

HDI NEWSLETTER

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CELEBRATING
INTERNATIONAL SAFE ABORTION DAY

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Dear Partners,

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

In this edition, we spotlight the International Safe Abortion Day celebrations, a platform that we leveraged to advance our advocacy efforts for safe and legal abortion.

We also highlight the value of empowering communities through promoting contraception use and how these efforts enable individuals to make informed choices about their reproductive health.

Next, we share highlights from the capacity building course for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on evidence-based advocacy and its significance towards empowering these organizations to become effective agents of social transformation.

Our final feature takes us to Nyagatare, where we engaged community leaders in critical conversations about the prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and teenage pregnancies and how we can collaborate to create safer environments for all.

As you read through these articles, we encourage you to reflect on the roles we can all play in fostering positive change.

Thank you for joining us on this advocacy journey. Together, let's continue to make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities, one step at a time.



CHAMPIONING WOMEN'S RIGHT TO SAFE AND LEGAL ABORTION CARE

This September, we joined the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) coalition at Kinyinya Health Center in Gasabo District to observe the International Safe Abortion Day.

The International Safe Abortion Day is a global celebration dedicated to advocating for a woman's right to access safe and legal abortion care as an essential component of women's healthcare and a fundamental human right. The celebrations, spearheaded by the Rwanda NGOs Forum on HIV/AIDS and Health

Promotion (RNGOF), a member of the coalition, highlighted the crucial need to destigmatize abortion.

Representing AmplifyChange Coalition members and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Bernard Muramira emphasized the need to destigmatize safe abortion. In his address, he shed light on the grave health risks associated with unsafe abortion practices.

The RNGOF Board Chair, Bernard Muramira highlighted the pivotal role played by Civil Society Organisations' extensive outreach programs, educational initiatives, and advocacy efforts enabling women to access proper healthcare information and services.

He added that these efforts not only empower them to make informed choices about their reproductive health, but also provide them with an opportunity to choose those that align with their individual needs and circumstances. Speaking at the event, the guest of honor, the Gasabo District Executive

Administrator, Pauline Umwali, reaffirmed the government's commitment to women's rights and healthcare. She emphasized the importance of the Ministerial Order on Safe Abortion, calling it a testament to Rwanda's unwavering dedication to safeguarding women's reproductive health.

She stressed the CSO and government's collective obligation to disseminate the provisions of this Order to communities to reduce the risk women and girls face when they resort to unqualified medical practitioners for abortion services.



Representing the Director General of the Rwanda Biomedical Center, Dr. Patrick Migambi shed light on the encouraging progress made in the provision of safe abortion services over the past three years.

He said that health facilities authorized to provide these services reported a substantial increase in the number of women and girls seeking safe abortion care. The figures have risen from 1,035 cases in 2020 to 1,936 cases as of June 2023.

He also expressed gratitude to the dedicated community health workers and CSOs who have played a pivotal role in disseminating information related to the Ministerial Order on Abortion.



The Numbers



In his address the Director at Kibagabaga Hospital Dr. Ernest Munyemana pointed out that despite the revision of laws to ease access to safe and legal abortion, the tragic consequences of unsafe abortions persist.

Over the past five years, an alarming 3,600 individuals have resorted to illegal abortions, resulting in negative outcomes. These figures are based on those who sought help at hospitals due to complications. In contrast, a mere 81 individuals have benefited from safe abortion services.

He said that these figures must be brought to light, ensuring that communities are well-informed about safe abortion and that those in need receive the high-quality care that they deserve.

THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL CELEBRATIONS

Prior to observing the International Safe ABortion Day, we joined Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD) and other AmplifyChange coalition members in Mushishiro Sector, Muhanga District to observe the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the Maputo Protocol.

The Maputo Protocol, a groundbreaking international treaty adopted by the African Union in 2003, was specifically designed to promote and protect the rights of women on the African continent. The protocol addresses a wide range of issues, including political and social equality, access to justice, protection from violence, and reproductive rights. For instance, Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol recognizes the importance of women's

health and reproductive rights and emphasizes the need for accessible healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services.

In its Section 2, it calls for States to provide appropriate services for the safe termination of pregnancy in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus.

In his remarks, Tom Mulisa, the Executive Director of GLIHD, recognised Rwanda's accomplishments in championing the cause of women rights and commended the government for being among the few that have taken deliberate steps in safeguarding women's lives by providing them the option to seek the care of qualified healthcare professionals when considering abortion.

As we embark on this journey, we are reminded of the significance of our shared commitment to advance the principles enshrined in the Maputo Protocol. Today's program is designed to engage, inspire, and inform, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, sectors, and experiences to celebrate the achievements made by Rwanda and its strong dedication to the cause of women's rights.

- Tom Mulisa,

Executive Director, Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development



The Chairperson of the National Commission for Human Rights, Marie Claire Mukasine, reaffirmed the importance of the Maputo Protocol and its transformative impact on women's rights in Rwanda.

The Maputo Protocol is a valuable instrument that can truly continue to benefit us, but its effectiveness hinges on our active participation as citizens. The responsibility for women's rights and empowerment should not rest solely on politicians; it necessitates our collective engagement as well. While the journey for women's rights continues, it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that we have overcome. Looking ahead to the future, the aspiration to advance and uphold women's rights becomes an achievable reality only when we unite as a cohesive force, joining our strengths and efforts harmoniously.

- Marie Claire Mukasine,
Chairperson, National Commission for Human Rights.





It is crucial to acknowledge that our progress is the result of the collective efforts of civil society organizations, which work tirelessly towards empowering women and advocating for their rights. The unwavering dedication of these organizations serves as a testament to the strides we have made and highlight the importance of collaboration in our journey towards equality.

- Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, The AmplifyChange Coalition Lead and & Executive Director, HDI Rwanda

The AmplifyChange Coalition Lead and also our Executive Director, Dr. Aflodis Kagaba, reminded that Maputo Protocol embodies the coalition's collective commitment towards promoting gender equality and women empowerment.

He reminded that a lot of work still lies ahead, calling for renewed commitment to championing the cause of gender equality, ensuring a brighter, more equitable future for all. She congratulated the AmplifyChange Coalition's commitment to advancing human rights and more specifically women's rights

and empowerment and reminded that achieving this requires collective effort including the African communities.

It is worth noting that at both events, we provided a family planning stand, where attendees had access to crucial information about their reproductive health choices.

By providing comprehensive resources and support, we aimed to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their bodies and their futures.



BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF CSOS TO EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO LAWS AND POLICIES

In partnership with AmplifyChange, we organised a transformative 4-day intensive capacity building course, tailored to empower 25 passionate individuals representing various young Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with the practical skills essential for navigating the terrain of policy formulation and legislative processes.

Throughout this comprehensive course, participants explored different sessions and group activities expertly curated to ensure that the content was not only pertinent but also aligned seamlessly with the current trends and challenges in the area of policy advocacy.

The course immersed participants in the intricacies of evidence-based advocacy, underscoring the pivotal role of robust evidence in campaigns while emphasizing ethical dimensions in evidence collection.

Under the expert guidance of the facilitator, participants explored comprehensive research methodologies. This encompassed everything from research design and data collection techniques to sampling methods and basic data analysis and interpretation. The focus was not just on learning these techniques in isolation but on practical application—identifying and framing issues using evidence, conducting situation analysis, and studying case studies of impactful campaigns.

Furthermore, participants received hands-on guidance in key areas such as goal setting, the formulation of evidence-based strategies, and the creation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

A crucial aspect of the course was the exploration of coalition building and stakeholder engagement, where participants learned how to forge alliances effectively. The participants discussed advocacy campaign

evaluation were thoroughly explored, ensuring that participants not only understood the techniques but also the ethical considerations in evidence collection. This encompassed a careful approach to data privacy, addressing biases, and responsible dissemination of gathered evidence.

ADVOCACY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Facilitated by the experienced lawyer Christian Garuka, the participants explored the process involved in crafting a good advocacy communication strategy.

The session looked into the multifaceted aspects that contribute to the success of any impactful advocacy initiative, recognizing that effective communication lies at the heart of driving meaningful change.

The participants had in-depth analysis of vital communication tools that serve as the backbone of any persuasive advocacy campaign, reviewing the latest technology and platforms that can be leveraged to amplify their messages, ensuring a wider reach.

A significant focus was placed on the identification of key stakeholders, emphasizing the need to recognize and engage with individuals, organizations, and communities that wield influence or are directly impacted by the cause.

This stakeholder analysis provided attendees with the strategic skills required to tailor their messages effectively, fostering genuine connections with those who could champion their cause further.

Furthermore, the session enlightened participants on the art of selecting the most appropriate communication mediums tailored to diverse audiences.

In an era characterized by diverse media consumption habits, understanding different channels – be it social media platforms, traditional print media, or immersive digital experiences –

is imperative. Advocates learned how to curate their messages for specific mediums, ensuring maximum impact across varied demographics. A cornerstone of the discussion was mastering the craft of crafting compelling media messages.

Attendees looked at the psychology of persuasive communication techniques such as storytelling, impactful visuals, and relatable narratives, equipping advocates with the expertise to weave narratives that tug at the heartstrings and inspire change.

This course was set apart by its holistic approach. Beyond theoretical knowledge, participants were fully immersed in practical exercises mirroring real-world scenarios and facilitated to engage in mock advocacy campaigns, an experience that not only boosted their confidence but also honed their communication and persuasion skills.

This course was also an opportunity for the participants to foster a vibrant network of like-minded individuals committed to driving positive change. Through group discussions, enriching peer-to-peer learning, and collaborative projects, participants seamlessly shared their experiences and best practices.

This collective exchange not only enriched their shared knowledge base but also fostered a spirit of collaboration that extended far beyond the boundaries of the course itself. This cohort on Evidence-Based Advocacy is one of the two

groups, each comprising 25 participants. As a testament to their hard work and commitment, each cohort concludes with a significant milestone: a graduation ceremony where participants are acknowledged for their achievements and presented with a well-deserved certificate, recognizing their expertise in the Evidence-Based Advocacy domain.

This achievement not only signifies their individual growth and knowledge but also marks the collective success of the program, showcasing the impact of education and collaboration.





EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH PROMOTING CONTRACEPTION USE

In collaboration with Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), UNFPA, and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), we launched a transformative one-week outreach program in Bugesera and Nyamasheke districts to raise awareness on contraception and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), with a special emphasis on cervical cancer screening.



These districts were specifically chosen due to their low uptake of modern family planning methods. The outreach initiative marked a pioneering step in integrating NCDs within Sexual Reproductive Health programming, enhancing the holistic healthcare approach.

Throughout the outreach, our dedicated teams engaged in one-on-one sessions with individuals, emphasizing the significance of contraception in family planning.

They provided comprehensive information about various contraceptive options, empowering people to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. Additionally, the outreach campaign served as a platform to remind the

communities in these districts of the critical value of regular screenings of NCDs and the pivotal role this plays in identifying potential health issues before they escalate, allowing timely intervention and improved treatment outcomes.

Furthermore, the outreach efforts emphasized the significance of a holistic approach to healthcare. This approach includes lifestyle modifications, such as adopting a balanced diet, engaging in regular physical activity, avoiding tobacco and alcohol consumption, and managing stress. These lifestyle choices, when combined with regular screenings, form a comprehensive strategy for preventing not only cervical cancer but also other NCDs like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory disorders.



To enhance the reach of our contraception outreach efforts, we employed a comprehensive multimedia approach, utilizing both social and traditional media platforms.

This included leveraging popular social media channels like Twitter, as well as radio and TV talk shows featuring carefully chosen panelists. Through these mediums, we aimed to educate the public about the advantages of contraception use and raise awareness about the wide range of family planning services accessible to our clients.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of reaching specific communities directly, we enlisted the assistance of a Mobile Sound System, strategically deployed in targeted areas. This innovative method was designed to capture the attention of residents and encourage them to avail our services.

By integrating these diverse communication strategies, we successfully engaged a larger audience, ensuring that vital information about contraception and family planning services reached those who needed it most.



WORLD CONTRACEPTION DAY CELEBRATIONS

One week after the outreach, we joined other partners in Mushishiro Sector, Nyamasheke district to observe the World Contraception Day.

This year's theme "Build Healthy Communities and Sustainable Development through Promoting Contraception Use" resonates with Rwanda's commitment to the SDG2030 agenda emphasizing the principle of leaving no one behind,

promotion of universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and advancing gender equality among others.

Representing the AmplifyChange Coalition members and other civil society organizations, Charlotte Mukandungutse highlighted the critical role played by CSOs in promoting reproductive health.



Through advocacy, education, service delivery and research, civil society organizations play a critical role of challenging and transforming societal norms that can hinder reproductive health. By fostering these conversations, changing attitudes, and reducing stigma surrounding reproductive health issues, CSOs contribute to creating an environment in which individuals are empowered to make informed choices and improve the overall quality of life.

- Charlotte Mukandungutse,

Speaking on behalf of AmplifyChange Coalition and other CSOs

The Head of the UNFPA Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit Marie Claire Iryanyawera highlighted the pivotal role of family planning in the significant reduction of maternal mortality rates. She discouraged the stereotype that associates family planning with only women and urged men and the general community to be actively involved.



I would like to express our gratitude to the government for its commendable efforts in ensuring that accessible family planning services are available to everyone, leaving no one behind. These efforts are crucial to our ongoing work to reduce maternal mortality and ensure the well-being of all mothers, families, and the entire nation.

- Marie Claire Iryanyawera,
Head of the UNFPA Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit

On the sidelines of the celebrations, our team set up a Family Planning services booth, offering vital information, empowering families with the choice and knowledge to plan their futures effectively. There were also teams to conduct NCD screenings, to detect potential health issues early, promoting preventive healthcare and ensuring that individuals received necessary guidance to lead healthier lives.



ENGAGING NYAGATARE LEADERS ON PREVENTION OF GBV AND TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

This September, we partnered with Nyagatare District to raise awareness about the prevention and response to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and teenage pregnancies. The dialogue, facilitated under the Generation Gender Program, targeted 30 GBV service providers at the district level and 691 Inshuti

Zumuryango (Friends of the Family) across all the Sectors and at district level, equipping them with the information and community engagement tools to support them to break the cycle of GBV and early pregnancies.

Speaking at the dialogue, the Vice Mayor of Nyagatare District in Charge of Social Affairs Juliet Murekatete appreciated the contributions made by the Generation Gender Program and its collaborators and highlighted the pivotal role they play in addressing urgent issues of GBV and unintended pregnancies within the district.

She pointed out that by offering spaces for dialogue, encouraging conversations around gender equality, and tackling sensitive topics, programs like Generation Gender contribute to dismantling gender stereotypes and challenge harmful social norms, paving the way for a more inclusive society.

The participants engaged in a comprehensive review of various aspects related to GBV, analysing the efficiency of existing related legal frameworks and exploring innovative strategies to enhance their enforcement.



Promoting Child Rights

During the discussions, the participants looked at various aspects of safeguarding the rights of children, emphasizing the significance of education as an important part of empowering children, not only academically but also in nurturing essential life skills and values.

The participants highlighted the need for inclusive and accessible education systems that cater to diverse learning needs, ensuring that no child is left behind. Furthermore, they stressed the vital role of awareness campaigns in promoting child protection. They emphasized the importance of raising public awareness about the various forms of child abuse, exploitation, and neglect. By fostering a society that is well-informed about these issues, the participants believed it would be possible to create a collective sense of responsibility towards protecting children.

They discussed strategies to encourage community members to actively participate in child protection initiatives, such as neighborhood watch programs,

counseling services, and support networks for families in need. The participants agreed that by fostering a strong sense of community and social support, children are more likely to grow up in nurturing environments that promote their well-being. In addition to these vital issues, the discussions also tackled topics such as sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse where they looked at the root causes and brainstormed actionable solutions. They explored the role of education and awareness campaigns in changing societal attitudes, aiming to create a culture of respect and empathy.

The facilitators encouraged the participants to engage men as allies and advocates in challenging harmful stereotypes, norms, and behaviors that perpetuate GBV and contribute to teenage pregnancies. They highlighted the value of shining a light on positive examples of men who champion gender equality who can inspire others to join the movement.

The participants concluded their training with a pledge to keep the conversation going and to be proactive in their efforts to create a safer and more inclusive community.

HDI WISHES TO THANK OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

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- IPPF-Asociación Profamilia
- JHPIEGO/MCGL
- MINISTRY OF GENDER AND FAMILY PROMOTION
- MINISTRY OF HEALTH
- MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
- MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID
- PARLIAMENT OF RWANDA
- PLAN INTERNATIONAL RWANDA
- PSA
- RNGOF
- RWANDA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM
- RWANDA SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS
- RWANDA BIOMEDICAL CENTER
- RWANDA EDUCATION BOARD
- RWANDA GOVERNANCE BOARD
- RWAMREC
- SFH
- SISTERLOVE INC.
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- STOP TB PARTNERSHIP
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- UNFPA
- UNICEF
- VSO
- WELLSPRING PHILANTHROPIC FUND
- WEMOS
- WHO
- WOMEN'S LINK WORLDWIDE

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



One of the biggest highlights about this training for me really relates to the work that I do as an advocate but also as a young woman that is working with women's networks or feminist networks. Most of the time, we do not have the right tools and we do not know the right processes, or even the right strategy. This training is very significant because I was able to clearly see the steps to take and the right stakeholders to engage, how to package my idea, how to advocate correctly without focusing on the negativity only, but also looking at what has been done and what can be improved.

- Hallelujah Mahoro, Save Generations Organisation



Addressing urgent issues of gender-based violence and unintended pregnancies requires collaborative efforts and dedication. We appreciate the programs like Generation Gender Program and its collaborators for their pivotal role in making a positive impact within our district.

- Juliet Murekatete, Vice Mayor in Charge of Social Affairs, Nyagatare District

