



# **External Evaluation of the GCRF/AHRC-funded project – Belonging and Learning:**

Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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Vicky was invited to take on the role of critical friend, and external evaluator, for the project because of her unique position as a practitioner with extensive experience of working with young people, her position as head of an organisation working with young people, and as a global trainer with experience of engaging with multiple organisations in different contexts.

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## Introduction

The *Belonging and Learning* project brought together young people who were either street-connected or urban refugees with researchers, artists and practitioners from three countries – Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.. The aim of the project was to explore the potential contribution of arts-based methods to research concerning young people’s experiences of conflict and protracted crisis, and of education. Using networking meetings that focus in particular on the intersections of the experiences of young people who are internally displaced, street-connected and/or refugees – populations who experience varying levels of trauma and extended periods out of education – the project aimed to pilot the methodologies as a means to encourage dialogue between young people and policy makers.

My role as evaluator was to ‘observe and advise.’ This involved me sitting in on the planning meetings for each of the three workshops, the workshops themselves, and the analysis meeting that evaluated each workshop the following day. As I observed the various stages I focused my observations around the first four objectives of the project developed by the research team for the funder. These were:

1. to bring together arts practitioners from three different performance related or arts perspectives with groups of young people, who are internally displaced, street-connected and/or refugees, and the policy and practice-based stakeholders whose decisions affect them...[to] explore the potential contribution of arts-based methods, used to engage with local understandings of knowledge, culture, and creativity to coproduce a response to the problem of researching education provision in situations of conflict and protracted crisis and to co-develop future research agendas.
2. to re-situate power relations that have traditionally been top down to privilege local, situated knowledge practices.
3. to enable young people to have a much stronger voice within every meeting. Their performances will be re-situated so that people in positions of power are asked to listen to their voices, using arts methodologies.
4. to engage people in more powerful positions in experiential methods (drawing, dance, theatre and other local, specific knowledge production practices) that are not based on linguistic forms of knowledge production.
5. to enable advances in understanding, using genuine and novel interactions across sectoral and country boundaries.
6. to enhance disciplinary understanding between social science and arts and humanities through a series of cross-disciplinary interactions with a focus on the arts and co-production to research education provision.

Straight after the end of each workshop, I also conducted a focus group with the young people in a closed room away from the research team. They were able to express how they felt about being part of the day and critique the research team. This focus group was audio

recorded. The data used for the evaluation therefore consists of the notes that I made of my observations in my research diary and the recordings made during the focus groups.

This evaluation report contains my reflections on the three workshops in Nairobi, Kampala, and Bukavu, and my suggestions for moving forward if the project is developed further. As a practitioner, who champions young-person centred approaches, this evaluation focuses on the experiences of the young people involved in the workshops. This is not only my area of expertise, but also my passion. I have considered their engagement, their wellbeing, and how we can better put their needs at the centre of such workshop experiences in the future.

Through this evaluation I have identified six key themes that surfaced across the three workshops and I have structured the report around them. The first section provides a brief overview of the project and how it was conducted in practice. The following sections then focus on each of the identified themes in turn: Communication and Planning; Linking Education and the Arts; Preparing young people to speak impactfully and safely; Networking; and Safe spaces. The final section of the report - Evaluating the project – provides an overview of the challenges of conducting this evaluation and the recommendations that I make for future work.

## Project Overview

In 2019, a collaborative research project took place across three countries: Kenya, Uganda, and the DRC. Coordinated by Dr Su Corcoran, the project team brought together artists, practitioners, and academics to explore the role of creative and arts-based methods in establishing dialogue between young people and education policymakers. It especially focused on the experiences of education of displaced populations of young people who are refugees or street-connected.

In May 2019, the Kenya-based artist facilitated a one day workshop that brought street-connected young people from three organisations together with head teachers and local government representatives to dance. During the course of the day, the artist led the participants through a number of dance-based activities and providing opportunities for conversation to take place about the young people's experiences of schooling and the challenges they faced in trying to access education and training.

In June 2019, a Uganda-based artist co-facilitated a two-day workshop in Kampala, with an academic from Makerere University, for young refugees supported by InterAid. The artist led various activities that introduced the young people, who all identified as artists, to new artistic techniques such as watercolours, drawing with charcoal, and the creation of Rorschach images. The academic, supported by Su and our DRC-based colleague, led discussion sessions that focused on the young people's experiences of being a refugee and accessing education in a new country. At the end of the two days, stakeholders from the education system were invited to an exhibition of the artwork created as part of the workshop as well as pieces of art brought to the event by the young people.

In December 2019, our DRC-based colleague – a practitioner working for a local NGO – co-facilitated a two-day workshop, with a local poet, in which street-connected young people and various stakeholders from the education system co-produced poetry and short drama skits about their experiences of education. Beginning with an overview of the articles related to education in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the participants discussed the various issues related to their right to education before separating into groups to focus on the stories they wish to tell through the compositions.

After the final workshop, the research team spent two days reflecting upon the three workshops and developing plans for future projects based on the learning that took place when planning and delivering the three workshops.

## Communication and Planning

One of the key questions that I was left with following all three workshops was:

“Who is best placed to plan and deliver workshops such as the ones in this project, and what should be considered for future projects”

As such, I focus on each of the workshops in turn in this section, to explore the ways in which members of the team worked together in planning the workshops and what that meant for the young people involved in the workshops that were eventually delivered.

### Kenya

The Nairobi workshop, in Kenya, was planned by the artist and one of the UK-based researchers who has been working in the country for a long time. They decided to use the project as a way to build networks of organisations who could work together, using the project to develop impact for those who took part. In a prior visit to Nairobi by the researcher, they met with three organisations, visiting their projects and discussing their plans and inviting them to take part. One of the organisations accompanied the research team to each of the venues that they were thinking of using and helped to decide on where the workshop would take place. In the lead up to the workshop an email was sent to all three contacts explaining what the workshop would entail and who the participants should be, aiming to ensure that the young people who attended would enjoy the event and would be able to give informed consent. A planning session with practitioners from all of the organisations was conducted with the whole of the research team who were in Nairobi on the evening before the workshop to finalise the structure of the day.

The meeting was very positive. The social workers from all three organisations involved had incredibly constructive ideas about how the day should run and how best to engage the young people attending. It was very positive to see the research team being so flexible with the session plan and their ability to change plans following the feedback from the three organisations' social workers. It is understandable that an artist and researcher will not have the in-depth understanding of the young people they are planning the session for and they were prepared to change their plans for the practitioner team to make them more appropriate for the young people involved.

One clear challenge on the day itself arose almost immediately when the workshop began. Three of the participants did not engage much in any of the sessions. This was nothing to do with their interest in the art form or the way the session was delivered, but they were not appropriate young people to be engaged in the workshop and should not have been present for a number of reasons. This was not down to any planning on the side of research team but the organisation did not follow the brief they were given about appropriate young people for this workshop. It raises important questions about how communication between the research team and practitioners from other partner organisations is conducted and how to ensure that recruitment of participants is as safe as possible. In this instance the young people stayed, were fed, and were compensated for their time, but they were not expected to participate as actively as their peers.

When artists and researchers are working with vulnerable young people, it is extremely beneficial to the young people, the art being created, and the research itself, to involve expertise in the voices we are trying to lift up. The practitioners knew the young people they were bringing individually and understood the individual challenges that each young person may have in a more formal setting like a workshop. This was particularly important as the workshop in Nairobi was conducted in only one day (which was extended to two for the following workshops). Having that knowledge of the young people earlier may have enabled the research team to create a richer workshop for both the policy makers who were invited to attend, and the young people.

In the focus group conducted with the young people after the workshop, it was clear that those who participated did not identify themselves as dancers and most reflected they would have preferred a football or cooking workshop, which raises the question of who should choose the methodology of the workshop and who should be invited. In this instance the artist was a dancer and so the method was chosen for the workshop. If the artist had worked closer with the three organisations in the lead up to the workshop, more appropriate young people who recognised dance as a way in which they could communicate, could have been invited to participate. This may have led to a more powerful dialogue and artistic creation.

### **Uganda**

In Kampala, the workshop was planned by the artist and a researcher working in a Ugandan University. They identified an organisation based fairly close to the workshop venue that are a well-known and well used organisation in Kampala. The young people were in a much more stable position than those in Kenya and DRC and presented with less vulnerabilities and complexities making engagement a lot easier during the workshop.

In Kampala, the practitioners only brought the young people to the space and did not participate in the workshop – except as translators. For the artistic creation this did not matter so much as the research team were lucky enough to have the lead for DRC team at the workshop – who spoke the same language as a number of the young refugees from the DRC and Burundi – and he was able to facilitate a discussion with the young people about their experiences of education.

When the artist later reflected on the workshop, she mentioned that if she was planning the workshop again, she “would have had the dialogue first and then pulled the content out in the creative content” That highlights the artist’s need for support from someone who understands the issues the young participants faced. It was clear the young people loved the artistic sessions and really enjoyed learning a new technique that really inspired them. They were all artists and were recruited by the organisation who acted as gatekeeper because of this. Not all the young people chose to engage in the dialogue session but those that did, thoroughly engaged in the session - discussing their access to education as young refugees.



However, the discussions were only planned for on the morning of the workshop and had the DRC team member not been present they would not have happened in the same way. If he had been given more time to prepare, the discussions could have been more powerful.

It is also worth noting that the DRC team member's speciality is with street-connected children not with urban refugees. While he is an expert in working with young people, if a practitioner with knowledge and expertise in working with urban refugees in Kampala and the challenges they face in accessing education had been consulted, there perhaps could have been a richer more informative dialogue within these discussions.

The artist commented that she would have liked "having more support from people who have a lot of expertise in working with refugees and street-connected children. Good dialogues would have given a greater understanding as well as time to exchange creative ideas together." She went on further to reflect upon how she would have liked, "Someone like [the DRC team member] along with me on the process, planning the dialogue". She reflected that the ideal set up would have been, a practitioner planning the dialogue, the academic leading the research space, the academics from UK feeding in with education knowledge (which was their expertise) and the artist developing the art sessions to overlap with each of them. "Then we would have come up with some killer stuff" she added!

### **The Democratic Republic of Congo**

In the DRC, the artist led the majority of the two-day workshop. He facilitated both the discussion and the artistic creation sessions. The discussions settings were focused on a rights-based approach using the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the guiding document. He focused on the rights within the convention that related to accessing education. Of the three workshops, this one was the most effective integrating the discussion with the creative process – although it must be noted that this is easier to do with a language-based art form. Whilst he did a great job of facilitating this session, it is important to acknowledge that there was more than one social worker present who had in depth knowledge of the UNCRC. I feel, it would have been more beneficial for the participants, both the young people and the adults, if the introduction to the UNCRC had been delivered by a practitioner who has a clearer understanding of those conventions and what they mean in practice. Alternatively, if the artist had wanted to lead this session, could there perhaps have been an opportunity in the lead up to the workshop to work with one of the social workers to ensure there was a clear and engaging way to introduce the UNCRC.

What worked really well in DRC was that the research was led by a practitioner with over 20 years of experience working with street-connected children. He understood the policy makers he needed to engage in the workshop to ensure the biggest impact for the young people to (re-)engage in education. He also had in-depth understanding of the barriers that children face on a daily basis on the streets of Bukavu and so was able to plan accordingly. The use of a rights-based approach meant that the workshop was framed in upholding duties and commitments to young people, not just talking about feelings and experiences, and he was able to present the mechanisms for change alongside those experiences.

**Summary:** The artists all did a fantastic job of using their art forms as a way of communicating and/or breaking down barriers. However, understandably, their expertise does not lie in creating spaces for vulnerable young people who have experienced multiple and complex traumas, and are therefore not best placed to create spaces for young people who have multiple needs without an effective support team with experience working with them. If practitioners who understood the needs and vulnerabilities of these young people were included at an early stage of the planning that could have been an opportunity for safer and more meaningful discussions, as well as the art form being more impactful in terms of having young people's voices heard.

In Kenya, the artist used dance to create a fun, engaging atmosphere that broke down barriers between the young people and the policy-makers in the room, enabling the young people, the practitioners, and these decision makers to work together. When everyone was dancing the room felt equal as there was no hierarchy. The challenge came when the session moved from dancing to discussion. There had been no clear direction around who would hold these discussion spaces as the original plan had been to choreograph dances in groups that represented the young people's experiences – however, the time was greatly limited by logistical problems at the venue and a late start.

The practitioners who have the clearest understanding of the lived experiences of young people, as well as relationships of trust with them, were best placed to hold those spaces. However, because they were not briefed the night before, there was a lost opportunity in some groups to hold those spaces in the most powerful and impactful way. The practitioners would have been best placed to ensure that the voices of the young people were not only heard but also put at the centre of the discussions. What I observed was that adults were often holding those spaces – including practitioner voices as they wanted to direct their issues at the policy makers – and the young people's voices and experiences were put second.

It is an ongoing challenge for practitioners who take a young person-centred approach to their work to create spaces where children's voices are at the centre. It is therefore, most certainly going to be a challenge for artists and researchers who do not have as an in-depth experience and knowledge of creating spaces for young people to be heard.

What was clear across all three workshops, was the need to put children and young people at the centre of the planning process, no matter what their lived experience. Of course, artists can strive to do this and all three did it well, but I am not convinced that is their role in a project of this type to be thinking about this. Ideally the collaboration should include practitioners from day one – in all country contexts, not just the DRC as was the case here – as well as some consultation process with the young people themselves, to ensure this space is as safe as possible for young people and ensures that their voices will be at the centre of the workshop experience. This would make for a richer, more powerful and more impactful experience for young people and policy makers.

## Linking Education and the Arts

In this section, I will focus on the art forms and the creative processes engaged in the project, as these were at the centre of the networking project, focusing on each country in turn. Across all three settings, the young people engaged in the art forms really well.

### Kenya

In Kenya it was fantastic to see most of the adults engaging in the dance as well as the young people. It felt as though there was a real equality in the space as adults and young people danced and laughed together. Understandably, with the time allotted for the workshop and the late start, using dance as the communication tool became incredibly challenging. That, coupled with the young people who were unable to participate fully, meant that the art and the education were not integrated as well as they could have been. The artist did well to be flexible with the session given that the participants had lost so much time, particularly as it was the shortest workshop of the three to start with. However, it is possible to say that young people felt more comfortable in being open about their experiences on the street and within education because of the positive impact the dance had in breaking down barriers, but the two activities still felt very separate.

### Uganda

In Uganda, once again, the art and the discussions felt very separate and as mentioned above the artist reflected that if done again, she would have done the bulk of the art activities after the discussions to ensure that experiences and feelings were put into the art. However, there is also an argument for integrating art with the discussion, asking questions that could be answered using art and using the image to elicit further detail. The art presented in the exhibition was stunning, but I am unsure if it had a powerful link to the lack of access to education for young urban refugees.

The deputy head of cooperation at the embassy of the kingdom of Belgium in Kampala, who attended the exhibition, commented that it was “refreshing to see something new” which is fantastic feedback. I hope he was able to discuss with the young people about their challenges accessing education, many of the discussions talked about the art forms rather than the content.

### The Democratic Republic of Congo

In Bukavu, the art forms involved words. The first involved writing poetry that was turned into a coproduced song and the second was the writing of two short plays. For the

first the adults worked together with the young people to compose the song, while in the second the adults created one play while the young people created the second. Both the song and the play were able to combine the art form and the advocacy message of young people’s experiences on the streets and the challenges they face in order to access education. This was to be expected, given that it was a verbal art form, meaning that it is easier or perhaps simpler for a young person to be included in that form and more importantly to be heard. Because the play writing took less time than the song writing, the group of adults involved in this activity were set the task of discussing education in the DRC

more broadly and the needs of street-connected young people within education. I will discuss this further below, but it was an incredibly valuable time and space for those adults to discuss and share their challenges with regards to the education system in the DRC, particularly in South Kivu. What that session did not do though is enable the young people to be heard by those adults in an in depth and meaningful way and then for those experiences to be valued and represented through art. That group was a space for adults' experiences and adults' voices.

It had been the intention that the plays and the song would be performed and discussed by the group as a whole, providing the children with an opportunity to critique the play developed by the adults in relation to their own experiences. This did not happen in practice as the discussion became more of a repeat of the morning session and an opportunity to repeat individual stories about the problems with the education system.

## Preparing young people to speak impactfully and safely

In this section, I discuss the ways in which the young people's voices and contributions were encouraged and the framework and support structure within which these contributions were made.

One of the main weaknesses of this project is that it was short-term, being based around organising only three workshops in three different countries. Watching the workshops in Kenya and Uganda (the young people were part of the organisation that were coordinating the workshop in the DRC) I wonder if the organisations who brought the participants to the sessions fully understood the purpose of the workshops and the long term objectives of the research. Research is complex for laypeople to understand and the concept of a networking project to pilot the use of arts-based methodologies is a niche one. For young people who are marginalised, therefore, who do not necessarily have any prior experience of research, especially when they have little or no experience of formal education, explaining a research project is extremely complex. As such, it is important to consider how we ensure that young people are fully prepared to be positioned at the centre of a research project, particularly when they are then expected to become advocates for change?

My main concern was that the young people did not fully understand why they were there. Although there was time taken to meet staff of the three organisations in Kenya in advance of the workshop and explain the research team's expectations – a month before face-to-face and then by email a week before – a detailed overview of the day was not fully developed until the evening before. There were therefore questions about how much preparation had gone into preparing the young people to participate. Some of the young people that participated in Kenya were not the most appropriate young people to be included (e.g. one participant was only 12 – which was not old enough to participate based on the recruitment requirements, and clearly very vulnerable. It was not appropriate to have her in a room of much older boys, particularly given the fact that many girls and young women on the streets are sexually abused and/or exploited.

In the focus group at the end of the workshop, the young people all agreed that they would have liked to have had time to prepare their thoughts and what they wanted to say about their experiences in accessing education before the workshop began, which was echoed in Uganda. One of the young people said that they would have liked to have been given the topic of discussion in advance so they would be able to prepare better and more relevant pieces of art. In both Kenya and Uganda, at least one young person in each group expressed an expectation that there would be ongoing support from the research team for them individually. This included asking to be taken (back) to school, for further support with developing their art skills and ways to make money out of their artwork. This was a major misconception that could have been avoided. Therefore, more time could have been spent to sure that the young people were appropriately prepared for the workshop.

This expectation or hope was not present in the group from DRC. To some extent this is related to the fact that the young people had been better prepared by the organisation as

they were leading the workshop. The expectations were also made clear by social workers as they were all engaged in one of the education-based projects run by the organisation. The organisation in DRC has experience of longer research projects and so would also have been better able to prepare young people to participate in the research.

However, it is not surprising that young people expected more than just a workshop. When planning workshops like this it is important that we remember how members of the research team are positioned by young people from extreme circumstances. They would have seen three or four white women – often typing on their laptops - as an opportunity to gain support to change their current situation. Many of them will have had ongoing engagement with organisations and white donors from overseas who have brought them presents, sponsored them or a friend to go to school, or been involved with an organisation that supports them financially. As a young person living on the street, you must ‘play the game’ to survive and their requests for help are no reflection on the organisations but simply highlighting how tough their lives are and also how the presence of women from the Global North may change the dynamic and their expectations.

In Uganda, it was fed back to us after the workshop that the organisation engaged as a partner was a very well-known NGO in Kampala and the “go to” NGO when people wanted to work with young urban refugees. This meant that many of the young people would have had an experience like this before. There was an expectation of some sort of benefit from the people leading the workshop as well as a degree of disillusionment with the process. During the focus group, one young person reflected that even though they were used to being asked about education and other issues and had been involved in a number of projects, he felt that “you are not like other people; you actually want to listen to what we have to say.” This may have been in relation to being asked to evaluate the day as part of the focus groups, so providing him with a space to be critical, but it should also serve to remind us that whilst there is a challenge to managing young people’s expectations, the team should acknowledge a success in ensuring that these young people felt heard and valued.

Whilst it is important to prepare young people to speak and ensure they fully understand the concept of the project and provide them with a safe space, it is also crucial to ensure that the adults in the room respect the voices of the young people present and the stories that they want to share. The art forms were very positive to make the power differential more horizontal, creating equality between young people and adults. Nevertheless, adult voices were incredibly prominent in the discussions and at times more dominant in the room. This was particularly prevalent in Nairobi and Bukavu during the more formal discussions between adults and young people. I witnessed on more than one occasion adults speaking on behalf of young people and those adults sharing the lived experiences of the young people present instead of supporting young people to speak. One of the young people in Bukavu commented that while the young people felt listened to, the adults finished the conversations for them.

If we are truly striving for young people to not only be at the heart of the project but for their voices to be lifted up, to be leading policy change, then we must ensure that the adults

present give those young people the space for their voices to be heard. In future projects, it is important to take the time to discuss how this would be ensured - by all the adults involved, whether that be researcher, artist, or practitioner. An additional challenge would also relate to fully briefing policymakers before they attend events. We want them to also hold the space and uplift young people's voices, but it is complex to understand how this can be managed in a context where children's voices aren't important. In many contexts, policy makers may feel that they should be listened to above all others. However, without this space being held and the uplifting of young people's voices as a priority, the objectives of the project will never fully be achieved.

## Networking

As this project was funded through an AHRC networking grant, it was planned around three networking workshops. However, what was clear in all three settings was the huge desire for more networking opportunities for both young people and for practitioners and policy makers.

In Kenya the young people fed back how much they had enjoyed meeting other young people who had experienced living in street situations in other areas of the city of Nairobi and to hear about their experiences. The practitioners from the three organisations had not met before but clearly all had a passion for their work supporting street-connected children and young people. Whilst the organisations take very different approaches to their work, they were all interested in sharing these approaches and the personal challenges of supporting these young people. At the evening meeting before the workshop, where the practitioners met each other for the first time, it was clear that they really wanted to share experiences and learn from one another. It was really positive to see them swap contact details and make a commitment to stay in touch with one another. The teachers present at the workshop also networked with one another

In Kampala, there was only one partner organisation involved who brought two members of staff who had not met before and they spent time getting to know each other, which was positive. What was very positive here was a clear desire for networking from the young people. All of the young people at the workshop identified as artists first and urban refugees second, and wanted to get to know each other as a group of artists who could share different techniques and their passion for art. The young people all fed back how much they enjoyed networking with other artists who specialise in different mediums. As the art was presented to stakeholders at the end of the workshop, there could have been an opportunity for networking amongst policy makers, but they were engaged with the young people. Also, there were very few policy makers present and so there was limited potential for this networking opportunity.

In Bukavu, educators had come from North and South Kivu to participate in the workshop. It was clear that outside this workshop, they had very little opportunity to discuss their roles as educators and relished the opportunity to share experiences and good practice. When the group was split into three to create a song and a play, a group of practitioners, who had finished their playwriting activity quickly, were asked to discuss their experiences. They spent quite some time on the second day discussing their approaches to education as well as their frustrations with the current system. It was clear that they could have kept talking all day if there had been time. Sadly, not all the practitioners were involved in the discussion as the others were creating a song with young people. Whilst this networking was incredibly impactful for those involved, it did shift focus away from the key objectives of the session: for “young people to have a much stronger voice within every meeting.” These discussions took place without the voices of young people so whilst it was a valuable networking tool moving forward and hugely beneficial, I do not believe it held up the key objectives of the project but did highlight a huge need for policy makers to have spaces to network and share practice.

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If a future project is developed, I would encourage the team to explore the possibility of including a much larger networking element into that project. There was clearly a major impact for both professionals and young people to meet those with similar experiences. If the key objective of this project is to raise the voices of young people to ensure their experiences are heard by policy makers, then it can be argued that there will be a greater impact if both young people and organisations work closer together. Networking can most definitely add power to the long-term goal of this project.

## Safe spaces

As someone who takes safeguarding seriously, a major consideration for me as I observed the workshops was the degree to which they were 'safe spaces'. I explored the question of how safe were these workshop spaces for young people when we were asking them to share the space with adults who were unknown to them?

The spaces chosen for the workshops were hotels or cafes that were spaces these young people would not normally be allowed to enter and were very much out of the young people's comfort zone, particularly in Nairobi and Bukavu. The hotels were mid-range and chosen to not be so high end as to completely scare the young people, but also not to be so low end that the adult guests would not attend. In Kenya it was a hotel, in Uganda a co-working space, and in DRC a hotel where we were sat round a boardroom table. Whilst these spaces were appropriate for the decision makers in the room, it is questionable whether they were appropriate for the young people – even though one of the Nairobi participants felt that eating chicken in a hotel was amazing. If we were striving to empower young people to speak up about the changes they want to see, it does not seem appropriate to put them in spaces where they are likely to feel out-of-place and potentially unwelcome. The spaces were very much designed for adults and raise the issue that it is important to be aware of the effect of the space on young people. These are spaces that young people who have experienced life on the streets or life as a refugee are not used to and if we are asking them to share their lived experiences, which are difficult and at times traumatic, we should be asking them to share these stories somewhere where they are comfortable.

Of course, there are most definitely benefits to being in these spaces. A simple one is getting policy makers to attend the workshop. A hotel that is central is going to be much more appealing than a drop in centre in an informal settlement. For young people one of the benefits was the food. Every young person at all three workshops commented on how they enjoyed the food as they would not get to eat meat etc. such as this due to its cost. It is so important to ensure young people have positive experiences like this, but a compromise should be found that enables them to do so in an environment where they are more comfortable.

In Uganda the venue was particularly problematic. We were given two small rooms across the corridor from one another and the rooms were too small for the number of young people and adults in the group. This space was in a co-working centre, which also had adults who were unknown to any of us coming in and out. In terms of safeguarding this posed some complex issues particularly as there was only two staff from the organisation to oversee the young people's wellbeing. It also meant that it was very hard for the research team and myself to sit in on discussions. Space was limited and it would have been inappropriate to sit in such a small room on a laptop making notes. Whilst I was able to listen to some of the discussions in Kampala and the feedback was very positive, I am unsure of what was discussed in any sort of detail.

In both Kenya and the DRC there were more adults at the workshop than young people, many of the adults were also unknown to the young people. A number of the adult guests were also coming in and out of sessions to take phone calls. During the creative elements of the workshops this is frustrating but certainly not detrimental to young people. However, when young people are sharing deeply personal and sometime traumatic experiences this can be very off putting for them and perhaps even put them off sharing further.

One of the main areas for future development was the development of codes of conduct for the adults in the room. These were not comprehensively developed in the project. In Kenya, verbal telephone conversations had taken place about the use of cameras in room and in DRC a printed code of conduct had been emailed to all the adult guests attending. In Uganda, the guests were asked not to take photographs at the exhibition. However, there was little or no briefing about the young people in the room and their challenges. Unless they had prior experience of working with displaced young people they were unaware of the complexities and vulnerabilities of the young people sharing their experiences. For example, photographs were still taken of performances in DRC and the research team had to ask policymakers and practitioners to delete photos taken on their phones. The ethics of the research project meant that imagery in any form was not acceptable, however, although this was written in the emailed code of conduct, they had not been properly briefed about this on the day to make sure that the email had been read. Although time was short, there should have been a briefing on the day of each of the workshops that laid out a clear code of conduct and expectations set for the adults in the room laying out a set of ground rules to be followed.

It is also important at this point to reflect upon the conversation that took place in the DRC about imagery and the ethics of photographs. There was a very significant difference of opinion between the research team from Manchester and the artist in Bukavu around images. In the planning meeting, quite a bit of time was wasted around this issue that could have been used to think about the children and young people's experiences of the workshop. If this project is expanded, I would encourage all involved to have clear guidelines on the uses use of imagery before the project starts.

**Safeguarding Summary:** In summary for this section, I would like to highlight the key areas of concern that should be addressed in future projects.

1. The first, as discussed above, is of the use of images.
2. It is debatable whether the young people were consenting to take part in the workshop. They were taken through the nature of the project at the beginning of the workshop and it was positive that they did not hand over their signed ethics forms until the end of the workshop so that the young people had an opportunity to change their minds about consenting to their stories being part of the research project. However, if some of the young people arrived with different expectations of the workshop, did they fully understand what they were taking part in? And can we say that they had given their full consent for participation?
3. In Kenya and the DRC young people had adults that they knew and trusted to support them through the workshop, which was especially important if they talked about possible lived trauma. However, in Uganda the adults accompanying the young people were not directly known to them (a male translator was hired to work with a young woman who he had not met before) and therefore raise the issue of how well these young people would have been supported should the conversation have raised issues of trauma. In the instance of an organisation bringing young people who should not have at the workshop (they were on a comedown from their drug use the day before and, in all likelihood, had had very little sleep due to their current situation of still living on the streets), it is important that there the research team adopt a duty of care approach to selecting the NGOs they are going to work with. Projects such as this ask young people to enter a space where they could be vulnerable whilst sharing lived traumatic experiences. I would encourage that there to be a more thorough due diligence – that relates to safeguarding young people and not just their financial and legal status - to ensure that the young people are ensured an experience that is as safe as possible.

## Evaluating the project

The evaluation process itself was not without its challenges. Across all three locations, there was limited time to conduct an evaluation with artists, practitioners, and researchers. The only location that I had time to reflect with the researcher one-to-one was in Uganda. Although I was able to have follow-up conversations with the Uganda team and the UK team, I was not able to contact the artist in Kenya or the DRC team to follow up. My reflections in this section therefore focus mainly on the analysis meetings that took place after each workshop. In future projects, I would encourage there to be space for artists in particular to have one-to-one reflection meetings with the evaluator as there is a deal of learning to be taken from their experience in these workshops. From artists we can learn how best to co-create and understand the challenges they face coming into an advocacy space and begin to recognise where support is needed for artists to make the art and advocacy work together to provide the biggest possible impact for the young people.

It would have also been incredibly beneficial to have some space and time with practitioners, particularly in Kenya as so many of them were involved in the workshop but not in the planning. Su Corcoran carried out follow up meetings in Kenya to find out about what they thought, but that is separate to this evaluation. Practitioners know the young people best and both the researchers and the artists can learn from their experience of the process. Had the meetings with the practitioners been conducted by the evaluator, rather than a member of the research team, this may have created a confidential space and potentially more constructive feedback from practitioners. Due to logistics of the young people coming from three separated locations in Nairobi, this plan was unworkable in the time provided.

The focus groups held after each workshop were key to evaluating the project. Learning from the young people's experiences should be at the heart of developing any future project; and it is their experience of being heard and raising their voices that need to be at the heart of the learning. However, due to logistical challenges these focus groups were held after long workshop sessions and the young people in each context were tired and eager to leave.

This was particularly the case in Kenya, where the young people were the most vulnerable. They were much closer to their lived experiences on the streets. Their concentration spans were still very low and some individuals found it hard to engage. They were very tired but also struggling to engage in conversation with a translator in a very short timeframe. It was challenging to ensure their voices were included in the evaluation. In addition, the afternoon session was very short, and they had eaten a very large lunch, which made them all very sleepy. They also all had long journeys back to their communities and did not want to get stuck in rush hour traffic. These factors made facilitating a session really challenging.

As the workshop was split across two days in Uganda, the young people were not as tired as they were in Kenya. However, they had come from across Kampala and were again were very time conscious as they did not want to get stuck in traffic jams as they had done the

previous evening. In the DRC, the young people were also tired after two long days of workshops. However, they were very engaged in the process of evaluation.

It is important to acknowledge that in all of the focus groups I facilitated, the young people were being asked to disclose their opinions to a stranger about the workshops. That stranger also happened to be a white woman and in the main, communicating through a translator. It is worth reflecting on how much more insightful an evaluation would be, if young people are in a safe space with adults they know and trust. Kenya was the only evaluation where social workers were present in the evaluation and that was for translation purposes. Within the evaluations I facilitated, there was an inherent power dynamic that meant the young people may not have been as open as perhaps they would have been with someone they knew or trusted.

One of the key challenges to conducting the evaluations with the young people was their reluctance to offer any truly constructive feedback. In every session, it was much easier to talk about what they enjoyed than what they did not like or would have changed. There are a number of obvious factors in this. Culturally, in East and Central Africa, young people are much less likely to challenge their elders or to give feedback to those in positions of authority. Whilst I emphasised to all the groups that what they said was confidential and we were in a space where they could say anything, young people from all three workshops were reluctant to offer constructive feedback. It took a lot of reassurance for young people to feel comfortable to give feedback that was not positive. There must be an acknowledgement here of not only cultural respect but also of a complicated power dynamic where an unknown white woman from the UK is asking the questions.

Even though we made it clear that I was an external part of the project observing the project team, not a member of Manchester Metropolitan University, I was still a white woman asking questions. There is an underlying power dynamic that needs to be acknowledged. From feedback in those sessions, I was positioned as someone with power that could 'help' the young people in their current circumstances. These expectations from young people should be expected and perhaps this could have been avoided if young people had been briefed more thoroughly about the purpose of the project and the roles of myself and the research team. However, the dynamic may always be present if an evaluation is conducted by an outsider who has no relationship of trust with the young people involved.

The original plan was to hold the focus groups on a different day at the centres they frequented that were run by the organisations, this was not logistically possible. But, if young people's voices and lived experiences are really at the heart of the advocacy work, which was the aim in this project, then so should their reflections of the experience in the project. A separate space and time with the adults that they trust and who speak their mother tongue would be the ideal situation to really hear and understand young people's experiences in the process. This would be invaluable for the learning and development of the project and subsequently the advocacy messages being created. There is no reason that an external evaluator could not support practitioners from afar to help them prepare and deliver sessions in which young people can reflect safely, openly and meaningfully on their experience of the project. Participatory evaluation models should be explored.

*External Evaluation of the GCRF/AHRC-funded project - Belonging and Learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*

## Summary and Recommendations

The *Belonging and Learning* project was incredibly inspiring, and it was exciting to see how we can begin to look at how art can be used in East and Central Africa to ensure young people have a stronger voice and impact on policy makers' decision-making - that relates to their lived experiences.

I would like to acknowledge that this research team chose to have critical friend who is a practitioner and was part of the vast majority of the process, rather than just a mid-point and end-point evaluation. I know now that this is not standard practice in many research projects, and they have been willing to open themselves up to a greater level of critique in so doing. For me, my involvement in this project truly highlights the commitment to learning and putting young people and practice at the centre of research. Choosing a practitioner as an evaluator really highlights the desire to develop better future projects that focus on good practice and child-centred approaches. Within a short-term research project, there were always going to be a lot of learning points and I hope that these points serve to benefit the growth and development of future research.

Across all three settings people in powerful positions engaged in experiential methods. This was most apparent in Kenya and DRC, as they were at the workshops and participating in the activities throughout. This was more challenging in Uganda given that the art form was visual art and the decision makers were only included in an exhibition at the end of the two days and not during the whole workshop. What was clear was that art was either a way to break down barriers or to start discussions or indeed both. Whilst young people did have a voice at every meeting, it is important for us to reflect on whether young people's voices are ever really heard and whether ingrained power dynamics and cultural norms between adults and children ever mean that they are truly equal. What was clear from all three workshops was that conversations were started, and opinions, beliefs and values were challenged. Young people and their eloquence around their lived experiences were able to begin a conversation and, in some instances, change a narrative that exists around some of the world's most vulnerable children not having access to education. Art was a key part of this. Whilst the workshops were short it is clear to me that there is power in this methodology and that if we were able to use art to challenge policy and ensure young people and their voices are at the heart of the creative process then there could be huge impact.

To ensure that we are able to resituate power relations and ensure young people have a stronger voice then we must consider how we plan our programmes to ensure young people are centre stage. We can do this by ensuring practitioners, and where their safety is ensured young people, are included from an earlier stage in the planning process. We must ensure that the spaces in which we expect young people to interact and contribute are safe and appropriate, to ensure that those who hold the power are appropriately briefed and understand the challenges and complexities that these young people face and are respectful of their voices and experiences.



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