

Community Impact Bulletin

Plan International Rwanda

Generation Change Programme (GCP)1.0

Strengthening Child Protection and
Sexual, Reproductive, Health and Rights
in Rwanda Project

Issue 1



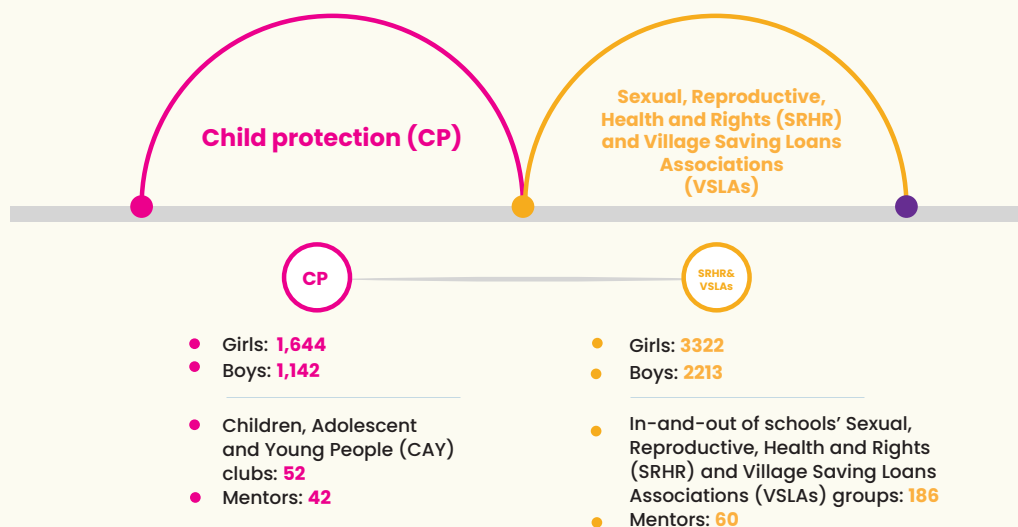
Project's overview

Plan International Rwanda was awarded a grant by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for a project titled “Strengthening Child Protection and Sexual, Reproductive, Health and Rights in Rwanda” for five years. This project is being implemented in partnership with four local organisations: Collectif des Liges et Associations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (CLADHO), Coalition Umwana ku Isonga (CUI), Young Women's Christian Association - Rwanda (YWCA Rwanda) and Health Development Initiative (HDI).

The project's goal is to create a conducive environment where vulnerable children, adolescent and youth, including those with disabilities, especially girls, are equally cared for, protected from all forms of violence, and supported to make informed decisions about their sexuality and reproduction.

This project collaborates with government institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), law enforcement officials, social workers, caregivers, parents and teachers, focusing on advocacy aspects, and is implemented across the local communities in Gatsibo, Bugesera, and Nyaruguru districts.

Participants



Child Protection (CP)

Proby: A brave young voice for equality in household duties

At 16, Proby is a determined third-year secondary school student and the only daughter among her four siblings. Each evening, she confronted a troubling reality: her three brothers avoided all household chores, leaving Proby to shoulder the burden alone. She was responsible for fetching water with unwieldy jerry cans, scrubbing dishes, tidying the house, and assisting her mother with meal preparation.

Her mother, Alphonsine, adhered to the belief that Proby should comply with her brothers' demands as part of cultural expectations for a young girl to prepare for her future role as a mother. This entrenched gender norm has taken a significant toll on Proby's well-being.

Proby's perspective began to shift dramatically when she joined her school's child protection club. There, she explored children's rights and the importance of addressing personal challenges. Empowered by this knowledge, Proby engaged with her parents and successfully influenced their views, contributing to a more equitable environment at home.

“Studying children’s rights deeply revealed how my family was violating my rights, especially in terms of equal treatment among siblings. I confronted my mother about this issue, and she eventually agreed to a change. Now, we share responsibilities more fairly, and I collaborate with my brothers in managing household tasks.”

– Proby, 16.

She credits the child protection club for teaching her crucial skills in public speaking, self-esteem, articulating her ideas and understanding her responsibilities as a child.



Proby's mother, Christine, was unaware of children's rights until her daughter educated her.



Proby and her brother equally share household chores in their family.

Lilian's triumph over domestic abuse

13-year-old Lilian and her 16-year-old brother, Mark, were enduring a home life marred by their father's abusive behaviour, particularly towards them and their mother. Burdened with heavy household chores, including fetching water, their lives took a turn for the worse when Mark had to drop out of school.

A turning point came when Lilian joined the child protection club at her primary school. This transformative experience not only bolstered her self-esteem but also saw her emerge as a leader. Through the club, she learnt about children's rights and came to understand the abuse she and her brother had suffered at home.

Armed with this newfound knowledge, Lilian began educating her parents, who had previously been unaware of these rights.

“I’m thrilled that my brother has returned to school, and my parents now understand children’s rights. Household chores are now fairly shared, and today, we also have family discussions, which allow us to share our experiences and challenges as children.”

– Lilian, 13

With support from mentors, Lilian's family receives daily guidance, leading to positive behavioural changes.



Lilian and her classmates at their secondary school's child protection club.



Lilian and her brother equally share household chores in their family.



Lilian leading a session at her school's child protection club.

Sexual, Reproductive, Health and Rights (SRHR)

Fabiola: Young girl conquers shame and fear for body autonomy

16-year-old Fabiola has gained invaluable knowledge through the sexual, reproductive, health and rights' club at her secondary school. For her, the most significant achievement has been overcoming shame to make informed decisions about her body.

Before joining the club, Fabiola believed it was deeply shameful to discuss issues related to sexuality. She couldn't dare approach her parents about it. She realised that this is a major issue for many girls, who face fears that can jeopardise their future lives.

Fabiola emphasises that when girls possess comprehensive knowledge about their bodies, they can avoid the dangers of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and misinformation from sexual predators.

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Shame is a significant issue for girls, one that I, too, have faced. Learning about my body has empowered me to speak out on every issue, including body changes and sexual violence, and to understand who to approach and when for my essential needs as a girl.

– Fabiola, 16

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Fabiola leads her school's sexual, reproductive health and rights club.



Fabiola has overcome the shame of expressing issues concerning her body.

Sexual education creates self-protection paths for rural women

Clementine and Clarisse understand the challenges faced by many rural young women who lack knowledge about their bodies and are bound by cultural misconceptions. Today, both are proud and informed individuals, reaping the benefits of sexual education.

Clementine, 22, the seventh of eight children, had to drop out of school in her sixth year of primary due to chronic illness. She resigned herself to household chores alongside her siblings.

She witnesses firsthand the challenges girls and young women face, including the pressure to engage in sexual activities to meet basic needs.

Clementine's outlook transformed when she learned about a sexual, reproductive, and health rights club in her local community.

“The most important knowledge I gained was learning to track my menstrual cycle and adopt protective measures. Today, I am a strong young woman, capable of protecting myself against sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.”

– Clementine, 22.

Similarly, Clarisse, 21, found herself pregnant, feeling her chances for a brighter future slipping away.

“The lack of sexual education led to my unwanted pregnancy. Parents in rural areas rarely discuss sexual health with their children. As a teen mother, the club has enabled me to become a self-protective woman in control of her own body. We need more sexual education efforts.”

– Clarisse, 21.



The sexual, reproductive health and rights club creates self-protection paths for rural women out of school.

Village Saving Loans Associations (VSLAs)

A small loan, a big change: Clementine's transformation story

It has been four years since Clementine, 22, joined the sexual, reproductive, and health rights' club, which also incorporates a future savings initiative that has profoundly improved her economic situation and lifted her out of poverty.

Through the savings initiative, Clementine had the opportunity to learn tailoring. She then applied for a small loan of Rwf 60,000, which she supplemented with her savings of Rwf 40,000 from selling a pig. With a total of Rwf 100,000, she purchased a sewing machine and launched her tailoring business.

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The financial savings group has equipped me with the skills to create my own job. I am contributing to a brighter future for myself and my family. I no longer rely on others to provide for my basic needs. As a young woman, I feel empowered to shape a positive future.

– Clementine, 22

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Clementine successfully repaid her loan through her small-scale tailoring business, which enabled her to purchase another pig for Rwf 15,000. Today, she manages to save over Rwf 20,000 monthly through the sectoral 'Saving and Credit Cooperative Society (Umurenge SACCO),' living a better life she has chosen for herself.



Clementine uses her tailoring skills to secure her financial future.

Meet Jean Claude, a youth flourishing in tailoring

Jean Claude, aged 22, completed his ordinary level studies in 2019 and chose to embark on vocational training to forge his own path, as his modest family faced challenges in affording his school fees.

He commenced with a three-month tailoring course, costing Rwf 30,000, and then returned home. While contemplating how to secure a brighter future, he discovered a sexual, reproductive, and health rights club that also offered a savings initiative.

Initially, Jean Claude gained invaluable knowledge on sexual education, but he felt particularly fortunate to learn about the future savings initiative for youth, which provided him with a small loan that perfectly complemented his newly acquired skills.



“I received a loan of Rwf 50,000, which I combined with Rwf 60,000 from my parents to purchase a tailoring machine that I set up at home. Now, the entire local community comes to me for tailoring services. I am skilled in tailoring, I know how to collaborate with microfinance organisations, and I can secure my future savings.”

- Jean Claude, 22

One of Jean Claude's significant achievements in tailoring is purchasing his own land for Rwf 200,000. As part of the initiative, he saves Rwf 3,900 weekly.



Tailoring helps Claude make a living.

Clarisse: A beacon of hope for young mothers through home business

At 21, teen mother Clarisse has transformed her life by joining a savings initiative. After enduring a hard life marked by poverty, farm work, and home chores, this opportunity was a turning point for her.

Upon joining the initiative, Clarisse received a modest loan of Rwf 30,000, enabling her to launch a sorghum-selling business from her home. Each week, she sells 50 kilograms of sorghum to her local community, purchasing it at Rwf 580 per kilogram and selling it for Rwf 800.



“Running a home business has greatly improved the quality of life for my child and me. As an independent young mother, I no longer depend on my family for basic needs. I feel empowered and capable of providing for my child.”

– Clarisse, 21

Clarisse is a strong advocate for the combined impact of sexual education and financial empowerment for girls and young women.

She believes that this dual approach is essential for fostering self-reliance and shielding them from the sexual risks and economic challenges that can arise from a lack of sexual health knowledge and poverty.

– Clarisse, 21

“Running a home business has greatly improved the quality of life for my child and me. As an independent young mother, I no longer depend on my family for basic needs. I feel empowered and capable of providing for my child.”



Clarisse, 21, runs a home business dealing in sorghum.

Community-Based Child Protection Structures (CBCPS)

Inshuti z'Umuryango (IZU): Donathille's crusade for children's rights in families

Donathille, aged 54, dedicates her life to educating families about children's rights, aiming to overcome domestic violence, ensure proper care, and foster a safe and healthy society. She also guides children in expressing the issues they face.

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“I devote all my efforts to ensuring families live safely. This helps create healthy environments that support children's growth. Parents need consistent education to fully understand children's rights, as many are unaware of what these rights entail.”

— Donathille, 54

Donathille is a committed member of "Inshuti z'Umuryango (IZU)," which translates to "Friends of the Family" in English, under the Community-Based Child Protection Structures (CBCPS).

Since joining IZU in 2018, Donathille has faced significant challenges, particularly with parents who, due to outdated mindsets, keep their children bound to household chores, leading to school dropouts and missed classes. Her work is vital in transforming these attitudes and ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive.



Donathille, aged 54, contributes to building families aware of children's rights and free from domestic violence.

Mentors speak up

Thimothee: A secondary school headmaster cultivating future leaders

Thimothee, the headmaster of a secondary school with over a thousand students, has significantly impacted his pupils' futures by establishing ten saving groups within the school. Each club, consisting of 30 members, encourages the younger generation to save for the future and dream big.

During school club sessions, Thimothee delivers compelling educational talks on the importance of saving for the future.

At the end of each year, Thimothee gathers with the students to review the fiscal year's achievements and set new goals for the future.

During the club sessions, students also navigate sexual, reproductive, health and rights, developing into a future generation that makes informed decisions about their bodies.

“My school clubs can save Rwf 2,400,000 annually. This stems from the dedication and education we instil in our students, helping them prepare wisely for a brighter future. I am honoured to be part of this journey, nurturing the country's youth who will sustainably contribute to its socio-economic development. Each child presents to the school how they effectively manage and use their annual savings. This assessment ensures they set smart goals and achieve them.”

- Thimothee

“As an educator and mentor, I see the transformative power of engaging adolescents, both girls and boys, in comprehensive sexual education. It is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about empowering them to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures. By integrating sexual education into our school clubs, we are nurturing a generation that values respect, equality, and responsible choices.”

- Thimothee



Thimothee, the secondary school headmaster, mentors his students through sexual education and future planning.

Parents on positive changes across families

Triphine, Wellars, Donatha, and Beatrice are parents whose children participate in Sexual, Reproductive, Health and Rights (SRHR) and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). They share their perspectives on the positive impacts that sexual education and financial empowerment sessions have brought to the families and local communities.



Triphine, 50

Before engaging in mentorship, I considered discussions about sexual education to be shameful. The Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights clubs across local communities have been crucial platforms for establishing open discussions between parents and children.



Wellars, 40

My two children have played a key role in changing the culture in our family. They brought us, the parents, on board, advising us to dedicate time to discuss the family's future, which we do now. Additionally, we opened our minds to help them contribute to the monthly saving scheme, allowing them to buy small livestock that supports the family's financial status and helps us beat poverty.



Donatha, 38

I remember when my daughter brought me the sexual education booklet and started reading it to me. I learnt a lot from it. I don't have any doubts that my children can face sexual temptations because they have been equipped with the knowledge to understand the right information about their bodies.



Alphonsine, 41

I remember my daughter coming home with her classmates. They taught me about the importance of children's rights, especially how boys and girls should be treated equally. The blend of cultural norms and poor education can lead parents to mistreat their children, which requires more effort in educating families. I personally believed that a girl had special home activities, which is not true, until I learnt deeply about children's rights.

Ends



Appreciation to all our partners:



About Plan International Rwanda

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Plan International has been operating in Rwanda since 2007 to change gender and social norms as well as policies that hold children back from reaching their potential.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity.

We are present at national and local levels with a focus on the districts of Bugesera, Gatsibo and Nyaruguru. We also work in 6 refugee camps across the country.

We won't stop until we are all equal.



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