



# SOUNGA

A HELPING HAND IN THE CONGO

MADAM DANIELE SASSOU NGUESSO



# SOUNGA®

## FEMMES DE DEMAIN

**Africa's patriarchal system often dwarfs women's contribution to the continent's growth and development - providing very limited information on their strides in government and the marketplace. However, women in the Africa have remained undaunted, electing to allow their works speak for them. As mothers, they are better suited to drive the much-needed change that the continent craves, which explains why a number of women with the means are pursuing people-oriented projects, that serves to assist the vulnerable members of the society. Sounga Foundation is one among the growing list of noble projects contributing to worthy causes in the continent and the founder, Madam Daniele Sassou Nguesso, talks to African Leadership Magazine, on the foundation's projects and her other social interventions in Congo and Africa at large; excerpts.**

[Our findings show that you had a successful experience in the medical field before venturing into Social entrepreneurship. Could you tell us about it? Also about your decision to pursue gender development in Congo?](#)

There was nothing that predisposed me to be interested in the fate of women, neither my education nor my training. It is the difficulties that have arisen throughout my career, which led me to realize that women occupy a marginal place in our societies. It is then that I decided to enroll in Sciences Po Paris in order to gather the technical tools necessary to effectively carry out this social project whose vocation is to see the Congolese woman grow in autonomy and more.

[You recently joined the growing list of influential women in Africa who are lending their voices to social causes happening on the continent. Tell us about the Sounga Foundation, founded in 2015.](#)

Sounga, a word signifying "help" in Lingala (a language spoken predominantly in Congo), is the foundation on which the Sounga Foundation was built. Created in 2015 with the objective to accompany Congolese women in their journey towards emancipation and autonomy, when so many of them are still subject to various types of injustices and violence

– be it public or in their private lives, and regardless of rural or city settings.

In order to change this situation, we gave ourselves the following four objectives: firstly, to set up training programs that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and know-how and thus allow women to take up activities which would render them autonomous. Secondly, encouraging entrepreneurship, notably via incubators, to be launched in the near future. Thirdly, showing that we value women while also portraying images of feminine success, is a way to combat the discrimination and violence that women experience on a daily basis. We believe at The Sounga Foundation, that we must first change the minds of man, where discrimination originates. It is only through such a measured approach that we can improve the image of women while inspiring other women. Our fourth focus consists of lobbying key decision makers. Our close relationships with many of these women allow us to speak on their belief, remaining faithful to their voiced wishes, (when engaging with key decision makers from the public and private, through the production of white papers, position papers or) when pleading their cause.

[What are some of the factors, that differentiates the Sounga Foundation, from other foundations with similar](#)

[objectives present on the continent?](#)

The SOUNGA Foundation is similar to other foundations with respect to its objectives. Wherein lies the differences is in the genealogy of the project, which finds its roots in the white paper "Improving the conditions of the Congolese Woman". This white paper is the result of 8-panel discussions that brought together the opinions of more than 8,000 Congolese. The White Paper is a compendium of proposals to improve the Congolese women's life. We have begun to implement some of these recommendations, with the support of some local and international partners. To date, we have been able to carry out a project to strengthen the economic empowerment of women through a women business accelerator called SOUNGA NGA. We are also working on a project called Label genre which aim is to classify companies according to the places given to women.

[Nigeria's president Buhari was recently quoted to have said that "a woman's place is in the Kitchen, bedroom, and the other room." The statement no doubt reinforces Africa's Patriarchal system, which has continuously placed women at a disadvantage position; from your experience, what needs to be done to give women their rightful place in the African society?](#)



## Speech at the 9th Annual Conference of Women Pan-African Parliament

A lot must be done for women to hold the place they deserve in our African societies. These things are many but so simple to implement. It is about giving to girls and women the same as boys and men in terms of consideration, opportunities, and rights in all fields of the society. We are not asking for a revolution, but simply that men who take the laws and acts about women remember that all this can have consequences on the lives of their daughters, their sisters; their mother or their wife.

[A cursory look at some of your interventions through the foundation and other initiatives that you support and promote shows that you are already involved in the first 5 items on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; what is the future of SDGs in Africa?](#)

My action does not only affect the first 5 SDGs because they are all linked to each other. Intervening on one aspect is supposed to affect the other objectives. That said, it is difficult to predict the future of SDGs in Africa as the challenges they bring about in Africa are huge. But I welcome the existence of these objectives, which have the merit of setting the course to follow, define the major challenges and propose clear solutions to take them up. If, by 2030, these objectives are achieved, at least in part, considerable progress for the development of Africa will have been made.

[Analysts have continued to maintain that Africa is the worst hit by the effects of climate change, yet her voice has remained insignificant in global climate change](#)

[debates. What specific interventions did you make at this conference to mitigate the effect of climate change on the continent?](#)

1.3 billion people are living in situations of extreme poverty, of which 70% are women. Climate change mainly affects the poorest among which African women. They are therefore in the front line of the effects of climate change because they spend 40 billion hours each year walking long distances to fetch firewood and water. They are also responsible for the production of 80% of foodstuffs. In spite of all this, they are the first victims of natural disasters. Among the victims of the Asian tsunami of 2004, 70% are women. Natural disasters turn them into easy prey for human trafficking, for rape or forced prostitution. The message I have given on this issue is that if women are the first victims of climate change, they are also able to work for the preservation of the environment if they are provided with solutions to empower them such as access to education and financing.

[What are some of the major Gender issues that Africa must confront to make meaningful progress on the global stage?](#)

The main gender challenge is parity. It starts with a girl's education and a woman's professional training, to the sort of access to financing that she will be awarded; the economic inclusion of women in companies and public services, and the possibility to inherit from their husbands; If women received what they rightfully deserved, 50% or rather half of all means of production and decision-making tools... Such a parity would lead to significant

global advantages. According to the United Nations, if women had the same access as men to means of production, their agricultural production would increase by 20% to 30% and some 150 million more people would be fed immediately. In the same vein, the McKinsey Global Institute says that parity would allow a potential gain of 28 trillion dollars or 26% of annual GDP in the world by 2025.

[As an influential female leader in Africa, what would be your advice to women on the continent?](#)

My main advice to my African sisters would be to continue to learn throughout your entire lives and make sure that your children, especially girls, learn just as the boys do. Only through the acquiring of knowledge and know-how can the girls guarantee their freedom and that of future generations. For the struggle of women is a simple quest for freedom, rights to be subject to the same duties as men. To do this, you must have been trained.

**Danièle Sassou Nguesso**

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**Sounga foundation - Brazzaville**

**[www.fondationsounga.org](http://www.fondationsounga.org)** ■