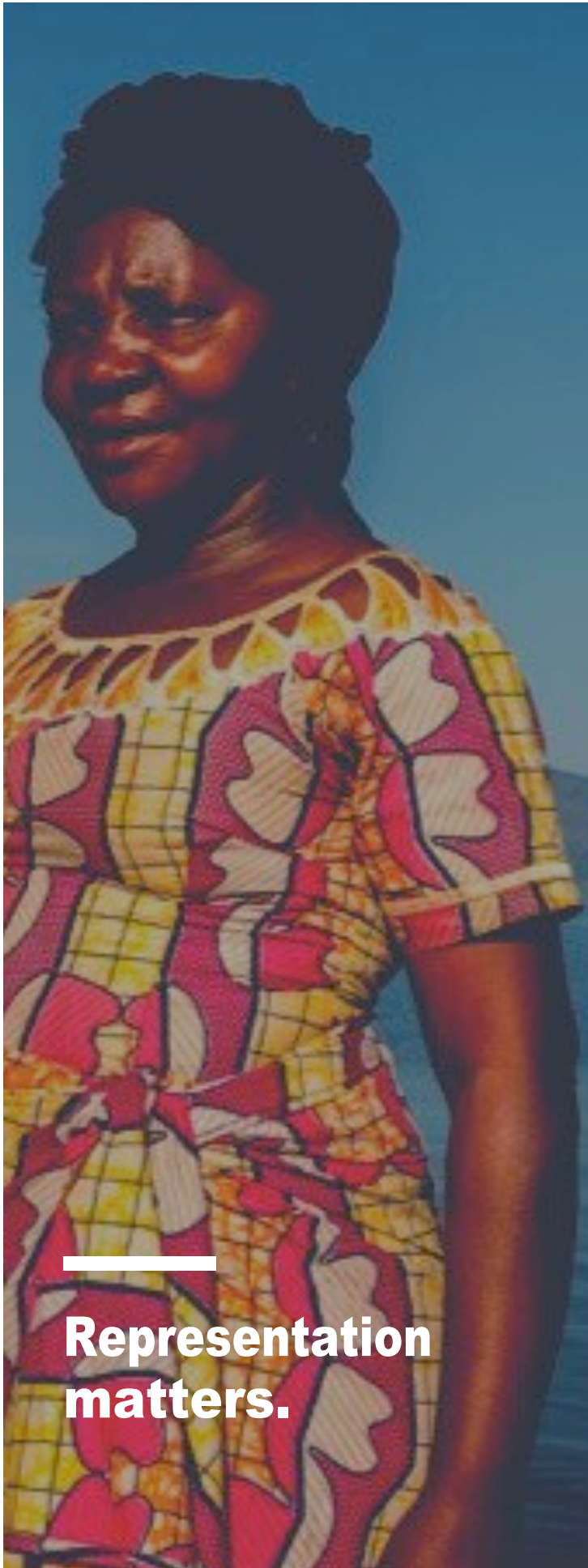


ROLE MODEL RESEARCH

KIVU RENEWABLE ENERGY SALES AMBASSADORS

8 MARCH 2021





**Representation
matters.**

The representation of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo private sector is important because it ensures that diverse perspectives are brought to the table, considered and integrated into business decisions which directly and indirectly impact the lives of potentially millions of poor women and men in the DRC.

The representation of women in the private sector and particularly in senior positions also importantly influences social norms and shapes what younger generations (particularly adolescent girls) imagine to be possible.

To test the hypothesis that role models have a positive impact on the representation of women and specifically on the career aspirations of young Congolese women, FCDO's private sector development programs, [Elan](#) and [Essor](#), are conducting joint participatory research with young women in three sectors: renewable energy (private and public sector), finance (private sector) and agriculture (private sector). The study findings are intended to help the DRC private sector and private sector development programs better understand the diverse range and sources of role models and their contribution to changes in perception of young Congolese women and their business potential and career ambition.

This brief summarizes the early findings of the research conducted with one renewable energy company and their sales ambassadors in North and South Kivu, one of the four different respondent groups. It also highlights notable themes or insights that emerged which merit further research. While the findings are specific to the renewable energy company, they offer insights which may be extrapolated for the broader direct to consumer renewable energy sector. The forthcoming full study on role models will include the research on young women in all three economic sectors and include the perspectives of their role models.

METHODOLOGY



The research combines a literature review with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with economically active young women and their role models from Kinshasa, and North and South Kivu. The primary research was conducted by two women researchers and managed by Elan's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) advisor (a woman) with support from Elan's and Essor's International GESI advisor (a woman) and Elan's and Essor's respective monitoring and evaluation managers (two men). Limitations to the research include the limited sample size of respondents due to the qualitative instead of quantitative focus of the research, reliance on partners to supply respondent contact lists and a limited body of literature on the subject-matter.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

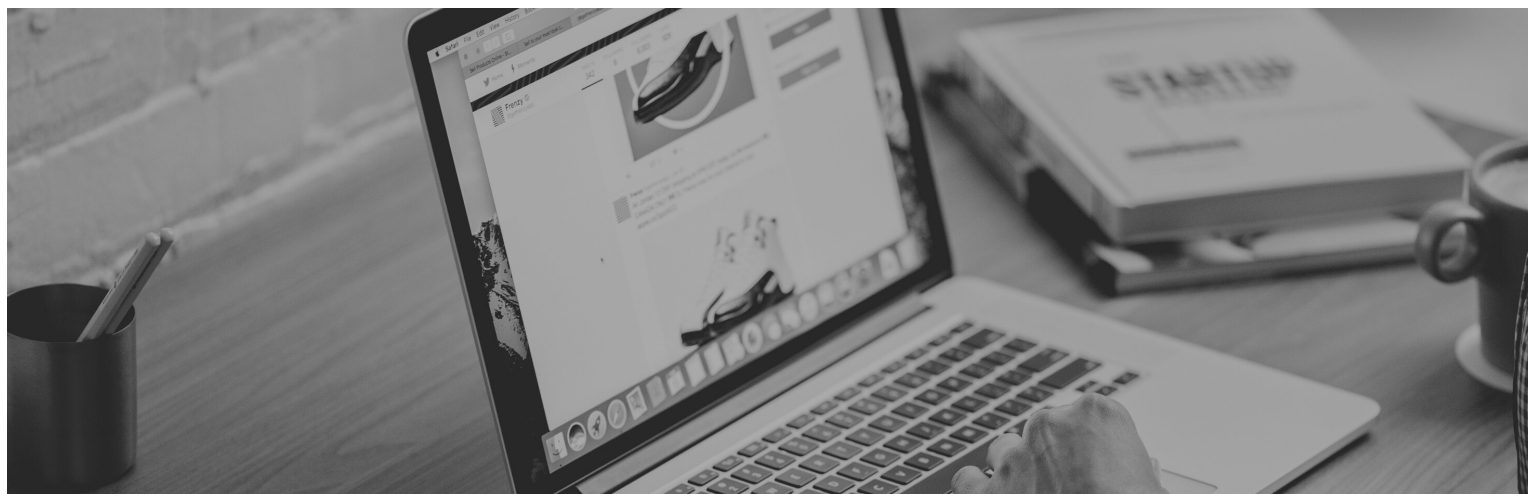


The 14 respondents ranged in age from 19-35 with a median and mode of 25 years old. A large majority of respondents were single and a minority of them had children. A small minority of respondents reported having a disability, of which sight was the most common disability followed by cognition. No other forms of disability were reported.

RESEARCH FINDINGS



The findings below correspond to three overarching research questions aimed at understanding the impact that workplace role models, women and men, have on the perception of career potential of young Congolese women.



WHO ARE PROFESSIONAL ROLE MODELS?

This area of inquiry sought to better understand the profile, characteristics and relationship between workplace role models and the respondents in the renewable energy sector.

▶ Both women and men serve as influential workplace role models to young women.

The research revealed that young women sales ambassadors see both women and men as professional role models. Some, just under one-third of respondents, reported having only women role models while just over one-third reported having only men role models. Respondents shared that many of these role models, both women and men, started as sales ambassadors themselves and have been promoted over time to Assistant Manager and then Manager positions.

▶ And encouragingly, most young women see themselves as role models to other young women.

Interestingly, a large majority of respondents viewed themselves as a role model for others and all respondents said that they desired to be a role model for others. A small but notable number of respondents said that owing to their good relationships, that they believed that they were role models. One believed that she was not considered a role model owing to bad relationships or a poor network within their field of work. Slightly less than half said that they made sure to actively encourage or advise others.

▶ Workplace role models are young, single, have a university degree and are accessible.

Of the 24 role models identified by the 14 respondents, the most common profile was single, aged between 25-30 years old and university educated. This profile is similar to that of the respondents. Respondents reported being in communication with their role models (even if the role model was unaware of their role model status' and WhatsApp and Facebook were the most frequently cited forms of communication followed by in-person communication.

▶ They are selected for different reasons including their openness, courageous actions and positive attitude.

Almost half of the respondents recalled that they realized they have identified a role model once they began seeking their advice, following their example or comparing their work to those of their role models. Slightly less than a third of respondents noted that they were taken by their role models' attitude or "sa facon d'etre" to working with others and the way that they treated others.

A minority mentioned that they felt that their role models demonstrated qualities such as courageousness – a word that came up frequently when interviewees were describing desirable qualities in role models, and a trait that many respondents mentioned that they would like to exhibit more of in relation to their own careers.



Insight - The characteristics identified in the role models suggests that a role model's approach to working and working with others is just as important as their outputs or achievements reached in their professional capacity.

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[I knew he had become a role model] “...when I started to take his advice and put it into practise”. [I knew] “...when I started to compare myself to him at work.



Not all workplace role models are informed of their privileged status

A little over half of those identified as role models were informed by the respondent that they had been identified as role models.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF ROLE MODELS FOR YOUNG CONGOLESE WOMEN?



This area of inquiry explored the perceived impact of role models on young women. Respondents were asked about whether their role model(s) supported their (and other women's) voice and career advancement and whether their role model had inspired them to take on a new role or position.

► **Active support for their voice and career advancement**

A majority of respondents felt that their role models support their (and other women's) voice and career advancement at the workplace. When asked to recount whether women and men role models actively supported their voice (or the voices of other women) in the workplace, women role models received more favourable responses than men.

Examples of this type of active workplace support included:

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- *"They advised me to work well and to make the effort on the ground to have a good commission."*
- *"By giving me advice to improve the performance of my work."*
- *"When I have a problem with my work, she helps me solve it."*



Boost confidence.

In terms of how role models have encouraged or strengthened their voices, over a quarter specifically noted that role models who provide positive feedback acted as a form of confidence boost. One respondent outlined that their role model was willing to back them with other senior representatives or other women, thereby raising their voice– “Yes, she advocates for us with the authorities”.

While more women role models were reported to support the voice and career advancement of other women, two-thirds of all male role models identified also actively supported women’s voices in the workplace too. Some key examples of the types of active support included: “He often follows up on my work and he always supports my work”. Yet, despite women role models being more active in raising other women’s voices in the workplace, the respondents appeared to find it easier to offer details or examples of exactly how men have offered such support.



- “He listens to our grief and supports our ideas.”
- “[He] takes my defense in front of the chief.”
- “He often follows up on my work and he always supports my work.”
- “...he supports if our idea is good, and if it is bad, he shows us the way to orient our claim well.”

A quarter of respondents with male role models also noted the importance of receiving positive responses to building their voice, presumably through confidence building.



Insight - A theme that emerged was how impactful receiving informal positive feedback was in building women’s confidence, which ultimately gave women the assurance to dedicate energy to build their careers and/or attempt new business opportunities or diversification strategies.



Inspire career ambition.

A large majority of respondents felt that their role model inspired them to pursue their career ambition, though only smaller majority was able to identify specific ways their role model had inspired them to pursue. Those interviewed recounted that their female role models were active in supporting their career growth, a slightly more favourable response than those given with a male role model. Some comments made by those with women role models include:



- “[She supports us] by showing us how to do a great job to improve our performance. She also gives us training.”
- “She gives me job offers...to have a more profitable job than the one I have. [She also offers] positive reactions or feedback.”



Motivate young women to seize opportunities and innovate.

Women role models were also influential in motivating the respondents to join the business and identify new and innovative business channels, products and services.

“She encouraged me to join the team and thanks to her advice, I am now an ambassador.”

“She told me to make the effort to raise awareness to have multiple clients.”

“By encouraging me to increase the torch sales capacity to get a good commission.”

In at least one case, the role model personally extended credit to a respondent.

“She gives me credit for the goods when I have no money.”



Improve professional performance.

Similarly, almost all men seen as role models gave advice which ultimately improved the professional performance of the respondents, examples include: educating customers, helping to seek out new clients and improve sales and pursuing further education

“They encourage us to work well and educate customers well to have their considerations and participation.”

“He also educates me to improve the quality of work by bringing me customers.”

“He encourages me to work well and endure to improve the quality of product sales.”

“He made me aware to go back to school.”

One respondent also claimed that her male role model actively lobbied for her promotion within the company.



Insight: Almost half of those interviewed again underlined the importance of receiving positive feedback to support their confidence, which inherently assisted in strengthening the career outlook. They also offered valuable advice on the way to operate/improve sales performance. This provides an insight into how role models might or can influence young Congolese women’s confidence and perception of their career potential/ambition.



► Raise awareness and improve career outlook.

More than a third of those interviewed felt that their role models had raised their awareness and improved their outlook, that they are potentially on the path to becoming a manager or noticeably increasing their income potential. Others said that they had really taken on board the idea that education and/or upskilling through further training can really strengthen their professional prospects.

Some, however, felt that there are few opportunities for them to further develop professionally, one saying that they she felt that there were no prospects of more senior roles as they were not available in her workplace.

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- “Yes, it makes me feel motivated to have a lot of courage and improve my sales skills to one day become a manager.”
- “Yes, [she motivates me] by encouraging me to make the effort to have a good commission.”
- “Yes, by encouraging me to make the effort to have a good commission.”

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF COVID-19?



In light of the current global COVID-19 pandemic, the research also covered the impact of COVID-19. Specific questions included the impact of COVID-19 on the respondents' career ambition and choices and whether the pandemic had impacted their relationship with their role model(s).

▶ **A negative impact on professional ambition and career choices**

A large majority of respondents cited that COVID-19 had a negative impact on their professional ambition and career choices. Most notably, that they had been experiencing financial concerns as many customers were experiencing cashflow problems themselves, and therefore either weren't interested in purchasing products, or defaulting on payments of products that they had already bought. One respondent has also added that "[they] had difficulties recovering product costs". Other comments included that in an effort to not be contaminated, or to contaminate others, their business was noticeably disrupted.

▶ **But not impacted on their relationship with their role model**

The majority of respondents, however, have stated that COVID-19 has not affected their relationship with their role models.

HOW CAN THE POSITIVE EFFECTS AND IMPACT THAT ROLE MODELS OFFER WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS BE AMPLIFIED?

This line of questioning explored how companies and private sector development programs can amplify the positive impact of role models. Specific questions covered whether the respondents' employer had any workplace initiatives to promote role models or mentor programs and how role models, women and men, could be better supported in the workplace. An additional question on the overall workplace conduciveness for women's advancement was included.

► Recognize and reward workplace role models.

Though the large majority of respondents said that their company did not have any initiatives to promote role models or mentors. The small minority that responded positively referenced the promotion of their supervisor.

A small minority of respondents also provided specific recommendations to support women and men role models. The most cited was promotion. Other recommendations included training, a salary raise, praise, giving a merit/award. There were no noticeable differences in support recommendations for women and men role models.

► Create a conducive environment for professional advancement of young women.

When asked whether their work environment supported the pursuit of their ambitions and professional development, a small majority of respondents felt that the work environment was conducive. However, the examples of how their ambition was supported was primarily linked to the networks or clients gained as a result of being affiliated with the company.

A large minority felt that the work environment was not supportive of their career ambition. One respondent commented that women do not get promoted – “ne donne pas la promotion aux femmes”, another mentioned that promotions were not likely to be extended to her, and neither were trainings available to improve her performance.

► Combat harmful stereotypes.

An interesting theme that emerged is that some respondents, slightly less than half, felt that women were not always necessarily suitable or interested to exceed professionally. Some comments suggested that women were not able to succeed professionally due to their lack of education - sometimes a result of women getting married or starting a family - or, instead opting to forego education, instead preferring to seek out financial support through marriage.

“Women do not like to study because if they find a husband, they directly abandon studies.”

CONCLUSION

The preliminary research on women sales ambassadors for renewable energy products in North and South Kivu suggests that role models, women and men, have an important impact on the perception of their career aspirations and potential for advancement. Considering the reported negative impact of the pandemic on the current business outlook, the influential role may be even more important in helping young women navigate this unprecedented time and remain in the workforce.

Despite the reported lack of formal business support for role models or mentorship programs, workplace role models, through their actions and positive feedback, have boosted the confidence of young women sales agents, inspired career ambition, improved professional performance and encouraged innovation and the seizure of new professional opportunities. Moreover, a majority reported that their respective role models actively supported their voice and career advancement at the workplace.

These are important findings because they support the research hypothesis that professional role models, women and men, are important for the career aspirations and advancement of young Congolese women. The research highlighted that role models play a vital role in raising women's voices, encouraging upskilling and challenging gender barriers in the workplace.

They also suggest that private sector investments in recognizing and rewarding role models along with creating a more conducive work environment for the professional advancement of young women including combating harmful gender stereotypes can potentially lead to more women in the workforce and greater representation in the private sector overall.

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