



**RWANDA HEALTH INITIATIVE
FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN**

IMPROVING ADOLESCENT HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH YOUTH-FRIENDLY SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES (2019-2015)

Objective

To improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes among adolescents and young people by increasing access to accurate information, integrated youth-friendly services, and supportive environments that enable informed decision-making, healthy behaviors, and equitable access to care.

Background

Adolescents and young people constitute a significant proportion of Rwanda's population and represent a critical demographic for achieving sustainable development and improved health outcomes. However, many adolescents continue to face barriers to accessing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services due to stigma, harmful social norms, limited adolescent-responsive services, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

These barriers contribute to persistent challenges, including unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV infection, unsafe abortion, gender-based violence (GBV), poor mental health outcomes, and limited utilization of essential health services.

To address these challenges, we adopted a comprehensive, rights-based, and youth-centered approach that combines service delivery, health education, community engagement, youth leadership, and health systems strengthening. Through community youth centers, schools, outreach platforms, and partnerships with public health facilities, the intervention has expanded access to quality services while strengthening local systems to sustainably respond to adolescent health needs.

Strategic Interventions (2019–2025)

◆ Expanding Access to Integrated Youth-Friendly Services

The program established and strengthened youth-friendly safe spaces within community youth centers, providing adolescents and young people with accessible, confidential, and non-judgmental services.

Integrated services included:

- Sexual and reproductive health information and counseling;
- Family planning, modern contraceptives methods and contraception counseling;



- HIV testing and counseling;
- STI screening and treatment;
- Pregnancy testing, counseling, and referral;
- Menstrual health counseling and support;
- Support and referral for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Psychosocial and mental health counseling;
- Screening and referral for reproductive health concerns;
- Health education and life skills development.



The program further expanded access through community outreach activities, school-based interventions, and mobile service delivery approaches targeting underserved communities.

Reaching Vulnerable and Marginalized Adolescents

Targeted interventions were implemented to address the needs of vulnerable populations, including youth with disabilities, street-connected children, refugee youth, adolescent mothers, and young sex workers.

Tailored information, counseling, psychosocial support, and referral services ensured that vulnerable adolescents could access services often unavailable through conventional health delivery mechanisms.

Promoting Youth Leadership and Community Ownership

The program invested in the recruitment, training, and mentorship of youth champions and peer educators who served as sources of information, role models, and referral agents within their communities.

Community engagement strategies actively involved community leaders, and local authorities to foster supportive environments for adolescent health and wellbeing.

Strengthening primary Health centers

Recognizing that sustainable impact requires strong systems, the program strengthened the capacity of healthcare providers across public health facilities through training on adolescent-responsive, gender-sensitive, and non-discriminatory service delivery.

The intervention also supported the dissemination and implementation of national adolescent-friendly service standards and strengthened referral linkages between youth centers, schools, communities, and health facilities.

Results Achieved (2019–2025)

◆ Expanded Access to Information and Services

- More than **150,000 adolescents and young people** reached with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information through youth centers, schools, community outreach initiatives, peer education platforms, and mobile services;
- Over **2,000 vulnerable adolescents and young people** accessed counseling, SRHR information, various SRH services and referral services;
- **Thousands of adolescents** benefited from integrated youth-friendly health services, including counseling, HIV testing and counselling, family planning and modern contraceptives methods, STI screening and treatment, Menstrual health counseling and support, Basic support and referral for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, Pregnancy testing, counseling, and referral psychosocial support, and referrals for specialized care.

◆ Increased Youth Participation and Community Engagement

- More than **120 youth champions and peer educators** trained and actively engaged in awareness campaigns, peer-to-peer education, and referral mechanisms;
- Strengthened community support structures that promote positive health-seeking behaviors and adolescent wellbeing.

◆ Improved Inclusion and Equity

- Approximately **500 vulnerable adolescents and young people**, including youth with disabilities, refugee youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and young sex workers, accessed tailored support services and referrals.

◆ Strengthened Health System Capacity

- More than **800 healthcare providers** from 5 districts trained in adolescent-friendly service delivery;
- Adolescent-responsive service standards strengthened across **61 public health facilities** in five districts;
- Improved quality, accessibility, confidentiality, and responsiveness of adolescent health services.

◆ Development Impact

The intervention has contributed to:

- Increased knowledge and awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights among adolescents and young people;
- Improved utilization of youth-friendly health services;
- Enhanced health-seeking behaviors and informed decision-making among adolescents;
- Reduced stigma and social barriers limiting access to sexual and reproductive healthcare;

- Increased inclusion of vulnerable youth in health programming;
- Strengthened referral systems linking communities, schools, youth centers, and primary public health facilities;
- Enhanced local capacity to deliver sustainable adolescent health services aligned with national priorities.

Sustainability and Systems Strengthening

Sustainability has been a central pillar of the intervention. By strengthening primary public health facilities, building the capacity of mid-level healthcare providers, institutionalizing adolescent-friendly service standards, and establishing community-based support mechanisms, the program has created lasting structures that continue to benefit adolescents beyond our projects lifecycle.

The investment in youth leadership, peer education networks, and community ownership has further strengthened local capacity to sustain health promotion efforts and maintain demand for services.

◆ Key Lessons Learned

- Integrated youth-friendly service models that combine health services, counseling, life skills education, and psychosocial support are highly effective in increasing adolescent engagement and service utilization;
- Youth champions and peer educators play a critical role in reaching adolescents with trusted information and facilitating timely referrals;
- Health care providers training in adolescent-responsive and non-judgmental care significantly improves service quality and client satisfaction;
- Community engagement is essential for addressing harmful social norms and creating enabling environments for adolescent health;
- Inclusive and tailored approaches are necessary to ensure vulnerable adolescents are not left behind.