

FORUM THEATRE ACTIVITIES

IMPROVING SOCIAL COHESION IN COMMUNITIES

THROUGHOUT BURUNDI



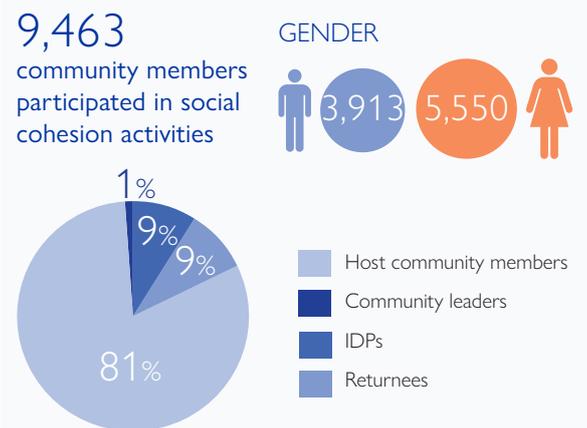
SOCIAL COHESION ACTIVITIES
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IOM's reintegration activities are improving the ability of host communities to absorb a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returning refugees from Tanzania by creating platforms for dialogue, strengthening existing basic service infrastructure, and providing opportunities for short-term employment and job training. IOM uses a participatory strategy that brings together returnees, IDPs and host community members to discuss their common needs during Community Dialogues and implement the solutions as Quick Impact Projects. The participatory and inclusive approach aims to foster bottom-up decision making, community ownership and cohesion.

In 2019, Forum Theatre was chosen to allow communities to express themselves through a performance on various topics that concern the community. Throughout the process, IOM facilitated and accompanied communities to create teams of actors, choose a subject related to reintegration and social cohesion, and rehearse skits twice a week for 2 weeks leading up to the performance.

Topics ranged from land and property conflict related to Burundian returnees from Tanzania, to teenage pregnancy and polygamy. Additionally, sporting events for both men and women such as sack races and football matches created an opportunity for communities to cheer for and encourage each other. Together with traditional dance performances carried out by members of the community, these events proved to be a great opportunity for diverse populations to come together and celebrate while peacefully expressing certain challenges faced by their community.

IOM's social cohesion activities in 2019 reached 9,463 community members in 9 hills of Makamba, Muyinga, Rutana and Ruyigi provinces. Among them were 838 returnees, 873 IDPs, 7,699 host community members and 53 local authorities. A total of 916 community members performed in the Forum Theatre plays, dances and other activities.



Mariya Ndimurwanko, a single mother of 4 children who returned from Tanzania to Rumandari hill (Muyinga province) participated in a forum theatre activity in November 2019. She believes social cohesion is the foundation for harmony within the community and helps to lessen the stigma which is often painfully felt by returnees. Based on her own experience, she explained, "When someone comes back and finds oneself rejected by others, it hurts a lot." However, Mariya described how IOM's reintegration activities helped her and the community to live together in harmony and spread the message on the importance of cohesion. "We learned a lot, understood the benefit of social cohesion and now we are teaching others," she added.



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