

HDI NEWSLETTER

JULY 2025



WHAT'S INSIDE

Sharing Best Practices in Harm Reduction for People Who Use Drugs

Page 3 - 6

Raising Awareness On Gender Based Violence Prevention for Domestic Workers

page 7 - 9

Delivering CSE to Out-of-School Adolescents from Sex Worker-Headed Households

page 10 - 11

Strengthening Media Reporting on Sexual and Gender Diverse Rights

page 12 - 14

For questions, comments, or feedback, please reach us on:

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Dear Partner,

Welcome to our July Newsletter.

This July, we participated in the International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference in Kigali, where our Kicukiro and Nyamirambo outreach centers were selected by the organizers as learning sites, giving us an opportunity to engage the delegates on our work on harm reduction, peer support, and community-led interventions for people who use drugs.

You will also enjoy updates from our engagement with female domestic workers to raise awareness on Gender-Based Violence prevention, seeking to strengthen their understanding of their rights, available support systems, and ways to prevent and respond to abuse.

Next, we give you a glimpse into our work around strengthening media reporting on sexual and gender diverse rights. We share insights into how we continue walking media professionals through how best they can produce accurate, and stigma-free reporting.

Finally, we created a safe space for adolescents from sex worker-headed households, bringing together over 35 out-of-school youth to discuss CSE, early sex exposure, GBV, contraception, teenage pregnancy, and HIV prevention. Their voices are featured in this edition.

We sincerely thank you all for your continued collaboration and support in advancing the health and rights of the communities we serve.



SHARING BEST PRACTICES IN HARM REDUCTION FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

This July, we participated in the International AIDS Society (IAS) conference, organised to explore global HIV trends and challenges. The conference focused on key and vulnerable populations worldwide, including people who use drugs, one of the groups disproportionately affected by HIV and often excluded from essential health services. The IAS 2025 Conference, held in Kigali, featured over 142 oral abstract presentations and

more than 1,400 posters, with about 600 presented in person. These conference sessions shared groundbreaking discoveries, innovative approaches, and lessons from across the world that are shaping the global HIV response. Of note, we presented the Tubiteho Project at the poster exhibition, showcasing our harm reduction and community health initiatives for people who use drugs.



We also supported over 20 community members and civil society organisations to attend the conference, where they shared their experiences and exchanged with other delegates on best practices, challenges and lessons learned so far.

Speaking about the poster exhibition, our Community Health Advisor, Elvis Benimana, noted that the conference came at a critical moment, as a global funding crisis threatens decades of HIV progress including for people who use drugs.

He explained that the conference is an important platform to share strategies that work in challenging contexts. "For instance,



our poster showcased how we collaborate with peer educators, local leaders, and law enforcement, leveraging community outreach to ensure consistent uptake of HIV prevention and management services.

This approach helps challenge stigma and discrimination, while strengthening community-led HIV prevention and treatment efforts."

This model has already reached more than 500 individuals who use drugs in the past six months alone, providing both prevention services and vital linkage to care.



Beyond the sessions at the conference, our centers in Kicukiro and Nyamirambo were handpicked by the organisers as the only host of a cross-section of international journalists and later, AIS delegates, giving them a firsthand look at our services for people who use drugs and other key populations throughout the conference week.

Our Executive Director, Dr. Aflodis Kagaba was also present to respond to questions on funding cuts, the SRHR landscape in the region, and HIV prevention among key populations, sharing insights on what is working and where challenges remain.

“With the evolving SRHR landscape, of course there are challenges, but we continue focusing on evidence-based interventions, using innovative methods, and collaborating closely with communities and other partners to ensure that those most at risk can access care and that the gains we’ve made are sustained,” he said.

The media professionals also interviewed members of different key populations who rely on our offices as shared workspaces in the face of funding and resource constraints.



The individuals provided a glimpse into both the challenges they face and the critical support our organization offers to ensure safe, inclusive environments.

We also welcomed a visit from Médecins du Monde's Harm Reduction Regional Coordinator for West Africa and program

leads from Benin and Togo, creating a space for inter-country learning and exchange.

Discussions explored shared challenges and practical solutions, with early agreements to collaborate on regional advocacy and exchange harm reduction tools and training resources.



RAISING AWARENESS ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

In July, we held a learning session for over 20 domestic workers from Gatenga Sector to expand access to accurate Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information among underserved communities. Domestic workers are often overlooked in SRHR programming due to long working hours, low pay, and the risk of losing employment if they seek care.

The session aimed to close information gaps, build confidence to claim rights, and provide guidance on available services. Our Litigation and Human Rights Officer, Brendah Karungi, led the discussions exploring GBV pointing out its manifestations in physical, emotional, economic, and sexual forms.

Participants shared personal experiences of workplace abuse, with fears of job loss, retaliation, or lack of evidence preventing reporting.

Karungi explained how to collect evidence, emphasizing timely reporting, medical documentation, photographs, preserved clothing, and digital evidence.

She followed with a presentation on the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion, explaining the legal provisions and conditions for accessing safe abortion services. While some participants were surprised by these provisions, others raised concerns about the high safe abortion service costs.

Karungi highlighted ongoing advocacy for fee harmonization and noted that safe abortion is now covered under the national community-based health insurance, Mutuelle de Santé.

The discussion shifted to child registration, sparking lively questions about eligibility, costs, paternity denial, and registering children under unmarried parents' names.

Karungi clarified that registration is free, can be done at any age, and is essential for legal identity, access to services, and future protection under the law.



Nurse Counsellor Devotha Wihogora introduced contraceptive methods, explaining their function and benefits. Participants shared concerns about myths linking contraception to infertility.

Wihogora provided evidence-based explanations, emphasizing that contraceptives are safe and effective. We also discussed HIV with participants asking questions about HIV transmission, treatment, and differences between HIV and AIDS. The session provided accurate information, dispelling myths. One participant reflected, "This is the first time I understand the difference between HIV and AIDS."



CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Participants raised concerns about workplace mistreatment, lack of trusted SRHR information, and the need for continued outreach.

One urged, “We need more of these conversations because we don’t have many sources of trusted information.”

Alongside the discussions, family planning and HIV screening services were offered to support participants’ health.

This session is part of our ongoing work to understand domestic workers’ experiences, amplify their voices, and advocate for stronger protections and fair treatment in the workplace.



DELIVERING CSE TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS FROM SEX WORKER-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

At the end of July, we conducted an outreach for over 35 adolescents aged 13 to 19 from sex worker-headed households gathered at our Nyamirambo Center to discuss out-of-school Comprehensive Sexuality Education. The safe space was an opportunity to share challenges around gender-based violence, contraception, teenage pregnancy, and HIV prevention and care and provide them with support resources. Participants were drawn from Gatenga, Gitega, and Rwezamenyo Sectors. Our Nurse Counselor, Devotha Wihogora, highlighted the

compounded vulnerabilities these adolescents face including exposure to early sex, carrying adult responsibilities, emotional distress, and exposure to sexual exploitation due to unstable home environments.

“We already work with sex workers on health and rights, but it’s equally important to listen to their children. We provide these safe spaces to guide them, connect them to resources, and support them to make safer choices,” she said.

The session addressed the realities of their lives, covering HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and the use of Post-Exposure and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. Contraception, particularly emergency pills, and menstrual hygiene were discussed to empower participants and address barriers to access.

Gender-based violence was explained in age-appropriate language, with guidance on reporting, while sexual exploitation was explored to help adolescents recognize abuse, understand their rights, and seek support.

Participants shared distressing experiences. Many said that they live in overcrowded single-room homes and are often forced to sleep outside during client visits, increasing their risk of sexual violence. Challenges also included interrupted HIV treatment, school absenteeism during menstruation, unequal access to education, substance use, and bullying linked to their mothers' profession.

"I'm the second born. My older brother doesn't live with us anymore; he used to fight our mother's clients, so she chased him away. Now, whenever there's a client at night, we go outside so our mom can work. It's very cold, and my younger siblings often get sick," said Renata, 19.



They shared testimonies of being targeted by men offering money or food in exchange for sex.

"When our mum got arrested, I had to take care of my two little brothers. A man in the neighbourhood gave me some little money and then demanded that I had to give him something in return," shared Niyigena, 17. The sessions with the adolescents from sex-worker headed households revealed the multiple vulnerabilities of adolescents who are children of sex workers including sexual violence and HIV stigma, discrimination, caregiver burdens, and substance use.



STRENGTHENING MEDIA REPORTING ON SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSE RIGHTS

Recognizing the media's power to dismantle stigma, we held a two-day interactive workshop with 25 media professionals on inclusive reporting about sexual and gender diverse rights. The workshop, attended by print journalists, radio broadcasters, and social media influencers, sought to deepen the participants' understanding of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Topics included Rwanda's legal and policy context, debunking myths and stereotypes, exploring lived experiences through an intersectional lens, the media's role in shaping public perceptions, and ethical journalism when reporting on marginalized groups.



Opening the workshop, our Senior Program Officer for Gender and Inclusion, Annonciata Mukayitete, said the aim was to build journalists' capacity to report fairly, accurately, and respectfully.

“

The media has the power to break down stigma and challenge stereotypes. We hope that by the end of this workshop, you feel confident reporting on communities that are often misunderstood.

- Annonciata Mukayitete

”



The media professionals reflected on their own practices, examining how language, framing, and silence can either humanize or harm. They also learned how journalism can promote dignity, inclusion, and human rights. Real-world case studies illustrated how word choice and framing can either foster empathy or reinforce stigma.

Participants raised the challenges they face. Agnes Kamaliza of Imvaho Nshya noted that deep-rooted cultural stigma often provokes backlash, making some reporters hesitant to cover sensitive issues.

She also highlighted safety concerns, including harassment and threats.

Jeannette Manizabayo from RBA pointed to newsroom gatekeeping:

“

Editors and managers decide which stories get told and how they're framed. This can limit fair reporting on gender and sexual diversity, leaving important stories untold or misrepresented.

”

In feedback, many participants said they left with a clearer grasp of how to cover stories related to gender-diverse communities. They highlighted the value of hearing firsthand testimonies from community members was especially impactful.

Particularly, they appreciated the reminder that seeking quotes from community members is important to writing accurate stories.



Key recommendations

- Key recommendations included involving editors and newsroom leaders in such training to ensure support for inclusive reporting.
- Ongoing capacity building on related issues such as human rights law, reproductive health, HIV , stigma, and social exclusion.
- Allowing more time for future workshops to enable deeper engagement.

IN OTHER NEWS

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



5TH JULY 2025:

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP FOR A COUPLE?

12TH JULY 2025:

WHY EARLY CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING MATTERS

19TH JULY 2025:

HOW SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS AFFECT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

26TH JULY 2025:

UNPACKING HEPATITIS



6TH JULY 2025:

BODY CHANGES DURING PUBERTY: WHAT TO EXPECT

12TH JULY 2025:

KEY INFORMATION YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

20TH JULY 2025:

DEBUNKING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENT FAMILY PLANNING METHODS

27TH JULY 2025:

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PREGNANCY

Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



We were pleased to host a delegation from Médecins du Monde Togo, Cameroon, and Benin. Our discussions focused on harm reduction approaches for people who use drugs and was an opportunity to share insights into our peer-led community outreach strategy and ongoing advocacy efforts.



We received a team from the Embassy of Sweden in Rwanda for an engaging discussion on the progress of our partnership. During the visit, we reflected on achievements, key challenges, and identified areas for growth.



Besides our headquarters in Kicukiro, the IAS delegates also visited our center in Nyamirambo where they sought to learn more about how we work with key populations on AIDS prevention and harm reduction in general.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



HDI Rwanda @HDIR... · 07 Jul

Always a good day when we get to sit down with @SwedeninRW for an engaging discussion on the progress of our partnership.

We reflected on achievements, key challenges, and identified areas for growth.

Grateful, as always, for the feedback and continued support.



2 20 51 2.4K

You reposted



Benjamin Habintwali

@b_habintwali

Replying to @HDIRwanda and @SwedeninRW

This kind of open dialogue and reflection is what keeps partnerships strong and purposeful.

Kudos to @HDIRwanda and @SwedeninRW for keeping collaboration meaningful and impact-driven!



HDI Rwanda @HDIR... · 20 Jul

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You reposted



Francisco Opazo

@frankopazo1

Following

Replying to @HDIRwanda

@HDIRwanda, it's inspiring to see such important discussions happening! how can we further promote harm reduction strategies globally? 🌍



Noella Shyaka

@noellashyaka

Reflecting on our recent session with media professionals , an honest look into how gender-diverse communities are portrayed in the media.

We questioned whose voices are amplified, whose are left out, and how storytelling shapes public perception. Together, we explored ways to foster respectful, inclusive, and responsible journalism.



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
- EAFP
- 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
- WELLSRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

