



Save the Children

NEWSLETTER

RWANDA AND BURUNDI COUNTRY OFFICE

July to September 2023

SAVE THE CHILDREN LAUNCHES THE ZERO-OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN PROJECT IN RWANDA

On September 8th, 2023, Save the Children (SC) in partnership with the Ministry of Education launched Zero-Out-of-School Children project under the fund of the Global Education Above All (EAA) Foundation.

Zero-Out-of-School Children project will be implemented in 30 districts across Rwanda. It aims at providing quality primary education to all out-of-school children (OOSC) in Rwanda. The newly launched joint project will engage and empower communities as advocates and supporters for education of all school age children. Data will be collected and methods enhanced to find and identify children who are out of school, including in remote areas of Rwanda.

The Save the Children team in Rwanda and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) will identify and enrol out-of-school children, track their attendance, provide school kits and safe spaces to learn, and contribute to school feeding programs for families which can't afford it. The project will also increase accessibility through technology, and help children catch up through remedial classes and emotional support. Selected schools will have resource rooms and disability-adapted materials for children with disabilities. SC and the MINEDUC will collaborate with multi-disciplinary committees and train teachers and educators to meet quality education standards.

It's expected that the five-year Zero-Out-of-School Children project will enrol 177,119 children in schools.

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We are honoured to work together with the Education Above All Foundation and the Ministry of Education of Rwanda to ensure all children, including those with disabilities, can go to school to learn and grow. As the world's leading child rights organization, Save the Children has a responsibility to deliver programs inclusive of children with disabilities that maintain their dignity and secure their full, effective and equal participation.

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Ian Vale,
the Regional Director for Save
the Children in Eastern and
Southern Africa





LAUNCHING BURUNDI'S FIRST EVER HEALTH RESPONSE

In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and Fight Against AIDS, Save the Children (SC) Burundi launched the first-ever cholera and health emergency response this quarter. On 14th December 2022, the Ministry declared a cholera outbreak around the Bujumbura capital. In the subsequent months, the cases spread quickly in at least four districts; including Bujumbura, Mpanda, Kabezi and Rwibaga. The situation has been worsened by poor sanitation, heavy rains and flooding. By April 2023, 725 cases had been confirmed, including 9 deaths (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, September 2023). Save the Children (SC) Burundi team and the deployed Emergency Health Unit have initiated different anticipatory actions to prepare and strengthen the capacity to prevent and respond to the cholera outbreak in the most affected communities.

Through this response, the SC trained 246 community health workers on community-level disease prevention, provided hygiene kits to the affected communities,

and supported referrals of those affected. More than 38,000 children and adults were reached through SC interventions, including the training of healthcare workers and community health workers, mass and door-to-door campaigns, community dialogue, and road shows among others.

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When the cholera outbreak started in our community, Save the Children supported my family with hygiene kits. Through different awareness-raising sessions, they taught us how to wash our hands well and how to protect ourselves from cholera by drinking clean water, cooking our food well and how to keep our toilet clean. I am thankful for this support.

Axella*, 15

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HOSTING THE CHILDREN'S ADVISORY BOARD AT THE COUNTRY OFFICE



In this reporting period, Save the Children Rwanda hosted 16 children's advisory board members at the country office. On this occasion, children interacted with the Senior Management Team on the progress made during the implementation of child protection, education, health and nutrition interventions.

During their visit to the Country Office, children were given space to understand and get aware of the key priorities of technical and program leads and acted in some of their roles. This was a medium to prepare them for future leadership roles. They also led a participative debate with the Country Office staff discussing the negative effects of Physical and Humiliating Punishments on Rwandan children.

Finally, these children drafted open letters to different ministries advocating for issues that affect their lives like different forms of violence, and climate change effects among others.



THE IMPROVED SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES TO ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN NKAMIRA TRANSIT CENTRE

In this quarter, Save the Children (SC) conducted mobilization sessions on the prevention of unwanted and early pregnancies and sexually Transmitted Infections among adolescents and youth in Nkamira Transit Centre.

These sessions were organised to disseminate social behaviour change messages to adolescents and youth and equip them with advanced knowledge on sexual and reproductive health. Due to limited resources at Nkamira Transit Centre, SC delivered limited Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive health services. This calls for the need to invest in tackling teenage pregnancies, Gender-Based Violence, coercion, and intimate partner violence; lack of education and information; high rates of early and unwanted pregnancy; alcohol and substance abuse, negative attitudes, and behaviour towards the risk of multiple sexual partnerships, and other harmful traditional practices.

To address these challenges and gaps, SC has been implementing life-saving interventions on adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health with funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) since June 2023.

Through the partnership with UNFPA, SC renovated and equipped a Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Youth corners to provide quality SRH services to adolescents and youth. SC conducted 84 awareness sessions targeting adolescents and youth aged 10-24 years old on the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV and the use of family planning.

As a result, 3,432 adolescents and youth were reached through awareness sessions on the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV, unwanted pregnancies, and family planning. Of those 3,432 adolescents and youth, 353 voluntarily tested for HIV, while 154 were tested for Hepatitis B and C for early detection and treatment. 183 adolescents and youth were diagnosed with STIs and were treated.

The use of family planning among adolescents and youth increased from 0% to 22% (36). 57 female adolescents received antenatal care services, with two defilement cases which were referred to Isange One Stop Centre for further interventions. Over 11,000 condoms were distributed to prevent the spread of STIs and HIV among adolescents and youth.

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Before I had no information about reproductive health, and didn't have anyone to teach me about it in my country of origin (DR Congo). When I arrived here, I started attending Sexual and Reproductive Health sessions. I learned about the changes in boys as they grow to adulthood and the use of condoms to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. Today, my knowledge on sexual and reproductive health improved. I learned that the more I improve the knowledge on reproductive health, the better I am empowered to face any SRH risk.

Fidele*, 16

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CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS BENEFIT FROM THE CHILD AND YOUTH RESILIENCE PROGRAM

On September 28th, 99 children and 100 caregivers/parents graduated from a Child and Youth Resilience Program in Mahama Refugee Camp. The Program targeted girls and boys aged 14-20 and their parents/caregivers. Child and Youth Resilience Program aims to promote positive coping and resilience among young individuals to sustain their protection, psychosocial well-being, and healthy development and build personal skills as well as protective social networks of young people at family, and community levels.

During the program implementation, Save the Children conducted workshops for children, youth, and parents to help children and youth build self-esteem, enhance positive expectations for the future, and improve cooperation and peaceful interaction among them while parents increased their understanding of the psychosocial and protective needs of their children.

These sessions also equipped them with the required skills to support young individuals as they transition from childhood to adulthood and promote positive discipline at home and in the community.

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The Child and Youth Resilience program has been a lifeline for me. It taught me to be strong, to believe in myself, and to find hope even in the toughest times. Thanks to Save the Children for this program, I've gained the skills and support I needed to overcome the challenges of life as a refugee. I now see a brighter future ahead, and I'm ready to face it with confidence and resilience.

Loique*, 17

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TRAINING FOR PRE-PRIMARY AND LOWER-PRIMARY TEACHERS ON SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Following the development and incorporation of the Social and Emotional Learning Framework into the Pre-primary and Lower Primary Curricula, Save the Children in collaboration with Rwanda Basic Education Board through its USAID-Schools and Systems Project trained 9,536 Early Childhood Education mentors, Headteachers and pre-primary and lower primary Kinyarwanda teachers to ensure a conducive environment in their schools and classrooms and to prepare them to facilitate Social and Emotional Learning activities in their lessons in all Rwandan schools.



THE VILLAGE SAVING AND LOANS ASSOCIATIONS IMPROVED THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF REFUGEES IN BURUNDI



VSLA members reimburse the loans they borrowed

In this reporting period, Save the Children (SC) supported 45 Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLAs) in different refugee camps of Burundi to improve their living conditions.

Most VSLA members are GBV survivors, young and single mothers, vulnerable families, and foster parents. VSLAs were initiated after realizing that the living conditions in the refugee camps were challenging and the humanitarian support was reduced due to COVID-19, wars, and natural disasters around the world. This has put many refugee children and their families at risk of malnutrition and food insecurity. This also raised the tension and increased Gender-Based Violence cases in some families.

Furaha, 36 years old is a member of DUKORERE HAMWE-VSLA in Muyinga Refugee Camp. Before she joined the VSLA, she had no economic means to start any income-generating activity and struggled to provide for her children.

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Since food supplies were cut, I knocked on every door and even borrowed large sums from shopkeepers to be able to get basic needs for my children. This resulted in deep debt which affected me and my family.

Furaha*

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The Village Saving and Loans Association is a successful practice run by Save the Children in Burundi that stimulates the creation of saving groups within communities. Self-managed Saving groups of 15 to 25 people meet regularly to save their money, access small loans, and obtain emergency insurance.

Since July 2023, the VSLA model has played a vital role in supporting 1,291 people, including 115 men and 1,176 women to access loans and improve their living conditions.

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Because of VSLA, I got a loan of 50,000 Bif and started selling bananas. The loan opened many opportunities as I got a benefit of 20,000 Bif. After one month, I reimbursed the total of the loan I borrowed. Today, my capital is 250,000 Bif. This enabled me to continue my business and to provide for my family without depending on humanitarian assistance

Furaha*

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Save the Children has been implementing the VSLA model since 2022 in different refugee camps in Burundi. To ensure the sustainability of these Saving groups, SC trained 235 members on small business management which resulted in the creation of 25 income-generating activities and small projects, including farming and breeding, and the production of porridge among others.



Furaha sells bananas as a result of the loan she got from VSLAs

IMPROVED NUTRITION, MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN NKAMIRA TRANSIT CENTRE



Following the influx of asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 7,396 asylum seekers arrived in Nkamira Transit Centre. Of those, 1,065 are under five years children.

Emergencies put children, and pregnant and lactating women at high risk of malnutrition and other health risks. This also exposes asylum seekers to various stress factors that may lead them to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, grief, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

To ensure the well-being of lactating mothers, pregnant women, children and people with mental health-related issues, Save the Children has been delivering nutrition, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health as well as mental health services in Nkamira Transit Centre since June 15 under the UNICEF Fund.

The fund enabled Save the Children to train 39 staff including community health workers and clinical staff on Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN), Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) and Infant Young Child Feeding in Emergencies.

Screen 1,452 children, and 624 pregnant and lactating women for malnutrition to detect new cases for early treatment and conduct 37 community sessions on malnutrition prevention and mental health screening in Nkamira Transit Center.

Thanks to these interventions, SC supported 1,452 children under five years old, 624 Pregnant Lactating Women, and 20 People Living with HIV, in the Blanket Supplementary Feeding. 14 children were cured of malnutrition. SC recorded 65 deliveries and reached 5,646 children through awareness sessions on Maternal, newborn and Child Health. 87 mental health cases, including nearly 15% of children under 18 were identified and are under treatment.

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Because of the medical and nutrition support, Stella is now healthy. She no longer suffers from digestive disorders or other health issues, which contributes to her normal growth and development

Stella*'s mother, 18 months

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Under five children, pregnant women and lactating mothers receive CSB+ every morning at Nkamira Transit Centre Health Post



Parents who completed the PDEP training were awarded certificates

In August 2023, a total of 100 caregivers/parents also completed a one-month training on positive discipline in everyday parenting in Mahama Refugee Camp. These parents have been attending sessions since early July 2023.

Save the Children organized these sessions to mobilize parents to avoid corporal punishments against their children and create a safe and friendly environment for them at home.

Trained parents testified that they learnt knowledge of positively disciplining their children instead of hurting them physically and emotionally. They are also committed to applying the knowledge acquired from the training

and being engaged in speaking out for the prevention of any form of violence against children whether at home or in the community.

“There are changes as children nowadays, children build up friendships and socialize with others. Before the child was afraid, now my children are courageous and talk to me about their problems. Children have become our best friends and more obedient to parents and others.” Said Bonaventure, a parent in Mahama Refugee Camp

According to the monitoring assessment conducted by Save the Children, 71% of parents/caregivers reported that they apply positive parenting skills in their homes, 28% reported they moderately apply them and 1% not applying them.

MAINSTREAMING OF CHILD PROTECTION INTO OTHER SECTORS



In collaboration with UNHCR and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, in August Save the Children held workshops on the mainstreaming of child protection into other sectors.

These workshops were intended to increase stakeholders' and partners' understanding of child protection mainstreaming into other sectors in humanitarian settings in line with protection principles

and other global documents and based on the context in the country, to enhance participants' skills, abilities, and commitment to promote safe programming, prioritize the protection and wellbeing of refugee children and avoid causing harm across sectoral programming. It was the right time for participants to produce time-bound Action Plans for protection and non-protection actors describing key actions to strengthen systematic CP mainstreaming across sectors, highlighting resources needed, and promoting sustainability.

The workshop brought together members of CP refugee coordination groups and other key sectors, like Education, Health, Justice, and livelihoods among others. All participants committed to becoming advocates for the integration of child protection into safe programming and being exemplary ambassadors for safeguarding children's rights.

THE BENCHMARKING OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING ASSESSMENT TOOL

To ensure the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is institutionalized in Rwanda as a National Child Development Assessment tool, Save the Children has conducted a five-day workshop for developing the contextualized benchmarks for IDELA. The workshop convened various relevant stakeholders, including NESAC, REB, Ministry of Education, USAID representatives, University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE), pre-primary teachers, and the USAID-School & Systems project staff. During the 5-day workshop, with the facilitation of a consultant (Jonathan), the team was first calibrated in the benchmarking process, and then they developed the benchmarks that would work for the Rwandan context, after their validation.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR MARGINALIZED CHILDREN IN THE PROMOTION OF THEIR RIGHTS



In August, Save the Children in collaboration with COPORWA capacitated 60 marginalized children from southern Rwanda with skills in advocating for their rights, preventing gender-based violence, and promoting gender equality as well as communication skills. Following these sessions, marginalized children created 5 clubs and safe spaces that enabled them to advocate for the issues affecting their rights. Around 403 cases of marginalized children with protection concerns were identified and advocated for. As a result, 86 % (349) of identified cases were solved by local authorities. 120 pupils from historically marginalized groups are being supported by school management to access a quality education.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN ASSYLUM SEEKERS AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICTS

Due to the overcrowding in the Nkamira Transit Center, UNHCR relocated 3,194 asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Mahama Refugee Camp. Among the new arrivals, 372 were unaccompanied and separated children. To ensure their safety and well-being, Save the Children provided them with psychosocial support. 29 unaccompanied and separated children were reunified with their relatives, 273 were supported to go back to school and 294 got ration cards because of the advocacy conducted by SC child protection staff.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS



Following the floods and mudslides that caused over 100 people to die and affected 20,326 people in Northern and Western Rwanda in May, Save the Children donated construction materials; including 1440 bags of cement, 3600 pieces of Iron sheets, 1000 kgs of Iron sheet nails, and foodstuff notably 2790 kgs of Sosoma Porridge and 120 boxes of milk; to support the affected families in nine districts that include Gakenke, Musanze, Nyabihu, Karongi, Burera, Nyamagabe, Rubavu, Rutsiro, and Ngororero.



EMPOWERING CHILDREN IN LEADING ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

In a bid to strengthen child-led advocacy and campaigns, in July, Save the Children (SC) trained 1,716 children and youth living in Burundi Refugee Camps on how to plan and conduct community-based sensitizations and advocacy events through talent shows and competitions.

The training aimed at empowering children and youth to speak out for issues affecting their lives through talent shows like football games, theatre, dances, presentations, painting and drawing among others.

As a result, the trained children and youth conducted the campaign under the theme of the “role to play in preventing early marriage.” The campaign was organized to encourage children and youth to be at the forefront in raising awareness of the prevention of early marriage in their communities and calling the government and its partners to address issues that hinder them from achieving their dreams.

During different sessions conducted through talent shows, SC reached more than 30,000 people, including 18,000 children living in Ruyigi and Muyinga Refugee Camps.

ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST POLIO



In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners, in July Save the Children conducted a comprehensive vaccination campaign against polio 2, that was aimed at boosting the immunity of children against poliovirus.

The Polio vaccination campaign ran in the third week of July 2023 in the refugee camps of Kigeme, Kiziba, Mugombwa, Nyabiheke, Mahama and Nkamira transit centres targeting children aged 0-7 years old.

Polio, an infectious disease primarily affecting young children, targets the nervous system and can result in spinal and respiratory paralysis and death.

SC staff and community health workers were at the forefront of vaccinating over 15,500 children across Rwandan camps through a door-to-door approach.

ANAEMIA MASS SCREENING CAMPAIGN



In August 2023, Save the Children conducted a five-day anaemia mass screening campaign targeting all children aged 6 to 59 months living in Mahama Refugee Camp I.

This screening campaign was organized to detect children with anaemia for early treatment and follow-up. Around 2,044 children were reached during the anaemia screening. Of those 28.4% (582) were diagnosed with it. These children with anaemia were immediately enrolled in our health and nutrition programs for treatment and follow-up. As a result, 25% (145) of 582 children diagnosed with Anemia are healthy.

Anaemia among children under five continues to be among the major health problems in Mahama Refugee Camp. However, Save the Children works to prevent children from it through regular screenings and health education sessions. This resulted in a decrease in anaemia among children from 30.8% in 2019 to 22.8% in 2021, according to the recent SENS report.





CHILDREN'S WALK FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

In August, 170 children conducted a Walk for Climate Justice in Musanze, one of the districts of Northern Rwanda that was affected by the flooding and mudslides in May 2023.

The walk aimed to raise community awareness on the direct and indirect effects of climate change on children's rights and well-being, inspire all Rwandan children, communities, and duty bearers to foster the collective responsibility towards climate action and amplify children's voices. Child campaigners also raised awareness of environmental conservation through two radio talk shows hosted by Energy Radio.

Around 5,000 people were reached during the walk for climate justice and the radio talk shows aired. As a result, the Ministry of Environment is committed to supporting children in organizing the walk for climate justice on an annual basis, and always considering children's participation in efforts aiming at protecting the climate and environment.

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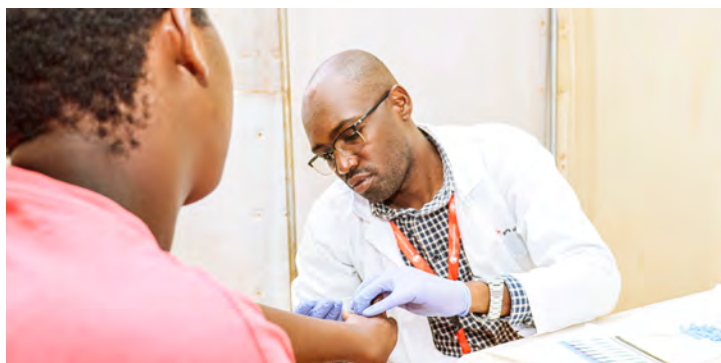
My aunt and my cousin died of mudslides which destroyed their home and ours. Although I survived natural disaster, it affected my mental health, and education. This happened because of climate change crisis. When it rains, I get traumatized because of what happened to me and my family. There are more children like me who are still suffering from climate change effects. To ensure the well-being of my peers, I request the decision makers to address the effects of this crisis and put in place measures aiming at protecting the life of children and that of our parents.

Sandra*, 12

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THE CAMPAIGN FOR HIV/AIDS PREVENTION IN MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP



In September, Save the Children (SC) Rwanda conducted a campaign for HIV/AIDs prevention in Mahama Refugee Camp.

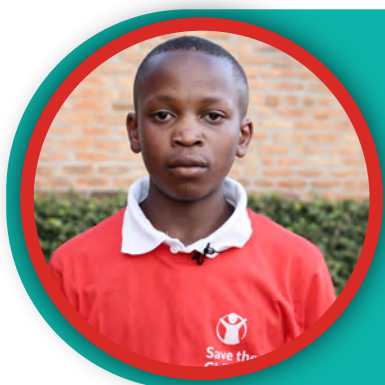
This campaign aimed to increase awareness and understanding of HIV transmission, and prevention, combatting stigmatization by promoting empathy and encouraging voluntary HIV testing among refugees as well as improving access to treatment.

To prevent the spread of HIV among young people and adults in a humanitarian setting, SC conducted mobilization sessions and mobile clinics to mobilize refugees on the prevention of HIV and negative attitudes about people living with HIV and encouraging them to undergo a voluntary test.

During the campaign, over 36,000 refugees, including nearly 7,600 adolescents and youth were reached. Among those, over 1,500 people voluntarily tested for HIV whereas over 5,700 people received condoms.



VOICES OF CHILDREN



Diogene, 15
Northern Rwanda

Some children don't get the opportunity to raise their voices at the international level. So, I would recommend global leaders to consider the promotion of children's rights in all projects' design and fiscal budgets in order to eradicate violence against children.

Alliance, 15
Southern Rwanda

I request the government to address natural disasters caused by climate change. When flooding and mudslides sweep away crops or destroy homes, children are the ones who are seriously affected. For example, they start suffering from a hunger crisis which can put them at risk of malnutrition or other diseases caused by flooding.



Elizabeth, 17
Kigali, Rwanda

I call on all Rwandans to come together to conserve the environment to ensure children grow and live in a healthy, safe, and clean world. When the planet is not protected, children are the ones who suffer the consequences.



KUMWE HUB



THE LAUNCH OF BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE PROJECT

Kumwe Hub, Save the Children Rwanda's innovation arm, has launched its newest programme, Bridging the Digital Divide to help refugees in Rwanda gain access to the digital world and become new digital citizens!

The launch signified the development of innovative sustainable solutions for refugees in Rwanda to access the internet, and for refugees to leverage this connectivity to improve their quality of life.

Refugees in Rwanda currently face barriers like costly digital devices, data, and limited digital literacy that are hindering them from accessing the internet. Kumwe Hub, in collaboration with the private sector, has now devised a solution. SAMPHONE and MTN Rwanda will offer refugees affordable smartphones and 4G data packages through a device financing program, which refugees will be able to pay in instalments. Additionally, Kumwe Hub has partnered with Internet Society (Rwanda Chapter) to provide Digital Literacy Training, teaching refugees how to use smartphones, navigate online tools safely, and maintain digital well-being.

On 4 October 2023, 114 entrepreneurial refugee parents successfully graduated as the first cohort of Bridging the Digital Divide.

"We are thrilled to be working together with the private sector to solve the wicked problem of internet barriers for refugees in Rwanda. We believe that this partnership will bring endless innovative possibilities that will mutually benefit refugees - both parents and their children - as well as create new business opportunities for African businesses, as MTN and SAMPHONE are now doing." Said Maggie Korde, Country Director of Save the Children Rwanda

"If we knew how to use the internet, the possibilities would be endless" said a refugee mother enrolled in the Bridging the Digital Divide programme.

Kumwe Hub shares this belief, recognizing that internet access empowers refugees by providing crucial information, connections with loved ones, educational resources, and employment opportunities. In today's interconnected world, internet access is not a luxury but a lifeline, offering hope, resilience, and a path to a brighter future.



114 entrepreneurial refugee parents successfully graduated as the first cohort of Bridging the Digital Divide

SAFE BACK TO SCHOOL- EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT GRANT



In June, a national call for Early Childhood Development (ECD) grants was initiated, allowing Kumwe Hub to disburse a total of USD 73,000 to 18 ECD centres. These centres received grants ranging from USD 4,000 to USD 5,000 in August 2023. The selection of eligible centres for this grant was a collaborative effort between Save the Children and the National Early Childhood Development Agency (NCDA), involving visits to these ECD centres.

The primary objective of these grants was to enhance the quality of the learning environment, improve infrastructure, increase access to educational resources, provide teacher training, and enhance inclusive practices for children aged 0-6 years throughout the country. Ongoing monitoring is in place to ensure that the funds are being effectively used and to track progress in these areas.

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The grant has significantly enhanced my ECD centre on various fronts, including the installation of a paved walkway, playground games and the acquisition of educational learning materials and toys. I was not aware of the existence of toys like dolls for role-play or corner play materials before. I am delighted to know that these toys with learning materials, will engage and stimulate the children's cognitive development, ultimately enhancing their learning experience

Franciose, an ECD
centre owner

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INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL EVENTS

THE 3RD REGIONAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



Save the Children health providers participated in the 3rd Regional Research Symposium that took place in Kigali Conference and Exhibition Village under the theme "Advancing Evidence-Based Interventions for Mental Health, Child Development, and Parenting Symposium" from September 20th to 22nd, 2023.

This symposium was organized by the University of Rwanda in partnership with FXB Rwanda, UNICEF, Boston College and Sugira Muryango,

and it aimed to bridge the gap between research, policy, and practice in the realms of mental health, child development, and parenting. It was also intended to include fostering knowledge exchange, promoting collaboration, and networking, and advancing evidence-based policy development.

During this 3-days symposium, our health providers presented two study findings conducted by our team in a humanitarian setting, where SC shared the impact of the use of length mats to eliminate stunting and improve mental health among children aged 3-18 months in a humanitarian setting in Rwanda, and the impact of our work in treating refugees with chronic mental health conditions through occupational therapy activities.

The Regional Research Symposium brought together non-government organizations, early career researchers, to participate in research presentations to enhance the well-being of children and families.



INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY CELEBRATION

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, in September, Soma Rwanda members celebrated International Literacy and conducted National Literacy Month activities aimed at promoting the culture of reading among children and adults in Rwanda.

The launch of the National Literacy Month took place in Rugerero Integrated Development Program Model Village in Rubavu District under the theme “Promoting literacy for all to enhance foundational learning”.

During the National Literacy Month launch, Rose Baguma, the Director General of Education Policy and Analysis at MINEDUC, Jonathan Kamim, the Mission Director of USAID Rwanda and the Mayor of Rubavu District launched the library equipped by Soma Rwanda members to avail reading materials for children and adults living in Rugerero community.

Delivering her remarks on behalf of the Soma Rwanda Secretariat, Maggie Korde, the Country Director of SC Rwanda & Burundi reflected on the progress made in literacy promotion under this platform in Rwanda and called on all government and non-government institutions to support children’s literacy as they read books.

“I would like to bring to your attention the challenge of limited reading resources accessible for children with disabilities at schools and in the communities, we still need more efforts to support parents in understanding their role in supporting their children’s literacy at home and in the community.” Said Maggie, the Country Director of Save the Children Rwanda and Burundi.

Thanks to the National Literacy Month campaign, Save the Children as the Soma Rwanda Secretariat recorded increased participation of children in reading activities within the community through reading clubs, and community and public libraries. Soma Rwanda members donated 3,589 books to the Rugerero community library to avail the reading resources in the community. The Rwanda Basic Education Board donated over 11,140 notebooks and 11,250 pens. 300 maths sets and 200 rulers to students as a part of safe back to school. Literacy messages reached 95% of the Rwandan population through RTV, Radio Rwanda and regional community radios.



Maggie, the Country Director of Save the Children Rwanda and Burundi addressed the participants during the event

THE STORY FROM THE FIELD

THE ROLE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SESSIONS IN REDUCING EARLY PREGNANCIES IN MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP



Ken*, 17 years old, lives in Mahama Refugee Camp with her parents and she is in senior four. When Ken got her first period at age 15, she got scared and felt ashamed and embarrassed. She was not aware of all about the menstrual cycle and had limited knowledge of sexual and reproductive health. Her parents never talked to her about that as well. This made her feel uncomfortable asking her parents for more information about her reproductive health.

“When I got my first menstrual period, I felt scared and embarrassed because I had no information about that. Fortunately, I was at school. So, I told my teacher what I was going through and she supported me with sanitary pads. Then, she advised me to be careful with having unprotected sexual intercourse so as I cannot become pregnant.” Said Ken

Many adolescents, like Ken* experience challenges of not communicating with their parents about reproductive health which results in the increase of early pregnancy cases in some villages of Mahama Refugee Camp.

To address this, in collaboration with Peer Educators, Save the Children has been raising awareness of adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) since 2016.

Ken* started attending group sessions for adolescents and youth on sexual and reproductive health in her community. These sessions are regularly organized by ASRH Peer Educators. Ken got an opportunity to ask various curious questions to know more about sexual and reproductive to help her understand herself and know where she can find ASRH information and services.

Today, Ken*'s knowledge about sexual and reproductive health has increased and she joins peer educators to educate other adolescents and youth on the promotion of reproductive health and the prevention of early pregnancies in her village. Now, she is also open to her parents about reproductive health-related support, especially when she is on her period.

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After realizing that 12 of my 14 friends got pregnant because of a lack of SRH information, I decided to regularly attend these sessions and encourage other adolescents to come and know more about their reproductive health. I now know how I can prevent myself from early and unwanted pregnancy and where I can get SRH services.

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Ken*, 17

OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS

