

## *Tuyage and United for Peace Combined Report:*

### *Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Burundi*

#### **a. Introduction**

Search for Common Ground (Search) has been working since 1995 to support peace and reconciliation in Burundi. In 2020, Search launched the second phase of the Tuyage (“Let’s Talk”) project to address the unique barriers that women, especially young women, face to their meaningful participation in their communities’ social and economic life. This combined study assesses the current state of community perspectives on women’s economic inclusion, evaluates the impact of Tuyage project activities, and builds a knowledge base to inform metrics and program design for the United for Peace project.

The study was conducted in spring 2022, using quantitative surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with men, women, local leaders, and media professionals in 12 localities across six provinces in Burundi.

#### **b. Key findings**

##### Perspectives on women’s economic inclusion in Burundi

The study found that the attitudes of community members towards women’s economic inclusion are trending in a positive direction. Over 95% of men and 97% of women expressed support for women’s economic inclusion. Women are seen as playing a greater role in economic activities than in the past: 65% of men surveyed felt that women were economically empowered, and 97% felt that their economic inclusion was a positive thing for the community. In interviews, men commented that women *“are more and more active in the community and have income-generating activities that are prospering.”* Participation in savings and loans associations (VSLAs) and access to information for women who have succeeded in economic affairs and overcome social barriers were key to promote these changes.

Men and local leaders were nonetheless resistant to women’s full empowerment, emphasizing that women must focus on household tasks and not challenge male social status. Relatedly, women expressed limited feelings of agency: only 50% felt that they were economically empowered, with slightly higher rates among women under 30 and in regions with greater economic activity, and 32% felt that they had the power to make decisions or control resources in their households.

##### Evaluation of Project Tuyage activities

Tuyage project activities were remarkably effective in improving women’s economic outcomes and increasing access to media that promotes women’s inclusion and rights. Mixed findings on changes in women’s agency and discriminatory norms, however, point to the need to adapt project activities to address more deeply ingrained barriers to women’s rights and empowerment.

##### *Women’s economic inclusion and empowerment*

Among women who participated in Tuyage, 73% felt economically empowered compared to 43 % of non-participants, and 70% reported increased monthly revenue compared to 33% of non-participants, with greater gains in rural communities. Activities encouraging women to form and join VSLAs and support to women in the coffee sector were particularly effective in this area. Although 92% of women felt their economic activity contributed to their household income, only 61% of Tuyage participants and 55% of non-participants felt they had the agency to make a difference in their household’s economic outcomes. Women cited lack of access to capital as their greatest barrier to increased economic empowerment, but also mentioned that men inhibit participation in VSLA meetings and income-generating activities, and do not support them in accessing capital to support their entrepreneurial projects.

### *Access to quality media programming*

All media professionals surveyed (100%) felt that Tuyage trainings and workshops helped them increase their skills in producing content on women's rights and inclusion, including how to feature the stories and experiences of women in their reporting. Female media professionals and community-based media organizations felt particularly confident in their ability to produce this content. Media professionals, particularly those based in urban areas, emphasized that financial and logistical constraints make it difficult to reach rural areas to speak with women.

Tuyage activities made a dramatic difference in access to media, with 95% of participants reporting increased access to programming on women's rights and inclusion. Women were four times more likely to regularly listen to this programming if they had participated in Tuyage. Although rural women faced greater difficulty accessing programming regularly, radio listening groups reduced this gap and, along with savings and loans associations, created a rich environment for discussion on issues of economic inclusion and empowerment. Among men, however, radio listenership did not appear to be correlated with greater support for women's economic empowerment.

### **c. Recommendations**

#### **2. Activating women leaders**

- Proactively engage more local female leaders and media professionals in Tuyage project activities, support them to build leadership capacities, and elevate their voices in their communities and organizations.
- Engage young women to take leadership positions in associations and civil society organizations, providing them with a platform to share their optimistic views on empowerment and inspire other women.

#### **3. Accelerating economic outcomes**

- Identify new opportunities for women to access financial tools and resources, including government programs, formal financial institutions, and other non-profit groups.
- Increase opportunities for women to form support networks by multiplying listening groups, encouraging women to engage in collective economic projects, and incorporating support networks as a topic in training and dialogues.

#### **4. Adapt project activities to increase focus on changing men's discriminatory perspectives on women's rights and empowerment**

- Include men in project activities more consistently, with a focus on increasing opportunities for men and women to jointly discuss concepts such as positive masculinity and concerns around household roles; foster male allies to take leadership in women's empowerment.
- Leverage community-based associations and cooperatives as venues to engage men on topics related to women's economic empowerment, rights, and inclusion.

#### **5. Building sustainability**

- Facilitate collaboration and skill building between community-based and national media organizations; provide guidance to media organizations on how to plan for sustainability and continued capacity building beyond the project timeframe.
- Support project participants to cascade the knowledge and expertise within media organizations and community associations (e.g., VSLAs, listening groups)
- Work with local authorities to regularly share information on project activities, in order to meet their desire to stay informed and, where possible, engage them as in project activities to champion women's empowerment and address discriminatory norms among men.