

SDSR/GIZ PROJECT, BURUNDI: Tools for Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health

Partnering with religious leaders to increase young people's access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

Working with the *Réseau des Confessions Religieuses pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Bien-Etre Intégral de la Famille* (RCBIF)

Religious denominations – influential actors for SRH in Burundi

In Burundi, over 90% of the population practices a religion. Religious denominations have a strong influence on society: through churches, mosques and their related associations, but also as service providers, including the many faith-based schools and the care facilities for people living with disabilities (PLWH), which are almost exclusively the responsibility of churches.

As elsewhere in the world, religious denominations in Burundi tend to have a conservative view of society and the family. They are often reticent about innovations such as sexuality education for young people, thus reducing access of a large number of young people to the SRH information and services promoted by the Ministry of Health (*Ministère de la santé publique et de la lutte contre le SIDA – MSPLS*) and its development partners. To respond to current social issues including SRH, the main religious denominations in Burundi have joined together within the framework of RCBIF.

RCBIF, a consultation structure on SRH for religious denominations in Burundi

Launched in 2013, the *Réseau des Confessions Religieuses pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Bien-Etre Intégral de la Famille* (RCBIF) associates the Catholic and Anglican dioceses, the accredited missions of the Church of Pentecost and the Islamic community of Burundi. With its focus on 'integral family welfare' and community development, RCBIF places SRH in the overall context of the marital harmony of an ethically motivated couple who educate the younger generation on responsible sexual and procreative health. RCBIF has decentralised structures down to the hill level – the *Ndemeshabuzima* ('Health Promotion') Committees – which interact with churches, congregations, local government and health partners. RCBIF collaborates with a variety of partners and is active in the areas of community health, maternal and child health, and HIV/AIDS.



Validation workshop with religious leaders of the 'Jeunesse Victorieuse' tool

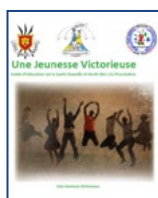
A shared concern to protect the health of adolescents and young people

With its vision of a younger generation informed and responsible in matters of sexuality, RCBIF was clearly an ideal partner for the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH* (GIZ) in implementing its Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Project (SDSR): '*Renforcement des structures de santé dans le domaine de la planification familiale et de la santé et des droits sexuels et reproductifs*'. Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), this project is implemented in partnership with the National Reproductive Health Programme (PNSR) of the MSPLS.

In supporting the establishment of 29 community networks around health centres for the promotion of adolescent and youth SRH, the SRHR Project encountered some resistance from faith-based actors. The project therefore decided to approach these key actors and propose that they work together on an approach for protecting the sexual health of young people that would be in harmony with their religious principles. This is how the dialogue between GIZ and RCBIF came about.

Development of an educational tool acceptable to the religious partners

Through a process of respectfully listening to one another, the partners developed a manual introducing young people to the different aspects of SRH, each chapter starting with a Bible quotation, and maintaining a strong focus on spirituality and love. Natural methods of contraception are presented, but also information on modern methods (and even the relevance of limiting the number of births). The guide *'Une Jeunesse Victorieuse'* was validated by the religious leaders and the PNSR and published in 2016.



“It was important for us to present the scientific concepts of procreative health from a holistic perspective for the next generation.”

André Bizosa, Executive Secretary of RCBIF

Use and dissemination of *'Jeunesse Victorieuse'*

Generally well received by the religious denominations, the tool has been widely introduced to young people in parochial schools, churches, PLWH structures and 50 *Ndemeshabuzima* faith-based clubs.

To support them, training was organised for:

- 10 trainers in the 3 provinces
- 50 *Ndemeshabuzima* supervisors
- 224 peer educators and
- A large number of school directors and religious leaders at the local level.

The collaboration with RCBIF has also enabled a constructive dialogue at the decentralised level between health professionals and church leaders..

Are you interested? To find out more

To discuss how your organisation could work with RCBIF to promote young people's reproductive health, please contact:

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Lessons learned from this partnership

Religious denominations are often seen more as barriers than as partners in promoting SRH. By making them partners, mutual understanding and agreement can take place. It is possible to develop synergies to achieve shared objectives. *'Jeunesse Victorieuse'* has met an existing need in the faith community for a tool to educate young people about SRH in language that religious leaders find appropriate. Another lesson was that working on all levels (central, intermediate and decentralised) facilitated the involvement of decentralised faith-based structures. This strategy was key to the success of the churches' follow-up of the interventions. Communication proved to be the key to resolving possible misunderstandings.

Possible entry points for further interventions

- Continue to strengthen the functioning of the decentralised structures of RCBIF
- Continue to multiply and exploit the tool *'Jeunesse Victorieuse'* in order to make it accessible in other faith-based structures
- Train new supervisors and peer educators to compensate for the high mobility of these key actors
- Scale up the use of this tool in parochial schools and other faith-based structures
- Develop an SRH guide for young Muslims
- Continue the exchanges on their respective interventions between the religious denominations and the health professionals.

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