

HDI NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2024



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Dear Partners,

Welcome to our June Newsletter.

We are delighted to share the latest updates and highlights from our recent activities. In collaboration with RBC, we conducted outreach across six university campuses, promoting HIV self-testing kits and raising awareness about HIV prevention among students.

Additionally, we discuss how we are leveraging technology to combat gender-based violence through a USSD chatbot, enhancing our support to GBV survivors.

We also share some highlights from our targeted education programs for women in the mining industry where we addressed their specific needs in family planning, empowering them with accurate information and effective methods to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

Lastly, we take you to Huye, Gisagara, Ngoma, and Rwamagana districts, where we held our recent awareness campaigns where we engaged community, opinion, and religious leaders on Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNH), Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC), Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASHR), and Family Planning (FP).

Find these and more updates as we take you on our mission to promote health and rights for all.

Thank you for your continued support.

The Communication Team.



ENHANCING FAMILY PLANNING EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE MINING SECTOR

In our ongoing commitment to enhance women's health and empowerment, this June, we organized an extensive family planning awareness and GBV prevention outreach campaign specifically for over 1,000 women employed in the mining sector. The campaign targeted Rutongo, Musha, and Nyakabingo mines situated across Rulindo and Rwamagana districts. Women in the mining sector often face unique challenges and vulnerabilities,

including limited access to healthcare services and higher risk of exposure to GBV making them a critical group for health interventions. This outreach campaign aimed to educate and support women in making informed choices about their reproductive health, while also addressing critical issues such as GBV and HIV prevention.

A key component of the outreach was on family planning where the facilitator, Devotha Wihogora, a nurse and counselor shared detailed information on the various methods of contraception, their benefits, and how to choose options that align with individual health needs and preferences.

Additionally, the session also addressed common myths and misconceptions about family planning to ensure women have accurate and reliable information.

Wihogora also shared information on the availability of the family planning methods and how they can be accessed.

During our sessions, we also provided on-site family planning methods and facilitated referrals to area health centers for more specialized family planning services beyond what could be provided on-site.

Chantal Mukeshimana, of Musha Mines in Rwamagana district, said that she had abandoned family planning, after what she had learnt at the meeting, but was convinced to try again.



We now understand that, just as there are different methods of family planning, our bodies respond differently to each one. Therefore, we should not rely on misinformation based on other peoples' experiences. I will try different family planning options until I find one that is suitable for me.

- Chantal Mukeshimana



SESSION ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Another key session was on addressing gender-based violence (GBV). The facilitator, our Senior Program Officer - Gender and Inclusion, Annonciata Mukayitete, facilitated a comprehensive session on addressing GBV, covering the definition and forms of GBV, the effects of GBV on individuals and communities, relevant legal frameworks, and available support systems for survivors.

She worked with the participants to discuss prevention strategies, the importance of reporting and accountability. Mukayitete also supported the participants to explore harmful cultural and social norms that perpetuate violence aiming to equip the participants with the knowledge and tools to challenge GBV, support survivors, and foster a more equitable and safe society for all. She shared information on the resources such as our GBV USSD chatbot (*350#) and our call center (3530) as well as other support systems such as legal aid. The facilitators included a brief segment on how family planning and addressing GBV are interconnected.

“When you have control over your reproductive life, you are better equipped to resist and escape abusive relationships, as financial and physical dependence on partners is often a barrier to leaving,” she reminded.

SESSION ON SAFE ABORTION

We discussed the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion, providing clarification on who is eligible for these services, the procedural steps required, and the rights of women and healthcare providers under the law.

The discussion addressed the importance of utilizing these provisions to ensure safe and legal abortions, while also tackling common misconceptions and stigma surrounding the topic. In addition, the facilitators also shared information about HIV and emphasised the importance of regular testing and early detection, which are crucial for effective management and prevention of HIV.

They also provided voluntary pre and post counseling as well as condoms and free HIV tests.



LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This June, we launched our USSD GBV Information Chatbot—our latest initiative in the fight against gender-based violence. This innovative tool, developed in partnership with GIZ Rwanda is designed to provide crucial information and support referrals for individuals affected by GBV across our community.

Our GBV Information USSD Chatbot is a user-friendly tool accessible to anyone with a basic mobile phone. It allows users to seek information and support anonymously, ensuring their safety and comfort, all without requiring internet connectivity.



Speaking at the launch, GIZ's Sexualised and Gender-Based Violence (P-SGBV) Project Manager, Christiane Adamczyk said that the information chatbot had been developed over the course of a year and a half and continues to be a work in progress.

“We wanted to share that we have developed this chatbot for over one year and a half, so we are here after a long and creative process that wouldn't have been possible without the support of our colleagues Project for Digital Solutions for Sustainable Development at GIZ, and of course nothing would have been possible without our colleagues at HDI,” she said.

IMPACT AND REACH

Speaking at the launch, our Deputy Executive Director, Louange Twahirwa Gutabarwa said that by leveraging widely accessible technology, we aim to reach and support a diverse range of individuals, including those in remote or underserved areas where access to accurate information may be limited.

She explained that as technology becomes increasingly integral to daily life, perpetrators have found new avenues to exert control and inflict harm, leading to the rise of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence.



The evolving landscape of GBV highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that address both conventional and modern manifestations of violence. I am glad that one of our solutions to combat misinformation is also technology-based.

- Louange Twahirwa Gutabarwa
Deputy Executive Director



Gutabarwa also told the guests that since it began its testing run in February, the GBV Information Chatbot has been used 17,639 times by 11,641 total users. In June alone, we had 3,038 new users.

Our USSD GBV Information Chatbot is a significant step forward, but it is just one part of our comprehensive approach to eradicating gender-based violence.

Our educational campaigns across social media, radio programming, and through influencers aim to change perceptions and break the silence surrounding this issue.

We continue to conduct workshops and provide training for local and religious leaders, opinion leaders and community members to recognize and respond to GBV effectively.

Our Centers for Health and Rights offer direct support services, including counseling and legal assistance to survivors.



PROMOTING SELF-TESTING FOR HIV PREVENTION

As part of our efforts to combat the spread of HIV, we partnered with Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) to roll out an HIV self-testing outreach campaign across six universities nationwide. The Director of the HIV Prevention Unit at RBC, Dr. Basile Ikuzo, says that this initiative seeks to provide university

students with information about HIV prevention and increase awareness about HIV testing options. Dr. Ikuzo explained that the campaign is targeting university students given the high prevalence of new HIV infections among young people, seeking to address gaps in HIV education and prevention efforts.

“Besides the services provided in health centres, we feel that self-testing kits are another approach that can empower students to take control of their health, supporting our goal to encourage regular HIV tests for early detection, and treatment, thereby reducing the stigma associated with HIV and fostering a supportive community environment.

He said that other than the convenience and confidentiality, self-testing kits also offer a crucial opportunity to destigmatize the virus within communities.

By enabling individuals to test privately at home, the kits enhance confidentiality and reduce the fear of judgment that often accompanies traditional testing methods.

The Director of Research at HDI, Dr. Alain Favina, says that this campaign is aimed at empowering students with essential tools and knowledge to proactively manage their health, combat stigma, and enhance both the early detection and comprehensive HIV management.



“Our goal is to make HIV testing more accessible and less intimidating. We introduced self-testing kits to empower young people to take charge of their health in a safe and private manner. We believe this campaign will play a crucial role in achieving that,” he said.

He added that in addition to providing the testing kits, HDI has also launched an extensive educational campaign across these universities to educate the students about the importance of HIV testing, how to use the self-testing kits, and the steps to take if the test result is positive.



The six university campuses participating in the program include the University of Rwanda- Kigali, Nyagatare and Huye Campuses, IPRC Kigali, Institut d'Enseignement Supérieur de Ruhengeri (INES-Ruhengeri), University of Tourism, Technology and Business (UTB).

Each university had designated distribution points where students obtained the self-testing kits free of charge. As the program rolled out, we closely monitored its impact and gathered feedback from students to continually improve the initiative.

The hope is that this model can be expanded to other educational institutions and communities across the country, contributing to the country's goal of achieving zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

In addition to raising HIV awareness, we also Besides HIV self-testing, we discussed PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis), a crucial protective method after potential HIV exposure, PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), a preventive method for those at high risk as well as the importance of consistent condom use.

We also facilitated sessions on contraception, addressing common questions about preventing unplanned pregnancies, and promoting comprehensive sexual health education.

We provided detailed insights into various contraceptive methods, their effectiveness, and practical guidance on integrating these choices into daily life. Our efforts aim to increase access to reproductive health services and support positive health outcomes among students.



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS TO DELIVER SAFE ABORTION SERVICES

This month, we continued our engagement with leaders and healthcare providers across the Huye, Gisagara, Ngoma, and Rwamagana Districts on the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion as well as patient and health service users' rights.

During these discussions, we explored the legal and ethical provisions of the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion, aiming to clarify its provisions and the circumstances under which safe abortion services are permitted.



Emphasizing the importance of adhering to the legal framework, we discussed the order's role in safeguarding the health and rights of women and girls. Participants shared insights on how the order impacts their daily professional practice and the challenges they face in its implementation.

We addressed common misconceptions and the stigma associated with abortion, advocating for a compassionate and non-judgmental approach to patient care.

We also discussed the broader context of reproductive health rights, connecting the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion to ongoing efforts to improve maternal health and reduce unsafe abortions.

The leaders and healthcare providers expressed their commitment to promoting reproductive health education and services that are respectful of women's rights and aligned with national health policies.

This series of engagements highlighted the collaborative effort needed to enhance the understanding and implementation of safe abortion services.

PATIENT RIGHTS

One of the key topics was the importance of informed consent. The facilitators emphasized that patients must be fully aware of their treatment options and the potential risks and benefits before making decisions about their healthcare. They explained that this ensures that patients are active participants in their care, fostering a sense of autonomy and trust in the healthcare system.

Confidentiality was another major topic of discussion. The facilitators explained the importance of protecting a patient's privacy, the best practices for maintaining confidentiality, including secure handling of medical records and sensitive patient information.

Equitable access to healthcare services was also a focal point. Our facilitators explored strategies to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, have access to the care they need.

This discussion explored how to address barriers such as transportation, financial constraints, and awareness of available services.

The participants highlighted the importance of continuous professional development to keep healthcare providers updated on the latest advancements in medical science and patient care practices. They explained that this ensures that they can deliver the highest quality of care while adhering to ethical standards and respecting patient's rights.



The conversations also touched on the role of healthcare providers as advocates for their patients. The facilitators explained that healthcare providers are often in a unique position to identify and address issues that may affect a patient's well-being beyond their immediate health concerns.

This includes advocating for better living conditions, access to social services, and support for mental health needs.

Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



This June, we welcomed a delegation of University of Nebraska–Lincoln students and faculty leaders.

Our engaging session included sharing insights into our advocacy work on adolescent sexual reproductive health, highlighting the importance of community engagement and stakeholder collaboration.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



“

Today clarified many things for me. I realise now that there's a lot that I did not know. For example, in my village, young schoolgirls who become pregnant, often by family members, have no one to turn to for support. Today, I learnt that these girls are eligible for safe abortion services, which can enable them to continue their education,” she said.

Louise Dusabimana

Rutongo Mines

Training on Family Planning, GBV Prevention and Safe Abortion



Marie Claire IRYANYAWERA · 02 Jun
 Every young person deserves SRHR information and services including those with disabilities. Let's ensure that they are available, accessible, affordable, with quality @UNFPARwanda @medsar_rwanda @RBCRWanda @HDIRwanda

MEDSAR RWANDA @m... · 01 Jun
 #MEDSARDay2024
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@UNFPARwanda – @HDIRwanda research presentation “Determining...



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You reposted
Giscard MWIZERWA @gisc... · 30 Jun
 We all need to live in society without any #GBV, since i knew @HDIRwanda, I have been empowered and inspired for fighting any form of #GBV. Thank you for the USSD.

HDI Rwanda @HDIR... · 30 Jun
 We're excited to share our highlight video from the launch of our #GBV USSD Information Code (*350#).

Thanks to our partnership with @giz...



IKIREZI Delice
 @DeliceIkir73456

Following

Dear men your mental health matters.

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwanda · 10 Jun
 Men shouldn't have to hide their feelings to be considered strong. This #MensHealthWeek, let's challenge that harmful narrative and encourage open conversations about #mentalhealth....



9:26 AM · 11 Jun 24 · 223 Views



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Mwakoze cyane kuri iki gitkerezwa cyiza #EndGBV #OnlineSafety

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwanda · 28 Jun
 This Thursday, we were excited to collaborate with @giz_rwanda's Prevention of Sexualised and Gender-Based Violence Project and other partners, to launch our USSD #Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Info...

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12:27 PM · 28 Jun 24 · 1,830 Views

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