



Results From Youth Engagement With Border Communities On The Fight Against Cross Border Transmission Of COVID-19 In The East African Community

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ACRONYMS

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention	AFRICA CDC
Africa Taskforce for Novel Coronavirus	AFTCOR
African Union	AU
African Union Office of the Youth Envoy	AU-OYE
Corona Virus Disease	COVID-19
East African Community	EAC
East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform	EACYAP
Gender Based Violence	GBV
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH	GIZ
Internally Displaced Persons	IDPS
International Organization for Migration	IOM
International Organization for Migration	PCR
Points of Entry	POES
Standard Operating Procedures	SOPS
United Nations	UN
World Health Organization	WHO

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ■■

This report is the result of several months of virtual and in person consultations with the government officials of the EAC partner states working in the Ministries of Health , Youth , East African Cooperation and Immigration including young people and residents from border communities and beyond.

The report highlights challenges linked to the Covid-19 pandemic that border communities face in the East African Community Partner states (Republic of Burundi , Kenya , Rwanda , Uganda , South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania). Additionally, the report outlines sensitization efforts to protect border communities from cross border transmission of the virus and recommendations by several stakeholders and young people to ensure the promotion of peace and security in border zones.

The EAC Youth Ambassadors Platform members would like to extend their sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to supporting and shaping this report under the leadership of the EAC Department of Political and Public Affairs. Our sincerest gratitude and thanks go to: H.E Ambassador Libérat Mfumukeko , the Secretary General to the East African Community, Mr. David Onen , Principal Political Affairs Officer , EAC Department of Political Affairs, Ms. Barbra Kaboha , EAC Programme Officer Department of Political Affairs , Ms. Aichatou Tamba , GIZ Support to the AU Border Programme at the EAC , Colonel Geoffrey Kambere.

Commissioner for Immigration ,Ministry of Internal Affairs - Uganda , Dr. Okware Joseph , Head of National COVID-19 Incident Management Team, Ministry of Health- Uganda, Mr. Olupot Lazarus ,Regional Integration Officer, Ministry of East African Community Affairs- Uganda , Ms. Aya Chebbi , AU Special Envoy on Youth. Without your support, leadership, and dedication to the EAC Youth Ambassadors online activities in response to COVID-19 among the border communities the findings from this report would not have been possible.

We would like to specially thank the Federal Republic of Germany through the GIZ support to the AU Border Programme team for their commitment to the youth of East Africa and Africa. Youth are at the fore fronts of advocating for ending border conflicts and promoting cross-border cooperation through joint planning and development of shared cross-border areas and to build the border management capacity of Member States in support of pragmatic border management and regional integration activities.



Authored by:

Jacob Eyeru and Petrider Paul , members of the EAC Youth Ambassadors Platform

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report draws on several months of national and regional youth virtual and in person interviews, awareness raising activities conducted by the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform in collaboration with the governments of Kenya , Uganda , Rwanda , Burundi ,South Sudan and The United Republic of Tanzania. A multi-stakeholder outreach for young people at the border districts/communities with the major goal of sensitizing them, the local leaders and actors as well as border agencies on protection and prevention of transmission (especially cross border transmission of the novel Coronavirus in line with the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan.

These activities include a) Rolling out of a two-way Bulk SMS to border community's residents, representatives from the private sector, institutions working on migration and border management including government agencies ; b)Conducting a series of online / phone Interviews with national authorities to gather information on the border situation issues during the COVID-19 and its impact to the young people, border communities and trade; c)through EAC secretariat's COVID-19 Taskforce disseminating information via radio stations for the selected border communities to be aired as radio spots following policies of the EAC COVID-19 Guidelines and WHO; d)Conducting a series of online messaging campaigns through EAC social media handles (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram); and e)Documenting the outcome that will inform/compliment the EAC COVID-19 Taskforce during and post the pandemic needs.

The results collected from this report showcase the vulnerability of border communities in the East African Community during the pandemic where they appeared to be at risk for cross border transmission of the virus, the majority have lacked verified information about the virus, been affected by business falls , unemployment , education disruption , family separation among others due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. East African truckers face backlash from COVID-19: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/east-african-truckers-face-backlash-from-covid-19/1843735>

BACKGROUND

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in East Africa in 2020, Border communities in the East African Community member states have faced a huge backlash following cross border transmission of the virus e.g. at Namanga border (Tanzania - Kenya). After recording a high number of COVID-19 infections in the area, especially among truck drivers and drivers who transport essential goods to Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, these actors were harassed and attacked because of the thought that drivers are transmitting the coronavirus across East Africa.

Furthermore, accessing real time COVID-19 border governance measures including mobility restriction information and analysis caused border users and migrant to be stranded and in need of assistance at several borders. As such the EAC border communities endured a high risk situation with regard to the spread of the virus that required particular redress specific to border communities and their organizational capacity to fight off the spread of the virus, and limit stigma around the corona virus so as to protect the interest and gains of the community in the common market protocol implementation.

In April 2020: The East African Community has unveiled a comprehensive COVID-19 Response Plan to reinforce measures to protect and prevent further spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic within the region. The response plan was developed following a directive by the Joint Meeting of Ministers responsible for Health, Trade and EAC Affairs held via Video Conference, which directed the EAC Secretariat to finalize and submit the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan to the Partner States.

Added to this accessing real time mobility restriction information and analysis about migrant stranded caseloads in need of assistance was lacking. As such the EAC border communities endured a high risk situation with regard to the spread of the virus that required particular redress specific to border communities and their organizational capacity to fight off the infection, spread and stigma around the corona virus so as to protect the interest and gains of the community in the common market protocol implementation.

Our duty as young leaders is to identify how to safeguard our generation from idle behavior when the world is in need of leadership. This sensitization outreach against COVID-19 is a statement of hope to border communities to rely on information and become resilient



Jacob Fyeru, Uganda

1. East African truckers face backlash from COVID-19: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/east-african-truckers-face-backlash-from-covid-19/1843735>
2. EAC reveals COVID-19 response plan <https://www.eac.int/covid-19>

EAC Border Response Status

The EAC member states in general through the relevant ministries of health, trade and infrastructure , ministries of East African Cooperation and others undertook different approaches to ensure safety of citizenry and border communities adhering the health safety measures by the World Health Organization (WHO) , Africa Center for Diseases Control (Africa CDC) and relevant COVID-19 taskforce teams established by the governments to enhance reduction , prevention and protection of people during the pandemic.

Some measures adopted included:

- i** Installations of prolonged curfews or lockdown measures for border communities.
- ii** Strict and increased security surveillances for movement of goods and persons across the borders.
- iii** Temporary cross-border movement seizures and restrictions.
- iv** Enhanced health services and reporting among border communities.
- v** Introduction of standard operating procedures for government and private sector services.
- vi** Distribution of relief food to vulnerable communities
- vii** Trucks and Goods disinfection while crossing borders
- viii** Mandatory testing or proof of status reports for all border users

The implementation of several measures adopted by governments within the East African Community led to positive and negative impact on infection trends among border communities but displayed gaps in the community involvement by the low levels of compliance towards these measures from the citizens in border communities who continuously carried out illegal cross border trade and smuggling while further non-compliance was hinged on the pressure to balance livelihood demands while attempting to observe the control measures.

3. How is WHO responding to COVID-19? <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/who-response-in-countries>

4. Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention <https://africacdc.org/>



The perception that there is no need to take precautions to prevent further spread of COVID-19 as the virus is here to stay is misguided and should be discouraged. As youths we have a responsibility to disseminate correct and reliable information to our communities



Ruth Ogolla, Kenya

EAC Youth Ambassadors Intervention Activities

As a member of the African Youth Front on Coronavirus, the EAC Youth Ambassadors Platform was selected to join in the African Union initiative under the Office of the AU Youth Envoy in a youth led multi-stakeholders advocacy group designed to bring African youth to the decision-making table to ensure youth solutions are incorporated in Africa's response to the pandemic.

By this mandate with the approval of the East African Community Secretary General under the leadership of the EAC Department of Political Affairs the EAC Youth Ambassadors set out to address gaps identified in border communities in EAC to achieve the following set of objectives that were in line with the intervention of the AU Border program supported by GIZ.

The intervention activities targeted 7 border points and surrounding communities in the borders of;



1. Tanzania – Kenya (Namanga /Namanga)



2. Kenya - Tanzania (Isebania /Sirari)



3. Tanzania – Burundi (Kabanga/ Kobero)



4. Burundi – Tanzania (Mugina/Manyovu)



5. Rwanda – Uganda (Kagitumba/ Mirama Hills)



6. Kenya - Uganda (Busia/ Busia)



7. Uganda - South Sudan (Elegu /Nimule)

5. African Youth Front on Corona Virus Launched to ensure Youth are the Custodians of their own Development <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200511/african-youth-front-corona-virus-launched-ensure-youth-are-custodians-their>

Border communities need to be aware of COVID-19 symptoms and prevention measures to ensure the communities they reside in are not put at risk for imported cases and any case is reported to the nearest health facility'



Mr. George Otieno Baraza

Assistant Director, Ministry of EAC & Regional Development, Kenya.

- **Online Survey to Map issues in the Border Communities**

Over 100+ people were reached through the online survey which gathered feedback on the pressing challenges among border communities targeting respondents from all partner states.

- **1000+ Bulk SMS Roll out to Border Community residence and Influential people in the Republics of Kenya , Rwanda and Uganda**

In order to reach communities without access to internet services the Bulk SMS Campaign enabled a collection of feedback from people on the key challenges that border communities face some of them were noted such as loss of jobs , movement of restrictions and food security among many others mentioned.

- **Government leaders Interviews response to Border Sensitization**

A series of 10 Interviews were conducted to national authorities per country with guidance from the respective Heads of Ministries of Health/ Certified \Health professionals tasked on COVID-19 within the partner states and Ministries of East African Affairs from the Republics of Kenya and Uganda on the border situation issues during the COVID-19 and collecting recommendations on the best way forward to be adopted.

Border zones are dynamic communities where the level of risks are higher ,I urge border community residence to be cautious apply the SOPs provided by local health leaderships to ensure protection and prevention of COVID-19 adhere to wearing masks, practice frequent handwashing and social distancing



Dr. Okware Joseph

Head of National COVID-19 Incident Management Team, Ministry of Health- Uganda,

- **Broadcasting of Interviews through Community Radios to Border Communities**

The series of interviews were aired into local community radio stations through radio spots in most listened educational programmes that have reached throughout the selected border communities as part of a broadcast radio media campaign to inform the border communities on best approaches to mitigate spread, conduct trade and migration during the pandemic period.

• Online messaging through EACYAP social media platforms

A series of online messaging campaigns through social media handles (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) to raise awareness on the different key asks or calls for actions on border management /recommendations to addressing border challenges.

As rural areas, border communities face a silent threat due to COVID-19 effects in line with health and wealth. Young people have to act to heal the more affected and vulnerable communities by creating resilience and put in place mitigative innovations to break the barriers and build bridges



Jean Claude Mugisha, Burundi.

Voices from Young People: Challenges and Outcomes

Identified Activity Implementation Challenges

The EAC Youth Ambassadors faced bureaucratic delays within EAC partner state actors that caused partial implementation in some partner states. Only two partner states achieved full implementation while the rest had varying implementation levels.

Activity facilitation did not incentivize stakeholder participation as many stakeholders requested for incidental financial facilitations and this led to non-progress on the part of some stakeholders in MEACAs and State agencies.

EAC Youth Ambassadors required further involvement of the COVID19 regional taskforce to enable quick action on the part of national actors. In the absence of this, many ambassadors faced challenges of authority while pursuing implementation activities.

Public response: Challenges at borders communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

Food Insecurity

- Shortage of food supplies to member states in the East African Community attributed to border closures.
- Cattle rustling, porous borders putting the lives of communities at risk
- Inability to facilitate food reliefs to countries and communities in need due to border closures.
- Governments faced unguaranteed sufficient food supplies, a situation that was contributed by border closures and heavy floods in the East African Community region.

Education

- Lack of Covid-19 awareness education among border communities, which inhibits community compliance attempts.
- Student failed to return to their specific institution due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increase in the digital divide where border communities that are located in the rural settings could not access internet facilitation for e-learning.

Information Access

- Lack of Transparency of information about Covid-19 for border community users, which limits engagement capacity of citizens to help government efforts.
- Reliable information on COVID-19 spread and prevention.
- Inadequate information on safety measures to control the spread of COVID-19 are not applied the same way in both two countries. On the one hand border communities' travelers wear face masks, practice hand washing and observing social distancing while on the other hand people some people believe COVID-19 does not exist.
- Lack of trust between member states (different COVID-19 testing certificate provisions)

Unemployment / Job loss

Aggravated unemployment rates caused by loss of livelihoods by many informal sector workers around borders.

Without jobs access this has created harsh economic conditions.

Loss of jobs, resulting from fear and restricted mobility associated with confinement measures.

Trade

Trade hardships including cross border difficulties, delays, emerging nationalistic sentiments in the common market and new NTBs during the process of implementation of the partner state COVID19 response plans

Increased costs of living due to increased trade challenges and cost of trade around the community.

Porous borders being exploited for wrong activities like smuggling and illegal trade.

Importation of goods and services become expensive affecting trade

Movement of People

The EAC has been instrumental in supporting harmonized border screenings to allow the movement of cargo across the region,

Travelers / border residents experienced long term restrictions on movement of people

Increase in illegal migrations attributed by the frustrations of people to cross borders during the closures.

Gender and Health

The EAC Partner States have reported a sharp increase in the number of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases. Ministries responsible for Gender across the region have reported near to a 48% increase in the Gender-Based Violence cases reported to the Police or through the GBV Toll-Free lines.

Attention shifts to fighting COVID-19, has led to increased reporting of cases of maternal mortality and limited lack of access to healthcare, due to limited means of transport to hospitals during curfew periods especially in border communities.

Economic and social stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV.

EMERGING COUNTRY SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AT BORDER COMMUNITIES



COVID-19 is an issue of urgency and border communities especially the youth and women are affected the most, awareness raising through community radios in border zones can help reduce the risks of infections



Petrider Paul, Tanzania

Lessons from the Republics of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda

As the governments of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda imposed curfews as part of the prevention measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 where we witness the ongoing curfews in Kenya and Uganda for the past 8 months since March 2020 to November 2020 highly affecting movement of people.

Moreover among all the 3 countries border residence who commute to neighboring countries are required to follow health protocols, including rapid tests for COVID-19 before being allowed to proceed to their destinations in a bid to prevent the virus's spread.

The EAC Youth Ambassadors during this period carried out virtual / online national sensitization activities with support of the GIZ African Union Border Programme. The lessons learnt from the three countries which directly benefited from the implementation of the activities include:



UGANDA

- The border communities in Elegu and Busia have overtime reduced resilience owing to slowing government effort on sensitization in the communities.
- There is low participation of community leaders in general response initiatives especially those involving contact tracing.
- There is a need for access to more personal protective equipment (PPE's), masks and sanitizers that will be affordable to local residents.
- Increase to advocacy on government /WHO information on COVID-19 is critical to avoid misinformation.
- Border zones of Elegu and Busia need more support on preventive measures adoption such as handwashing, social distancing and avoiding non essential movements.



KENYA

- Increase of spread of conflicts within One Stop Border Points (OSBP) for instance the tension and conflicts at Kenya – Tanzania Namanga OSBP reached climax due to the restriction of movements of people especially the traders who conduct day to day movements from the neighboring countries.
- There was a need for more awareness raising activities at the Kenya-Uganda Busia OSBP on preventive and protection measures to local communities.
- Access to the right information on COVID-19 situations in OSBP's is highly needed to avoid misinformation.
- Inadequate preventive gears such as masks, PPE's, gloves and handwashing stations.

RWANDA

- Rwandan authorities reopened border crossing for good and cargos linking the country to the Democratic Republic of Congo's city of Goma to ease small cross border business after 3 months of border closure (March - May 2020) whereas the closure was part of measures against the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- The Government adopted high measures programs across the country to facilitate prevention and protection of citizens.
- Need was pointed to provision of more aid for community resilience in terms of personal protective equipment and sensitizations.
- Movements remain intermittently where travelers need to present a negative COVID-19 PCR test before and upon return in their communities.

Leaders from all sectors have a duty to ensure our communities are sensitized on the fight against COVID-19 through authorized information sharing especially on border communities, youth leaders also need to mobilize the society and share educational information and not leaving the bulge to government leaders alone'



Mr. Olupot Lazarus

Regional Integration Officer, Ministry of East African Community Affairs- Uganda ,

Lessons from the Republics of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda

There were difficulties to facilitate implementation of this initiative directly in the Republics of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania due to the General Elections proceedings while the online social media campaigns benefitted both three countries of the Republic of Burundi, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania some of the lessons learnt include



BURUNDI

Young people and stakeholders engaged to share feedback through social media campaigns rolled out via Twitter, Facebook and Instagram where the response was vital to inform the challenges of COVID-19 to border communities some results gathered are:

- The Burundian government launched a three-month nationwide coronavirus screening campaign which had a reach to border communities.
- As part of supporting Government's COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts in its role as pillar lead for Points of Entry (PoEs) and Cross-border Coordination IOM has strengthened public health surveillance at border areas by monitoring cross-border population flows.
- The EAC Secretariat with support from the German Government through (GIZ) GmbH has engaged AMREF Flying Doctors (AFD) to conduct the emergency intervention trainings for about 330 staff in total at 12 OSBPs in the region, covering all Partner States.

7. OCHA Burundi Situational Report June 2020 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Burundi%20%20-%2030%20Jun%202020.pdf>

8. EAC targets One Stop Border Posts' staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the region [Posted in Healthhttps://www.eac.int/releases/147-health/1856-eac-targets-one-stop-border-posts-staff-to-prevent-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-the-region](https://www.eac.int/releases/147-health/1856-eac-targets-one-stop-border-posts-staff-to-prevent-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-the-region)



SOUTH SUDAN:

- There is a need for more involvement of citizen action in raising awareness on the prevention and protection of the spread of the virus on many fronts including stronger pitching for SOPs.
- Border points enforce an awareness campaign on COVID19 for all border users
- The implementation of social distancing rules, curfews and the closure of non-essential business had a drastic impact on small businesses, especially in the informal sector where women constitute the majority of the workforce.
- There is a need for reliable information control on COVID-19 whereas most border communities have low levels of knowledge of the disease, low risk perception and negative attitudes toward movement restrictions may compromise COVID-19 control.



UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA:

- The Government of Tanzania issued a ban on mass public gatherings imposed, and citizens encouraged not to leave home for non-essential purposes, reports indicate daily life for the majority of working citizens were minimally affected.
- Community response was in tandem with government requirements and government messaging for border specific sensitization was present with the authorities.
- EAC Youth Ambassadors observed need to expand sensitization through dissemination of these context ready messages by the Tanzania ministry of Health.

7. OCHA Burundi Situational Report June 2020 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Burundi%20-%202030%20Jun%202020.pdf>

8. EAC targets One Stop Border Posts' staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the region [Posted in Healthhttps://www.eac.int/releases/147-health/1856-eac-targets-one-stop-border-posts-staff-to-prevent-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-the-region](https://www.eac.int/releases/147-health/1856-eac-targets-one-stop-border-posts-staff-to-prevent-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-the-region)


Achievements of the EAC Youth Ambassadors Border Sensitization Outreach


Toll Free Bulk SMS Reach


The EAC Youth Ambassadors reached a total of **1200+** East African border community members with vital information on COVID19 prevention in 4 partner states. These were from both two-way and one-way bulk SMS messaging. EACYAP received up to **50 responses** that informed stakeholder interviews for sensitization


Messages sent to the communities where for instance :

ONE WAY MESSAGES


 Greetings from EAC Youth, please wash your hands with soap after getting into contact with people that have been around your border community.


 Greetings from EAC Youth, Always wear your mask while communicating to border community members and encourage others to do so too.


 Greetings from EAC Youth, when you see a suspected COVID19 case, report to the nearest health official available in the border community.


 Greetings from EAC Youth, Support government initiatives to fight COVID19 spread in your border community by keeping social distances

TWO-WAY MESSAGING QUESTIONS

 Are local border leaders involved in keeping people safe from COVID19 infections?

 Which challenges do you see in your border community as a result of COVID19?

 What should government do for you to help with the problems caused by COVID19?

 Do you think the cases of covid19 discovered are given the treatment they need to get?

Informative Interviews



Interviews in the Partner states of Uganda and Kenya helped relay information to stakeholders from the bulk SMS feedback. This shall enable stakeholders planning for future responses to pay keen interest in community needs. Based on the feedback, EACYAP engaged **8 officials** in interviews from Directorates of Immigration, Ministries of Health, Security agencies and Local leaders.

The interview guide based on feedback was as follows:

- a** *How can border communities work with the government to avoid further spread of Covid19 at the border?*
- b** *What is the government doing for border communities given their higher level of risk factors in the pandemic?*
- c** *What can youth leaders and local leaders do to encourage community resilience at the border in this Covid19 fight?*
- d** *If a community member is exhibiting symptoms, what measures can the border community take for community safety?*
- e** *What plans does the government have to strengthen community resilience as borders ease restriction on cross border movement?*

Radio Spot broadcast



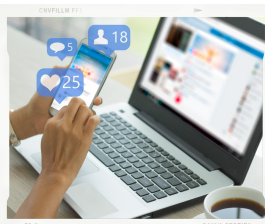
Interviews held were broadcasted to border communities in three border areas with a total reach of about **100,000-250,000** East Africans and border users in a total of 8 different sessions per border.

As a government we have organized sensitization programme where we are able to give information on how to respond to COVID-19, the protocols, how people need to carry out themselves operating within the border because of high risk



Mr. Samuel Mwangi , Acting Director Social Affairs Ministry of EAC, Uganda.

Online Engagements



Social media campaigns reached an audience of up to **10,000+** online community members on **Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram** with vital information posters on prevention and resilience against COVID-19 in different posts for a period of four weeks.

What next; recommendations for stronger prosperous Border Communities

Governments should consider measures such as medical screening or testing, preventative and time-bound quarantine facilities at border crossing points to allow access to asylum seekers.

Cross-border transmission of COVID-19 is an increasing concern, particularly as countries begin to ease travel restrictions and lift border closures.

Cross-border travel is essential to the member states of the East African Community region's economy and society. People on both sides of borders in this region often share culture, familial ties and economic activity, and movement across the borders is fluid regardless of formal closures.

Involvement of more community members in initiatives at the border points by EAC Governments.

Diversification of opportunities for youth to curb unemployment and risk factors during such pandemic outbreaks.

Facilitating a safe but efficient trade management system at EAC border points to facilitate trade resilience.

Employing community dialogues for consensus approaches to response strategies around COVID-19.

Provision of relief food and free reusable masks in the vulnerable communities.

There is a need for increased support to sustain youth sensitization campaigns to achieve community resilience and eradicate laxities that may provide avenues for succeeding waves of infections.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown why it is critically important to have collective and inclusive community solutions; young people have stepped up in incredible ways to respond to the pandemic and moving forward co-designing and co-leading should be the norm



Afekuru Animu Risasi

CONCLUSION

Border zones need to be prioritized as part of the development agenda as these are areas which accelerate movements of people as well as services that enable the socio-economic and political prosperities of neighboring countries, young people have shown the ability to lead the advocacy efforts to tackle conflicts , illegal migration , counter trafficking and other disruptions in border communities attributed by the COVID-19 pandemic to foster peace and stability among the East African Community member states.

The pandemic has accelerated job loss , food insecurity , trade barriers and many more hurdles yet through the use of digital spaces young people have managed to end the gap caused by mis-information and lack of information to border communities though co-leadership with government leaders and development partners has helped to end mis-information especially to border communities.



CELEBRATING
20
YEARS



EAC
Youth Ambassadors
Platform



Implemented by
giz
GIZ - German International
Cooperation