**Terms of Reference - Impact Evaluation**

**Impact evaluation of initiatives to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade on social cohesion in the Great Lakes region of Africa**

**February 2025**

# Context

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| **Period to be assessed** : From 1st January 2011 to 30 December 2024  **Evaluation dates**: April to August 2025  **Areas of operation**: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Rwanda and Republic of Burundi |

International Alert (Alert) is a UK-registered international organisation that works to build peace through local civil society organisations through research, advocacy, capacity building, inclusive dialogue and political and civic participation.

Alert works with people directly affected by violent conflict to improve their prospects for peace. We also seek to influence the policies and working methods of governments, international organisations such as the UN and multinational companies in order to reduce the risk of conflict and strengthen the prospects for peace.

Alert works primarily with national civil society organisations and other stakeholders, such as democratically elected institutions, with a view to strengthening their capacities, in a reciprocal relationship of healthy and open collaboration. Alert considers that its role is to support the population and structures of society in accessing information, building capacities and strengthening mechanisms that can enable the participation of all in development and the consolidation of peace. In order to improve their effectiveness, Alert provides its partners with the necessary technical and financial resources.

Since 2010, International Alert has been working on initiatives to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade and promote social cohesion in the Great Lakes region of Africa

Small-scale cross-border trade plays a major role in the Great Lakes region, where goods are traded between the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, enabling the supply of specific goods (mainly foodstuffs) to regions that do not produce enough to cover their needs.

These cross-border trade links are visible proof of the economic interdependence between the countries of the region, and are an important lever for economic growth as well as for bringing together populations that are often divided and distrustful of neighbouring populations because of the violent conflicts that have affected and continue to affect this region.[[1]](#footnote-2)

International Alert has implemented the following projects to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade and promote social cohesion

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| * "Economic empowerment of women in the Great Lakes", implemented from January 2011 to July 2013 in Burundi, the DRC and Uganda, and funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. * "Improving the living conditions of cross-border traders in the Great Lakes region", implemented from March 2012 to December 2013 in the Goma and Bukavu sites in the DRC with Rwanda and funded by the World Bank. * "Tushiriki wote - Consolidation of peace through economic strengthening and women's participation", implemented from August 2014 to July 2018 on border sites between the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, and funded by the Swedish Embassy in Kinshasa. * "Mupaka Shamba Letu - The border, our livelihood", implemented from January 2019 to March 2023 at border sites between the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, financed by the Swedish Embassies in Kinshasa and Kigali and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. * "Mupaka Shamba Letu - The border, our livelihood", Phase II, has been running since September 2023 (and will continue until December 2027), funded by the Swedish Embassy in Kinshasa and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. |

As part of the above projects, we have carried out important research to deepen our knowledge in this field, such as :

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| * "Walking in the Dark. Informal cross-border trade in the Great Lakes region".[[2]](#footnote-3) * "La Traversée. Small-scale trade and improved cross-border relations between Goma (DRC) and Gisenyi (Rwanda)".[[3]](#footnote-4) * *Deriving maximum benefit from small-scale cross border trade between DRC and Rwanda'.[[4]](#footnote-5)* * "Mapping of microfinance institutions and programmes in the border towns of Goma-Gisenyi, Bukavu-Kamembe and Uvira-Gatumba in the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi".[[5]](#footnote-6) * "Traversées: On the road to peace[[6]](#footnote-7) * *"Mapping Small and Medium Enterprises in the Great Lakes Region*[[7]](#footnote-8) * *"Mupaka Shamba Letu, Curriculum genre - Manuel pratiques des groupes de dialogue sur le genre* [[8]](#footnote-9) |

These projects have mainly targeted women small-scale cross-border traders (FPCTs), their spouses and families, FPCT associations and cooperatives, microfinance institutions, border authorities and decision-makers at provincial, national and regional level. Indirectly, the projects have also targeted populations living in border towns, local leaders and platforms of municipal (PALPGL) and religious (ACEAC) authorities in the 3 countries.

All these projects have been implemented by International Alert in partnership with more than thirty civil society organisations in the countries concerned (*a list of all the partner NGOs and CSOs has already been drawn up*). More recently, these partnerships have also included microfinance institutions, FPCT cooperatives, platforms of cross-border traders' associations (P-ACT), advocacy platforms, local authority platforms and the network of Central African bishops' conferences.

The project intervention areas have been the following borders, with quite different levels of activity among them. For example, the Aru-Arua border between the DRC and Uganda was only targeted in the first two projects.

* Kavinvira/Uvira border (DR Congo) and Gatumba (Burundi)
* Petite Barrière border/Goma (DR Congo) and Rubavu (Rwanda)
* Grande Barrière border/Goma (DR Congo) and Rubavu (Rwanda)
* Ruzizi1/Bukavu border (DR Congo) and Rusizi border (Rwanda)
* Ruzizi2/Bukavu border (DR Congo) and Rusizi border (Rwanda)
* Border between Kamanyola (DR Congo) and Bugarama (Rwanda)
* Border between Ruhwa (Rwanda) and Cibitoke (Burundi)
* Kanyaru Haut/Mparamirundi (Burundi) and Akanyaru (Rwanda) border
* Gasenyi/Kirundo border (Burundi) and Nemba border (Rwanda)

In addition, International Alert has used various approaches, methodologies and activities, such as :

* Conflict sensitivity, to understand the context of conflict dynamics, the two-way interaction between the intervention and the context, and the impact of the context on the intervention.
* Economic strengthening of women small-scale cross-border traders, including :
  + Literacy for FPCTs
  + FPCT training and coaching in entrepreneurship, financial education and leadership
  + Structuring FPCTs into village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) and linking them to microfinance institutions
  + Structuring FPCTs into cooperatives
  + Structuring and/or revitalising the platforms of cross-border traders' associations
  + Funding and support for cooperative business plans
  + Networking cross-border traders at sub-regional level
* *Business For* Peace, to understand the positive and negative roles that businesses can play in conflict situations to contribute to peace.
* Transformation of gender dynamics, including gender dialogue groups for FPCTs, gender dialogue groups for wives of FPCTs and reflection sessions for couples, to analyse and transform gender dynamics.
* Training for border authorities on customs and cross-border regulations, cross-border trade facilitation agreements in the sub-region and legal instruments protecting 's rights
* Working with MFIs (Micro-Finance Institutions) to develop financial products tailored to FPCTs and young people, and to promote the financial inclusion of FPCTs and young people.
* Radio communication programmes and awareness campaigns on positive peace, gender, social cohesion and the business climate
* Proactive advocacy to influence policy decisions or standards and practices at borders, and to mobilise key players
* Cross-border dialogue, to strengthen the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully and to cooperate across political boundaries

After more than 10 years of implementing cross-border projects in the region, International Alert wants to assess the impact of these projects, as well as the relevance of its approaches, by identifying recommendations that the second phase of the Mupaka Shamba Letu project (ongoing until December 2027) could take into account.

# 2. Assessment objectives

## 2.1 General objective

The overall objective is to assess the long-term impact of International Alert's small-scale cross-border trade facilitation projects on beneficiaries. This involves examining whether the projects have achieved their intended outcomes and whether any unintended consequences have occurred, as well as examining the extent to which our approaches and initiatives have contributed to these outcomes.

## 2.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this evaluation are :

* Brand the contribution and attribution of our projects to the broadest and most significant changes/effects
* Gathering evidence to understand how our approaches, methodologies and activities have contributed to these effects.
* Analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of project design and implementation
* Identify potential areas for improvement that could be addressed by our ongoing project to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade; and other future projects.
* Document the long-term effects, positive and/or negative, induced by our projects, whether direct or indirect, expected or unexpected.

## 2.3 Evaluation questions

* What were the main objectives and expected results of the projects? Were they clear and measurable?
* What were the main project approaches and activities? Were they implemented as planned? What were the challenges?
* Who were the main beneficiaries of the project? Were they reached as planned?
* What have been the main indicators for the projects? How have they evolved since the first project? How has the data collected for these indicators evolved?
* What concrete effects (changes in perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, and changes in practices and policies), positive and negative, direct and indirect, expected and unexpected, have occurred? Who or what has changed? When and where did these changes occur? Has the impact been sustained over time?
* To what extent have our approaches, methodologies and activities contributed to these changes
* What were the strengths and weaknesses of the design and implementation of the projects? And the opportunities and threats? What approaches, methodologies and activities were most effective?
* What lessons can we learn from the projects? Are there areas for improvement? How can they be applied to the current project?

# 3. Scope, timetable and duration of the

This study will be carried out in the borders, towns and provinces targeted by the projects and at national level in DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

The study will focus on feedback on the experiences of small-scale cross-border traders and their spouses, members of cross-border communities, local, municipal and national authorities, officials from cross-border services, local leaders, microfinance institutions, civil society organisations and international organisations that have also implemented initiatives to promote cross-border trade in the Great Lakes region in the same period.[[9]](#footnote-10)

The study will also look at members of the border community who have not been direct beneficiaries or stakeholders in the initiatives but who may have benefited indirectly or observed the changes brought about; and at the donors who have supported these projects since 2010.

The evaluation will be carried out between April and August 2025. The exact evaluation period (number of days) and timetable will be discussed and agreed with the evaluation team, but we envisage a work schedule based on the following phases

* Literature review, development of detailed methodology and data collection tools, finalisation of work plan and production of inception report
* Data collection
* Results feedback/validation workshop
* Analysis of the data and drafting of the report
* Integration of comments and finalisation of the report after feedback
* Dissemination of evaluation results

# 4. Methodology

The detailed methodology will be proposed by the evaluation team and will be reviewed and approved by International Alert. The evaluation would adopt a much more qualitative than quantitative approach. The dimension of causality and attribution of changes is paramount, and calls on the notion of counterfactual, which uses the comparison group (control group or reference group). One of the major limitations of this evaluation is the difficulty of identifying the appropriate comparison group, given that the projects were complex and had a high contamination effect on potential comparison groups. The methodology used will also have to compare the results achieved on borders that have always had intervention from our projects from 2011 to the present day with those that have had little intervention (much less activity).

***In this way, International Alert will leave the evaluation team free propose mixed and innovative methodological approaches, which reconcile rigour and flexibility and which can adapt to changing contexts and provide a more nuanced understanding of impact***.

This assessment will include the following main stages:

* 1. Document review, development of the detailed methodology and data collection tools, finalisation of the work plan and production of the inception report. The main project documentation will be provided to the evaluation team for a desk review and will include for each project concerned: the project proposal, the logical framework, the budget, the final report submitted to the donor, the baseline study and evaluation reports, and any other relevant reports. Following the document review, the evaluation team will prepare the detailed methodology, work plan and data collection tools. All of this will be included in the inception report, which will need to be reviewed and validated by the International Alert team.
  2. Data collection. Fieldwork will be carried out in a sample of agreed intervention areas. International Alert will provide the evaluation team with lists and contacts of various project partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders so that the evaluation team can make a selection.
  3. Feedback workshop. At the end of the field data collection and before the submission of the draft report, the evaluation team will conduct a feedback workshop with key stakeholders to present their initial observations.
  4. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and drafting of the evaluation report, in full compliance with the terms of reference.
  5. Integration of comments and finalisation of the report after feedback
  6. Dissemination of evaluation results. This phase will be led by International Alert, but the evaluation team will be able to propose ideas and recommendations on dissemination, and will provide a power point presentation with a summary of the report.

# 5. Deliverables

As part of this evaluation, the main deliverables expected and the provisional deadlines (to be confirmed by the evaluation team) for providing them are as follows:

1. Inception report, including results of literature review, detailed methodology, work plan and data collection tools: 21 March 2025
2. Facilitation of the feedback workshop, to present an overview of the data collected to the main stakeholders: 2 May 2025
3. Draft evaluation report: 23 May 2025
4. Final evaluation report, including comments from International Alert: 13 June 2025

All deliverables must be submitted to International Alert in the form of drafts. International Alert will review and respond to the draft of each deliverable within the days agreed in the work plan (in turn one or two weeks per deliverable). The evaluation team will amend the draft deliverable in the light of these comments and the final version of the deliverable must incorporate them in full.

International Alert will own all deliverables and data from the evaluation, which can be used for internal and external reporting and communication materials.

The report must be written in French and English, and the main body of the evaluation report, in Word format, must be between 20 and 30 pages long (without annexes) and must include the following elements:

* Table of contents
* List of acronyms
* Executive summary
* Introduction and background
* Evaluation objectives and questions
* Methodology and limitations
* Main results and analysis, clearly answering the evaluation questions in these terms of reference
* Conclusions
* Recommendations (at least part of these recommendations must be oriented towards the current project
* Appendices, including :
  + List of documents consulted
  + Data collection schedule and list of interviewees
  + Evaluation data collection tools
  + Summary table (or tables) describing the various objectives and expected results, the main approaches used and activities carried out, and the main beneficiaries targeted from 2010 to 2024.
  + Summary table showing the evolution of the various indicators and the progression of the data collected for these indicators from 2010 to 2024
  + Any case studies or testimonials collected

Once the report has been validated, the evaluation team must also submit a copy of the executive summary in English.

# 6. Roles and support provided by International Alert

International Alert will play the role of :

* Recruiting and supervising the evaluation team, organising and participating in meetings to launch, monitor and close the evaluation.
* Facilitating access to relevant project documentation for stakeholders and beneficiaries, and providing the necessary support to the evaluation team to enable them to carry out their work
* Review and approve deliverables

Alert will provide logistical support, including national and regional (and international if necessary) travel arrangements, and all travel and accommodation in the countries involved in the evaluation. The evaluation team will be required to provide their own computer, but if necessary International Alert will make tablets available.

Alert will also provide all the documents required for the assignment, at least two weeks before the start of the fieldwork. Alert will also communicate in advance with the stakeholders to be met and will send introductory emails when relevant.

# 7. Skills and experience required

The evaluation will be carried out externally by an evaluation team, ideally comprising an international consultant and a national consultant in each target country. In each country, the team may also have a team of local interviewers to collect quantitative data.

We are looking for an external evaluation team with the following skills and experience:

* Master's degree in social sciences or other relevant field
* Solid, documented experience in conducting evaluations linked to governance projects, peace-building, women's economic empowerment and/or the transformation of dynamics.
* Proven experience in conducting at least two impact assessments
* Good knowledge and understanding of the Great Lakes sub-region of Africa (DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and/or Uganda)
* Knowledge of conflict sensitivity and gender transformative approaches
* Ability to interact with different categories of stakeholders, such as low-income women and men, local and national authorities, the private sector and civil society organisations
* Excellent oral and written communication skills in French and
* Proficiency in local languages such as Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, Luganda and Kirundi would be an advantage.

# 8. procedures

Evaluation teams interested in this call for tenders may submit to International Alert a dossier containing :

* A covering letter
* Updated CVs of the members of proposed evaluation team
* Two study/evaluation reports in English or French produced by team members (if possible, impact assessments)
* A draft technical proposal for this consultancy of no more than 10 pages. It should contain a summary of the evaluation team's experience and the distribution of tasks between members, a brief description of the proposed methodology, and a provisional work plan.
* A detailed financial proposal
* Three references from organisations for which the team has carried out

All proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

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| Selection criteria | Note |
| Technical proposal (30) |  |
| General description of the methodology and its relevance | 10 |
| Presentation of the tools proposed in each stage of the methodology | 10 |
| Work schedule consistent with the methodology, the time available and the budget | 10 |
| Financial proposal (20) |  |
| Detailed financial proposal within budget | 20 |
| Evaluation team (50) |  |
| Master's degree in social sciences or other relevant field | 5 |
| Solid, documented experience in conducting evaluations linked to governance projects, peace-building, women's economic empowerment and/or the transformation of gender dynamics. | 15 |
| Proven experience of the evaluation team in conducting impact evaluations | 10 |
| Good knowledge and understanding of the Great Lakes sub-region of Africa (DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and/or Uganda) | 10 |
| Knowledge of conflict sensitivity and gender transformative approaches | 5 |
| Fluency in French, English and local languages | 5 |
| Grand total | 100 |

Expressions of interest for this call must be sent by e-mail to the following address:[DRC.Office@international-alert.org](mailto:DRC.Office@international-alert.org) with a copy to[PLwanzo@international-alert.org](mailto:PLwanzo@international-alert.org) and[nzihindula@international-alert.org](mailto:nzihindula@international-alert.org) by 16 March 2025 at the latest with the subject "Technical and financial proposal for the MSL impact assessment".

# 9. Budget

International Alert encourages the firm/consultant to submit a detailed budget covering all the expenses of the evaluation, including the fees of the consultants and data collection teams, travel, accommodation, communication, teams, etc.

It should be emphasised that the consultant or firm will also be responsible for recruiting data collectors, training them and providing them with mobility (transport). In the event that they cannot be recruited, Alert could make its database of data collectors available to the consultant or firm.

1. International Alert (2012), "Walking in the Dark. Informal cross-border trade in the Great Lakes region", September. Available here: https: [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. International Alert (2010), "La Traversée. Small-scale trade and improved cross-border relations between Goma (DRC) and Giseny (Rwanda)", June. Available here: https: [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. International Alert (2015), 'Deriving maximum benefit from small-scale cross border trade between DRC and Rwanda', October. Available here: [https:](https://www.international-alert.org/publications/deriving-maximum-benefit-small-scale-cross-border-trade-between-drc-and-rwanda/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. International Alert (2016), "Mapping of microfinance institutions and programmes in the border towns of Goma-Gisenyi, Bukavu-Kamembe and Uvira-Gatumba, DRC, Rwanda and Burundi", August. Available here: https: [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. International Alert (2015), "Crossings: On the road to peace". Available here: https: [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. International, Alert (2022) " Cartographie des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises dans la Région des Grands Lacs ", March. Available here: https://www.international-alert.org/fr/publications/cartographie-des-petites-et-moyennes-entreprises-dans-la-region-des-grands-lacs/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. International Alert (2021), "Mupaka Shamba Letu, Curriculum genre - Manuel pratiques des groupes de dialogue sur le genre" June. Available here: *https:*//www.international-alert.org/fr/publications/mupaka-shamba-letu-curriculum-genre/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. It should be noted that other organisations also implemented initiatives to promote cross-border trade in the Great Lakes region during the same period. These include Search For Common Ground, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Pole Institute, CCF, iPeace or ProFemmes, IOM, UNDP and Partner Africa. In addition, there are key players at regional and international level, such as TradeMark Africa (formerly TradeMark East Africa), the World Bank, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)