

Over 400 fishermen of Karongi have been trained and know that a condom is a weapon to avoid HIV/AIDS, according to Vincent Mwizerimana, vice-president of the Union of Fishing Cooperatives in Karongi District

“We tested 400 fishermen for HIV infection, the survey found that between 10 and 20 people were HIV positive and we started encouraging them to start taking medication as well as requesting them to be open about their status while advising others on measures of prevention. ” Mwizerimana notes.

Mwizerimana, 56, a fisherman for about 30 years reveals that life on the lake is not an easy life as most of their work is done at night and when fishermen are back in the morning exhausted some find solace in prostitutes which has many downturns.



Fisherman talking to media in Karongi

Upon a fact finding mission organized by Rwanda Media Network Against HIV/AIDS and for Health Promotion (ABASIRWA), journalists were able to interact with business operators and fishermen who narrated the efforts undertaken to let the

fishermen and others in the business community in Karongi to understand the disease that is much alive and how help those infected.

The president of the Union of Fishermen's Cooperative, Emmanuel Ndagijimana, confirmed that prevention against HIV/AIDS among fishermen is done in collaboration between the Private Sector Federation (PSF) and Health Centers.

"There are condoms available in lodges and we have benefited from training to protect ourselves, especially the youth who have joined the trade, regular tests are carried out at the cooperative at least once a year. Fishermen who test positive are linked to the Health Center and put on Anti-retroviral (ARVs) medication,"he said.

Ndagijimana further divulged that fish mongers with women as the majority have also been sensitized and advised about the epidemic.

He further noted that, "Come November, training and screenings will be organized on site in Karongi, while the big challenge that remains to convince all fishermen to go for free testing.

PSF is doing its best to place condom sale points at the various fishing sites frequented by fishermen.

Léon-Pierre Rusanganwa, who is in charge of health within the PSF in Karongi called upon the youthful members who are the majority to be equipped with condoms in their pockets incase they are unable to abstain from sexual encounters.



Léon-Pierre Rusanganwa (Left) in-charge of health in PSF in Karongi and Mathias Abimana, Chairman of PSF in Karongi

“You have to carry an umbrella or a stick, because you don’t know when it will rain or when you will encounter a vicious dog or any other danger. Even people who have been exposed to the risk of infection, when the condom has broken during sex or when they have been forced to have sex in some form of abuse, care is provided for a prophylaxis after such exposure. The health centers are equipped with these protective measures,” he said.

“Most of the fishermen sleep with women whom they pay money or in exchange of small fish (Isambaza). We continue to encourage them to protect themselves, getting tested and taking ARVs in case of HIV/AIDS infection. In Rwanda, it is proven that we have reached 95% in suppressing the disease,” explains Rusanganwa.

PSF is continuing its efforts with other partners in putting condoms in hotels and lodges but still faces challenges where most establishments are owned by clerics

who don't embrace condoms in their businesses.

President of the Private Sector Federation in Western Province, Mathias Abimana said that fishermen have been made aware of the importance of hygiene and the fight against HIV/AIDS. The campaign is aimed at 13 sectors of the Karongi district and the whole Province.

"Since fishermen are very mobile we endeavor to carry out awareness campaigns for their protection because they are valuable to the nation, and since there are over 3,000 fishermen in the country operating from 22 lakes. PSF is in contact with them to enable them carry out their business normally while taking heed of HIV/AIDS virus," he said.