

# HDI NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2023



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**Dear Partners,**

**Welcome to our March Newsletter.**

In this edition, we share highlights of different activities that we carried out to celebrate the International Women's Day in Kigali City and Karongi District.

We also share highlights regarding our engagement with over 700 students at Kepler College and Gashora Girls Academy of Science and Technology where we discussed different topics related to Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Additionally, we conducted a 10-day refresher training program on obstetric ultrasound for mentors from Rusizi District. We explain why this training program is timely and necessary in areas like Rusizi.

We also touch on the training of over 100 female sex workers on the Ministerial Order on Abortion and how to identify, prevent and report Sexual and Gender Based Violence. These and more stories and feedback from the people that we serve can be found in this edition of our newsletter.

We welcome your feedback and invite you to follow us on our social media for daily updates on the work that we do to serve our communities.

**Best Regards,  
Communication Team.**



## WOMEN'S DAY: RAISING AWARENESS ON MATERNAL HEALTH

**A**s part of celebrations to mark the International Women's Day, we partnered with UNFPA and Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) to organise three key events in recognition of the achievements made by women and to raise awareness on critical issues affecting women's rights, particularly in maternal health. Maternal health refers to the health of women during

pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. While maternal health is essential in minimising risks related to pregnancy and childbirth, access to quality maternal healthcare is still challenging in most developing countries due to limited access to skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care, or safe and clean delivery environments.

## MASS SPORT FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

In line with the international women's rights day celebrations, the organisations came together to organise a 'sports walk for pregnant women' on March 4 to raise awareness around the necessity of staying active during and throughout pregnancy. The short walk, which stretched from Hotel Chez Lando to Gasabo District Offices was among others, attended by pregnant women, gynecologists, and district officials among others.

Speaking at the event, senior gynecologist and proprietor of La Croix Du Sud Hospital, Dr. Jean Chrysostome Nyirinkwaya said that at least thirty minutes of daily physical activity is recommended for both the pregnant woman and her unborn baby.

Physical activity during pregnancy has been associated with decreased risks of adverse health outcomes for both the mother and baby. Anita Batamuriza, who is expecting, said that her sport of choice is usually swimming. However, incorporating lighter exercises like walking has made a difference in how she feels overall.





Anita Batamuriza, who is expecting, said that her sport of choice is usually swimming. However, incorporating lighter exercises like walking has made a difference in how she feels overall.

“After my sports session, I can tell the difference in how both the baby and I feel. While I feel more energetic, the baby on the other hand feels excited if I can go by how much moving and kicking is happening. Today, I learnt that doing sports while pregnant sharpens a baby’s brain and I liked that,” she said.

Besides the walk, the participants were also provided information on nutrition for pregnant women, family planning and postpartum family planning counseling services for women as well as Non-Communicable disease screening.



Whether you are pregnant or not, simple sports aid your blood circulation. A pregnant woman can walk for 30 minutes daily and do simple abdominal exercises to build strength and fitness that will enable her to push the baby without many physical challenges. For many women, exercise is not easy in the first three months. However, in the last three, it is important to start moving your body every day

**Dr. Jean Chrysostome Nyirinkwaya,**

Senior gynecologist and proprietor of La Croix Du Sud Hospital



## HANDOVER CEREMONY

On March 7, we handed over Infection Prevention Control (IPC) materials including bed sheets and medical scrubs to Karongi District authorities. The handover was officiated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Representative, Kwabena Asante-Ntiamoah and the Vice Mayor in Charge of Social Affairs, Valentine Mukase.

The IPC materials will be distributed among the district's health wards from the spread of infectious diseases. Speaking at the handover, the Director of Research at HDI, Louange Gutabarwa Twahirwa said that IPC materials support health facilities to fight healthcare-associated infections that compromise patient and healthcare provider safety.



*Lack of IPC materials in health facilities leaves healthcare workers exposed to infectious agents, leading to illness and absenteeism. Additionally, patients may acquire infections that can prolong their hospital stay, increase healthcare costs, and even lead to mortality. These infectious diseases are likely to spread to the wider community and increase the burden on public health systems.*

**- Louange Gutabarwa Twahirwa**, Director of Research at HDI

Healthcare-associated infections are those that patients or health providers acquire while giving or receiving medical care, and they can be caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microorganisms.

A total of 780 bedsheets and 390 medical scrubs will be provided to all health centers and hospitals in the districts of Karongi, Nyamasheke and Rusizi.

## WOMEN'S DAY

On March 7, we joined the people of Ruganda Sector in Karongi district to celebrate the International Women's Day. The celebrations were preceded by the district authorities' handover of the Infection Prevention Control (IPC) materials to Biguhu Health Center, one of the beneficiary facilities.

Speaking at the ceremony to observe the day, the Mayor of Karongi District Vestine Mukarutesi thanked the partners that chose her district as the target of their activities and reminded that such partnerships have played a significant role in transforming many lives.

The government has made significant progress in improving maternal health as a result, the maternal mortality rate currently stands at 203/1000. However, reducing these numbers requires an all-round approach that includes improving access to healthcare services, promoting women's education and empowerment, and addressing social and economic inequalities that affect women's health outcomes.



Our district has excellent partners, and we are pleased that they joined us today to celebrate women. I would like to remind you all that our partners' contributions can only benefit us if our communities see the value of working together to capitalise on this support.

**Vestine Mukarutesi**, Mayor of Karongi District





## FOSTERING POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS SRHR AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

**T**his March, we were invited by Kepler College to lead discussions on Sexual and Reproductive Health during 'Kepler's Success Week'. The event sought to improve students' knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and to equip them with the tools that they need to access SRHR information and services.

The discussions, which involved more than 700 students, focused on HIV/AIDS, menstrual hygiene, cervical cancer, and contraception. We discussed the value of accurate SRHR information including safe and healthy relationships, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and consent.

We touched on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a key tool for promoting positive attitudes towards SRHR and its contribution in providing young people with accurate information about their bodies, relationships, and sexuality, and how this information helps them develop the skills to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

The students talked about the need to foster an open and non-judgmental environment where young people feel safe and supported to ask any question and share their thoughts and feelings about sexuality and relationships without fear of judgment or stigma.

We also encouraged them to think critically about SRHR information that they receive to learn how to evaluate sources of this information and to question myths and stereotypes about gender, sexuality, and relationships.

The participants also discussed the root causes of SRHR challenges where they agreed that most of them were rooted in social, economic, and cultural factors, such as gender inequality, poverty, and stigma.



They agreed that addressing these root causes is essential for promoting positive attitudes towards SRHR among young people and creating a world where young people have the knowledge, skills, and support they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We also discussed the stigma associated with menstruation and how it affects them and the available menstruation cycle tracking tools. We explained a woman's menstrual cycle, how to accurately calculate it, demonstrated the use of different menstrual hygiene products as well as menstrual hygiene.



“

Addressing SRHR issues among young people is crucial to their well-being and ensuring their future prospects. We must continuously engage them and involve them in the design and implementation of all SRHR programs and policies. This not only ensures that their needs are met, but it encourages them to play an active role in advocating for themselves.

- **Jocelyne Ingabire** ,  
The Director of Community Outreach

During the session on HIV/AIDS, we provided detailed insights on the groups most at risk of contracting the virus, the country's prevalence rates among young people aged 19-24 years, effective methods of prevention and the importance of treatment.

The students were split into groups to discuss more on these topics where they expressed their opinions and made suggestions on how to deal with challenges related to each topic.

To challenge the stigma surrounding menstruation, the participants put emphasis on involving both men and women in creating spaces that provide ease for women and girls during menstruation.

***“I think we should stop taboos around menstruation and educate both boys and girls about it. Also, schools should put effort into providing rooms that are well equipped to provide comfort and support to women and girls when they are menstruating.” Chris, 23.***

## THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV

On HIV/AIDS, the students discussed the role of taking responsibility for one's health and exchanged ideas on safe sex and regular testing to ensure better prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. They also touched on the value of fighting stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

"Everyone who is sexually active should make it a practice to use protection and also do regular HIV screening. There is nothing wrong with being responsible for your health." Diane, 22.

The discussions were followed by a session on contraception focusing on different methods available on the market, their accessibility and affordability. They also discussed the myths on contraception and how to fight stigma related to their use. The students raised questions on the efficiency of contraceptives, the appropriate age to start using them, the possible side effects and ways to select a method that works for individual needs.

**"The best way to pick a method that suits you is to visit the doctor. He or she will help you to understand your needs, and recommend the option that best suits you." Alliance Ishimwe, HDI's Communication Officer suggested.**

During the same week, we engaged 600 Agahozo Youth Shalom Village students in similar conversations around Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.





## ENHANCING OBSTETRIC ULTRASOUND SKILLS THROUGH MOBIMENTA

**T**his March, we conducted a 10-day refresher training program on obstetric ultrasound for mentors from Rusizi District. Obstetric ultrasound is a critical tool in prenatal care that enables obstetricians and other healthcare providers to confirm pregnancy, estimate gestational age, monitor fetal development and wellbeing as well as detect any abnormalities among others.

The on-the-job mentorship is part of other existing interventions aimed at reducing preventable maternal and neonatal mortality and bridging gaps in emergency obstetric neonatal care (EmONC), family planning and Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC).

It aims to involve obstetric ultrasound into antenatal care routines and improve service delivery to those who are increasingly seeking these services. After the mentorship program, the participants are expected to share what they learnt in on-site training programs involving 19 health facilities in Rusizi District.

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## WHAT IS INVOLVED

The refresher training, provided in partnership with Rwanda Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RSOG) and Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), is an opportunity for experienced ultrasound practitioners to share their knowledge and expertise with less experienced colleagues, supporting them to develop their skills and build confidence.

Carried out at Nyamata and Mayange Health Centers, the mentees receive individualized instruction and feedback tailored to their specific needs, allowing them to focus on areas where they need the most support.

The trainees are taken through a review of the fundamentals of ultrasound physics including the basic principles of ultrasound, such as the properties of sound waves, image formation and the anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive system to support them to interpret obstetric ultrasound images better.

They are provided real-time guidance on ultrasound scans, allowing them to learn through hands-on experience while receiving immediate feedback and correction.

Commenting on the mentorship program, Bob Sumayire, a Medical Doctor at Mibirizi District Hospital said that although he knew the basics of conducting an ultrasound scan, the training has given him the confidence to not only detect challenges but to also act swiftly.



This particular training has given me a big opportunity to do practical training. We were able to scan many expectant mothers and I now feel confident enough to successfully conduct ultrasound scans. Most midwives and nurses lack adequate skills in ultrasound. We have been given an opportunity to change that because we are going to train each one of them and improve their skills and we are positive that this will play a significant role in reducing maternal and infant mortality rate.

**- Liliane Iyambajwe,  
Mibirizi District Hospital,  
Radiographer, Western Province**



As someone who deals with expectant mothers often, ultrasound is a very important tool in primary health care. Not only does it contribute to faster diagnosis, it also offers us an opportunity to provide counseling to patients and reduces the number of medical referrals," he said.

Dr. Emmanuel Mashyaka, the Director of Medical Services, at Bushenge Provincial Hospital said that the program was special since it does not dwell on theory but puts its effort in practical training.

“What I knew was basic, but this training was special because it helped me understand how I can support more expectant women better. I am now eager to also train other healthcare providers and to encourage more women to prioritize ultrasound because now I fully understand how valuable it is to the health of both the mother and baby,” he said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) new Antenatal Care (ANC) guidelines recommend at least one ultrasound before 24 weeks of gestation for every pregnant woman. In 2022, UNFPA, RBC and HDI partnered to organize a training of midwives and nurses working in health centers of Rusizi district on obstetric ultrasound.

The refresher course is delivered under the mobile mentorship initiative dubbed “MobiMenta”, a capacity building model specifically adapted to the Rwandan context.



**There is a lot that I didn't know. For instance, we were given some training on anatomical malfunctions where for instance, during this training, I was able to tell that one of the expectant mothers that we scanned was carrying a child with spin bifida. At first, I wasn't sure, but I was happy that based on the lessons that I had been given, my mentor confirmed that my suspicions were true. That was one of my first achievements from this training.**

**- Bob Sumayire,**

Medical Doctor, Mibirizi District Hospital,  
Western Province





## RAISING AWARENESS ON THE MINISTERIAL ORDER ON SAFE ABORTION AMONG SEX WORKERS

**T**his March, we engaged over 100 sex workers from Nyarugenge District (Nyakabanda Sector) and all the other sectors of Kicukiro District on the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion.

We focused on the legal provisions determining conditions for a medical doctor to perform an abortion and the rights of health service users as stipulated in the medical liability insurance law.

We outlined the circumstances under which abortion is permitted and the procedures that must be followed including legal grounds for obtaining an abortion, requirements for healthcare providers who perform abortions and access to counseling and post-abortion care services.



The HDI Human Rights and Litigation Officer Brenda Kalungi told the participants that safe abortion laws were put in place to ensure their reproductive health rights and reduce the incidence of unsafe abortions.

She reminded that the Ministerial Order on Abortion legally permits abortion to four categories of people including victims of rape, incest, those who are underage and those with pregnancy related complications that are likely to harm the mother or the unborn child.

She pointed out that healthcare providers are not required to ask anyone seeking abortion services for a police report or evidence.

In the case where the one seeking safe abortion services is a minor, she reminded that a parent or guardian will be required to sign off and where the parent/guardian is in disagreement with the minor, the minor's wish will be prioritised.

## Medical Liability Insurance Law

She reminded that sex workers have the same rights as other individuals when it comes to their reproductive health including the right to access safe and legal abortion services.

She touched on the various barriers such as stigma, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare, which make accessing these services even more challenging for people involved in sex work. She touched on Article 3 of the Medical Liability Insurance Law which provides for the right to dignity and privacy. Kalungi reminded that healthcare providers are required to perform their duties with due respect for the human person's life, privacy, and dignity.

She also reminded that Article 4 of the same law provides all human beings a right to access medical procedures without any form of discrimination. She added that this includes accessing consultation, and healthcare services among others.

The training addressed the importance of seeking care from trained and qualified healthcare providers, rather than seeking unsafe abortions from unlicensed providers or attempting to self-induce abortion. They also discussed the unique challenges that they face when it comes to accessing safe and legal abortion services.

For instance, they raised the issue of stigma and discrimination from healthcare providers, both which make it difficult for them to access reproductive healthcare services, including safe abortion services. They also touched on financial barriers due to lack of constant income which they said makes it difficult for them to visit private polyclinics where they are less likely to face stigma and discrimination. Additionally, the group was also trained on different contraception methods and GBV reporting.

“Our aim is to empower sex workers with the tools that they need to claim their rights to sexual and reproductive health, access to justice, access to medical services, and the provisions in the ministerial order on safe abortion for those who may face sexual abuse,” she said.

The participants pointed out that most sex workers face challenges in accessing accurate information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights and as a result, they are unable to seek help when they face challenges, especially sexual abuse.

Reacting to the training, 32-year-old Marie- Claire Umugwaneza said that such programs were instrumental in providing guidance to sex workers who most often are overlooked by society.



***Information is power. If I know what to do and where to go, then I am winning when it comes to the challenges that I face every day. I am going to spread this information and I hope that we are included again when such important programs open up to people like me.***

- Marie- Claire Umugwaneza

# STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:

**Sweden in Rwanda** @SwedeninRW

This afternoon @SwedeninRW signed a 3-year agreement with @HDIRwanda for core support to the implementation of HDI's Strategic Plan. A partnership for furthering #SRHR for the most marginalized & for empowering civil society as a development actor in its own right. @Sida 🇸🇪



**Minna Strömberg** @MMJStromberg

Love it! A result of months of hard work and heaps of mutual learning. Well done, @Louisalejandro & team and @HDIRwanda team. Looking forward to seeing the results! #decolonizeaid

**Sweden in Rwanda** @SwedeninRW · 7 Mar

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**Sweden in Rwanda** @SwedeninRW · 7 Mar

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**Julius Kwizera** @Juliuskwizera

Congratulations HDI for this Partnership with Sweden, its an milestone achieved not only for HDI but more for Rwandan society since the awareness on SRHR is very low in the country. All the best.

**Louis Busingye** @Louisalejandro

SRHR for the most marginalised- way to go. Congratulations to @HDIRwanda the entire HR Demo and Dev Coop team @SwedeninRW

18:20 · 07/03/2023 · 61 Views

1 Like

**Butera Clau...** @ButeraClau... · 8 Mar

Well done @HDI, Yr work around SRHR is paramount in Rwanda 🇷🇼. Keep it up

**Eric Mahoro** @Emahoro1 · 7 Mar

Great news! HDI is the reason we still talk about SRHR. It has stood in tough moments to advocate for the vulnerable and engage key stakeholders to improve human rights everyday. This model is the way to go. Kudos both sides!

**Marie Claire IRYANYAWERA** @miryanyawera

Thank you the @RwandaGov for your efforts to put girls and women at the center of Sustainable Development. Together @UNFPAwanda, @HDIRwanda & other partners we can achieve zero preventable maternal deaths

**HDI Rwanda** @HDIRwanda · 4 Mar

#RwOT

As part of #InternationalWomensDay2023 celebrations, @HDIRwanda in partnership with @RBCRWanda, @CityofKigali, @UNFPAwanda & other partners conducted a walk this morning to raise awareness on the value of staying active during and throughout pregnancy #IWD2023 #Mobimenta

# 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
- UNAIDS
- UNFPA
- UNICEF
- VSO
- WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

