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ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY REPORT

1ST MARCH 2017

Get up all against stigma associated with HIV and AIDS

Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV (RRP+) is a network that represents over 100,000 people infected and affected by HIV (PLHIV) and has a strong decentralized structure in place. RRP+ is therefore best positioned to know the challenges PLHIV have to face in their daily life. It's our duty to bring their worries up to the level of political decision making to assure they are taken into account by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other partners, and to advocate for measures to be put in place to improve the quality of life of PLHIV.

As stigma and discrimination remain among the biggest problems PLHIV are struggling with, RRP+ joined the world on the 1st of March 2017 to commemorate the international **Zero Discrimination Day**. A press conference was organized with the participation of various partners including MOH, RBC, UNAIDS, WHO, UNICEF, GIZ and civil society organizations engaged in the HIV response.

The national theme of this year was “Get up all against Stigma associated with HIV and AIDS” which calls everyone to advocate for zero tolerance of discrimination against People Living with HIV (PLHIV).



L-R: Dr Grace Murisa (UNICEF), Dr Michel Gasana (WHO), Sylvie Muneza (RRP+), Dieudonne Ruturwa (UNAIDS), Dr Emmanuel Yoboka (MOH), Dr Mpundu Ribakare (RBC)

In her opening remarks, the Chairperson of RRP+ Muneza Sylvie, said: “Stigma and discrimination continue to have a negative impact on efforts to increase HIV testing and treatment. Although the new Differential Services Delivery Model (DSDM) will contribute to reduced stigma, more investment to fight stigma is needed”.

The RBC representative, Dr Mpundu, emphasizes that the MOH is recognizes stigma has to end: “Together we have to stand up and fight stigma and discrimination faced by PLHIV, also beyond this international day against stigma. We have to reach zero discrimination.”

The WHO representative said we also have to fight auto stigma: “Isolation is a problem because it deprives PLHIV of accessing free HIV treatment. Nobody is discriminated at health facilities but some people decide to isolate themselves and stop taking treatment. HIV should be considered as any other chronic disease and people in the family or community should not discriminate PLHIV”, said Dr. Michel Gasana on behalf of the World Health Organization (WHO).



Dr Michel : *“Isolation of PLHIV is a problem of accessing free HIV treatment”*

During the press conference RRP+ projected a documentary film produced based on testimonies of PLHIV. This movie emphasizes how 3 young persons living with HIV managed to overcome stigma and the role of the community in eliminating any form of stigma and discrimination. This movie will be distributed largely by social media and through health facilities, and aims to inspire people living with HIV and the community to stand up against stigma and fight for a dignified life. The movie can be seen here: <http://www.youtube.com>

As the movie and experiences of other members of RRP+ show, stigma and discrimination by their family, at school, at work and in the community, is one of the major problems affecting PLHIV. During discussion after the movie, participants of the press conference recommended to:

- Facilitate access of PLHIV to equitable health services and don't discriminate PLHIV in any form. Special efforts need to be done to end stigma among youth and avoid their isolation.
- Strengthen the mobilization in and out of school to end stigma and discrimination among students
- Emphasize community mobilization in fighting discrimination through the media
- Organize quarterly press conferences on HIV issues in partnership with the media umbrella ABASIRWA.

RRP+ urges that following actions need to be taken:

- The stigma discrimination day activities should be decentralized for more discussion with the community with the support of all stakeholders in the HIV response.
- The latest Stigma Index from 2009 needs to be updated in order to document and analyze current practices of discrimination in Rwanda. This will enable the government and civil society to define more targeted and effective measures to fight stigma and to track progress made.
- More investment is required to focus on access to HIV services and elimination of stigma among youth.
- Existing structures in the community need to be used to discuss stigma and discrimination, like Umugoroba w'abayeyi (community discussion) to ensure parents start talking about reproductive health with their children.

In commemoration of the international Zero Discrimination Day, the participants posed with the posters proving their engagement in ending stigma.



DR Grace, Dr Michel, Sylvie, Dr Mpundu, Dr Emmanuel, Sage, Eraste,



Bahati Innocent/ ABASIRWA



Dieudonne Raturwa/ UNAIDS



Jean Luch Munyanziza / RRP+