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# ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN BURUNDI

## Tuyage E4W Project Overview

Since July 2018, Search for Common Ground (Search) has been implementing **“Tuyage: Information Access and Economic Discourse Strengthening project”** in Burundi. The project is funded by USAID for a 5 years period, and the overall objective of the project is to foster an enriched information landscape and culture of open discussion on economic concerns and civic engagement that directly affect Burundians in their daily lives, increasing dialogue across divides and building social cohesion. **The project relies on 3 components:**



To expand the cadre of professional journalists capable of producing high-quality, ethical and non-politicized news and information on economic issues.



To promote networking among economic actors.



To reduce the social norms and cultural barriers limiting ownership of property and productive assets for women.

A study was conducted between December 2020 and January 2021 to shed light on the existing cultural barriers to women's economic empowerment (WEE), the social norms that limit or support women's access to economic opportunities.

**The study targeted four of the eighteen provinces of Burundi.** It comprised surveys of 735 households (55% women), 52 interviews with representatives from local authorities, private sector, CSOs, the international community and there were 8 groups for the Focus Group Discussions with 69 participants including young women, older women, and men representing both rural and urban settings.



735 households



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8 groups for the Focus Group Discussions



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## The qualitative and quantitative data highlights the following findings:

- 1** With regards to the **roles of women according to social norms**, the study emphasised the traditional role of women in charge of the household and obeying the husband. These views are shared more widely in rural areas and among low-educated people. Providing for the household and managing finances are viewed as being the remit of men. Both women and men contribute to furthering this dichotomous perception.
- 2** With regards to the **social barriers to women's economic empowerment**, the study underlined women's lack of independence and economic leverage.
  - a.** Because they are expected to take care of the household, women's occupation mainly relies on unpaid work and leaves them with limited time for other activities.
  - b.** Girls are more likely to be withdrawn from schools and retained at home. Mothers who have not been educated do not see the need to educate their girls, therefore perpetuating a vicious circle.
  - c.** Sexuality is taboo in Burundi and this further hampers WEE. Husbands' reluctance to WEE is for instance linked to fears of sexual misconduct when wives travel for professional reasons, and employers are reluctant to hire women for fear they would get pregnant.
  - d.** Lastly, the fact that women do not have the right to inheritance leaves them all the more dependent on their husbands.
- 3** The study also showed that the **evolution of the Burundian society could benefit WEE**. Societal perceptions growingly view women as good multi-taskers based on their management of the household. Women living in urban areas are also more likely to have maids take care of the household. Consequently, more women have engaged in trade in the markets, have become salesperson in stores or have even been employed in administrative positions.
- 4** With regards to the **knowledge and perspectives on women's economic empowerment**, the study indicated that for the large part, WEE is viewed as a contribution to the income of the household, rather than an autonomization tool. However, certain initiatives are supporting WEE. Public policies such as the financing of municipalities since 2015 contribute to women's empowerment as income-generating activities are mostly held by women in rural areas. The civil society also supports WEE through the work of local organisations promoting girls' education.

The third component of the project will be the primary focus of the implementation for the remaining period. As such, Search will keep supporting WEE through gender awareness programs, women entrepreneur training, mentoring sessions, as well as financial support provided to women-led economic initiatives.

Additionally, Search will endeavour to promote the concept of positive masculinity through influencing actors such as the media in order to raise awareness, to help men overcome the perceived threat that comes with WEE, rather see it as a win-win opportunity.