

**Dialogue on Economic Empowerment of Women and their Effective
Participation in Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region within the evolving
context of COVID-19**

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The World Bank is committed to promoting women and girl empowerment through the 4 E's; (i) Education (ii) Employment (iii) Enhanced access to health services and (iv) creating Enabling environment for girls and women empowerment. This agenda is even more important in the covid-19 context as the crisis magnifies existing disparities and stifle recent gains. As such urgent action is needed to: (i) Safeguard girls' education, (ii) Address Gender Based Violence and (iv) Protect women's livelihoods. Economic empowerment of women and girls is a cost effective and high return investment in response to the pandemic. The World Bank is working intensively in the response to COVID19 and its economic consequences. Our focus has four key pillars: i) saving lives through interventions that support the health response to COVID19; ii) protecting the poor and vulnerable through strengthening social safety nets in rural and urban areas; iii) ensuring sustainable business growth and job creation, especially in SMEs; and iv) strengthening policies, institutions and investments for building back better.

The World Bank's response to Economic Empowerment of Women within the evolving context of COVID-19 has seen (i) more projects investing in women and girls, (ii) Higher awareness of sub-national variations and vulnerability "hotspots" to inform decision making (iii) Increased effort to improve collaboration, (iv) More operations addressing social norms and (v) Ground-breaking knowledge on women's and girls' empowerment being generated. Within the context of the GLI, the World Bank is financing the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project. The project is a US \$79m regional operation that involves DRC (\$34m), Rwanda (\$26m), Uganda (\$14m) and COMESA (\$5m). Burundi will join in this FY21, the second phase of these project (\$50m). The project development objective is to facilitate cross-border trade by increasing the capacity for commerce and reducing the costs faced by traders, especially small scale and women traders, at targeted locations in the borderlands.

The project directly addresses poverty reduction by targeting the constraints faced by poor small-scale cross-border traders (8 out of 10 small scale traders at the target border crossing points are women), as well as the countries growth enhancing economic activities which will contribute to increasing national revenues. As well established in empirical evidence, greater bilateral trade plays an important role in reducing vulnerability, fragility and the probability of conflict. Small scale trade is quite important for the region and especially women, in terms of balance of trade and more importantly, livelihoods. For example, in Uganda small scale trade exports in 2017 amounted to 16 percent of overall exports and imports to 1.4 percent of total imports, meaning that the country's balance of payment deficit was more than 17 percent lower than it would have been if the calculations had been only based on Customs records . Statistics at some border crossing points with the DRC suggest that the volume of small-scale trade is greater than that of formal, large scale flows. The borders between Rwanda and DRC see as many as 50 thousand pedestrian crossings per day at some sites, of small-scale traders who are involved in the exchange of mostly agricultural products. However, the traders face many hurdles, some due to complex requirements and others due to a corrupt control regime.

The World Bank is taking urgent action in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic in line with the 4 E's.

- **EMPOWER;** Rolling-out rapid surveys and promoting positive gender roles to address GBV
- **ENHANCE;** Maintaining Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and nutrition services, supplying health commodities, incl. family planning and Avoiding demand-side drops
- **EDUCATE;** Enhancing distance learning, Stepping-up cash transfers for a safe return to school and (iii) Supplying school kits, food support and other needed supplies
- **EMPLOY** (i) Providing cash grants and supporting women's employment and productivity