RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AFFECTED BY LANDSLIDES AND FLOODS IN GAKENKE DISTRICT

It was one night and everything was destroyed and lives were lost!

“I was heavily pregnant and couldn’t help myself and my daughter when the roof of our house went off and wall started falling apart” Niyonambaza recalls

Gakenke District was affected by a series of landslides that occurred in almost all sectors in the district. The landslides were triggered by torrential rains caused by the El Niño phenomenon. The sustained heavy rains and landslides caused the death of 34 people and injured 19 and loss of properties. Almost 1,500 houses were damaged, rendering approximately 6,031 people homeless, many of which were children and expecting mothers.

The health assessment showed that the needs of vulnerable women and girls had to be addressed, especially in terms of their sexual and reproductive health.
600 dignity kits were donated to support vulnerable pregnant women who have been affected by the floods and landslides. Each dignity kit contains a number of basic hygiene items for a mother and her newborn baby.

The Vice Mayor in charge of Social Affairs (L), former UNFPA representative Mr. Jozef Maerïën (C), Gakenke District Mayor (2nd R), receiving one of the trucks carrying dignity kits.

BENEFICIARIES OF UNFPA DIGNITY KITS IN GAKENKE DISTRICT

Uwimana Josiane with her newborn baby in Ganzo Health Center Gakenke District

Muyjawamariya Pelagie and husband Ayimanigira Anaclet with their two months baby at home in Mataba sector Gakenke District
Mukagatare Enatha, in a maternity ward in Mahama refugee camp is full of joy as she looks on her day-old healthy baby girl. She represents thousands of babies safely delivered in the refugee camp and in neighboring district hospitals with assistance from the UNFPA-supported facilities.

“I had nothing to cover my baby and myself. I am grateful for UNFPA’s dignity kits and medical equipment to this health center to serve those in need like me. The nurses here are very helpful through the entire process of delivery and those with complicated cases are transferred to hospitals for C-section, we all don’t pay for the services. I imagine how much this would cost me in such a terrible life, it’s a relief!” Mukagatare said.

Mukagatare repeatedly said “Thank you, Thank you…” to UNFPA support for the kits that are helpful to meet the specific needs of the women and girls while in critical conditions in the camp.

UNFPA Rwanda is providing financial and technical support in humanitarian settings to save the lives of women and girls with a special focus on sexual and reproductive health, prevention of and response to Gender-Based Violence.

Beneficiary populations include Congolese refugees and Burundian refugees.

Kirehe Hospital Director (L) with UNFPA Rep a.i Daniel Alemu (R) during the handover of medical equipment.
“We believe that investing in girls, 10 years old, is crucial for the development of a country because discrimination and inequality of girls of ten years old hold back a lot of development of the country. So, what we think is that when ten year old girls get access to services like education and healthcare they will become much more productive citizens in the future.”

Mr. Jozef Maeriën, UNFPA former country representative, said that “the reason to start at 10 is to avoid difficulties in changing things late as at 15 years it would be too late to change a number of things.

"With support from family, community and nation, and the full realization of her rights, a 10-year-old girl can thrive and help bring about the future we all want,” Maeriën said.

The ‘State of World Population 2016’ report, warns that without taking action, many 10-year-old girls, at 25, will be struggling in poverty, with multiple, closely spaced pregnancies and some will already have their own 10-year-old daughters. Girls between the ages of 10 and 15 are still vulnerable to school dropout, early pregnancies and are subjected to domestic works, inviting new approaches to tackle the challenges.

At 10, the report says, a girl may become property, a commodity that can be bought and sold with her future no longer hers. It is determined by others.

UNFPA says that, over the last 20 years, Rwanda has made great progress towards gender equality, which has greatly benefited adolescent girls. For example, establishing the legal age of marriage at 21 for both girls and boys has been a very important measure to protect girls against child marriage and gender based violence.

Government believes starting to nurture girls from 10 years of age can be beneficial to the country’s development. “The current status is good as Rwanda has been among the best performing countries in achieving global goals, especially in reducing child and maternal deaths, Dr. Diane Gashumba, Minister of Health” said.

She spoke of the need for more sensitization campaigns to impart reproductive health education, as well as Rwandan values to both girls and boys.

The minister also stressed the need to devise deterrent punishments for offenders violating children rights.

The State of the World Population Report is an annual publication. This year, the report was entitled, “10: How our future depends on a girl at this decisive age.”
Men’s Involvement in Family Planning

“...My wife was using short-time birth control methods and after years, I found she was spending too much time seeking such contraceptive services. I decided, with her consent, to go for vasectomy as an alternative to save time that she used to spend at the health centre,” Basabose said, adding that it is now seven years and he has not felt any side effect.

He chose the family planning method to relieve his wife of stress resulting from continually seeking short-term contraception injections, he says.

“Most men are reluctant to engage in family planning. I would like to tell them not to worry, some tend to think that a man who uses such a method loses sexual vitality but it’s not the case,” Basabose assured the audience.

His wife, Mujawamariya, is happy with their decision, saying fears of unplanned pregnancies are no more. And, she adds, they can now sufficiently provide for their three children, guaranteeing for them a better future.

“We can’t fail to raise fees for our children; we ensure they have health insurance and we are able to feed them. It is easier to look after few children and give them the care that a parent owes a child,” Mujawamariya said.

Nzabonimpa cited two reasons men often fear to embrace long-term family planning: poor mindset and cultural perceptions which put family planning responsibilities solely on women’s shoulders.

There are more family planning methods for women than men, contributing to the false perception that it’s a women’s issue.

“Today, we can’t say that family planning is for a man or a woman, it is instead for the family through consensus,” Nzabonimpa said.

Vasectomy is, without doubt, a hard sell. However, it remains a viable option in the quest to bring more men in family planning. The couple also shared their testimony during an event to mark the World Contraception Day.
The Innovation Accelerator is a mentorship driven acceleration programme, which aims to explore new and engaging ways to tackle pressing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) challenges, while promoting social entrepreneurship among young people.

The iAccelerator will start with a countrywide selection of sustainable and scalable youth-friendly SRH projects.

The top 4 projects will win a grant, as well as access to 3 months of training and mentorship.

Seed Funding: USD 10,000
Takes: Program takes 0% equity
Markets/Focus: sexual and reproductive health issues among young people

This competition is open to all Rwandan Nationals and Residents of Rwanda between the ages of 18 – 30.

Apply on www.iaccelerator.rw not later than 23rd Jan 2017

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@UNFPARwanda
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