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SUCCESS STORY

Community Health Workers: Sources of Information and Support in the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence

CHWs from Rutsiro District join the international movement to combat GBV



Photo by Lauren Welch

Christine, a community health worker at her home in Rutsiro, happy to serve her community against gender-based violence (GBV).

“Before [the Isange One Stop Center] there was a lot of GBV in Rutsiro, but now people know their rights and can report it. Once a person is aware of their rights, it is easier to prevent GBV.”

Christine Kayitesi
Community Health Worker
Rutsiro District

Every year, from November 25 to December 10, the world mobilizes through the *16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence* campaign. In Rwanda, nearly 56 percent of women report experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. To help address the high rate of violence and give victims a place to seek refuge and support, USAID’s Rwanda Family Health Project, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, supported the establishment of the Isange One Stop Center in Western Rwanda to provide a safe location where victims of GBV and those affected by it can receive medical, psycho-social and legal support.

This year, the Isange One Stop Center in Rutsiro district joins a number of functioning centers across Rwanda. The project outfitted the center with the needed equipment, and to ensure quality services, the project strengthened the skills of 20 healthcare providers within the center and 36 additional healthcare providers who are expected to refer victims from neighboring health centers.

The One Stop Centers are important resources and tools for combatting gender-based violence in Rwanda, but they often are reactive, usually reaching the victim after the violence has already occurred. Recognizing the need for efforts to prevent violence from occurring in the first place, the project has also trained healthcare providers in gender-based violence prevention and management so they can facilitate identification, referral and counseling for victims.

These healthcare providers in turn strengthened the gender-based violence case management skills of over 1,440 community health workers throughout the district, who returned to their villages and engaged the community through outreach focused on gender-based violence prevention and response. Further, to raise local awareness and secure sustainable support, the Isange One Stop Center and the project hosted a community sensitization meeting with nearly 150 participants, made up of district authorities and hospital staff.

Christine Kayitesi, a newly trained community health worker affiliated with the Karumbi Health Center in Rutsiro, is excited to use her new skills to fight gender-based violence. She is enthusiastic about her ability to refer patients for help close to home due to the newly established Isange One Stop Center. She confidently shared that reasons for gender-based violence include poverty and the economic disparity that exists between men and women in the rural areas. She is now the point person in her community and is proud to have hosted a number of inquisitive neighbors in her home, where they can talk freely about the violence they are experiencing or seeing in their community.

“After having the training on gender-based violence, we learned about the different kinds of gender-based violence and after, we came back home and started to mobilize the community through meetings. We explained what gender-based violence was and a person’s rights. Now, we are seeing less gender-based violence in Rutsiro because people know about it and the related laws. When we meet a victim of gender-based violence, we are able to immediately refer them to the local authorities and the One Stop Center at Murunda District Hospital” she explained.

Christine is energetic and happy to be able to share this information and join the world in the fight against gender-based violence.