

HDI NEWSLETTER

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

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Dear Partner,

Welcome to our June Newsletter.

This past month, we continued our commitment to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights through strategic collaboration, skills-building, and data-driven advocacy. Here is a glimpse into what we have been up to.

We brought together members of the SRHR-Rwanda Coalition for a dialogue on our shared advocacy priorities. In this edition, we share our discussion about how best to close gaps in program design and delivery to drive more impactful change.

This June we also share highlights from our trainings for healthcare providers working in youth corners, equipping them with practical tools to better understand and respond to the realities young people face when seeking SRH services. We partnered with Gender Ministers and their Universities to spark conversations around harmful gender and social norms, particularly those affecting adolescent girls. We share notes from those engagements.

Finally, we convened civil society organizations for a two-day workshop focused on building their capacity to leverage data and evidence to influence policy. We share more about that too.

Thank you for walking this journey with us. Your partnership continues to make a difference. Warm regards,

The Communication Team



HARNESSING COALITION COLLABORATION TO STRENGTHEN SRHR OUTCOMES

This June, members of the SRHR-Rwanda Coalition came together for a reflective and forward-looking convening aimed at deepening collaboration, realigning shared goals, and strengthening our collective response to the evolving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights landscape. During the discussions, we mapped out lessons learned, identified untapped collaboration opportunities among the members, and explored

how best to realign priorities and invest in more sustainable strategies. Key discussions centered on strengthening resource mobilization, identifying new areas for joint programming, and developing approaches that speak to the realities of the communities we serve; particularly adolescents and young people, and other underserved groups.

We're navigating a shifting SRHR landscape, with growing anti-rights movements and shrinking funding. This retreat is a chance to reflect on how we can collaborate more effectively and stay grounded in the realities our communities face

Dr. Aflodis Kagaba,
Executive Director- HDI

Our Executive Director, Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, reminded participants that staying relevant requires us to rethink our approach and strengthen the way we work together.

Participants reflected on both successes and gaps, highlighting stronger partnerships, increased awareness, and youth engagement. The retreat also spotlighted innovations from member organizations, such as an initiative by Medical Doctors for Choice to map out



progressive doctors across the country who provide abortion services, tracking not only where they work but also their movements to ensure up-to-date access and referral pathways. They also discussed innovative collaboration ideas, including joint advocacy campaigns to mark international observances.

For example, they highlighted the Great Lakes Initiative for Health and Development (GLIHD)'s innovative idea to facilitate specialized training for judges on implementing the Maputo Protocol's provisions, which was scheduled as part of the Maputo Protocol Anniversary in September last year.



As the retreat came to a close, participants emphasized the importance of collaboration. The communications and advocacy teams agreed to strengthen joint messaging, align their narratives across campaigns, and develop a shared content calendar to amplify coalition-wide initiatives more effectively.

Participants also committed to improving internal information flow, ensuring that success stories, challenges, and emerging priorities from the ground are regularly shared and reflected during advocacy initiatives.

Our ability to serve communities depends on how well we understand each other as partners. Strong partnerships are built on strong communication. We can't assume we're on the same page. We need to constantly keep engaging, listening, and refining our approach; together.

Nooliet Kabanyana,

the Executive Director of Rwanda NGO Forum for HIV/AIDS and Health Promotion.



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF YOUTH CORNER HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS TO PROVIDE FRIENDLY SRH SERVICES.

This June, we partnered with Plan International Rwanda, to conduct a training for over 40 healthcare providers serving in youth corners at health centers across Nyaruguru and Gatsibo Districts. The training aimed to strengthen providers' understanding of patient rights and equip them to challenge stigma, enabling the delivery of inclusive, friendly adolescent SRHR services.

The healthcare providers opened up about the barriers they face when trying to deliver youth-friendly services and what must change if young people are to truly feel safe and supported in health centers. Participants spoke about the fear and shame that continue to keep adolescents away from the very services designed for them.



Many young people, especially those seeking contraception or information about sexuality, hesitate to approach health centers in fear of being judged or shamed. Providers also raised concerns about the high turnover of trained staff.

Many shared frustration that just when a staff member becomes confident in offering youth-friendly services, they are reassigned or transferred, forcing health centers to start over.

This instability affects service quality and damages the trust between providers and the adolescents they serve.

“Every time we train someone, they’re moved,” one provider shared. “It feels like we’re constantly starting from zero.” Compounding these issues are the cultural and religious norms that still discourage open discussions about sexuality and reproductive health. Several participants admitted that stigma doesn’t only come from communities, it exists among providers themselves.

Noah Banshimire, a nurse at Rwimbogo Health Center, emphasized the urgent need for better understanding of patient rights within the provider community.

“There’s a significant gap when it comes to patient rights,” he said. “When providers understand the law, they feel protected and so do their patients.”

The healthcare providers also raised concerns about basic resources.

Many health centers frequently run out of essential SRHR supplies such as condoms, emergency contraception, and youth-appropriate educational materials.

Some mentioned a lack of simplest visual aids to support conversations with adolescents. Still, the training wasn’t just about identifying problems, it sparked ideas.

Drawing from both the training content and their own lived experience, providers proposed concrete ways to strengthen adolescent SRHR services in their districts.

These included more regular and targeted refresher training, follow-up mentorship after capacity-building sessions, and improvements to infrastructure that protect adolescent privacy. Many highlighted the need for deeper engagement with religious and cultural leaders to address stigma in the broader community.



There was also a strong push to strengthen provider knowledge of the full spectrum of legally permitted SRHR services, including safe abortion care where applicable, and to integrate rights education into professional development programs to promote respectful, rights-based care.

The session in Nyaruguru stood out for its energy and reflection. Participants described the training as a much-needed space for peer learning, critical dialogue, and honest exchange. They repeatedly emphasized the importance of continuity with many pointing out that while training is important, without follow-up, mentorship, and systemic change, the gains made risk being lost.



The participants recommended regular refresher training, upgrades to infrastructure to ensure privacy, and broader community engagement including with religious and cultural leaders to help reduce stigma.

They also emphasized the importance of equipping nurses with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver the full range of SRHR services, including safe abortion care where applicable. Other suggestions included developing age-appropriate visual aids and communication tools, and incorporating patient rights education into ongoing professional development.

Jean Claude Nshimiyimana, the Nyaruguru District Health Officer, reminded that issues around teenage pregnancies, drug use, and persistent stigma around sexual and reproductive health, highlighting the relevance of the training.

“As frontline providers, we’re not only offering treatment, we are also educating, advocating, and supporting young people through complex issues. Equipping us with up-to-date knowledge directly improves the care we provide to young people.”



ENGAGING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON HARMFUL SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS

This June, we conducted three dialogues at the University of Kigali (UK Musanze), the University of Lay Adventists of Kigali (UNILAK Nyanza), and the University of Tourism, Technology, and Business Studies (UTB Rubavu) on harmful social norms. The dialogues brought together over 800 students in all three universities. The university dialogues brought together a

diverse group of students, fostering a space where together, they explored the ethics, cultural context, and impact of labia elongation, particularly on minor girls. Claudine Uwimana, a student at UNILAK, pointed out that young girls should not be pushed into cultural practices they don't fully understand or haven't chosen for themselves.



“The question we should be asking is why we are telling a child to start thinking about changing her body for a man’s pleasure. What message are we really passing on to these girls?” she wondered.

At the University of Kigali (UK Musanze Campus), the conversations focused more on how men perceive the labia elongation practice. The male participants admitted that they hadn’t thought much about the practice before while others had no idea what it entailed. Eric Nshimiyimana admitted that he heard about the practice in passing but had never paid much attention to it.

“This is the first time I have actually sat down and thought about what it means and honestly, it has made me uncomfortable. It sounds like a really outdated practice that should be left in the past,” he said.

Nicole Akaliza, a student at the same university observed, “If the new generation of men is unaware or even uncomfortable with the idea of labia elongation, then why are girls still being told it’s for them? We need to stop using outdated expectations to control girls’ bodies.”



Our Senior Program Officer for Gender and Inclusion, Annonciata Mukayitete, noted that although many harmful norms are shaped around male approval, most young men remain unaware of how their silence sustains them. She emphasized the importance of involving boys and men as active participants in challenging these traditions, not just observers.

“It’s encouraging to see open-minded young men actively engaging in this dialogue, showing a genuine willingness to learn and reflect on how they might contribute to the solution. We need more of this,” she said.

Mukayitete also reminded that minors are not capable of giving informed consent, and these decisions must be left until girls are adults, fully able to make their own choices. From these three dialogues that were conducted in UNILAK Nyanza, UK-Musanze, and UTB Rubavu we are now using the testimonies, recommendations, and insights gathered from these conversations to develop a policy brief.

This document will be an advocacy tool to call for stronger protections for minors and recognition that no girl’s body should be tampered with for the benefit of others.



ENHANCING CSO ADVOCACY THROUGH STRATEGIC USE OF EVIDENCE

This June, we facilitated a two-day capacity-building workshop designed to empower civil society actors with the tools and skills necessary to generate, interpret, and translate evidence into effective advocacy strategies and policy influence, particularly around critical issues such as safe abortion. The workshop aimed to bridge the gap between data and decision-making, supporting the organisations to anchor their advocacy in credible, rights-based evidence.

Over the two days, the participants explored how to review data, using leveraging it as a tool for framing arguments, challenging stigma, and bringing the lived realities of the rights holders, especially those affected by unsafe abortion, into the policy conversations. Participants also learned how to apply a gender lens when interpreting evidence, ensuring that their advocacy is inclusive.

One of the most engaging sessions, led by our Policy and Advocacy Officer Denise Teta, focused on crafting compelling policy briefs. Participants were taken through the building blocks of an effective brief including defining a sharp and focused problem statement, to summarizing credible evidence and formulating actionable, decision-maker-oriented recommendations.

“This isn’t just about putting words on paper,” Teta said. “A strong brief can change how people think and influence decisions.”

Using real-world examples and interactive peer review exercises, participants began drafting briefs that spoke directly to the contexts of their programs. On keeping programs running smoothly, the session expanded her perspective.



The session placed a strong emphasis on clarity, political relevance, and timing, recognizing that even the strongest evidence must be communicated in a way that resonates with policymakers. Commenting on the session, Nshuti Karake, a Program Officer at Feminist Action for Development Ambition (FADA), shared that while her day-to-day usually focuses. “I am often deep in the operational side where I am mostly tracking deliverables and supporting implementation,” she said. “This session made me realize that what we learn in the field can and should feed into how decisions are made at a higher level.



Another key highlight of the workshop was a session on strategic communication for policy influence. Participants reflected on how to shape messages that not only convey facts but also resonate emotionally and culturally with different audiences.

Our Senior Communication Advisor, Nasra Bishumba encouraged to think strategically about who they need to influence whether it is policymakers, media, faith leaders, or communities themselves and how to tailor their messages and channels accordingly.

The session covered how to frame SRHR issues such as safe abortion and access to contraception for adolescents, in ways

that are culturally sensitive, evidence-informed, and resonate with local realities without watering down the message.

The participants looked at the power of storytelling in shifting public opinion and policy. Here, they were put in groups where they developed key messages, countering misinformation, and using data as a persuasive tool. Participants discussed how to navigate challenging media landscapes, build relationships with journalists, and respond strategically in moments of backlash.

The participants concluded with commitment to integrate these skills into their ongoing advocacy work.

IN OTHER NEWS

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



7TH JUNE 2025:
HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

14TH JUNE 2025:
LET'S TALK GENDER EQUALITY

21ST JUNE 2025:
DOMESTIC CONFLICTS: A BARRIER TO PEACE AND
FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

28TH JUNE 2025:
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE SUPPORTED TO
ACCESS RELIABLE SRH INFORMATION



1ST JUNE 2025:
LEARN HOW TO PREVENT UNINTENDED
PREGNANCIES

08TH JUNE 2025:
APPROPRIATE AND RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR IN
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

15TH JUNE 2025:
WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN FIND RELIABLE
INFORMATION ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

22ND JUNE 2025:
LEARN HOW TO TRACK A WOMAN'S MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



Pleased to host Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW), a global health and SRHR advocacy organisation working to empower youth. During the visit, we discussed shared priorities including women's health, research, and evidence-based advocacy.



Delighted to be paid a courtesy visit by a team from Expertise France, including Mr. Eric Fleutelot, the Technical Director of the Health Department's Major Pandemics Unit. Alongside other partners, we explored emerging trends and potential areas for collaboration aimed at minimizing disruptions to health services for key populations, especially in light of a rapidly evolving global health landscape.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



HDI Rwanda
@HDIRwanda

This Friday, we convened key CSO advocacy stakeholders for a dialogue to strengthen the SRHR-Rwanda Coalition.

Discussions focused on advancing Coalition priorities, including enhancing collaboration, improving coordination and maximizing the impact of our advocacy efforts.



You reposted



Benjamin Habintwali
@b_habintwali

When changemakers come together, transformation follows. Big kudos to @HDIRwanda for rallying CSO voices to strengthen the #SRHR-Rwanda Coalition! Strategic dialogue, powerful partnerships, and united advocacy; this is how impact is multiplied.
#SRHRForAll #UnitedForChange



UR Public Health Students' Associ...
@urphsa

Such a privilege to be hosted by @1023KISSFM on Air #KUMBE elaborating more about "Where youth can get reliable information about SRHR." Let's keep the conversation going! Youth deserve access to safe, accurate SRHR information
@HDIRwanda @Imbuto @WHORwanda #URPHSAinAction



You and 6 others

8:58 PM · 15 Jun 25 from Rwanda · 1,430 Views



Luc Dushimitanga @d... · 20 Jun

👏 Incredible work happening at the @KicukiroDistr Open Day! Love seeing initiatives that provide free family planning, HIV counseling, and fight stigma with facts. Let's keep empowering communities with knowledge and choice. ❤️ #HealthForAll #EndHIVStigma #Rwanda

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwa... · 20 Jun

We're back for Day 2 at the @KicukiroDistr Open Day! Drop by for:

- ✓ Free family planning info&services
- ✓ HIV counseling,testing &referrals....



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
- WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

