

HDI NEWSLETTER

JUNE-JULY 2023



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Dear Partners,

Welcome to our June - July Newsletter!

In this edition, we share our incredible experience at Women Deliver 2023, a unique platform where we co-organised different side events and sat on different panels alongside influential changemakers from around the world, all united in their mission to create a more equitable future for women.

We also share details of our workshop with opinion Leaders on Safe Abortion and the meaningful dialogue and collaboration with influential voices to advance understanding, destigmatize conversations, and promote access to safe abortion.

The newsletter also includes updates about our adolescent training on effective SRHR advocacy where we equipped them with the tools to amplify their voices in the realm of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

These and more updates about our visitors, the feedback from the community that we serve and others can be found in this newsletter.

Please follow our social media platforms to get these and more.

Happy reading.



SHARING OUR WOMEN RIGHTS ADVOCACY EXPERIENCES AND WORK AT WOMEN DELIVER 2023

We are thrilled to share our incredible experience at Women Deliver 2023, a global event dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's rights.

As an organization committed to empowering women and transforming lives, Women Deliver was a unique platform to showcase our work on health, human rights and advocacy.

Our organization sent a strong team of young women activists to share their expertise on various panels alongside influential leaders, policymakers, activists, and change-makers from around the world, all united in their mission to create a brighter and more equitable future for women.

Throughout the conference, our organization actively engaged in numerous insightful sessions and workshops, where we shared our knowledge and experience in implementing innovative programs and initiatives. Our staff served as panelists, speakers, and moderators, leading discussions on critical topics such as:

01

The Rwanda HerStory: An Intergenerational & Intersectional Perspective: A profound exploration of the journey of women's rights and gender equality organizing in Rwanda.

02

How do movements make safe abortion legal? Lessons from Rwanda and Nepal: An examination of successful strategies used to promote safe abortion laws in Rwanda and Nepal.

03

The Power of Choice: Fostering Partnerships to Realize Bodily Autonomy: A powerful examination of how strategic partnerships can pave the way for bodily autonomy.

04

Strategic Litigation as a Tool for Safeguarding Women and Girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Africa:

An exploration of the role of strategic litigation in protecting women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa.

05

Breaking the Binary: Strengthening Sexual and Gender Minority Inclusion in SRH Research, Programs, and Services:

An eye-opening exploration of promoting inclusion and equity in sexual and reproductive health for all gender identities in which our SRHR Advisor, Annet Mwizerwa, presented HDI's evidence-based study on 'LGBT People's Lived Experiences and Public Perceptions of Sexual and Gender minorities in Rwanda.

06

Promise, Progress, Possibilities: Past and Future of SRHR in Rwanda:

A reflection on the progress and potential of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Rwanda.

During the conference, one special occasion stood out when our Adolescent Champion, 17-year-old Kerlene Gaju, delivered a powerful keynote speech during the high-level pre-conference event titled “Fostering Partnerships to Realize Bodily Autonomy.”

Speaking on behalf of millions of adolescents worldwide, Gaju used her speech to passionately advocate for access to adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services and to rally activists globally to join this call to action.

The Women Deliver conference also provided us an exceptional opportunity to showcase the transformative work that we do through our programs.

Thanks to the generous support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the HDI booth at Women Deliver 2023 became a powerful platform through which we shared our Shadow Reports, Policy Briefs, Research Reports, and testimonies from diverse groups that we collaborate with.



I stand before you today to call upon...

- **Young women and feminists:**
It's time to amplify your voices and advocate for our rights as young individuals... We must claim our power back!
- **Local and international organizations:**
We need your ally-ship in advocating for a transfer of power... to the hands of adolescents themselves.
- **Our present leaders:**
*Adolescents are capable! Give us the chance to express our needs and voice... **Nothing should be done for us, without us.***

The partnership with Sida added a valuable dimension to our presence at the conference, enabling us to make an even greater impact and further our mission of empowering women, transforming lives and creating a more just and equal world.

In addition to sharing our work, the conference provided us an opportunity to forge meaningful partnerships with other like-minded organizations, international donors, and governmental agencies. These partnerships will amplify our impact and accelerate progress towards achieving our shared goals.



In partnership with Imbuto Foundation and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, we co-hosted a side event at the Women Deliver Conference titled, 'Progress, Promise, Possibilities: Past and Future of SRHR in Rwanda.' The event brought together current and potential partners to identify opportunities for further collaboration and explore Rwanda's efforts in enhancing access to sexual and reproductive health services for youth and adolescents.

Additionally we also partnered with UNAIDS to organise a field visit for 'The Elders' team composed of Mary Robinson, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Graça Machel to Mayange Health Center where they had one on one conversations with adolescents

to assess the challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these conversations, the group sought to continue their advocacy work to ensure that many others can avoid facing the same often avoidable challenges in future. As Women Deliver 2023 drew to a close, we joined the collective call to action for governments, institutions, and individuals to step up efforts in promoting gender equality and empower women worldwide.

We pledged our continued commitment to advocate for policies and programs that safeguard women's rights and improve their access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT REINTEGRATION OF TEEN MOTHERS

This June, with support from UNFPA, the Anglican church and HDI partnered to implement training programs in Karongi, Nyamasheke, and Rusizi districts targeting local and religious leaders, parents, and teachers to enhance their understanding of sexual and reproductive health and rights, with a particular emphasis on adolescent health.

The main objective of the training was to equip these groups with the necessary knowledge and skills to mobilize the community and support the smooth social reintegration of teenage and first-time young mothers.

During the training sessions, participants delved into child rights, fostering collaboration between child rights advocacy and communal and religious perspectives. They were updated on the laws protecting teenage mothers and their children, the impact of adolescent pregnancies on individuals, families, and the society at large and the value of teaming up to find comprehensive approaches to address these issues.

The participants discussed the importance of safeguarding young lives, promoting their well-being, and ensuring

their access to education, health, and a safe environment. They engaged in compassionate discussions surrounding challenges related to sexual and reproductive health, especially pregnancy.

They then explored the best approaches on how to start open conversations with young people about healthy relationships and responsible decision-making, as well as how to provide accurate and evidence-based information on topics like puberty, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and comprehensive sexuality education.



The issue of school dropouts was addressed, highlighting the right of pregnant teenage girls to stay in school and be readmitted after childbirth.

During the training, concerns were raised by some religious leaders regarding perceptions around SRH education and promotion of promiscuity. The facilitators emphasized that adolescent sexual and reproductive health is not solely about sexual activity but encompasses overall health and well-being.

They reminded religious leaders of their crucial role in providing guidance, counseling, and creating safe spaces for young people seeking advice and support. The facilitators clarified that SRH programs are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and developed in consultation with all stakeholders, including communities and religious leaders.

To ensure a supportive environment for teenage mothers, the training included sessions for teachers where they discussed how best to create an enabling environment for teenage mothers to enable them to prepare for their own future and that of their children.

The teachers shared their experiences in teaching SRH-related topics, promoting open dialogue and interactive teaching methods like role-playing and group discussions. They discussed the value of maintaining a non-judgmental approach to allow their students to explore different perspectives and make informed decisions based on accurate information.

The training also addressed menstrual health education, emphasizing the importance of understanding the menstrual cycle and breaking down social-cultural taboos and dispelling myths surrounding menstruation.

Additionally, they recognized the value of involving boys in menstrual cycle discussions to foster respectful attitudes and support for peers experiencing discomfort or challenges related to their periods.

The teachers pointed out the need for menstrual products, including disposable pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and reusable cloth pads, to be made available to students.

Overall, the participants concluded the programs felt more committed to empowering communities to be more understanding, compassionate, and supportive of teenage mothers' reintegration into society while promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights for all adolescents.



EQUIPPING ADOLESCENTS WITH THE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE SRHR ADVOCACY

In 2020, HDI in collaboration with Plan International launched an initiative to promote conversations on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) among adolescents in Gatsibo, Nyaruguru, and Gisagara Districts.

The main goal was to empower adolescents with knowledge on SRHR from a human rights perspective, equipping them

and their community with the necessary skills to address vulnerabilities and risks related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH). As the first step towards achieving this mission, HDI and Plan International provided comprehensive advocacy training, empowering adolescents to participate effectively in the policy-making process regarding SRHR.

Over the past three years, we have facilitated continuous advocacy meetings led by adolescents at the district level. These meetings have provided a platform for empowered adolescents to engage with duty bearers, fostering conversations around SRHR and the needs of adolescents.

This July, HDI revisited the districts to evaluate the progress made by the adolescents and duty bearers in disseminating SRHR information as ambassadors.

The primary objective was to assess whether the training had facilitated easier conversations between parents and their children on SRHR matters. We also sought to determine the impact on their lives and their children's lives, as well as to identify areas where additional support could further enhance their role as champions advocating for adolescents and young people.

The evaluation revealed significant progress within families and the community regarding open discussions on SRHR topics and the provision of guidance for adolescents.

Parents reported feeling more comfortable discussing sensitive subjects such as sex with their children after participating in the training. This has led to improved communication and a supportive environment where information can be shared and learned together.

Adolescents, too, have experienced transformational changes in their lives. Where they previously hesitated to seek information on reproductive health due to feelings of shame, after the training, they have been motivated to inquire and learn, feeling empowered to freely ask SRH-related questions and concerns.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ADVOCACY

Adolescents highlighted the need for better understanding between parents and themselves on SRH issues. They suggested that similar training for parents would enable them to engage in more effective conversations and communication on these topics.

The partnership between HDI and Plan International has been instrumental in empowering adolescents as SRHR ambassadors. Through advocacy training

and continuous engagement, these adolescents have become confident advocates for SRH matters, sparking positive changes within their families and communities.

Moving forward, additional support and training for parents could further enhance the impact of this initiative, fostering stronger relationships and open dialogues on sexual and reproductive health rights.



FACILITATING DIALOGUE WITH OPINION LEADERS ON SAFE ABORTION

This July, we convened a series of workshops with opinion leaders drawn from Nyagatare, Kirehe, Gatsibo, Ngoma districts to discuss challenges around sexual reproductive health, particularly in relation to access to safe abortion.

The dialogue aimed to facilitate open discussions, knowledge sharing, and exploration of solutions to the issues around access to information and services related to safe abortion.

The participants included district leaders, District leaders, Isange One Stop Center personnel, religious leaders, Friends of the Family (Inshuti Z'umuryango), representatives from the national youth and women's councils, security organs, district hospitals, private clinics, Rwanda Medical Supply among others.

The Vice Mayor of Nyagatare district, Juliet Murekatete thanked HDI for its partnership in increasing awareness on reproductive health.

She reminded that over the last couple of years, her district has felt the weight of issues related to teenage pregnancies adding that any activity that seeks to address these issues is welcome. She pointed out that besides domestic violence, many of the teenagers become pregnant due to lack of access to SRH information and services.

The participants covered a wide range of topics including the legal and policy frameworks where they examined the restrictions, limitations, or protections for access to safe abortion services.

They worked with the facilitators to identify the obstacles individuals face in accessing safe abortion services, such as geographical barriers, financial constraints, and explored the impact of social stigma and discrimination surrounding abortion as a significant barrier to individuals seeking abortion and ways to combat it.

While Rwanda has liberalized its abortion laws to permit safe abortion in cases of rape, incest, when the pregnant person is a minor, in cases of forced marriage or to protect the woman's life, the participants looked at how navigating the legal framework and procuring a safe abortion is still challenging for many women and girls as a result of limited information for both the service provider and the rights holder.

They looked at the communal stigma that is attached to abortion and how women who seek these services may face social ostracization or discrimination influenced by cultural norms and values that continue to influence attitudes towards abortion, making it difficult for women to openly discuss their reproductive health needs and access safe services.

The participants also discussed healthcare provider attitudes where personal or religious beliefs that are not supportive of abortion often lead to biased or judgmental treatment towards women seeking these services. Such attitudes can discourage women from seeking safe abortion care and create a hostile environment.

They looked at the shortage of trained and willing healthcare providers willing to offer safe abortion services both which limit the availability of services and result in delays for women seeking timely and safe care.

Overall, the opinion leaders agreed that their participation can enhance the delivery of safe abortion services and significantly contribute to reducing barriers, increasing awareness, and creating a more supportive environment for women seeking reproductive healthcare options.

The participants looked at how they can leverage their platforms to raise awareness and use their influence to educate their communities on the importance of women's reproductive health and dispel myths and misconceptions about abortion.



They discussed how community events and communal activities can be leveraged to engage community members and provide a safe space for open dialogue, questions, and concerns, related to reproductive health issues, including safe abortion.

At the end of the workshops, the participants pledged to support Civil Society Organisations to curb issues around unsafe abortions.



I am a transformed person. I have a different view on safe abortion because I now have a better understanding of what our laws stipulate. I am now ready to provide my contribution in curbing maternal death due to unsafe abortion.

- Archdeacon Felicien Hakizimana

Archdeacon Felicien Hakizimana said that before the workshop, his views about safe abortion were negative and his initial reason to attend was to oppose the Ministerial Order provisions.

The workshop for opinion leaders on safe abortion provided a vital platform for informed dialogue and understanding. They committed to promoting comprehensive reproductive health, destigmatizing safe abortion, and advocating for policies that empower individuals to make informed choices about their bodies.

PARTNERSHIP & LEARNING EXPERIENCES



This July, we were super excited to welcome an amazing team from Planned Parenthood Global to our offices where we had a great opportunity to exchange the diverse approaches, contextual understanding and success stories related to the work that both our organizations do on Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Our collaborative brainstorming session covered the progress, gaps, and the opportunities related to SRHR topics such as safe abortion, adolescent SRH, youth partnerships, key populations, CSO and government collaboration, Maputo Protocol and EAC SRHR Bill among others.



We were also delighted to hosting over 20 representatives from the Generation Gender Global with whom we shared with our groundbreaking work in advocacy, gender, and SRHR work, empowering communities country-wide. They toured our Hotline Center and witnessed our digital revolution in providing reliable SRHR information, services, and referrals.



Inspiring Collaboration: This July, we also had the privilege of hosting our partners from Amplify Change Global Office with whom we share a commitment to fostering positive change and advancing health and rights. The exchange was marked by insightful discussions, collaborative brainstorming sessions, and a collective drive to amplify our impact and empower communities.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:

HDI Rwanda Retweeted

GIZ Rwanda @giz_rwanda

With the aim of strengthening the rights-based approach among Rwandan CSOs, on July 19, we held the 5th of 10 sessions of [#HumanRights](#) Training for the staff of @AmahoroR, @FADArwanda, @HDIRwanda, @iPeace_GL, @rrpplus, @RUBRwanda, @WicecekaC. We focused on the [#RightToHealth](#).



1:44 PM · Jul 20, 2023 · 1,769 Views

11 Retweets 26 Likes

HDI Rwanda Retweeted

Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) @MDFC_Rwanda · Jul 16

We're absolutely thrilled to have had the incredible opportunity for @MDFC_Rwanda to engage in this conversation with @PPFA! It was an inspiring exchange where we shared invaluable insights, experiences, and barriers for HCP in delivering essential SRHR services. @HDIRwanda

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwanda · Jul 16

We were super excited to dedicate our Saturday to welcoming an amazing team from @PPFA to our offices where we shared lunch and had a great opportunity to exchange the diverse approaches, contextual understanding and success stories related to the work that both our... [Show more](#)




9 Retweets 13 Likes 597 Views

HDI Rwanda Retweeted

Nathan Duhawumugisha @Nathan_faida

As it is posted on their twitter account, @HDIRwanda has engaged opinion leaders in @RwamaganaDistr and @kayonza, discussing the Ministerial Order on safe abortion and the Medial Professional Liability Insurance Law.



3:34 PM · Jul 6, 2023 · 503 Views

2 Retweets 10 Likes

Nathan Duhawumugisha @Nathan_faida · Jul 6

This platform aimed to address the burden of unsafe abortion in Rwanda, a major contributor to maternal mortality rates. During the discussions, participants shared their opinions and heartfelt stories from their communities,

1 Reply 1 Retweet 45 Likes

Nathan Duhawumugisha @Nathan_faida · Jul 6

highlighting the immense burden this issue imposes on women's health and well-being.

1 Reply 23 Likes

HDI WISHES TO THANK OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

- AMPLIFYCHANGE
- BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE
- CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE
- CRICKET BUILDS HOPE
- DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO RWANDA
- EAHP
- EQUIMUNDO
- FEMNET
- FOSI/OSIEA
- GIZ
- GLIHD
- GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS
- IMBUTO FOUNDATION
- IMRO
- IPPF-Asociación Profamilia
- JHPIEGO/MCGL
- 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
- RWANDA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM
- RWANDA SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS
- RWANDA BIOMEDICAL CENTER
- RWANDA EDUCATION BOARD
- RWANDA GOVERNANCE BOARD
- RWAMREC
- SFH
- SISTERLOVE INC.
- SOCIETY FOR FAMILY HEALTH
- STEPHEN LEWIS FOUNDATION
- STOP TB PARTNERSHIP
- 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
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- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

