



ANNUAL REPORT

MEDICAL DOCTORS FOR CHOICE

2022-2023

ABOUT MDFC

Rwanda Medical Doctors For Choice is a non-governmental organization established by a network of pro-choice physicians who believe in the right to choose and body autonomy. We advocate for reproductive rights and access to comprehensive reproductive health care, with a primary focus on safe abortion. Our vision is a future where individuals can confidently and safely decide, with equitable access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health and rights, free from harassment, stigma, and discrimination.



MDFC STRATEGIES

To achieve sustainable change, MDFC works under four main strategies: advocating for and contributing to the implementation of progressive policies; actively creating partnerships with civil society organizations and other institutions working on comprehensive SRHRJ to create a stronger movement for transformative and sustainable change; empowering healthcare professionals on the legal and medical aspects of abortion and post-abortion care; and fostering positive behavior change.

MISSION

Creating a network of Medical Doctors who believe in the right to choose confidently and to access safely comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

MDFC 2022-2023

**860
women**

received friendly SRH services through our network of providers

**85
Students**

85 Final Year Medical students trained on medical and legal aspect on safe abortion

**455
Providers**

Healthcare providers reached/Empowered on friendly SRH services provision

**13
Partnerships**

new partnerships created

Contact us for more information



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MDFC 2022-2023 Annual report

Dear partners,

We are delighted to present the Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) Annual Report, showcasing our journey from 2022 to 2023. These initiatives embody the dedication and passion that drove us forward throughout the year, from empowering medical professionals to address sexual reproductive health challenges and friendly services provision to advocacy—a significant milestone in our commitment to women's rights and sexual reproductive health. This past year marked significant growth for Medical Doctors for Choice, from expanding our organization staff and partnerships to enhancing our capacity to serve communities nationwide.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your steadfast support. We acknowledge the invaluable contributions and strong collaboration with the local government, funders, partners, individuals, and the communities we serve. Your collective efforts have been instrumental in advancing sexual reproductive health and rights, underscoring the power of collaboration and partnership.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to nurturing these vital partnerships and amplifying our collective impact. Here's to a New Year brimming with the health and well-being of all.

Chair of The Board
Dr. Jean Berchmans Uwimana

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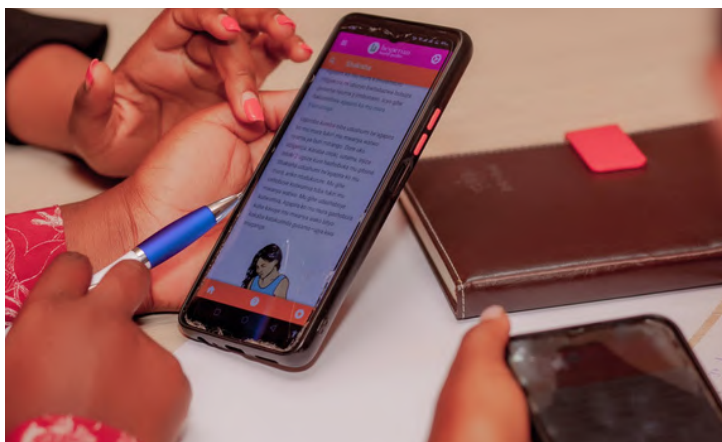
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I. TRAINING OF FUTURE PROVIDERS ON SAFE ABORTION (SA) & FAMILY PLANNING MOBILE APPLICATIONS CREATED BY HESPERIAN HEALTH GUIDES.

On 5th November 2022, Medical Doctors for Choice (MDFC) conducted a training session on Safe Abortion (SA) and Family Planning mobile applications created by Hesperian Health Guides. The training targeted medical doctors and future medical doctors in Nyamata, Bugesera district, aiming to equip the participants with the knowledge and skills to use mobile applications to provide quality and comprehensive reproductive health services. The training covered topics such as abortion methods, post-abortion care, contraceptive options, and counseling.

Participants also acquired skills in accessing and navigating the mobile application, built upon Hesperian Health Guides' books and resources. The training fostered interactivity and active participation through group discussions, role plays, and demonstrations. Appreciation was voiced by participants for both the training and the mobile applications, noting their utility and user-friendly nature.

EMPOWERING FUTURE HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS USING DIGITAL SOLUTIONS



2. TRAINING OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) PREVENTION AND RESPONSE.



On 24th December, 2022, In partnering with African Youth and AdolescentS Network (AfriYAN) Rwanda, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) organized two days training of young Medical Professionals (doctors) on GBV prevention and response in December, 2022.

The training happened in Musanze district, and provided young medical professionals with essential knowledge and skills on gender equality, GBV in all its forms and how they can be prevented and responded to within the society and in the clinical environment. As the young medical professionals they should speak up, take a stand, be at the forefront of the battle against GBV and also take big and small actions to advance Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights information among Adolescents as they are the backbone of the country.

During the training, MDFC also conducted participative sessions on important digital platforms that exist to advance the access to SRHR information in Rwanda. Furthermore, the participants discussed approaches of engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality and preventing GBV, and on approaches of supporting victims of GBV during health care services delivery and in the society.

The training contributed to building the next generation of young leaders in Rwandan health system with gender knowledge and skills to support the national effort to engage youth in gender promotion, women's empowerment and GBV prevention and response.





3. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

The UN established the International Women's Day in 1972 as a global platform to celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness about gender inequalities, and increase support for women worldwide. It's a day to honor the social, economic, cultural and political contributions of women. The theme for the year 2023 was "DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equity".

In line with IWD23, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) and other coalition members working on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) with the support of Amplify Change decided to join their efforts to strengthen the SRHR movement. On the 8th March, 2023, the coalition members celebrated the International Women's Day in Ngoma district, Eastern province, Rwanda. The coalition aimed to advocate for gender equality by amplifying women's voice and achievements and highlighting the role of men in promoting access to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) & services and information, as well as their role in policy development.



On the 8th March, 2023, also Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) with its partners, Women Doctors For Reproductive Justice (WDFRJ), Medical Students For Choice (MSFC), at its office in Nyamata, Bugsera district celebrated International Women's Day 2023 by acknowledging the role of women in driving Innovation and Technology towards a more equal World and embracing equity.



4. ADVANCING SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL IN RWANDA.



On 16th March, 2023 with other Civil Society Organizations, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) participated in discussion concerned about advancing Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights through effective implementation of the Maputo protocol in Rwanda led by Great Lake Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD) and Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR).



The workshop addressed crucial topics, exploring the "Policy & Legal Framework on Abortion in Rwanda" and facilitating experience sharing by medical doctors in Safe Abortion Provision. Its objectives included increasing stakeholders' understanding of the legal framework on sexual reproductive health and rights, identifying gaps in the conditions for medical doctors to perform safe abortions in legal context, and informing key players about challenges faced by women and girls in accessing abortion services. Ultimately, the collective knowledge gained during the workshop positioned participants to take informed and impactful actions for addressing complexities in abortion services and reproductive health. A strong believe that together, we can create positive change around the provision and access of sexual and reproductive health services.



5. WORKSHOP ON MAPPING AND CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN RWANDA

On 18th March 2023, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) participated in a workshop on mapping and capacity assessment of Youth-Led Organizations (YLOs) in Rwanda organized by the African Youth and Adolescent Network (AfriYAN) Rwanda. The three-day workshop brought together YLOs from operating across the country and assessed their capacities to shape an informed capacity-building plan.

Through the UNFPA_SYP Programme designed to empower adolescents & young people aged 10-24 years to protect themselves from STIs, HIV, early & unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, early marriage, gender-based violence, & harmful cultural practices while promoting gender-equitable norms.



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN RWANDA



The three-day workshop aimed to enhance meaningful youth participation in policy and decision-making, empowering young people to actively shape policies that affect them. The mapping and capacity assessment of these Youth-Led Organizations created a targeted capacity-building plan based on the unique needs of each organization.



6. MEDICAL STUDENT'S ASSOCIATION OF RWANDA (MEDSAR) DAY 2023



On the 18th of March, 2023, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) and other partners contributed to the Medical Students Association of Rwanda (MEDSAR) Day 2023. The event took place at Kigali Lemigo Hotel. The partnership between MDFC and MEDSAR extends from MDFC founding members, who are committed to contributing and giving back to the medical student society in Rwanda. It is important to work and partner with future healthcare providers to bring about the change we want, the future generation providers who are committed and value community health.



MDFC exhibition booth

Furthermore, on MEDSAR day 2023, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) exhibited its new project called "AASAP (Accelerating Access to Safe Abortion services Project) Finder". AASAP is a digital pro-choice map that aims to expand access to adequate safe and high-quality abortion care under the recently updated Rwandan abortion law by composing a transformative user-friendly digital Pro-Choice human resource map that maps and links pro-choice physicians and maps clinics where they officially practice, to create a secure channel that effectively guides and connects women and girls to where they can specifically access fast abortion services without, delays, stigma, judgment, or discrimination.

7. SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY WORKSHOP



On 21st March, 2023 in Nyamata, Medical Doctor For Choice (MDFC) participated in one day Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) communication strategy workshop themed “Through Good Communication, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can build a stronger SRHR Network” organized by Ihorere Munyarwanda Organization (IMRO), one of our consortium members of AmplifyChange Project.

The workshop focused on building Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) communication strategies that empower Civil Society Organizations to become agents of change in promoting and protecting Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and Services



8. FP2030: EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (ESA) HUB SUPPORT VISIT TO RWANDA

FP2030 is the only Global partnership that is centered solely on family planning. It's one year now since Rwanda launched its FP2030 Commitment which happened in April 2022, and with the launch, Rwanda joined a global partnership together with many other commitment-making countries. Through FP2030, the East and South Africa (ESA) Hub of the Global Family Planning partnership had paid a visit to Rwanda that seeks to further strengthen the collaboration between Rwanda and the ESA Hub to systematically advance rights-based family planning.

On 20th April 2023, Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) joined FP2030 stakeholders and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Family Planning Technical working groups to discuss the FP2030 country action plan, the technical assistance required and to raise more awareness about the FP2030 Global partnership.



9. TRAINING PROGRAM OF ICPD25 YOUNG CHAMPIONS IN RWANDA.



Following the implementation of Rwanda's commitments at the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, looking forward to ICPD30.



Medical Doctors For Choice participated in the three-day training of the Rwandan agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development ICPD25 Young Champions in Rwanda, organized by AfriYAN Rwanda. The training aimed to equip young champions with a blended knowledge and understanding of the ICPD Programme of action and the national commitments to lead on meaningful youth participation and accelerate the realization of the agenda.

Young people embracing their responsibilities to harness their various potential within full diversity will accelerate the implementation of national commitments as we move from ICPD25 to ICPD30.

10. SAVE THE CHILDREN – KUMWE HUB VISIT

On the 10th of July, MDFC received delegates from Save The Children Rwanda and Kumwe Hub as our esteemed partners under the implemented project titled 'Advancing Access to Safe Abortion Project.' Kumwe Hub facilitates investment efforts in startups, small businesses, and entrepreneurs who are making a positive difference for children and communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The AASAP is a digital platform that stands out as the only tool providing comprehensive mapping and locating of legal health facilities offering safe abortion services throughout the country in a legal, safe, and timely manner.





II. MEDICAL DOCTORS FOR CHOICE AT WDC2023

On 17-20 July, MDFC was thrilled to attend the Women Deliver Conference. WD2023 took place in Rwanda and convened thousands of decision-makers from diverse fields, including civil societies, governments, the private sectors, international agencies, and advocates representing the intersectional identities of girls and women, and underrepresented populations around the World to break the barriers, address the challenges and identify the opportunities to advance gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and improve the wellbeing of girls and women, in all their intersecting identities. It was a great memorable and inspiring moment for MDFC to exchange invaluable insights, experiences, and barriers faced by Healthcare Professionals in delivering essential SRHR services with different stakeholders and partners that work on advancing SRHR services accessibility to all.



The theme of WD2023, "Spaces, Solidarity, and Solutions," facilitated inclusive and co-created spaces that fostered solidarity for sustainable solutions in the realm of gender equality.

During WD2023, with sexual and reproductive health and rights at core, It embraced intersectional feminist principles to address compounding issues impacting girls and women – from climate change to gender-based violence and unpaid care work. The conference collectively identified evidence-based solutions, enhancing collective power by championing the leadership of grassroots advocates, connecting them with decision-makers, and sharing key advocacy strategies. Coming together, WD203 aimed to break barriers, address challenges, and identify opportunities to advance gender equality and improve the well-being of girls and women in all their intersecting identities.

12. WORKSHOP WITH MEDICAL DOCTORS ON EXPANDING PRO-CHOICE PHYSICIANS



On 21st July 2023, MDFC organized a workshop for new physicians, focusing on expanding the network of pro-choice physicians. The workshop aimed to reflect on current strategies and the local context of safe abortion care in Rwanda. It was interactive, fostering experience-sharing among physicians in their daily practices for safe abortion care provision.

During the workshop, MDFC explored the barriers and challenges faced by healthcare professionals in providing legal abortion care services. Physicians discussed what can be done to address these challenges and increase access to safe abortion in Rwanda.



Furthermore, new members were introduced to MDFC as the organization representing the opinions, ideas, and services of medical doctors dedicated to providing and advocating for SRHR services to save lives. Leveraging digital technology, medical doctors discussed and provided feedback on AASAPFinder, a digital intervention implemented by MDFC in partnership with RWDFRJ. The aim is to bridge the gap in accessing abortion care services by locating and mapping legally health facilities in Rwanda that provide those services in a timely manner.

13. COALITION MEETING EVENTS AND AMPLIFYCHANGE-COALITION VISIT



MDFC has participated in different coalition meetings with other coalition members to evaluate the project implementation progress within the coalition members. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to harness their power of collaboration to increase their impact and sustain meaningful change around SRHR in Rwanda.

On 16th June 2023, MDFC participated in a training workshop for CSOs on monitoring and reporting techniques on Human rights organized by GLIHD as one of our coalition members.



On 21st July, Rwanda Reproductive Health Coalition (RRHC) met under the AmplifyFund project to evaluate the progress and results of completed project activities by each coalition member Civil Society Organization ensuring alignment and effective implementation of the project goals.

On 25th July 2023, Rwanda SRHR coalition members received a delegation from AmplifyChange, both sides overviewed the implementation and the work done by each partner by consolidating the work plan, indicators, and milestones. It was a participative plenary session and sharing experiences from downstream partners on the lessons learned and challenges faced.





14. MDFC AND MEDSAR SCORA-EXCHANGE PROGRAM 2023

On 24th July 2023, under the Rwanda Standing Committee of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights including HIV/AIDS (SCORA) Exchange program 2023 hosted by the Medical Student Association of Rwanda (MEDSAR), MDFC was privileged to introduce to future medical doctors the current SRHR policy framework specifically on safe abortion in Rwanda.

The session facilitated by MDFC founder, Dr. Jean Berchmans UWIMANA was a great moment to reconceive the role of physicians in the provision of sexual reproductive health services including safe abortion care by building the capacity of medical students for sustainable Sexual Reproductive Health Rights solutions.



15. AMPLIFY CHANGE VISIT TO MDFC OFFICE.



28th July 2023, Medical Doctors For Choice was honored to receive a delegate from Amplify Change as one of its partner organizations. AmplifyChange supports civil society organizations (CSOs) that advocate for improved sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). It was a great opportunity for MDFC to introduce its working system and how it collaborates with the SRHR coalition in advancing and securing full attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all through justice advocacy and services provision within the existing wide SRHR movement channels in Rwanda.





16. INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY-2023 CELEBRATION

Every Year on 12th August, the World marks the International Youth Day. This year on the same date, MDFC joined the World in celebration of International Youth Day under Youth Cafe gathering of diverse youth-led organizations. The theme was "Green Skills for Youth-Towards a Sustainable World". As the World is embarking on green transition, we young people acknowledge how the development of green skills plays a crucial role in providing a space for us to unite, amplify our voices, and mobilize resources to achieve our goals.

Africa's young people are the principal engine for fostering development at all levels. By 2063, Africa's children and youth will be fully engaged as the talent pipeline, principal innovators, and indeed the sustainers of Africa's advantages from transformation



The Youth Café serves as the centerpiece of the celebration of #IYD2023 and has brought together various youth-led organizations and members of to recognize how the green transition is directly interrelated to other topics that matter most to young people.



“Young people are lucky today. During our time we never had such platforms. I am happy you can organize through such forums. I can say that you need to exploit the platforms & achieve much more than we ever achieved.” Dr. Joseph RYARASA, one of our senior mentors.

He urged young people to be more intentional & honest in addressing the challenges young people face today, particularly the issues of teenage pregnancies, which the country is grappling with, by applying solutions that are youth-centered.



17. HESPERIAN APP WORKSHOP FOR NURSES AND MIDWIVES



On 19th August, MDFC held an informative workshop introducing nurses and midwives to the current use of digital technology advancing safe abortion care service provision for nurses and midwives in their daily practice. Nurses and Midwives had an excellent opportunity to learn about the Hesperian App, a reliable resource for step-by-step instructions on safe abortion and post-abortion care, the use of a pregnancy calculator, patient education, and other features of the App. The workshop was closed with feedback, questions, and recommendations from participants to improve quality health services delivery. Together we explored the new benefits of HesperianApp adding to existing practices in the provision of Legal safe abortion in the Rwanda context.

18. MEDICAL STUDENT FOR CHOICE TRAINING WORKSHOP

29th August, Medical Student for Choice organized a workshop for welcoming new future pro-choice physicians at hand. MDFC got opportunities to share insights with fresh minded medical students on SRHR focusing on the current ministerial order permitting safe abortion care provision. It was so inspiring to see the future healthcare providers engaged in such conversations. Additionally, MDFC engaged the participants in the Values Clarification for Action and Transformation session, which emphasized on exploring assumptions around Safe Abortion and the role of future healthcare providers in ensuring legal and safe access to abortion care for women and girls in the Rwandan context.



Under this great occasion, it was a great opportunity to showcase the role of digital technology in advancing access to safe abortion. We presented the AASAP platform, the first publicly accessible platform in Rwanda that helps girls and young women to locate certified health facilities in Rwanda that offer legal and safe abortion services.



19. CSOs TRAINING COURSE ON EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY



From September 12th to 15th, 2023, MDFC actively participated in a 4-day training program focused on evidence-based advocacy. The collaborative initiative brought together 25 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) under the AmplifyChange project, organized by HDI as part of the Rwanda Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Coalition.

At the core of MDFC's values is a belief in the importance of advocacy as a tool for catalyzing positive change in policies, laws, and practices, ensuring alignment with a human rights-centered approach. The training played a significant role in advancing our mission, strategically positioning advocacy as a central tenet for strengthening SRHR-related policies and practices within our local context.

The program provided valuable knowledge and skills while fostering a space for open dialogue and collaboration among diverse civil society entities, promoting transparency and openness. This collaborative ethos aimed at working collectively towards citizen-centered approaches, fortified our shared commitment to driving policy and advocacy objectives that resonate with the broader community.

20. MSFC EAST AFRICA REGIONAL MEETING 2023

On August 26th, MDFC actively participated in the East Africa Regional meeting, a gathering that brought together all chapters of Medical Students For Choice in East Africa. This event provided a valuable opportunity to exchange insights and experiences with aspiring pro-choice physicians from across the region. The overarching theme of the meeting was "Shaping the Future: Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights," with a specific emphasis on safe abortion.

During the event, MDFC founders and MSFC alumni associated with Medical Students For Choice emphasized the importance of collective action. They encouraged all participants to unite their efforts in order to amplify their voices, advocate for their impacts, and establish a robust global network. The focus was on merging efforts to advocate for universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), particularly in the context of comprehensive safe abortion. This collaborative approach was underscored as a key strategy to enhance advocacy and contribute to positive change in healthcare on a broader scale.



21. THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL



On 22nd September 2023 Medical Doctors for Choice, Attended the 20th Anniversary of the Maputo Protocol Celebration. The celebration happened in the southern province, Muhanga District with the Theme: **“20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL: CELEBRATING AND CONTINUING TO DEFEND WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN AFRICA”**.

The Maputo protocol aims to address the various forms of discrimination, violence, and other human rights violations that women in Africa face. As the purpose was to keep driving transformation and empowering African women, Everyone learned to honor the unwavering champions of women’s rights advocates, dedicated decision-makers, supportive government, and all relentless agents of change! The event was organized as a celebration to be attended by CSOs that work on Human and Women’s rights SRHR, Relevant government institutions, Development partners, Law enforcement agencies, Media houses, and other gender activists as well as citizens of Muhanga District.



The expected result was an increase in awareness of this women's rights protocol and its role in advancing women, along with recommendations for the continued implementation of the Maputo Protocol. Joining other African nations to celebrate the adoption of the Maputo Protocol every year and recognizing the efforts and achievements made by the Government of Rwanda to ratify and domesticate this protocol, promotes women’s rights and combats discrimination against women. Reminding ourselves of the role and contribution of CSOs in implementing the provisions of the protocol to better the lives of women and girls in Rwanda.

Different displays, speeches, and sketches were used to remind families how they should maintain sustainable and peaceful households by treating each other well. People also learned different ways of family planning for both men and women.



22. THE AFRIYAN RWANDA GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023



Medical Doctors For Choice Participated in AfriYAN Rwanda General Assembly 2023, which took place from September 21st to 23rd at Classic Hotel in Musanze District, Rwanda. The assembly aimed to strengthen the foundations of youth-led organizations in Rwanda by enhancing proficiency in national policies and strategies, particularly focusing on the revised National Gender Policy and programming for adolescent girls and young women. The event also involved the election of the new leadership team for 2023-2025, revising operational strategies, and promoting collaboration and partnership.

The training happened in Musanze district, and provided young medical professionals with essential knowledge and skills on gender equality, GBV in all its forms and how they can be prevented and responded to within the society and in the clinical environment.



Medical Doctors for Choice believes that young medical professionals should speak up, take a stand, and be at the forefront of the battle against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). It is crucial for them to take significant actions, even small ones, to advance information about Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights among adolescents, because every step counts.



SESSION 01: AGYW PROGRAMMING IN RWANDA



In the opening session led by Dr. Laurence NTAWUNGA, HIV Prevention and SRH Data Analyst at the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), participants delved into Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) Programming in Rwanda, addressing critical issues and challenges that girls and young women encounter in their reproductive journey.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: PLENARY I



The following session featured welcoming remarks from Ms. Patience Iribagiza, Chairperson of AfriYAN Rwanda. Afterwards, Dr. Evode Niyibizi, Country Director of AfriYAN Rwanda, shared the journey, achievements, and opportunities of AfriYAN Rwanda. The afternoon session included a presentation and voting on membership candidatures.



SESSION 02: GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTION

In a very engaging session, Silas NGAYABOSHYA, Director General of Gender Promotion and Women Empowerment at MIGEPROF, disseminated the revised National Gender Policy with a special focus on gender equality in action. Participants got the opportunity to engage in questions and sharing ideas on their role in gender equality promotion.





SESSION 03: ENGAGING BOYS & YOUNG MEN IN PREVENTING TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

In session 3, Mr. Anastase Ndagijimana, Executive Director of We Got Your Back, led a session on engaging boys and young men in preventing teenage pregnancies. The conversation ignited essential topics about consent, bodily autonomy, responsible behavior, and open communication. Emphasizing the importance of asking and granting consent for healthy relationships, a pivotal role that men and boys should champion.



AFRIYAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCLUSIONS



Medical Doctors for Choice played an active role in the AfriYAN General Assembly as committed members, contributing significantly to the final plenaries. On the concluding day, September 23, 2023, we actively engaged in discussions and contributed to resolutions.



This General Assembly 2023 successfully met its objectives by enhancing understanding of the National Gender Policy, reinforcing programming for adolescent girls and young women, and electing a new leadership team for AfriYAN. The event further facilitated collaboration, partnership, and knowledge-sharing among youth-led organizations in Rwanda—aligning seamlessly with the core objectives of Medical Doctors For Choice, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in our mission.

23. CELEBRATION OF WORLD CONTRACEPTIVE DAY 2023



World Contraception Day takes place on September 26th every year with the vision that every pregnancy is wanted. Launched in 2007, WCD's mission is to improve awareness of individuals and couples including young people on contraception and to enable people to make informed decisions on their sexual and reproductive health.

This year at the National level, MDFC with SRHR coalition members joined the Ministry of Health/ Rwanda Biomedical Center in collaboration with its partners to celebrate World Contraceptive Day 2023 at Nyamasheke district-Kanjongo sector, themed **"Building Healthy Communities and Sustainable Development through Promoting Contraceptive Use"** with the aim to disseminate comprehensive information on reproductive health in general and particularly on contraception use.



The focus on universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and gender equality mirrors Rwanda's core values. World Contraception Day 2023 aimed to raise awareness on reproductive health and contraception, especially in hard-to-reach areas, striving for universal health coverage.

We urge support from all sectors—reproductive health programs, development partners, CSOs, health professionals, and more to advocate for contraception as a human right. Together, let's empower informed choices and accessibility to quality contraceptives, respecting each individual's autonomy.



24. INTERNATIONAL SAFE ABORTION DAY 2023

Annually on September 28th, the world marks International Safe Abortion Day. Originating as a day of action for decriminalization in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1990, it was officially declared an International Day for Women's Right to Safe Abortion by the Women's Global Network And Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) in 2011.

Rwanda began its celebration in 2020, and this year, Medical Doctors For Choice and the SRHR Coalition, at the national level, joined RBC for the fourth celebration. The event, held at Kinyinya Health Center in Gasabo District, focused on the theme "Ensuring Access to Safe Abortion Services for Women and Girls in Need: Break Barriers, Saving Lives," aiming to review Rwanda's successes, address challenges, and propose solutions for the implementation of laws and policies affecting reproductive rights.

Dr. Patrick, alongside guests from the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), officially opened the day, bringing together CSO members, local leaders, doctors, and citizens to highlight their collective role in enhancing women's and girls' health. He emphasized the legal framework for safe abortion, citing that 1035 women and girls received safe abortions in 2020-21, 1384 sought safe abortions in 2021-2022, and 1959 were provided in 2022-23 across all public health facilities. He stressed on the importance of Safe Abortion Day for its potential to increase awareness and information about safe abortion, promoting women's health and rights, and how legal safe abortion services contribute to the reduction of maternal mortality & morbidity rates.



In Rwanda, safe abortion is permissible in 5 circumstances: when the pregnancy is a result of child defilement, rape, incest in the second degree, forced marriage, or if the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the fetus. In these circumstances, women and girls who seek safe abortion are not required to provide evidence upon which they need the service. During the Safe Abortion Day 2023, Gasabo_District's Executive Administrator, UMWALI PAULINE mentioned Political will to improve women's health and implementation of legal safe abortion law. She also reminded families' role in preventing teenage pregnancy that might lead to unsafe abortion.



PANEL DISCUSSION ISAD2023

The panel discussion was on "Ensuring Access to Safe Abortion for Women and Girls in Need: Break Barriers, Save Lives". Panelists tackled on Rights and Laws on safe abortion in Rwanda, showing that despite the progress of safe abortion services legalization and commendable advancement, some challenges persist and need to be addressed.

One challenge is the stigma associated with abortion among some medical professionals which leads to reluctance to provide abortion services and makes it difficult for women to access these services. Another challenge is the cost of safe abortion services in polyclinics which creates financial barriers for some women, impeding their ability to afford necessary care for some women, this can make it difficult to afford the care they need. Finally, women in rural areas may have difficulty accessing safe abortion services due to the lack of nearby acceptable health facilities that can provide safe abortion services.



Continuing the discussion on the availability of safe abortion care and service provision in health facilities, with a focus on pre and post-abortion care at Kinyinya Health Center, midwives play a crucial role. Their primary audience is adolescents, and they provide pre-safe abortion information, guiding them through legal procedures and then facilitate a transfer to hospitals where medical doctors offer the necessary services. Emphasizing the importance of increasing public awareness regarding the need for safe abortion and ensuring access to these services. In conclusion, the imperative is clear: all women and girls in need should have unhindered access to legal safe abortion services, promoting reproductive health and rights for all.



25. MDFC STAFF MEETING WITH IPPF AFRICA REGION



On 17 October 2023 Medical Doctors For Choice, was delighted to welcome delegates from the International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region, IPPF is a locally-led, globally connected civil society movement, delivering sexual and reproductive healthcare and fighting for sexual and reproductive rights. IPPF serves the under-served especially women of reproductive age and young girls, young people, and marginalized communities. The meeting focused on building a strong partnership between the two organizations, aiming to join both local and global civil society movements that advocate, provide services, and champion Sexual Reproductive Health Rights for all.



The occasion served as a significant platform to share our experiences with various local partners, emphasizing the transformative power of collaboration and network building. IPPFAR looking for a partner aligned with their values, and MDFC, in its introduction, detailed the organization's origins. Additionally, how we work with our esteemed partners, such as the Health Development Initiative (HDI), which was highlighted for its interest in supporting diverse activities, including facilities and advocacy procedures. MDFC explained the successful networking system with various organizations, attributing tangible results and growth to the invaluable support provided by our esteemed partner organizations such as Health Development Initiative (HDI).

26. EVALUATION MEETING OF THE AMPLIFYCHANGE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS



On 02 Nov 2023 Medical doctors for choice with SRHR Consortium members joined to evaluate the progress of the AmplifyChange project implementation. Amplify project is a project that focuses on advancing advocacy and service provision within existing wide SRHR movement channels in Rwanda.

It was a good moment to all implementing partners to ensure best practices and all staff members are protected and empowered.



All partners participated in giving different ideas with different examples about Anti-sexual harassment and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and Anti-corruption as well. It was a productive meeting, members were also trained on Anti-sexual harassment, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and Anti-corruption policies.

The primary objective of the meeting was to tackle various forms of violence and propose practical measures that recognize gender discrimination as a violation of human rights. This meeting was a crucial step in the development of a new implementation strategy, reflecting commitment to addressing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse And Sexual Harassment (SEAH) Comprehensively.



27. VALUES CLARIFICATION AND ATTITUDE TRANSFORMATION (VCAT) ON SAFE ABORTION



The Values Clarification and attitude transformation (VCAT) training was a 4-days workshop organized by Ihorere Munyarwanda Organisation (IMRO-Rwanda), that took place from Nov 28th - Dec 1st 2023.

The objective of the training was to ensure that healthcare providers approach such the sensitive and often controversial issue in the society with empathy and professionalism. The training, focused on values clarification and attitude transformation, aimed to better equip doctors to navigate the complex ethical and moral considerations surrounding safe abortion. This approach promotes a more compassionate and patient-focused stance in reproductive healthcare.



On the first day of VCAT training session, the focus was on the prevalence of pregnant teenagers in Rwanda. According to the most recent Rwanda Demographic Health Survey (RDHS 6), 5% of girls aged 15-19 have begun childbearing; 4% have given birth, and 1% are pregnant with their first child. Additionally, it was revealed that 1.8% of teenagers have HIV. Participants gained valuable insights into broadening their focus beyond preventing unsafe abortions and addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS. The session also covered the impact of unsafe abortion, highlighting that is one of the leading cause of maternal mortality in Rwanda.

Furthermore, participants learned about international, regional, and national conventions concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). They explored Rwandan laws and their components, emphasizing the Maputo Protocol as a convention advancing African women's rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was discussed for its role in realizing equality between women and men. Advocacy efforts at the national level in Rwanda and the legal framework of SRHR and abortion in the country were also shared during this highly engaging training.



VCAT TRAINING DAY 2

Day 2: The second day of the training covered various topics, starting with legal induced abortion and the reasons for it. The participants learned that legal induced abortion increased from 1,035 to 1,989 between 2020 and 2023. They discussed different reasons for induced abortion, such as 2% for incest, 1% for forced marriage, 5% for defilement, 32% for therapeutic reasons, and 60% for rape. Another interesting topic introduced was the social-ecological model, which explained how outcomes depend on various factors like society, community, relationships, and individuals. The facilitator also discussed components of SRHR, including sexual health and sexual rights.



The discussion shifted to the epidemiological profile of legal induced abortion and its reasons in Rwanda, and with that the facilitator introduced the Values Sessions, emphasizing that there are no universal values; that everything depends on the culture, norms, beliefs of different people and their countries. Medical doctors participated in an exercise called "Four Corners on Values on SRHR and Abortion," providing a safe space for them to explore, question, and confirm their personal beliefs around safe abortion. This exercise also allowed them to understand the issues from different perspectives.





VCAT TRAINING DAY 3-4

On the third day, doctors learned about the social and gender norms connected to abortion, as well as counseling in abortion and post-abortion care, aiming to assist women and girls in taking charge of their futures. The session also explored gender-based violence (GBV) and safer abortion, highlighting the economic and physical power dynamics in cases of rape that affect different women. Participants were reminded of the time (not beyond 22 days) for a woman to access safe abortion and identified approved healthcare facilities in Rwanda. Challenges for implementation, such as religious and cultural influences, were discussed. The facilitator also refreshed medical safe abortion care provision and explained the 7 C's of Post Abortion Care (PAC) - counseling, compassion, confidentiality, care and treatment, contraception, clinics, and community - emphasizing their roles in understanding situations, addressing problems, and offering alternatives for reproductive health.



On the final day of the training, medical doctors explored the pivotal role of community engagement and mobilization in providing accurate information on safe abortion care, ensuring expanded accessibility for women and girls to make informed choices. Participants were refreshed on patient and provider rights and responsibilities to prevent malpractice and prioritize patient care. The session also covered community engagement in abortion care. The facilitator highlighted public health indicators like infant mortality rate, under-five mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, and contraceptive prevalence rate, explaining their significance in assessing the country's development. The day concluded with IMRO Rwanda recognizing the achievements of the V-CAT training participants, presenting them with certificates for their completion.



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