

# HDI NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2025



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

**Nasra Bishumba**

Senior Communication Advisor

**Email:** [nasra@hdirwanda.org](mailto:nasra@hdirwanda.org)

**Cell:** +250 788 309 262

**Dear Partner,**

**Welcome to our September Newsletter. Below are some highlights.**

This past month, our work reached new heights as we partnered with Plan International Rwanda to observe World Contraception Day in Nyaruguru District. Over the course of a week, thousands of community members—including adolescents and young people—joined us for awareness-raising, learning, and access to essential family planning services.

Our efforts to strengthen local leadership on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) continue, and this September, we engaged law enforcers, security officials, and local leaders from Kirehe, Kayonza, and Nyanza districts. The sessions focused on gender equality, social norms, and survivor-centred, human rights-based approaches to prevention and response.

This September, we also partnered with Yego Centers and Gikondo Youth Center to equip 40 aspiring peer educators with essential knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, HIV/STI prevention, and TFGBV, preparing them to expand access to accurate information and life-saving services for their peers.

Thank you for your continued partnership.





## RAISING AWARENESS ON FAMILY PLANNING IN NYARUGURU DISTRICT

**T**his September, we partnered with Plan International Rwanda to observe World Contraception Day with an Outreach Campaign in Nyaruguru District, bringing together thousands of community members, including adolescents and young people for a week of awareness raising, learning, and access to essential family planning services. Nyaruguru District was strategically selected based on data revealing notable disparities

in family planning and reproductive health indicators. While the national family planning uptake is 58%, Nyaruguru lags behind at just 44%. The district also records a higher fertility rate; 4.9 children per woman compared to the national average of 3.8. Likewise, teenage pregnancy remains a concern, standing at 6% in Nyaruguru versus 5% nationally.





During the outreach, the participants engaged in interactive sessions that highlighted the importance of preventing early pregnancies and understanding different contraceptive options. Participants also learned about the new healthcare law, including key changes such as allowing adolescents aged 15 and above to access healthcare services without parental consent; empowering them to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

The sessions provided a safe space for adolescents and young to ask questions, challenge myths and misconceptions, and openly discuss their sexual and reproductive health concerns.

Participants asked questions about common myths such as the belief that using contraceptives before having a child causes infertility, that teenagers cannot get pregnant the first time they have unprotected sex, or that HIV only affects “promiscuous” people.

Our facilitators discussed topics including choosing the right contraceptive method, preventing early pregnancy, STIs and HIV prevention, managing menstrual health, navigating consent and healthy relationships as well as sexual and gender-based violence.



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One of the lessons that truly surprised and moved me today is that if someone experiences sexual abuse, they should not shower or wash their clothes before reporting the case, as doing so can destroy important evidence. This is an important message I will make sure to share with parents in my area

- **Emmanuel Habanabashaka**, facilitator

“We had an opportunity to ask many questions, and I learned that adolescents are first guided on how to avoid early and unplanned pregnancies. Once they become sexually active, they can access contraceptives and protection against STIs,” Francine Ukwishaka.

Health professionals were on-site to offer a range of free services, including family planning counseling and contraceptive provision, HIV counselling and testing as well as one-on-one support and referrals for follow-up care where needed.



Many of the participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to access both accurate information and quality care close to home. The Head of Community Health Workers at Kabirizi Health Center, Rachel Iraturora emphasized the impact of these sessions on adolescents and young people, noting that it's not uncommon to find many unaware that such services exist.

“These sessions help us change mindsets,” she said. “After awareness campaigns such as this, more young people feel confident to visit health centers and access information and services.”



## STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL LEADERS ON TFGBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

**T**his September, we engaged law enforcers, security officials, and local leaders from Kirehe, Kayanza, and Nyanza districts on gender equality, norms, and technology-facilitated GBV, emphasizing survivor-centred approaches and human rights approaches. The training also included health and social protection staff, as well as officials from child protection, disability, and gender promotion units. The training began with a session led by gender expert Hillary Peace Tumwesigire, who introduced participants to feminist perspectives and the social dynamics of technology-facilitated GBV.





She addressed common misconceptions about feminism and showed how entrenched gender norms, such as victim-blaming, rigid beauty standards, and unequal power dynamics, intersect with online harassment, privacy violations, and digital abuse. Participants examined societal expectations of women and girls, how these harmful norms enable online abuse.

Building on this foundation, legal expert Chris Sengoga led sessions focused on the legal frameworks surrounding GBV and

TFGBV . He guided participants through relevant laws, reporting procedures, and the practical application of these instruments. His session further addressed barriers that prevent victims from seeking justice, including economic dependence and social pressures, while stressing the importance of stronger enforcement against sexual harassment and other abuses.

Throughout the workshop, participants actively reflected on their own practices and institutional challenges.



Alfred Hitimana, a Civil Registrar in Nasho Sector, Kirehe District, observed, "I thought we were close to achieving gender equality in Rwanda but these discussions show we still have a long way to go and need to educate our communities.

As leaders it is our responsibility to prevent any GBV related crimes whether on or offline. Our laws need to reflect the realities on the ground." The workshop also highlighted several challenges.

Cultural resistance to certain gender-related concepts remained evident, and baseline understanding of gender, gender equality, and women's empowerment varied widely among participants.

Some participants still perceived feminism as an anti-men movement, demonstrating the need for expanded and repeated training to address misconceptions.

Despite these challenges, participants remained engaged, openly sharing experiences, and contributing to discussions on practical solutions for preventing GBV and TFGV.



Key outcomes from the training included strong recognition of the importance of survivor-centered approaches that prioritize confidentiality, and the avoidance of victim-blaming. Participants identified economic dependence, entrenched social norms, and limited awareness of legal protections as persistent barriers to justice.

They emphasized that addressing these challenges requires more localized and practical training initiatives, community engagement, and stronger collaboration across legal, health, and security sectors.





**Participants also offered several recommendations to sustain the impact of the workshop:**

expand training programs to reach more law enforcers, community leaders, and service providers; integrate digital safety education into GBV prevention efforts; promote community awareness of feminist principles and gender equality to reduce stigma; and provide continuous mentorship and refresher sessions for trained officers to reinforce behavioral change. Overall, the workshop reinforced the

critical role of local leaders and security actors as trusted pillars within their communities.

As Annonciata Mukayitete, our Senior Program Officer - Gender and Inclusion, concluded in her closing remarks, "True progress begins when understanding turns into action, when those charged with enforcing the law also become champions of equality and justice."





## CHAMPIONING ADOLESCENT SEXUAL HEALTH THROUGH PEER EDUCATORS

**W**e continued our strategy to partner with Yego Centers to improve the access of information and services for adolescents partnering with Gikondo Youth Center to train 40 aspiring peer educators, equipping them with essential knowledge on adolescent sexual health, HIV/STI prevention, and the emerging threat of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). The training was also designed to prepare peer educators to become trusted mentors and advocates within their communities, sharing accurate knowledge, modelling healthy behaviors, and supporting peers in navigating challenges related to sexual health, relationships, and digital safety.





The first session, led by our Hotline Counsellor Nelly Kamanzi, provided a foundational overview of puberty, body changes, and the characteristics that define adolescent development. This sparked lively discussions about widespread myths surrounding sexual health and puberty; with participants openly questioning long-held beliefs. “I’ve heard that having sex can get rid of pimples for girls; is that true?” Nadia Umutesi asked, while another peer educator, Kelly Byiringiro, asked whether

having sex while having ulcers could actually help relieve the pain. The session then shifted to sexual health, led by Dr. Ruth Byukusenge, our Health System Strengthening Advisor, who guided an interactive discussion on STIs and HIV.

Participants demonstrated familiarity with common symptoms, including abnormal genital discharge, painful urination, and genital sores.





Dr. Byukusenge emphasized the critical responsibility of a peer educator: "As peer educators, you may receive confidential information from your peers. It's important to respect confidentiality. Remember to constantly encourage your peers to seek professional care." Marie Ange Niyonzima raised a question he frequently encounters in his role as a peer educator: "How effective are condoms in preventing STIs and HIV?"

Dr. Byukusenge explained that when used consistently and correctly, condoms are highly effective at preventing HIV and most STIs, but reminded participants that besides abstinence, no method is 100% effective. The training also addressed the

modern challenge of TFGBV, covering issues such as doxxing, cyberbullying, and sextortion. Alice Kanyana, our Gender Equality Advisor, challenged young male peer educators to take a stand against dismissive attitudes.

"If your peer says, 'that's just online drama,' or claims digital violence isn't real violence, don't entertain that. TFGBV is often dismissed as a harmless joke. Make it clear; violence is violence, regardless of where it happens."

By the end of the training, the peer educators were equipped not only with knowledge but also with the skills and responsibility to make a tangible difference.





## STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL LEADERS TO FIGHT STIGMA AGAINST KEY POPULATIONS

**D**espite Rwanda's steady progress in promoting human rights and gender equality, many key populations still face discrimination and social stigma in their daily lives. In partnership with the European Union to Rwanda, this September, we organized sensitization workshops for local authorities and community leaders in Rusizi, Kayonza, and Rubavu districts to deepen participants' understanding of human rights principles

and build their capacity to identify and prevent discrimination for all. Throughout the workshops, facilitators revisited Rwanda's constitutional and international commitments to human rights. The participants learnt that Rwanda has ratified eight of the nine core international human rights treaties, aligning its national laws with global standards of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.





The Rwandan Constitution reinforces these values, emphasizing gender equality, unity, and the rule of law as the foundation of national governance. Participants explored a range of civil, political, and socio-economic rights — from freedom from discrimination to the right to health and education — highlighting that all human rights are universal and interdependent. Legal expert Christopher Sengoga reminded participants that while laws are essential, they are not enough.

“Legal reforms are important,” he said, “but without changing mindsets and institutional cultures, discrimination will persist.”

A core session focused on the experiences of Sexual and Gender Minorities and Female Sex Workers, groups that often face overlapping layers of stigma and exclusion. Sengoga reminded the participants that although Rwanda does not criminalize same-sex relationships or sex work, social prejudice still limit access to healthcare, justice, and economic opportunities.

According to the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), an estimated 13,417 female sex workers live in Rwanda, with an HIV prevalence rate of around 35 percent, nearly 30 times the national average.



The figure highlights an urgent need for stigma-free, tailored health services. Yet, many still encounter judgmental attitudes, police harassment, or breaches of confidentiality when seeking healthcare services.

The workshop's session on Promoting Inclusion and Stigma-Free Services encouraged participants to confront cultural and religious misconceptions that fuel discrimination. Through interactive discussions and case studies, they developed practical ways to make communities safer and more inclusive — including peer education, collaborative advocacy, and community campaigns that challenge stereotypes.

"Inclusion is not just a policy; it's a responsibility," said Jeanne Umurerwa from the Access to Justice (MAJ) office in Rubavu District. "Every Rwandan deserves to feel protected and valued; without exception."

"We cannot talk about human rights if some members of our community are still afraid to seek justice or health services because of who they are," said Pelagie Mukanyiringira, Isange GBV Officer at Rwinkwavu Hospital in Rubavu. "This training challenged us to lead with empathy and fairness in everything we do."



Participants closed the sessions with a renewed commitment to become agents of change within their institutions.

They recommended continuous human rights and SOGIESC training for service providers and policymakers, integrating inclusion into local and national policies, expanding grassroots awareness campaigns, enforcing anti-discrimination frameworks in workplaces, and improving access to healthcare, legal aid, and psychosocial support for key populations.



## IN OTHER NEWS

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



**6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
UNPACKING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

**13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
CHALLENGES ADOLESCENTS STILL FACE IN ACCESSING  
SRHR SERVICES

**20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
UNDERSTANDING PREGNANCY-RELATED  
COMPLICATIONS

**27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS METHODS OF  
FAMILY PLANNING



**7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
INTERNATIONAL SEXUAL HEALTH DAY: SEXUAL HEALTH  
IS HEALTH

**14<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
THE IMPACT OF GENDER NORMS ON SOCIETAL  
DEVELOPMENT

**21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
THE IMPACT OF GENDER NORMS ON SOCIETAL  
DEVELOPMENT

**28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025:**  
SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH: WHAT IS YOUR ROLE?



## Courtesy Visits with Our Partners



We welcomed students from the African Leadership University and the University of Washington for an immersive learning visit, where they engaged with our team, learned about our advocacy work, and explored how young leaders can drive social change.



# STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK:



HDI Rwanda · 10/09/2025  
Wari Uzi Ko?

Ubushakashatsi twakoze mu bakozi 875 bo mu rugo bo mu muji wa Kigali mu mwaka ushize wa 2024, abagera kuri 287 bavuze ko bigeze gutekereza kwiyahura, 84 muri bo bakavugaga ko bigeze gutekera uko biyahura naho 69 bakavugaga ko babigerageje?

Kuri uyu muni mpuzamahanga wo kurwanya kwiyahura, wumva impamvu nyamukuru itera iki kibazo muri iki kiciro cy'abanyarwanda ari iyihe? Ni gute bafashwa?

#WorldSuicidePreventionDay2025  
#WorldSuicidePreventionDay



EMMERANCE NIYON... · 10/09/2025  
Usanga abenshi baza gukora akazi ko mu rugo, kubera ubwumvikane bucyeye buba buri iwabo mu rugo, ntibabone, ntibabone urukundo! Aba ameze nkuhunze iwabo.

1 83



Brian. @cetangelas · 11/09/2025  
It is a shame that the suicide prevention hotline doesn't work....

1 21



Byishimo Bizoza @byi... · 18/09/2025  
Nibyo byombo babona batazasaza barangije kubyoza

1



Kayiranga Marcel @K... · 11/09/2025  
2/2 Hakaba kandi n'ubwo inyo byiyongeraho ko hagira uhura n'umukoresha mubi cyangwa agakoreshwa nabi! Umuti mwiza wo kubafasha: Gutegura ubukangurambaga buhoraho ku bakoresha babo, bwo kubumvisha ko abakozi bo mu rugo nabo ari abakozi b'umumaro kandi bakwiye kubahwa no kurengera

1 259



IRAMBONA Elissa @E... · 10/09/2025  
Njye mbona biterwa ahanini n'ihoterwa bakorerwa, Yaba kubabwira amagambo mabi asesereza, kubacyurira n'ibindi nyinshi bigatuma biyumva nkaho ari ntagaciro bafite Kandi bamwe kubera ihoterwa bakorerwa bibangiza mu mutwe bikabaviramo kwiyambura ubuzima.

1 475



Niyigena Alexis @Niyi... · 11/09/2025  
Murahoneza HDI Rwanda ? Nashakaga kubaza niba mutanga professional internship kubantu bize statistics Murakoze.

24



Kibogo @Rwamiro... · 11/09/2025  
Abakoze ubu bushakashatsi bazakore ubundi mu bakozi ba Leta ku ngingo nk'iyi maze mwirebere.

29



Nsabimana Jean Bosco · 11/09/2025  
Iyo mubaza na ba Shebura cg ba Nyirabuja niba nabo icyo kibazo batagifite

54



Avogadro @terre.tour... · 10/09/2025  
Nabonye ubuhanga bw'ibindi buvuye kuri @Alberto61040 bubafasha kwinjiza amafaranga. Nahiseho rero kubigerageza no gutungurwa myanjye iminsi 7 yambere ninjije amadolari arenga 10.580 \$ yose, ukurikire @Alberto61040 maze ubone ibyawe

65



Imbwa y'Umutima 96 · 11/09/2025  
Uburyo bafatwamo namagambo atarimeza babwirwa.

1 259



NISHIMWE VITAL@Un... · 10/09/2025  
Cyane cyane ikibitera usanga uko bafatwa na banyirabuja cg aba boss babo aribyo bibitera rimwe na rimwe amazina bahamagara abo bakoresha, kubacyurira, kuba batabaha uburenganzira bwo kwisanzura nkabandi bana ugasanga barahazwa ibyo biba mu mpamvu ituma natekereza kwiyahura.

1 404



Troll Rwanda · 10/09/2025  
Mwasanze impamvu nyamukuru zituma bashakira kwiyahura ari izihe?  
- Imishahara idahagije?  
- Ihoterwa ryo mu ngo?  
- Ibindi

Ese mwasanze ari hagati y'abagabo cg abagore ari irihe janisha rinini rifite uruhare mu guhohotera abakozi bo mu ngo? Mu buhe buryo?

1 340



# 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



