spaces; equal opportunity to participate in electoral processes; and state-supported socioeconomic reintegration of GBV survivors.
- **DECREE NO. 19/204 OF JULY 12, 2019, ON SPECIAL MEASURES FACILITATING ACCESS FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN TO EDUCATION AND ADULTS TO LITERACY.** This decree prohibits enrollment discrimination based on age or ethnic origin in public and private schools and aims to reduce structural and socioeconomic access barriers to education services through adult literacy centers, provision of incentives (e.g., scholarships and school feeding programs), and more.
- **ORGANIC LAW NO. 22/003 OF MAY 3, 2022, ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.** In broad terms, this law provides a legal basis for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. It aims to improve physical accessibility to public transportation and infrastructure, increase representation of persons with disabilities in public and private institutions, implement a *National Accessibility and Empowerment Fund* for vulnerable persons, and fine individuals who are found to violate the rights of persons with disabilities.
- **LAW NO. 22/030 OF JULY 2022, ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLES.** This policy formalizes and safeguards the rights of Indigenous Pygmy People, particularly around customary land rights and livelihoods. Articles 46 and 51 guarantee collective and individual ownership of land and rights to resources, and Article 5 guarantees the rights to benefits resulting from the use and commercial exploitation of lands and resources, as well as the right to education and health.

In some instances, the Government of the DRC has taken measures to promulgate and popularize legal frameworks so that they become accessible to the greater public. For example, the Ministry of People Living with Disabilities and Other Vulnerable Persons, created in 2019 and institutionalized in 2022, has implemented a national strategy for the “popularization and adoption” (“*vulgarisation et appropriation*”) of Organic Law No. 22/003. There is some evidence that these efforts pay off. According to a disability advocate living in Kisangani, a local commission of persons with disabilities formed as a result of awareness campaigns about the policy to advocate for increased physical accessibility to public facilities. He notes that ramps to public buildings have since begun to appear around the city. A disability advocate in Kinshasa believes that the institutionalization of the ministry in and of itself brought about “significant advances in the inclusion of people living with disabilities

over the past 3 years,” adding that “we still have a long way to go.” The enforcement of laws to make political participation more accessible to persons with disabilities has reportedly brought about tangible benefits in Kinshasa, such as reasonable accommodation to support voter registration for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. These achievements align with survey findings that people with disabilities are more involved in decision-making in Kinshasa than in other provincial capitals (see *Annex 4* for regional overviews).

Nevertheless, knowledge of policies and institutional practices that promote the inclusion of marginalized groups often remains restricted or poorly enforced. A Mbuti man in Isiro (Haut-Uélé) asserts that, to his knowledge, Indigenous Pygmy People are denied the right to run for political office, despite the recent promulgation of Law 22/030. A Batwa community leader in Mai-Ndombe who is aware of the law claims that it has not gone into effect: “We’ve never been asked to give our opinion about anything relating to the community. Perhaps when the law is applied, there will be change.”

Limited local government’s capacity and local actors’ and institutions’ poor understanding of legal frameworks inhibit the enforcement of policies designed to protect the rights of marginalized groups.

USAID partners provide technical support to Congolese government institutions to develop or reinforce policy frameworks that protect the rights of marginalized groups. However, the impacts of policy reform can be slow to materialize and are complicated by capacity issues at lower levels of government. USAID/DRC’s Countering Trafficking in Persons (C-TIP) Activity, implemented by IOM, has worked closely with the Ministry of Human Rights (*Ministère des Droits Humains*) to implement a policy reform that formally criminalizes trafficking practices. The policy (“Law 22/067 of December 26, 2022 on the prevention and repression of human trafficking”) modifies the Congolese Penal Code of 1940 by introducing the formal criminalization of TIP, thereby reinforcing the country’s existing legal apparatus to repress various forms of human trafficking. Now that the policy has gone into effect, USAID partners are sensitizing judicial actors and front-line workers to its implications; however, persistent capacity challenges make enforcing the law difficult. While advances have been made in criminal prosecution and reporting of TIP, an IDA participant notes that many service providers remain unclear on what constitutes TIP or how it differs from more general cases of GBV or domestic violence.

USAID C-TIP has worked to train first responders in case identification, recognizing that more technical and material capacity support is needed for policy reform to bear fruit.

“It’s really complicated because not everyone understands this phenomenon very well. Even the actors themselves, sometimes they are confused. They will refer ‘trafficking’ cases to us, and we will analyze them and realize that it’s more general cases of GBV or domestic violence, which could be easily confused with trafficking. So, first of all, the identification is a challenge. [...] The Ministry [of Social Affairs] doesn’t always have the capacity to identify trafficking cases. [In addition], even if they know, they often don’t have the material means or tools to act.” (USAID implementing partner)

IDA participants view policy reform and accompanying technical support to government entities as foundational building blocks for the protection of marginalized groups. Given the scope and recency of many legal instruments, participants see numerous opportunities to facilitate the implementation of inclusive policies through legal socialization and RBAs.

ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ASSETS AND RESOURCES

Structural barriers such as employment discrimination, socio-economic pressures, and geographic inaccessibility contribute to disparities in access to public services, including healthcare, the justice system, and formal education.

Our analysis of KIs and FGDs identifies a number of structural barriers that affect the ability of marginalized groups to access resources that have critical impacts on development outcomes. *Table 5* summarizes these barriers and their reported effects.

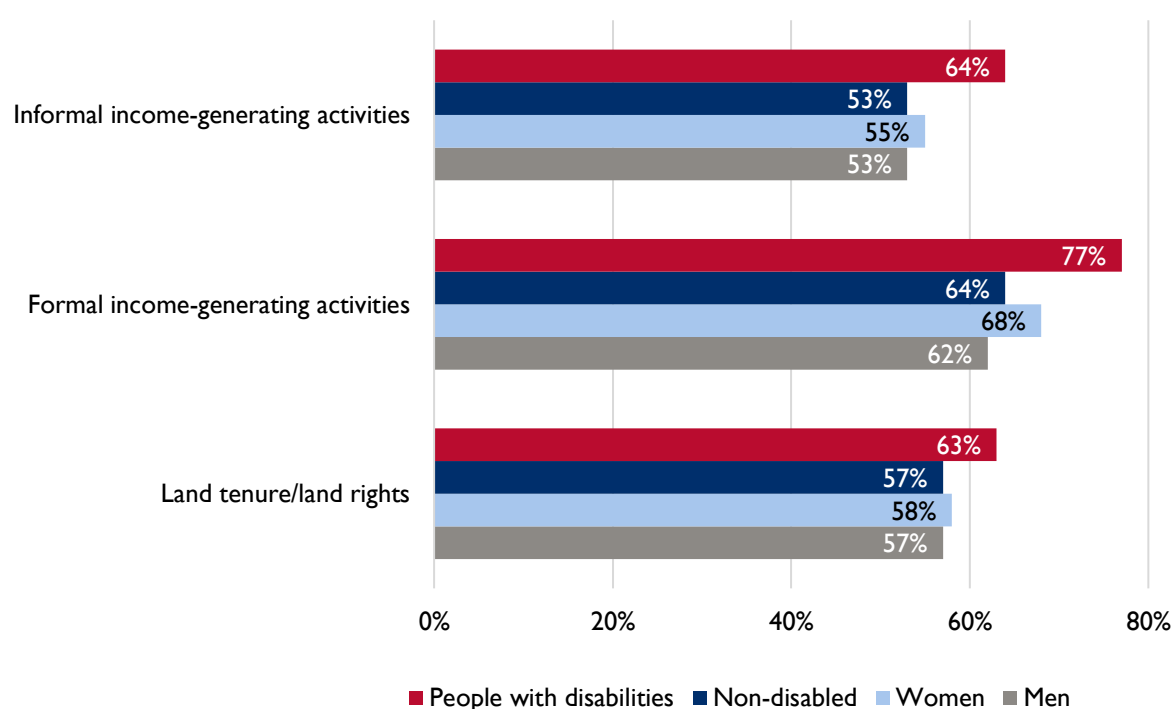
Table 5. Reported impact of structural barriers on access to public services according to qualitative assessment

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS	AFFECTED GROUPS	IMPACT ON ACCESS TO PRODUCTIVE ASSETS AND RESOURCES
Employment discrimination	Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities, TIP/GBV survivors, LGBTQI+ people, women, youth	Differences in physical characteristics or dress, preconceived notions about intellectual or physical ability, and cultural stereotypes contribute to employment discrimination and poverty among traditionally marginalized groups.
Socioeconomic pressures	Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, women/girls, GBV or TIP survivors	Socioeconomic pressures in households with limited resources lead families to prioritize the education of boys, non-disabled, and heteronormative children. These practices can contribute to TIP when children living in extreme poverty are forced into begging or other exploitative labor practices. Moreover, seasonal work patterns and social fragmentation between Indigenous Pygmy People and Bantu people discourage Indigenous Pygmy People from sending children to integrated schools.
Geographic inaccessibility	Indigenous Pygmy People, GBV or TIP survivors in non-urban areas	Vulnerable groups residing in remote or conflict-affected areas are unable to access resources and public or social services found in provincial capitals.
Limited recognition of land or property rights	Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities, women	Limited enforcement of existing policies to protect customary land rights of Indigenous Pygmy People and women's property rights contribute to disparities in land ownership and tenure.
Language barrier	Indigenous Pygmy People, persons with disabilities	Indigenous Pygmy People with low levels of French-language proficiency have difficulty advocating for themselves in the Congolese justice system, while public information campaigns are often inaccessible to people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
Physical inaccessibility	Persons with disabilities	Public- and private-sector buildings (e.g., hospitals and office spaces) are often inaccessible to people living with a physical disability.

Similar barriers also prevent marginalized groups from accessing productive resources such as income-generating activities and land rights. Key informants report that customary traditions commonly prevail over national-level legal frameworks that protect land rights for women and Indigenous Pygmy People.

As noted, the 2022 *Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples* formalizes and safeguards the rights of Indigenous Pygmy People around customary land rights and livelihoods. Similarly, the Congolese Constitution of 2006 consecrates the principle of non-discrimination based on sex, including the protection of personal property for women. Article 9 of the Law No. 15/013 of August 1, 2015, further establishes the state’s role in taking measures to “eliminate any practice harmful to women’s rights in terms of access to property, management, administration, enjoyment and disposal of goods.” Yet nearly 60 percent of all men and women surveyed (from the general population) report that they cannot access property ownership rights (Figure 6).¹² Concerning women’s rights, legal scholars attribute this trend to the fact that traditional customs tend to override national policies in local contexts. For instance, married women are prohibited from inheriting land from their fathers or spouses in certain rural areas of eastern DRC, while illiteracy and lack of formal education prevent women from exercising their legal rights to land ownership through the civil justice system (Vumilia-Nakabanda 2014). IDA participants—especially young women and civil society actors—confirm that discriminatory local customs and limited knowledge of legal frameworks continue to be barriers to women’s land ownership.

Figure 6. Disparity in access to productive resources, by sex and disability status



*Plots percentage of respondent groups reporting each item is inaccessible to them.
Values of "Don't know" and "Refuse" imputed as missing (n=1,446)*

In addition, Indigenous Pygmy People representatives widely report that decision-makers located in provincial capitals have “confiscated” or “occupied” their ancestral lands, preventing Indigenous communities from practicing traditional livelihoods and contributing to socioeconomic precarity. One participant reports that Indigenous Pygmy People-led attempts to negotiate have led to violent conflict with Bantu-majority communities in Kisangani. A young Mbuti man in Isiro notes that lack of land titles prevents Indigenous Pygmy People from defending their property rights:

¹² Note that there is no significant difference in the percentage of men (57%) and women (58%) reporting inaccessibility to land rights, highlighting the broader issue of unfamiliarity of legal rights and protections described elsewhere in this chapter. Qualitative data suggest that these barriers disproportionately affect women.

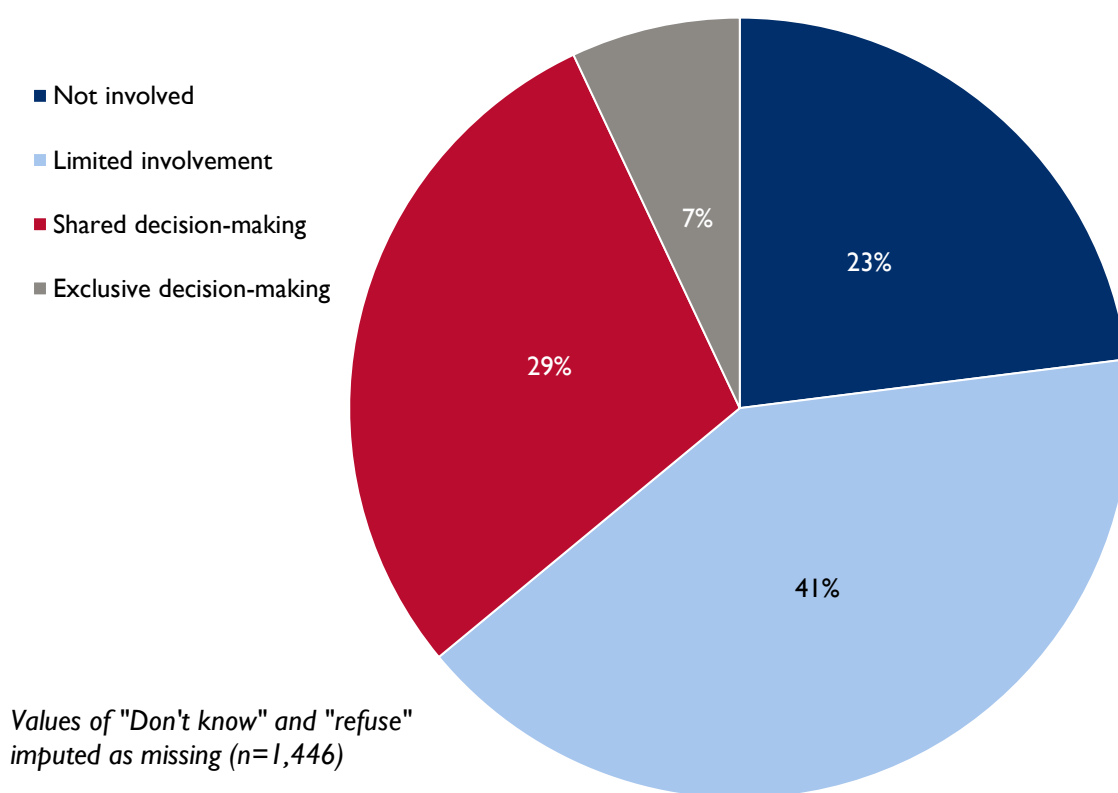
“Land bequeathed to us by our ancestors is being confiscated by the ‘second Congolese’ [non-Indigenous communities], who look down on us. When they ask us the question of what land title do we have to occupy these lands, and which title we are always missing, this frightens us.” (Young man, Haut-Uélé)

Finally, persons with disabilities are also more likely to report inaccessibility to income-generating activities and land rights than non-disabled survey respondents (Figure 6).

Women have limited control over household financial resources due to cultural norms and beliefs about gender roles, perpetuating economic disempowerment.

Numerous qualitative testimonies confirm that women are relegated to the spheres of domesticity with limited control over household income, echoing survey findings. More than two-thirds of survey respondents (71%) report that women have limited or no involvement in making decisions about household financial resources, with only about 7 percent of respondents stating that women have exclusive decision-making authority (Figure 7). Cultural norms and beliefs that men ought to control household assets and financial decision-making reportedly perpetuate the economic disempowerment of women.

Figure 7. Perceived involvement of women in household financial decision-making



PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

This section presents cross-cutting barriers to inclusive development from the perspective of current USAID implementing partners and sub-awardees, as well as Congolese CSOs and CBOs that work with marginalized groups. It responds to research question 2 (see above).

EXPERIENCES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The main challenge that Congolese CSOs face in improving the well-being of marginalized groups centers around their internal capacity to obtain funding and manage donor resources.

Congolese CSOs are critical stakeholders in engaging marginalized groups across geographies and sectors, often serving as intermediaries between public service providers, local authorities, and affected communities. Successful CSO initiatives create sustainable employment opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups, raise awareness about human rights, and address structural barriers to increase access to essential services. However, many CSOs report significant challenges in learning about donor funding opportunities and meeting administrative requirements for obtaining and managing it. In KII, many proposed that organizational strengthening initiatives would be the most promising pathway to enhancing their ability to promote inclusion. When asked to elaborate on their experiences, organizational representatives stated:

“USAID has a lot of processes! [...] I think it would be good for USAID, through its first- and second-level partners, to hold regular explanatory workshops. That would enable us to do things properly every time. We spread out procedures, and there are lots of them. To remember all this in addition to our own procedures, it’s really a lot.” (CSO representative, USAID sub-awardee, Kinshasa)

Limited access to information on funding opportunities. Despite USAID’s efforts to increase access to funding opportunities for local organizations, many Congolese CSOs have limited awareness of the platforms where opportunities circulate. Small organizations typically self-finance with member contributions or personal investments, but CSO representatives view this approach as unsustainable and prohibitive to organizational growth.¹³ Well-connected partners rely on personal networks to stay informed about donor priorities and opportunities, and in some cases, formal structures such as humanitarian coordination mechanisms (e.g., United Nations clusters and working groups). In most cases, organizational representatives are unfamiliar with outlets where donors post announcements, leading to calls for increased visibility via social media (YouTube, Instagram, etc.) or emailing lists. In addition, some CSOs believe that information about funding opportunities is less accessible to partners who lack English-language proficiency.

Administrative challenges related to contracting with USAID. USAID’s rigorous oversight and compliance requirements are designed to secure transparency and accountability of financial resources. For example, all USAID partners and subcontractors must register in the System for Award Management (SAM), the U.S. government’s portal for managing contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements, and undergo formal administrative procedures to determine financial eligibility (USAID 2020). The federal government has taken steps to streamline the partner registration process in recent years—notably, by replacing the third-party Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number with a new authoritative code that can be issued directly through SAM (USAID 2022). However, complex administrative procedures and requirements continue to be major obstacles for local partners who lack grant management capacity and experienced staff who can navigate USAID’s processes. At the most basic level, the SAM portal is only available in English. While the U.S. government has previously organized webinars to make the platform more accessible to francophone audiences, available materials tend to be dated.¹⁴

¹³ USAID’s Partnership Incubator is designed to help local organizations identify funding opportunities through existing platforms (SAM.gov, Grants.gov, USAID’s Business Forecast portal) and opportunities posted directly to the website. For more information, see the [Work With USAID](#) web portal.

¹⁴ For instance, a 2015 French-language webinar on SAM registration is available via the [USAID Learning Lab](#).

Limited organizational capacity. While local organizations experience capacity constraints across the board, IDA participants believe that CSOs representing traditionally marginalized groups are at an acute disadvantage. Such organizations may be composed of members with lower levels of formal education, lack of technical training or certification, and limited professional or organizational management experience to draw on. Structural barriers and education disparities amplify capacity constraints, and IDA respondents believe they prevent local actors from meeting USAID’s partner eligibility criteria, leading to calls for more equitable partnership practices. As one IDA participant explains, “In the eyes of USAID, everyone must deliver, everyone must perform, everyone must meet the criteria. It’s the same for everyone. This is a very egalitarian way of thinking, but it’s not very equitable.” To this end, Congolese CSOs and the underrepresented groups they serve widely view organizational strengthening of local structures as the most promising pathway to inclusion.

EXPERIENCES OF USAID IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

USAID implementing partners often comprise U.S.-based or international NGOs that have decades of partnership experience with the Agency. USAID/DRC’s implementing partners provide technical and operational support to Congolese organizations and institutions in their oversight of program activities. In many cases, these partners serve as intermediaries between USAID and local actors who work directly with program participants. Echoing issues CSOs raised, implementing partners described several factors that facilitate or inhibit the integration of ID principles into their programming.

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT INHIBITORS

Despite USAID’s Agency-wide efforts to advance localization, implementing partners struggle to foster equitable partnerships with local organizations—especially those that have never received USAID funding. While implementers view partnerships with local actors as key to engaging traditionally marginalized groups, working with new or limited-capacity organizations can compromise operational efficiency.

Institutional barriers to new partnerships. USAID’s New Partnerships Initiative (NPI), relaunched in 2019 to align with the Agency’s 2018 *Assistance and Acquisition Strategy*, strives to diversify USAID’s partner base, promote local leadership, and foster innovation by supporting “prospective partners to overcome the informational imbalance typically faced by groups that are new to, or less familiar with, how USAID operates” (USAID 2023). While NPI resources do exist, implementing partners face numerous challenges in supporting organizations that have never received USAID funding, particularly those run by and for marginalized groups.

- *Laborious vetting and sub-awarding process to newcomers.* When issuing subawards, implementing partners who manage grant disbursement mechanisms are tasked with reviewing up to dozens of applications for a single opportunity. This is a major challenge for activity managers who must disburse several millions of dollars-worth of grant money over a short period of time. It also increases the likelihood that newcomers get screened out.
- *Capacity concerns.* Partners highlight a paradox in USAID’s broader localization agenda: While the Agency intends to channel more money to local organizations through NPI and related initiatives, partners report institutional pressures to prioritize partnerships only with local organizations that can spend grant money efficiently and responsibly. Concerns over backlogging of grant money can quickly disqualify applications, disproportionately affecting low-capacity organizations run by and for marginalized groups.
- *Limited human resources.* Unless explicitly planned for in activity budgets, even well-funded USAID activities lack the human resources to provide intensive and continuous capacity

support to marginalized or underrepresented organizations. For instance, Kinshasa-based partners do not always budget for long-lasting field visits to underserved geographies or embed temporary capacity support staff within local organizations.

Partners have devised strategies to establish more equitable partnership practices, while recognizing that these efforts can increase their workload and, at times, compromise their ability to implement according to a strict timeline. Examples IDA participants noted include (1) setting informal quotas for first-time USAID grant recipients, with a preference for those that represent marginalized groups (e.g., women and Indigenous Pygmy People), (2) conducting qualitative assessments of grant applicants to account for organizational diversity alongside other base qualifications, and (3) increasing representation of traditionally marginalized groups within implementing organizations through equitable hiring practices.

“Our biggest struggle to meet those goals [engaging Indigenous groups and women-led organizations] is, it’s hard to give money away with big grant programs. We don’t have a lot of staff, so when you want to work with marginalized or underrepresented groups, or people who have never gotten USAID funding before, it’s a ton of work. That’s a big effort for us. It’s much easier to give money to someone who’s already gotten money. [...] USAID’s first concern in [partnering with new organizations] is that they don’t have a lot of capacity. It’s odd, because then you have to convince USAID that that’s okay, even though this is USAID’s goal.” (USAID implementing partner)

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT FACILITATORS

Organizational representatives underscore the importance of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) advisors and activity-level GESI strategies in the ID planning and mainstreaming process.

Most organizational representatives interviewed agree that GESI advisors play a crucial role in planning and implementing inclusive practices. Below are the common themes they cited.

GESI strategic frameworks are key to defining scope and tailoring approaches, and ought to be developed early in the activity lifecycle. When asked about challenges implementing partners face in ID planning, many emphasize that marginalized groups are not homogeneous; there are significant differential needs among and within groups, and it is unrealistic for a single intervention to address all those needs. The development of activity-level GESI strategies can help implementing partners identify key stakeholder groups and develop feasible engagement approaches to maximize impact from the outset. Despite their activity’s achievements, one partner regrets that their team did not prioritize GESI strategy development sooner, noting that intentional, in-depth engagement with USAID/DRC early in the program life cycle could have led to productive conversations about defining and prioritizing inclusive goals.

For context, GESI strategies are initiative- or program-level strategic documents that outline detailed approaches to gender equality and social inclusion throughout the activity lifecycle, from scoping and implementation to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). Below are several examples of USAID GESI strategies; we have not provided examples from ongoing USAID/DRC initiatives to ensure IDA participant’s anonymity.

- [Integrated Natural Resources Management Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy](#) (DAI 2021)
- [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy. Programa Para El Fortalecimiento De Instituciones De Justicia Penal Estatal \(Conjusticia\)](#) (USAID/Mexico 2020)

- Gender and Youth Inclusion Strategy – USAID Agribusiness Competitiveness Activity in Tajikistan (Winrock International 2018)

GESI advisors help make sure ID plans are developed and operationalized. Project staff dedicated to ID mainstreaming play an important role in the planning, developing, and operationalizing activity-level GESI strategies. Among other responsibilities, GESI advisors lead community consultations with marginalized group representatives, oversee gender and inclusion assessments, engage with civil society and relevant government ministries, and serve as technical support staff to implementation teams to ensure adherence to and monitoring of GESI plans. One partner representative describes the role of their organization’s GESI advisor as “indispensable” to their work supporting the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) in implementation of CENI’s strategic framework for youth. Several IDA participants expressed interest in participating in a community of practice to share approaches and resources among GESI advisors.

PART III: OPPORTUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

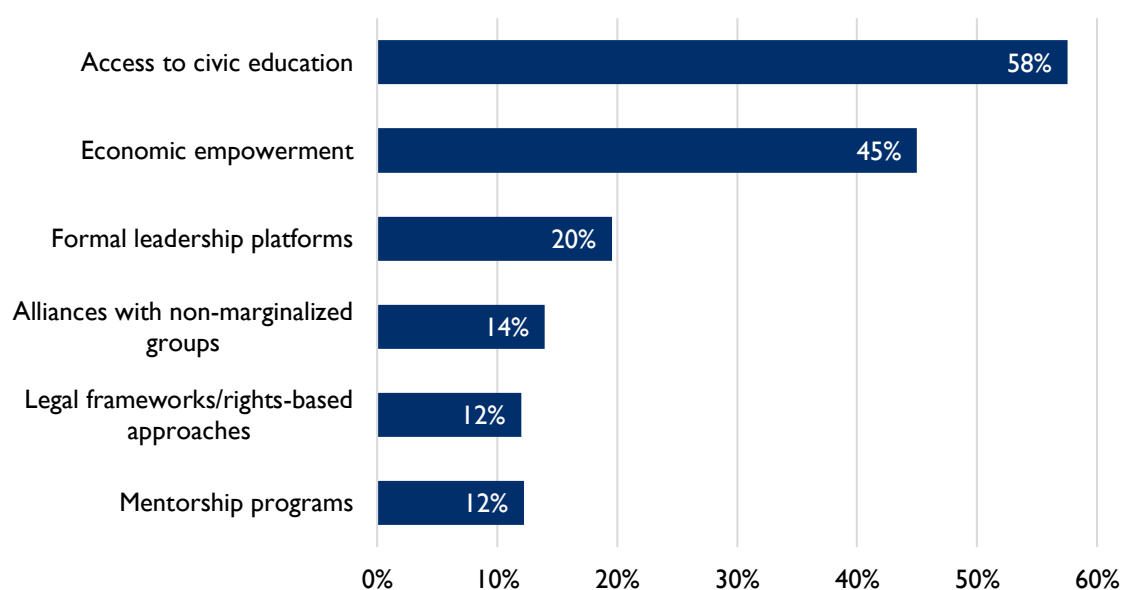
The IDAMS team also collected data on respondents’ perspectives about opportunities and engagement approaches that have the potential to improve ID practices through USAID’s programming.

INCLUSION OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN THE CIVIC, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC SECTORS

This section presents our analysis of respondents’ perspectives on how to promote the inclusion of women and youth in civic, political, and economic spheres (research question 3 *above*). Using qualitative insights collected from IDA participants, quantitative survey results, and our inferences through data triangulation, we present opportunities USAID/DRC could pursue to increase participation and improve their capacity to affect decision-making.

According to our survey respondents, the most important types of support in empowering marginalized groups are access to civic education, economic empowerment, and inclusion in formal leadership platforms (*Figure 8*).

Figure 8. Perceived entry points for increased influence of marginalized groups



Plots percentage of cases indicating each item (multiple response, $n=1,446$)

Survey findings closely align with the experiences of implementing partners and Congolese CSOs who work to break down barriers for women, youth, and marginalized subgroups, explored in detail below.

Participatory consultation frameworks and accessible communications channels address information gaps through increased access to civic education.

As noted in the *Main Findings* chapter, political participation among women, youth, and historically underrepresented groups begins with access to credible information about political processes and the electoral cycle. USAID/DRC partners working in the DRG sector describe several approaches that have found success in advancing inclusion through civic education.

- Community consultation frameworks (*Cadre officiel de concertation*).** In 2013, CENI formally adopted a participatory community consultation mechanism (“*cadre officiel de concertation*”) to facilitate key stakeholders’ interfacing during electoral periods (Ravidá 2021). The community consultation framework entails the organization of a collaborative forum composed of political party representatives, CSOs, affected communities, and the media to improve dissemination of essential information on the electoral process. It is predicated on the principles of positive messaging, participatory stakeholder engagement, transparency, and anti-misinformation with the goal of addressing information gaps to engage wider audiences in elections. USAID partners that support CENI in the implementation of community consultations believe that the inclusion of women, youth, persons with disability, and Indigenous Pygmy People is essential in understanding differential information that needs to be addressed through relevant communications channels. Stakeholder consultations can also inform the development of GESI strategic frameworks, while fostering social cohesion and unity between diverse community groups.
- Reinforce trusted information sources to address information gaps.** USAID partners reinforce trusted information sources to increase access to reliable information, encourage dialogue through discussion and debate, and combat misinformation. Community radios, in particular,

are among the most accessible and trusted radio sources in less-urban areas of DRC, allowing information to reach a wider audience. USAID/DRC partners have found success in engaging women and youth through radio clubs established to support community radios. Among other benefits, these structures strengthen capacity among underrepresented groups in media sector activities, such as content development, debate facilitation, and reporting. Radio clubs enable participatory discussions on topics ranging from awareness about elections to counter-GBV messaging, allowing for open exchange between local communities and authorities. USAID partners also work to track election rumors that circulate on social media and aim to undermine democratic systems, noting that this approach is particularly useful in dispelling common misconceptions among youth.

- *Accessible elections communications for underserved groups.* USAID partners have increased access to civic information through the adaptation of communications about elections to local and non-verbal languages. One partner supported the DRC Senate to produce a lexicon of over 400 electoral concepts in a “harmonized” sign language adapted to the national context. While they deemed the process time-consuming and expensive due to the rigorous lexicon development methodology, it has since been used to augment CENI’s video communications for the hearing impaired.

In addition, a 2021 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) report notes that CENI produces educational materials in French as well as DRC’s four other national languages to overcome education and literacy barriers (Ravidá 2021). However, as noted in *Annex 4*, more than a quarter of survey respondents in Mbuji Mayi cite “language barrier or communication challenges” as an obstacle to political participation for marginalized groups—a significantly higher proportion than in other provincial capitals surveyed. This signals a potential need for more civic education materials in Tshiluba, the most-spoken language in the Kasais.

Inclusive decision-making platforms increase the influence and build leadership capacity of women and youth, while ensuring that development solutions are relevant to community needs. Perceptions of political efficacy in the DRC are low among many women and youth—especially members of DRC’s diverse Indigenous communities—who view engaging in civic life as futile due to experiences of systematic exclusion, lack of financial resources to fund campaigns, and perceptions of corruption.¹⁵ IDA participants note that the inclusion of underrepresented groups in formal or informal leadership structures can both increase their influence in the short term and strengthen leadership capacity to prepare them for public service in the long term. Participants cite promotion of women and youth leaders via micro-credit associations, university clubs, farmer’s cooperatives, local development committees (*comités locaux de développement*), community forestry concessions, and more as an important first step in ensuring inclusion in civic and economic spheres.

¹⁵ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies the notion of political efficacy as “one of the most relevant indicators of the overall status of democratic systems.” Political efficacy refers to “the feeling that individual political action does have or can have an impact upon political processes” (OECD 2021).

In the success story below, a CSO representative based in Mbuji-Mayi highlights her organization's successes in responding to GBV through women-led problem-solving and co-creation.

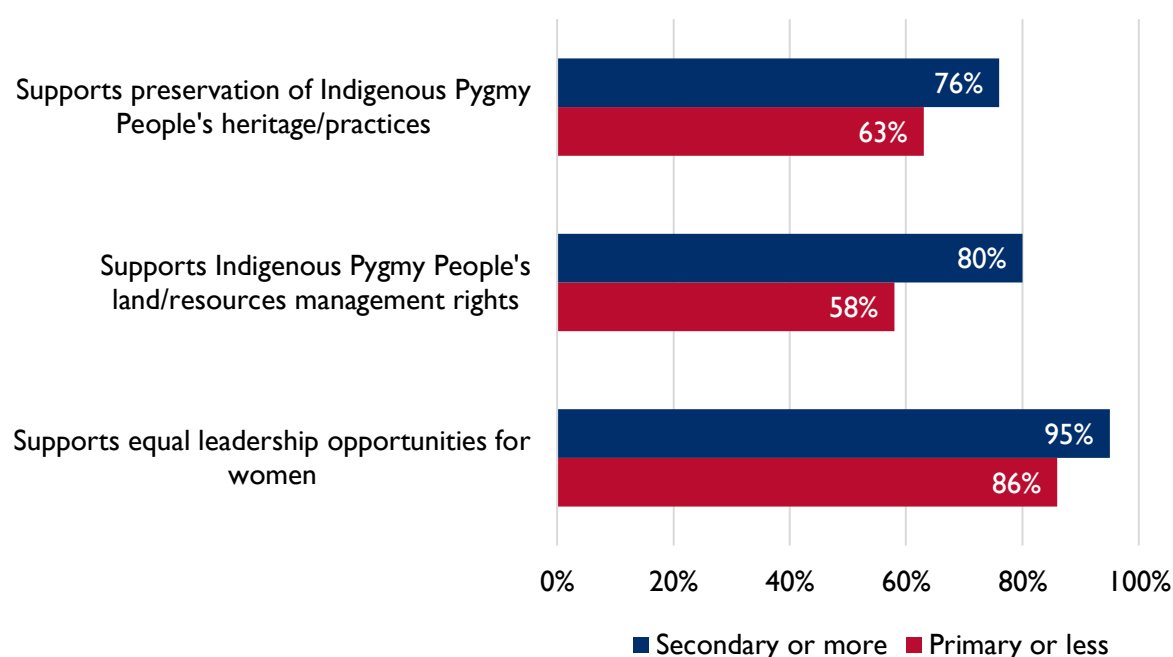
PARTNER SUCCESS STORY: WOMEN-LED RESPONSE TO GBV IN KASAI ORIENTAL

"We use an 'upstream' approach to inclusion, where women are involved in reflecting on problems and planning [solutions]. I mentioned earlier that the domestic violence problem in Kasai is widespread. We began by identifying women's organizations and creating a platform to group these associations. We implemented various training and capacity-building activities so that these women are able to initiate action plans and resolve problems on their own, thanks to the capacity strengthening our own organization has received through donor funds. These associations now have knowledge, and we plan activities together according to issues important to them. We are in the process of defining alongside them strategies and solutions in relation to each issue. They participate in the reflections, they participate in the planning, they participate in the implementation, and even after the implementation; these women are still supporting the community so that the actions we are carrying out are sustainable."

– Civil society actor, Kasai Oriental

Respondents believe that access to education—be it traditional, vocational, or remedial—reduces fundamental inequities that hinder participation in civic, political, and economic spheres. On several levels, IDA results suggest that empowerment begins with education. Measures of social inclusion are notably higher among IDA participants with higher levels of formal education (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Indigenous Pygmy People in Tshopo, Mai-Ndombe, and Haut-Uélé unequivocally cite education disparity as the primary source of their marginalization from civic life, with Indigenous women reportedly being disproportionately affected. Respondents perceive technical training and remedial education as viable paths out of poverty for men and women who never attended school. While education service provision is inherently a function of the national government, USAID/DRC's numerous ongoing investments to support public- and private-sector entities in inclusive education attest to institutional recognition of this approach, in alignment with perceived needs.

Figure 9. Measures of social inclusion, by educational achievement



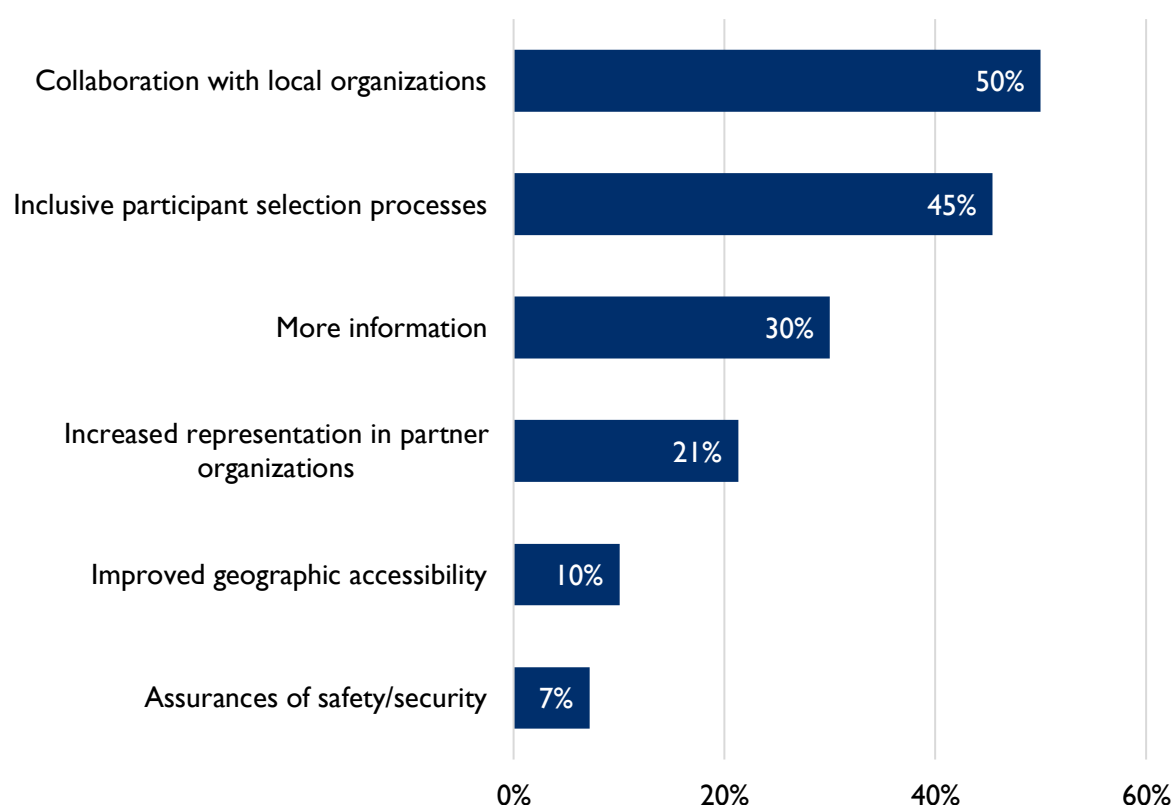
Plots percentage of sub-samples reporting "somewhat" or "strongly" agree.
(n=1,446); values of "Don't know" and "Refuse" imputed as missing

INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLE IN DONOR-FUNDED PROGRAMS

This section presents our analysis of respondents' perspectives on how to promote the inclusion of Indigenous Pygmy People in USAID programming (research question 4 above). Informed by insights collected during interviews with USAID partners and practitioners, we present promising engagement strategies USAID/DRC could pursue to increase Indigenous Pygmy People's participation in donor-funded development initiatives.

According to survey respondents, collaboration with local organizations, inclusive participant selection processes, and more information about donor-funded development activities are the most important entry points for increasing the participation of marginalized groups in donor-funded programs (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Key entry points for increased participation of marginalized groups in donor-funded programs



Plots percentage of cases indicating each item (multiple response) (n=1,446)

While these entry points are applicable to marginalized groups beyond Indigenous communities, several of them are consistent with partner-recommended engagement strategies to improve the inclusion of Indigenous Pygmy People across USAID/DRC's program portfolio.¹⁶ Below is a summary of effective engagement strategies based on the experiences of implementing partners and CBOs.¹⁷

RBAs implemented in partnership with Indigenous-led organizations show promise in protecting land rights and livelihoods. Many Indigenous Pygmy People lack recourse to legal instruments that protect their right to land ownership and traditional livelihoods, often resulting from education disparity and reported discrimination in the civil justice system (see *Main Findings*). Indigenous communities call for advocacy support and oversight mechanisms that can help Indigenous Pygmy People reclaim their rights to the management and use of forest resources without fear of persecution. USAID partners have found successes in supporting Indigenous women

¹⁶ Figure 10 is based on survey item #12 (see

Annex 2) and is thus not specific to Indigenous Pygmy People: "What types of support are the most important in enabling marginalized groups to participate in donor-funded programs? Note: Marginalized groups are groups of people that face social, economic, or political exclusion based on their identity or other factors. Marginalized groups may be denied important rights like legal protection, participation in society, and access to services such as health care, education, and jobs."

¹⁷ Note that USAID has produced numerous resources on RBAs and best practices to protect the rights of Indigenous Pygmy People in conservation activities, as well as a formal policy that institutionalizes the Agency's commitment to Indigenous rights. See the March 2020 USAID Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (PRO-IP), as well as Dr. Robert Moïse's CARPE Guide to Engaging Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (n.d.) and Partnering with Indigenous Peoples in Carpe Initiatives: Towards a New Conservation Practice (n.d.).

to secure land rights through various RBAs, showing tangible results. To illustrate, a USAID partner working in the conservation and natural resources management sector tells of their organization's achievements in supporting local and Indigenous women's associations in the areas surrounding Salonga National Park. The approach consists of providing technical assistance and advocacy support to a consortium of existing women's associations who possess small—albeit unrecognized—parcels of land. By interacting with local district authorities, each association has been able to secure indefinite rights to 3 to 5 hectares of exploitable land to practice environmentally responsible livelihoods. This approach, captured in the success story below, has yielded success and implementing partner respondents view it as “easily replicable” in other regions of the DRC.¹⁸

Other IDA participants describe the critical role of nationally registered advocacy-based NGOs such as the Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA), as well as their regional affiliates, in helping Indigenous communities secure land titles through advocacy work.¹⁹

PARTNER SUCCESS STORY: WOMEN'S LAND TENURE NEAR SALONGA NATIONAL PARK

“Most of these associations had little pieces of land, but they weren't officially recognized. Anybody could have come and taken it from them. Coming from a recognized association, the whole land tenure aspect of this advocacy became feasible. For women as individuals, it is very difficult to have your land tenure rights recognized even though it is [sic] written into national policies. At the local level, customary rights are stronger, and women don't have access to them. Though an organization, they were able to obtain official recognition of 3–5 hectares of land per association secured indefinitely so that they were able to do agroforestry or other activities to secure livelihoods and provide for their family.”

– USAID implementing partner

Integrating the principles of FPIC can help build trust among Indigenous communities with historical experiences of conservation displacement or associated human rights violations. By and large, Indigenous Pygmy People interviewed in Haut-Uélé, Mai-Ndombe, and Tshopo believe local governments and international donor agencies' implementing partners do not adequately consult their communities before making important decisions that affect them, especially because both overwhelmingly employ Bantu staff. Perceptions of exclusion from decision-making processes contribute to institutional distrust, undermining government- and donor-funded efforts to support Indigenous Pygmy People through policymaking or service provision. Community consultation is critical throughout the program cycle—in the design stage, to appropriately tailor activities; in the implementation stage, through effective feedback mechanisms and monitoring; and in the learning stage, through targeted data analysis, learning, and reflection activities, and adaptation of interventions. The notion of community consultation is particularly important because conservation-related displacement and resettlement are known to affect Indigenous Pygmy People across the Congo Basin (Boyd 2021). While FPIC is a well-established principle in international law, USAID's formal guidance on FPIC is fairly recent, and experts observe that understandings of “consent” may be subject to “different interpretations by different stakeholders” (Moïse n.d.). The 2021 *USAID Guidance on Monitoring Free, Prior and Informed Consent* provides essential information on FPIC requirements and recommendations to mitigate unintended negative consequences of development activities on project-affected people and communities (PAPC) (USAID 2021). Operationalizing FPIC

¹⁸ Local organizations reportedly apply similar approaches to support non-Indigenous women in other geographies. A Congolese CSO based in Kinshasa establishes agricultural cooperatives for women farmers to facilitate the collective ownership of cultivable land. The organization also works to sensitize traditional authorities on women's property ownership rights in an effort to break down cultural barriers and increase the buy-in of local authorities.

¹⁹ Read more at DGPA's official website: <http://www.dgpardc.org/a-propos/>.

principles, from activity planning to project closeout, is essential to building trust among communities that have historical experiences of human rights violations.

Gender-transformative approaches are necessary to balance the differential needs of Indigenous women and men. IDA participants describe working with Indigenous Pygmy People as a “balancing act” due to the differential needs of men and women. One organization has coined a “couples’ approach” strategy, which targets young married couples to gain buy-in from men for women’s social and economic development, mitigating perceptions that development activities usurp cultural norms or favor women’s interests at the expense of men. Gender-sensitive programming in Indigenous communities entails targeted communications that highlight the community-wide benefits of women’s empowerment, while engaging influential men in the promotion of women’s rights. These approaches are highlighted in a 2019 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) GESI report, which found that the inclusion of women in grassroots governance structures such as local development committees (LDCs), enables interaction between traditional male decision-makers and aspiring women to bring about formal recognition of women’s contributions to natural resources management (WWF 2019).

School officials, religious leaders, and customary authorities act as champions of inclusion who can intervene on behalf of Indigenous Pygmy People and influence community attitudes. IDA participants point to the crucial role of school officials, faith-based leaders, and non-Indigenous customary authorities as potential champions of inclusion. As influential figures embedded within local structures, these champions can intervene on behalf of Indigenous Pygmy People to advocate for their inclusion in social and economic spheres. For example, school administrators combat prejudice in integrated schools where Indigenous Pygmy People reportedly face discrimination when interacting with Bantu children. Recounting an experience where a Bantu peer instigated a physical conflict following verbal harassment, a young Indigenous man from Mai-Ndombe tells of a schoolmaster intervening on his behalf and encouraging his continued education.

“When the schoolmaster [préfet des études] arrived, he asked for explanations, and I gave him my version of the facts. As a person who often concerned himself with the supervision of Indigenous peoples, he suspended the boy who had pushed me, and I stayed in the classroom to continue with the lessons. And he directly encouraged me to study on the grounds that I had the same rights as the Bantus at school.” (Young man, Mai-Ndombe)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, the DRC’s policy environment has become increasingly conducive to USAID’s inclusive development objectives. The principles of gender equality are inscribed in the country’s 2006 Constitution and several comprehensive legal instruments were adopted to advance the rights of women, Indigenous Pygmy People, and persons with disabilities since 2015 (see *Annex 5* and *Main Findings* sub-section on “Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutional Practices”). Against this backdrop, there is great potential for USAID/DRC to continue supporting national and decentralized institutions to increase awareness, application, and enforcement of inclusive policies. Moreover, USAID/DRC’s strong network of partnerships with Congolese civil society—typically seen as the key entry point for supporting marginalized groups, often by way of USAID implementing partners—creates numerous opportunities aligned with the Mission’s commitment to inclusive, locally led development. The principles of participatory engagement and co-creation are essential change facilitators, offering viable pathways to address the significant structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate marginalization at all levels of the society.

Below, we present strategies that USAID/DRC may consider to better integrate ID principles across the Mission's current and future activity portfolios, regardless of sector, geography, or implementation area. Then, we present population-level recommendations to advance the inclusion of women, youth, and Indigenous Pygmy People in civic and economic spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MISSION-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategy 1. Build on existing policy frameworks, while accompanying policy development with dissemination and popularization strategies. Legal instruments and policies exist to protect the civic and economic rights of the traditionally marginalized groups included in this IDA, with the exception of the LGBTQI+ community. However, enforcement of these policies lacks due to limited awareness among local institutions (decentralized government entities, judicial apparatuses, police and security forces, etc.) and affected communities, compounded by traditional customs that override application of national policies in many local contexts. Therefore, as a first step, USAID could include in its programming efforts to further dissemination and understanding of the legal rights and recourse individuals have when those rights are violated. At the subnational level, there is a continued need to accompany inclusive policy development with formal dissemination and popularization (“*vulgarisation*”) strategies so that affected communities are aware of their rights and local institutions can better secure their application. For example, international partners have organized public open-house days (“*journées portes ouvertes*”) to strengthen the government's efforts to repress GBV in Eastern DRC. Action-oriented dissemination and dialogue sessions convene key actors from the public and non-governmental sectors (e.g., judicial police officers, prosecutors and magistrates, civil society, media, and affected communities) to raise awareness about ongoing legal efforts and instruments to combat GBV. These sessions also provide a public forum for institutional actors to identify gaps and brainstorm solutions (Okala 2016). Dissemination efforts should include an approach for monitoring public knowledge of civic rights and processes at scale through either modules added to existing household data collection activities (e.g., demographic and household surveys, census, or other survey administered by the national institute of statistics) or new data collection efforts focused in specific intervention areas.

Beyond supporting better understanding of existing legal protections, USAID could work directly or through implementing partners with government institutions to expand protections. In the case of the LGBTQI+ community, this may focus on civic and economic rights, while for other populations, it may center on expanded service delivery to achieve more equitable outcomes. For instance, a USAID activity could build on the recent criminalization of TIP to assist government agencies and civil society develop prevention measures and protection and reintegration services for survivors.

Strategy 2. Reduce funding barriers for local partners through Agency-wide equitable partnership practices. U.S.-based implementing partners often serve as intermediaries between USAID and local organizations. However, awarding subgrants to organizations that have never received federal funds can increase labor and decrease efficiency for implementers, while administrative barriers make the partnership process even more onerous for local actors. These barriers disproportionately affect organizations run by and for historically marginalized groups, which face acute capacity constraints. USAID/DRC may consider leveraging the Agency's emergent contracting mechanisms to advance more equitable partnerships:

- *Raise awareness about existing NPI resources at the Mission level.* USAID offers formal guidance and quick reference guides on NPI standard practices and definitions, accountability and feedback plans, and partner landscaping designed to help USAID operating units and

contracting officers in diversifying USAID's partner base.²⁰ Increased awareness and use of NPI resources may help Mission staff more easily identify and support organizations that serve marginalized communities.

- *Make NPI resources more accessible to local actors.* NPI resources are not lacking for prospective awardees, despite perceptions that information about funding opportunities and registration is scarce. The USAID Partnerships Incubator platform contains key information about funding opportunities for local and non-traditional partners. However, the information (1) may be inaccessible to francophone audiences, and (2) can contribute to perceptions of administrative burden due to information saturation. Instead of developing new materials, USAID/DRC and its prime contractors could work to curate, disseminate, and encourage use of existing NPI resources through webinars or public information sessions.
- *Advance equity in large grant programs.* For ongoing programs that disperse large sums of grant money, USAID/DRC may suggest quotas for “newcomers” in the selection of sub-awardees, and/or require that a fixed percentage of prime contractor funds reach these organizations in future initiatives. While establishing hard quotas for organizations that support marginalized groups may prove impractical or unfeasible, assessments of grant applications can qualitatively consider organizational characteristics to better account for member composition and background.

Strategy 3. Establish a minimum technical assistance support package for new and non-traditional partners and earmark a pot of funds to support current partners that demonstrate a commitment to ID. Whether engaged through a large grant program or a conventional sub-award, new and non-traditional partners require designated funding to strengthen technical, organizational, and grant management capacity. “High-dosage” capacity support is particularly relevant to organizations whose members are disproportionately affected by education disparity, safety concerns, or other forms of discrimination. For future activities, USAID/DRC’s implementing partners can consider providing a minimum capacity support package to new and non-traditional partners, which calls for an explicit assignment of costs in activity budget proposals. For existing programs, USAID/DRC ought to allocate a small pot of funds that can be used to modify existing contracts that demonstrate commitment to ID. Partners could specify how they plan to use these funds through GESI plans they develop in close collaboration with USAID and other relevant stakeholders.

Strategy 4. Dedicate sufficient time and resources to co-create GESI strategies with the input of USAID/DRC contracting officers, activity-level GESI advisors, CSO actors, and affected communities. The development of robust GESI strategies can be time-consuming and labor-intensive. IDA participants affirm that the most successful strategic frameworks are those that entail multiple tiers of community consultation, carried out through formal feedback mechanisms, needs assessments, and engagement with local leadership platforms. Implementing partners are encouraged to develop GESI strategies early in the program lifecycle in close collaboration with USAID/DRC and activity-level GESI advisors, and must also plan for extensive consultation with local actors and affected communities in line with NPI’s co-creation principles.²¹ The Mission ought to allocate sufficient resources for the development of GESI strategies, and the typical 90-day window for delivery of work plans and MEL plans must also account for this timing.

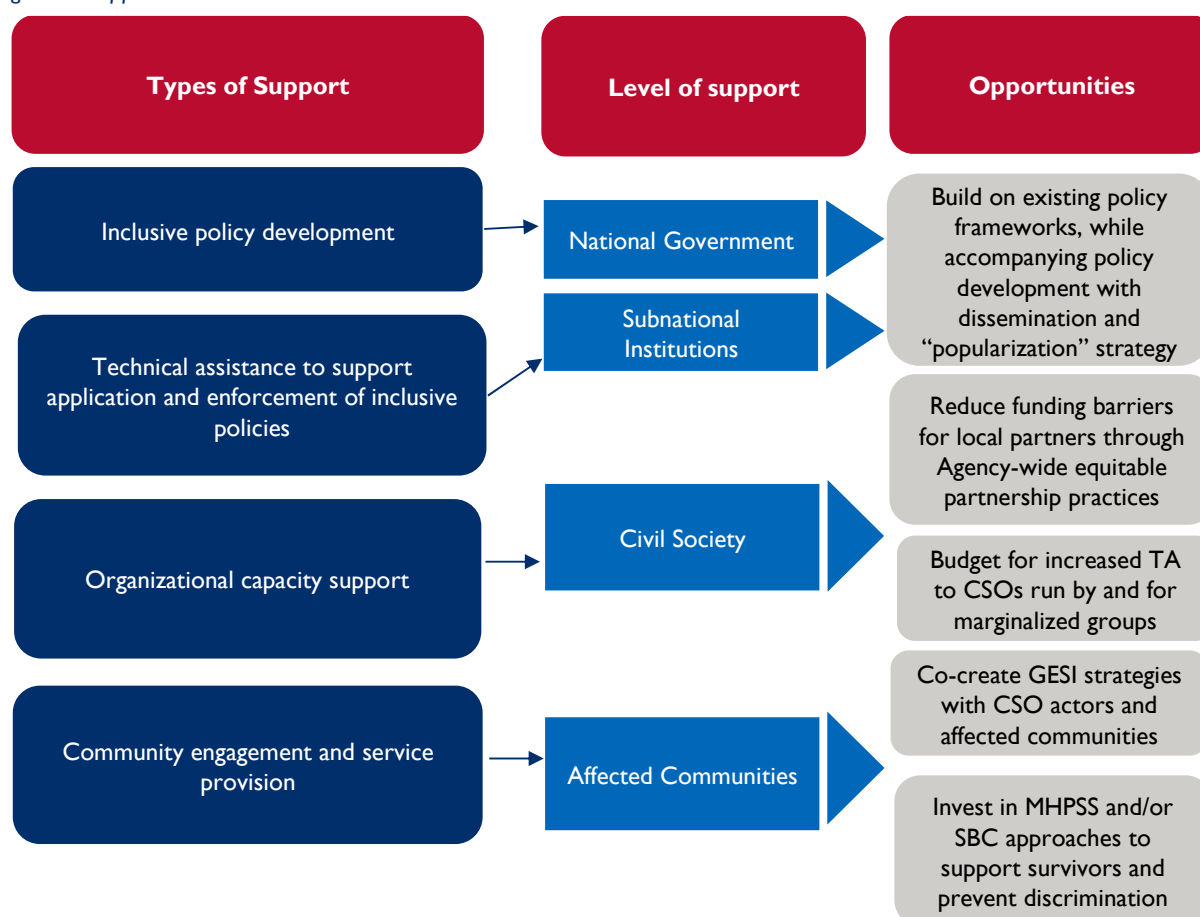
²⁰ See “NPI Links” under New Partnership Initiative Standard Practices and Definitions: <https://www.usaid.gov/npi/npi-key-definitions>.

²¹ See NPI’s interactive co-creation guide for more information: <https://www.usaid.gov/npi/capacity-building-indicator-resources/co-creation-interactive-guide>.

Strategy 5. Invest in trauma-informed approaches to support survivors of GBV, TIP, and ethnically motivated violence, complemented with social and behavior change methods to influence cultural norms and beliefs about marginalized groups. At the individual level, psychological distress and experiences of trauma constitute major barriers to the participation of traditionally marginalized groups in various facets of public life, from enrollment in formal education to civic and economic activities. USAID/DRC is compelled to continue investing in mental health and psychosocial support services to support survivors of violence, discrimination, and abuse. Trauma-informed approaches, such as provision of safe spaces, counseling services, and support groups, enhance individual agency and improve the enabling environment for socioeconomic reintegration. In addition, incorporating social and behavior change approaches—including social cohesion messaging—into relevant programming can mitigate the development of discriminatory attitudes that perpetuate violence.

Figure 11 summarizes the sector- and population-agnostic strategies revealed through the IDA that could support USAID/DRC in its ID journey.

Figure 11. Opportunities to advance ID across USAID/DRC activities and technical sectors



POPULATION-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS: WOMEN AND YOUTH

Opportunity 1: Increase access to civic education through participatory consultation frameworks and accessible communications channels. IDA participants identify several entry points to increase access to civic education for marginalized communities. Participatory community consultation frameworks (*cadre officiel de concertation*) improve dissemination of essential information on the electoral process to women, youth, and Indigenous communities, while combating myths and misconceptions about democratic systems. Accessible elections communications for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and expansion of information delivered through community radios outside of

Kinshasa (both in terms of content and reach) can help address civic information gaps at scale, while addressing sensory obstacles and illiteracy.

Opportunity 2: Establish or reinforce inclusive decision-making platforms to increase the influence and strengthen leadership capacity of women and youth. Promoting underrepresented groups via established decision-making platforms can both increase their influence in the short term and strengthen leadership capacity to prepare them for public service in the long term. IDA participants identify numerous platforms for increased influence of women and youth, such as micro-credit associations, university clubs, farmer’s cooperatives, local development committees (*comités locaux de développement*), community forestry concessions, and more. This recommendation presents opportunities across USAID/DRC’s core technical areas, especially DRG, economic growth, and the environment.

Opportunity 3. Continue to support public- and private-sector entities in inclusive education—traditional, vocational or remedial—to reduce fundamental inequities that hinder participation in civic affairs. Many IDA participants believe that civic and economic empowerment begins with education. USAID/DRC’s ongoing investments in education finance and inclusive education to better serve girls and underrepresented communities attest to institutional recognition of these approaches, which respond to perceived needs across IDA sites and sub-populations. Beyond access to formal education, lifelong learning (e.g., technical training, remedial education, and adult literacy initiatives) offer viable pathways out of poverty for people who never attended school—particularly Indigenous Pygmy People, who unequivocally cite limited access to education as the primary source of their marginalization.

POPULATION-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS: INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLE

Opportunity 4: Implement RBAs in partnership with Indigenous-led organizations to protect land rights and traditional livelihoods. USAID partners have found success in supporting Indigenous women to secure land rights through advocacy and RBAs, with measurable results. Partners view RBA as easily replicable across geographies. There are several nationally registered NGOs USAID could partner with to implement RBA to support Indigenous communities.

Opportunity 5: Build institutional trust through stakeholder consultations and the FPIC principles. Indigenous Pygmy People widely believe their communities are not adequately consulted before important decisions affecting them are made. IDA participants affirm that operationalizing FPIC principles is essential to building trust among communities with historical experiences of conservation displacement or associated human rights violations. USAID implementing partners working in the conservation and natural resources management sectors are well positioned to initiate FPIC processes. Specific approaches include the establishment of grievance and redress mechanisms that allow Indigenous Pygmy People to contest protected area policies and practices, or the *Whakatane* conflict resolution mechanism, a four-step process to “enable Indigenous peoples and/or local communities affected by protected areas to address and redress the effects of historic and current injustices against them” (IUCN 2012).

Opportunity 6. Implement gender-transformative approaches to balance the needs of Indigenous women and men. Gender-transformative approaches in Indigenous communities can be designed to address the needs of both women and men, mitigating perceptions that development activities usurp cultural norms or favor women’s interests. Examples from the IDA include targeted communications that highlight the community-wide benefits of women’s empowerment, engage influential men in the promotion of women’s rights, and support interaction of men and women through grassroots governance structures.

Opportunity 7. Promote champions of inclusion such as school officials, religious leaders, and customary authorities who can intervene on behalf of Indigenous Pygmy People and influence community attitudes. As influential figures embedded within local structures and familiar with local customs, champions intervene on behalf of Indigenous Pygmy People to advocate for their inclusion in social and economic life. Champions can be identified and promoted across institutions and levels of government.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I. LIST OF QUALITATIVE DATA SOURCES

Below is a list of qualitative data sources cited throughout this report.

ID	CLASSIFICATION	PROVINCE/SITE	RESPONDENT GROUP
1	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - Environment
2	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - Education
3	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - DRG
4	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - Sub-awardee (Health)
5	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - DRG
6	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - DRG
7	KII	Kinshasa	USAID Implementing Partner - Environment
8	KII	Kinshasa	Person with disability
9	KII	Kinshasa	Person with disability
10	KII	Kinshasa	Person with disability
11	KII	Kinshasa	LGBTQI
12	KII	Kinshasa	LGBTQI
13	KII	Kinshasa	LGBTQI
14	KII	Kinshasa	LGBTQI
15	KII	Kinshasa	GBV or TIP Victim
16	KII	Kinshasa	GBV or TIP Victim
17	KII	Kinshasa	GBV or TIP Victim
18	KII	Kinshasa	Community leader
19	KII	Kinshasa	Community leader
20	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Civil Society Actors
21	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Civil Society Actors
22	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Person with disability
23	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Person with disability
24	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	IDPs

ID	CLASSIFICATION	PROVINCE/SITE	RESPONDENT GROUP
25	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	IDPs
25a	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	IDPs
26	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Community leader
27	KII	Tshopo (Kisangani)	Community leader (Indigenous)
28	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Civil Society Actors
29	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Civil Society Actors
30	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Civil Society Actors
31	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Civil Society Actors
32	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	GBV or TIP Victim
33	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	GBV or TIP Victim
34	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Community leader
35	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Community leader
35a	KII	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Community leader
36	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Civil Society Actors
37	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Civil Society Actors
38	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Civil Society Actors
39	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Person with disability
40	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Person with disability
41	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	IDPs
42	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Community leader (Indigenous)
43	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Community leader (Indigenous)
43a	KII	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Community leader (Indigenous)
44	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Civil Society Actors
45	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Civil Society Actors (USAID sub-awardee)
46	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Civil Society Actors
47	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Person with disability
48	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Person with disability
49	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	LGBTQI

ID	CLASSIFICATION	PROVINCE/SITE	RESPONDENT GROUP
50	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	LGBTQI
51	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	IDPs
52	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Civil Society Actors
53	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	GBV or TIP Victim
54	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	GBV or TIP Victim
55	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Community leader
56	KII	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Community leader
57	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
58	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
59	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
60	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
61	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Person with disability
62	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Person with disability
63	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	LGBTQI
64	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	LGBTQI – former USAID project participant
65	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
66	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Civil Society Actors
67	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	GBV or TIP Victim
68	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	GBV or TIP Victim
69	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Community leader
70	KII	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Community leader

ID	CLASSIFICATION	PROVINCE/SITE	GROUPE DE PARTICIPANT	INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY
1	FGD	Kinshasa	Young men (18-29)	No
2	FGD	Kinshasa	Young women (18-29)	No
3	FGD	Tshopo (Bafwasende)	Young men (18-29)	Yes
4	FGD	Tshopo (Bafwasende)	Young women (18-29)	Yes

ID	CLASSIFICATION	PROVINCE/SITE	GROUPE DE PARTICIPANT	INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY
5	FGD	Tshopo (Bafwasende)	Non-youth men (30+)	Yes
6	FGD	Tshopo (Bafwasende)	Non-youth women (30+)	Yes
7	FGD	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Young men (18-29)	Yes
8	FGD	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Young women (18-29)	Yes
9	FGD	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Non-youth men (30+)	Yes
10	FGD	Haut-Uélé (Isiro)	Non-youth women (30+)	Yes
11	FGD	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Young men (18-29)	Yes
12	FGD	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Young women (18-29)	Yes
13	FGD	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Non-youth men (30+)	Yes
14	FGD	Mai-Ndombe (Inongo)	Non-youth women (30+)	Yes
15	FGD	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Young men (18-29)	No
16	FGD	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Young women (18-29)	No
17	FGD	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Non-youth men (30+)	No
18	FGD	Haut-Katanga (Lubumbashi)	Non-youth women (30+)	No
19	FGD	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Young men (18-29)	No
20	FGD	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Young women (18-29)	No
21	FGD	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Non-youth men (30+)	No
22	FGD	Kasai Oriental (Mbuji-Mayi)	Non-youth women (30+)	No

ANNEX 2. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments can be viewed at the following hyperlinks.

Quantitative

- [Quantitative survey questionnaire \(EN\)](#)
- [Quantitative survey questionnaire \(FR\)](#)

Qualitative

- [FGD Guide – General Population and IPs \(EN\)](#)
- [FGD Guide – General Population and IPs \(FR\)](#)
- [KII Guide – Marginalized Group Representatives \(EN\)](#)
- [KII Guide – Marginalized Group Representatives \(FR\)](#)
- [KII Guide – IPs, CSOs, and Service Providers \(EN\)](#)
- [KII Guide – IPs, CSOs, and Service Providers \(FR\)](#)
- [KII Guide – Community Leaders \(EN\)](#)
- [KII Guide – Community Leaders \(FR\)](#)
- [Informed Consent \(EN\)](#)
- [Informed Consent \(FR\)](#)

ANNEX 3. TECHNICAL NOTES – SURVEY SAMPLING AND ANALYSIS

Section 2: Research Questions, Methods, and Limitations describes the proportional quota sampling approach used for the quantitative survey. This section provides further context on data quality verification processes and sample weights calculation.

IDAMS partnered with Xantonn Consulting Group LLC, a Goma-based market research and analytics firm, to engage enumerators and collect survey data across the six provinces. Survey data collection took place from August 29 to September 8, 2023. Xantonn was responsible for survey logistics and coordination, oversight of data collection, and data quality verification (DQV). Measures undertaken to ensure high-quality survey data included:

- Conducting a virtual training and refresher training for the data collection team to make sure enumerators were familiar with the tool.
- Using a computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) digital platform (KoboCollect) to limit data entry and transcription errors.
- Geo-tagging survey observations with GPS coordinates; cases outside the specified geographic zone were discarded during the DQV process.
- Recording interview audio files, allowing data collection managers to conduct audio checks to verify outliers or inconsistencies.
- Carrying out routine data checks for completeness and accuracy throughout data collection; supervisors flagged and analyzed select audio files to confirm approval or removal from the dataset.
- Removing incomplete interviews, observations where consent was not given, and pre-test data from the survey dataset.

More than 9 in 10 (93%) surveys collected passed the DQV process. Enumerators collected a total of 1,551 interviews across the six provinces, of which 105 were discarded during DQV due to unverifiable audio content, poor survey administration, invalid GPS coordinates, or other deficiencies.

The DQV process resulted in slight imbalance between the planned and achieved survey samples in certain provinces, shown in *Table 6*. The imbalance is attributed to purposive over-sampling in each province to offset anticipated deletions during the DQV process and varying performance of data collection teams. Higher performing teams in geographies such as Haut-Katanga experienced fewer DQV rejections, whereas lower-performing teams in other geographies (e.g., Mai-Ndombe and Haut-Uélé) experienced comparatively more rejections.

To account for this imbalance, IDAMS applied a simple weighting formula to calculate survey weights. The purpose of assigning weights is to correct discrepancies between the planned and achieved sample sizes, ensuring that the analysis appropriately reflects the intended distribution of the population across different respondent groups and geographies. The weighting formula is represented as follows:

$$Weight = \frac{Planned\ sample\ size}{Achieved\ sample\ size}$$

Where:

- *Weight* represents the weight assigned to each observation for a given quota group (e.g., age and gender groups in each province) within the achieved sample
- *Planned sample size* represents the originally intended sample size for each quota group based on provincial-level population statistics pulled from the *DRC Annuaire Statistique* (INS 2019)

- *Achieved sample size* represents the actual number of observations obtained for each quota group during the survey.

Table 6 compares the planned and achieved sample size with the corresponding weight ratio for each respondent group.

Table 6. Planned vs. achieved survey sample size and survey weights ratio

IDAMS PROVINCES	YOUNG WOMEN (AGE 15–29)	NON-YOUTH WOMEN (AGE 30+)	YOUNG MEN (AGE 15–29)	NON-YOUTH MEN (AGE 30+)
Tshopo	Planned: 54 Achieved: 57 Ratio: 0.9551	Planned: 70 Achieved: 66 Ratio: 1.0534	Planned: 55 Achieved: 61 Ratio: 0.9026	Planned: 61 Achieved: 64 Ratio: 0.9527
Kasai Oriental	Planned: 61 Achieved: 64 Ratio: 0.9576	Planned: 61 Achieved: 60 Ratio: 1.0215	Planned: 62 Achieved: 68 Ratio: 0.9188	Planned: 55 Achieved: 61 Ratio: 0.9008
Kinshasa	Planned: 56 Achieved: 52 Ratio: 1.0786	Planned: 62 Achieved: 57 Ratio: 1.0962	Planned: 55 Achieved: 65 Ratio: 0.8480	Planned: 66 Achieved: 66 Ratio: 1.0047
Mai-Ndombe	Planned: 61 Achieved: 47 Ratio: 1.2956	Planned: 65 Achieved: 51 Ratio: 1.2814	Planned: 60 Achieved: 54 Ratio: 1.1152	Planned: 54 Achieved: 47 Ratio: 1.1390
Haut-Uélé	Planned: 54 Achieved: 43 Ratio: 1.2652	Planned: 70 Achieved: 41 Ratio: 1.6957	Planned: 55 Achieved: 48 Ratio: 1.1538	Planned: 61 Achieved: 63 Ratio: 0.9633
Haut-Katanga	Planned: 63 Achieved: 88 Ratio: 0.7145	Planned: 59 Achieved: 68 Ratio: 0.8665	Planned: 63 Achieved: 85 Ratio: 0.7462	Planned: 55 Achieved: 70 Ratio: 0.7826

ANNEX 4. REGIONAL OVERVIEWS

Our regional overviews shed light on key survey findings and qualitative trends in each of the six provincial capitals. Note that due to limited sample sizes at the provincial level (n=195 - n=309) and the non-probability sampling approaches employed, these findings capture high-level trends but may not be generalizable to the entire population. *Figure 12* through *Figure 15*, referenced throughout, are found at the end of this section.

KINSHASA

Kinshasa is the largest city and political capital of the DRC, with an estimated population of 13.9 million in 2019 (INS 2019). As a destination for migrants seeking economic opportunity, Kinshasa has a diverse population representing various ethnic and cultural groups from across the country; Lingala and French are widely spoken languages. The city is a major economic hub with a variety of industries, including finance, commerce, manufacturing, and agribusiness (Ministère du Plan 2023). The city's urban landscape includes a mix of modern infrastructure and informal settlements; as one of Africa's fastest-growing cities, the rapid urbanization of Kinshasa has exacerbated challenges related to congestion, poverty, and inadequate public services (Vang Eghoff and Ranarividy 2019). USAID funds development programming in Kinshasa in the health, economic growth, DRG, youth and education, and peace and security sectors (USAID 2023).

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=228)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Twenty-one percent (21) percent of Kinshasa survey respondents believe that people with physical disabilities are engaged in community decision-making processes, which is substantially higher than the proportion of respondents across provinces (8%) (*Figure 12*).
- **Women's economic empowerment.** Women in Kinshasa are significantly more involved in household financial decision-making than in other provinces; 53 percent of Kinshasan survey respondents report that women's opinions are taken into consideration in financial matters (compared to 29% across provinces), while 14 percent report that women have exclusive decision-making about household finances (compared to 7% across provinces) (

- *Figure 13*).
- **Barriers to civic engagement.** In Kinshasa, lack of information on civic engagement is perceived as less of a barrier to the civic participation of marginalized groups when compared to other provinces (only 13% of Kinshasan survey respondents report this as a barrier, compared to 54% across the sample). “Lack of self-confidence” (40%) and lack of financial resources/funding (34%) are viewed as the other top barriers in Kinshasa (*Figure 14*).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** Kinshasans are the geographic cohort the most receptive to leadership and mentoring programs as a means of increasing the influence of marginalized groups within their community (33%, compared to 12% across provinces) (*Figure 15*).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs** (*Table 6*). Kinshasan respondents (23%) are somewhat more accepting of LGBTQI+ rights and legal protections than respondents across provinces (16%), but significant anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment persists.

QUALITATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Disillusionment due to corruption and urban poverty.** IDA participants in Kinshasa are quick to condemn corruption within the political establishment, the exclusion of young candidates from electoral lists, gender disparities in the political realm, and social issues relating to urban poverty that discourage young people from participation in civic affairs (e.g., substance misuse and crime). Young people criticize wealthy individuals and members of the political elite who commit crimes for avoiding prosecution through bribery or political favors. These factors contribute to low levels of political efficacy among urban youth, fueling feelings of resignation and apathy toward political activity.
- **Impact of RBA on persons with disabilities.** Persons with disabilities note that the enforcement of laws intended to make political participation more accessible has brought about tangible benefits (e.g., reasonable accommodation to support voter registration for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing). This aligns with survey findings that people with physical disabilities are more involved in decision-making in Kinshasa than in other provincial capitals.
- **Digital information campaigns targeting LGBTQI+ issues.** Members of the LGBTQI+ community note that while initiatives to support their inclusion in decision-making processes are rare, CSOs have found success implementing digital information campaigns (e.g., podcasts and webinars) to raise awareness about LGBTQI+ issues. “Virtual” advocacy efforts are seen as effective due to their widened reach and low-risk mode of delivery, which helps protect advocates or allies from violent confrontation.
- **Strategies to engage women and youth.** Community gatekeepers and civil society actors emphasize the importance of RBA, inclusive leadership platforms, and leadership development programs in better engaging women and youth.

LUBUMBASHI, HAUT KATANGA

Lubumbashi is the provincial capital of Haut Katanga, a mineral-rich province in southeastern DRC with an estimated population of 5.4 million (INS 2019). Lubumbashi is known for its mining activities, particularly copper, cobalt, and zinc mining (Ministère du Plan 2023). The city’s economy revolves around mining and related industries, contributing significantly to the DRC’s export revenue (Yager 2022). However, economic disparities and resource-related conflicts are prevalent challenges, caused, in part, by competition between industrial and artisanal miners (Crisis Group 2020). The greater province of Haut Katanga has experienced decades of inter-ethnic conflict resulting in persecution of the Kasaïen-Luba minority and, more recently, between ethnic Luba militias and Indigenous Pygmy (Batwa) People (IRB of Canada 1997; HRV 2015). USAID funds development programming in Haut Katanga, primarily in the health, economic growth, and DRG sectors (USAID 2023).

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=309)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Perceived involvement of women and youth in decision-making processes in Lubumbashi parallels sample-wide trends, with about 35 percent and 30 percent of the sample reporting that women and youth are “somewhat” or “very” engaged, respectively (*Figure 12*).
- **Women’s economic empowerment.** Women are reportedly less involved in household financial decision-making than in most other provinces, with 20 percent of survey respondents reporting that women benefit from “shared” decision-making and only 2 percent reporting that women have exclusive financial decision-making (

- Figure 13).
- **Barriers to civic engagement of marginalized groups.** Civic information gaps are by and large the greatest perceived barrier to the political participation of marginalized groups in Lubumbashi (87%), followed by lack of resources to fund civic activities (76%). These figures are significantly higher than in other provinces (Figure 14).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** In alignment with the perceived barriers, access to civic education (79%) and economic empowerment (60%) are seen as the top entry points to increase the influence of marginalized groups. Survey respondents in Lubumbashi are also more receptive to the impact of legal instruments and RBA (21%) than other geographic cohorts (Figure 15).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs.** Measures of social inclusion are typically higher in Lubumbashi than other provinces, especially concerning equal career and leadership opportunities for women. However, survey respondents in Lubumbashi tend to be less supportive of the cultural preservation and traditional practices of Indigenous Pygmy People (60%) than in other provinces (Table 6).

QUALITATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Issues affecting young women.** The intersection of age and gender is a common theme among IDA participants in Lubumbashi, who report that young women—and particularly those living in rural areas—lack representation in decision-making platforms, face employment discrimination due to preconceived notions about their professional competencies and have more difficulty securing rights to land ownership.
- **Prevalence of GBV and limitations of RBA.** The IDA produces numerous reports of GBV against young women and members of the LGBTQI+ community. While some women have found success leveraging legal frameworks to denounce GBV to local authorities, men-who-have sex-with-men GBV survivors have reportedly experienced discrimination—and even arbitrary arrest—when attempting to report cases.
- **Calls for improved coordination between civil society actors.** As southern DRC’s most populous urban center, Lubumbashi benefits from an expansive network of CSOs that support marginalized groups in leadership development, health care provision, advocacy, and more. CSO actors have found success implementing sensitization campaigns to counter GBV and raise awareness about women’s legal rights, but some believe that CSOs carrying out complementary work could benefit from improved coordination to increase their collective impact.
- **Potential for social accountability approaches.** Young men affirm that local government authorities must be held accountable to their constituents. Social accountability approaches such as “citizen audits” (“*contrôle citoyen*”) can help ensure that grievances are not only expressed, but also addressed in the translation of advocacy into action.

MBUJI-MAYI, KASAI ORIENTAL

Mbuji-Mayi is the provincial capital of Kasai Oriental province (estimated population of 3.6 million, INS 2019), sometimes referred to as the “diamond capital of the world” due to its large-scale industrial diamond mining activities (Marion 2013, Ministère du Plan 2023). The broader Kasai region, encompassing five provinces, witnessed a large-scale humanitarian crisis following a chieftaincy conflict between the central government in Kinshasa and supporters of the traditional leadership system from 2016 to 2017 (OHCHR 2022). The crisis spurred mass displacement, human rights violations, and extreme food insecurity that continue to affect Kasaians, with substantial negative impacts on children, women, and girls (CARE 2017, Toma 2018). In addition to the humanitarian assistance provided by USAID/BHA, USAID funds health, economic growth, youth and education, and DRG programs in Kasai Oriental.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=253)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Perceived involvement of women and youth in decision-making processes in Mbuji-Mayi roughly parallels sample-wide trends, but perceived involvement of Indigenous Pygmy People is much lower (10%, compared to 23% across provinces) (*Figure 12*).
- **Women's economic empowerment.** Similar to geographic cohorts other than Kinshasa, women in Mbuji-Mayi are perceived to have very limited involvement in household financial decision-making, with nearly two-thirds of the sample indicating that women have limited or no involvement in household finances (

- *Figure 13).*
- **Barriers to civic engagement of marginalized groups.** Gender-based discrimination (34%) and age-based discrimination (31%) are more often perceived as barriers to the political participation of marginalized groups in Mbuji-Maji than in other provinces. More than a quarter of survey respondents (26%) cite “language barrier or communication challenges” as a barrier—a significantly higher proportion than elsewhere (*Figure 14*).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** Apart from economic empowerment (69%), there is less consensus on the top pathways to increased influence of marginalized groups in Mbuji-Mayi. About a third (34%) of survey respondents report “access to civic education” as the most important type of support, followed by legal instruments/RBA (18%) and formal alliances with non-marginalized groups (15%) (*Figure 15*).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs.** Measures of social inclusion tend to be much lower in Mbuji-Mayi than in other provinces. Survey respondents are substantially less likely to support equal leadership, professional, and educational opportunities for women; less likely to value the contributions of young people to community development; and less supportive of Indigenous rights and cultural preservation than other geographic cohorts (*Table 6*).

QUALITATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Information sharing via humanitarian clusters.** In light of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Kasais, CSO actors in Mbuji-Mayi perceive humanitarian clusters as potential information sources about ongoing donor-funded activities to support vulnerable groups. While humanitarian response has become more regulated through coordination mechanisms and inter-agency working groups, local actors feel that they are not adequately represented in these structures and thus, remain unaware of important decisions and funding opportunities.
- **Engaging at-risk youth.** Partners working in the DRG sector deploy complementary strategies to engage vulnerable youth. For example, USAID sub-awardee specializing in electoral civic education and participatory governance supports young taximen (“*motards*”) known to be exploited by local officials to undertake politically motivated violence. Multiple tiers of engagement—for example, involving affected communities in rumor tracking, civic education, and electoral observation activities—effectively address misinformation while providing opportunities for involvement in civic spaces.
- **Socioeconomic reintegration of the most vulnerable.** As in other geographies, IDPs interviewed in Mbuji-Maji lack access to essential needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. GBV survivors reportedly face acute socioeconomic disempowerment accompanied by social exclusion and psychosocial distress. IDA participants view socioeconomic reintegration of the extremely vulnerable as a necessary enabling factor for participation in all aspects of public life, echoing survey findings that highlight “economic empowerment” as the most salient entry point.

KISANGANI, TSHOPO

Kisangani is the provincial capital of Tshopo province (estimated population of 2.6 million, INS 2019). Situated along the Congo River in DRC’s northern forest region, Kisangani is a vital trading and transportation hub with a diverse economy that includes agro-industry, mining, artisanal and industrial logging, and more (Ministère du Plan 2023, CAFI 2023). In 2011, Tshopo was one of the first provinces of the DRC to be selected for the implementation of REDD+ deforestation projects (Majambu et al. 2022). While Kisangani is known for its ethnic heterogeneity, the forest areas surrounding the provincial capital are home to Indigenous Pygmy People and local communities increasingly supported in sustainable natural resources management practices through community forestry concessions (Nsamba 2023). USAID funds development programming in Tshopo in the environment, DRG, economic growth, and health sectors (USAID 2023).

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=248)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Perceived involvement of youth (51%) and Indigenous Pygmy People (34%) in community decision-making processes is reportedly higher in Kisangani than the sample-wide trends (40% and 23%, respectively) (*Figure 12*).
- **Women's economic empowerment.** Women's perceived involvement in household financial decision-making in Kisangani is particularly low, with less than a quarter of the sample reporting that women have shared or exclusive decision-making power (

- *Figure 13).*
- **Barriers to civic engagement of marginalized groups.** Perceived barriers to the civic and political participation of marginalized groups in Kisangani parallel sample-wide trends, with lack of information (61%) and lack of self-esteem (45%) figuring as the top barriers. Perceptions of gender- and age-based discrimination are slightly less common in Kisangani than in other provinces (*Figure 14*).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** Survey respondents in Kisangani tend to be more partial to the establishment of formal leadership platforms to increase the influence of traditionally marginalized groups than in other geographies (30% report this as an important type of support). Paralleling sample-wide trends, access to civic education is still perceived as the most important type of support (59%) (*Figure 15*).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs.** Measures of social inclusion are much lower in Kisangani than other geographies surveyed, with the exception of Mbuji-Mayi. Survey respondents are substantially less likely to support equal leadership, professional, and educational opportunities for women; less likely to value the contributions of young people to community development; and less supportive of Indigenous rights and cultural preservation (*Table 6*).

QUALITATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Socio-economic impacts of ethnic discrimination.** Tshopo is the only province where data collection was carried out both within and outside of a provincial capital, as field teams traveled to nearby Bafwasende to meet with Indigenous Pygmy People communities. FGDs with these communities reveal reports of widespread ethnic discrimination against the Batwa people at the hands of the neighboring Bali (a Bantu ethnic group). Ethnic discrimination reportedly contributes to disparity in land tenure and housing, access to health and legal services, and exclusion of Indigenous Pygmy People from decision-making platforms. Indigenous Pygmy People IDA participants widely view access to formal education (e.g., through government incentives, subsidies, and scholarships) as the most promising pathway to economic empowerment.
- **Existence of inclusive leadership platforms.** In line with the survey findings, several IDA participants highlight the role of inclusive leadership platforms as viable pathways to increased influence. Examples given include a local commission dedicated to disability rights and a committee dedicated to supporting victims of war crimes, chaired by a group of survivors (including those with physical disabilities). Indigenous communities lament that similar platforms rarely exist for their people despite the efforts of local NGOs to encourage the participation of Indigenous Pygmy People in sustainable forest resource management through community forestry concessions.
- **Government's role in supporting marginalized groups.** Civil society actors and disability advocates view employment discrimination as the greatest barrier to the socioeconomic integration of persons with disabilities in Kisangani, with IDA participants noting that local CSOs dedicated to disability rights are often the sole sources of income generation for people with significant physical impairments. While recognizing the critical role of civil society in supporting affected communities, some IDA participants believe that the government should do more to reinforce social safety nets and ensure the representation of marginalized groups in local institutions.

ISIRO, HAUT-UELÉ

Located in DRC's extreme northeast, Isiro is the provincial capital of Haut-Uélé (estimated population of 2.05 million, INS 2019). The local economy is largely driven by agriculture, including coffee, cocoa, palm oil, manioc, and maize production, as well as its timber industry (Ministère du Plan 2023). Isiro has faced insecurity in recent years due to sporadic intercommunity violence in

Haut-Uélé and protracted conflict in neighboring Ituri province (Sengenya 2016). Haut-Uélé encompasses parts of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a protected area where USAID funds ongoing conservation, land management, and law enforcement activities with an emphasis on inclusion of the Indigenous Efe and Mbuti people, who call the reserve their ancestral home (USAID 2022b). IDAMS’s qualitative assessment in Haut-Uélé focuses largely on the experiences of Indigenous Pygmy People.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=195)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Among all geographies surveyed, Isiro is the provincial capital where perceived involvement of Indigenous Pygmy People in community decision-making processes is the highest (43% of survey respondents report that Indigenous Pygmy People are “somewhat” or “very” engaged). It is important to note that quantitative findings—based on a Bantu-majority sample—contrast sharply with the qualitative testimonies of Indigenous FGD participants who condemn systematic exclusion (*Figure 12*).
- **Women’s economic empowerment.** Less than a third of survey respondents in Isiro report that women exercise shared or exclusive decision-making power with household financial resources, paralleling trends across all provinces other than Kinshasa (

- Figure 13).
- **Barriers to civic engagement of marginalized groups.** Lack of information on civic engagement (74%), gender-based discrimination (33%), lack of self-esteem (31%), and age-based discrimination (28%) are the most commonly reported factors that prevent marginalized groups from participating in civic activities in Isiro (Figure 14).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** Survey respondents in Isiro view access to civic education (64%), economic empowerment (32 %), and the establishment of leadership platforms (21%) as the most promising pathways to increasing the influence of marginalized groups, paralleling trends across the sample (Figure 15).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs.** Survey respondents in Isiro are generally more accepting of Indigenous rights and cultural preservation than in other geographies. About 9 in 10 survey respondents in Isiro somewhat or strongly agree that Indigenous Pygmy People should be supported in preserving their cultural heritage and traditional practices, while about 8 in 10 believe that Indigenous Pygmy People should have a legal right to manage land, water, and mineral resources found in their ancestral homes. Again, these figures contrast the reports of common abuse and discrimination among Indigenous IDA participants (see *Main Findings*) (Table 6).

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=195)

- **Perceptions of government abandonment among Indigenous Pygmy People.** Indigenous IDA participants in Haut-Uélé live in extreme poverty, approximately 7 kilometers from Isiro's center in the village of Nazareth. Perceptions of government abandonment are widespread, stemming from reports of poor service provision and unaddressed grievances. Indigenous Pygmy People condemn political leaders who seek votes on the campaign trail but fail to respect commitments, leading to belief that the political establishment neither understands nor takes Indigenous interests to heart.
- **Low levels of political efficacy among Indigenous Pygmy People.** Likewise, perceived exclusion from decision-making processes and lack of representation in local governance structures fuel a sense of political inefficacy among Indigenous Pygmy People of all ages, both men and women, who characterize political participation as unlikely to bring about social change. Education disparity and limited resources make political organization particularly difficult, and the few Indigenous candidates who do run for political office typically lose elections.
- **Issues affecting Indigenous women.** Paralleling trends highlighted in this report's *Main Findings*, there is broad consensus among IDA participants in Isiro that Indigenous women face acute disadvantages in terms of educational achievement, representation in leadership platforms, and control over household resources.
- **Institutional priorities and organizational capacity.** A CSO actor who advocates for Indigenous Pygmy People describes the role of civil society as a "bridging institution" ("*institution relais*") between marginalized groups and local authorities, noting that their advocacy work is not always fruitful due to low levels of government buy-in and institutional capacity. This corresponds to calls for the international community to strengthen organizational capacity so that local actors can design, implement, and monitor activities in close collaboration with public powers, and help convince affected communities that grievances are being addressed.

INONGO, MAI-NDOMBE

Inongo is the capital of Mai-Ndombe province (estimated population of 2.08 million, INS 2019). The province's economy primarily depends on traditional agricultural livelihoods (crop production and livestock), fishing, and hunting due to its proximity to Lake Mai-Ndombe and surrounding forestland (Ministère du Plan 2023). Despite its wealth of natural resources, Mai-Ndombe faces major

infrastructure-related challenges, poverty, and poor service provision, with Indigenous communities being disproportionately affected (Rainforest Foundation 2017). USAID currently funds conservation and biodiversity support initiatives in Mai-Ndombe under CARPE (USAID 2023). IDAMS's qualitative assessment in Mai-Ndombe focuses largely on the experiences of Indigenous Pygmy People.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (N=199)

- **Involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.** Perceived involvement of women (12%), youth (10%), and Indigenous Pygmy People (3%) in Inongo is substantially lower than in all other geographic cohorts surveyed. This finding aligns with common reports of exclusion by Indigenous IDA participants (see *Main Findings*) (*Figure 12*).
- **Women's economic empowerment.** Women's reported involvement in household financial decision-making is slightly higher in Inongo than in other provincial capitals, although the majority of survey respondents still report that women have limited (45%) or no involvement (15%) (

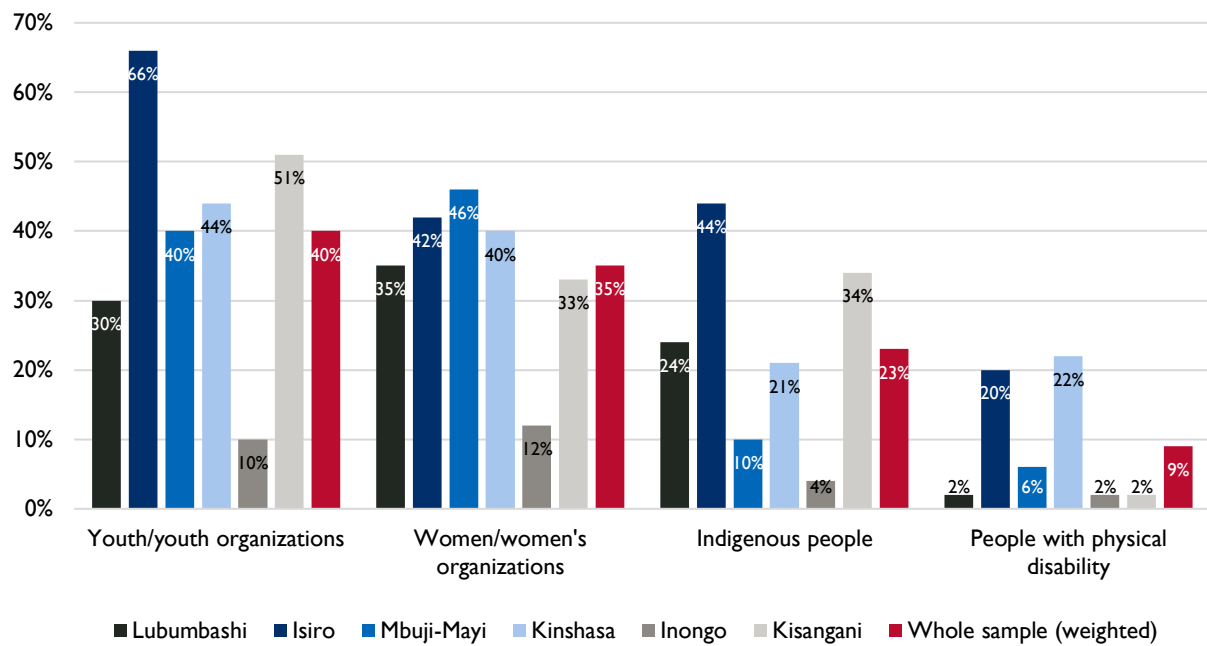
- *Figure 13*).
- **Barriers to civic engagement of marginalized groups.** When compared to other provincial capitals, gender-based discrimination (34%) and age-based discrimination (25%) in Inongo are more often reported as factors that prevent marginalized groups from participating in civic activities. Information gaps remain the most prevalent issue, with nearly three-quarters of respondents citing this as a barrier to civic participation (*Figure 14*).
- **Pathways to increased influence.** Survey respondents in Inongo overwhelmingly cite access to civic education (83%) and economic empowerment (51%) as the most important types of support to increase the influence of marginalized groups (*Figure 15*).
- **Cultural norms and beliefs.** Measures of social inclusion tend to be significantly higher in Inongo than in other provinces. The research team believes that these results may stem, in part, from social desirability bias considering the widespread reports of anti-Indigenous sentiments in Mai-Ndombe in the qualitative dataset (*Table 6*).²²

QUALITATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Reliance on traditional livelihoods.** Indigenous Pygmy People are economically dependent on traditional forest livelihoods, such as logging and hunting, but typically lack access to land titles or legal instruments to defend rights to land ownership.
- **Ethnic discrimination and lack of consultation.** Indigenous Pygmy People—especially young Indigenous men—express grievances over employment discrimination, as well as personal safety concerns stemming from intercommunity violence between Batwa peoples and the Bantu majority. Despite the expansion of inclusive REDD+ conservation programs in the greater Inongo territory, Indigenous Pygmy People residing near the provincial capital report that they are rarely consulted when decisions are made about communal resources.

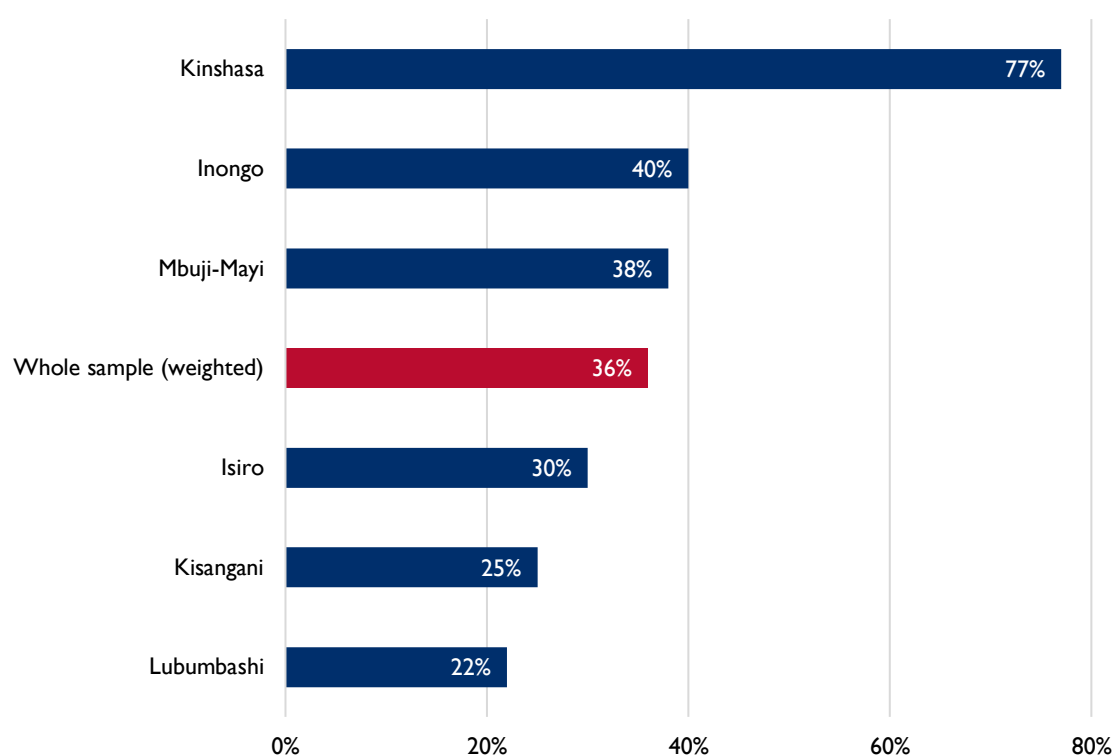
²² In survey research, social desirability bias is defined as “an individual’s propensity to respond in a way that is viewed favorably by society” (Teh et al. 2023). Social desirability bias occurs when respondents provide answers that they perceive as favorable instead of those that reflect their true beliefs, behaviors, or experiences, often because individuals prefer to present themselves in a positive light.

Figure 12. Perceived participation of community actors in decision-making processes, by site



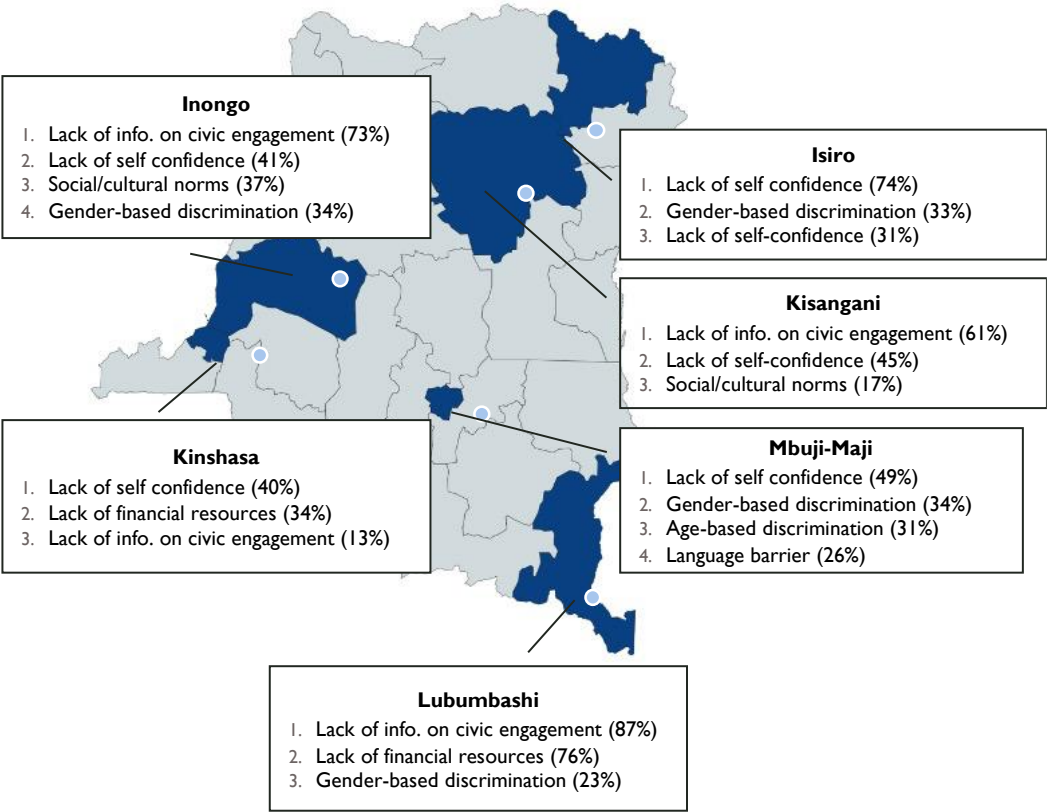
Plots percentage of subsample reporting each actor as “somewhat” or “very” engaged in decision-making (n=1,446)

Figure 13. Perceived involvement of women in household financial decision-making, by site



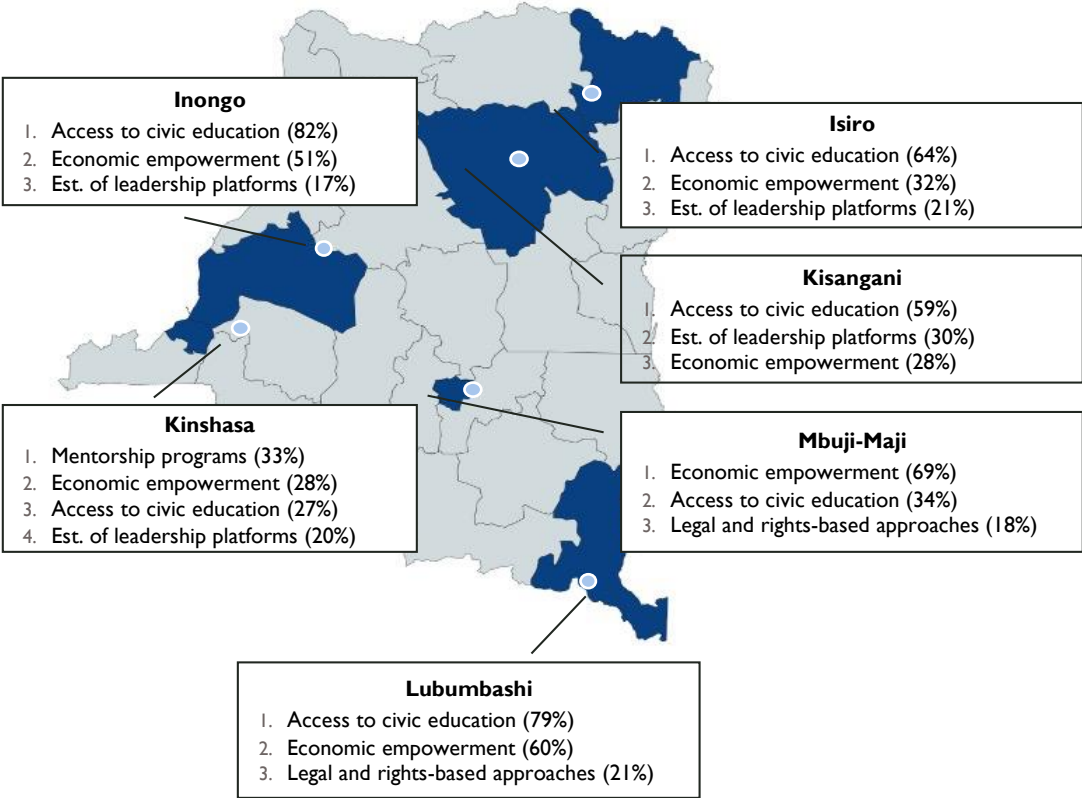
Plots percentage of respondents reporting that women have “shared” or “exclusive” household financial decision-making power (n=1,446)

Figure 14. Top perceived barriers to the civic participation of marginalized groups, by site



Displays percentage of survey respondents reporting each item as a barrier
(n=1,446, regional subsamples vary)

Figure 15. Top perceived pathways for increased influence of marginalized groups, by site



Displays percentage of survey respondents reporting each item as an entry point
(n=1,446, regional subsamples vary)

Table 6. Attitudes towards marginalized groups, by province

	WHOLE SAMPLE (WEIGHTED)	HAUT KATANGA	HAUT -UÉLÉ	KASAI- ORIENTAL	KINSHASA	MAI- NDOMBE	TSHOPO
“Women should have equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making roles in their communities.”	88%	94%	85%	84%	90%	98%	76%
“Women are capable of succeeding in professional life and should be provided equal access to educational and career opportunities.”	92%	99%	96%	87%	97%	98%	74%
“Young people possess valuable knowledge and skills that can contribute to the development of their communities.”	89%	96%	94%	78%	91%	97%	75%
“Indigenous communities should be respected and supported in preserving their cultural heritage and traditional practices.”	73%	60%	93%	41%	81%	99%	55%
“Indigenous communities should have a legal right to manage land, water, and mineral resources found in their ancestral homes.”	72%	84%	83%	41%	69%	95%	52%
“LGBTQI+ individuals should have equal rights and protections under the law and be able to fully participate in society without fear of persecution.”	16%	20%	16%	12%	23%	18%	11%

Indicates percentage of survey respondents who “agree” or “strongly” agree with each statement, by province.

Cells highlighted in red indicate frequencies that fall below the whole sample average; cells highlighted in blue are above the whole sample average.

ANNEX 5. POLICY AND LANDSCAPE REVIEW

The Policy and Landscape Review below provides an overview of drivers of and mitigating factors for vulnerability among key marginalized groups in DRC, with an emphasis on the existence or lack of legal instruments intended to protect the rights of marginalized groups.

INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLES

Population estimates of Indigenous Pygmy People in the DRC vary from 250,000 to 2 million (U.S. Department of State 2020). The primary groups that are considered to be Indigenous Pygmy People include the Mbuti, Baka, and Batwa peoples (IWGIA 2023). Indigenous Pygmy People's communities frequently lack access to health and education services and to decision-making processes. Until recently, DRC's legal code neither formally enshrined the concept of Indigenous Pygmy People nor identified which communities met the criteria of being Indigenous, although those concepts were present in national action plans, strategic plans, and other governmental documents.

The Constitution of 2006, amended in 2011, protects the rights of all Congolese (including Indigenous Peoples) but it made no provision for customary systems of land ownership. The Constitution assigns the state the duty of promoting peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups and ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups and all minorities (Articles 51 and 123). In practice, Indigenous Pygmy People have typically been dealt with as a subset of a larger local community, without special rights or protections. In July 2022, however, the *Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples* was adopted, formalizing and safeguarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly around customary land rights and livelihoods. Articles 46 and 51 guarantee collective and individual ownership of land and rights to resources, and Article 5 guarantees the rights to benefits resulting from the use and commercial exploitation of lands and resources, as well as the right to education and health. Advocates and media are optimistic that the law will improve the situation of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples because it provides a framework for integrating the FPIC concept and participatory community planning (Gauthier 2022). Critics, however, note that it is not yet clear how implementation of the law will affect the long-term trajectories of the affected communities. Further, they stress that the law fails to recognize how women are frequently excluded from decision-making with regard to land and resource use. The law only requires the prior consent of Indigenous Pygmy People regarding the creation of protected areas on their lands, which is a very narrow interpretation of how it could be applied (Dhedy Lonu, Sarmiento, and Larson 2022).

Indigenous Pygmy People in the DRC are largely concentrated in the country's forest regions. Management of natural resources and deforestation are two of the key areas where engagement of Indigenous Pygmy People has garnered significant effort among the international donor and NGO communities. The establishment of Local Community Forest Concessions created a mechanism for community planning, but Indigenous Pygmy People's communities have not been integrated into these efforts in many cases. The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change requires the effective participation of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Pygmy People and local communities. While the DRC has made some progress towards this requirement, the role of Indigenous Pygmy People's communities in the community-based monitoring of REDD+ projects has not been made clear. While the DRC's National REDD+ Framework Strategy provides for conflict and dispute resolution mechanisms, no law formally enshrines them in the REDD+ Framework, which means they have little recourse when they are not included in those processes.

LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

Estimates of the number of LGBTQI+ people in the DRC are not available. LGBTQI+ people in the DRC lack equal standing under the law compared to their heterosexual, cisgendered peers. While same-sex relationships are not criminalized, there have been two recent attempts to outlaw them (2010 and 2013). The DRC has no antidiscrimination or hate crime legislation that protects LGBTQI+ people from harassment or violence based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Transgender or intersex people also have no access to any mechanism to change their sex on legal documents. LGBTQI+ people also experience considerable discrimination. For example, public displays of affection between persons of the same sex can lead to prosecution for indecency (under Article 176 of the Congolese Penal Code, as amended in 2004) or indecent assault (under Article 167 as amended by Law No. 06/018 of 20 July 2006). Several organizations have also reported that in some communities, law enforcement have used the threat of arrest under these laws for extortion and blackmail.

Rights are also highly restricted under DRC's family law. Article 40 of Law No. 11/002 (January 2006) limits the right to marriage to persons of the opposite sex and expressly states that persons of the same sex cannot enter into marriage. In addition, Article 20 of Law No. 09/001 (January 2009) and Article 653 of the Congolese Family Code prohibits the adoption of a child by LGBTQI+ people.

Discrimination and stigma are pervasive, with one recent report citing that 75 percent of LGBTQI+ people lack access to education, employment, housing, health, or social security services (UNDP 2022). Several organizations have reported human rights violations of LGBTQI+ persons, particularly in North Kivu and South Kivu. In addition to the arbitrary arrests noted above, lesbian, bisexual women, and transgender men regularly report incidences of so-called "corrective rape." Staff of LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations have also reported threats made against them.

One area where reports note recent improvements in the situation of LGBTQI+ people in the DRC is in the health sector (UNDP 2022). LGBTQI+ people are represented in the planning processes around health, with the development of the *National Multisectoral Strategic Plan to Combat AIDS, 2021–2023* cited as a strong example of inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in sectoral planning. Health services have reportedly become more inclusive of gay men and transgender people but remain limited to non-existent in large parts of the country. And despite legislation requiring non-discrimination on the basis of gender in the delivery of health services (and HIV services in particular), intolerance remains.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Disability prevalence statistics are not readily available for DRC, but some sources cite an estimated rate of 11 percent (Scolesea et al. 2020). Disability has many causes in the DRC, including lack of hygiene, poor access to vaccinations and medications, lack of knowledge about common diseases and their treatment, landmines, armed conflict, psychological trauma from armed conflict, and motor vehicle accidents (SIDA 2014).

The state supplies little support, and although there are many NGOs that do provide services, they are limited and fractured, not comprehensive (SIDA 2014). Therefore, few effective services are available to support persons with disabilities, and individuals with physical impairments may face significant challenges to accessing employment opportunities, health care, and education. Individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities encounter deep-rooted discrimination that may prevent them from almost any engagement in public spaces, and some sources indicate that they are often accused of witchcraft and may even be rejected by their families (De Coster, Metho Nkayilu, and Devlieger 2016). Discrimination against persons with albinism is also widespread. Assistive devices and technology are not widely available, and despite recent trials that demonstrated the effectiveness

of mental health and psychosocial support as part of rehabilitation therapy, such services remain almost nonexistent (Andersen et al. 2022). Economic opportunities are typically limited to informal work, or the “petit métiers.” Cross-border trade is a common means of earning income, but carrying heavy loads can exacerbate physical impairments and ill health (De Coster 2012).

Persons with disabilities may also not be able to exercise their rights to marry and form families. A recent study in Kinshasa indicated that women with disabilities are often exploited as extra-legal “wives” (“*deuxièmes bureaux*”) and abandoned by their partners if they become pregnant (De Coster, Metho Nkayilu, and Devlieger 2016). The intersectionality of gender and disability has other stark impacts on women with disabilities, because they are frequently excluded from decision-making in the household and in the community. A recent study showed that the severity of a woman’s impairment correlated with her experiences of violence. More women with mild disability reported past-month physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (85%) than those with severe or no disability (76.5% and 70.8% respectively). Age also correlated with violence— fewer younger women with mild disability reported physical violence than older women (Scolesea et al. 2020).

WOMEN AND GIRLS

DRC’s 2006 Constitution establishes progressive foundations and a pioneering approach to gender parity and inclusion of marginalized groups relative to other African countries, but legal scholars argue that additional legislative and regulatory efforts are required to fully realize these constitutional goals (Ravidá 2021).

To illustrate, the Law No. 15/013 of August 1, 2015 relating to the *Implementation of Women’s Rights and Parity* calls for the elimination of discrimination against women in politics, administration, institutions, and public services. The policy mandates “equal representation” in political and administrative spaces as well as equal opportunity to participate in electoral processes. It stipulates that an equal percentage of men and women must be present on party lists to access state financing; however, this legislation has not been enforced due to the absence of regulatory mechanisms (Ravidá 2021). Chapter III establishes national structures to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the law, including an Inter-ministerial Committee and the National Council on Gender Parity, while Article 26 also mandates that the state ensure legal support, compensation and the socioeconomic reintegration of GBV survivors. Despite these provisions, the Congolese legal framework regarding women’s participation in various aspects of the electoral process is poorly enforced, requiring further development and harmonization throughout the legislation, as well as effective implementation through regulatory mechanisms and oversight bodies (Ravidá 2021).

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPS)

The long-term insecurity in DRC, particularly in the Eastern parts of the country, has produced millions of IDPs over recent decades (White 2014). IOM has tracked more than 5.7 million internally displaced individuals through March 2023 (IOM 2023). Most IDPs resettle in other villages, urban areas, or forests. They often try to remain close to home, but protracted conflict and changing frontlines in North and South Kivu have forced people to flee greater distances. Host communities have become overwhelmed with few resources to provide assistance and in many cases, long-term residents feel greater insecurity with the influx of IDPs (Jacobs and Paviotti 2017). These conditions have spurred extensive international humanitarian assistance, but the assistance does not overcome all the issues that accompany shifts in large numbers of people: competition for scarce resources, conflicts from mixing of populations with no history of co-existence (or customs and traditions to draw on), and the replacement of some traditional leaders with military commanders who have not been trained to uphold customary law (Katsiaficas, Jacobs, and Wagner 2021).

Until recently, some scholars have held that many IDPs effectively integrate into their new communities (notably youth), particularly when they find connections through family, religious communities, and other familiar connectors. Those who integrate engage in the social lives of their new communities. However, they did observe that others remain alienated. Host communities often blame IDPs for cases of theft and banditry (whether supported by evidence or not), which alienates the IDPs, causing them to withdraw further. This withdrawal can reinforce distrust on the part of the host community and hinder integration. More recent scholarship has concluded that although networks provide significant support, they are only effective temporarily and do not really overcome displacement (Katsiaficas, Jacobs, and Wagner 2021).

Sexual violence and GBV also hamper integration. They are reported frequently enough to be considered endemic in some communities. Gender inequalities and the vulnerability of IDPs to abuse of power heighten the susceptibility of women and girls to GBV and human trafficking. A recent study revealed that GBV survivors are often shunned by their communities, further exacerbating the physical and psychological suffering of the assault itself (Lugova, Samad, and Haque 2020). There are few services to assist survivors, and they often have no legal recourse.

United States Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20523