Corinelle, beneficiary of the MERANKABANDI project in the commune of Itaba, province of Gitega. She makes modern pottery, November 2020.

International Development Association (IDA) has granted to the Government of Burundi for the implementation of the “MERANKABANDI” social protection net and support project - a cash transfer program with complementary training activities targeting the most vulnerable rural households.

These social safety nets, which provide a social protection base for the most vulnerable, aim to protect families from the consequences of economic shocks, natural disasters and other crises.

The social protection sector must be a priority for resource mobilization within the framework of internal and external financing plans.

Testimonial from beneficiary

“The cash transfers allowed the children to go to school and our family to have food. In addition to money, MERANKABANDI taught us a lot, especially about financial education, how to save money and how to do an income-generating activity. These trainings were a real eye-opener for us. You can receive money but do not do anything really useful with it because you need to improve your knowledge on how to manage the money you receive. We applied what we learned to the letter. We joined a savings and credit association and we saved. Finally, we got a credit to start the cafeteria. We offer tea, doughnuts and cakes that we make ourselves. My husband takes care of the customers and I take care of the production. With the cafeteria, we are able to provide for our family. We have a house and arable land. We are no longer indigent; we have become like others.”

Consolate and her husband, on Muriza colline (Butaganzwa commune, Ruyigi province), are raising 9 children, including 2 adopted ones. Repatriated, the family lived for a long time in indigence, with no land to cultivate.
• Regular and predictable cash transfers of 40,000 BIF (USD24), every 2 months to households with children aged 0 to 12 living in and suffering from extreme poverty and vulnerability in the selected areas.

• Accompanying measures are implemented to promote self-investment of program beneficiary households in their human capital.

• Consolidate key mechanisms developed for the social safety net system.

Poverty and vulnerability rates remain very high in Burundi. Social protection coverage accounts for less than 10% of the state budget, excluding the most vulnerable households.
Project components

- An approach combining cash transfer (Cash) and support for beneficiaries (+).
- A unique innovation increasing the impact of the program and the sustainability of investments in human capital.

1. CASH TRANSFER COMPONENT

- Payments consist of cash transfers (wire transfers) of 40,000 Burundian francs (about USD24) every 2 months for 30 months.
- The payment is made via a cell phone, a device given free of charge to the beneficiaries.
- The beneficiary receives the full amount of the assistance payments all along the program, the transfer and withdrawal fees are taken care of by the social safety net project.

2. COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES COMPONENT

- Implementation of complementary activities to cash transfers in order to promote and generate change in beneficiary households through the adoption of positive behaviours and to develop their human capital.

These accompanying measures consist in:

- Facilitating home visits to model and struggling households to promote peer education.
- Conducting demonstration sessions on good nutrition, agriculture, hygiene and exclusive breastfeeding practices;
- Conducting awareness sessions on behaviour change promotion modules.

5 modules have been developed around the following themes:

- Explanation of the process and objectives of the Household Social Nets support program (POP).
- Maternal and Child Health/Family Planning (SMI/PF).
- Infant and young child feeding (ANJE).
- Financial Education (EF).
- Integrated Early Childhood Development (DIJE).

These complementary activities are conducted by NGOs specialized in supporting rural households:

- ODAG Caritas in the province of Gitega,
- Pathfinder International, Kirundo Province, and
- ActionAid International Burundi, Karusi and Ruyigi provinces.
Supporting beneficiaries during 36 months.

This program is an excellent way to increase coverage for the Burundian population.

**SELECTION OF GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**
- The provinces are selected according to their degree of monetary vulnerability and their chronic malnutrition rate.
- Each targeted province identifies the most vulnerable communes.
- In each targeted commune, the collines are selected at random.

**ACCURATE AND FAIR SELECTION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS**
- In each selected colline, a survey is conducted on all resident households having children aged 0-12 years, and also classified according to their degree of vulnerability.
- The community confirms this ranking of the most vulnerable households, eligible for the program.

**BENEFICIARY REGISTRATION IN THE DATABASE**
- The beneficiary household is officially registered in the MERANKABANDI project.
- The mother is registered as the representative of the household and receives a beneficiary card.

**MONETARY TRANSFERS (FOR 30 MONTHS)**
- Registered households receive 40,000 BIF (about USD24) every 2 months, through cell phone money transfer.

**DONATION OF A CELL PHONE FOR MONEY TRANSFERS**
- A cell phone with a SIM card is given to the mother.
- This phone number corresponds to the account number used for the money transfer.

Virginie on Gisura colline (Buraza commune, Gitega province) has benefited from complementary activities in gardening and nutrition. She grows vegetables that enrich her children’s meals to get out of chronic malnutrition. Her daughter Françoise was able to return to school and dreams of becoming a teacher.

Consulate and her husband opened a cafeteria in the market of Muriza (commune of Butaganzwa2, Ruyigi province). They are raising 9 children, including 2 adopted ones. After repatriation, the family lived for a long time in indigence, with no land to cultivate. For Consulate, the situation has changed thanks to MERANKABANDI.
The MERANKABANDI social protection net support project has proven to be an effective social protection mechanism in Burundi.

UNICEF is partner of the project and provides technical assistance for the implementation of complementary activities. UNICEF focuses its support on quality assurance of complementary activities, to ensure that they are properly implemented according to internationally recognized standards in the field of communication for development.

UNICEF is also supporting the analysis of complementary activities performance to enhance advocacy for the national expansion of the program.

Finally, UNICEF supports capacity building, quality control, activity monitoring and program studies.
By combining cash transfers and complementary activities, the MERANKABANDI project has enabled households to:
- increase their consumption;
- invest in the human capital of their children;
- strengthen intra-family cohesion; allow children to return to school;
- undertake income-generating activities;
- improve the health of children and their mothers.

Beneficiary households have been able to escape from their poverty and malnutrition. Their situation has improved and they are now confident for a better future.

In the socio-economic context of Burundi, where 65% of the Burundian population and 69% of children aged 0–17 years are poor, social safety nets such as the MERANKABANDI project,
- are an effective approach to poverty reduction;
- protect families from the consequences of economic shocks, natural disasters and other crises;
- provide the basis for social protection for the most vulnerable.

97.4% of respondents declare saving in their households.

In 90.4% of beneficiary households, exclusive breastfeeding is properly observed during the first 6 months.

77.9% of beneficiary households have an acceptable level of food consumption.

In nearly 50% of households, all children are attending school.

90.2% of households have soap available at all times.

It is essential to keep on strengthening the social protection system, to meet the needs of vulnerable households and their children throughout their life cycle.