

Investing in Girls and Young Women: Breaking the Silence and Advocating for Women's Rights in HIV Response in Rwanda

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1,2,7: Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV / AIDS (RRP+) ¹Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV / AIDS (RRP+)

3: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (UNWOMEN)

4,5: The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) – Rwanda

6: United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

Issues

The abstract highlights critical issues faced by girls and young women living with HIV in Rwanda, primarily focusing on their marginalized status in society. Gender inequality hinders their empowerment, perpetuating HIV-related stigma and leading to limited access to comprehensive health services for this vulnerable population.

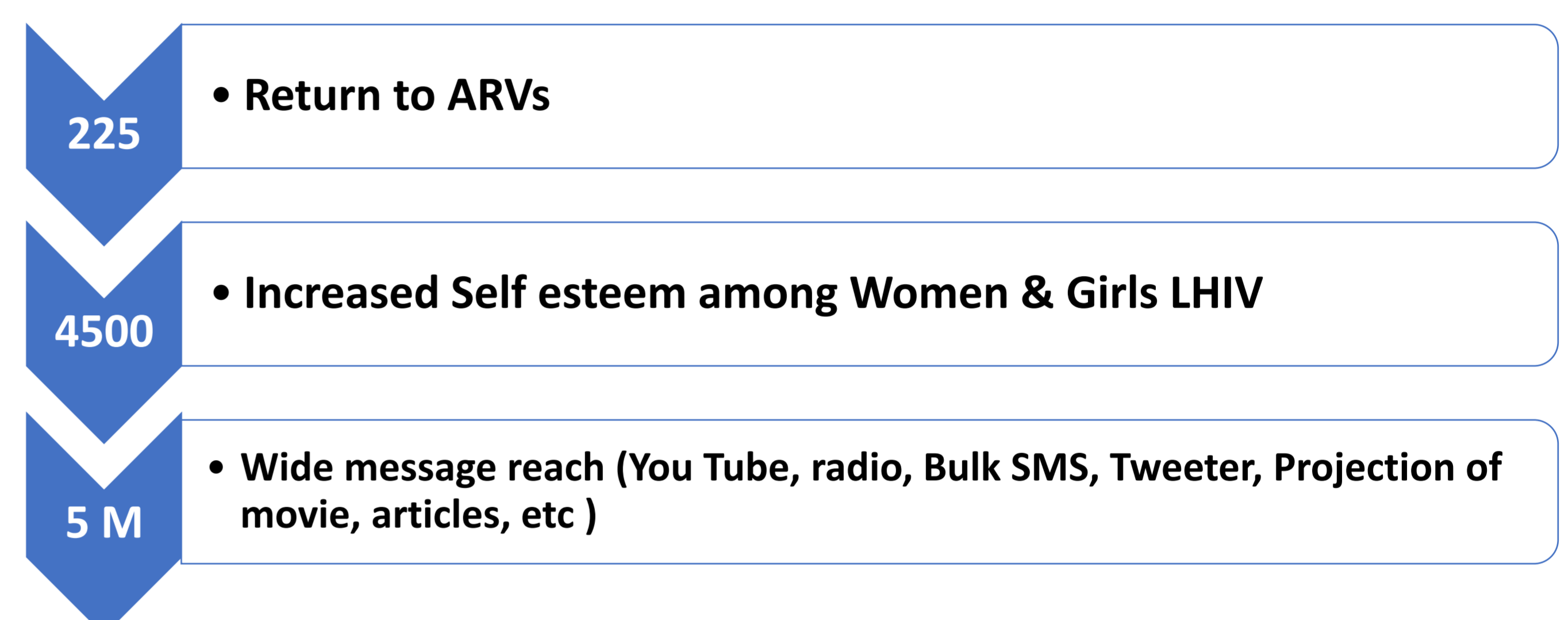


Description

To address these challenges, Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV / AIDS (RRP+) in collaboration with UNWOMEN and UNAIDS initiated a project, aimed at empowering selected representatives of girls and young women living with HIV in the 30 districts of Rwanda. Through enhanced leadership, communication, and advocacy skills, the project sought to transform them into agents of change and champions of awareness campaigns through various communication platforms. The intervention utilized a multi-channel approach, including social media, meetings, bulk SMS, radio talk shows, and video broadcasts, to reach a diverse audience, including previously hard-to-reach youth. Remarkably, the project successfully increased the knowledge of more than 7,186 girls and young women aged 18-30 on women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), HIV prevention, gender-based violence (GBV), and access to health services.

Lessons learnt

The utilization of multiple communication channels proved highly effective in raising awareness and fostering community engagement, breaking barriers and engaging traditionally difficult-to-reach youth.



Furthermore, specialized training programs on public speaking, social media management, and advocacy empowered young women leaders, enabling them to advocate for their rights actively and participate in gender-responsive actions. However, a crucial learning point emerged as the engagement of girls alone was insufficient in inducing behavior change in men. As a response, the project adopted a more inclusive approach, involving men and boys in promoting gender equality, recognizing the importance of engaging all segments of society for effective change.

Next steps

Moving forward, the project's success offers valuable insights for future interventions. Scaling up similar initiatives and widespread dissemination of key messages should be prioritized. Leveraging partnerships with telecommunication companies can facilitate broader information distribution, reaching an even larger audience and maximizing the project's impact. To enhance effectiveness, exploring collaborations with other sectors is essential to address systemic issues related to gender inequality and HIV response. Crucially, the next phase involves empowering men and boys through education on positive masculinity and engaging them in promoting gender equality. An inclusive approach that involves all segments of society will create a more supportive and equitable environment, further strengthening the project's impact and achieving lasting change.