

Summary research report

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Research Project: "Supporting associative resilience in the face of the Covid-19 crisis: case study of innovative public support mechanisms for associations"

Selected for IFMA's call "The associative world in light of the COVID-19 crisis".

Report Title: "Fighting gender-based violence through innovative partnerships involving associations: a Global North-South perspective"



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We thank our study’s associative and public participants. Their efforts to deploy real equality and fight against violence in the studied territories are admirable. We respect here the wish for anonymity some participants expressed. They manage to co-produce social innovations in complex contexts, displaying creativity, collective intelligence and resilience. We thank the Hauts-de-France region’s Gender Equality Directorate (DRDFE) for allowing us to study an ongoing experiment, *Nina & Simon.e.s.* Many people provided us with scientific support and guidance throughout this project: we would like to thank colleagues from the University of Reims’ SSE chair and Copenhagen Business School’s Business Humanities and Law department, peers, students, and the associative actors we met during this journey.

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Fighting gender-based violence through innovative partnerships involving associations: a Global North-South perspective

This report presents the scientific results of the research project funded by the French institute for Civil society (IFMA) carried out by Caroline Demeyère (principal investigator), Lamia Bouadi and Stéphanie Havet-Laurent as part of the 2020 call for research projects on "The associative world in light of the COVID-19 crisis". Our research project focuses on a particular associative sector and area of public policy: the promotion of gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. The Covid-19 crisis was the starting point of our research.

We observed a gap between expectations towards the associative sector and the destabilization of associations' socio-economic models, networks, and activities. On one hand, associations were portrayed in media, public, and scientific discourses as drivers of societal resilience (Curnin & O'Hara, 2019; Demiroz & Hu, 2014; Lethielleux, Demeyère, Artis, Vézinat & Girard, 2024). This is because they are framed as civil society organizations, close to the needs of citizens and communities, as well as drivers of social innovations (Demeyère, 2020; Demeyère, Havet-Laurent & Richard, 2022). In other words, associations carry the hopes to address the Covid-19's consequences, to 'come back to normal' or even anticipate other crises and prefigure 'the world after Covid'. In the gender equality field, associations experienced a dramatic increase of demands: indeed, gender-based violence and inequalities have exploded. As shown by several studies (examples: World Economic Forum in Davos, 2021; UN Women, 2021), the Covid-19 will have long term effect: a generation -36 years! - have been lost on average to achieve gender equality at the global level.

On the other hand, the crisis has affected associations' socio-economic models, with weaker and more uncertain public funding, difficulties to organize paid and volunteer work (ILO, 2020). The traditional associative action model has been called into question. In the gender

equality field as in other areas within care and social work, the Covid-19 has exacerbated limits in how the activities are organized, i.e. with beneficiaries coming to in-presence meetings at one organization's premises, during limited office hours. It is complicated to take care of beneficiaries in an efficient and 'holistic' way when traveling is impeached, and associative networks are destabilized.

Civil society can play its role in societal and community resilience, and more broadly in organizing for a just transition (Demeyère, Cortambert, Havet-Laurent & Eynaud, 2024; Eynaud & de França Filho, 2019) through partnerships. The Covid-19 has raised the issue of public-associative relationships and cross-sector partnerships as an urgent one (Chabaud, Eynaud and Raulet-Croset, 2024): the need to deploy collaborative public management and policies. Coproduction and co-construction (Bouadi & Demeyère, 2021; Fraisse, 2017; Vaillancourt, 2019), inter and cross-sector collaborations are major aspirational discourses for public policies. It is particularly true in the gender equality field, because of the gender mainstreaming strategy. However, public and associative relationships are ambivalent (Dauphin, 2002; 2010; Hersent, 2015) and public funding in this sector is volatile. This situation questions the sustainability of the paradigm shift towards the management of public interest and collaborative governance (Demeyère, 2020). The challenges for civil society and gender equality will last beyond the Covid-19's short term effects. In the gender equality field, the stakes at play are extremely high: citizens' access to their rights and the real ability to exercise them in their everyday lives and local communities (Feltesse, 2013).

We draw on case studies in two different institutional contexts, in a Global North country and in a Global South one. In the Global North context, equality of rights has been won thanks to civil society's organizing but inequalities persist in the effective access to these rights. In the Global South context we studied, associations still fight for gender equality legal rights. We aim to put into conversation the cases and the associative actors and refuse to hierarchize the

activities carried out in the different contexts or to promote standardized ‘good practices’ from the Global North to be applied to the Global South. On the contrary, we highlight the common issues and efforts deployed by civil society actors in both contexts and the opportunities to create a space for collective sharing of experiences. Our results show that the crisis can foster new partnerships’ (see the scientific dissemination article in the professional magazine *Juris Association* on March 1st, 2024, by Demeyère, Havet-Laurent & Bouadi).

Regarding the method, we developed two case studies (Dumez, 2016; Hlady-Rispal, 2015; Gombault, 2005) of on-going experimentations from 2020 to 2023 to limit success biases and retrospective rationalization. We were interested in how associative and public actors organized in the face of the crisis, without judging in advance and being normative of what is a ‘failure’ or a ‘success’. First, we analyzed the institutional contexts of the two cases such as civil society, feminism and gender policies by mobilizing secondary data (regional, national and supranational public and associative reports) and primary data (interviews with associative and public actors and experts). Secondly, we explored in depth the cases, including documentary collection (official communications, associative and public archives, gray and internal literature), semi-directive interviews of volunteer and paid associations’ workers, managers and various stakeholders (partners, beneficiaries), as well as participant observation in an ethnographic perspective. We conducted the fieldwork online and in person, in a hybrid strategy that became more and more common with the Covid-19 crisis.

We published details about the Global North case, Nina & Simon.e.s as an academic book chapter (Demeyère, Havet-Laurent & Bouadi, 2024). In this report, we focus on our Global North/South perspective and its surprising results.

First, beyond the differences between the two institutional contexts in terms of public support for civil society and gender equality, all associations share a common understanding: the will

to no longer be public service providers dealing with emergencies -including life-threatening ones such as organizing shelters for women and children who are victims of physical violence. They conceptualize a holistic and inter-associative strategy to fight gender-based violence and inequalities, including prevention, awareness-raising and empowerment. Inequalities and violence are framed as a systemic problem that calls for cultural change rather than associations fixing the consequences with a public mandate. Associations expressed their needs to become public actors' partners to reinforce gender equality networks in territorial contexts. With the public support they could infuse a gender equality culture not from a top-down perspective but from existing needs, knowledge and communities. In both cases, the stigmatization of the local communities in terms of gender equality, i.e. the spread discourses that people from these areas are more sexist and violence because of a supposed lack of education, social misery, tradition, religion or culture- is mentioned as a driver. A common territorial identity could be created against these stereotypes, transcending the divisions between associative, public actors, men and women in the population. In the Global North case, the institutionalization of gender equality public policies i.e. the 'official feminism' has leveraged public-associative collaboration and its formalization. In the Global South case, the spaces and arrangements for such cross-sector collaborations are more informal. Yet, they exist, and a lot of administrative and public actors offer significant support to the gender equality associations' initiatives -often based on their own personal values, political agenda and proximity with local civil society.

Second, the crafted solutions the associations deployed share similarities in both contexts. In the Global North and Global South studied cases, there is a wish to break with the 'beneficiary comes by' model by implementing a philosophy of 'going towards', which is an important ethical referential in care and social work (Adloff, 2018; Avenel, 2023; Baillergeau & Grymonprez, 2020). The associative activities go beyond the boundaries of a single organization and a physical space. Associations develop their activities in new spaces, such as

public ones including commercial, for-profit spaces: for example, shopping centers, Sunday outside markets, village squares and post offices. This enables associations to reach new (types of) beneficiaries in rural and/or peripheral areas and implies the ability to quickly adjust the activities to the local needs. New targets include young people, who often feel outside of the prevailing framing of domestic violence (within married couples living together) while gender-based violence in teenagerhood has exploded. A key strategy is the development of hybrid activities, blending online and on-site encounters and multiplying the physical and online spaces. Traditions and pride in belonging to a local community can be mobilized to identify the beneficiaries' need and develop a bottom-up approach, with customized activities and framing. This is for instance the case when associations in the Global South case designed workshops around women's economic emancipation by valuing their expertise on local crafts. This framing on entrepreneurship attracts the support of public actors who focus on local economic development. Beyond new spatial opportunities for associations, new temporalities emerge in implementing the 'going to the beneficiary' philosophy: extended hours vs. in-person office hours at the associations' premises, to fit the citizens' needs and lifestyles and 'eventization' of gender equality with celebration, festivals and pop-up formats. Gender equality is designed as a source of joy and socialization to unite the local community. In both case studies, the idea is to question the figure of the beneficiary as the disempowered victim or 'user' who must take the responsibility to come to the association. Gender equality is co-constructed as a source of pride for the organizational partners and inhabitants. The formalization of the two initiatives differs, particularly with regards to public funding and (un)official governance involving associative and public actors. Yet, they are spaces to prefigure the transition, develop and implement new imaginaries on governments-civil society relationships. They are extremely valuable as on-going experiences, involving learning how to cooperate and establish 'milestones' for cross-sector collaborations.

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