

The Success of Peer Education Projects in Burundi is at Risk

Authors:

Armand Nsababaganwa¹

¹ *Association Nationale de Soutien aux Seropositifs et Malades du Sida (ANSS-Santé PLUS; National Association for the Support of HIV-Positive Individuals and People Living with AIDS)*

Background: Founded in 1993, ANSS-Santé PLUS is a peak body organisation that works to combat HIV/AIDS and related stigma in Burundi. Despite a low national prevalence of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), specific populations remain disproportionately affected. A 2021 community-representative survey reported prevalence rates of 30.2% among sex workers, 15.3% among people who use drugs, 5.9% among men who have sex with men, including transgender individuals (versus 0.9% in the general population). To address these disparities, ANSS-santé PLUS prioritises peer-led approaches that are gender-inclusive and non-discriminatory. In this talk, I will discuss the success of peer work in Burundi before government funding cuts.

Description of intervention: In August 2022, with United States Aid for International Development funding, ANSS-santé PLUS implemented a community-based strategy for HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. Peer educators (n=121) from key populations were trained and deployed in community organisations. Outreach activities were conducted in 13 provinces to promote HIV testing and linkage to care.

Implementation: In 2023, 435 new HIV cases were identified, with 100% of those diagnosed initiated on antiretroviral therapy. Peer educators established strong trust in these marginalised communities and helped reduce stigma and discrimination. The program (NGIRANK'ABANDI) strengthened collaboration between community actors and health professionals. In March 2025, USAID Burundi terminated the program, threatening the sustainability of these gains.

Conclusion and Next Steps: Continued progress depends on securing new funding and partnerships.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: This model of peer work has strong potential for adaptation to other public health priorities, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Nothing to declare