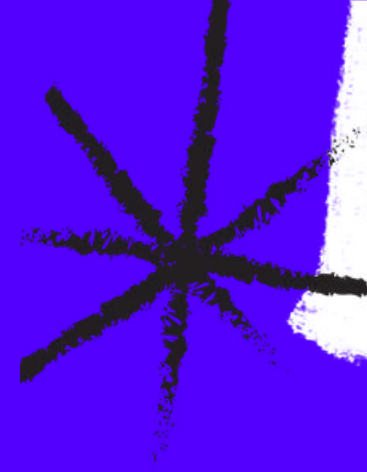
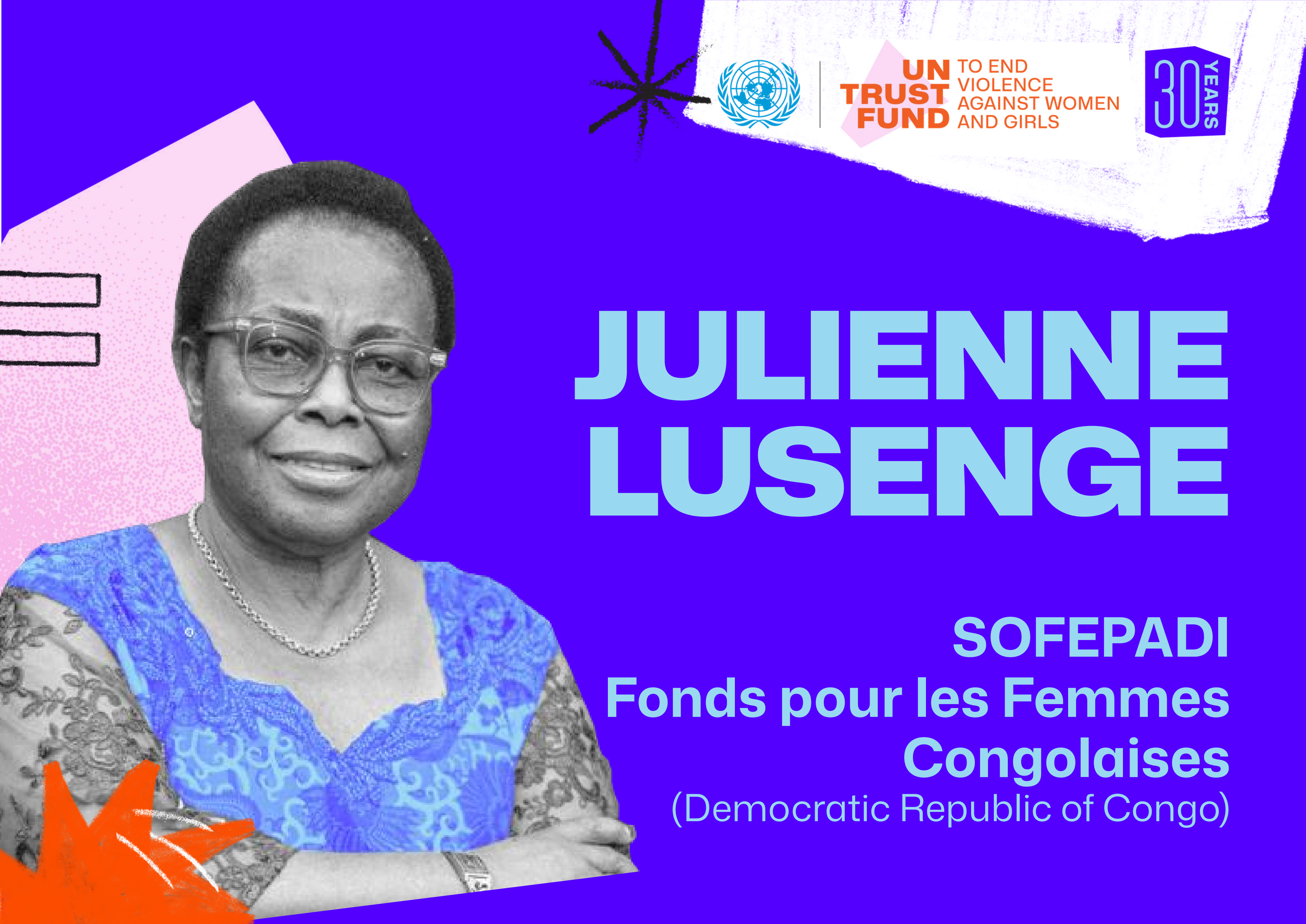




UN
TRUST
FUND TO END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS

30
YEARS

JULIENNE LUSENGE

SOFEPADI
Fonds pour les Femmes
Congolaises
(Democratic Republic of Congo)

“

I started my career listening to women whose voice went unheard.

My first job was at a radio station focused on development. We traveled to villages across the Democratic Republic of Congo, sat with women for hours, and let them talk. Custom and tradition meant many had never been asked what they thought, even about decisions that shaped their own lives and their daughters' futures.

We took their questions to prosecutors, doctors, and agronomists, then broadcast the answers in local languages so entire communities could hear them. I realized I had a voice, and decided to use it to create space for other women's voices to be heard.

In 2021, the UN Trust Fund invested nearly one million dollars in a Congolese women-led organization, the kind of investment few were prepared to make at the time. With this, SOFEPADI reached the women and girls at the highest risk of violence: displaced women, Pygmy women, women living with disabilities, and women with no income to fall back on.





Across six districts in North Kivu, we got care to survivors within the critical first 72 hours, opened psychosocial counseling, offered free legal aid to help survivors reach courts long out of reach, and supported 60 families raising children born of rape with direct cash assistance. Because recovery doesn't end with a case file, we helped survivors rebuild through income-generating activities of their own choosing, and put information on GBV risks and services directly in people's hands, so protection was something the community helped build.

As SOFEPADI's reach grew, so did my sense of how much more was needed beyond what one organization alone could cover. I founded the Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises (FFC) to extend our work into more provinces and reach even more women and women's groups. When the UN Trust Fund partnered with FFC in 2019, no programme in the DRC was addressing sexual violence against girls inside schools. We knew we had to be the first.



“What gives me hope is what I have watched grow around me: girls who once stay silent can now speak up. Change cannot be imposed from outside. It can only be built with communities.



So I come back to one thing: trust. Trust local, women-led organizations not only to deliver, but to lead with the resources, flexibility and space to shape the solutions to end violence against women and girls.



Julienne Lusenge is a Congolese women's rights leader, peacebuilder and human rights defender who has spent more than three decades advancing justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and strengthening women's leadership in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She co-founded SOFEPADI, a women-led organization working with survivors and communities affected by conflict.