

HEALTH IN ACTION

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet Newsletter

Winter 2023



In this edition:

Cultivating change in Rwanda

Plus: Girls in the Shadow of the Pandemic, empowerment through knowledge in India and more...

**HEALTH
POVERTY
ACTION**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter, Health in Action. My name is Maurice Nizeyimana and I work as the Country Director for Health Poverty Action in Rwanda. I am responsible for developing, managing and supporting our work, personnel and the organisation across the country. Whether helping communities take control of their health, supporting people to develop better livelihoods, or contributing to economic development, our team in Rwanda is making a real difference every day.



In this edition, you can learn more about our work with rural communities in Rwanda to develop opportunities for people who've experienced or are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. We look at the stories behind our new film, 'Girls in the Shadow of the Pandemic', detailing the impact of vaccine injustice on women and girls in Kenya. You can also read about our sister organisation, Find Your Feet's work with tribal communities in India to ensure that people can empower themselves through sharing knowledge.

As we launch our 'Cultivating Change' appeal, you can contribute to the work that Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are doing alongside communities to build a healthier, more prosperous world for all.

Front cover: A group at one of our safe centres in Rwanda

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Get involved!

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet share resources and expertise so we can better support marginalised communities to enhance their health, livelihoods and wellbeing.

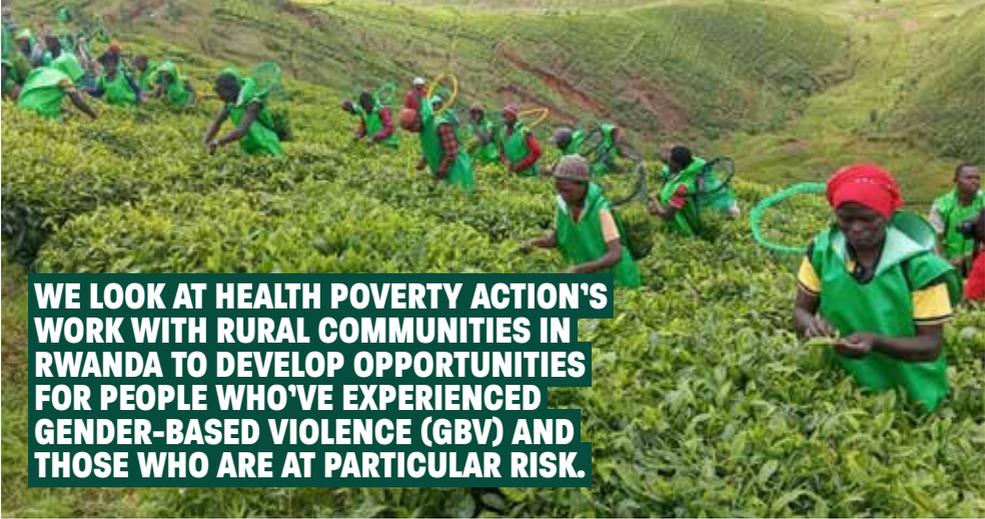
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CULTIVATING CHANGE



WE LOOK AT HEALTH POVERTY ACTION'S WORK WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES IN RWANDA TO DEVELOP OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WHO'VE EXPERIENCED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND THOSE WHO ARE AT PARTICULAR RISK.

We've been working with communities across Rwanda for several years to address issues around gender-based violence – whether supporting survivors, raising awareness or helping to build connections between people and institutions. While the country is known for its proactive approach to gender equality, with over 60% of parliamentarians being women, many women and girls still face specific challenges, such as gender-based violence.

As our Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator, Clarisse Dusabimana, explains: **“Misunderstandings about gender and perceived gender roles can especially affect women in rural areas.”**

Last year we reported on the ‘safe centres’ we helped to establish alongside our partners, where people

who've experienced gender-based violence can access vital support and the broader community can explore ways to tackle this issue.

Crucially, through these ‘safe centres’ we also provide opportunities for survivors to learn skills and develop small businesses. We found that helping survivors gain financial independence was a key element of providing holistic support. Clarisse tells us: **“Lack of finance makes people more vulnerable to victimisation by partners”.**

Our team in Rwanda has been building partnerships with voluntary sector organisations and businesses to ensure that people who've experienced gender-based violence, and those whose

Continues over ►

JULIE'S STORY

Julie, an 18-year-old girl, lives with her parents in a village in western Rwanda. She was unable to complete her secondary education as her parents couldn't afford to pay her school fees. After leaving school, Julie explains that she was exposed to abuse and manipulation in her local area:

“Most girls of my age in my area have children because they are vulnerable to sexual abuse by men who manipulate them with small gifts. We live in a settlement where so many people, especially young people, do not have occupations for earning money to cover their basic needs. This exposes young ladies to sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and manipulation by men. I do not want to experience the same anymore.”

Julie engaged in training that Health Poverty Action conducted

in her community, completing courses in work-readiness, business development, personal development and financial literacy. Now Julie is undertaking tea-harvesting training at a local tea estate, and she is already earning a small wage for the 20kg of tea leaves she picks on an average day.

Julie tells us: “During [work-readiness and business development] training I learned a lot but the module on personal development and [financial literacy] was the most helpful and changed my life because I learned to have a personal goal and how to set money aside to achieve that goal. I have joined [a community savings group and] am aiming to save as much as possible. I have set a goal for myself to buy a cow worth 350,000 Rwandan Francs by the end of this year.”

economic status places them at risk of experiencing gender-based violence, are able to earn a living wage, improve their social status and better defend their rights.

Many of the tea estates located in western Rwanda have been unable to efficiently harvest their produce, with much of their crop going to waste. Equally, people working on tea estates are often not trained and find themselves unable to harvest enough tea leaves to earn a decent wage.

Alongside our partners we've begun to train people and support them to gain better-paid employment in the tea industry. By connecting people with tea estates and helping them develop specialist tea harvesting skills, in addition to transferable work skills, we're creating opportunities for people to improve their livelihoods and bring more money into rural communities struggling with high rates of unemployment.



◀ We train and connect people in rural communities with employers like Rutsiro Tea Factory, so they can earn a living wage



So far, we've trained and supported over 3000 people, mainly women, to start working on tea estates. Most of these people have directly experienced gender-based violence, and the remainder are people from relatively low-income households who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Many of these trainees are already earning far above the average wage and are now able to take care of themselves and their families with their earnings. In addition to the financial independence they now enjoy, they are also contributing to their wider community both materially and as role models.



Charlotte, a young trainee, tells us: **“People in their communities used to consider teen mothers and GBV survivors in general as people who are hopeless, without a destination, depending on others, and speechless. But our time has come to restore hope in ourselves, become independent, and make our voices heard.”**

Donate now:

Give to our Cultivating Change Appeal and support community leaders, activists, women and young people as they challenge gender-based violence and build healthier, more prosperous lives. To donate today, please visit: 📄 <https://bit.ly/3BPRfKx>



KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN INDIA

WE LOOK AT OUR WORK WITH TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA TO SHARE VITAL INFORMATION AND DEFEND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS.

For nearly 35 years, we worked with tribal communities in India to strengthen people's access to land and share vital knowledge – enabling them to build healthier and more prosperous lives. We have seen how small, but critical, interventions can have a huge impact over time.

Over the years we have worked with communities to create spaces and systems where people can learn how to defend their rights and support each other.

For example, many community members didn't know they were entitled to financial support from the government. Without realising, people who were struggling to provide for their families were missing out on a crucial source of income.

We helped establish Public Information Centres - places where people could come together and

get help to apply for government support. Over a 12-month period, 3,268 applications reached government departments for consideration. Out of these, 2,984 applications were successful - that's a 91% success rate! The rest, at the time of gathering reports, were being processed and were soon expected to materialise.

91% of people who used Public Information Centres we supported were successful in getting access to government support they previously didn't know about!

A lack of knowledge was not the only way tribal communities were missing out. Tribal communities have a legal right to access their ancestral land. This land can be used to collect firewood, leaves for their animals and medicinal products.



◀ **Tribal communities are advocating for their rights, sharing vital information and claiming their ancestral lands.**



Despite their legal rights, tribal communities continually face discrimination. From forest officials harassing them to powerful groups and people using their privileged positions – tribal communities are frequently denied access to their land.

Find Your Feet worked with tribal communities to raise awareness of the Forest Rights Act, which gives them the right to make legal claims for their ancestral land. Together, we established committees where people could meet regularly to learn about their rights and decide how to fight for them. One village has won claims for land totalling over 3.6 million square feet!

One tribal community won legal rights to almost 4 million square feet of land

It has been the greatest honour to work alongside these communities in India. While Find Your Feet's presence in India is reducing, we are excited to hear from our partners how these projects are continuing to help communities.

TACKLING MALNUTRITION – THROUGH HEALTH EDUCATION!

In India, 4.7 million tribal children suffer from chronic malnutrition. In order to tackle this problem, it is critical that parents know about nutrition and related health issues.

We worked alongside community leaders and local organisations to create spaces that bring people together to share knowledge. In these spaces people learn about calculating daily calorie requirements, identifying locally available foods that are rich in vitamins, and cooking methods that preserve these vital nutrients. Some people subsequently use their knowledge and training to spread these critical health messages to more people in their communities.

Long after we have left, people will continue to share key health messages that strengthen community knowledge around nutrition, benefitting many more people over time.

Your contributions mean we can work alongside communities around the world, helping them defend their rights and tackle malnutrition. Please visit www.findyourfeet.org to donate today.

SHARE THE SCIENCE!

OUR LATEST FILM EXPOSES THE IMPACT AVOIDABLE DELAYS IN DELIVERING VACCINES HAD ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN KENYA.

During the making of our recently released film, **'Girls in the Shadow of the Pandemic'**, we spoke to women in Kenya and heard about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and the 12 months they were in lockdown.

The film shows how financial insecurity, caused by the lockdowns, made women vulnerable to abuse. Mama Victor, a team leader from the Mothers of Victims & Survivors Network, explained that men exploited the situation by using the promise of food to draw girls outside of their homes.

"The lockdowns took away the places we felt safe," explained Tashley Glades Mwangi, the dancer who provides the voice over in the film. She told us how it was especially difficult for girls who could no longer attend school.

Being locked down at home left many women unable to escape domestic violence. Mary (not their real name) spoke about her experience, and how the abuse from her husband became so extreme she considered taking her and her child's life. It was when her friend intervened that she felt she had a reason to live.

In Kenya, organisations like the Mothers of Victims & Survivors Network are speaking out against abuse during the pandemic. We join them in their campaign to prevent the injustices that led to extended lockdowns from happening again.

As vaccines were being developed by big pharmaceutical companies, profit was put before people.

Under our current system pharmaceutical companies 'own' the science for the vaccine, meaning they can refuse to share the science. During the pandemic, this system prevented many countries from creating their own vaccines more affordably.



Once rich countries had bought as many vaccines as they could, it was left to their ‘charitable’ contribution to help the rest of the world. By this point, it was too late.

Without the science to produce their own vaccines and after being pushed aside by countries who could pay more, the only way countries like Kenya could keep people safe was to extend the lockdown. As the film shows, the physical and psychological impacts on women and girls during the extended lockdowns was immeasurable.

► **Right: Mama Victor advocates for marginalised communities affected by the pandemic**

▼ **Below: Filming in the Mothers of Victims and Survivors' Justice Centre**



“
A KEY POLITICAL CHOICE THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WAS TO PUT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AHEAD OF THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND GIRLS.
”

MRS PENINAH KHISA, REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR THE PEOPLE'S HEALTH MOVEMENT.



It did not have to be this way. Rather than profiting from harbouring essential information about how to produce the vaccine, pharmaceutical companies could have shared the science. This would have allowed national governments to produce their own vaccine.

Equity must be at the heart of responses to global pandemics. We must tackle these challenges together to ensure no one is left behind. As Tashley concludes: **“We have to shift the power. We have to decolonise our health systems. We have to share the science.”**

You can watch the film here:

<https://bit.ly/3rWSddk>

**A GIFT IN YOUR
WILL HELPS PEOPLE
AROUND THE
WORLD CONTINUE
TO TAKE CHARGE OF
THEIR OWN HEALTH.**



Stand with the communities, campaigners and health workers who've been taking a different approach to tackling poverty and poor health for almost 40 years.

Health Poverty Action was founded in 1984 by a young doctor who returned from Afghanistan with a profound understanding of the connection between health and poverty, and how people were overlooked because organisations were unable or unwilling to face political consequences. Today, because of our committed supporters, we work across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To find out how even a small gift in your will can make a huge difference, please contact fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org or tick the relevant box in the response form and send it to us for free.

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There are many ways to support the work of Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet. Here are just a few ways, and you can find more on our websites at www.healthpovertyaction.org and www.findyourfeet.org.

Chai for Change

Host your own tea party or coffee morning to support our work with marginalised communities worldwide. We're launching Chai for Change to raise money for global health and equality, inspired by the survivors of gender-based violence who are gaining financial independence working on tea estates in Rwanda (see page 3). Hand out cups of tea and coffee, try new flavours and brewing methods and ask for people to donate the cost of their usual takeaway coffee. A great way to raise funds at work and with friends! You can email tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org for more information or check out our guide here: <https://bit.ly/3ZVyxD6>.



Volunteer

London Marathon cheer squad needed! We're looking for volunteers to cheer on our runners April 21st 2024 as they complete the London Marathon 2024! As a volunteer you will get a dedicated space to watch the race with a group of like-minded, passionate individuals who also support Health Poverty Action. Contact Tabitha-Levis Jarsdel via email at tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org if you'd like to come along.

Be inspired

Fundraising A-Z! Want to fundraise but not sure where to start? Check out our new Fundraising A-Z for ideas and try your hand at unique fundraising activities, from movie nights with your friends to loose change collections at work. You can find the guide on our website to get inspired by fundraising ideas here: <https://bit.ly/46Vly6V>.

Get involved!

If you'd like to get involved in any of these opportunities or have other unique fundraising ideas, please contact Tabitha-Levis Jarsdel via email at tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org.



CULTIVATING CHANGE

DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

All too often, people who lack economic power are exposed to poor treatment and abusive relationships. This issue can particularly affect women and girls. We're working with communities in Rwanda to ensure that people who've experienced gender-based violence, and those whose economic status places them at risk, can gain financial independence and better defend their rights.

Alongside our partners we're training people and supporting them to enter better-paid employment. By connecting people with tea estates, and helping them develop specialist tea harvesting skills, we're creating opportunities for people to improve their livelihoods and bring more money into rural communities struggling with high rates of unemployment.

Make a donation today

Please give whatever you can to our Cultivating Change appeal and support community members, health workers and activists as they challenge injustice and build healthier, safer, more prosperous communities.

How to donate:

Web: www.healthpovertyaction.org
Email: fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org
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