



New project to increase levels of financial inclusion among Refugees

Pilot project aims to give 100,000 refugees in Rwanda access to financial services through mobile phones

Kigali, Rwanda August 25 2020: FSD Africa and Equity Bank Rwanda, today launched a pilot project that aims to provide almost 100,000 refugees in Rwanda access to savings, loans, remittances and insurance services through their mobile phones.

Over the next 18 months, the project aims to test the viability of using unstructured service data (USSD) channels to provide banking and financial services to refugees living in Gihembe before being made available throughout the country. There are plans to expand the project to refugee populations in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By the end of the project, Equity Bank Rwanda hopes to open 90,000 accounts, including 40,000 savings accounts, 50,000 loan accounts and 10,000 insurance clients.

Rwanda has been hosting refugees for the last 20 years and the total refugee population is estimated to stand at about 150,000 as at December 2019.

Research shows that increasing access to financial services can allow low-income households, including refugees, to build assets, mitigate shocks and contribute to the local economy. However, despite the benefits that arise when refugees can access financial services, issues such as documentation challenges, access to seed capital and lack of tailored products, hampers the uptake of financial services.

The project builds on earlier work funded by FSD Africa and Access to Finance Rwanda (AFR) in partnership with UNHCR and conducted by BFA Global to identify and provide solutions for removing the barriers refugees face when accessing financial services. That research found that stakeholders in the humanitarian sector have a key role to play in enabling refugees to become an attractive segment for financial service providers.

Following the publication of the report, FSD Africa and AFR conducted an innovation competition to identify and support financial services providers to develop tailored solutions for refugee populations in Rwanda.

Today's announcement is the next step in this process. Equity Bank Rwanda PLC, who was one of selected financial service providers, will pilot the USSD channel to give refugees access to services on their mobile phones that will enable them to open accounts, make purchases, apply for loans, receive remittances, and set savings goals.

In addition to support with opening and operating accounts, the project's participants will receive training on how to enhance their personal and business management skills.

Hannington Namara, Managing Director, Equity Bank Rwanda, said: "We are very proud to partner with FSD Africa to empower the refugees and sensitize them not to rely on humanitarian assistance but start the financial inclusion journey leading to financial independence in future "

Mark Napier, CEO, FSD Africa, said: "This pilot is a valuable step in testing the solutions that could break down barriers and increase levels of financial inclusion among refugee populations. Research funded by FSD Africa reveals that refugees, like anyone else, crave financial stability. When refugees are

included in financial markets, we can transform their lives by helping them mitigate shocks and contribute to the local economy.”

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About FSD Africa

FSD Africa is a specialist development agency working to reduce poverty by strengthening financial markets across sub-Saharan Africa. Based in Nairobi, FSD Africa’s team of financial sector experts work alongside governments, business leaders, regulators and policy makers to design and build ambitious programmes that make financial markets work better for everyone. Established in 2012, FSD Africa is incorporated as a non-profit company limited by guarantee in Kenya. It is funded by UK aid from the UK government.

About Equity Bank Limited – Rwanda

Equity Bank Rwanda PLC exists to transform the lives and livelihoods of our people socially and economically by availing them modern, inclusive financial services that maximize their opportunities. To this aim they offer inclusive, customer focused financial services that socially and economically empower our clients and other stakeholders. The bank commenced its operations in October 2011 and has since opened 14 branches and serves a large number of SMEs across the country. It is a subsidiary of Equity Group Holdings Plc, which has other banking subsidiaries in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

For more information, visit <https://rw.equitybankgroup.com>

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