

IMRO Rwanda

Quarterly Newsletter



In this newsletter you can expect:

Advocacy Meeting	Mapping & Linkage of KPs	Bi-annual Coordination meeting with the former TB patients
TB contact tracing by CHW at village level	Enhance access to and utilization of PMTCT services	Distribution and promotion on Condom and lubricant
Linkage of PWUDs for Harm reduction services	IDADAIT 2026	Day of the African Child

Executive Director's Message:

Welcome to this edition of the IMRO Rwanda Newsletter. We are pleased to share the progress and impact achieved through our partnerships and community-led interventions over the past quarter.

These stories reflect our unwavering commitment to improving the health and well-being of Key Populations by expanding access to HIV and TB prevention, harm reduction, maternal health services, and stigma-free healthcare. Every achievement featured in this newsletter is made possible through the dedication of our staff, peer educators, healthcare providers, and community volunteers.

We are deeply grateful to our partners, including the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), the Global Fund, the TUBITEHO Consortium, district authorities, healthcare providers, civil society organizations, and community leaders, whose continued collaboration and support make these achievements possible. Most importantly, we thank the communities we serve for their trust, resilience, and active participation in creating sustainable solutions to public health challenges.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support as we work together to build healthier, more inclusive, and resilient communities.

Building Bridges for Health: Advocacy Strengthens the Right to Care for Key Populations

"Everyone deserves access to healthcare without fear of stigma or discrimination." This message was at the heart of IMRO Rwanda's annual advocacy meetings held in Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts under the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV Prevention Project.

The meetings brought together local authorities, healthcare providers, Community Health Workers (CHWs), law enforcement agencies, religious leaders, peer educators, and community representatives to strengthen a shared commitment to protecting the health rights of Key Populations, including People Who Inject Drugs (PWID/IDUs).

Through open dialogue, participants explored practical ways to create health services that are welcoming, confidential, and free from stigma. Discussions highlighted the importance of respecting human rights while expanding access to HIV testing, STI diagnosis, TB services, condom promotion, and timely referrals to healthcare facilities.



A key highlight of the meetings was the distribution of HIV Self-Test kits to Community Health Workers. After receiving orientation on confidentiality, community sensitization, and referral procedures, CHWs are now better equipped to reach individuals who may not otherwise access conventional health services. This community-based approach is expected to improve early HIV diagnosis and strengthen linkage to care among hard-to-reach populations.



The meetings also reinforced collaboration between Community Health Workers and Peer Educators, enabling stronger community referral networks and more effective outreach to people at increased risk of HIV infection.

By the end of the advocacy sessions, stakeholders had renewed their commitment to promoting equitable access to healthcare and reducing stigma and discrimination in both health facilities and communities. The activity demonstrated that meaningful partnerships between communities, healthcare providers, and local leaders are essential to achieving sustainable HIV prevention outcomes.



As Rwanda continues advancing community-led HIV and TB responses, IMRO Rwanda remains committed to ensuring that every person regardless of their background or circumstances can access quality healthcare with dignity, respect, and without discrimination.

Finding the Communities That Need Us Most: Mapping the Path to Better HIV and TB Services

Reaching Key Populations with life-saving HIV and TB services begins with knowing where people are, when they can be reached, and what support they need. During Quarter 4 of Year 2, IMRO Rwanda strengthened this foundation by conducting a comprehensive hotspot mapping and validation exercise across Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts under the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV/TB Prevention Project.

Working hand-in-hand with peer educators, community informants, hotspot managers, and healthcare providers, IMRO Rwanda verified existing hotspots, identified new locations, and updated referral pathways to nearby health facilities. The exercise was more than a mapping activity—it was an opportunity to reconnect communities with essential HIV prevention, care, treatment, and TB screening services.

The updated database identified 147 active hotspots with an estimated 2,790 Key Population members and established referral linkages with 30 health facilities providing HIV testing, antiretroviral therapy, STI diagnosis and treatment, TB screening, and other essential health services. By combining these findings with historical mapping data from Rubavu District, IMRO Rwanda now maintains a cumulative database of 339 hotspots serving an estimated 6,304 Female Sex Workers and other Key Population members.

The mapping also revealed valuable insights that are transforming outreach strategies. While Nyanza hosts the largest concentration of Key Populations, Rubavu's highly mobile communities require flexible outreach approaches, and Burera's dispersed residential hotspots call for confidential, community-based services. Across all three districts, evening hours—from 4:00 PM to 1:00 AM—were identified as the most effective time to deliver HIV testing, distribute condoms and lubricants, provide HIV self-test kits, conduct TB screening, and strengthen referrals to health facilities.



- 📍 147 Active Hotspots Identified
- 👥 6,304 Key Population Members Reached
- 🏥 42 Health Facilities Supporting Referrals
- 🕒 Peak Outreach: 4:00 PM – 1:00 AM
- 📌 339 Cumulative Hotspots in Project Database

These findings are already helping IMRO Rwanda deploy peer educators more strategically, prioritize high-risk locations, improve commodity distribution, and ensure that HIV and TB services reach the people who need them most.

Despite challenges such as population mobility and hidden hotspots, continuous collaboration with community informants, Community Health Workers, and local leaders has enabled IMRO Rwanda to maintain an up-to-date evidence base for planning interventions.

By investing in data-driven, community-led mapping, IMRO Rwanda is ensuring that no community is overlooked. The strengthened hotspot database is not simply a collection of locations—it is a roadmap that guides equitable access to stigma-free HIV and TB services, bringing Rwanda one step closer to ending new HIV infections among Key Populations.

From Survivors to Champions: Former TB Patients Lead the Fight Against Tuberculosis

A person who has recovered from tuberculosis carries more than a story of survival—they carry hope, experience, and the power to inspire others to seek care early. Recognizing this, IMRO Rwanda continues to place former TB patients at the center of community-led tuberculosis prevention efforts through the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV/TB Prevention Project.

During Quarter 4 of Year 2, IMRO Rwanda organized six bi-annual coordination meetings across Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts, bringing together former TB patients, Community Health Workers (CHWs), healthcare providers, TB Champions, peer educators, and district health representatives. The meetings created a platform for sharing experiences, strengthening collaboration, and identifying practical solutions to improve TB prevention, referral, and treatment support within communities.

Former TB patients openly shared the challenges they faced during diagnosis and treatment, encouraging participants to recognize the importance of early screening, completing treatment, and supporting individuals affected by TB without stigma or discrimination. Their testimonies served as powerful reminders that tuberculosis is curable when diagnosed early and treated correctly.

The coordination meetings also strengthened collaboration between communities and health facilities. Participants developed strategies to improve household contact tracing, enhance referrals of people with TB symptoms, support treatment adherence, and increase community awareness about the signs and symptoms of tuberculosis. By reviewing progress during the second round of meetings, stakeholders were able to monitor actions agreed upon earlier in the year and identify new opportunities to strengthen community-led responses.



One of the most significant outcomes was the growing confidence of former TB patients to become community advocates. Many expressed their commitment to educating neighbors, encouraging people with persistent coughs to seek medical attention promptly, and supporting Community Health Workers in identifying individuals who may require TB screening.

Although stigma surrounding tuberculosis remains a challenge in some communities, the involvement of TB survivors is helping to change perceptions and create safe spaces for dialogue. Their lived experiences are breaking down misconceptions and encouraging more people to access diagnosis and treatment without fear.

Through these coordination meetings, IMRO Rwanda continues to demonstrate that the voices of survivors are essential in building resilient, people-centered health systems. By empowering former TB patients as champions for change, the project is strengthening community ownership of TB prevention, improving referral systems, and contributing to Rwanda's efforts to end tuberculosis through inclusive and community-driven action.



Bringing TB Services Closer to Home: Community Health Workers Lead the Way

For many people, the first step toward defeating tuberculosis begins with a knock on the door. Across Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts, IMRO Rwanda is strengthening community-based tuberculosis (TB) prevention by supporting Community Health Workers (CHWs) to identify people at risk before the disease spreads. Through the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV/TB Prevention Project, trained CHWs, TB Champions, former TB patients, and healthcare providers worked together to ensure that vulnerable families received timely screening, referrals, and treatment support.

During Quarter 4 of Year 2, the project carried out two rounds of household TB contact tracing in each district. Community Health Workers visited the homes of people diagnosed with TB, screened family members and close contacts for symptoms, provided health education, and referred individuals with suspected TB to nearby health facilities for further testing.

These community-led efforts reached 161 household contacts, representing a 10.3% increase in tracing coverage compared with the previous quarter. Through early screening and prompt referrals, seven new TB cases were identified and successfully linked to treatment, helping to reduce the risk of further transmission within families and communities.

The initiative was supported through close collaboration with 34 health facilities, ensuring that individuals referred by Community Health Workers received timely diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care. Former TB patients also played an important role by sharing their experiences and encouraging families to seek care early, helping to reduce fear and stigma surrounding the disease.



Beyond identifying new cases, household visits provided valuable opportunities to educate families about the signs and symptoms of TB, the importance of completing treatment, and simple infection prevention practices that protect loved ones and the wider community. Regular follow-up visits also enabled Community Health Workers to support treatment adherence and strengthen the connection between communities and health facilities.

While reaching remote households and overcoming TB-related stigma remain ongoing challenges, the dedication of Community Health Workers and community volunteers continues to make a measurable difference. Every household visited represents another opportunity to detect TB early, prevent transmission, and ensure that no one is left behind.

By bringing TB services directly into communities, IMRO Rwanda is helping transform the fight against tuberculosis from a facility-based response into a people-centered movement. The success of these contact tracing activities demonstrates the vital role of community health workers in protecting families, strengthening local health systems, and advancing Rwanda's goal of ending tuberculosis.



Supporting Healthy Mothers, Protecting Healthy Babies: Expanding PMTCT Services for Female Sex Workers

Every mother deserves the opportunity to give birth to a healthy child, regardless of her background or circumstances. Through the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV/TB Prevention Project, IMRO Rwanda is working to ensure that Female Sex Workers (FSWs) can access respectful, stigma-free maternal health and HIV services that protect both mothers and their babies.

During Quarter 4 of Year 2, IMRO Rwanda strengthened community-based Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) services across Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts through peer-led outreach, health education, and referrals to trusted healthcare facilities. Working alongside Community Health Workers, healthcare providers, and peer educators, the project increased awareness of the importance of early antenatal care, HIV testing during pregnancy, and continuous support throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding.

The initiative reached 60 Female Sex Workers through district-level sensitization sessions that encouraged women to seek timely maternal healthcare and understand the benefits of PMTCT services. Through routine outreach at community hotspots, peer educators also identified 30 pregnant women who were referred for HIV testing and comprehensive antenatal care.

The project achieved an important milestone by linking eight HIV-positive pregnant women to PMTCT services, ensuring they received the treatment and care needed to significantly reduce the risk of HIV transmission to their babies. At the same time, 22 HIV-negative pregnant women were enrolled in antenatal care and preventive services to help them remain HIV-free throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding.



Beyond referrals, peer educators provided one-on-one counselling and continuous follow-up, helping women overcome barriers such as fear of stigma, limited knowledge of available services, and concerns about accessing healthcare. This personalized support strengthened trust in health services and encouraged more women to seek care early, improving outcomes for both mothers and infants.

The success of the initiative reflects the power of community-based approaches that bring healthcare closer to vulnerable populations while promoting dignity, confidentiality, and respect. By working hand in hand with healthcare providers and community networks, IMRO Rwanda is helping ensure that every pregnant woman has the opportunity to access life-saving services without fear of discrimination.

Through continued outreach, education, and strong referral systems, IMRO Rwanda is contributing to Rwanda's vision of eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and ensuring that every child has the healthiest possible start in life.



DELIVERING PREVENTION WHERE IT MATTERS MOST: BRINGING HIV PROTECTION CLOSER TO KEY POPULATIONS

For many people at increased risk of HIV, access to prevention tools can make the difference between vulnerability and protection. Through the Global Fund/RBC/MoH HIV/TB Prevention Project, IMRO Rwanda continues to ensure that these essential services reach the communities that need them most.

During Quarter 4 of Year 2, IMRO Rwanda expanded community-based HIV prevention across Nyanza, Rubavu, and Burera Districts by providing condoms, lubricants, and HIV Self-Test (HIVST) kits through peer educators and Community Health Workers (CHWs). Integrated with routine hotspot outreach, these services were accompanied by health education on safer sexual practices, HIV prevention, STI prevention, and the importance of regular HIV testing.

Despite national shortages of condoms caused by funding constraints, the project adapted quickly by prioritizing distribution in high-risk hotspots identified through community mapping. This targeted approach ensured that the limited supplies reached individuals at greatest risk while maintaining access to critical HIV prevention services.

During the quarter, IMRO Rwanda distributed 4,100 condoms, 2,450 lubricants, and 1,080 HIV Self-Test kits across the three districts. The HIV Self-Test kits, provided through Community Health Workers, are helping extend confidential HIV testing to people who may face barriers to visiting health facilities because of distance, stigma, or concerns about privacy. Individuals with reactive self-test results are then referred for confirmatory testing and linked to appropriate care and treatment services.



Beyond distributing prevention commodities, peer educators used every outreach visit as an opportunity to build trust, answer questions, and encourage healthy behaviours. Community members received practical information on the correct and consistent use of condoms, reducing HIV and STI risks, and the importance of early testing and timely treatment. Outreach teams also linked individuals to additional services, including PrEP, STI diagnosis and treatment, TB screening, and antiretroviral therapy.

The activity demonstrated that effective HIV prevention depends not only on providing commodities but also on ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence, and support to use them correctly. Through trusted peer networks and community-based education, IMRO Rwanda continues to strengthen prevention efforts among populations that are often underserved by conventional health services.

As Rwanda advances toward ending new HIV infections, community-led outreach remains a powerful tool for reaching those most at risk. By combining prevention commodities with education, counselling, and referral services, IMRO Rwanda is helping create healthier communities where every individual has the opportunity to protect their health and access care with dignity.

For many People Who Use Drugs (PWUD), accessing healthcare is often made difficult by stigma, fear, and limited knowledge of available services. In Rubavu District, however, trusted peer educators are helping to change that reality—one conversation and one referral at a time.

Through the Global Fund-supported harm reduction programme, IMRO Rwanda conducted quarterly field visits to strengthen the capacity of peer educators and improve access to essential health and harm reduction services for PWUD. Working closely with healthcare providers and community partners, peer educators reinforced their skills in identifying health needs, providing counselling, and linking their peers to stigma-free healthcare services.

The field visits also enabled IMRO Rwanda to review referral systems with health facilities, ensuring that community referrals translated into quality services for beneficiaries. Together with healthcare providers, the team assessed referral records, strengthened counter-referral mechanisms, and promoted closer collaboration between communities and health facilities.

The impact of these efforts has been significant. During the reporting period, peer educators facilitated 462 referrals for a wide range of health services, including HIV testing, tuberculosis screening, hepatitis services, sexually transmitted infection management, PrEP, family planning, mental health support, and antiretroviral treatment. In addition, more than 5,300 condoms, 500 lubricants, and 430 HIV Self-Test kits were distributed, expanding access to HIV prevention among vulnerable populations.



One of the most remarkable achievements was the successful identification and referral of 15 opioid overdose cases. Thanks to the rapid response of peer educators and strong collaboration with health facilities, every individual received timely emergency care and clinical management. This achievement demonstrates how community-led harm reduction interventions can save lives and strengthen confidence in health services.

Beyond referrals, the project strengthened the role of peer educators as trusted community leaders. Through practical mentorship, peer-to-peer learning, and continuous support, they are helping individuals overcome stigma, access essential healthcare, and make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.

As IMRO Rwanda continues to strengthen community-based harm reduction services, the dedication of peer educators remains central to ensuring that no one is left behind. By bringing healthcare closer to vulnerable communities and building strong partnerships with health facilities, the programme is improving lives, preventing HIV and other infections, and promoting dignity, inclusion, and hope for People Who Use Drugs in Rwanda.

The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT) is more than a day of awareness –it is a reminder that every person deserves the opportunity to live a healthy life with dignity, respect, and access to quality healthcare.

To mark IDADAIT 2026, IMRO Rwanda, in collaboration with Gisenyi Health Center and partners implementing the TUBITEHO Project, organized an integrated health screening and awareness campaign in Rubavu District under the theme "Breaking the Chains: Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery for All."

The event brought together People Who Use Drugs (PWUD), peer educators, healthcare providers, and community stakeholders to promote prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, and recovery while addressing the stigma that often prevents vulnerable individuals from seeking care.

Throughout the day, participants accessed a comprehensive package of free health services, including HIV testing, tuberculosis (TB) screening, sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening, viral hepatitis testing, blood pressure screening, counselling, and health education. A total of 200 community members benefited from these integrated services, demonstrating the value of bringing healthcare closer to those who need it most.

The screenings led to the early identification of several health conditions requiring follow-up care. Three individuals tested positive for HIV and were immediately referred for treatment and ongoing support. One participant was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, one with an STI, and one with tuberculosis, while twenty participants with elevated blood pressure received counselling and referrals for continued medical care. Early detection allows these individuals to begin treatment sooner, improving their health outcomes while reducing the risk of further disease transmission.



Beyond medical services, the event created a safe and welcoming environment where participants could openly discuss substance use, mental health, recovery, and harm reduction without fear of judgment. Through one-on-one counselling and group education sessions, healthcare providers and peer educators encouraged healthier choices, promoted overdose prevention, and shared information about available health and social support services.

One of the day's greatest achievements was strengthening trust between healthcare providers and the community. By working side by side with peer educators, health workers demonstrated that compassionate, respectful, and person-centred care is essential to improving the health and wellbeing of People Who Use Drugs.

The success of the commemoration reflects the strength of collaboration between IMRO Rwanda, Gisenyi Health Center, and TUBITEHO Project partners. Together, they are helping build a future where health services are accessible to everyone, stigma is replaced with understanding, and recovery is supported through community partnership.

As Rwanda continues advancing evidence-based harm reduction and public health interventions, initiatives like IDADAIT 2026 demonstrate that investing in prevention, early diagnosis, and compassionate care can transform lives and create healthier, more inclusive communities.

“WE ARE NO LONGER INVISIBLE”: HOW PEER EDUCATORS IN RUBAVU ARE TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH HARM REDUCTION



For many People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) in Rubavu District, accessing healthcare and social support has been challenging due to barriers such as stigma, homelessness, and limited access to essential services. Today, Peer Educators are helping to change this reality by becoming trusted bridges between communities and health services.

“Our role is not only to connect people to services, but also to remind them that they deserve dignity, respect, and support,” shared a Peer Educator during a supportive supervision session organized by IMRO Rwanda.

On 25 June 2026, IMRO Rwanda brought together 17 Peer Educators and 3 Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Rubavu for a follow-up and supportive supervision meeting under the TUBITEHO Project, implemented by IMRO Rwanda and partners with financial support from Expertise France.

The session provided an opportunity for Peer Educators to reflect on their work, share community experiences, and strengthen approaches to harm reduction, human rights, and community-based support for PWUD.

During discussions, Peer Educators highlighted challenges affecting PWUD, including homelessness, limited livelihood opportunities, health insurance barriers, and civil registration difficulties. Participants also recognized important progress achieved through collaboration between IMRO Rwanda, local authorities, health facilities, and community structures, including improved referral systems and increased access to social protection services.

While acknowledging these achievements, Peer Educators emphasized the need for sustainable solutions, particularly livelihood opportunities and skills development, to support the long-term social and economic inclusion of PWUD.

The meeting also prepared Peer Educators for the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT) commemoration, where they mobilized PWUD to access integrated health services at Gisenyi Health Facility, including HIV testing, TB screening, hepatitis screening, STI services, mental health support, and other harm reduction interventions.

The session concluded with renewed commitment from Peer Educators to continue promoting health access, reducing stigma, and ensuring that PWUD are treated with dignity and respect.

Through community leadership and partnership, Peer Educators in Rubavu are proving that every person deserves access to care, support, and hope.



Every child deserves the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive in a safe and supportive environment. As Africa commemorates the Day of the African Child (DAC), IMRO Rwanda joins communities across the continent in celebrating the rights, dignity, and potential of every child while renewing its commitment to protecting and promoting child wellbeing.

This year's commemoration highlights the importance of ensuring that children have access to essential services, including clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) – foundations that are critical for preventing disease, supporting healthy development, and creating an environment where children can reach their full potential.

At IMRO Rwanda, we recognize that child rights go beyond protection; they include creating conditions that allow children to live healthy, dignified, and empowered lives. Access to safe water and proper sanitation plays a vital role in improving children's health, supporting school attendance, and strengthening resilience within families and communities.

Through its programs and community engagement initiatives, IMRO Rwanda continues to work with partners and communities to promote health, social protection, and inclusive development, ensuring that vulnerable children and families are not left behind.

The Day of the African Child is a reminder that investing in children today means building a healthier and stronger Africa tomorrow. By protecting children's rights and improving access to essential services, we contribute to a future where every child has the opportunity to dream, grow, and succeed.

IMRO Rwanda remains committed to standing with children, families, and communities in advancing dignity, equality, and a healthier future for all.

Conclusion

As we reflect on the achievements of this quarter, one message stands out clearly: “**community-led action saves lives**”. From strengthening HIV and TB prevention among Key Populations, empowering peer educators and Community Health Workers, supporting pregnant women to access PMTCT services, promoting harm reduction for People Who Use Drugs, and expanding access to stigma-free healthcare, every activity has contributed to building healthier, more inclusive communities.

These achievements would not have been possible without the commitment of our dedicated peer educators, Community Health Workers, healthcare providers, local authorities, community leaders, and the resilience of the communities we serve. We also extend our sincere appreciation to our partners and donors, whose continued support enables IMRO Rwanda to deliver evidence-based, rights-based, and people-centered interventions that leave no one behind.

While challenges such as stigma, discrimination, and resource constraints remain, the progress highlighted in this newsletter demonstrates that collaboration, compassion, and community ownership can transform lives. Every person reached, every referral made, every health service accessed, and every life empowered brings Rwanda one step closer to ending HIV, tuberculosis, and the harmful consequences of substance use.

IMRO Rwanda remains committed to working alongside government institutions, development partners, civil society, and communities to expand equitable access to quality health services, protect human rights, and strengthen community resilience. Together, we are creating a future where every individual—regardless of their circumstances—can live a healthier, safer, and more dignified life.

Thank you for reading!

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