

HDI NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2025



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

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Dear Partner,

Welcome to our October Newsletter.

In this edition, we are excited to give you a glimpse into stories that showcase our work in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across Rwanda and beyond. This October, our Annual SRHR Adolescent Conference became a vibrant platform for adolescents and young people from across the country to take the lead—sharing their experiences, challenges, and creative solutions to issues affecting their sexual and reproductive health. Read our lead story to see how young voices are shaping policies that respond to their needs.

Understanding and implementing the new law regulating health services is crucial for protecting communities and ensuring accountability in healthcare delivery. We share how our training for legal practitioners and health providers is working to strengthen rights-based care and community accountability.

This month, we also extended our health education and services to cross-border communities along the Rwanda/DRC border. Explore how our cross-border programs are breaking barriers to reach communities with limited access to information and services.

We also highlight engaging school debates organized to mark the International Day of the Girl Child. Young girls and boys debated the importance of access to SRH services for adolescents, reinforcing the need for communities to create supportive environments where girls can thrive.

Thank you for being an essential partner in this journey.

Warm regards,

The Communication Team



DEEPENING ADOLESCENT ENGAGEMENT AT THE ANNUAL SRHR ADOLESCENT CONFERENCE

In October, we convened the 6th Annual Adolescent SRHR Conference, gathering over 200 participants including adolescents (in and out of school), adolescents with disabilities, teenage mothers, policymakers, educators, civil society actors, and healthcare professionals to discuss how health policies

can better address adolescents' needs. The conference, held under the theme "From Policy to Action: Securing SRHR Access for Every Adolescent," brought together adolescents to highlight their realities, raise awareness, and demand stronger policy and stakeholder commitment to adolescent SRHR.



WHAT WAS DISCUSSED?

Discussions featured two presentations by the Rwanda Biomedical Center with one exploring the Five-Year Adolescent and Youth SRHR Strategy, outlining priorities, objectives, and planned interventions to improve SRHR outcomes among young people.

Another presentation discussed the Family Planning Minimum Service Package, detailing essential services, standards, and implementation approaches to ensure accessible and quality family planning services across health facilities. A separate youth-led panel explored barriers to SRHR access for vulnerable adolescents, focusing on

social, cultural, and economic factors, service gaps, stigma, limited sexuality education, and policy gaps, and potential solutions. Another discussion examined the new law regulating healthcare services, its impact on service access and quality, implementation challenges, and opportunities for improving adolescent health.

Highlighting gaps in services, education, and rising health risks, youth centre leaders also used the platform to share strategies to enhance Adolescent and Youth SRHR (AYSRHR) access and support for adolescents. investment to ensure long-term sustainability.

Plan International Rwanda delivered a presentation detailing an analysis of SRHR programme funding from 2017 to 2021, revealing ongoing financial challenges and a call to action

for increased domestic investment to ensure long-term sustainability. Each discussion prompted many questions from adolescents, reflecting their active engagement and interest.

ADOLESCENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Referencing the new Law Regulating Health Services, Sarah Asimwe, an adolescent from Nyagatare said that to benefit adolescents, new laws must be disseminated widely across the country.

Alfey Niyonkuru from Groupe Scolaire Gatunga in Gasabo District emphasized the need to assess teachers' attitudes and effectiveness in delivering Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

Princia Bella Arakaza, a youth participant representing refugee adolescents called for the deployment of sign language interpreters in health facilities to ensure inclusion for adolescents with hearing and speech disabilities.



“

At this conference, many discussions referenced the new law regulating health services, but we still need a clearer understanding of its provisions and how it can benefit us so we can fully take advantage of it. I advise that we have countrywide sensitization campaigns to ensure that young people, parents, and health providers understand the law.

Sarah Asimwe
Nyagatare District



“

This year's theme for the adolescent conference, 'From Policy to Practice,' says that we need to turn policies into real impact. This is good news because today, we still see teachers delivering sexuality education without providing us adequate depth or context. I urge education authorities to evaluate how this subject is being taught and to consider regular capacity-building sessions for teachers to ensure it is delivered effectively

Alfey Niyonkuru
Groupe Scolaire Gatunga



“

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Sarah Asimwe
Nyagatare District



OTHER REMARKS

The Deputy Director of RBC, Jeanne Umuhire, highlighted the government's commitment to improving adolescent and youth health through transformative initiatives. She pointed to programs such as the Youth Corners at health centers, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools, and the new Health Law as key steps in ensuring that young people can access care, accurate information, and support without fear or stigma.

In her remarks, the Operational Controller and Deputy Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden, Raquel Báez, commended HDI and partners for creating an inclusive, youth-led platform. Highlighting recent progress, Báez hailed Rwanda's new health services law allowing adolescents aged

15+ to access SRHR services. "This milestone shows the strength of advocacy, civil society engagement and government leadership," she said.

Our Executive Director, Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, applauded the government's dedication to advancing adolescent health, promoting gender equality, and empowering youth.

He emphasized that recent actions, including the passing of the law regulating health services, support for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as well as youth-friendly services, reflect a strong policy commitment to building a resilient future that prioritizes young people's health and rights.



In her remarks, Plan International Rwanda's Business Development Manager, Benita Kamikazi Mugabo said that the Annual Adolescent Conference is a crucial space to listen to young people and break the barriers they face in accessing the information, care, and support needed to make informed and healthy choices.

The Coordinator of the Karongi Youth Center, Aime Niyonagize, highlighted that gatherings such as the Annual Adolescent

Conference provide powerful learning platforms to improve young people's knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights and support them to voice their challenges.

"This conference taught us a lot not just about SRHR, but also how to advocate effectively and support adolescents, especially girls. I hope similar efforts can reach rural districts like ours so that no young person is left behind," he stated.



GROUP DISCUSSIONS

During group discussions, the adolescents were required to discuss the challenges around the channels through which they access information and offer solutions to how best they can be improved. The group presentations highlighted several challenges in accessing information, including widespread misinformation online, limited access to reliable digital platforms, lack of privacy

when seeking sensitive information, the prevalence of misinformation on social media, and insufficient youth-friendly services at community centers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve access, adolescents suggested creating more interactive and secure digital platforms tailored to their needs, increasing awareness of trustworthy sources, establishing confidential spaces in schools and community centers for those seeking information as well as the need to integrate mental health into every aspect of adolescent health.

Presenting outcomes from the group discussions, young people called for meaningful involvement in designing and implementing programs that affect them. Their message was clear; “Nothing about us without us.

” Adolescents want to be part of shaping SRHR solutions, not just recipients of services.

The first annual adolescent conference was organised in 2019.



ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF LEGAL PRACTITIONERS TO APPLY THE NEW LAW REGULATING HEALTH SERVICES

This October, we facilitated a 2-day dialogue for lawyers, legal practitioners, and representatives from child protection, women's rights, and health advocacy institutions on the new law regulating health services. Organized in collaboration with the Rwanda Bar Association, the dialogue sought to enhance participants' understanding of the new legal framework governing healthcare services and to strengthen collaboration between legal and health sectors. The new law regulating health services includes articles strengthening patient rights, assisted reproductive technology such as IVF, surrogacy, egg or sperm donation as well as the removal of parental consent on access to health services for adolescents aged 15 and above. The law also defines professional liability and accountability mechanisms for healthcare providers.



Over the two days, participants examined how these provisions will impact legal practice, health service delivery, and the protection of vulnerable groups.

The discussions unpacked the new health services law by looking at its ethical and social impact, strengthening accountability and legal aid, promoting confidentiality and informed consent, integrating GBV response, and increasing public awareness of patients' rights. Advocate Jean-Baptiste Mvano emphasized the

importance of balancing rights-based approaches with legal interpretation. He challenged participants to reflect on their own lived realities to better understand how biases and cultural contexts can either strengthen or undermine rights.

"To be fair and effective, we must look beyond legal texts. We must first examine our own biases and then focus on being intentional about understanding the everyday lives of those the law is meant to serve and protect," he said.



GBV DISCUSSION

Participants engaged in a conversation on GBV using exercises such as “Gender Boxes” to explore how social norms, biases, and gender expectations influence legal reasoning and justice delivery. The session also explored the GBV Law of 2008, sexual harassment in the workplace, and the gaps between law and practice. Participants reflected on how power dynamics, culture, and hierarchy affect harassment, highlighting the key importance

of clear reporting channels, accountability mechanisms, and legal awareness to ensure enforcement.

A WELCOME WORKSHOP

The Improvement and Development Officer at the Rwanda Bar Association (RBA), Joy Mukakamali, pointed out that the newly enacted health services law marks an important milestone in strengthening accountability and clarity within the sector.

She also added that the workshop will support the legal practitioners to become more effective in advising and supporting their clients.

“This law is new, and many people aren’t yet familiar with its provisions. This training helps us guide clients, raise awareness, and turn progressive policies into action at the community level,” she added. Denise Teta, Policy and Advocacy Officer at Health Development Initiative (HDI), highlighted the importance of the training, pointing out that while the new medical law is a progressive milestone, gaps in legal awareness persist.

“Legislation alone does not guarantee change; effective implementation depends on all stakeholders, including legal practitioners supporting health facilities to apply the law and protect the rights of patients,” she said. Teta said that the dialogue was also an opportunity for participants to also learn about emerging issues such as technology-related GBV.

“With this knowledge, we hope they can contribute to the ongoing review of GBV laws and ensure that their legal input keeps pace with Rwanda’s evolving social realities,” she said.



Liberal Majyambere, a practicing lawyer and mediator, said the training has been valuable for keeping legal practitioners updated about recent legal changes.

“As lawyers, we have a responsibility to stay informed about legal reforms. This knowledge is key as we guide clients who can be providers, patients, and the general community to understand their rights and obligations under the law.”

He called for more similar opportunities to ensure that more legal practitioners are informed.



EMPOWERING CROSS-BORDER COMMUNITIES WITH HEALTH EDUCATION AND SERVICE PROVISION

In partnership with International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), we conducted a month-long community outreach programme in Rubavu District, Gisenyi Sector, aimed at strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among vulnerable and mobile populations living along the Rwanda–DRC border. The initiative combined capacity-building sessions, direct service delivery, and stakeholder engagement to ensure that communities with heightened

health risks received accurate information, accessible care, and reliable referral pathways. Throughout the month, participants engaged in interactive sessions, gaining practical knowledge and skills related to HIV and STI prevention, gender-based violence response, family planning and contraceptive options, patients' rights under Rwandan law, and available referral pathways for both clinical and psychosocial support.



These sessions were specifically tailored to reach groups that often face exclusion from health systems, including female sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), domestic workers, and other mobile and cross-border populations. As the sessions progressed, participants not only enhanced their understanding of SRHR but also became more aware of the free and confidential services available at HDI's Rubavu Clinic and partner health facilities. Building on this foundation, we collaborated with Gisenyi and Gacuba health centers in Gisenyi to roll out a comprehensive HIV and STI component

that reached over 300 participants. This segment emphasized prevention, safer sex practices, and the importance of timely screening and treatment. This session also included counselling and testing services, as well as pre- and post-test HIV counselling and screening.

To further support safer practices, we also distributed over 20,000 condoms over the course of the month. Testimonies gathered during these sessions highlighted the tangible impact of the outreach.

As the outreach commenced, the focus shifted toward expanding access to family planning and contraception. Participants received clear, factual guidance on the full range of contraceptive methods, the importance of dual protection; using combined methods that prevent both unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and the legal provisions surrounding safe abortion in Rwanda.

Service uptake reflected both interest and need: long-term contraceptives including injectables and implants such as Implanon and Jadelle were administered, alongside doses of emergency contraceptive pills. These services also played a crucial role in dispelling persistent myths about contraception.

Some participants shared that the sessions helped them clarify misconceptions, such as the belief that men who use family planning lose sexual desire.

Others highlighted that access to reproductive health services through the outreach encouraged them to seek care and support for themselves and to guide others in similar situations.



Recognising that menstrual hygiene remains a significant challenge, particularly for women and girls living in transit or engaged in cross-border work, we prioritised conversations on the menstrual cycle and proper hygiene.

Participants received practical education on menstrual hygiene management, addressing misconceptions and empowering women and girls with accurate information. To complement these discussions, packages of sanitary pads were distributed, ensuring that the knowledge shared was supported with essential materials.



These efforts aimed to restore dignity and provide much-needed care to women and girls who often face compounded vulnerabilities due to their mobility and living conditions. Building on the successes and insights from the community outreach, HDI reinforced the impact of its work by engaging strategically with key stakeholders across the district.

Introductory meetings were held with the various local leaders including; the Director of Health for Rubavu District, the Vice Mayor for Social Affairs, and the Head of Gisenyi Health Center.

Health providers in Rubavu expressed appreciation for HDI's role, noting the value of free, non-discriminatory services in a context where many clients face stigma.

Staff at partner health facilities emphasised that the people HDI serves are often discriminated against elsewhere, yet receive free medical care and benefit from SRH education and support that makes a tangible difference in their wellbeing.

As regional tensions continue to displace communities and increase cross-border mobility, and trusted SRHR services are more critical than ever.

Through this month-long outreach, HDI strengthened local health systems, expanded access to lifesaving services, and reinforced the rights and dignity of communities that are often overlooked.

By combining direct service provision, community education, cross-border collaboration, and preparedness efforts, HDI's work in Rubavu continues to build health, resilience, and protection for mobile and crisis-affected populations whose needs remain urgent and ongoing.



CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD THROUGH SCHOOL DEBATES

In October, in partnership with Plan International Rwanda we organized a series of inter-school debates centered on the motion. “This house supports that access to accurate sexual and reproductive health information enables adolescents to make informed choices.” The motion directly aligned with the global theme, “The Girl I am, the change I lead.” The first activity kicked

off in Gatsibo district, where thousands of students gathered at G.s Rwimiteriri in Kibirizi sector. Opening the day, our hotline and project coordinator Diane Uwase reminded students that “The reason as why we are is to celebrate together the International day of the Girl child. We will share our message through debates — follow closely and take what matters to you.”



The debate were officially opened by Gatsibo Education Inspector Mbarubukeye Callixte, He emphasized the importance of women, “a girl who feels valued grows into a woman who contributes confidently to her society. Girls should say no to any form of violence that hinders them from realizing their dreams” The debate kicked off with the proposition side supporting the motion, Irandukunda Beulla, a 15 year old from s3 at G.s Rwimitereri where she supported the motion stating that, “When we have correct information, we can protect ourselves and make choices that help our future, also having

information on Sexual reproductive health helps us to understand our bodies and also how we can prevent our selves from unplanned pregnancies”

“I disagree with this statement,” said Isimbi Lyna. “What matters most are the cultural values and norms we grew up with. As Rwandans, we are raised to uphold our values before anything else,” she emphasized. “If young people have SRHR knowledge but lack those values, it’s like having wisdom guided by the wrong spirit.”

Lyna Isimbi continued to challenge the motion, raising concerns about trust and credibility. "How can we be sure the information we're given is even right? Who decides its value?" she asked. She argued that guidance should come primarily from parents rather than outside institutions. "When the information comes from elsewhere, we can't always tell who truly has our best interests at heart," she added.

Muhoza Alliera, a 14 years old S1 student, challenged Lyna with a simple questions; "Lyna, don't you trust the information you get from teachers, youth centers or institutions that provide SRHR guidance, like the Kumbe radio talk show on Kiss Fm?" she added that while parents play a role, they are not the only reliable source. "Teachers, trained peers, and radio programs also help us learn. We know many parents shy away from these conversations, so information can't come from them alone."

Niyomugisha Liliane a 15 year in S2, came in to support what Lyna Isimbi said both from the opposition side, "I'm afraid that giving adolescents too much information might actually push them toward sexual activities," she argued. "When young people learn thing like how to use a condom, some boyfriends may pressure girls into trying it.



Even if the girl agrees out of fear or confusion, that pressure itself becomes a form of sexual violence."

" I really don't agree with that," Zaninka Yvonne said, "Knowledge and information empowers adolescents, especially girls to stand against abuse, make informed choices and understanding themselves, Just because my friend agrees to having sexual acitivities with my her boyfriend doesn't mean I should do the same." Zaninka emphasized.



She concluded by emphasizing that, “When young people have information and knowledge about their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), it equips us with a sense of responsibility— We learn how to make decisions even underpressure. Having knowledge doesn’t automatically lead to certain actions — Knowledge is power, and choosing to act is actually part of the information and knowledge.”

The debate ended with the proposition side taking the trophy home, marking another success in the series of debate competitions. It also highlighted the importance of celebrating the International Day of the Girl Child by equipping girls and boys with knowledge, showcasing their talents, and creating discussions that amplify their voices affirming their right to access accurate information.



We were happy to host the RRP+ team, the national network of people living with HIV, with whom we discussed potential areas of collaboration on HIV prevention and management. The team was also keen to learn how our SRHR hotline works and explore ways to incorporate it into their HIV prevention and support programs.



This October, we joined the Embassy of Sweden in Rwanda for a field visit to Huye District. There, we engaged with partner organizations serving key populations, learned from Medical Students for Choice about future safe abortion service provision, and explored collaboration opportunities with Mayor Ange Sebutege regarding inclusive health services.

A Glimpse into the screening of “Her Right”

This October, in partnership with RWAMREC, AfriYan and Kwetu Films, we screened “Her Right”, a documentary exploring the hidden realities of labia elongation, a traditional practice that is often promoted for its supposed sexual pleasure benefits. Featuring perspectives from

women, researchers, activists, lawyers, and a gynaecologist, the film opens dialogue on harmful social and gender norms and how the practice, when performed on minor girls who cannot give informed consent, violates their bodily autonomy.



Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



We were delighted to host the Sida Headquarters Finance team, led by CFO Anders Eliasson, to discuss our partnership, showcase our impact, and provide firsthand experience of our clinics and SRHR call center serving women and adolescent girls.



Delighted to host Médecins du Monde Global and Mdm Tanzania to review the Tubiteho Project and connect with community groups and peer educators advancing harm reduction for people who use drugs.

IN OTHER NEWS

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



4TH OCTOBER 2025:
ARE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS TREATABLE?

11TH OCTOBER 2025:
UNDERSTANDING THE POSSIBLE CAUSES OF FAMILY
CONFLICT

18TH OCTOBER 2025:
UNDERSTANDING STIS AND HOW THEY SPREAD



5TH OCTOBER 2025:
FAQS ON HOW TO PREVENT UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES

12TH OCTOBER 2025:
CELEBRATING THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE
GIRL CHILD

19TH OCTOBER 2025:
KEY FACTS ABOUT MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

26TH OCTOBER 2025:
RELIABLE SOURCES OF ACCURATE SRHR INFORMATION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



Edmund Kagire
@kagire

Oh my! Just watched "Her Right: Not Her Choice", a documentary produced by @EricKabera and @HDIRwanda on "gukuna," the practice of labia elongation in #Rwanda. It lays bare how culture, beauty & pressure intersect; where pride meets pain. It is deeply thought-provoking. #HerRight



6:40 pm · 29 Oct 2025 · **24.5K** Views



Dr. Samuel Byiringiro 🇷🇼❤️🇸🇪
@Samu_Byiringiro

Understanding healthcare ethics is key to protecting patients and ensuring fair access for all.
From minors' rights and contraceptive access to surrogacy and legal accountability, these discussions shape a safer, more equitable healthcare system for next generations.

1:58 pm · 29 Oct 2025 · **288** Views



Health Development Initiative (HDI)
1,961 followers
1mo · 🌐

This past week, we joined the **Embassy of Sweden in Kigali** team on a field visit to @HuyeDistrict, where we met two partner organizations serving key populations. We discussed their programs, challenges, and ideas on how to improve.

We also met with Medical Students for Choice to learn how they are strengthening their capacity to safely provide abortion services in the future.

The visit concluded with a courtesy call to the Huye District Mayor, Ange Sebutege with whom we explored potential collaboration opportunities for inclusive health services.



Aime Bertrand Nizeyimana · 2nd 1mo · ...
Medical Student at University of Rwanda, Passi...

The visit from the **Embassy of Sweden in Kigali** and **Health Development Initiative (HDI)** was an eye-opening and inspiring experience for us at MSFC_Huye Chapter. Engaging in discussions about programs, challenges, and innovative ideas reminded us how collaboration and shared vision can drive real change in improving health outcomes for all, especially for key populations.

We are more motivated than ever to strengthen our capacity and uphold our commitment to providing inclusive, evidence-based, and compassionate reproductive health services. This visit reaffirmed our belief that with the right partnerships and dedication, we can make a lasting impact in our community and contribute meaningfully to a healthier, more equitable future.

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HDI WISHES TO THANK OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

- AMPLIFYCHANGE
- ANGEL FAMILY FUND
- BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE
- CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE
- CRICKET BUILDS HOPE
- DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO RWANDA
- EAFP
- EQUIMUNDO
- EXPERTISE FRANCE
- FEMNET
- FOSI/OSIEA
- FP2030
- GIZ
- GLIHD
- GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS
- IMBUTO FOUNDATION
- IMRO
- IPPF
- JHPIEGO/MCGL
- MEDECIN DU MONDE
- MEDICAL DOCTORS FOR CHOICE
- MEDICAL STUDENTS FOR CHOICE
- MINISTRY OF GENDER AND FAMILY PROMOTION
- MINISTRY OF HEALTH
- MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
- MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID
- PARLIAMENT OF RWANDA
- PLAN INTERNATIONAL RWANDA
- PSA
- RNGOF
- ROBERT ANGEL AND FAMILY FOUNDATION
- RWANDA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM
- RWANDA SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS
- RWANDA BIOMEDICAL CENTER
- RWANDA EDUCATION BOARD
- RWANDA GOVERNANCE BOARD
- RWAMREC
- SISTERLOVE INC.
- SOCIETY FOR FAMILY HEALTH
- STEPHEN LEWIS FOUNDATION
- STOP TB PARTNERSHIP
- STRIVE FOUNDATION RWANDA
- THE CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
- THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION
- THE EMBASSY OF SWEDEN
- THE EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF NETHERLANDS
- THE GLOBAL FUND
- THE NEWTIMES
- UHAI-EASHRI
- UNAIDS
- UNFPA
- UNICEF
- VSO
- WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

