

# Strengthening capacity of cooperatives for accelerating HIV impact reduction in Rwanda

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## **General**

**Category:** D4: Community-engaged/participatory social science-based interventions

**Country of research:** Rwanda

**Please use the drop down list to indicate if your abstract relates to any of the below** People living with HIV

## **Abstract Text (max 350 words)**

**Background:** To encourage People Living with HIV (PLHIV) to get involved in HIV prevention, care, and treatment as well as impact mitigation, Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (RRP+) was founded in 2003 and established 500 associations, 300 cooperatives, and 12 NGOs whose members are people living with or affected by HIV. Cooperatives provide financial resources, vocational training, and psychosocial counseling to PLHIV members, fostering resilience, reducing stigma, and promoting prevention and treatment awareness.

**Description:** From 2019 to 2022, RRP+ with the support of Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), and Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA), 138 cooperatives benefited from financial and capacity building support to enhance their income generating activities as a way to promote independence and social economic inclusion. RCA trained them on cooperative management and governance. 67% female and 33% male benefited doing small businesses, animal breeding, handicrafts, and agriculture, which help them to share experiences, enhance community education and create safe spaces

**Lessons learned:** The members of the supported cooperatives have shown changes benefited from the cooperative income generating activities by exchanging information on HIV status and coping strategies to the community on HIV that they also have transformational potential in decreasing the negative effects of HIV. The diverse range of income within PLHIV demonstrates the power of community-led approaches; they improved life condition as well as nutrition on 58%, school education facilitation of their kids on 59%, health insurance on 81% and other needs on 54%, through their generated income. Also, 99% of members in our cooperative reached viral load suppression, which was partly attributable to routine health education during their activities. They have shown that working together in organizations can be an effective way of meeting HIV-related needs through resource sharing, knowledge sharing and creating an enabling environment.

**Conclusions/Next steps:** It can be concluded that establishing and running PLHIV cooperatives contribute to their well-being and social and economic situation. RRP+ plans to continue educating and training cooperative members in order to encourage more cooperatives. It will focus efforts on building cooperatives for youth and engaging with other partners.

## **Additional questions**

**Ethical research declaration:** Yes

## **IAS digital learning platform**

**IAS+:** HIV prevention, Stigma, Community leadership, Financing the HIV response

**Preconference: Co-infections, viral and host diversity: impact on HIV cure strategies:** Yes

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