

HDI NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2024



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Dear Partner,

Welcome to Our November Newsletter!

This past month, we've made strides in several key areas:

November's main highlight was hosting our Annual Adolescent Conference, a platform for young voices to advocate, learn, and inspire action on SRHR. We share their insights and colorful photos to give you a glimpse into the packed 2 day conference.

To improve service delivery, we also provided training on family planning and STI management to our nurses and counselors who serve our clients in different capacities, whether in the field or on our hotline. We share highlights from our partnering with RBC in raising awareness and increasing access to Mpox vaccines for key populations.

We also held an intergenerational dialogue promoting positive masculinity and gender equality. These and other stories highlight our continued commitment to creating healthier, more inclusive communities. As the year comes to an end, we take this moment to wish all our partners a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Thank you for your partnership. We look forward to achieving even greater milestones together in 2025!

Warm holiday wishes,

HDI-Rwanda Team



AMPLIFYING ADOLESCENT VOICES AT THE ANNUAL SRHR ADOLESCENT CONFERENCE

This November, we hosted the 5th Edition of the Annual Adolescent Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) under the theme, “Our Rights, Our Voice: Shaping Adolescent SRHR Together”. The conference sought to provide adolescents a platform to voice their personal stories and experiences to raise awareness, challenge social norms, and mobilize policy and stakeholder support for addressing issues related to adolescent sexual reproductive health. The conference brought together a diverse group of participants, including students, adolescents from various schools, teenage mothers, government officials, civil society organizations, and healthcare professionals.

In his opening remarks, our Executive Director, Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, called on partners and decision-makers to leverage the conference to listen to the challenges that adolescents are facing and to commit to removing any barriers to accessing SRHR services, and create a world where every young person feels empowered.

He acknowledged the numerous challenges faced by young people today, including stigma, restrictive laws and policies, and societal norms that place heavy burdens on them.

“You are not just the leaders of tomorrow—you are the leaders of today. Your experiences, your insights, and your aspirations are valuable. Share them boldly. Ask the hard questions. Demand the changes you want to see. You have the right to be heard and the power to inspire all of us in this room to act with urgency and purpose,” he said.

In her remarks, the Deputy Director General of the Rwanda Biomedical Center, Noella Bigirimana, reminded that this year’s theme, “Our Rights, Our Voice: Shaping Adolescent SRHR Together,” reflects the essence of what



the government and development partners aim to achieve; ensuring that adolescents are not only beneficiaries of health policies but active participants in shaping them.

She emphasized the need for training healthcare providers to offer stigma-free, adolescent-centered care and expanding infrastructure to reach even the most remote areas.

Louis Busingye, the National Program Officer for Human Rights and Democracy at the Swedish Embassy, delivered a speech on behalf of Swedish Ambassador Dag Sjöögren.



He highlighted the recent draft law on healthcare services presented to Parliament recently as a demonstration of Rwanda's political will and its commitment to address the needs of the youth through practical solutions.

Busingye reiterated Sweden's unwavering support for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), emphasizing that when adolescent girls and boys are given an opportunity

to make independent decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, their overall well-being improves, which in turn results in better outcomes for society. Joyce Nyirimana, a member of the Rwanda National Union of the Deaf, was grateful to attend the conference, especially thanks to the sign language interpreter who ensured she could fully engage with the sessions.



he highlighted how often people with disabilities, particularly adolescents, are overlooked in such critical conversations and how their needs must be prioritized.

“Too often, our needs are forgotten, and we are left out of programs designed to help our peers. As a young deaf woman, I know firsthand the challenges we face in accessing accurate sexual and reproductive health information. I am truly honored to be part of this conversation,” she said.

She shared that the conference was an eye-opening experience, particularly the exhibitions on sexual and reproductive health services. Among the exhibitors, Jocare left a lasting impression, offering braille documents that made the display more accessible and interactive.

Joseph Niyitegeka, a student at GS Kabuga, reflected on his experience at the conference, highlighting the valuable insights he gained on sexual and reproductive health. He shared how the discussions helped him better understand how to navigate the stigma surrounding topics like menstruation, HIV, and bodily changes.

“It was an interesting experience. Some of the topics that we covered during the conference are the kind that I haven’t been able to learn at home or in school. I did not know anything about menstruation and learning about it was eye opening.”

At the conclusion of the two day conference, key insights that emerged:

- ✔ Adolescents took center stage throughout the conference, openly sharing their challenges and offering thoughtful, actionable recommendations. Their input highlighted the importance of this year’s theme “Our Future, Our Voice: Shaping the future of adolescent SRHR, together”, ensuring that their voices remain integral to shaping policies and programs that directly impact their lives.
- ✔ Participants left the conference with a deeper understanding of SRHR, armed with the information needed to make empowered, informed decisions about their health and well-being.
- ✔ Our partners demonstrated a clear commitment to improving services for adolescents.



- ✔ They actively shared their ongoing initiatives and plans and pledged to strengthen their support for young people, ensuring their work aligns with the real needs and concerns highlighted by adolescents during the conference.
- ✔ A powerful message emerged: ASRH is a shared responsibility. The conference highlighted that to create sustainable change, all sectors must work together—placing adolescents at the heart of these collaborations to drive meaningful, long-lasting improvements in their health and rights.



“

Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Rights deserves increased attention and our current strategy for our development assistance highlights improved health for the most vulnerable as a priority. SRHR is basically aimed at ensuring the right of all people to control their own bodies and to live a healthy and productive life. Those most in need, should be first in line.

Louis Busingye

National Program Officer-Human Rights and Democracy, Embassy of Sweden

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This year's theme, "Our Rights, Our Voice: Shaping Adolescent SRHR Together," reflects the essence of what we aim to achieve: ensuring that adolescents are not only beneficiaries of health policies but active participants in shaping them. To our adolescents and young leaders here today: this platform is for you. Your insights are invaluable in shaping the policies that affect your lives. To the stakeholders: let us listen, learn, and most importantly, take action. The outcomes of this conference must translate into tangible actions that positively impact adolescents' lives across Rwanda.

Noella Bigirimana,

Deputy Director General, RBC

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FOSTERING POSITIVE MASCULINITY THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

As part of our 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, we partnered with Generation Gender Coalition members to host a dynamic two-day Intergenerational Dialogue on Positive Masculinity. This activity brought together individuals from diverse civil society organizations to challenge stereotypes,

share experiences, and inspire change. Under the BE MEN Campaign, the dialogue engaged over 40 participants from diverse CSOs, with a strong emphasis on youth, as the majority of attendees were under 30—aligning with the campaign's mission to empower and inspire young people.

The dialogue highlighted the significant harm caused by traditional notions of masculinity, such as the belief that “men don’t cry,” which restrict men’s emotional expression, reinforce power imbalances, and fuel gender-based violence.

Annonciata Mukayitete, our Senior Programs Officer for Gender and Social Inclusion, opened the dialogue with an engaging, participatory discussion exploring the meaning of “Being a Man” in the Rwandan context.

During the dialogue, participants openly discussed how traditional expectations define masculinity as being a provider, protector, problem-solver, financially stable, and emotionally reserved. The participants also discussed how cultural and religious beliefs often portray a “real man” as one who has achieved financial success.

Building on Mukayitete’s insights, a panel discussion brought diverse perspectives to the table, extensively exploring what it means to “be a man” in Rwanda and the younger generation’s role in challenging harmful norms.



This session provided a platform for candid dialogue and actionable recommendations. Young human rights activist Egide Niyonshuti highlighted the urgent need to challenge and transform these harmful norms to promote healthier conceptions of masculinity.

“Men are often judged solely on their ability to provide financially. When they can’t meet these expectations, they face severe mental health challenges and strained relationships. This narrative needs to change.”



YOUNG PEOPLE'S ROLE IN CHALLENGING HARMFUL NORMS

Moving on to the session on the younger generation's role in challenging harmful norms, Muhire Pascal from Medical Students Association of Rwanda (MEDSAR) suggested utilizing accessible platforms such as social media and radio programs to spread messages about gender equality. Throughout the dialogue, participants emphasized the importance of

men, particularly the young, taking the lead in challenging harmful masculinities and advancing gender equality. They highlighted the widespread lack of understanding of the concept of consent within the Rwandan context, calling for targeted awareness efforts to address this gap.

The dialogue highlighted several important takeaways. Ernestine Uwimbabazi from Impanuro Girls Initiative observed, **"Young men in Civil Society Organizations**

are slowly getting a better understanding of positive masculinity because they're exposed to these discussions regularly. We need to find ways to reach those outside these networks."

The dialogue also demonstrated that intergenerational discussions are powerful tools for bridging understanding gaps and fostering education on gender equality across age groups.

Another key takeaway was the severe impact of failing to meet societal expectations on men's mental health. Muhire Pascal from MEDSAR emphasized, "We must normalize conversations around emotional expression for men."

Participants pledged to integrate positive masculinity principles into both their organizations and personal lives, emphasizing the crucial role of men's leadership in advancing gender equality. Others committed to sharing research findings to enhance community understanding of gender realities as research can dispel myths and help people see the benefits of gender equality.



Additionally, participants pledged to advocate for positive masculinity incorporation in the education system, which is where the next generation is shaped.

At the heart of this initiative was a shared vision: creating spaces to reimagine masculinity in ways that advance a culture of respect, equality, and inclusion.



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF NURSES AND HOTLINE COUNSELORS ON FAMILY PLANNING

The calls that come through our hotline reveal recurring patterns in the concerns individuals, especially women and girls, have about their sexual and reproductive health. From a woman wondering if she could get pregnant after missing her pills to a young man unsure whether a rash might be an STI, many of the most frequently asked questions center around family

planning and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Recognizing this trend, we organized a specialized training session to strengthen the skills and knowledge of our nurses and Hotline Counselors in addressing the most pressing concerns around family planning and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).



The training was designed to go beyond textbook information, equipping participants with practical tools to handle real-life scenarios they frequently encounter during hotline calls and outreach activities. The training sought to ensure that our staff can confidently address sensitive questions, debunk myths, and guide individuals toward making informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Delivered by experienced gynaecologist Dr. Dan Butare, the training incorporated interactive role-playing exercises, in-depth discussions, and expert-led sessions. It not only enhanced participants' technical knowledge

but also highlighted the importance of empathy and clear communication in building trust with clients. Our Hotline Coordinator, Diane Uwase, highlighted the importance of refreshing counselors' and nurses' knowledge to ensure they can confidently guide clients in making informed reproductive health decisions.

“When you look at the questions we get, they reflect a combination of curiosity, confusion, and fear. Our goal is to ensure that every response we give isn't just accurate but also reassuring, helping people feel empowered to take charge of their health.”



During the training, the nurses and counselors were also taught how to effectively respond to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about sexually transmitted infections. This included addressing common misconceptions, providing accurate information about symptoms, transmission, and treatment, and offering practical advice on prevention strategies, such as condom use and regular testing.

They were trained on how to handle sensitive conversations with empathy, maintain confidentiality, and guide clients toward available resources or in-person care when necessary. The training also included role-playing exercises to build their confidence in answering difficult or awkward questions while

fostering a supportive and nonjudgmental environment. For Proscovia Kayitesi, one of our hotline counselors, the training was transformative. “I used to struggle with finding the right words when callers sounded nervous or unsure,” she shared. **“Now, I feel more confident in giving clearer, supportive answers that help them make informed decisions.”** The training also emphasized the role of accessibility.

In conclusion, counselors were guided on how to direct callers to additional resources, such as health centers for family planning methods, while also providing information about HDI-Rwanda’s other platforms, including our SRHR call center and chatbot.



HARNESSING MEDIA PROFESSIONALS' EXPERTISE TO ADVOCATE FOR HARM REDUCTION

This November, we hosted a two-day training workshop to engage media professionals about harm reduction strategies and services for people who use drugs (PWUDs). The training sought to deepen the media professionals' understanding of the issues faced by PWUDs, emphasizing the significant role of accurate reporting in reducing stigma, challenging misconceptions and highlighting the crucial role

of harm reduction in improving public health. Among others, the participants explored sessions on people who use drugs (PWUD), with a focus on key populations. The sessions also explored the socio-economic and public health context of drug use, addressed myths and misconceptions about PWUD, and examined their health risks, including HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and Tuberculosis.

Our Harm Reduction Officer, Deborah Kansiime, emphasized the importance of treating people who use drugs (PWUDs) as patients rather than criminals, highlighting this approach as essential to minimizing their health risks.

She highlighted the risks faced by people who use drugs, citing research from Rwanda that shows that they have nine times the HIV incidents compared to the general population, adding the risk extends beyond HIV.

“It’s not just HIV. There is also Hepatitis C and B, because of sharing needles. Unfortunately, we’ve seen that 91 percent of the people who were interviewed in the past said that they had shared needles,” she added.

She also added that harm reduction concepts were not entirely new, as similar strategies had been put in place before, but often not targeting those who inject drugs specifically. “art, we recognize their challenges and acknowledge that these individuals need support, want to tailor services to their needs, while also implementing many other prevention programs.” she added.

LEGAL PROVISIONS

Our Legal Associate Diane Igihozo, explained that much like any other citizen, people who use drugs are protected under Rwandan laws, emphasizing that while the legal framework offers protections, there are still complexities around how people who use drugs are treated in the judicial system, especially when it comes to addiction. She further highlighted the current legal challenges, noting that individuals who use drugs often face punitive measures. She proposed that Rwandan laws might consider adopt treating addiction as a health issue rather than a criminal matter.

“I think Rwandan law could consider viewing individuals struggling with drug use as facing a health issue rather than addiction in the traditional sense. The laws and policies are well-elaborated, but the challenge lies in their implementation, which could be improved,” she noted.

The media professionals also had an opportunity to engage with the Director General of the Isange Rehabilitation Center based in Huye District Patrick

Rwagatare, who provided insights into the daily challenges faced by individuals who use drugs. This highlighted the importance of humanizing media coverage, focusing on recovery stories to reduce stigma and encourage empathy. The media professionals and experts also discussed the best ways to advocate for comprehensive treatment programs, including Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) to manage withdrawal symptoms, and the distribution of naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses and save lives, all in support of harm reduction strategies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Philemon Gisubizo, a journalist at Isango Star, shared how the training deepened his understanding of people who use drugs.

“These sessions prompted me to rethink my approach to reporting on drug use. I realized the importance of understanding the underlying reasons why people start using drugs. Moving forward, I will focus on shedding light on these factors and emphasizing the need for support systems to help them recover,” he said.



Sabine Kayihura, a journalist at Isibo TV and a participant in the training, highlighted the importance of combating stigma through informed reporting. S

he emphasized the need to raise public awareness about drug use, including the lesser-known fact that HIV prevalence is significantly higher among people who use drugs—a crucial insight she gained during the training.

IN OTHER NEWS.

This November, **we hosted the following radio shows.**



2ND NOVEMBER 2024: SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS AND OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACCESS SRH SERVICES

9TH NOVEMBER 2024: ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO TEACHING SRH IN SCHOOLS

16TH NOVEMBER 2024: THE ROLE OF MEN IN PROMOTING FAMILY PLANNING

23RD NOVEMBER 2024: EXPLORING TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED GBV



3RD NOVEMBER 2024: SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS AND OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACCESS SRH SERVICES

10TH NOVEMBER 2024: ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO TEACHING SRH IN SCHOOLS

17TH NOVEMBER 2024: HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA BE LEVERAGED TO ADDRESS GBV?

24TH NOVEMBER 2024: HOW IS MASCULINITY DEFINED IN THE RWANDAN CONTEXT?

OBSERVING 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

This November, we joined the World to observed 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence with a series of activities to raise awareness, challenge harmful social norms, and inspire collective action for a more equitable society.

Here's what we accomplished:



Twitter Space: We hosted a discussion on “How masculinity is defined in the Rwandan Context,” attended by 618 people, focusing on how societal views of masculinity affect young people and gender equality.



Intergenerational Dialogue: As part of the Generation Gender ‘Bite Bro: Reka Tubiganireho’ campaign, we held a 2-day dialogue with 38 participants discussing the role of men and boys in promoting positive masculinity.



Car-free Day Walk: We participated in the community walk to raise awareness about GBV, symbolizing solidarity with the cause.



Video Production: We created videos to challenge harmful social norms, reaching 3,936 impressions across social media.



Radio Talk-show: We hosted a show on Kiss FM discussing masculinity in Rwanda, focusing on its impact on men's mental health and the media's role in shaping these perceptions.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



HDI Rwanda
@HDIRwanda

Umushinga w'Itegeko rigenga serivise z'ubuvuzi wagejejeje ku Nteko Ishinga Amategeko usaba ko imyaka yo kwemererwa kubona amakuru na serivisi byerekeye ubuzima bw'imyororokere yagabanywa, ikava kuri 18 igashyirwa kuri 15.

Twishimiye cyane ko ibiganiro ku guhindura amategeko yemerera abangavu n'ingimbi gufata ibyemezo ku buzima bwabo bw'imyororokere byasubukuwe.

Kugabanya iyi myaka ni intambwe ikomeye izafasha gukemura icyuho gihari ndetse binahe urubyiruko amahirwe yo gusobanukirwa uburyo bwo gufata ibyemezo bifite ingaruka nziza ku buzima harimo kwirinda inda zidateganyijwe.g

Iyi mpinduka ni ingenzi mu kubaka ejo hazaza heza h'urubyiruko rwacu.

Wowe ubyumve ute?



BUZIMA NEWS
@buzimanews

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Replying to @HDIRwanda @SwedeninRW and @UNFPAwanda

Rikwiye gutorwa kuko biragoye ko umubyeyi yaherekeza umwana gusaba serivisi z'ubuzima bw'imyororokere, Ikindi kandi, usanga abana babuzwa kwirinda nyamara ingaruka zaza bakemererwa kwifatira umwanzuro. Urg: Gukuramo inda, iyo umubyeyi yanze, hahabwa agaciro icyemezo cy'umwana

6:46 AM · 07 Nov 24 · 284 Views



Iradukunda liliane
@Iraduku

Follow

Replying to @HDIRwanda @SwedeninRW and @UNFPAwanda

Perso en notant que toutes les informations sont bien données et que l'éducation sexuelle est enseignée depuis la maternelle sinon la garderie ça pourrait être envisageable. Dans les sociétés occidentales il y a pas de tabou sur ce sujet ce qui fait que à 14 ans ça peut passer.

Translate post



HDI Rwanda
@HDIRwanda

A simple Monday morning reminder that acknowledging violence against women does not exclude or invalidate the experiences of male victims.

Sibyo?

What it does is call attention to a gendered pattern of violence that is deeply rooted in power imbalances and harmful social norms among other contexts.

When someone highlights that violence against women is prevalent, they are emphasizing the specific challenges and systemic inequalities women face, which often make them more vulnerable to certain forms of violence, such as femicide, domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking among others.

#Duhindurelmyumvire
#Hinduralmyumvire

Most relevant replies



Dr. Mick Ndayishimiye @... · 11 Nov
Replying to @HDIRwanda

Can't say it any better! Well crafted and clear. It takes just a will to read and understand.

#Duhindurelmyumvire
#Hinduralmyumvire

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STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:

Truth Bridge Media
@Bridgemedi... Follow

Exemplary initiative for creating lasting change in our communities 🙌

Training the teachers on how to navigate sensitive topics and openly discuss sexual health and consent will, in turn, open meaningful dialogues and participation from students. Superb work, HDI!

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwanda · 12 Nov
We've just wrapped up a training for teachers, equipping them with the tools to confidently deliver Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in their classrooms.



2:09 PM · 13 Nov 24 · 528 Views

Aimable Official™
@Aimable150

Great work @HDIRwanda & @RBCRWanda! 🙌 Your commitment to #Mpox awareness, vaccination, and education in key communities is a vital step toward a healthier, safer future. Prevention, early detection, and knowledge truly empower us all. Keep up the impactful work!

Minister of Food and Drinks... · 10 Nov
@HDIRwanda in collaboration with @RBCRWanda, last Tuesday #Mpox awareness and vaccination outreach campaign continued in Gatenga, Remera and Biryogo health centers, targeting key p...



2:20 PM · 10 Nov 24 from Rwanda · 833 Views

BUZIMA NEWS
@buzimanews Follow

By giving our adolescents the access to SRHRs info & services, we are protecting them from related consequences, including teenage pregnancies & STIs. Thanks @HDIRwanda for building the future of our young generation

HDI Rwanda @HDIRwanda · 08 Nov
We're excited to share that we've wrapped up an intensive two-day refresher training with our adolescent and youth champions in preparation for upcoming school outreach programs. ...



10:31 AM · 10 Nov 24 · 639 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
- EAHP
- 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 BELGIUM
- 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

