

HDI NEWSLETTER

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Dear Partner,

Welcome to our **March Newsletter!**

This edition highlights our continued efforts to strengthen systems and support the actors who shape how health and rights are experienced at community level. Across all engagements, a clear focus emerges: translating progress into practical, inclusive, and responsive services. We begin with efforts to sustain progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), bringing together civil society, media, and stakeholders to strengthen dialogue, address emerging challenges, and promote evidence-based, context-sensitive approaches.

We also advanced work on legal identity and access to justice for children by strengthening the capacity of Child Protection and Wellbeing Officers to better respond to the needs of vulnerable populations. This reinforced the importance of coordination, legal awareness, and timely response. At community level, we engaged religious leaders to address gender-based violence (GBV), supporting shifts in perspectives and strengthening their role in promoting safer, more equitable communities.

Our multi-campus outreach to university students combined dialogue, education, and service delivery to address stigma and improve access to SRHR services, demonstrating the impact of linking awareness with care. In border districts, we strengthened community preparedness for Mpox and other diseases by supporting community health workers and frontline actors to enhance awareness, early detection, and response. We also worked with district leaders and service providers to promote equitable service delivery, encouraging reflection on how attitudes and systems influence access for marginalized populations.

Finally, we supported law students to engage with gender, inclusion, and accountability, while contributing to global dialogue at CSW70 on advancing justice for women and girls.

Across all initiatives, one message stands out: strengthening systems requires both capacity and commitment to ensure services reach those who need them most.

Ends



FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION: SUSTAINING PROGRESS ON SRHR IN RWANDA

Rwanda's journey in advancing health and human rights has been shaped by resilience, strong leadership, and a commitment to inclusive development. Over the years, the country has made important strides in improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), supported by progressive policies and sustained investment in health systems.

Yet, as in many contexts, progress is not always linear. Differences in perspectives, often rooted in culture, faith, and evolving

social norms, continue to shape how SRHR is understood and accessed across communities. It is within this context that we, in collaboration with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), convened a two-day capacity-building workshop bringing together civil society actors, media practitioners, and key stakeholders to strengthen their ability to navigate emerging challenges and sustain gains in SRHR. The workshop provided a platform for reflection, dialogue, and shared learning, grounded in Rwanda's unique social and institutional landscape.



Participants explored how public narratives, access to information, and service delivery environments influence the uptake of SRHR services. Discussions highlighted that while policies may be in place, implementation often depends on community-level understanding, trust, and engagement.

This underscores the importance of continuous dialogue, ensuring that different perspectives are acknowledged while reinforcing the central goal of improving health outcomes for all.

A key focus of the workshop was strengthening analytical and strategic skills among participants. Through case studies

and practical exercises, participants examined how to better understand trends, identify risks, and respond constructively to challenges that may affect access to services.

Emphasis was placed on evidence-based approaches, collaboration, and the importance of clear, context-sensitive communication. Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, our Executive Director, emphasized the importance of building on Rwanda's progress while remaining attentive to the realities on the ground. He noted that meaningful progress often requires patience, dialogue, and sustained engagement across different segments of society.



As a country, we have made significant strides over time. The task ahead is to ensure that these gains are translated into practical access and improved outcomes for communities.

- **Dr. Aflodis Kagaba**, Executive Director, HDI

He further highlighted that strengthening systems goes beyond policy frameworks. “It is not only about what is written in law, but how it is experienced by people in their daily lives,” he said,

pointing to the need for continued investment in awareness, capacity, and collaboration among stakeholders. The workshop also underscored the role of partnerships in sustaining progress. With shifts in global funding landscapes, participants reflected on the importance of coordinated efforts and locally driven solutions.

Strengthening collaboration between civil society, institutions, and communities was identified as a key priority in ensuring continuity and resilience. Importantly, the engagement reinforced the value of inclusive, participatory approaches.

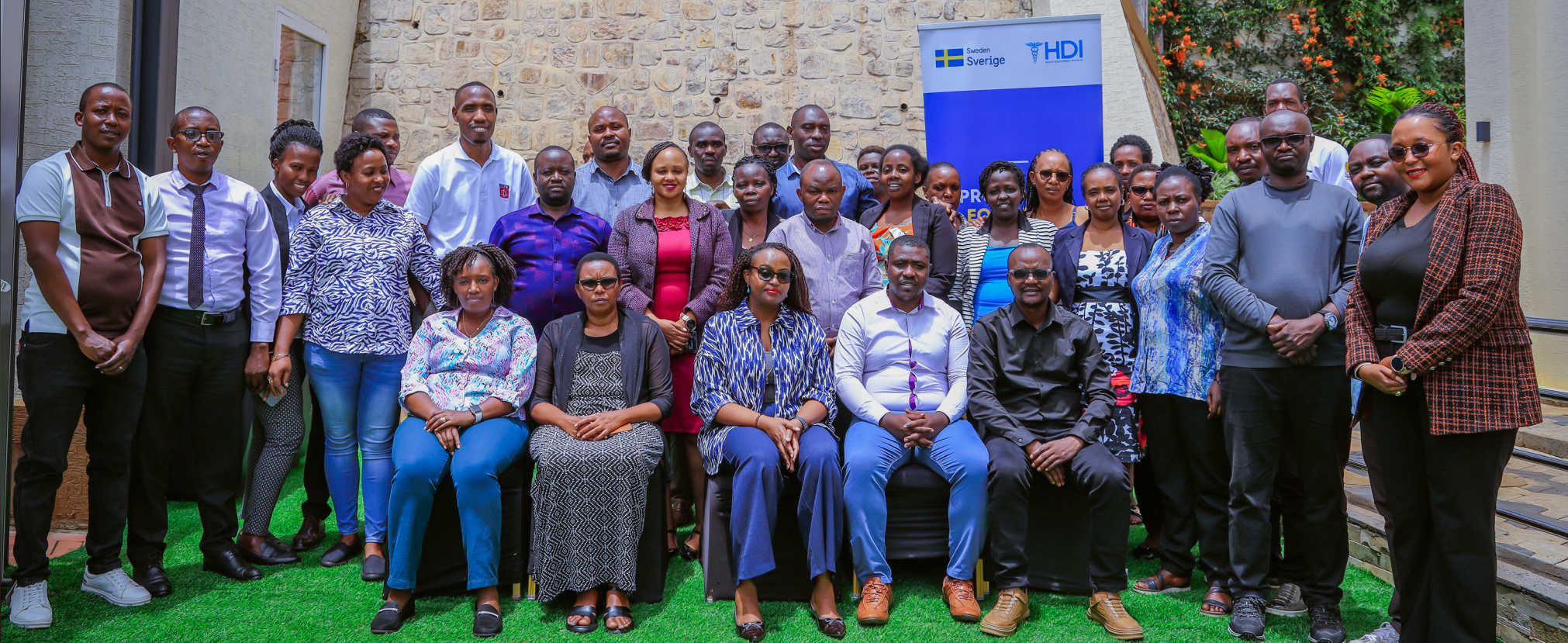


By creating space for dialogue and experience sharing, the workshop enabled participants to better understand diverse perspectives and identify practical pathways forward.

This approach not only builds technical capacity but also fosters trust, an essential component in advancing health and rights in a sustainable manner. As Rwanda continues to build on its achievements, initiatives like this workshop play a critical role in supporting informed, coordinated, and context-sensitive responses to emerging challenges. They contribute to a broader

effort to ensure that progress in SRHR is not only maintained, but strengthened, so that services remain accessible, responsive, and aligned with the needs of all communities.

For partners and stakeholders, this work represents an opportunity to support approaches that are grounded in evidence, shaped by local realities, and focused on long-term impact. Through continued collaboration and investment, there is strong potential to consolidate gains and advance equitable access to health services across Rwanda.



PROTECTING EVERY CHILD: STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS FOR LEGAL IDENTITY AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN RWANDA

Ensuring that every child in Rwanda is recognized, protected, and able to access essential services remains central to the country's commitment to human rights and inclusive development. While significant progress has been made in civil registration and child protection systems, barriers to legal identity and access to justice persist, particularly for children in vulnerable situations.

To help address these gaps, in collaboration with the National Child Development Agency (NCDA), we convened a two-day national workshop in March, bringing together Child Protection and Wellbeing Officers from across the country. The workshop focused on strengthening frontline capacity to better respond to the realities children face at community level.



For participants, the training offered practical tools and renewed clarity on their role in safeguarding children. Jean Pierre Ngirimana, a Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer from Nyamasheke District, said the training significantly strengthened his understanding of child protection frameworks and the importance of inter-agency coordination.

“I have gained a deeper understanding of child protection laws and how different institutions must work together to respond effectively to cases involving children. Working closely with health facilities, law enforcement, and local authorities is essential to ensure children receive timely and comprehensive support,” he said. He also emphasized that rising cases of abuse and children

in conflict with the law require stronger coordination and faster response mechanisms at district level.



We are seeing an increase in cases of child abuse and children in conflict with the law. This requires us to strengthen collaboration across all sectors so that no child is left without support.

- Pierre Ngirimana, Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer from Nyamasheke District,



Alexia Mukashema , who works with NCDA, in charge of children without parental care, underscored the importance of prevention, awareness, and community responsibility in protecting children's rights. She highlighted the need to equip communities with knowledge, particularly around child rights, health information, and protection mechanisms.

"It is important to continue raising awareness among communities about children's rights, including access to health information and protection services. When communities are informed, they are better able to prevent violence and respond

appropriately when children are at risk," she said. She also stressed the importance of timely response and care for children who experience violence, as well as stronger systems for supporting those without parental care.

"When a child is abused, they must receive immediate support, both legal and psychosocial. We also need stronger systems to care for children who are abandoned or without parental care, so that they grow up in safe and supportive environments," she noted.



Across discussions, participants pointed to persistent challenges that continue to affect service delivery. Stigma and discrimination remain key barriers, particularly for children from marginalized backgrounds. Gaps in legal knowledge, combined with procedural and financial barriers related to civil registration and parental recognition, further limit access to justice and essential services.

At the same time, the workshop reinforced the importance of strengthening systems through coordination and continuous learning. Participants emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between Child Protection Officers, civil registration authorities, and community structures to ensure that no child falls through the cracks. translate into real outcomes for communities.

In her remarks, Ariane Dusenge, our Deputy Executive Director, highlighted the importance of strengthening frontline capacity to ensure that child protection systems “Building the knowledge and skills of Child Protection Officers is critical to promoting and protecting children’s rights, particularly for those most at risk,” she said.

The workshop also generated practical recommendations to improve service delivery, including expanding community awareness on children’s rights, strengthening legal aid and representation, enhancing coordination mechanisms, and investing in continuous capacity building for frontline actors. As Rwanda continues to strengthen its child protection systems, initiatives like this workshop play a critical role in bridging the gap between policy and practice. By equipping those at the forefront with the tools, knowledge, and partnerships they need, there is strong potential to ensure that every child, regardless of their circumstances, is recognized, protected, and supported.

For partners, this work underscores the value of investing in integrated, systems-based approaches that connect legal identity, access to justice, and community-level protection, ensuring sustainable impact where it matters most.



ENGAGING FAITH LEADERS TO CHALLENGE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PROMOTE SAFER COMMUNITIES

In communities across Rwanda, religious leaders are often the first point of contact for families facing conflict, crisis, or uncertainty. Their influence extends beyond places of worship, shaping beliefs, guiding behaviour, and mediating some of the most sensitive issues within households. Recognizing this role, the Health Development Initiative (HDI) is working to strengthen

their capacity to address one of the most persistent challenges affecting families: Gender-Based Violence (GBV). From 17th to 18th March 2026, HDI convened over 50 religious leaders in Gasabo District for a two-day training focused on gender, GBV prevention, and response.



The training created space for open dialogue on issues that are often difficult to address, challenging long-held beliefs, unpacking harmful norms, and building practical skills to support survivors and prevent violence.

From 17th to 18th March 2026, HDI convened over 50 religious leaders in Gasabo District for a two-day training focused on gender, GBV prevention, and response. The training created space for open dialogue on issues that are often difficult to address, challenging long-held beliefs, unpacking harmful norms, and building practical skills to support survivors and prevent violence. From the outset, discussions revealed a

critical gap: while many participants were deeply engaged in counseling families and resolving disputes, their understanding of gender equality and GBV was often shaped by cultural norms and misconceptions. Some initially expressed concern that promoting gender equality could disrupt family structures.

However, as conversations deepened, perspectives began to shift. Before, I thought these discussions about gender equality could weaken families,” one participant reflected during a group session. “But now I see that respect and equality are what actually strengthen them.”



By connecting these concepts to real-life situations, the training helped leaders move beyond theory and reflect on how these dynamics play out within their own communities.

A key turning point came during group exercises, where participants analyzed real GBV cases they had encountered and discussed how they were handled. These exchanges allowed leaders to learn from one another, identify gaps in their responses, and consider alternative, more supportive approaches. “We often try to resolve issues quickly, without fully understanding the harm caused,” shared another participant.

“Now I realize the importance of listening, protecting the victim, and guiding families in a way that does not tolerate violence.”

Beyond strengthening understanding, the training also focused on equipping religious leaders with practical tools, ranging from basic knowledge of Rwanda’s legal framework on GBV to communication techniques that promote non-violence and respect. These skills are essential in ensuring that religious leaders not only advise, but also respond in ways that uphold rights and dignity.

Importantly, the training addressed the role of religious leaders as agents of change. By integrating GBV prevention messages into sermons, counseling sessions, and community outreach, they have the potential to influence attitudes at scale, challenging harmful norms and promoting positive values across entire communities.

Participants embraced this responsibility. “As leaders, people listen to us,” one participant noted. “We must use that influence to speak against violence and promote respect in families.”

The training also highlighted the importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue. While some participants were initially hesitant to engage, particularly given the sensitive nature of GBV, open discussions and experience sharing gradually built trust and confidence. This shift enabled more honest reflection on the role of culture, tradition, and religion in shaping gender norms. By the end of the two days, many participants expressed a renewed commitment to action, not only in addressing GBV cases more effectively, but in actively preventing violence through their daily interactions with communities.



This approach reflects a broader understanding that addressing GBV requires more than awareness, but it also demands engagement with the very structures that shape beliefs and behaviors. Religious leaders, positioned at the intersection of faith, culture, and community life, are critical to this effort.

As Rwanda continues to strengthen its response to GBV, initiatives like this demonstrate the value of working with trusted community figures to drive change from within. By equipping religious leaders with knowledge, skills, and a deeper understanding of gender equality, HDI is contributing to safer, more respectful communities, where families are supported not by silence or compromise, but by accountability, dignity, and care.



DESTIGMATIZING SAFE ABORTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Adolescents and young people continue to face disproportionate sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) risks, including unintended pregnancy, HIV infection, unsafe abortion, and gender-based violence (GBV). These challenges are often worsened by stigma, misinformation, and limited access to youth-friendly services. In Rwanda, about 5% of girls

aged 15–19 have begun childbearing, often leading to significant social, educational, and health consequences. Despite ongoing efforts to expand access to reproductive health services, many young people still face fear and judgment when seeking care, particularly around safe abortion and post-abortion services.



To address these gaps, Health Development Initiative (HDI), in partnership with the University of Rwanda (UR), the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), Medical Students' Association of Rwanda (MEDSAR), and Rwanda Midwifery Students Association (RMSA) conducted a multi-campus outreach campaign from March 11–18, 2026. The campaign, held across Rukara, Nyagatare, Remera, and Rwamagana campuses, was part of the global movement to mark the Day of Action to Destigmatize Abortion.

The initiative combined education, open dialogue, and on-site service delivery, ensuring that students were not only informed

but also directly linked to essential SRHR services. A total of 1,430 students were reached, with strong participation from young women (71%). Most participants were aged 20–24, reflecting the campaign's success in engaging the core university population.

Beyond awareness, the campaign integrated service provision. 169 students received HIV testing, more than 11,000 condoms were distributed, and many accessed contraceptives, emergency contraception, and counseling services. Students who tested positive for HIV were immediately linked to care.

Pre- and post-session assessments revealed significant improvements in knowledge and attitudes. Awareness of Rwanda's legal framework on abortion, initially one of the weakest areas, has more than doubled. Misconceptions around contraception, HIV prevention, and consent also declined notably.

More importantly, the conversations began to shift how students think and speak about abortion.

Jovine Umutoni, from Nyagatare Campus, reflected on how stigma continues to silence open discussion:

"We talk about relationships and even contraception, but abortion is always avoided or judged. This session made it easier to ask questions without feeling like you are doing something wrong."

Audace Mwirerwa from Rwamagana campus highlighted the impact of understanding the legal framework.

"I did not know that there are legal conditions under which someone can access safe abortion services. Knowing this changes how we support our friends instead of just spreading fear."



For many students, the biggest shift went beyond knowledge to confidence in seeking care, as Umutoni highlighted.

"Before, I would rather keep quiet than go to a health facility because of what people might think. Now I know where to go and that I have a right to services without being judged."



The campaign also strengthened collaboration with student leaders, including Gender Ministers, and partners such as MEDSAR and RMSA, who played a key role in mobilization and peer engagement.

Despite challenges such as exam schedules and limited time for engagement, the initiative demonstrated that combining education, safe dialogue spaces, and direct service delivery significantly improves both knowledge and service uptake.

By addressing stigma and linking students to care, the campaign contributes to a broader shift, one where young people are better equipped to make informed decisions about their health and access services with dignity. Moving forward, HDI aims to expand these efforts across more campuses, strengthen follow-up support for students, and continue building partnerships that ensure young people can access accurate information and stigma-free SRHR services.



KEEPING BORDERS SAFE: HOW COMMUNITY ACTION IS STRENGTHENING DISEASE PREPAREDNESS

At Rwanda's busiest border points, movement is constant. Traders cross daily, transporters move goods across regions, and families maintain ties that stretch beyond national boundaries. This flow is essential to livelihoods and regional connection, but it also presents a persistent public health challenge: how to prevent and respond to infectious diseases

in high-mobility settings. In March, the Health Development Initiative (HDI), working alongside the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), continued strengthening cross-border community preparedness for Mpox and other epidemic-prone diseases.



The focus was not just on awareness, but on ensuring that prevention becomes part of everyday life in border communities. Across districts such as Rusizi and Rubavu, community health workers (CHWs) moved through neighbourhoods, markets, and transport hubs, engaging directly with residents and travellers. These were not one-off sensitization sessions, but sustained, face-to-face interactions designed to help people recognize symptoms early, understand how diseases spread, and take practical steps to protect themselves and others.

For many, these conversations are the first point of access to reliable health information.

“People here are always moving, and information moves just as fast, but not always correctly,” said a Community Health Worker in Rubavu. “When we go door to door, we are not just giving messages. We listen, we explain, and we help people understand what to do if they see symptoms.”

To reinforce these efforts, the initiative scaled up the distribution of information, education, and communication materials across six high-mobility border areas. Posters and flyers were placed in markets, border crossing points, health facilities, and transport hubs - spaces where people naturally gather and where health messages can remain visible.

At the Points of Entry themselves, Mpox awareness materials have been strategically installed in screening areas, waiting zones, and administrative offices. Here, the audience includes not only local residents but also travelers and border officials, ensuring that critical information is accessible at key decision-making moments.

A border official in Rusizi highlighted the importance of this visibility:



Every day we receive people from different places. Having clear information at the border helps travelers understand the risks immediately. It also supports our work, because people are more aware before we even engage them.



Beyond materials, the strength of the intervention lies in human interaction. CHWs do more than distribute information, they translate it into context, address misconceptions, and encourage early health-seeking behavior.

This approach is particularly important in communities where stigma and misinformation can delay response.

Follow-up sessions with CHWs and key population groups have also created space for dialogue, allowing communities to share concerns and experiences while strengthening community-based surveillance and response mechanisms.

For cross-border traders like Dieudonne Majaliwa, the impact is practical and immediate.

“We used to hear different things about diseases and didn’t know what to believe,” said Majaliwa, a trader operating between Rubavu and Goma.

“Now, when someone explains it clearly, you understand how to protect yourself and your family. It changes how you think about your health.”

What is emerging is not just increased awareness, but a more connected and responsive system.

Communities are better informed, frontline workers are more equipped, and coordination between stakeholders is strengthening.



Cross-border health security depends not only on systems, but on whether individuals understand risks and feel empowered to act. It depends on trust, access to accurate information, and the ability to respond early.

In Rwanda’s border districts, that work is ongoing. And with each household visit, each conversation, and each visible message, preparedness is becoming a shared responsibility, which is rooted in communities and sustained across borders.



WHEN RIGHTS MEET REALITY: RETHINKING EQUITABLE SERVICE DELIVERY AT LOCAL LEVEL

In Rwanda, access to healthcare is increasingly shaped not only by the availability of services, but by how those services are delivered, and to whom. For marginalized and vulnerable populations, the difference between access and exclusion often comes down to the decisions, attitudes, and understanding of those on the frontlines. In March, with support from SIDA, we

conducted a series of district-level trainings for local leaders, healthcare providers, and community actors in Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, Kirehe, Rubavu, Musanze, Gicumbi, Musanze and Kayonza. These engagements focused on equitable treatment and human rights, encouraging participants to reflect on how their day-to-day roles influence access to care.

Across all districts, one message stood out: Rwanda has made significant progress in establishing legal and policy frameworks that protect patient rights and promote inclusive service delivery. However, translating these frameworks into consistent, non-discriminatory practice at community level remains an ongoing challenge.

In Kicukiro, discussions revealed a critical gap between service availability and understanding. Despite hosting the country's first and largest Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) clinic, many local leaders and service providers had limited awareness of harm reduction approaches. This disconnect highlighted how even well-established services can fall short of their potential if community-level actors are not equipped to support them.

In Nyarugenge, where baseline awareness of human rights and harm reduction was relatively strong, conversations revealed mixed attitudes around sexual orientation and gender identity. While many participants affirmed their responsibility to provide services without discrimination, others expressed hesitation, highlighting the complex interplay between personal beliefs, social norms, and professional responsibilities.



Rather than avoiding these tensions, the trainings created space for open dialogue.

It was in Kirehe District, however, where some of the clearest reflections on transformation emerged.

Munyentwari Straton, A MAJ Assistant, noted a shift in understanding after the training, reiterating the need to apply the skills they learned in their daily work.

“I have gained a better understanding of the importance of protecting key populations, who are often overlooked and marginalized in society. I have also strengthened my knowledge and skills on human rights, particularly regarding LGBTQ+ persons, and the need to protect them from all forms of discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion.”

Similarly, Hakizimana Charles, Gender Officer in Kirehe District, reflected on how the training reshaped his understanding of inequality.

“Participating in the HDI training on gender and human rights strengthened my understanding of how gender inequalities are deeply rooted in social, cultural, and institutional structures.

The training also enhanced my knowledge of social inclusion and deepened my understanding of how to protect the rights of key populations and advocate for their access to services free from stigma and discrimination.”

District leadership also reinforced the importance of translating learning into action. The Vice Mayor in charge of Social Affairs, Mrs. Janviere Mukandabarura, emphasized.



“We appreciate HDI for the impactful work being carried out in our community, especially in HIV response and advocacy in Kirehe District.

Advocacy remains very important, and I encourage participants to reflect on the knowledge gained during these two days and consider how they will apply it in their workplaces to create meaningful change.”



Across all eight districts, participants engaged in case studies, discussions, and practical reflections that challenged assumptions and encouraged more inclusive approaches. Topics such as gender-based violence, adolescent access to services, safe abortion care, and harm reduction were explored not as abstract concepts, but as real issues affecting individuals in their communities. Exercises like “Why did she die?” case scenario brought into focus the consequences of delayed or stigmatized care, reinforcing the importance of timely, rights-based responses. What emerged was a clearer understanding

that equitable service delivery is not achieved through policy alone. It requires continuous engagement, reflection, and coordination among those responsible for implementing it.

Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration between community leaders, healthcare providers, and district authorities. By improving communication and referral pathways, local systems can become more responsive to the needs of marginalized populations, including people who use drugs and sexual and gender minorities.

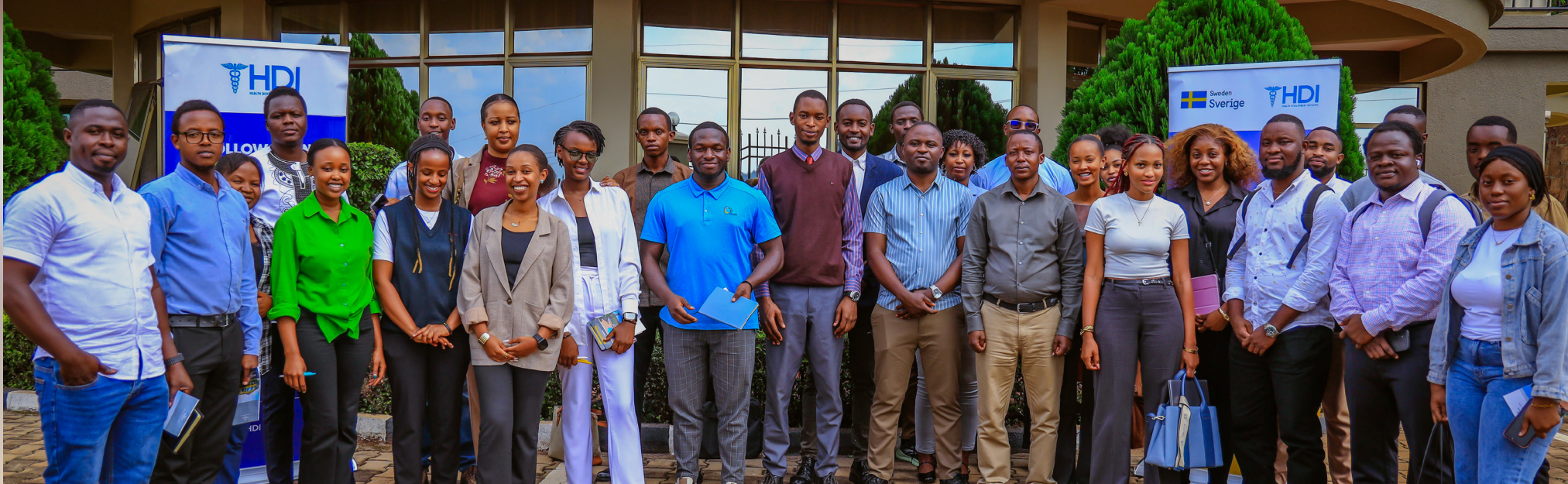


At the same time, the trainings revealed important structural gaps. Participation remained predominantly male across districts, pointing to the need for more intentional inclusion of women and younger leaders. Limited time for engagement also constrained deeper discussion on sensitive topics, underscoring the need for longer, phased, and more context-sensitive capacity-building approaches.

Beyond knowledge gains, the engagements contributed to a shift in how participants perceive their roles. Leaders left with a stronger sense of responsibility—not only to uphold

human rights, but to actively address stigma, discrimination, and systemic barriers that prevent individuals from accessing services.

Because in practice, access is not just about what exists—it is about whether people feel able to use it. As Rwanda continues to strengthen its health systems, these local-level conversations are critical. They ensure that progress is not only measured by policies and infrastructure, but by how effectively systems respond to the realities of those they are meant to serve.



SHAPING FUTURE LEGAL MINDS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

As Rwanda continues to strengthen its commitment to human rights and inclusive justice, a new generation of legal professionals is being equipped not only with legal knowledge, but with the values and perspectives needed to uphold dignity and accountability in practice.

In early March, in partnership with SIDA, we convened 34 university law students from across Rwanda for a two-day capacity-building workshop focused on gender, Gender

Transformative Approaches (GTA), Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC), and the prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH).

The training aimed to bridge the gap between legal theory and real-world application, preparing law students to navigate complex social and legal challenges as future practitioners.



Through interactive discussions and case-based learning facilitated by our internal staff, participants explored how gender norms, power dynamics, and stigma influence access to justice and shape institutional responses. For many, the sessions challenged long-held assumptions and introduced new ways of thinking about everyday interactions, professional responsibility, and the role of the law in protecting vulnerable populations.

“Before this session, I thought giving compliments was always harmless,” said Fatima Mohammed Elbashir. “But now I realize

that when it is repeated or makes someone uncomfortable, it can be considered harassment.”

This shift in understanding reflects a broader outcome of the training, moving beyond abstract legal definitions to practical, lived realities. By examining how behaviors are perceived and experienced, students began to connect legal frameworks on SEAH with everyday conduct, both on campus and in future workplaces.

Similarly, Theodore Sinumvayabo noted the importance of respecting boundaries.

“Sometimes we confuse friendly words with acceptable behavior, but I learned that if the other person feels uneasy, it is no longer just a compliment. Harassment ignores how the other person feels.”

Beyond SEAH, the training introduced participants to SOGIESC concepts, prompting critical reflection on inclusion within academic and legal spaces. While many students acknowledged the presence of gender-diverse individuals on campus, discussions revealed that their specific protection needs are often overlooked.

“Understanding SOGIESC helped me realize that diversity exists within our campuses, and inclusion requires intentional support,” said Dushimumuremyi Vasta. “Some people are naturally who they are, and that is okay.” These reflections highlight the importance of equipping future legal professionals with the tools to address discrimination and promote equal protection under the law.



As students engage with these concepts early in their careers, they are better positioned to shape legal systems that are responsive to all members of society. The sessions on gender and Gender Transformative Approaches further deepened this understanding by examining how societal norms and power structures influence leadership, decision-making, and access to opportunities. Participants emphasized that gender equality should not be treated as a “women’s issue,” but as a shared responsibility.



“Challenging harmful gender norms starts with us,” said Izere Aime Yvette. “We must promote shared responsibility, not treat gender as a women-only issue.”

This recognition is critical in shifting attitudes and fostering inclusive leadership across sectors. By encouraging both men and women to actively engage in advancing gender equality, the training reinforced the importance of collective action in driving social change. At its core, the workshop underscored the role of law students as future defenders of justice and accountability. Discussions on legal frameworks and reporting mechanisms

for SEAH highlighted the responsibility of legal practitioners to protect survivors, uphold ethical standards, and ensure that justice systems remain accessible and responsive.



“As future legal professionals, we have a duty to prevent and respond to SEAH by upholding accountability and protecting survivors.

- Blag John Jambo Robert.



By combining technical knowledge with critical reflection, the initiative created a space for students to question assumptions, engage with complex issues, and commit to more inclusive and rights-based approaches in their future careers. As Rwanda continues to advance its human rights and gender equality

agenda, investing in the next generation of legal professionals remains essential. Through initiatives like this, HDI is contributing to a legal culture that not only understands the law, but actively works to ensure it serves everyone—without discrimination, exclusion, or harm.



HDI AT CSW70: ADVANCING JUSTICE AND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA

We were honored to participate in the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), held in New York from March 9–19, 2026. During this convening, we joined governments, civil society, and diverse stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and partnership aimed at advancing gender equality and the rights of women and girls across Africa.

At CSW70, the global community reaffirmed a clear priority: strengthening access to justice for all women and girls as the foundation for equality, dignity, and sustainable development. While progress is evident, it must accelerate through coordinated, evidence-driven, and rights-based action.

Our participation was marked by active engagement in two significant side events. The ODAS Movement's event on "Understanding the legal frameworks governing sexual and reproductive health in Africa: a continental analysis beyond linguistic borders" convened a range of key actors, including the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa and Ipas, to examine how legal systems across the continent shape access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

During this side event, our Executive Director, Dr. Kagaba Aflodis, highlighted Rwanda's recent legislative reform lowering the age of consent for accessing healthcare services, including SRHR services, from 18 to 15 years, positioning it as a milestone in advancing adolescents' autonomy, access to care, and the broader realization of their rights. Discussions at the ODAS event underscored that the effective implementation of legal frameworks must place rights holders at the center and be supported by deliberate and sustained government action. This includes raising awareness at both national and regional decision-making levels, strengthening education systems and public awareness programming, and engaging local leadership to ensure that laws are translated into lived realities within communities.



Regional and continental frameworks, including the African Charter and the Maputo Protocol, were reaffirmed as critical instruments guiding these efforts. Maputo Protocol, were reaffirmed as critical instruments guiding these efforts.

Building on these discussions, we also co-organized a side event with the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), focusing on "Commitment to Action: Advancing the Rights of Women and Girls in Africa Through Legal Reform." This panel brought together regional partners to showcase Africa's progress in adopting and implementing rights-based legal frameworks for women and girls.



While notable achievements were acknowledged, discussions also highlighted persistent challenges, including uneven ratification of human rights systems across countries and inconsistencies in national-level implementation. The session underscored the importance of strengthening systems that facilitate the translation of legal commitments into practice, ensuring clarity, accessibility, and enforceability of the law.

Country experiences further illustrated these dynamics in practice. Contributions from Malawi and Tanzania demonstrated how accountability mechanisms, such as ACERWC and national human rights commissions, are being actively utilized to challenge structural inequalities through strategic litigation.

Notable examples included a recent case in Malawi addressing sexual violence and access to safe abortion, which opened space for discussions on the development of safe abortion care guidelines, as well as a case submitted to ACERWC addressing punitive measures faced by adolescent girls. These measures include school expulsions due to pregnancy and mandatory pregnancy testing upon enrolment practices that undermine access to education and violate fundamental rights. These examples underscored the importance of building well-coordinated systems that not only establish legal protections but also ensure their effective implementation, monitoring, and accountability.



Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized the need to confront persistent barriers, including structural and cost constraints, stigma, and gaps in implementation that continue to limit access to services. Case-based advocacy, such as the Violet Zulu case in Zambia, was highlighted as a powerful example of how strategic litigation can dismantle systemic barriers, challenge harmful practices, and strengthen accountability mechanisms.

Further reinforcing this direction, the forum emphasized the importance of adopting a progressive advocacy approach, citing

the process of ratifying and lifting reservations to Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol. These conversations reinforced that legal reform alone is insufficient without sustained and coordinated efforts to operationalize rights through inclusive systems, institutional alignment, and multi-level collaboration. The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion also highlighted Rwanda's integrated approaches to service delivery, including models such as the Isange One Stop Centers, which demonstrate the value of coordinated, survivor-centered responses in addressing gender-based violence and advancing access to justice.



Across discussions, there was a strong emphasis on addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including harmful social and cultural norms, unequal power dynamics, and entrenched structural barriers within communities that continue to limit the realization of rights.

Reflecting on CSW70, HDI reaffirms its commitment to working alongside the Government of Rwanda and partners across Africa to strengthen legal frameworks, promote accountability, and expand access to justice for all women and girls. Ensuring that legal reforms translate into meaningful and sustained change requires collective responsibility among governments, civil society, communities, and regional institutions, as well as

continued investment in systems that support implementation. Participation at CSW70 underscored that Rwanda's progress in legal reform is not only a national achievement but also a meaningful contribution to regional and global efforts toward gender equality, and that this momentum must continue to accelerate.

Sincere appreciation is extended to all partners and stakeholders engaged during CSW70, including the Government of Rwanda and collaborators globally. Through sustained collaboration, shared learning, and collective commitment, efforts will continue to advance practical, inclusive, and rights-based solutions for women and girls across the continent.

IN OTHER NEWS

This March **we hosted the following radio shows:**



7TH MARCH 2026:

UNDERSTANDING BREAST CANCER : AWARENESS, EARLY DETECTION, AND CARE

14TH MARCH 2026:

PROMOTING POSITIVE MASCULINITY FOR RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN FAMILIES

21ST MARCH 2026:

UNDERSTANDING THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

28TH MARCH 2026:

BUILDING SAFE HOMES: ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN



8TH MARCH 2026:

EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS TO CLAIM THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY

15TH MARCH 2026:

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH DECISION-MAKING

22ND MARCH 2026:

UNDERSTANDING CONTRACEPTIVES AND FAMILY PLANNING

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:

Women Doctors For Reproductive J... @doctors_wo... · Mar 30

Today, @doctors_women paid a courtesy visit to RHIA - Women Chapter, marking an important step with a shared commitment to advancing equitable access to healthcare services for women and girls across Rwanda, and exploring how digital solutions can help bridge existing gaps in

Show more

You and 9 others

4 15 530

IMRO-Rwanda @ImroRwanda · Mar 28

This week, IMRO Rwanda joined a civil Society Consultative Meeting convened by @HDIRwanda, bringing together partners to reflect on progress & strategies to sustain & advance Rwanda's SRHR landscape, while highlighting emerging barriers to reproductive justice & collective solutions

You and 5 others

2 11 27 305

Community Based Health Promoters @c.hpromoters · Mar 27

CBHP took part in a two-day capacity building workshop focused on the design, monitoring and evaluation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) interventions. Appreciation goes to @chbrwanda @RBCRWanda and @UNESCO for organizing such impactful sessions.

You and 9 others

2 11 27 305

Dream village organization @dreamvillage6 · Mar 26

Through Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), with support from @SwedeninRW and @HDIRwanda, we conducted impactful support groups at @GitagataRehab in partnership with @nrs_rwanda empowering adolescent girls, boys & young women with SRHR knowledge 🙌 #CSE #YouthEmpowerment

You and 9 others

Nyaruguru District @NyaruguruDistr · Mar 26

As part of family week, @NyaruguruDistr in collaboration with, @PlanRwanda @HDIRwanda @sfhRwanda, @compassion, @Imbaraga held a meeting to discuss the root causes of unwanted pregnancies among the youth, gaps in Sexual Reproductive Health education and possible strategies

Ministry of Gender & Family Promotion | Rwanda and 2 others

1 3 16 880

Bugesera District @BugeseraDistr · Mar 24

Uyu muni, ku bufatanye bw'Akarere na @HDIRwanda, urubiruko ruhagarariye urundi rwo mu Karere, rwahawe amahugurwa agamije kurwongerera ubumenyi ku buzima bw'imyorokere, kureba imbogamizi zikigaragara mu kubona serivisi z'ubuzima bw'imyorokere n'icyakorwa kugira ngo zikemuke.

You and 6 others

2 9 20 932

Gatsibo District @GatsiboDistrict · Mar 19

Ku bufatanye na @HDIRwanda, mu Karere ka @GatsiboDistrict habaye inama Nyunguranabitekerezo y'igihembwe igamije guteza imbere ubuzima bw'imyorokere mu nzego zitandukanye z'ubuzima, mu rwego rwo gukumira inda ziterwa abangavu. @RwandaLocalGov @RwandaHealth @RwandaEast

You and 6 others

2 9 20 932

HDI WISHES TO THANK OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

- AMPLIFYCHANGE
- ANGEL FAMILY FUND
- BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE
- CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE
- CRICKET BUILDS HOPE
- DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO RWANDA
- EAHP
- EQUIMUNDO
- EXPERTISE FRANCE
- FEMNET
- FOSI/OSIEA
- FP2030
- GIZ
- GLIHD
- GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS
- IMBUTO FOUNDATION
- IMRO
- IPPF
- JHPIEGO/MCGL
- MEDECIN DU MONDE
- MEDICAL DOCTORS FOR CHOICE
- MEDICAL STUDENTS FOR CHOICE
- MINISTRY OF GENDER AND FAMILY PROMOTION
- MINISTRY OF HEALTH
- MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
- MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID
- PARLIAMENT OF RWANDA
- PLAN INTERNATIONAL RWANDA
- PSA
- RNGOF
- ROBERT ANGEL AND FAMILY FOUNDATION
- RWANDA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM
- RWANDA SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS
- RWANDA BIOMEDICAL CENTER
- RWANDA EDUCATION BOARD
- RWANDA GOVERNANCE BOARD
- RWAMREC
- SISTERLOVE INC.
- SOCIETY FOR FAMILY HEALTH
- STEPHEN LEWIS FOUNDATION
- STOP TB PARTNERSHIP
- STRIVE FOUNDATION RWANDA
- THE CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
- THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION
- THE EMBASSY OF SWEDEN
- THE EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF NETHERLANDS
- THE GLOBAL FUND
- THE NEWTIMES
- UHAI-EASHRI
- UNAIDS
- UNFPA
- UNICEF
- VSO
- WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

