



IMPACT STORY



PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO TEEN MOTHERS IN RWANDA

Photo: UN Women/Courtesy of Afrifame Picture

“The mobile clinic services helped me learn more about sexual and reproductive health, taking care of my child’s diet and doing her civil registration so that she can get a birth certificate, health insurance and personal legal identification,” said Elisabeth*, 19, a single mother from the Burera District in Rwanda.

Elisabeth was raped by her neighbour on her way back from high school. The perpetrator fled to Uganda, which is only a few metres away from the Burera District, when he learned that Elisabeth was going to report the case. Elisabeth’s family abandoned her, and she was faced with shame and discrimination which made her life as an adolescent tough.

In May 2021, UN Women, in partnership with the Imbuto Foundation and the National Child Development Agency, organized a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) mobile clinic outreach to teen mothers in the Burera district as part of the UN Women project “Fostering Women and Girls’ Dignified Lives through GBV Prevention, Response and Women’s Economic Autonomy in Rwanda,” funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The outreach activity was organized in the framework of UN Women and partners’ efforts to strengthen the socioeconomic reintegration of survivors of GBV, especially teen mothers, using a full-package combined strategy. The package includes psychosocial support group counseling; parent-adolescent communication

Photo above: Elisabeth and her daughter during the mobile clinic visit to the Burera District in Rwanda.

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

UN Women’s programme “**Fostering Women and Girls’ Dignified Lives through GBV Prevention, Response and Women’s Economic Autonomy in Rwanda**” (2020-2023) is funded by the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation**.

The programme focuses on preventing sexual and gender-based violence through awareness-raising on women’s rights, strengthening response mechanisms (such as legal assistance), enhancing institutional capacity for effective and long-lasting service delivery to victims and survivors, and increasing the economic empowerment of women and girls.

As part of the programme, since May 2021 UN Women is partnering with the **Imbuto Foundation** to provide mobile clinic services in the Burera district, working with trained nurses from four local health centers.

forum sessions; community-based outreach campaigns to increase awareness on GBV, male engagement in fighting social discrimination, stigma, and violence; and the promotion of income-generating activities for teen mothers. For Elisabeth, the psychosocial sessions helped restore her dreams, dignity, and self-confidence.

The close-out meetings with teen mothers and parents provided an opportunity to discuss the main challenges they encounter and parents' role in reintegrating children to their homes, as well as the role of community and local leaders in preventing and responding to violence and child abuse.

For Niyitanga Alliance, a teen mother also from the Burea District, the conversations she had with her parents during the Parent-Adolescent Communication forum helped restore her relationship with them. "The conversations changed a lot of things in my life. My parents apologized for what they had put me through, as a result of my pregnancy, and I also had an opportunity to apologize to them [...] They helped me legally register my child and are paying for her health insurance [...] Because I had finished my school exams and before the pregnancy the results were good, my parents sent me back to school," she shared.

The teen mothers' meetings were organized in groups of twenty mothers and their children where they were provided with different services onsite, including psychosocial counseling, HIV testing, legal advice and orientation, information on sexual and reproductive health, child legal registration and nutrition, among others. Teen mothers who were willing to file their GBV cases with the Rwanda Investigation Bureau were also given the opportunity to report at the Bureau's mobile van onsite.

"Promoting women is at the heart of what we do, so seeing services close to the beneficiaries like the mobile clinic gives me hope that GBV is addressed, though, on a small scale; but I am assured that it will one day reach more teens and Rwandans," said Nadege Kanyange, Communications and Cultural Officer at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The project outreach also brought together different key stakeholders, including local authorities, law enforcement actors, civil society organisations and development partners involved in GBV and child abuse prevention and response to raise awareness around violence and COVID-19, inform the communities of existing GBV services, and provide GBV case management, legal advice and referrals.

This project fits into the larger picture of UN Women's work to end GBV in Rwanda, which follows a holistic, multidisciplinary approach whose success has led to significant scaling-up of activities over the past 10 years. Referring to what has been demonstrated to work and moving forward, UN Women Representative in Rwanda, Fatou Lo, explained, "The achievements made during the past

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RWANDA






Gender-based violence reporting rate has increased over the past few years. In 2017, over **17,000** cases were identified countrywide. In only two years, in 2019, the number of teen pregnancies increased to **23,000**. Still, many cases remain unreported, due to a persistent culture of silence combined with patriarchal social norms, cultural beliefs, and unequal power relations between men and women.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unreported cases are estimated to have increased as a result of the lockdowns, which forced survivors of violence to remain at home with perpetrators with limited access to support. Over the past 10 years UN Women has developed a holistic and multidisciplinary model of GBV response in Rwanda through a fruitful collaboration between the Government and the UN Team in the country. This multi-stakeholder approach includes the establishment of one-stop centers for survivors of violence and mobile clinics, training of legal advocates, security officers and service providers in preventing and responding to GBV, and the engagement of local and religious leaders. Successful approaches are being scaled up and applied to more centers across the country.

decade, in setting up functional centres providing holistic support, capacity building and coordination among service providers, and the availability of systems to gather GBV data through the GBV Management Information Systems, will be vital in the continuous work to provide support to victims and to prevent violence against women."

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* Names have been changed to protect the identities of the survivors.

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