



IMRO RWANDA NEWSLETTER



"Together as One For a Healthy Society"

October-December 2024

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Dear Partners,

Welcome to the latest edition of the IMRO Rwanda newsletter! We're excited to share with you the fantastic progress and initiatives we've been working on lately.

In this issue, we're thrilled to share updates on our recent initiatives. We trained Peer Educators in Rubavu District to support People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) with skills in overdose prevention and harm reduction while raising awareness of HIV prevention through outreach campaigns and also reached out to health management teams to sensitize them on harm reduction and address stigma within healthcare settings in the area . Key populations, including Female Sex Workers, MSM, and Transgender individuals, were reached through targeted training and public rallies. We also conducted NGO activity supervision, launched an Adolescent SRH Leadership Training, and, with 19 CSO partners, submitted a position paper advocating for menstrual hygiene accessibility. These efforts demonstrate our dedication to driving positive change across Rwanda.

As an organisation dedicated to serving our community, we take great pride in the work we do. Each project, no matter how big or small, represents a step forward in our mission to create positive change and improve lives.

We invite you to explore this newsletter and learn more about our recent endeavours. Your support and interest mean the world to us, and we're excited to share our journey with you.

Thank you for being part of the IMRO Rwanda community. Together, we can continue to make a difference and build a brighter future for all.

Warm regards,

Communication Team
IMRO Rwanda

SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION FOR PWUDs PEER EDUCATORS IN RUBAVU DISTRICT

Harm reduction is critical in addressing the health, social, and legal challenges faced by PWUDs. By equipping Peer Educators with essential skills and tools, this initiative not only improves service delivery but also contributes to the broader goal of reducing stigma and ensuring equal access to healthcare for vulnerable populations.



IMRO Rwanda through this follow-up meeting and supportive supervision session for Peer Educators working with the People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) community in Rubavu district aimed to refresh critical skills in overdose prevention, safer sex, and injecting practices, while addressing challenges Peer Educators face in linking PWUDs to health services.

Interactive sessions included discussions on challenges in accessing health services, presentations on data quality assurance, and training on the effective use of project tools. Facilitators, including Phn. Emmanuel Mugabarigira and Melina Gaju, provided expert insights into best practices for harm reduction programs.



The session successfully reinforced Peer Educators' roles as intermediaries between the community and health service providers. It also fostered collaboration with health facilities, improving referral systems and accessibility for PWUDs. Participants expressed a strong commitment to implementing the strategies discussed.

Through such initiatives, the TUBITEHO project continues to align its efforts with Rwanda's national HIV response strategy, targeting hard-to-reach populations and working toward the elimination of new HIV infections by 2030.

SENSITIZATION WORKSHOPS WITH HEALTH MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN RUBAVU DISTRICT

Health management teams play a vital role in the successful implementation of harm reduction initiatives by overseeing health facilities, integrating best practices, and supporting policies that improve community health outcomes.



This two-day workshop addressed critical challenges faced by People Who Use Drugs (PWUD), emphasizing the need for inclusive and stigma-free healthcare services. Facilitators led discussions on harm reduction principles, health risks like HIV and Hepatitis, and practical solutions to enhance service delivery.

The workshop brought together representatives from health institutions, including the District Health Unit, District Hospital, Health Centers, and the Kanzenze Transit Center, to strengthen their capacity in implementing harm reduction strategies.

Participants engaged in interactive sessions to debunk myths about PWUD, fostering empathy and understanding. Also, Comparative analyses of punitive versus supportive policies highlighted best practices from global contexts. Moreover, Group discussions focused on improving healthcare providers' roles in addressing the needs of PWUD.

The workshop successfully enhanced participants' knowledge of harm reduction principles and increased their awareness of the barriers faced by PWUDs. Participants demonstrated a shift towards greater empathy and understanding, fostering a more inclusive and supportive healthcare environment. The workshop concluded with a discussion on the way forward, where participants committed to integrating harm reduction practices into their work and addressing stigma within their respective institutions. Closing remarks reinforced the importance of continued collaboration and advocacy for harm reduction strategies.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS FOR PWUDS HEALTH SERVICE AVAILABILITY

The primary goal of the community outreach campaign in Rubavu District was to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment among PWUDs. The campaign aimed to help PWUDs understand their HIV/AIDS status and ensure those who tested positive could access appropriate care and treatment.



The campaign engaged 80 participants, offering HIV counseling and testing services facilitated by healthcare professionals. Peer Educators played a vital role in encouraging their peers to participate, helping reduce stigma and promoting knowledge sharing. Of the 80 individuals tested, 11.25% were diagnosed with HIV, highlighting the urgent need for continued intervention and support in this community.

This outreach campaign was facilitated by Gisenyi Health Center through HIV testing among PWUDs during this campaign, interactive counseling sessions, linkage to antiretroviral treatment for those who tested positive, and enhancing collaboration with the community.

This outreach campaign contributed to addressing stigma and improving health service accessibility for marginalized communities. By empowering PWUDs with knowledge and support decreases their vulnerability.



To build on these efforts, follow-up sessions for those who tested positive will be conducted, while prevention measures will be reinforced for those who tested negative. Expanding the reach of future campaigns will ensure more individuals benefit from HIV testing and care.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY LED MONITORING FOR ENHANCING HIV SERVICES IN MUHANGA, RUHANGO & RUBAVU DISTRICTS. (CREATION OF CLM TASKFORCE)

IMRO Rwanda conducted a series of workshops in Muhanga, Ruhango, and Rubavu districts to establish CLM Task Teams aimed at improving HIV service delivery for Key Populations (KPs). These efforts focused on integrating principles of community-led monitoring, strengthening inclusivity, and addressing intersectional barriers.



Key achievements include the formation of district-level CLM Task Teams, development of work plans, and improved stakeholder understanding of CLM principles. Challenges such as stigma, limited inclusive policies, and resource constraints were also identified.



The workshops aimed to build stakeholder capacity on CLM principles and practices, establish CLM Task Teams in Muhanga, Ruhango, and Rubavu, develop work and monitoring plans for CLM implementation, and strengthen feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of HIV services.



The workshops featured interactive presentations on CLM principles, HIV service gaps, and the importance of inclusion, along with group discussions on barriers to accessing services and potential solutions. Additionally, task team members were elected, and their Terms of Reference (ToRs) were formulated.

The workshops resulted in the establishment of functional District CLM Task Teams with clearly defined Terms of Reference (ToRs), the development of tailored work plans for monitoring CLM activities and assessing HIV service delivery outcomes, and capacity building for stakeholders to enhance their skills in CLM implementation and advocacy for service improvements. Additionally, awareness was raised on the importance of inclusion and intersectionality to address barriers faced by diverse groups.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS FOR FSWS, MSM, AND TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS ON COMMUNITY- LED MONITORING



IMRO Rwanda successfully conducted a comprehensive training program on community-led monitoring tools for peer educators from Female Sex Worker (FSW) and Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)/Transgender communities in Muhanga, Ruhango, and Rubavu Districts. This initiative sought to address the persistent challenges of stigma, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare services faced by these key populations in Rwanda.

The training aimed to empower 30 peer educators per district (20 FSWs and 10 MSMs/LGBTQI community members) with the skills to collect, analyze, and report data that reflect the realities and needs of their communities. By leveraging these tools, participants are better equipped to advocate for data-driven policy reforms and enhanced service delivery for key populations.

The training consisted of four core modules covering community-led monitoring principles, data collection tools and techniques, data analysis and reporting, and advocacy strategies. Sessions were designed to be interactive and practice-oriented, ensuring participants gained practical experience.



This training marks a significant step toward empowering key populations in Rwanda to take charge of their health and well-being through data-driven advocacy. IMRO Rwanda remains committed to fostering a supportive environment where the voices of FSWs, MSMs, and Transgender individuals inform policies and practices that impact their lives.

WAD 2024: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION AND MASS CAMPAIGNS FOR KEY POPULATION / Mpox Vaccination



IMRO Rwanda, in collaboration with the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), conducted a significant HIV/AIDS awareness and Mpox vaccination campaign in Rubavu District, beginning on Sunday, December 1, 2024, to commemorate World AIDS Day. The campaign featured activities aimed at raising awareness about HIV prevention, showcasing IMRO Rwanda's interventions to the Minister of Health, donors, and stakeholders, and launching a targeted Mpox vaccination drive for Female Sex Workers (FSWs).

Services Provided in the as part of this large-scale campaign include Free and confidential HIV testing and counseling, Access to treatment for individuals who tested positive, Distribution of condoms, lubricants, and self-test kits, Public awareness and education on HIV prevention.

Vaccination efforts were also carried out across various sites, including Intare Arena, Nyakiriba Site, Cyanika Site, Kigufi Health Center, and Rwaza Cell in Cyanika Site, resulting in the successful vaccination of 334 FSWs in Rubavu District.



Different stakeholders participated in Umuganda Day before WAD 2024

Dr. Nsanzimana emphasized the importance of prioritizing health, urging participants to adopt behaviors such as avoiding excessive alcohol consumption (#Tunyweless), staying hydrated, engaging in physical activity, and practicing HIV prevention strategies, including abstinence, protection, and consistent condom use.

Mpox Vaccination at Intare Arena Rubavu

Mpox vaccinations campaign in Rubavu District was a critical step in addressing the outbreak among FSWs while raising awareness about HIV prevention. IMRO Rwanda remains committed to ensuring the health and well-being of key populations through impactful and inclusive public health interventions.



***Training of Key Population (FSWs, MSMs & Transgenders)
Peer educators on community led monitoring tools for KPs;
data collection, reporting and data use in advocacy for HIV
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The key objectives of the workshops were to strengthen participants' capacity to collect and report high-quality data for advocacy, provide hands-on training in the use of community-led monitoring tools, foster collaboration and networking among peer educators to amplify their collective impact, and empower participants to use data as a foundation for advocating for their rights and well-being.



POSITION PAPER: MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCT ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY IN RWANDA.



Through Our commitment to advancing SRHR, IMRO Rwanda developed a policy brief highlighted the critical challenges faced by women and girls due to inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products, emphasizing their impact on health, education, and economic participation.

A dissemination workshop was hosted to share the findings through which a major recommendation emerged of developing and position paper around the issue and submit it to relevant stakeholders.

The position paper calling for comprehensive national guidelines to address menstrual health challenges was developed and endorsed by 19 of our CSO partners and it was submitted to relevant including the Ministries of Health, Gender, Education, Justice, and Trade, as well as the NCDA.

We and our partners remain committed to coordinated advocacy, an essential tool to ensure affordability and accessibility for all women and girls which is essential for true gender equality.

ADOLESCENT PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION TRAINING



IMRO Rwanda is thrilled to announce the launch of its Peer-to-Peer Education Program in the Eastern Province, starting in Bugesera District. Held at Palast Rock Hotel, this initiative designed to equip adolescents with knowledge on SRHR and provide space to discuss it, impart advocacy leadership skills.

Adolescents in Rwanda face challenges such as teenage pregnancies and limited access to SRHR services. By launching this program, IMRO Rwanda is addressing these gaps and empowering young people to make informed decisions, advocate for their rights, and foster change within their schools and communities.

The program was successfully launched in 10 public schools in the district and with continuous follow-up sessions we will ensure sustained impact hence contributing to better health outcomes of the youth.



Mass campaigns through community public rallies and outreach targeting key population groups (FSWs and MSM) to increase their HIV knowledge and HIV services utilization in HIV/AIDS and other pandemics

IMRO Rwanda conducted a comprehensive HIV prevention campaign in Muhanga, Ruhango and Rubavu Districts, offering Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services, distributing essential prevention tools, and raising community awareness. This initiative aimed to empower individuals with knowledge, resources, and access to early detection and care to combat HIV effectively.



IMRO Rwanda's dedication to reducing new HIV infections and promoting early detection. By combining education, testing, counseling, and distribution of prevention tools, we are making tangible progress toward ending HIV as a public health threat.

IMRO Rwanda remains committed to empowering communities, fostering partnerships, and working together to achieve a future free from HIV.



The workshops included live demonstrations, providing step-by-step guidance on effective condom use to ensure maximum protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Participants were also shown how to use HIV self-test kits effectively, empowering them to take control of their health and status in a confidential and convenient manner.



The next steps include providing comprehensive post-test counseling for individuals who tested positive to help them understand their status and the available support systems, along with immediate linkage to care and treatment services. Regular follow-ups will be conducted to ensure adherence to treatment and provide continued psychosocial support. Ongoing prevention efforts will focus on awareness campaigns, education sessions, and community outreach to address stigma and promote safer sexual practices. Additionally, condoms, lubricants, and self-test kits will be distributed during future campaigns and through community-based organizations to ensure sustained access to these essential tools.



IMRO RWANDA WISHES TO THANK

★ **Our Partners and Supporterts** ★

- **AHF**
- **AMPLIFYCHANGE**
- **CDC**
- **EXPERTISE FRANCE**
- **FHI 360**
- **FXB**
- **GLIHD**
- **GLOBAL FUND**
- **HDI**
- **IOM**
- **MÉDECINS DU MONDE (MDM)**
- **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**
- **MINISTRY OF HEALTH**
- **MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**
- **MUHANGA DISTRICT**
- **PEPFAR**
- **RUBAVU DISTRICT**
- **RUHANGO DISTRICT**
- **RWANDA CIVIL SOCIETY
PLATFORM**
- **RWANDA NGOS FORUM**
- **SFR**
- **UNAIDS**
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- **LAF**
- **GASABO DISTRICT**
- **BUGESERA DISTRICT**