

Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) in collaboration with Kirehe District with the support of UNICEF Rwanda on Thursday, April 19 2022 launched a new project aimed at improving access to HIV services for adolescents and young people in Kirehe District.

The one year project to be implemented in all the 12 sectors (60 Cells) of the district targets adolescents and young people between 15-24 years of age with more focus on girls and young women, given their higher vulnerability to HIV infection.

Nzirabatinya Modeste, Vice Mayor in charge of economic development of Kirehe District, welcomed the initiative from RDO and committed that the district will facilitate and support this project.



*Nzirabatinya Modeste, Vice Mayor of Kirehe District*

He said that the district authorities will support the programme intended to uplift the youth in Kirehe to become responsible citizens.

To supplement the initiative, the Vice Mayor noted that Unicef had agreed to further support the district to help those youth with special problems and those with disabilities that may require special services.

For Dr. Grace Mulisa, the representative from Unicef, this project is not for Unicef or RDO but for our young sisters and brothers. She said that such a project is very important because it aims to help our young people which should be given special considerations.



*Dr. Grace Mulisa from Unicef officially launching the new project in Kirehe*

“This initiative should not be business as usual,” Dr. Mulisa told the health providers from across Kirehe who had gathered for the official launch. She called on everyone to support the initiative because the good health of the youth is of paramount to our future.

Diana Mugwaneza, RDO Programs Officer promised close collaboration with all stakeholders including Unicef, district authorities, local administration leaders, youth and women representatives and health providers.

She said that this initiative is not new or something to replace the services given to the youth but will supplement on efforts by different providers. She said that RDO comes in to offer support because of the vulnerabilities that have been reported among the youth in the district.



*Diana Mugwaneza, RDO Programs Officer welcomed participants at the event and promised her organization's close collaboration*

Kirehe has been reported with a higher risk of HIV infection among the youth owing to the high cross border traffic and trading activities, where mobile truck drivers are known to be at relatively higher risk of HIV infection and do engage young girls and women in transactional risky sexual behavior.

The district is also home to Mahama refugee camp with many out of school and unemployed young people who may be more vulnerable to HIV infection and teenage pregnancies.

Kirehe ranks among the top five districts with the highest number of teenage and youth pregnancies for the past four years (2018:1055, 2019: 1303,2020: 960, 2021: 839 Jan-Jun).

Marie Grace Byukusenge the Project Coordinator said that to address these challenges, RDO will use various strategies to improve access to HIV prevention information and services for young people aged 15-24 years.



Marie Grace Byukusenge the Project Coordinator while explaining the rationale of the project and how it will work

During the launch, she said that youth peer volunteers will be selected and trained to provide HIV education to improve knowledge and to promote positive and protective behavior and demand for HIV and SRH services. This will be done through Interpersonal Communication (IPC), small group discussions and referrals to HIV and SRH services.

The trained youth peer volunteers will also collect condoms from health facilities and community health workers and distribute them to peers in need. Community radio spots and talk shows will also be used to reach more young people. Targeted HIV testing will be done through community outreach in identified "hot spots"

frequented by young people, and targeting high risk and hard young people including out of school girls and boys, teen mothers, and young single mothers. This will be done in close collaboration with peer volunteers and health facilities.

The project will also purposefully include adolescents and young people living with disabilities and training places will be disability- friendly.

The launch event at RPF auditorium in Kirehe was attended by different representatives from across the district including heads of health centres, district hospital, youth leaders, in-charge of health units at sector and district among others.

