

HDI NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2025



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Dear Partner,

Welcome to our March Newsletter.

This past month, we focused on enhancing the capacity of Youth Center Coordinators and nurses to deliver inclusive, rights-based Sexual Reproductive Health services. We share highlights from our discussions on crucial topics such as HIV prevention, contraception, drug abuse, and more, all aimed at equipping young people with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

We also launched the “My Voice, My Rights” Project with a three-day workshop, bringing together 25 leaders from gender-diverse and sex worker-led community-based organizations. We share the key takeaways from our discussions on advocating for equality, challenging discrimination, and addressing the specific challenges these communities face.

We also leveraged our Gender Café platform to engage our staff and partners in a discussion on workplace sexual harassment. Together, we explored how to spot and report instances of harassment, emphasizing strategies to ensure that workplace policies are updated to provide effective protection and support for all employees.

Finally, we continued our work on harm reduction with a workshop for healthcare providers in Nyarugenge, where we sought to deepen their understanding of the rights and needs of people who use drugs.

We hope these updates and more of the stories we are sharing will inspire your continued support and engagement.

**Warm regards,
The Communication Team**



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF YOUTH CENTER COORDINATORS ON SRH SERVICE DELIVERY

This March, we gathered more than 25 Youth Center Coordinators and nurses from across Rwanda for a two-day consultative meeting aimed at assessing challenges, sharing best practices, and co-creating solutions to strengthen their capacity to provide friendly, inclusive and rights based Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services for adolescents and young people. Throughout the meeting, participants engaged in a collaborative process to identify critical gaps in service provision, strengthen referral systems, and foster improved coordination among youth centers nationwide.



Throughout the training, we explored what it truly means for a service to be youth-friendly. Participants reflected on how young people often raise their concerns over facing judgment, stigma, and sometimes dismissal when seeking SRH services. The Facilitator led us in discussions exploring how best to create a welcoming environment, respect confidentiality, and how to use clear and respectful language when listening to adolescents and young people's needs.

Another key part of the training was focused on HIV prevention. We discussed how youth leaders can support young people to understand life-saving tools such as PrEP and PEP and how to access them, and explored how to talk about HIV in ways

that support them in HIV prevention and testing. We also explored how to reach and support vulnerable groups such as young people with disabilities, and those living in poverty. The participants reflected on the importance of inclusion, and how they can ensure that no young person feels left behind when it comes to accessing health services.

The youth leaders shared that many of the young people they work with experience challenges around anxiety, depression, or trauma, especially after facing violence. We talked about the link between mental health and SRH, and how youth centers can offer basic psychosocial support or refer the adolescents and young people to the right services when needed.



We looked at the issue of sexual and gender-based violence. Many participants reported having encountered cases of adolescents and young people who survived abuse but didn't know where to go or whom to trust. The training offered practical guidance on how to handle such situations with sensitivity putting survivors first, ensuring privacy, and connecting them to the right support services without causing further harm. Contraception was another key topic. The youth leaders discussed how to counsel young people on the range of available contraceptive methods from condoms to pills while respecting their choices and supporting them to differentiate between myths from facts. We also touched on harm reduction approaches, especially for young people who use drugs.



The leaders were reminded of the importance of offering non-judgmental support and sharing information referring the young people who use drugs to places that can support them instead of involving security organs. Finally, we looked at the role of technology in improving access to information. We shared resources such as our GBV chatbot and SRHR toll-free hotline and discussed how digital tools are making it easier for youth to get reliable SRHR information discreetly and on their own terms.

The youth center leaders brainstormed ways to integrate these tools into their everyday work and reach even more young people in their communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The participants expressed appreciation for the knowledge gained and the safe space created to discuss sensitive but critical SRHR issues.

Thadeo Talemwa, the Coordinator of YEGO Kimisagara, lauded the partnership between HDI and youth centers and called for enhanced inclusion measures.

“We urgently need training in sign language to better serve deaf adolescents and youth. Relying on interpreters compromises privacy and confidentiality. We would appreciate equipping training for our staff to enhance sign language skills to improve trust,” he noted.

Gratien Munyaneza, Coordinator of YEGO Nyamasheke, commended the comprehensive discussion on drug use and harm reduction.

“It was eye-opening. This is the first training I’ve attended that addressed drug use in depth. It’s a growing challenge among young people, and I feel I have better understanding of the problem.”





HARNESSING THE GENDER CAFÉ TO CHALLENGE WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

In March, through the Generation G program, we partnered with Rutgers International to host our Gender Café, our in-house collaborative platform that brings together partners to address critical issues related to gender equality.

During this session, we focused on the theme, 'Safeguarding against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace', timed to coincide

with International Women's Month. Denise Teta, our Policy and Advocacy Officer, articulated the relevance of the topic in light of International Women's Month. She emphasized that addressing workplace sexual harassment is a crucial step towards fostering a work environment rooted in respect, inclusion, and safety; core values that align with our broader objective of advancing gender equality and empowering women.



Teta elaborated on our recent Policy Brief, detailing how it evaluates progress made in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace while highlighting persistent gaps in legal, policy, and institutional frameworks. This brief calls for further reforms from policymakers and stakeholders to close these gaps and ensure stronger protections for workers.

She discussed the International Labour Organization (ILO) C190 Convention, which affirms everyone's right to a workplace free from violence and harassment. She also pointed out how the Convention sets out comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, and access to redress.

Teta emphasized that the Convention's coverage extends beyond traditional work environments, encompassing workplace-related activities such as travel, training, social events, digital communication, and commuting.

She also referenced Article 8 of the Law regulating labour in Rwanda, which prohibits sexual harassment by employers and ensures protection against dismissal for employees who report or testify about harassment. She underscored that resigning due to harassment by a supervisor is legally considered an unfair dismissal, further reinforcing the importance of robust protections.



Teta provided an overview of HDI's internal policies, which promote a zero-tolerance approach to workplace harassment. She explained that these policies outline clear procedures for reporting, responding to, and preventing harassment incidents. She also shared practical strategies that organizations can adopt, including regular staff training, leadership commitment, transparent grievance mechanisms, and comprehensive awareness campaigns.

The discussion highlighted the shared responsibility in creating a respectful workplace. Teta emphasized that while organizations must establish policies and



structures, individuals have a duty to uphold dignity, equity, and mutual respect in all professional interactions.

As the conversation progressed, participants shared examples that shed light on how subtle, everyday comments can unintentionally contribute to a toxic work culture. From comments about colleagues' attire to unsolicited assumptions about personal relationships, these stories highlighted how even well-meaning remarks can sometimes cross boundaries, becoming uncomfortable or discriminatory. The discussion emphasized the need for workplaces to prioritize professionalism, mutual respect, and understanding.



The event also featured a session led by Mukayitete Annonciata, our Senior Program Officer for Gender and Inclusion, who provided an insightful overview of International Women's Day. She reflected on the progress women have made in education, leadership, and social development, while acknowledging the persistent challenges women continue to face. Mukayitete shared strategies for advancing gender equality, including through policy reforms, advocacy, and empowering women to take leadership roles across all sectors. Looking ahead, participants shared future Gender Café topics such as exploring the intersectionality of gender issues in the workplace, examining how various factors such as disability, and socio-economic status intersect with gender to create unique challenges and opportunities.

"I've learned that it's not enough to just talk about harassment. We need to make sure people know they have the support they need when they speak out." Yassina Igihozo, participant from RNGOF said.

"What stood out to me is that we all have a role in preventing harassment. It's not just the HR department's responsibility; it's something we all need to be mindful of every day." Rosine Izabayo, a participant from IMRO

The event concluded with a collective call for action, emphasizing solidarity and the need for continuous efforts to advance gender equality



EMPOWERING CBO LEADERS TO DRIVE EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

In partnership with the European Union, this March, we launched the “My Voice, My Rights” Project, marking a significant stride towards non-discrimination and equity for gender-diverse individuals and sex workers. The launch was highlighted by a three-day capacity-strengthening workshop, bringing together 25 leaders from gender-diverse and sex worker-led community-based organizations.

The CBO leaders gathered to enhance their ability to advocate for equality, challenge discrimination, and address the unique challenges faced by their communities. This initiative sought to empower CBOs with practical tools and knowledge on how to utilize strategic litigation to challenge discriminatory laws, policies, and practices.

The workshop created a platform for participants to explore landmark cases, understand legal frameworks, and build crucial skills in documenting rights violations.

Through tailored sessions and peer learning, the CBO leaders deepened their understanding of how to leverage the legal system to demand justice and accountability. The emphasis was on equipping participants with the means to challenge the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

The workshop also focused on fostering meaningful engagement with policymakers, law enforcement, media practitioners, and the public, highlighting the importance of building alliances to drive inclusive public discourse.

Through real-life case studies and peer learning, the workshop provided participants with the tools to craft effective advocacy messages, engage power holders, and build networks that could push for community protection. As Jean Claude Cedric Uwihoreye, a gender-diverse activist from Kamonyi District, shared, "Hearing from other activists gave me so much strength. We face similar challenges, and this reminded me that we're not alone."



Similarly, Gael Uwamahoro, an activist from Kigali, reflected on the power of connection: "Being in a room full of people who understand your struggle is powerful."

A major highlight of the workshop was the election of a Steering Committee, made up of dedicated leaders from the participating organizations. The committee will be instrumental in transforming the momentum from the workshop into tangible actions on the ground, ensuring that community voices remain at the heart of the project, extending the project's influence well beyond its conclusion.



ADVANCING RIGHTS-CENTERED HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Happy to also share that in March, we also facilitated a two-day capacity-building workshop for healthcare providers in Nyarugenge District aimed at strengthening their understanding and application of a rights-based approach to care. The training, attended by nurses, counselors, and mental health professionals, focused on Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) and the delivery of stigma-free, people-centered services for key populations, with an emphasis on People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs). The session opened with remarks from Elvis Benimana, our community health advisor and the Tubiteho Project Lead, who provided an overview of the project's work in advancing the health and rights of PWUDs.



He highlighted the initiative's reach to over 350 PWUDs with tailored services and emphasized the urgency of addressing criminalization and systemic discrimination, which continue to undermine access to essential healthcare.

"These barriers do not just exclude people, they endanger lives," Benimana stressed. "They reinforce stigma, deepen health inequities, and deny individuals their right to quality care."

The training encouraged self-reflection among providers, challenging them to examine personal biases and expand their capacity to offer nonjudgmental, evidence-informed

support. The Director of the Kigali Mental Health Referral Center, Dynamo Ndacyayisenga, facilitated a critical discussion on how personal, cultural, and religious values can shape provider attitudes. He debunked persistent myths about addiction, including the notion that it only involves "hard drugs" or those individuals can simply "choose" to stop using substances without support.

"Addiction is a health condition, not a moral failure," he stated. "It alters brain chemistry, and recovery is not only possible but more successful when rooted in compassion and professional care."



The sessions offered a safe space for dialogue, where participants shared real-world challenges. Claudine Mutesi, a mental health officer at Nyarugenge District Hospital, raised concerns about the high burden of HIV, mental health disorders, and unintended pregnancies among PWUDs.

She highlighted how stigma continues to deter individuals from seeking timely care. Particular concern was raised around the marginalization of PWIDs, who remain highly vulnerable to

infections such as HIV due to limited access to harm reduction services. Participants collectively emphasized that substance use disorders are shaped by a range of intersecting factors, including trauma, peer dynamics, structural poverty, and lack of psychosocial support.

While the challenges are complex, participants acknowledged that recovery is possible and reaffirmed the need to treat PWUDs as individuals in need of care—not punishment.

The dialogue also explored the need for stronger collaboration between the health sector and law enforcement to support health-based rather than punitive approaches.

Strengthening referral pathways, improving access to harm reduction, and reaching PWUDs at the community level were key recommendations raised by participants.

By the close of the training, many participants expressed a shift in thinking, demonstrated by questions such as:

- **How can we better support PWUDs who are incarcerated?**
- **How do we ensure seamless referral and follow-up care? How can we proactively engage PWUDs before they reach crisis points?**

In his concluding remarks, Ndacyayisenga reiterated that training healthcare providers is an essential first step in transforming broader systems of care and public perception.



“Too many people face substance use challenges in silence, not knowing where or how to access support. It’s our duty to ensure that care is available, accessible, and affirming.”

The Director of Health for Nyarugenge District, Evariste Nkunda, commended the Tubiteho Project for centering human dignity in healthcare delivery.

“This initiative has exposed the everyday discrimination PWUDs face. It’s our collective responsibility to take these conversations beyond training rooms into our clinics, and communities.”



FOSTERING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AMONG PARTNER ORGANISATION

In March, we convened Project and M&E Leads from our implementing partner organizations to collectively review and strengthen the integration of gender mainstreaming into our programming. This session was informed by the findings from a comprehensive Gender Assessment carried out with our four implementing partners under the Advancing Sexual and

Reproductive Health and Rights in Rwanda project. Our goal was clear and aligned with our commitment to gender equity, to ensure that our gender indicators are not only clear, practical, and consistent across all interventions, but also truly reflect the realities and needs on the ground.

Through collaborative reflection and dialogue, we examined how gender policies are being operationalized within our organizations and discussed ways to enhance their effectiveness in driving change.

We also stressed the importance of creating a culture of openness around gender, diversity, and power dynamics. We recognized the urgent need for sustained training to ensure that these principles are embedded in our work moving forward. A crucial aspect of the conversation was around the Annual Gender Report. Partners shared their perspectives on how each organization contributes to the report, emphasizing the necessity of equipping staff with the right skills, knowledge, and resources to meaningfully contribute to this process.

To this end, we collectively committed to an ambitious target: by 2026, at least 90% of our staff will be trained in gender, diversity, and inclusion, fostering a workforce that is not only skilled but also deeply invested in advancing these critical issues. To ensure the successful realization of this goal, we identified several action points, including the implementation of regular joint training sessions and fostering stronger, more integrated collaboration between program and M&E teams.



Additionally, we agreed to hold quarterly learning sessions that will serve as a platform for monitoring progress, addressing challenges, and sharing best practices. These sessions will not only ensure accountability but also create a space where we can learn from each other, build collective capacity, and drive continuous improvement across all partners.

IN OTHER NEWS

This March, **we hosted the following radio shows:**



1ST MARCH 2025:
THE IMPACT OF SRHR MISINFORMATION AND ITS
IMPACT ON YOUTH

8TH MARCH 2025:
HOW WOMEN HAVE ADVANCED IN EXERCISING
THEIR SRHR

15TH MARCH 2025:
THE PRESSURE OF MARRIAGE ON YOUNG PEOPLE

29TH MARCH 2025:
HOW TO CALCULATE A WOMAN'S MENSTRUAL CYCLE



9TH MARCH 2025:
UMUGORE WAHawe IMBARAGA N'UBUSHOBOZI:
ISOKO Y'ITERAMBERE

16TH MARCH 2025:
HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF DURING
MENSTRUATION

23RD MARCH 2025:
UNDERSTANDING SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED
INFECTIONS

30TH MARCH 2025:
THE ROLE OF YOUTH CENTERS IN DELIVERING
SRHR SERVICES AND INFORMATION



TWITTER SPACE:

3RD MARCH 2025: PATIENTS' RIGHTS

Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



We hosted Richard Lusimbo, Director General of UKPC, at our Nyamirambo Outreach Center for a knowledge exchange with gender diverse and sex worker organizations. The visit focused on collaboration and the power of unity in advancing key populations' rights and empowerment.



This March, we had the pleasure of welcoming the newly established Medical Doctors for Choice committee at our offices. Our conversation centered on deepening collaboration and advancing access to reproductive health services.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



HDI Rwanda ✓
@HDIRwanda

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Mu cyumweru gishize, twagiranye ibiganiro byiza n'abahagarariye ibigo by'urubyiruko bizwi nka YEGO Youth Centers hamwe n'abaforomo bakorera muri ibyo bigo.

Twagiranye impaka nyinshi, aho bamwe bavugaga ko gukomeza gufunga abakoresha ibiyobyabwenge bagafatwa nk'abanyabyaha ari byo, abandi bati nyamara ntibitanga umuti urambye, bati ahubwo bafatwe nk'abarwayi, bafashwe kubona ubuvuzi no gusubira mu buzima busanzwe.

Ese wowe ubibona ute?



Maxime 🇷🇼
@maxime_ntaganda

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bafatwe nk'abarwayi, bafashwe kubona ubuvuzi no gusubira mu buzima busanzwe.

11:32 am · 1 Apr 2025 · 223 Views



Innocent
@ViboyInnocent

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NIWEMWIZA Anne M... ✓
@Annemwiza

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Ku bwanjye, mu gihe gukoresha ibiyobyabwenge ari icyaha gihanwa n'amategeko, ababikoze bagomba kubihanirwa.

Gusa nka bamwe babaye imbata bo bakwiye kuvuzwa no gufashwa kubireka, kd ubanza ari muri uwo mujyo bajyanwamo i wawa cg ahandi.

Ahubwo jye mbona bamwe babitunda, bakanabicuruza bakwiye guhanwa nk'abica abantu, kuko rwose ni abicanyi pe.

11:55 am · 1 Apr 2025 · 730 Views



STEPS INITIATIVE 🇷🇼
@STEPS_INITIATIV

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[@STEPS_INITIATIV](#). Twemera ko ikibazo cy'abakoresha kigomba kwitabwaho nk'ikibazo cy'ubuzima aho kuba icyaha. Gufunga abakoresha ibiyobyabwenge ntibikemura impamvu zibitera, ahubwo hakenewe ubuvuzi, ubujyanama mu by'ubuzima bwo mu mutwe, n'uburyo bwiza bwo kumwitaho [#UbuwuzImbere](#)

5:05 pm · 1 Apr 2025 from République du Rwanda · 84 Views

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
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- STOP TB PARTNERSHIP
- STRIVE FOUNDATION RWANDA
- THE CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
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- 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

