TRADING FOR PEACE

Promoting Cross-Border Trade for Women’s Civic, Political and Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Peace

28-31 March 2015
AUC Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Panel discussion and photo exhibition
Introduction

International Alert (Alert) in collaboration with the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission (AUC/PSD) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) are pleased to present Trading for Peace: Promoting cross-border trade for women’s civic, political and economic empowerment and sustainable peace, a panel discussion and photo exhibition on the role of cross-border trade in empowering women and promoting peace and security in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation with nearly 30 years of experience laying the foundations for peace. International Alert works with local people around the world to help them build peace, and advise governments, organisations and companies on how to support peace. The organisation focuses on issues that influence peace, including governance, economics, gender relations, social development, climate change, and the role of businesses and international organisations in high-risk places.

International Alert works in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, the South Caucasus and UK, and has 16 offices around the world. Alert’s programmes target the attitudes, behaviours and structural conditions in society that lay the foundations for peaceful and sustainable social and economic development. The organisation has been working in the Great Lakes region of Africa since the mid-1990s.

AUC/PSD, COMESA and International Alert believe that cross-border trade offers an important opportunity for peace and prosperity in the Great Lakes region of Africa. COMESA’s Trading for Peace programme commenced in 2006 in response to the Decision of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, with a strong focus on regional stability and poverty eradication. The programme which was funded by AfDB, DFID, KfW, and USAID became operational in 2007 and has established twelve Trade Information Desks at different borders areas to provide trade information to thousands of small scale traders across borders, a majority of which are women, as well as support the resolution of disputes through dialogue. To sustain this, infrastructure development at border areas, the construction of markets and border offices are important. PCRD has also since 2012 been working closely with COMESA and KfW in supporting cross border trading for peace which focus on increasing cross border interaction through trade with a view to promoting peacebuilding through community engineered cross-border cooperation and create job opportunities for youth and women and boost their income. Since 2009 International Alert has been working to strengthen women’s economic empowerment and build trust across borders in a region long torn apart by violence and where tensions remain high. International Alert’s work on cross-border trade helps traders become more confident in demanding that their rights be respected. Traders collaborate more freely with one another, provide each other with credit, and devise common strategies to deal with emerging problems. Traders have also gained better business skills and knowledge, such as when to
save, buy or sell stock, thus increasing their ability to switch to goods with higher profit margins.

International Alert’s research\(^1\) shows that 75% of small-scale cross-border traders are women and that they have fewer commercial opportunities than their male counterparts. The economic potential of these women traders is often ignored by financial institutions and national policymakers, and they often face discrimination, harassment at borders, lack of access to credit and markets, high taxes and in some areas mandatory payment of bribes or ‘informal taxes’. These are obstacles that must be addressed to release the economic and peacebuilding potential of this daily trade and enable empowerment of women traders.

In August 2014, International Alert started implementing a project by the government of Sweden entitled *Tushiriki Wote [Let us all participate!]* which seeks to address women’s economic vulnerability and their exclusion from decision-making in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in the cross-border areas of Rwanda and Burundi, promoting women’s civic, political and economic empowerment through improved knowledge, networking and advocacy.

This panel discussion and photo exhibition seek to contribute to awareness-raising and advocacy in line with the *Tushiriki Wote* and Trading for peace projects objectives. Specifically, the exhibition and panel aim to:

- Raise awareness about the condition of women cross-border traders in DRC borders with Rwanda and Burundi, their day to day lives, and showcase how if properly supported, this trade can sustain livelihoods, contribute to women’s civic, political and economic empowerment, and support peace.
- Prompt reflection on cross-border relations in the Great Lakes region and mobilise support for regional peacebuilding and deeper economic integration through the implementation of the Peace, Security and Collaboration Framework (PSCF).

The theme of COMESA Summit, which is *Inclusive, Sustainable Industrialization* is consistent with the AU’s theme for 2015: *Women’s Empowerment Year and Africa Development for the Concretization of Agenda 2063*. Thus the panel discussion and photo exhibition under the theme of “TRADING FOR PEACE; Promoting Cross-Border Trade for Women’s Civic, Political and Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Peace” will contribute to maintaining the momentum on the Trading for Peace agenda of the AU and COMESA.

The exhibition

For the photo exhibition, International Alert, AUC/PSD, and COMESA will identify a selection of stories and photo essays that strongly depicts the importance of cross-border trade for women’s empowerment and peace in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and

---

\(^1\) International Alert (2012): *Walking in the dark: Informal cross-border trade in the Great Lakes Region*
Rwanda. The exhibition which will run from 28th to 31 March, will illustrate the potential of this trade to contribute to peace and women’s empowerment, and improve livelihoods in the region.

In June 2013, as part of the evaluation of a project on peacebuilding and women cross-border traders funded by the World Bank and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Alert commissioned award-winning photographer Carol Allen-Storey and independent researcher Alexis Bouvy to document and tell the story of the daily lives of small-scale traders from DRC, as well as Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.

The team interviewed traders, their families, members of trade cooperatives, border service agents, and local authorities concerning the challenges they face in their daily work. We wanted to understand the reasons traders take up this trade, and the benefits they draw from it. The team also photographed the traders and other stakeholders, their contexts and interactions, illustrating both the conditions under which traders do their work, the cooperative dynamics, and the atmosphere of the border as a symbolic meeting place as well as the broader context of the lives of traders. A sample of these photos can be found in Annex 2.

Interviews and photographs were conducted and taken in Bukavu and Goma, DRC as well as in Gisenyi, Rwanda. They document the importance and transformative potential of cross-border trade, both in terms of its economic importance as a source of livelihood for hundreds of thousands of traders – and in terms of its value as a factor for trust-building, positive regional integration and reconciliation between people in the conflict-torn Great Lakes region.

The photos and accompanying interviews challenge predominant narratives about the region that highlight ‘conflict trade’ and ‘rape’, showing the peace dividend that can be – and is - brought about by trade across borders.

The panel discussion

Research on women’s political participation and economic empowerment in the Great Lakes region shows that more active economic roles for women do not automatically produce an improvement in their social status and political participation. For instance, in Northern Uganda there is evidence that women’s participation in the post-war economy resulted in their increased economic empowerment, but there was no parallel increase in women’s political representation. Likewise, a higher percentage of women in political decision-making does not automatically (or quickly) improve women’s livelihoods. For example, Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world and has adopted a number of gender-related mechanisms which are rightly praised, but the majority of women there still live in poverty.

---

2 International Alert (2012): Women’s political participation and economic empowerment in post-conflict countries. Lessons from the Great Lakes region in Africa
However, while there is no automatic link between improvements in women’s economic and their political empowerment, it is certainly true that poor political participation of women reinforces their economic vulnerability. For example, gender discriminatory policies often lead to women ending up in insecure, low-wage jobs and curtail their access to economic assets such as land and loans. There is a negative reinforcing cycle between women’s economic and political disempowerment, whereby women who have little economic or political voice get few chances to shape economic and social policies, further perpetuating disempowerment. Similarly, a positive reinforcing cycle can be created, whereby increased economic opportunities allow women to also gain a stronger political voice, which over time enables more inclusive and gender equitable economic and social policies.

The panel discussion will focus on exploring the link between women’s economic empowerment, women’s political participation and peacebuilding, addressing the following specific questions:

• How can we ensure that an increase in women’s income translates into an increase of their decision-making power at home and in their communities?
• How can cross-border trade be an entry-point for sub-regional rapprochement?
• How can we enable access of women from lower incomes to decision-making positions at all levels?

The panel discussion will be based on the theme of the exhibition, and the topic for the speakers will be shaped to fit the theme of COMESA Heads of State and Government meeting.

Panel members are:

1. Salvator Matata, Head of COMESA Liaison Office to AU
2. Beatrice Hamusonde, Director Gender and Social Affairs, COMESA
3. Madame Nunu Salufa, Executive Secretary of the Association for Female Entrepreneurship - APEF (Association pour la Promotion de l’Entreprenariat Feminine), DRC
5. Co-Chairs: Madame Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security and Dan Smith, Secretary General of International Alert
Annex 1: Case study

Uvira, 21st of June, 2013. Standing proud in the office of APPEL, a grassroots community based organization, are two young, promising women leaders. Their names: Eugenie Sikabwe and Louise Feza. These women are actively participating in the project implemented by International Alert aimed at improving conditions for cross border traders and empowering women economically. Eugenie and Louise are a testimony of the project foremost achievement, empowerment. Through participating in numerous training sessions where they gained valuable skills about cross border trade, as well as sensitization sessions with border officials and government authorities which helped create respectful relationships between traders and officials, Eugenie and Louise have been “conscientized”, and their leadership skills have been nurtured. These two women have shown in a fairly short timespan what it takes to become a leader. They dare speaking up, defending their rights, as traders, as women, as human beings. They are not afraid to challenge the authorities.

How and when do they do it? A few months back for instance, a bread trader got held at the border with bread bought in Burundi. Eugenie was informed, as president of an association entrusted with the responsibility to defend the rights of cross border traders, went to the border with a group of 15 women, inquired about what happened, before going to the administrator (the highest local authority in Uvira) to convince him about the unfairness of the young bread trader’s arrest. Eugenie emphasized that the bread had been confiscated and the trader imprisoned without legal grounds (it turns out a baker in Uvira feared the competition from the young trader and had bribed border officials to stop the trader from bringing bread into the country), presenting such a convincing case that the administrator felt compelled to intervene. The administrator sent a group of police force with the 15 women to free the young bread trader and his merchandise.

What drove Eugenie and the other women to challenge the authorities? Maybe their life story can shed light in who they are and what motivates them. Eugenie, for instance, has

---

3 Case study drawn from final evaluation report of International Alert’s project on Economic Empowerment of Women, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
been a cross border trader since 1998. She was born in 1980, is married and has 6 children. Her husband is not a cross border trader. He is a human rights activist and works for a local NGO. Eugénie’s personality and feel for leadership has probably been shaped or facilitated by her situation at home. Gender, a basic human right based on the premise of equal man woman relationship, starts at home. Louise has been a trader since 1999. As for Eugénie, she has always been working as a cross border trader. She was born in 1983, is also married and has 5 children. So far, Eugénie’s and Louise’s life paths are similar. The main difference is that Louise’s husband is also a trader.

Eugénie sells maize while Louise sells dried fish. When asked why they are traders, Eugénie answers “to help her family”. Louise nods. Are they traders by choice? Both answer positively. Eugénie even adds that if she had the possibility to do something else, she would “become a big trader, instead of small scale trader”. Both resent the adjective “small” when referring to their trade. There is nothing “small” about their trade, besides the quantities they buy, which is mostly due to lack of credit. They get credit once a year, usually from a cooperative. Last time they received 300 USD. In any event, they both have the ambition of growing, of investing every penny they save in their business. Both do not wish to become minister, governor or to work for the government. This is remarkable in a country where power, income and status are often derived from working as a public servant.

Eugénie was elected president of a recently established network to defend the rights of cross border traders. Louise would also have liked to be president but is happy for Eugénie. They work hand in hand. Eugénie wants to promote the cause of other women, “given the violence they have encountered the past few years.” The violence has recently stopped. Thanks to numerous complaints and the active lobby work of women traders together with NGO’s such as APPEL and International Alert. Through participating in training and sensitization sessions organized by International Alert and APPEL, women are conscious of their rights. Harassment sometimes happens, but women now are much faster in reporting it.

Besides having contributed to the release of the bread trader, what are the other benefits of the project? Eugénie and Louise sum them up together, speaking with one loud and clear voice: “we work together with Burundian traders, both men and women, we know our rights when crossing the border, we are able to conduct a dialogue with the authorities, we are now being heard, we know how to manage our funds and, we are not afraid anymore.” Both women look at me with pride and confidence. Suddenly, they hand me a pen and ask me bluntly for my email address. “We want to maintain contact.” Pride and confidence. That’s what it takes to become a leader.
Annex 2: Selection of pictures from the original exhibition *Crossings: The journey to peace*

Photos: © Carol Allen-Storey for International Alert

*A photo essay can be seen here:* [http://international-alert.org/resources/publications/crossings-journey-peace](http://international-alert.org/resources/publications/crossings-journey-peace)
Gisenyi, Rwanda

Maman Soki was in the third grade of primary school when she got polio, which left her disabled and unable to continue her education. Today she is one of the older women transporters at the Petite Barrière. She is independent and able to provide for her four children.

“Life in that condition seemed useless to me. One day, I’d had enough: I tried to poison myself. It was the people from the association for disabled people who gave me courage; they came up to me and explained that even I could work and have a life.”

Maman Soki, Congolese transporter
“My dream is to have the government establish a market dedicated exclusively to poultry and eggs – because the environment in the larger markets is harmful for the chickens, as they are very crowded and sometimes die from the heat. I am a member of the association for chicken traders, AVPEO. The association has helped me cope with trading problems, such as how to negotiate and handle relationships with the border officials.” Nzigire, Congolese trader

International Alert’s project supports traders like Nzigire to form and join cooperatives, helping them to defend their rights by providing training to improve their negotiation and business skills. Being part of these associations allows women to share their stories, learn from one another and collectively defend their interests and needs.
Petite Barrière, Goma, DRC

A Congolese border policeman carefully inspects the jetons (passes) of a young Rwandan woman and her daughter.

International Alert’s work facilitates dialogue between women traders, border officials and authorities from both sides of the border, giving them a chance to talk about their experiences and voice and address grievances and obstacles to trade. Thanks in part to this work, there has already been a reduction in the number of harassment cases reported at border posts, in some cases by as much as 60%.

“The agents don’t push us like they did before. Even the undercover agents behave more respectfully toward us.”
Maman Chantal, Rwandan trader
Dada Dorcas, aged 24, left school to work as a cross border trader. When she was in her fourth year of secondary school, her family no longer had the means to send her to school. At the age of 20, Dorcas began supporting her parents and contributing to the upkeep of 12 siblings. Her father, a carpenter, gave her 60 dollars to start selling eggs.

Since then, every week, Dorcas sits on the ground outside her small stall in Nyawera market in the city of Bukavu, eastern DRC, selling eggs for between sic and nice Congolese francs. With what she earns, she helps her father provide the daily ugali (a food made from boiled and pounded cassava or maize flour) and beans for her family. Three years ago, she managed to save enough money to buy a pig, which her grandmother takes care of in her village in South Kivu, using the income from piglets to increase her capital.
Gisenyi, Rwanda

“Most problems related to the insecurity experienced in eastern Congo have had an impact on traders in Gisenyi. Before, I bought my supply of cassava from Goma, but since the M23 took the city in November 2012, there isn’t any cassava to be found there anymore. We have to bring it from farther away, from Uganda, which increases our costs.”

Assya, flour vendor and president of COTRAFAGI, a cross-border cooperative of flour vendors

The wars and tensions that continue to scar the region have a devastating effect on these traders, threatening to destroy their very fragile livelihoods.
Muhangu village, Bukavu, DRC

Every day is a struggle for Esperance, as she is the head of household. Yet uniquely, the family works as a team. Kalembu, Esperance’s husband, does the domestic chores, while Esperance crosses the border to purchase chickens and her eldest siblings manage her market stall in town.

“Fatigue, physical and emotional, is my daily challenge.”
Esperance, Congolese trader
Petite Barrière, Goma, DRC

Traders need capital to start trading, but most don’t have much – sometimes as little as fifteen dollars. Access to affordable microcredit through group loans to cooperatives could give traders the capital they need to develop their business.

“My biggest problem is capital.”
Dada Dorcas, Congolese trader
Bukavu, DRC

Maman Bahati has been the head of her household for 15 years, after her husband fell ill and couldn’t work as a nurse any more. But she wasn’t always a trader; she spent 17 years as a school teacher: “My true calling is being a teacher, but when teachers were no longer paid, I had to stop.” Her husband gave her $150 to start trading and 15 years later her income still feeds the family. Her education and skills have made her the voice of traders: she is the Vice-President of the Nguba market in Bukavu, defending the rights of both Rwandan and Congolese traders.

“There is real reciprocity between us. The Rwandan traders need us like we need them. When you have been clients for a long time, you become sisters. Over there in Rwanda they say ‘Turi kumwe’ – we are one.”
Maman Bahati, Congolese trader