Rwanda has made remarkable progress in the last 28 years with a strong commitment to an integrated and evidence-based response to the HIV epidemic that also fostered substantial improvements in health outcomes for many Rwandans.

The evolution to scale-up the HIV program in the country has emphasized that a strong leadership and investing in programs that strengthen the health system as a whole are some of the architectural features of health development in Rwanda.

Sandra Mutoni (not real name) who is living with HIV infection and takes antiretrovirals (ARVs) from Kibuye Hospital says that, when she found out was infected, it was very difficult for her to accept of contracting the disease, with time it was fathomable and started participating in the antiretroviral therapy that since has never had any complications about the disease.

Mutoni urges many especially those who have contracted the disease to take it normal but importantly seek medical help from health centers or hospitals to avoid health complications or even death at an early stage.

She said: “following medical schedule allows a person to be able to live healthy which calls for taking medicine properly, because if you don’t live in denial, you are able to live health and with others peacefully.”

She continues to say that before 2001 there were many deaths and she also lost a husband leaving her with two kids aged 5 and 4 years old then, he had tested positive to HIV/AIDS, which made it difficult for him to seek treatment.

Many died from AIDS due to lack of medication. Thereafter, through advocacy it was decided that the Kibuye hospital establish an HIV/AIDS division.

In Bwishyura Sector where Mutoni lived came three NGOs to help the locals, these were; Twizerane, Twubake Ubuzima and Tugire imbabazi.

When she started medication in 2005, Kibuye hospital did not have any department for HIV/AIDS related services like today and people from the area had to travel to Kabgayi Hospital in Muhanga District.

At the time the available medication was a little bit stronger that many would experience side effects like pain and swelling of stomach.

She adds that, “In the beginning, it was difficult to cope with the fact that one was infected since the community stigmatized us and thought we were dying but with courage to seek medical attention from Kibuye Hospital life changed.”

One of the biggest sponsors to support people living with HIV was RPP+, and through advocacy things changed, like better medication with no side effects, counseling and training through different workshops organized by Care, RPP+ and FHI.

Mutoni has been on ARVs for the last 17 years, she has no complaints and lives well because she follows all the instructions provided by doctors and now she is as any healthy person, works well to cater for her family.

Nurse Innocent Dusabimana, head of the Antiretroviral Service at Kibuye General Hospital revealed that they monitor about 10 health centers. Their division services about 890 patients but the number keeps changing when people relocate while other loose their life.

Women are the majority at 528, while men are 362, among them there are 18 children under the age of 15, while 51 are teenagers and young adults, 22 boys and 29 girls.

Nurse Innocent Dusabimana (Left) with Innocent Bahati, the Executive Secretary of ABASIRWA during a visit at Kibuye Hospital

There are some members of the community that are closely monitored than others, according to Dusabimana. Prostitutes once registered at Bwishyura are closely monitored, and today there are 51 in total, some take their medication satisfactorily.

Dusabimana notes they have reached at least 95% eradication rate, as there are 873 people, 98.1% of which are those who started treatment immediately, including those who toke 3-month dosage course and others are on a 6-month dosage course.

He said that patients on a 6-months dosage totals to 518 people, 3-months dosage are 303 individuals but they have others who not fall in either category and takes medication every month.

Dusabimana underlined the aim as to achieve 100%, to weaken the HIV virus and reduce attacks while strengthening the immune system. In addition to providing medication, people living with HIV are given awareness on HIV prevention, counseling, better nutrition and visits of different categories among others.

He concludes by saying that they are happy with the progress achieved because there are no more deaths because of irregular medication. He said that since the year began, only four among the monitored patients at the facility lost their lives even so from other diseases.