



# ANNUAL REPORT

2024



## **ABOUT UPHLS**

Umbrella of organizations of Persons with Disabilities in the Fight against HIV&AIDS and for Health Promotion is network of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities which was created on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2006 and registered in Rwanda Governance Bord (RGB) under No 048/NGO/2015.

## **UPHLS VISION**

UPHLS Vision is to have an inclusive society where diverse persons with disabilities are empowered to enjoy wellbeing and dignity.

## **UPHLS MISSION**

Strengthen the capacity of organizations for persons with disabilities & stakeholders, and promote the rights of Persons with Disabilities for inclusive services and participation

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Goal**

Promote disability inclusive health and empower diverse persons with disability for their fully participation and engagement in the development process.

### **Objectives**

- Promote and support disability inclusive health.
- Promote disability inclusive social activities and mobilize the community to allow and support persons with disabilities to play an active role in social transformation programs and initiatives.
- Uphold and improve disability inclusion in economic transformation programs and livelihood activities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, UPHLS successfully implemented six major projects advancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Rwanda. Key initiatives focused on strengthening ear and hearing care, promoting early detection, inclusive maternal and child health (MCCH), and integrating disability in national HIV responses. Vocational training, youth empowerment, and health policy reviews also featured prominently. Through these projects, over 509 healthcare providers from 203 facilities, 196 Community Health Workers (CHWs), and 431 PWDs and caregivers were trained. Public awareness campaigns reached over 13,000 individuals directly and more than 30,000 community members nationwide.

To promote accessible healthcare, UPHLS renovated five health centers across Karongi, Gatsibo, Gicumbi, Huye, and Kicukiro, enhancing ramps, pavements, accessible toilets, tactile floors, and signage. In partnership with RBC, 1,838 children with hearing issues were pre-screened, 836 assessed by ENT doctors, and 160 received 332 digital hearing aids. An additional 651 PWDs received assistive devices 282 wheelchairs (including 8 electric), 373 crutches, and 169 white canes while 120 individuals accessed rehabilitation services, including 45 prosthetic fittings.

Significant strides were made in youth employability through the Menya Ukorane Ubuzima Bwiza project and USAID's Hanga Akazi initiative. A total of 242 youth with disabilities (122 females, 120 males) were trained in technical trades such as tailoring, carpentry, soap production, and culinary arts, with 241 successfully completing their programs. Additionally, 193 youth gained soft skills training, and 13 youth-led business groups received 7.59 million RWF in start-up funding. Five TVET institutions underwent disability inclusion audits, while 21 staff and 103 market actors were trained on disability mainstreaming paving the way for more inclusive education and employment systems.

UPHLS also conducted evidence-based research on hearing impairment, MCCH service barriers, and health system accessibility, generating data for policy engagement. The organization led national advocacy dialogues, including workshops with procurement authorities, faith leaders, and media professionals. Impact stories emerged across programs children fitted with hearing aids transitioned to mainstream schools, youth gained employment or launched businesses, and renovated health centers improved access for all. These outcomes affirm key lessons: inclusive planning boosts efficiency, assistive technologies unlock potential, and trained professionals can be catalysts for

systemic change. UPHLS recommends continued investment in inclusive infrastructure, stronger policy implementation, and scaling successful models to ensure the full participation of PWDs in Rwanda's development agenda.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2024, UPHLS implemented a series of impactful interventions to advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in key sectors, particularly health and social services. These efforts focused on strengthening the capacity of health facilities, employment companies, technical training centers, and government partners in disability mainstreaming. UPHLS facilitated comprehensive assessments, screenings, and the provision of assistive technologies, while empowering persons with disabilities through targeted capacity-building initiatives to enhance their resilience. Additionally, community dialogues were conducted with both community members and persons with disabilities to challenge and transform social norms, fostering greater acceptance and support.

In 2024, UPHLS focused its activities on five key areas: HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), health system capacity strengthening, capacity building for persons with disabilities, and employability and advocacy, alongside rehabilitation and assistive technologies.

During 2024, UPHLS covered 22 districts from all provinces and the City of Kigali including Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Muhanga, Ruhango, Nyanza, Huye, Gisagara, Rulindo, Musanze, Burera, Gicumbi, Nyabihu, Rubavu, Karongi, Ngororero, Nyagatare, Gatsibo, Rwamagana, Kayonza and Bugesera.

The successful implementation of these interventions was supported by technical and financial contributions from key partners, including the Ministry of Health (CDC-CoAg), Rwanda Biomedical Center (Global Fund), See You Foundation, Disability Rights Fund, UNAIDS and UNICEF.

This annual report highlights key achievements from 2024,(from January to December) along with best practices, lessons learned, remaining gaps, recommendations, and an overview of the 2025 annual plan.

Rwanda -  
New Province / Regions and New Admin District Boundaries

Province / Region

- EST (1)
- NORD (1)
- OUEST (1)
- SUD (1)
- VILLE DE KIGALI (1)

New District Boundaries

New District Region

The map displays the administrative districts of Rwanda, color-coded by province/region: EST (light orange), NORD (yellow), OUEST (orange), SUD (blue), and VILLE DE KIGALI (light green). Red location pins indicate UPHLS intervention coverage across various districts including NYAGATARE, GATSIBO, KAYONZA, KIRIHE, NGOMA, RWAMAGANA, KICUKIRO, NYARUGENGE, GASABO, RULINDO, GICUMBI, BURERA, MUSANZE, RUBAVU, NYABIHU, GAKENKE, RUTSIRO, NGORORERO, MUHANGA, KARONGI, NYAMASHEKE, RUSIZI, NYAMAGABE, NYANZA, RUHANGO, KAMONYI, NYARUGURU, HUYE, GISAGARA, and BUGESERA. A scale bar (0-60 km) and a compass rose are included.

UPHLS Intervention Coverage

### 3. UPHLS ADMINISTRATION

#### 3.1. UPHLS Boad of Directors activities during the year 2024

The year 2024 was marked by different activities including organizing two general assembly one held in March 2024 and the extra ordinary general assembly held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at Five-to-Five Hotel for the election of the new Board of Directors. Additionally, four regular Board of Directors meetings were held, alongside two meetings organized by the Conflict Resolution Committee to prepare for the elections. The Internal Audit Committee also conducted two audit exercises.

As the term of the existing Board of Directors, in place since 2018, ended in April 2024, the Conflict Resolution Committee organized the election process. The elections were successfully conducted on date mentioned , marking a pivotal moment in the organization's leadership transition

| OUTGOING COMMITTEE     |             | NEW ELECTED COMMITTEE      |             |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Name                   | Position    | Name                       | Position    |
| Dr. Patrick SUUBI      | President   | Patrick SUUBI              | President   |
| HABIYAREMYE<br>Leonard | V/President | KARANGANWA Jean Bosco      | V/President |
| MUGABO B. Emmanuel     | Treasure    | HABIYAREMYE Leonard        | Treasure    |
| TUMWINE Winnie         | Secretary   | UMUNYEMBABAZI<br>Angelique | Secretary   |
| UWIZEYE Emile          | Advisor     | TWIRINGIYIMANA Gilbert     | Advisor     |
| UWIMANA Latifa         | Advisor     | IRACYADUKUNDA Pricille     | Advisor     |

Following the election, the newly elected Board members participated in a comprehensive retreat. This retreat served as an opportunity for the new Board to receive in-depth information about UPHLS's history, current operations, and strategic direction. It also provided a space for reflection on the future of the organization, allowing Board members to discuss key priorities, challenges, and opportunities to guide UPHLS in the years ahead.

#### 3.2. Capacity Strengthening of UPHLS Constituencies

During the year 2024, UPHLS played a key role in strengthening the capacity of its member

organizations through a series of targeted support activities, including:

- Facilitating General Assemblies for member organizations, which served not only as governance milestones but also as valuable opportunities for knowledge sharing and capacity building.
- Organizing specialized training on disability-friendly procurement to promote inclusive practices within procurement processes across member organizations.
- Conducting training on community-based red monitoring to equip members with practical tools for effective engagement in monitoring and accountability efforts at the community level.
- Providing orientation on the new Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) regulations governing non-governmental organizations, enabling members to understand updated compliance requirements and successfully complete the necessary documentation for registration and continued operations.
- Engaging OPD members in various UPHLS-led events and activity implementation, particularly advocacy initiatives, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of persons with disabilities were represented in public dialogues and policy discussions, and contributing to increased visibility and influence within the broader development space.

### **3.3. UPHS Secretariate**

#### **3.3.1. Management of staff and materials**

From January to December 2024, the management of UPHLS staff and equipment adhered to the UPHLS Administrative and Financial Manual, as well as Rwandan laws. Staff meetings were regularly organized and conducted. UPHLS also organized one staff retreat at the beginning of the year. Regarding equipment management, some materials, such as printers and computers, were outdated and not functioning properly. To address this, UPHLS is replacing the old equipment depending on the available funds. It is in this framework that some office chairs, tables, and a few computers were replaced. However, the issue with printers remains unresolved.

#### **3.3.2. The Social events**

Under this section, UPHLS, in collaboration with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) and other organizations representing persons with disabilities, organized a commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi. This solemn event took place on [insert date] in Bugesera District, providing a platform for reflection and remembrance.

At the end of the year, UPHLS also hosted a celebratory event for its staff and their families, marking the closure of the year. This gathering served as an opportunity to express gratitude for the team's dedication and to foster a sense of community within the organization

#### **4. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

In 2024, UPHLS focused on enhancing its organizational development and strengthening its resource mobilization efforts. A key achievement was the development of the UPHLS Strategic Plan for 2024-2028, which outlines the organization's long-term goals, priorities, and strategies for growth. This plan is expected to guide UPHLS in achieving its mission of strengthening the capacity of member organizations and stakeholders to promote the rights of Persons with Disabilities for inclusive services and participation.

Alongside strategic planning, UPHLS continued its efforts in resource mobilization through various initiatives. These included writing and submitting several project proposals to both local and international donors, aimed at securing funding for ongoing and future initiatives. The organization also worked to establish new partnerships with government agencies and NGOs to expand its network and enhance support for its programs. These activities are crucial in ensuring UPHLS has the resources necessary to sustain its operations and further its impact in the community.

This year's efforts in organizational development and resource mobilization reflect UPHLS's commitment to sustainability and its goal of building a strong foundation for future success.

#### **5. UPHLS PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTATION 2024**

UPHLS has three main programs such as HIV&AIDS program, Health Promotion and Employable programs. Under these programs, 6 main projects were implemented during the year: RBF-NSP HIV Program funded by Global Fund through RBC, Every Life Matters funded by See You Foundation, Menya Ukorane Ubuzima Bwiza funded by See You Foundation, Strengthening HIV Clinical Services in Rwanda funded by CDC through the Ministry of Health, Ear and Hearing Care – WINSIGA NDUMVA funded by UNICEF,

## 5.1. HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAMME

Health promotion in the disability area refers to efforts aimed at improving the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities through the strengthening of healthcare systems, the enhancement of healthcare environments, and the promotion of awareness and understanding. In this context, UPHLS conducted different interventions including HIV and AIDS related interventions, sexual and reproductive health, maternal, child and community health (MCCH), Ear and Hearing Care and the provision of assistive technologies.

### 5.1.1. Capacity strengthening of health facilities

#### *Training of health care providers*

During the year 2024, UPHLS conducted a series of targeted training sessions aimed at increasing the capacity of healthcare providers mainly those working in HIV response on disability mainstreaming, disability specific needs. These training programs were designed to enhance the quality of healthcare delivery by integrating disability inclusion into existing healthcare practices. By equipping healthcare providers with necessary knowledge and practical skills, the trainings sought to improve the accessibility and responsiveness of health services for persons with disabilities, ensuring that, they receive equitable care in HIV prevention, treatment, and support. The initiative also sought to raise awareness among healthcare professionals about the specific needs of patients with disabilities, helping them to better communicate, engage, and provide care that is both inclusive and effective.

A total of 509 healthcare providers from 158 health centers and 45 public hospitals across the country including 57 nurses working in HIV related services, 94 health center staff trained as disability focal points and 192 nurses in charge of youth corners mainly focusing on adolescents sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), 120 OPD Nurses and 56 health care providers working in rehabilitation department from 45 public hospitals. The trainings focused on disability mainstreaming in healthcare services in general with particular emphasis to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in HIV-related services. Key areas of focus included disability-friendly communication, with focus to basic sign language skills to ensure effective interaction with persons with hearing and speaking impairment. Additionally, participants received instruction on improving the mobility and orientation skills for persons with visual impairment.

### **Training of Community Health Workers**

During the year 2024, UPHLS organized and facilitated the comprehensive training of 196 Community health care providers (CHWs). This training aimed to ensure that CHWs are better prepared to support the families of persons with disabilities in their communities, promoting equitable health care access and improving the overall quality of care for these persons as well as addressing the issues related to social norm around persons with disabilities including the mindset change towards persons with disabilities.

As part of this initiative, 96 CHWs were trained on disability-inclusive practices, with a particular emphasis on delivering HIV/AIDS services that are disability-friendly in the community. 100 CHWs were trained on disability mainstreaming and disability early detection to ensure that children suspected to have conditions that may result on impairment are identified early and referred to the health centers on time.

During the year UPHLS organized mentorship activities to continue to capacitate the CHWs, documenting the best practices, identifying the remaining gaps and proposing possible strategies to address them through human centered design. In total 914 CHWs.

#### **5.1.2. Capacity building of persons with disabilities on disability rights, SRH and HIV**

The Capacity Building of Persons with Disabilities during this year targeted two categories including youth with disabilities both in school and out of schools on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH), Disability Rights, and HIV. The training of youth with disabilities aimed to increase the knowledge and engagement of youth with disabilities on sexual and reproductive health (ASRH). The second category target was the representatives of self-help groups of persons with disabilities on HIV&AIDS, disabilities, leadership and cooperative management.

UPHLS also organized and conducted the training the selected parents (mothers) of children with disabilities from the self-help groups of persons with disabilities to reach vulnerable mothers with disabilities or mothers of children with disabilities. They were trained on disability rights (definition of disability, category of disability, legal framework) and Income Generating Activities. As result on that training mothers returned to their community and start to identify mothers in their home to sensitize them on how to take care of their children and create other small groups.

A total 431 persons with disabilities and their families including 264 youth with disabilities (147 females and 117 males) from six districts (Gicumbi, Rwamagana, Huye, Ruhango, and Nyagatare) trained on ASRH and disabilities. 99 representatives of self-help groups (54 females, 45 males) were also part of the capacity building of persons with disabilities to increase their engagement in HIV response efforts, disabilities and basics on leadership and cooperative management. 68 mothers with

disabilities/ parents (mothers) of CWDs.

By the end, participants were empowered with the knowledge and skills to take active roles in HIV prevention and reproductive health within their communities, contributing to stronger, more inclusive self-help groups and a better-informed youth population with disabilities.

### **5.1.3. Comprehensive Disability-Friendly Awareness and Outreach Campaigns on HIV, STIs, SRH, Mental Health, and NCDs**

Throughout the year, UPHLS conducted a series of disability-friendly outreach campaigns targeting various segments of the population, including persons with disabilities and their families, as well as the general public. These campaigns aimed to raise awareness and provide crucial health information on HIV, STIs, SRH, mental health, and NCDs. In total, the comprehensive campaigns reached 13,108 individuals in 19 districts across all provinces and the City of Kigali (Rusizi, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Karongi, Nyaruguru, Huye, Muhanga, Ruhango, Nyanza, Kayanza, Nyagatare, Gatsibo, Bugesera, Rwamagana, Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Gicumbi, and Musanze districts) ensuring that both persons with disabilities and the community at large are informed and engaged on key health issues. The campaigns also helped raise awareness about disability-related issues and addressed social norms surrounding persons with disabilities.

#### **Disability-Friendly Outreach Sessions on HIV, STIs, SRH, & PF**

The goal of these outreach sessions was to increase awareness of persons with disabilities and their families across 14 Districts including Nyabihu, Karongi, Muhanga, Ruhango, Nyanza, Kayanza, Gatsibo, Bugesera, Rwamagana, Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Gicumbi, and Musanze districts. These sessions targeted persons with disabilities. The technical areas covered include HIV, STIs, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and family planning (PF) through accessible health information. In total, 3,640 individuals were reached, including 3,260 PWDs (1,674 females and 1,296 males) and 380 caregivers (300 females, 80 males).

| Category                                     | Female | Male  | Total Number |
|----------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------------|
| Parents of children with disabilities        | 300    | 80    | 380          |
| Persons with Physical Impairments            | 832    | 432   | 1,264        |
| Persons with Visual Impairments              | 216    | 179   | 395          |
| Persons with Hearing/Speaking Impairments    | 205    | 202   | 407          |
| Persons with Intellectual/Mental Impairments | 410    | 268   | 678          |
| Persons with Other Disabilities              | 334    | 182   | 516          |
| Total                                        | 2,297  | 1,343 | 3,640        |

As mentioned in the table, 3,640 persons with disabilities including 2,297 females and 1,343 males.

### **Robust Awareness and Community Outreach Campaigns on HIV, TB, STIs, SRH, and Disability Rights**

A comprehensive series of awareness campaigns were organized to raise awareness on HIV, TB, STIs, SRH, and disability rights, reaching community members including persons with disabilities and their families across different settings. These campaigns included targeted sessions in health center settings, where UPHLS staff, in collaboration with healthcare professionals working in HIV and TB conveyed message on HIV, TB, STIs and disability rights as well as the preventive to persons with disabilities and urge them to use the available health services. A total of 2,074 persons with disabilities (1,310 females and 764 males) were engaged in these sessions, empowering them to make informed health decisions.

In addition to the health center campaigns, mass community outreach efforts were conducted in collaboration with East African Promoters (EAP) through the Iwacu Muzika Festival across three districts: Huye, Rusizi, and Rubavu. These campaigns aimed to increase community awareness on critical health issues including mainly HIV and AIDS, promote safer HIV prevention practices, and reduce stigma surrounding persons with disabilities. In total, 30,310 individuals were reached out, including 19,280 males and 11,030 females, with 1,310 persons with disabilities (780 males and 530 females) actively participating. These initiatives fostered greater understanding, encouraged healthier behaviors, and worked to enhance inclusivity for persons with disabilities in health discussions and practices.

### **Disability-Friendly Community Mobilization on HIV and Mental Health**



In collaboration with the RBC Mental Health Department, a targeted community mobilization effort on HIV and mental health was conducted in Nyagatare, Gicumbi, Rubavu, and Nyaruguru. The initiative utilized drama, testimonies, and speeches to address stigma and discrimination against people with mental health conditions and other disabilities. The campaign reached 3,200 individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of the

intersection between mental health and HIV.

#### **5.1.4. Conduct accessibility checks and disability inclusion score card (DISC) for health facilities and renovation of the selected ones**

##### **Conduct Accessibility Check and DISC**

The activity involves conducting accessibility checks and using the Disability Inclusion Scorecard (DISC) to assess the accessibility and inclusivity of health facilities. Based on the findings, selected health centers will undergo renovations to address identified gaps, ensuring full accessibility for persons with disabilities. This initiative aims to foster an inclusive healthcare environment, guaranteeing equitable access to quality services for all individuals, including persons with disabilities. A total of 33 health centers were audited. The findings revealed that most of the health centers are not physically accessible to persons with disabilities, lack inclusive signage, do not have accessible toilets, and have few staff trained in disability mainstreaming and disability-friendly communication. To ensure proper accessibility, significant upgrades are needed in these facilities.

##### **Renovation of the selected health centers**



After the conduct of accessibility check, 5 health centers including Mubuga HC in Karongi, Gakenke in Gatsibo, Giti HC in Gicumbi, CHUB in Huye and Nyarugunga HC in Kicukiro were renovated focusing on pathways within the health facility including the pavements and ramps where necessary, covering the water channel, upgrading the sign posts,

accessible toilets and the tactile flow.

#### **5.1.5. Disability early detection, intervention and management (Rehabilitation and provision of Assistive Technologies)**

As part of UPHLS ongoing efforts to support persons with disabilities, in 2024, UPHLS, in collaboration with RBC and other partners, continued the initiatives of Disability Early Detection, Intervention, and Management. These activity focuses on a comprehensive process of pre-screening, screening, assessment, treatment, and the provision of assistive devices to the eligible people, with a particular emphasis to children and adolescents. In this context, UPHLS worked alongside RBC to conduct outreach clinics for children with hearing impairments, providing digital hearing aids in 9 districts: Muhanga, Huye, Nyarugenge, Rusizi, Nyabihu, Musanze, Nyagatare, Rwamagana and Bugesera. In addition to hearing care, UPHLS provided a range of assistive devices to both children and adults with disabilities. Furthermore, UPHLS conducted assessments across 21 districts to identify children in need of rehabilitation services or assistive technologies.

### **Screening, Assessment, treatment and referrals of children with hearing issues and follow up**

In 2024, UPHLS, in collaboration with RBC, conducted outreach clinics across 9 districts to screen, assess, refer, and provide digital hearing aids to eligible children. A total of 1,838 children with hearing issues (1,031 males and 807 females) were pre-screened. Of these, 836 children (458 males and 378 females) were screened by ENT doctors, and 160 children (81 males and 79 females) were fitted with digital hearing aids. In total, 332 digital hearing aids were distributed. Additionally, 122 children (60 males and 62 females) received treatment through syringing while others were prescribed the medications.

### **Provision of mobility assistive devices**

Throughout the year, UPHLS identified persons with disabilities across 15 districts including Musanze, Gicumbi, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Nyaruguru, Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Huye, Nyanza, Muhanga, Ruhango, Rulingo, Karongi, Nyagatare, and Kamonyi districts in need of assistive devices, in response to both individual needs and requests from district authorities. In total, UPHLS identified 1,149 persons with disabilities in need of assistive devices without counting the request from districts and partners. From this demand, UPHLS was able to cover only 651 persons with disabilities including. Additionally, UPHLS facilitated medical/ rehabilitation care for 120 persons with disabilities (including paying for them for transportation fees, covering the cost not covered by health insurance, food and other necessities), of which 45 were fitted with prostheses. The assistive devices distributed by UPHLS include 282 Wheelchairs including 8 electrical wheelchairs, 169 white canes, 373 crutches and prosthesis.

| # | Item                  | Quantity |
|---|-----------------------|----------|
| 1 | White canes           | 169      |
| 2 | Elbow crutches        | 373      |
| 3 | Wheelchairs           | 274      |
| 4 | Electrical wheelchair | 8        |

## **Conduct Community dialogue sessions to increase community awareness on disability early detection, intervention and management**

The primary objective of the community dialogue sessions was to raise awareness about disability, focusing on early detection, intervention, and management. These sessions encouraged community members to seek medical attention for their children at health centers if they suspect any condition that may lead to impairment, ensuring timely detection and intervention. Participants were also urged on the importance of following healthcare providers' advice for proper management.

Another key focus of the dialogues was to inform the community about the factors that can contribute to impairments in children and the preventive measures that can be taken to reduce these risks. These sessions also addressed prevailing social norms and negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities, particularly children and their families, with an emphasis on fostering inclusion and challenging stigmas.

Throughout the year, these community dialogues were conducted in 14 districts including 9 districts covered by WINSIGA NDUMVA (Nyagatare, Rwamagana, Bugesera, Nyarugenge, Musanze, Nyabihu, Rusizi, Huye and Muhanga) and 5 districts covered by Every Life Matters (ELM) including Ruhango, Nyarugenge, Karongi, Musanze and Nyagatare) brought together 66,712 individuals, including 28,216 males and 36,464 females.

Special sessions were held for parents of children with disabilities under 5 in five districts covered by ELM, specifically aiming to raise awareness about the importance of bringing their children to health facilities for medical and rehabilitation services seeking. These sessions also emphasized the importance of providing positive, supportive care for children with disabilities.

In the 9 districts covered by WINSIGA NDUMVA, the community dialogue sessions not only focused on early disability detection but also emphasized hearing care awareness. The discussions highlighted the risk factors that can lead to hearing loss and the importance of early detection. These sessions were strategically organized alongside outreach clinics, which offered screening, assessment, treatment, and the provision of digital hearing aids. As a result, the community dialogues provided an invaluable opportunity to raise awareness among parents, encouraging them to bring their children for screenings during the outreach events. This initiative not only provided critical information to the community but also helped create a supportive environment for children with disabilities and their families.

## 5.2. Employability

In 2024, UPHLS, in collaboration with its partners, launched an employability program aimed at enhancing the skills of persons with disabilities, particularly youth. The program focused on both soft and technical skills development to improve employment opportunities. To achieve this, UPHLS implemented the main initiative, "Menya Ukorane Ubuzima Bwiza," along with a small grant from USAID/Feed the Future Rwanda Hanga Akazi (HA).

### 5.2.1. Local labour market assessment (updates), mapping of stakeholders

The activity was conducted from 12th to 23rd February 2024, across 4 districts (under the project including Musanze, Rubavu, Huye and Gatsibo) and 8 sectors in Rwanda. UPHLS team worked alongside key informants, including local authorities, business owners, company managers, cooperatives, and other stakeholders involved in employment-generating projects.

The purpose of this activity was to assess the local labor market, focusing on identifying employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. To gather comprehensive data, the team employed various methodologies, such as prepared questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and site visits to businesses, cooperatives, and schools.

During the assessment, the team visited 34 institutions, which included 4 districts, 18 businesses, 4 cooperatives, and 8 schools. A total of 64 key informants participated, with 16 females and 48 males. The sectors observed during the assessment primarily included tailoring, food processing, shoe making, and coffee processing. TVET schools focused on trades such as tailoring, knitting, leatherwork, masonry, and carpentry.

#### Key Institutions and Informants Visited:

| Institution Type | Number of Institutions Visited | Number of Key Informants | Female Participants | Male Participants |
|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Districts        | 4                              | 16                       | 4                   | 12                |
| Businesses       | 18                             | 30                       | 8                   | 22                |
| Cooperatives     | 4                              | 8                        | 2                   | 6                 |
| TVET Schools     | 8                              | 10                       | 2                   | 8                 |
| Total            | 34                             | 64                       | 16                  | 48                |

**Main Gaps Identified:**

Limited Accessibility: Many businesses and schools lacked adequate accommodations for persons with disabilities, limiting their participation in the workforce.

Lack of Targeted Training: There was a gap in specialized skill development programs for youth with disabilities, especially in high-demand industries like food processing and construction.

Awareness Deficiencies: Employers and educational institutions had limited awareness of how to engage effectively with persons with disabilities, leading to exclusion from employment and training opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

**Enhanced Accessibility:** Improve physical and digital accessibility in businesses and educational institutions to promote equal participation for youth with disabilities.

**Targeted Training Programs:** Develop specialized training programs for youth with disabilities, focusing on key trades such as food processing, tailoring, and construction.

**Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate employers and schools about the benefits of inclusive employment and the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

**Strengthening Partnerships:** Build stronger partnerships between businesses, educational institutions, and disability advocacy groups to foster inclusive employment and training opportunities.

This activity has provided valuable insights into the local labor market and will guide future efforts in mobilizing and preparing youth with disabilities for long-term, inclusive employment.

**5.2.2. DISC sessions with TVET institutions to identify disability inclusive measures, including action planning, advocacy tools for infrastructure upgrade**

UPHLS has conducted an accessibility check using the Disability Inclusion Score Card (DISC) at five (5) TVET institutions in order to increase access of youth with disability to quality technical skills lessons and employment opportunities.

The accessibility audit for TVETs institutions was conducted in the following institutions:

- EMAKA TVET /Kanama Sector / Rubavu Districts
- Rugerero Youth Friendly center/Rugerero Sector/ Rubavu District
- Busogo TVET Saint Martin/ Busogo Sector /Musanze Districts
- Gakoni Technical Secondary School/ Kiramuruzi Sector/ Gatsibo District
- Mwogo Technical Secondary School/ Nyamagabe District

The main objectives of DISC session were the following:

- To assess the current level of disability inclusion at selected TVET institutions.
- To identify specific areas for improvement in disability inclusion.
- To develop action plans for enhancing disability inclusion based on the findings.

### **5.2.3. Train staff from TVET institutions and selected employers on disability mainstreaming and specific needs of YWDs, including monitoring**

As part of the MUB Project, UPHLS and RNUD conducted a 4-day training on disability mainstreaming to empower staff from TVET institutions, selected employers, and service providers. The training aimed to equip participants with knowledge on disability rights, specific needs of youth with disabilities (YWDs), and how to implement disability inclusion in their respective roles. The training took place in Muhanga District at Hotel Saint Andre Kabgayi from 25th to 28th March 2024. The session brought together a total of 21 participants from 5 districts, including Rubavu, Musanze, Huye, Gatsibo, and Nyamagabe (not directly covered by the project but included due to proximity to a relevant school in Maraba Sector, Huye District). The goal was to enhance the participants' capacity to support YWDs in accessing employment opportunities and inclusive services.

#### **Training Details:**

| <b>District</b>  | <b>Participants</b> | <b>Female Participants</b> | <b>Male Participants</b> |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Rubavu</b>    | 5                   | 2                          | 3                        |
| <b>Musanze</b>   | 5                   | 2                          | 3                        |
| <b>Gatsibo</b>   | 7                   | 3                          | 4                        |
| <b>Huye</b>      | 2                   | 1                          | 1                        |
| <b>Nyamagabe</b> | 2                   | 2                          | 0                        |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>21</b>           | <b>10</b>                  | <b>11</b>                |

Participants gained the ability to provide inclusive services and learned how to support persons with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities. They are now better equipped to integrate disability mainstreaming into their roles. The training successfully equipped participants with the necessary tools to implement disability-inclusive practices in their respective institutions. By enhancing their understanding of the specific needs of YWDs, the training ensures a more inclusive approach to employment opportunities for youth with disabilities across the covered districts

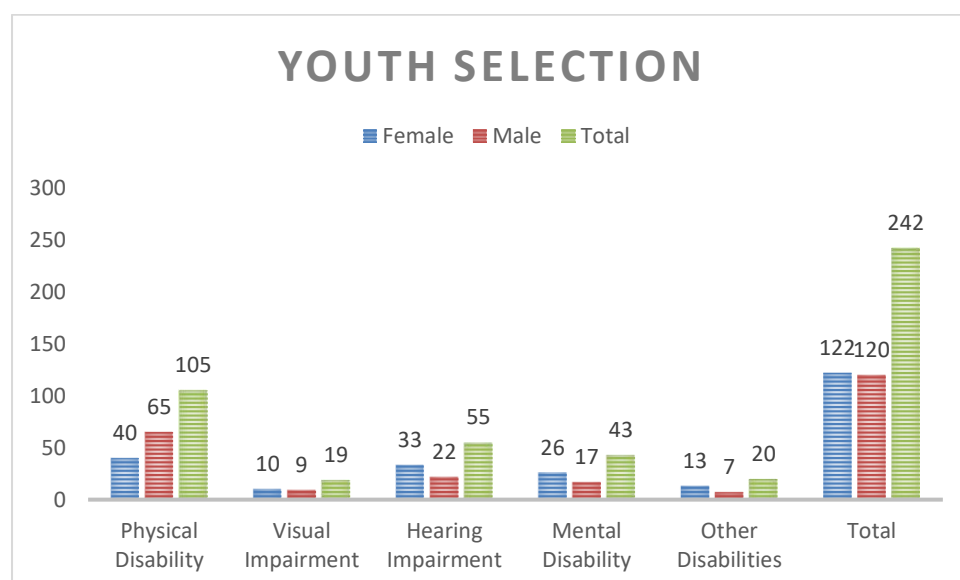
### **5.2.4. Selection and provision of soft and technical training to youth with disabilities**

One of the key activities was selecting youth with different types of disabilities to participate in soft and technical training programs, tailored to their preferences and the trades available in their respective sector and district.

## Youth Selection

The youth selection activity was conducted in 4 districts including Gatsibo, Huye, Musanze and Rubavu. The target was to select 240 YWDs across 8 sectors under 4 mentioned districts, with 30 YWDs per sector. The identification and selection process involved using various outreach channels, with support from sector authorities, social affairs staff, youth representatives, NCPD and OPDs.

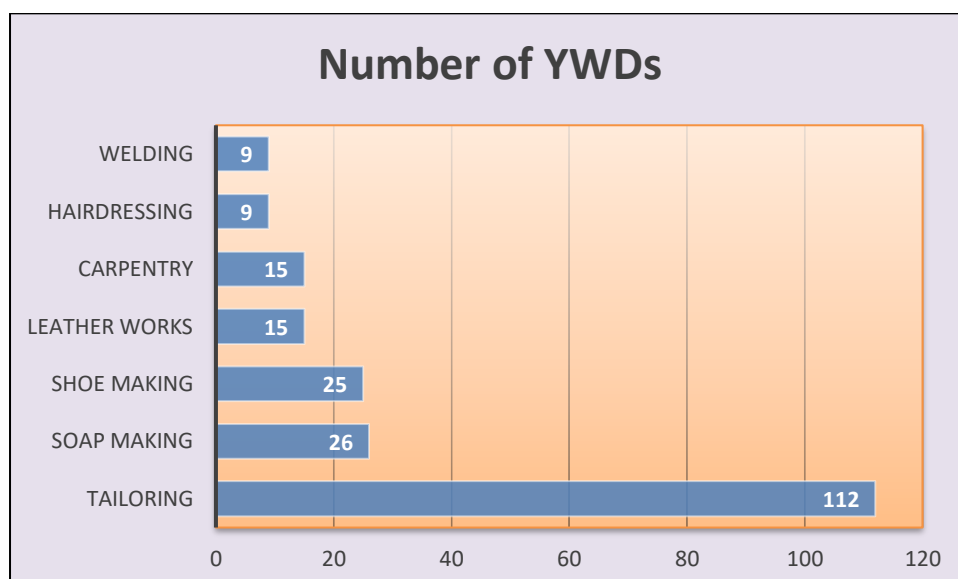
During the selection, youth were briefed about the project and its requirements, which included being a person with disability, aged between 18 and 35, living in a project-covered sector, and interested in pursuing technical skills or employment. A total of 242 YWDs were selected, surpassing the target, with 122 females and 120 males.



### 5.2.5. Technical and financial support for scholarships/internships for YWD to access TVET training

The main objective of the technical training was to equip youth with disabilities (YWDs) with the knowledge and skills necessary to access employment opportunities and succeed in the job market or entrepreneurship sector. This was achieved through vocational and on-the-job training. A total of 242 YWDs, selected from 8 sectors across 4 districts, benefited from technical training provided by 19 service providers, including 5 TVET institutions and 14 companies. These institutions offered training in various trades, including carpentry, welding, soap production, knitting, tailoring, culinary arts, masonry, shoe making, hairdressing, beverage processing, leather works, and more.

A total of 242 YWDs were enrolled in technical training, with 241 successfully completing the program. One YWD was unable to attend due to serious illness.



#### 5.2.6. Facilitate soft-skills training for YWDs to improve employability, including PSS sessions

Prior to the technical training, UPHLS organized the soft skills training aimed at empowering youth with disabilities by enhancing their creative and critical thinking skills. In collaboration with RNUD, UPHLS organized a 5-day soft skills training for selected YWDs in Rubavu, Musanze, Huye, and Gatsibo Districts. The training, held from April 22–26, 2024, targeted 160 YWDs but successfully engaged 193 participants (96 females, 97 males).

The training focused on three key objectives including Enhancing teamwork and communication skills, providing knowledge on delivering excellent customer service and Increasing motivation for job performance.

| Type of Disability        | Number of Participants |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Physical Impairments      | 105                    |
| Hearing Impairments       | 57                     |
| Mental Impairments        | 24                     |
| Visual Impairments        | 3                      |
| Other Disabilities        | 4                      |
| <b>Total Participants</b> | <b>193</b>             |

The training was facilitated by 11 trainers including 3 sign language interpreters under the supportive supervisions of UPHLS Staff.

#### 5.2.7. Delivery financial support to business groups, including supportive monitoring/coaching.

Following technical training, youth with disabilities formed 13 business groups, each starting small businesses based on the trades they learned. To support these groups, a total of 7,591,000 FRW in

financial assistance was distributed. The goal was to enhance employment opportunities by providing start-up capital aligned with the trades and projects the youth pursued, enabling them to access jobs or generate income.

The funds were transferred to the groups via their account numbers. Currently, the groups are focused on saving and seeking job opportunities. The funds will be fully utilized after members receive additional training from sector Business Development and Employment officers.

#### **5.2.8. Training of Market Actors on Disability Mainstreaming & Inclusion**

UPHLS has been contracted with USAID Hanga Akazi to implement a capacity development initiative targeting 55 Agri food market actors (companies, institutions and organizations). This initiative was part of the Feed the Future Rwanda Hanga Akazi (HA) project, a five-year USAID-funded program aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth by promoting equitable opportunities for all, including Persons with Disabilities. The initiative's purpose was to build the capacity of key market actors in the agri-food system and beyond to integrate disability inclusion into their organizational cultures, policies, and operations, aligning with the broader objectives of the HA project.

The purpose of these workshops was intended to raise awareness and build the capacity of participants to integrate disability inclusion into their organizational policies and practices. From a broader perspective, the objective of this intervention was to drive systemic change within the private sector by embedding disability inclusion into core business strategies and operations. By addressing structural and attitudinal barriers, the initiative seeks to create an enabling environment where persons with disabilities can access opportunities without discrimination. The program aims to establish a sustainable framework by integrating disability-inclusive policies into governance structures, human resource practices, and financial planning across diverse sectors. A key aspect of this broader goal is to encourage collaboration between businesses, policymakers, and disability advocacy organizations to foster an inclusive economic landscape. Ultimately, the intervention envisions a market system that embraces diversity and inclusion as fundamental principles, ensuring long-term social and economic empowerment for persons with disabilities. The trainings were conducted in 3 cohorts and reached 103 participants including 49 females and 54 males from 53 market actors.

### **5.3. RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY**

This activity involves comprehensive research, surveys, and assessments conducted with the purpose of fostering the inclusion of persons with disabilities across key sectors with main focus on health care services, education, employment and social protection. By gathering evidence through these research efforts, the UPHLS seeks to identify barriers to access and propose actionable solutions. In

addition to sector-specific research, advocacy meetings are held with a diverse group of stakeholders including government officials, development partners and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. The focus of these advocacy efforts is not limited to health, education, and employment but extends to broader societal inclusion, including social participation, rights, and community integration. The evidence generated from these activities serves as a powerful tool to influence policy, raise awareness, and ensure that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities and full participation in all aspects of life.

### 5.3.1. Research

In 2024, the following studies were conducted:

- **Baseline Assessment:**

- A study to assess the number of children (0-18 years) suspected to have hearing issues and evaluate the capacity of health facilities for ear and hearing care (report available). This assessment was conducted under WINSIGA NDUMVA and was conducted in 9 districts covered by WINSIGA NDUMVA.
  - *The findings of the assessment revealed significant shortages in both equipment and trained personnel. Notably, deficiencies in otoscope availability at the most of health centers underscore the existing gaps, alongside deficits in EHC knowledge and specialized procedures in hospitals.*
  - *Furthermore, during pre-screening a considerable number of children with hearing impairments within the community and schools were identified. The pre-screening revealed that 3,556 children and adolescents (1,627 girls and 1,929 boys) were suspected of having ear and hearing issues. Among these, 2,139 children (approximately 60%) were out of school, indicating a high dropout rate associated with hearing impairments. Since the identification, assessments have begun for those suspected of having hearing impairments.*
- Baseline/midterm/endline survey on the access to rehabilitation services among mothers with/without disabilities and children with disabilities. *The baseline survey conducted in 5 Districts under ELM project the into self-help groups to look on the access to rehabilitation services among mothers with disabilities and who have children with disabilities where all of them have some challenges even if it is different due to the needs also are different.*

- **Feasibility Study:** A study was conducted under WINSIGA NDUMVA program, aimed at informing the Ministry of Health and partners on strengthening the ear and hearing care program in Rwanda (report available).
- **Needs and Challenges Assessment:** An evaluation of the challenges faced by mothers and children with disabilities in accessing Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Community Health services in Rwanda (final report available).
- **Health Services Inclusiveness Analysis:** A situation analysis on the inclusiveness of health services for persons with disabilities, providing evidence on gaps and potential actions to integrate disability into health policies and the Health Sector Strategic Plan (final report available). *This research was conducted under ELM project in 15 Districts to assess the specific needs and challenges faced by mothers in accessing maternal health services.*
- **Accessibility Assessment for Women and Girls with Disabilities:** A study on the current situation regarding access, reasonable accommodation, and other conditions at health facilities for women and girls with disabilities (final report available).
- Conduct a situation analysis on the inclusiveness of health services for persons with disabilities for evidence generation on gaps and positive action to mainstream persons in health policy health Sector strategic plan.
  - *This analysis focused on evaluating current policies and the Health Sector Strategic Plan 4 (HSSP4), with the goal of providing data to inform the development of HSSP5. The findings were compiled into a summary and shared with the Ministry of Health to support the review of the HSSP5 draft.*
  - *After the situation analysis and desk review of HSSP 4 with the related policies, a national dialogue with the key stakeholders in the health and disability sectors held to discuss on the draft desk review report and to highlight key recommendations for the 5th health sector strategic plan*

Additionally, UPHLS published two research papers from formative research on the prevailing knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding children with disabilities:

- **Factors Associated with Attitudes Toward Inclusive Society and Education of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities in Rwanda** [Read here](#)
- **Barriers to Inclusive Society and Integration of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities: The Case of Rwanda** [Read here](#)

These studies contribute to the global discourse on disability inclusion and provide actionable insights for improving policies and programs, particularly in education and social participation for children and adolescents with disabilities in Rwanda and beyond.

### 5.3.2. Advocacy activities

To advocate for accessible and inclusive services particularly those related to health for persons with disabilities, disability prevention and management and the promotion of rights of persons with disabilities in the community, UPHLS conducted a series of community dialogues, stakeholders' engagement workshops and participated in different conferences. The study tours to the renovated health facilities to advocate for learning and the scale up in other health facilities. UPHLS also organized radio and TV talks shows on different topics.

#### **Workshop with Rwanda Public Procurement Authority (RPPA) and OPDs to discuss the implementation progress of the recommendations under the position paper on the accessibility of persons with disabilities and the procurement of WASH facilities**

A workshop was held with the RPPA and OPDs to discuss the implementation of recommendations from the position paper on disability accessibility in the procurement of WASH facilities. The session, attended by 26 UPHLS staff and OPDs, focused on disability inclusion in the tendering process. Key gaps were identified, and recommendations were made to prioritize accessibility in procurement guidelines. Progress was tracked using a questionnaire shared by RPPA.

#### **Host a joint advocacy meeting with National religious leaders to sensitize them about health rights among mothers and children with disabilities through RICH meetings (between UPHLS and RICH)**

UPHLS, in collaboration with the Religious Interfaith Council for Health (RICH), hosted a advocacy meeting (twice) with 21 religious leaders to raise awareness about the health rights of mothers and children with disabilities. The meeting aimed to empower religious leaders to advocate for disability inclusion and the health rights of both mothers with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities. After an introduction to disability, mainstreaming, and social norms surrounding mothers with disabilities, the religious leaders developed plans to better engage persons with disabilities (PWDs) in their programs, recognizing the challenges they face in accessing healthcare services.

#### **Training of Journalists on Disability rights and friendly communication to address social norms around children with disabilities**

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping social norms as well as Social Behavior Change and influencing public perception. However, there is a need for media houses to adopt disability friendly reporting practices, to produce fair and accurate reporting on disability and promote rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. To increase the awareness of journalists on disability rights and disability friendly reporting, UPHLS conducted four days training of journalists from

different media houses. This training took place at the Hotel St. Andre Kabgayi, in Muhanga from 19 to 23rd November 2024 during which 40 Journalists (8 females and 32 males) from RBA and Key Media Houses were trained on Disability rights and disability friendly reporting to address social norms around children with disabilities and their families. The trainees were mainly for journalists from the key media houses including Radio, Television and social media including mainly YouTube Channels.

 **National dialogues with the key stakeholders in the health and disability sectors to discuss on the draft desk review report and to highlight key recommendations for the 5th health sector strategic plan**

The National dialogue was organized and brought together the key stakeholders in health and OPDs on the findings from the situation analysis and the desk review on accessibility of health services to persons with disabilities.

## **6. International, National Conference and other important Events**

Throughout year 2024, UPHLS participated in both national and international conferences, workshops and meetings. In these conferences, UPHLS contribution focused more on advocacy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in different programs. The following are the main activities UPHLS participated in:

- Participation JADF meetings at the District and Provincial level (in the districts of operation),
- Participate in National Conferences on Health and Disability related themes,
- International Conference such as “3rd National SBC Summit, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, First Track Cities held in Paris, France, International AIDS Society, held in Munich, Spain, Training on Community Led Monitoring (CLM), held in South Africa, etc”

Participating in national and international meetings throughout 2024 has significantly enhanced our organization's visibility and advocacy efforts. Through presentations at various conferences, we were able to effectively inform partners about UPHLS's ongoing initiatives, raise awareness of the gaps still hindering the well-being of persons with disabilities, and emphasize the importance of mainstreaming disability inclusion by removing all barriers. These events also provided valuable opportunities for networking, fostering collaborations, and exchanging ideas with key stakeholders, furthering our mission to ensure greater inclusion and support for persons with disabilities across diverse sectors.

## **Participation in the celebration of international events**

### **Participation in the celebration of World AIDS Day**

Rwanda joined the global community in observing the 36th anniversary of World AIDS Day in 2024 under the theme 'End AIDS, My Responsibility: Kurandura SIDA, ni Inshingano yanjye.' The national event was held at Kivu Intare Arena in Rubavu District on December 1, 2024. UPHLS, as a key partner of the Ministry of Health/Rwanda Biomedical Centre, actively participated in this important event, ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly youth, in the celebrations. Leading up to the event, UPHLS, in collaboration with RBC, organized an awareness campaign on HIV, AIDS, and other STIs, encouraging the people of Rubavu District to engage in World AIDS Day activities.

### **Participation in the celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

On 3 December 2024, the world commemorated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD). This year, the theme was “Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future”. During 2024 IDPD, UPHLS joined the rest of the country in the celebration of the event which was preceded by disability week where UPHLS played a role in the planned activities. One event UPHLS contributed in is the award of the companies or individuals who played a role in the inclusion of persons with disabilities “Rwanda Disability Inclusion Art Festival & Awards 2024”. On 3rd December, apart from participating in IDPD at National level held at Nyaruguru, UPHLS also joined the districts to celebrate the event where we are operating including Nyagatare, Musanze, Muhanga, Huye, Karongi and Ruhango. During this event UPHLS provided assistive devices to persons with disabilities in need.

## **7. Success Stories & Lessons Learned**

### **- Improved Planning & Team Efficiency**

The adoption of a weekly planning system significantly enhanced team efficiency, collaboration, and resource management. This framework minimized task duplication, improved time management, and encouraged cross-functional teamwork. As a result, project implementation was streamlined, major events were organized effectively, and the team’s participation in national and international platforms increased the organization’s visibility.

### **- Impactful Interventions for Persons with Disabilities**

#### **Assistive Technology Transforming Lives**

UPHLS provided critical medical and rehabilitation support, including assistive devices such as digital

hearing aids for children with hearing impairments. These interventions improved communication, academic performance, and inclusion.

**Case Study 1: Fatuma Mbabazi (Rwamagana District)** *A 15-year-old girl with a hearing impairment transitioned from a school for the deaf to a mainstream school after receiving digital hearing aids. Her academic performance and social participation greatly improved, proving the transformative power of early intervention and inclusive healthcare.*

**Case Study 2: The Mukanomero Family** *Four siblings with hearing impairments benefited from hearing aids. The eldest was admitted to medical school, while the others excelled academically. Their mother reported improved family communication and credited the aids for enabling her children's success.*

#### - **Economic Empowerment for Youth with Disabilities (YWDs)**

##### **Post-Training Employment**

Vocational training enabled many YWDs to secure employment:

- 12 youth in carpentry remained employed at their training workshop.
- 3 shoemaking trainees were hired by training companies.
- 5 tailoring trainees were also retained by their training institutions.

**Case Study: Ingenzi Cooperative (Gatsibo District)** *16 YWDs were trained in soap making and juice processing. Ten were hired, earning salaries between 25,000–30,000 RWF/month. The cooperative received a 1.9 million RWF investment from the Direct Aid Society to expand soap production.*

#### - **Accessible Healthcare Services**

##### **Facility Renovations & Staff Training**

Renovated health facilities and staff trained in disability awareness and basic sign language have made services more accessible and respectful to persons with disabilities.

**Testimony: Nshizirungu Ndungutse (Wheelchair User)** *Post-renovation, he can now access health services independently, highlighting the impact of infrastructure changes and staff sensitization.*

**Testimony: Betty (Hearing Impairment)** *Previously reliant on assistants, she can now communicate directly with healthcare providers, preserving her confidentiality and dignity.*

*Testimony: Sr. Pendeza, Head of Mubuga Health Center* Noted a rise in patients with disabilities accessing services due to improved infrastructure and staff attitudes.

- **Inclusive Mindset Shift in Health Workers**

*Case Study: Mr. Valens – Nurse at Shyira Health Center* Following UPHLS training, Mr. Valens began using basic sign language to communicate with clients with hearing impairments. One satisfied client returned with seven peers, increasing service uptake among persons with disabilities and proving the ripple effect of inclusive care.

**Key Lessons Learned**

- Simple systems (like weekly planning) significantly improve coordination and impact.
- Assistive technologies unlock potential in children with disabilities.
- Vocational training paired with job placement creates long-term economic empowerment.
- Accessibility and empathy in health services transform community trust and health outcomes.
- One empowered and trained health worker can spark widespread inclusion.

## Our Partners

UPHLS extends its heartfelt gratitude to all partners who provided both technical and financial support, enabling the organization to fulfill its mission of empowering persons with disabilities. Over the past year, this support has played a vital role in amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities and advocating for their inclusion through trainings, community dialogues, assistive technology, and efforts to promote social justice. Key achievements include strengthening the capacity of health facilities to offer inclusive services by training healthcare professionals and upgrading health centers not only to provide inclusive care but also to serve as models for accessible healthcare delivery. UPHLS continues to work in close collaboration with the Government of Rwanda, the Ministry of Health, Rwanda development partners, International Organizations, UN agencies, and other stakeholders to advance the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.



Republic of Rwanda  
Ministry of Health



Funded by  
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