

### Gender and Programmatic Context



Women constitute **55.2%** of the workforce of Burundi, with the majority working in the agriculture sector. While agriculture provides for **90%** of food production and **90%** of the country's exports, women's lack of equal land ownership and access to credit limits their opportunities for growth. The prevalence of women in growth sectors, such as formal trade, banking and industry, is minimal, and they are held back by gender norms and stereotypes which disadvantage them and hinder their ability to become financially independent.

**Building Bridges in Burundi** is a country-wide, five-year peacebuilding project, developed to mitigate the root causes of conflict and instability in Burundi. The programme aims at transforming the lives of young men and women, by equipping them with the means to become responsible and resilient citizens and work towards peaceful coexistence.

Women were given equal opportunities to improve their socio-economic resilience and start entrepreneurial enterprises through the mixed gender self-help groups; however the recent study found that structural barriers and traditional gender norms continue to hold them back.

*"I can save and access loans that will allow me to invest and create an income for myself, reducing poverty and conflicts in the community"*

**(Female, Kirundo)**

*"Personally, the BBB program allowed me not to have to be asking for everything to my husband as a wife. I can also participate in the wellness of my family, we have access to better nutrition, healthcare, we have improved our lifestyle. Moreover, we have psychosocial support agents (APS) in our groups who help us to resolve peacefully our conflicts."*

**(Female, Kirundo)**

### Gender Study Findings on Socio-Economic Resilience

In 2021, an analysis was conducted to examine how BBB initiatives made an impact on gender relations at community level. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus-groups across 13 municipalities in Burundi. Here we share our main findings and recommendations.

## Main findings and observations:

### Structural and cultural inequalities present barriers to women's full participation:

**Despite high motivation**, women have a greater time burden than men due to holding the majority of household and family care responsibilities.

**Husbands sometimes refused** to permit their wives to take part in self-help groups due to misperceptions and fear that the groups would turn their wives against them.

**Male members of** the groups sometimes expressed resentment about the involvement of women as they felt it devalued the groups.

### Internalised patriarchy sees women disqualify themselves from leadership positions:

**Women showed less** interest to hold leadership positions, preferring the secretarial roles and believing the presidential positions to be best held by men.

**Societal norms of** male leadership and structural challenges of education and literacy prevented the achievement of equal representation.

### Entrenched perceptions of gender roles inhibit women's access to high capital trades:

**An inability to** travel and limited networks limit the potential growth opportunity of women's businesses.

**Despite all vocational** training being offered to men and women, the choices of participants largely fell along stereotypical gender lines.

*SHGs have helped develop a spirit of saving and entrepreneurship. Through vocational skills training both women and men have improved their economic standing and learnt better management of assets. Women, in addition, reported finding another family and a place for fulfillment where they felt valued and could build social capital. Men, on the other hand, tended to view the groups more as an economic tool and were more likely to leave when other opportunities arose.*

*Women themselves reported greater self-esteem through opportunities to take responsibility, speak out and be involved in local discussions. While at the household level fewer arguments, lower levels of domestic violence, better joint management of assets and greater respect from their husbands demonstrated changes in attitude.*

*In cases where women were in leadership the advantages were clear to all SHG members, who said they inspired confidence, and were more sensitive to the particular needs of vulnerable groups*

## Recommendations:

There is a need to work on deconstructing stereotypes related to different occupations and encouraging people not to limit their vision in entrepreneurship.

SHGs provide great opportunities for learning and could be used to introduce other themes such as gender equality. The improved status of women under the BBB project must be built upon to challenge gender norms and ensure lasting change.

Learning from examples of women that did take up leadership positions can teach us how to improve participation and self-selection, and be used to encourage and inspire others.



Beneficiary selling Kitenge on Market