

HDI NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2022



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD: HDI PRODUCES DOCUMENTARY ON 'PERIOD POVERTY'

Every October 11, we join the world to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child, in recognition of girls' rights and the unique challenges that they face. In celebration of this day, this year, Rwanda's theme was 'My Health, My Dignity'.

In line with the theme, HDI in partnership with UNFPA tackled the issue of period poverty, a challenge that many girls, especially those in rural areas, continue to grapple with.

Period poverty refers to the lack of access to menstrual products, hygienic spaces and the presence of stigma or shame associated with menstruation. We visited TVET Rubona, in rural Rwamagana District, Eastern Province where we interviewed a cross section of girls on the challenges that they face accessing sanitary products as part of our documentary on period poverty in Rwanda.



A study by WEE and WaterAid conducted in Rwanda, 38.7% of Rwandan women rely on unsafe methods for menstrual management while 72.9% have challenges related to accessing sanitary pads due to their high price. A pack of ten sanitary pads costs between \$1 and \$1.2.

At TVET Rubona, we interviewed Tabitha Nyiramahirwe, a student, who told us that just like her, there are many girls in her school whose parents are unable to afford purchasing sanitary products every month due to poverty. She said that as a result, many of them have resorted to using pieces of cloth cut out of old clothes.

“What we normally do is get our mothers’ old skirts or any other pieces of clothing, cut them into pieces and then use them for padding. It is very uncomfortable and shameful, especially when you have to wash those pieces of clothing and hang them on the wire to dry,” she said.

For Francine Muragijimana, also a student at TVET Rubona, lack of sanitary pads is a constant point of frustration and worry for many girls in her school. As a result, she says that some of the girls are forced to miss school.





“ Many parents invest in their children because they hope that in future, those children will in turn, take care of them when they get old. This is not the same attitude they have towards children with disabilities because they don’t foresee them being of value to them in future.

Yvonne Uwicyeza Nkaka,
A youth with disabilities

“There are many times when a student can fail to get sanitary products and constantly have to worry about staining themselves at school. This makes many girls uncomfortable and unfortunately, when that happens, you are always lagging behind the other students because you are missing out on some classes,” she said.

Globally, women and girls continue to face stigma and exclusion due to menstruation. However, girls with disabilities often experience double discrimination, due to both their gender and disability, making them far less likely to receive the information, supplies and support they need during menstruation.

She explains that many families are already poor and cannot afford to buy sanitary pads for their children but even when the funds are available, many don’t see the need to invest in girls with disabilities. In 2020, the government made a significant step forward and removed the Value Added Tax (VAT) on sanitary products.

However, a pack of sanitary pads still costs the equivalent of a day’s wages for many low-income women. This means that school going girls who cannot afford sanitary products will continue to miss school, have a lower standard of education, and will less likely be able to find a high-income job in future.

What can be done?

As part of the documentary, we interviewed local sanitary pad manufacturers on finding the way forward. Claire Ketsia Kabanyana, Founder and President, Dorcus Consolation Family said that manufacturers continue to face challenges when purchasing raw materials.

“They are still very expensive. I think that whether it’s those producing reusable or single use sanitary pads, local manufacturers should be supported. There should be some exemptions when buying materials both locally and internationally,” she said.

She added that this will give manufacturers an opportunity to produce different sanitary products as well as provide girls a wide range of products to choose from.

“Access is good, but affordability is also very important,” she said.

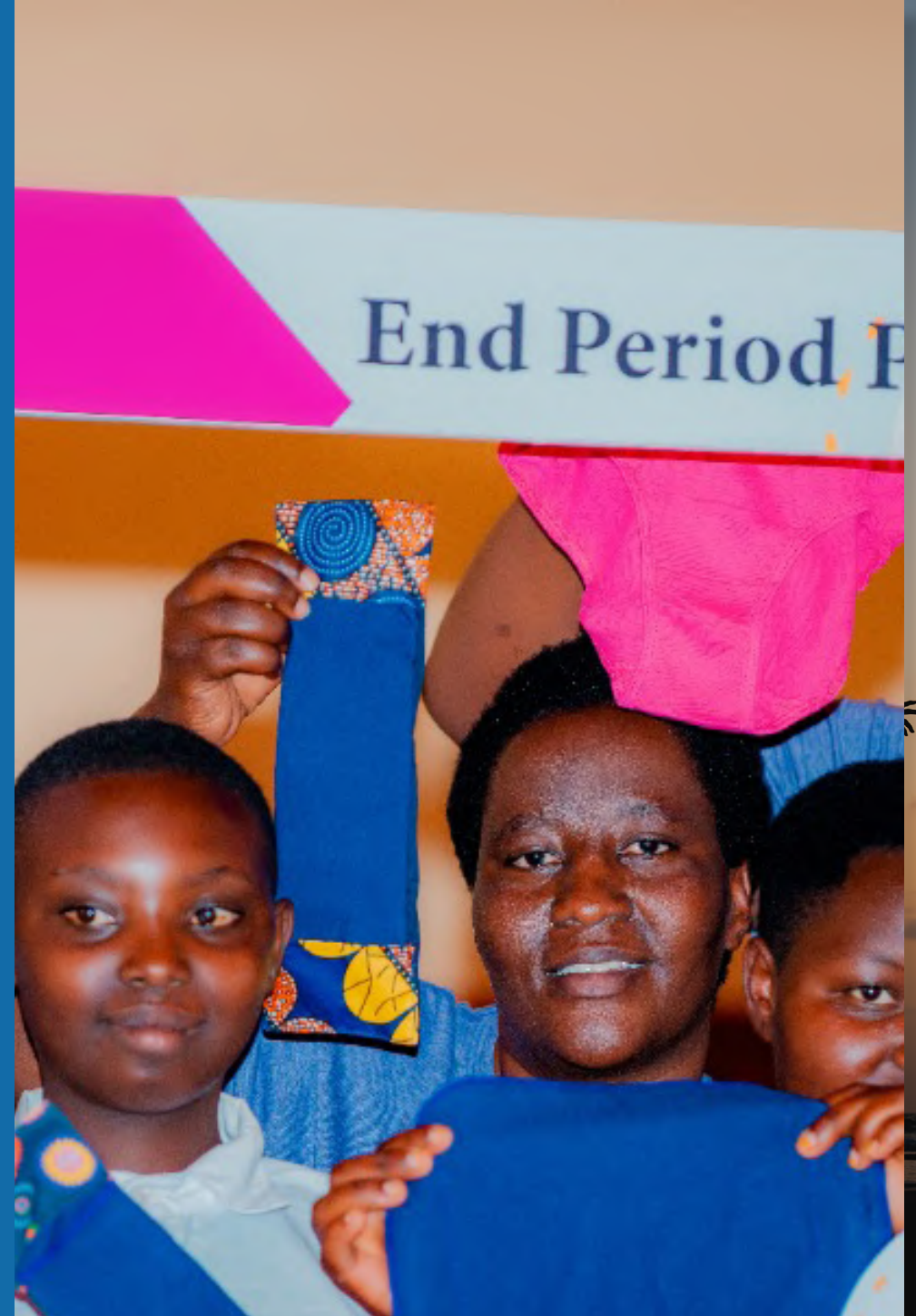


In a separate interview, Opportune Uwacu Tumukunde, the Operations Manager for Kosmotive said that her company has not been able to put the affordable reusable pads that they produce on the market due to challenges related to standards.

“We are not yet permitted to take our products to the market because the standards guiding reusable pads manufacturing are not yet in place. We request those in charge of putting those standards in place to expedite the process so that the girls and women seeking these products are able to access them easily and in a timely manner,” she said.

However, there has been progress. For example, the Ministry of education requires every school to have a girls’ room where girls can access sanitary pads, water, and soap during menstruation to facilitate them not to miss school.

Besides the documentary, we also hosted a Twitter Space under the topic, “Debunking Stigma Associated with Menstruation in Rwanda’ where participants discussed different topics including myths and facts about menstruation and challenges faced by girls and women with disabilities in accessing information and services among others.



YOUNG PEOPLE REACT TO DEBATE ON PARLIAMENTARY DECISION ON CONTRACEPTIVES

In the month of October, the Parliament rejected the amendments of Article 7 of the Law relating to human reproductive health that was advocating for the age at which teenagers can access contraceptives to be lowered to 15.

The public, particularly young people, expressed their discontent with the decision. Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRH&R) is an essential component of the Reproductive Health Policy adopted in 2003. Additionally, Rwanda has committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2035, placing Family Planning and adolescent sexual reproductive health as a priority to achieve universal health coverage.



The Bill was expected to respond to the challenges around the rising number of teen pregnancies with 20,000-23,000 teens impregnated each year. Members of Parliament who opposed the Bill cited cultural concerns and religious beliefs as reasons for their stance. Some MPs who rejected the draft bill called for more involvement of different stakeholders like parents and faith-based organizations on the issue.

In a Twitter space hosted by HDI and tuned in by more than 4,000 young people, concerns related to the rise of teenage pregnancies were discussed as many called on the MPs to rely on the available data or to commission a study to inform unbiased decisions related to SRHR. "Why don't we involve 15-year-olds themselves and seek their opinion about this matter that affects them?"

It is not a secret that (we) teenagers are sexually active at an early age. It is high time parents and others helped us to look for solutions," said 18-year-old Agape Fabiola Ikirezi. Currently in Rwanda, anyone aged under 18 is considered a minor. However, those aged between 16 and 18 can access some sexual reproductive health information and services with consent from their parents or guardians.

"Teens, especially girls, simply want a say about their own bodies. All we ask is to be given a chance to have options. Not every 15-year-old wants to use contraception but it is important to know that I have options should I find myself in a particularly tricky position," said Janon Mudacogora, a University student.

In a debate aired on Rwanda Television, the Program Officer in Charge of Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Ange Umutoni said that the Bill doesn't necessarily involve introducing teens to severe contraceptive methods but denies them overall access including even the simplest of all, condoms which exposes them to risks.

"With or without support, young people will involve in sexual activities. It's better we educate them, while also facilitating them to avoid risks." she said.

DUTY BEARERS, CBOS MEET IN DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND INCLUSION



This October, we held two-day interface workshops with 60 Complaint Officers, Civil Status Registration Officers, and Community Based Organisation (CBO) leaders drawn from Nyarugenge, Kicukiro and Gasabo districts aimed at improving the knowledge of duty bearers on human rights and inclusion. The meeting provided a platform where reflections on appropriate interventions tackling extreme indifferences or hostile attitudes toward the LGBT and Sex workers people can be made.



The Facilitator, Christopher Sengoga updated the participants on how best they can rely on the Constitution and other relevant policies and laws to effectively approach issues within their communities and ensure that human rights and citizen safety are guaranteed. The representatives of the key populations CBOs reminded that stigma and discrimination continue to block many of them from reporting their challenges and seeking solutions.

Khatibu Hakizimana, the President of Building Hope for Future(BHF) said that the dialogues are an opportunity to face their leaders and shed light on the challenges that members of the LGBT community face.

“When the workshop began, there was a lot of negativity, but by the time it was over, both groups were on the same page. The leaders were willing to listen instead of being defensive. Meeting them face to face is good because the next time we approach them with any challenge, we are sure that they will remember pledging to protect and serve us,” he said.

Consolee Nyiraharerimana, who represented the Gasabo District Sex workers said that the meeting was a learning opportunity for the leaders to listen and understand.

“We have had incidences where we approach local authorities to report cases of rape and the leaders send us to get condoms. It’s dehumanizing. I am walking out of this meeting with some hope because at least, our leaders acknowledged that they could do better in terms of supporting us to fight discrimination,” she said.

She called for more such dialogues since most of her peers are not aware of

their rights. Jean Pierre Hakizuwera, the Citizen Complaint Officer at Rusororo Sector said that the training was instrumental in teaching the leaders how to serve their communities using a human rights-based approach.

“We learnt that before everything else, key populations are human beings must be treated with dignity devoid of stigma or discrimination. We can do better as leaders in terms of how we have been addressing their challenges,” he said.

Angelique Mukarutabana, the Complaint Officer of Nyakabanda Sector, said that the workshop was an eye-opener for her since there is a lot

that she was doing in her line of work that did not know was a violation of human rights. In 2021, HDI in collaboration with Africa Population Health Research Center (APHRC) conducted a study that provided insights into the lived experiences of sexual minorities in Rwanda.

The findings indicate that about two-thirds of the respondents had experienced at least one form of discrimination, but this experience was more common when participating in religious (44.9%), cultural (41.7%) events, and when looking for housing (30%).

“ For instance, I didn’t know that evicting someone has particular procedures set by the law. I suggest that more such workshops are extended to more leaders and refresher ones are introduced each year to help us serve our communities better.

- Angelique Mukarutabana, the Complaint Officer of Nyakabanda Sector

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK



HDI Rwanda
@HDIRwanda

Host



HDI Rwanda Host

Icyemezo cy'uko Abadepite banze kwemeza Ishingiro ry'umushinga w'itege

18 Oct 2022 · 2h 46m · 5,692 tuned in

Play recording

6:53 PM · 18/10/2022 · [Twitter for Android](#)



RUKUNDO Athanase
@Rukath

Replying to [@RobCyubahiro](#) [@JujuLaBelle](#) and 2 others

Next time invite the ministry of health and other concerned institutions to contribute in these twitter space. These are not just numbers, they're human beings whose right to health is being denied. [#Rwot](#)

10:02 PM · 18/10/2022 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



MWISENEZA Jean Claude
@mwiseclau

Replying to [Icyemezo cy'uko Abadepite banze kwemeza Ishingiro ry'umushinga w'itege](#)

Well said Honorable [@Theomporanyi](#) abantu bose by'umwihariko abafata ibyemezo dusobanukirwe ubuzima bw'imyororokere bifashe korohereza abantu bose kubugiraho uburenganzira

9:01 PM · 18/10/2022 · [Twitter for Android](#)



Frank Kigenza
@Rwakigenza

Replying to [@HDIRwanda](#)

[#Lawmakers](#) we're not asked to decide whether it was OKAY for a 15YO to access contraceptives.

They were asked to decide whether it was OKAY to let a 15YO become a [#Mother](#). Their response was affirmative, illogical and sordid.



Alice in Rwandaland
@bayinganaa

Anyways shout out to HDI-Rwanda for never letting up on this fight! We, unlike that parliament, refuse to abandon our youth and leave them absolutely unprepared and unprotected!

7:53 PM · 17/10/2022 · [Twitter Web App](#)



RUKUNDO Athanase
@Rukath

Replying to [@RobCyubahiro](#) [@JujuLaBelle](#) and 2 others

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10:02 PM · 18/10/2022 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



Deus
@deus_muhirwa

Replying to [@HDIRwanda](#)

There is a great need of making policies basing on available data of research, the forest is on fire 🔥 as far as teenage pregnancies are concerned and there should be an emergency intervention, you can imagine 23k of young girls in one year.

8:19 PM · 18/10/2022 · [Twitter for Android](#)



Le Robert 🐦
@LeRobert13

Thank you [@HDIRwanda](#) for the fruitful conversation today? 🙏🙏



KANAMUGIRE Alain Thierry 🇷🇺
@kanamugiret

Replying to [@HDIRwanda](#)

[@RwandaParliamnt](#) I'd like to see MP following this debate and exchange with the society on the case



Amiel NZAYISENGA
@Amiel3418

Replying to [@HDIRwanda](#) and [@CricketBuilds](#)

[#SRH](#) Information are the key for young adolescent to know more abt their body's change according to their age!

HDI wishes to thank our partners and supporters

- AMPLIFYCHANGE
- BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE
- CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE
- DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO RWANDA
- EAHP
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- FOSI/OSIEA
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