

Learning & Legacy

from the **USAID/Higa Ubeho** Program



Through five years of implementation, the USAID/Higa Ubeho program **assisted over 75,000 vulnerable households** in 23 districts. Working in partnership with local authorities and civil society, **5,646 new community-based service points** were established with the goal of increasing self-reliance – services which benefited both vulnerable households and the wider community.

Community-based services

EDUCATION

LIFE SKILLS

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

FOOD SECURITY

HYGIENE

NUTRITION

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

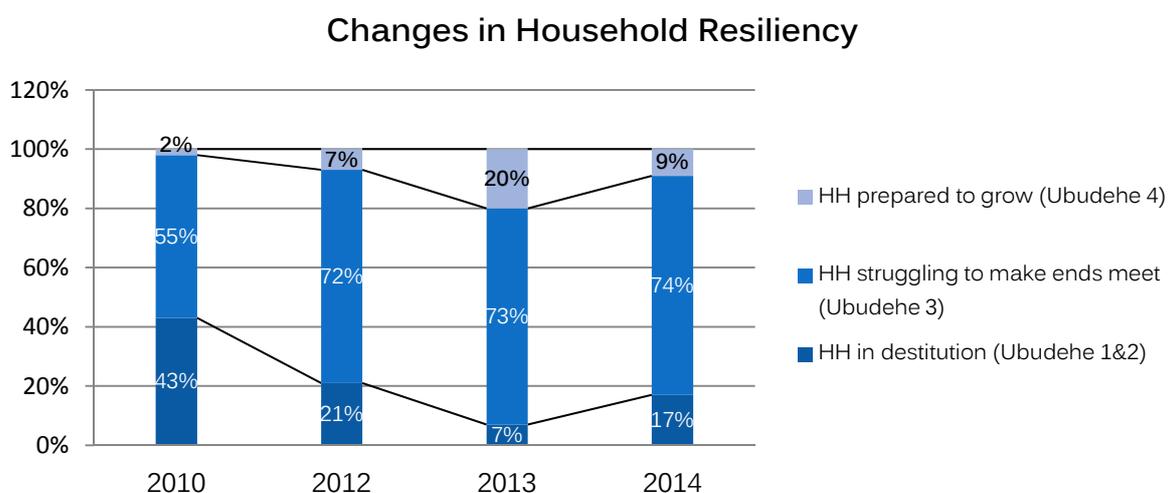
- Education support provided to **52,763** children.
- **242** School-based clubs established.
- Peer mentoring/support provided to **12,193** youths.
- Holiday camps served **13,399** youths.
- Scholarships for vocational programs provided to **6,542** youths.
- **5,949** youths supported with industrial attachments.
- **304** volunteers were trained to lead playgroups for young children.
- Playgroups served **10,853** children under age five.
- **20,000** parents/guardians received positive parenting messages.
- Farmer Field Schools were established in **790** sites.
- **87%** of households adopted bio-intensive agriculture techniques.
- Community growth monitoring sessions benefit **17,164** children.
- **738** Positive Deviance Hearth Groups were established.
- Trained **2,157** volunteer counselors in Helpful Active Listening.

Household economic resiliency as measured by the Household Resilience Index which is closely aligned to the Government of Rwanda Ubudehe system, showed an increase by 26%, as households moved from lower to higher socio-economic categories; this includes an increase of 19% of households in the category households struggling to make ends meet, and 7% in the category households prepared to grow. (Global Communities, 2012, Ayishubijye & Birasa, 2012, Karasi, 2013).

† The following CSOs led the establishment and scale-up of services over the life of the program: African Evangelistic Enterprises (AEE), Association Des Eglises de Pentecote du Rwanda (ADEPR), Association Pour la promotion de la Veuve au Rwanda (ICYUZUZO), Association pour le Developement Rural Integre (DUHAMIC ADRI), Caritas Rwanda, Eglise Presbyterians au Rwanda (EPR), SINAPISI Rwanda, Women Investment Fund (WIF), Women's Equity in Access to Care and Treatment for Hope (We-Actx for Hope).

Program Impact on Household Resiliency Results from 3-year longitudinal cohort study

83% of the beneficiary households included in the three-year longitudinal cohort study have graduated to or maintained higher levels of resiliency. Analyzing the findings of the 2014 survey, 9% were categorized in the higher socio-economic category of 'households ready to grow'; 74% were categorized as 'households struggling to make ends meet'; and 17% were in the lowest socio-economic category: 'households in destitution'. These results indicate a decline in household economic resilience, compared to results achieved in 2013. However, the present results remain higher than resilience levels measured in 2012 and against the households' Ubudehe Categories assigned in 2010. See graph below:



There are some important lessons and issues to consider as part of the larger effort learning and legacy from this program.

Key lessons & observations:

It is possible to transition the majority of households out of the lowest socio-economic categories, however, some households will fail to progress² and may need long-term assistance.

Even as households demonstrate increased capacity for self-reliance, there is a need to monitor changes over time to ensure sustainability of outcomes.

The USAID/Higa Ubeho resiliency model assisted families to transition into the next level of socio-economic development. However, transitioning households into higher socio-economic categories, namely Ubudehe 4, may require a different set of interventions or assistance.

² Based on follow-up research conducted in 2013, most of the households that failed to progress out of the lowest socio-economic category suffered shocks – the most commonly cited issues being health shocks particularly HIV/AIDS, chronic illness and physical or mental disability and economic related shocks such as business decline or loss of a household asset.

Investing in economic strengthening for improved health outcomes

One of the key development hypotheses behind the USAID/Higa Ubeho program is that **investing in household economic strengthening will contribute to improved health outcomes**. These investments, part of Global Communities' economic resiliency model, (pictured below) includes **short-term services and support that help families to become increasingly self-reliant**.



For economic strengthening - every household in the program was invited to join a savings and lending group, and then invited to form a Farmer Field School, and then a nutrition group.

To strengthen safety nets - services and support were offered according to need: education support, life skills strengthening, psychosocial support and early childhood care.

Market-based approach

Connecting people to sustainable income-generating opportunities and to local networks that provide critical safety nets.

Findings from program assessments and routine implementation reveal that **beneficiaries have made investments to increase access to health services, reduce health risks and improve household hygiene**. In other words, as they gained more assets and income, they also made strategic investments to improve the family's well-being. A summary of key data is provided below:

- **80%** of households have health insurance.
- Hand-washing facilities are used in **84%** of households.
- **97%** of households have covered latrines.
- Long-lasting treated nets are used **92%** of households.
- **93%** of households use dish drying racks.

Key lessons & observations:

Investing in **household economic strengthening (HES) interventions contributes to improved health outcomes**, when paired with health, hygiene and nutrition education.

Positive peer pressure, achieved through group membership, appears to be an effective strategy for improving household hygiene and the purchase of health insurance.

Additional **couple education paired with gender equity initiatives** may be needed to assist men and women to plan for and make investments at critical stages of their children's development.

Strengthening life skills

With the goal of strengthening life skills and helping adolescents perform well in school and stay in school, the USAID/Higa Ubeho worked with 242 secondary and vocational schools to establish peer mentoring programs – named Abahizi Clubs. The program provided an initial training to two youth mentors and a teacher from every school, annual leadership seminars for the youth representatives, and a Toolkit and Activity Guide to enable the clubs to **independently run their meetings following a common set of participatory learning activities**.

Abahizi Clubs reached over 12,000 youth – non-vulnerable and vulnerable adolescents – encouraging them to **adopt healthy behaviors, develop positive relationships, excel academically and plan for their future**. This intervention has had significant positive outcomes, especially for vulnerable youth who report being better able to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and to focus on school and their future.

Testimonies from Abahizi Clubs Members (excerpt from 2013 Assessment):

“I used to be a [sex worker] but I was enrolled in school... school management was very concerned about me & encouraged me to join the Abahizi Club. The club assigned me a ‘big sister’ who supported me with routine counseling and mentorship. The club has transformed my life; I am now focused on school and planning for a fruitful future.”

“In the past, I was given school punishment every quarter and I did not have enough time for my studies as others did. But from the time I joined the Abahizi club and was trained on personal goals setting and behaviour changes, my life at school has totally changed. I follow all school rules, and respect all my elders.”

“Some students [non club-members] had dropped out of the school due to the lack of fees. During the holidays, each club member collected funds from parents, neighbors and paid school fees for the [2] student in need...they returned to school to continue their studies.”

Comparing outcomes for youth in Abahizi Clubs with a control group shows **significant positive differences across life-skill development indicators particularly measuring positive behavior, leadership and self confidence** (Kabayiza & Mukabutera, 2013) - see excerpt from the assessment below.

| Results from 5-point Linkert Scale | Non Club Members | Abahizi Club Members | Sig. |
|--|------------------|----------------------|------|
| I clearly state my thoughts and ideas to others | 51.9 % | 86.1 % | *** |
| I trust my abilities to solve problems | 69.4 % | 88.9 % | *** |
| I can say no to activities that I think are wrong. | 51.9 % | 93.5 % | *** |
| I try to follow school rules | 72.2 % | 90.0 % | *** |
| I work hard to improve on my personal weaknesses | 69.4 % | 99.1% | *** |
| I am able to compete for leadership roles | 26.0 % | 96.0 % | *** |

***P.value<0.001

Improving Academic Results

Using a comparative analysis between non-members and Abahizi Club members over a period of three years (2011 – 2013), the study (Kabayiza & Mukabutera, 2013) explored the effect on academic performance. The findings, presented below, indicate that **Abahizi club members performed better overall and have improved their academic scores** since the clubs were initiated in 2011.

Academic Performance Among Non-Club Members



Academic Performance Among Abahizi Club Members



Club members had the lowest percentage of students scoring below 50%, with significant decreases each year since the clubs were established in 2011. On the contrary, the percentage of students scoring below 50% consistently increased among non-club members suggesting that these students were less able to cope with the increasing complexity and challenges as they advanced in their academic studies.

Similar trends were observed with best performing students, with **Abahizi Club members having a higher and increasing proportion of students scoring above 70% each year**. Meanwhile with non-club members, the proportion of students scoring above 70% consistently declined each year.

Key lessons & observations:

The Abahizi Club methodology has proven to be a successful strategy to **increase confidence, strengthen problem-solving skills, and improve academic performance**, particularly among vulnerable youth.

The model shows **promise of sustainability and replication** without direct program support. Implementers should continued to explore ways to scale-up and sustain this model – including: (1) integrating the club guide and tools into existing clubs/programs; (2) promoting local fundraising initiatives to sustain the clubs; and/or (3) widely disseminating the club achievements, particularly among school officials and local authorities.

Increasing enrollment in vocational training



With the launch of a new Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II) in Rwanda, productivity and youth employment gained new prominence, along with vocational training. The government called on development partners to prioritize quality, availability, and demand for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The USAID/Higa Ubeho Program responded to this call by nearly **tripling enrollment of youth from Ubudehe 1 and 2 Households in 2013 in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs** accredited by the Workforce Development Authority (WDA) – see the graph below.



In addition, the program worked with the WDA to **actively promote TVET** through radio, television and billboards, under the slogan “TVET, My Career, My Future, - TVET Umwuga Wanjye, Ubuzima Byanjye” **assessed schools** for their readiness/capacity to enroll additional students, and **organized exchanges between TVET School Officials** to share experiences, challenges & lessons – with specific attention to enrolling and supporting vulnerable youth to complete their 1-year program, secure an industrial attachment and future employment.

Key lessons & observations:

There can be an **overwhelming demand for TVET when scholarships are available**; within a two-month period, Global Communities received over 12,000 applications.

Most **young people lack career guidance** and choose trades without a full understanding of the nature of the work, or consideration of their natural talents and abilities.

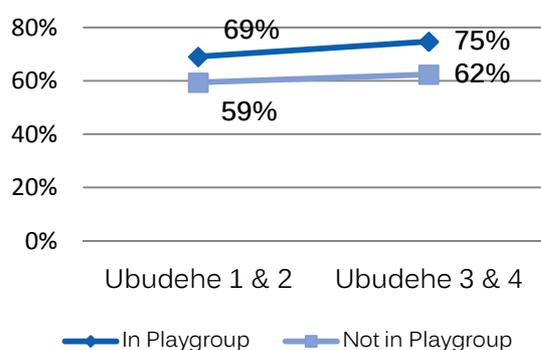
Experience-sharing between TVET providers can help newer and emerging institutions to overcome common challenges – particularly when dealing with a large intake of vulnerable youth.

Supporting early childhood development

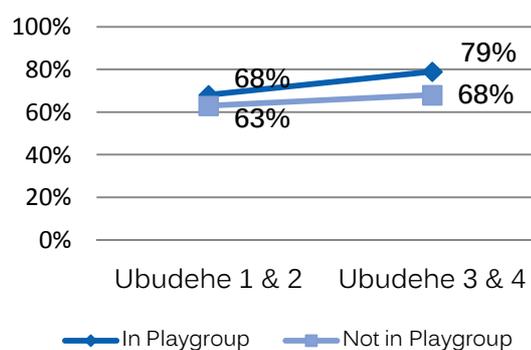
The USAID/Higa Ubeho program was among the first programs in Rwanda to introduce **playgroups as a strategy for delivering age-appropriate services** to children under-five years of age and enhancing parent/caregiver knowledge and practices. This initiative included a weekly gathering for 1-2 hours to promote the **emotional and physical development of young children** through structured and unstructured play. Over 200 volunteers were trained to run the playgroups, and parents are encouraged to accompany their children in order to build supportive relationships and to foster a sense of belonging in the family and community. Currently, 93 playgroups operate in nursery schools, churches and other community locations serving 10,620 children.

An assessment of the model revealed that “playgroup **participation increased the life skills scores of the most vulnerable children to approximately the same level as that of children from higher income households**” (Honeyman, 2013). An excerpt from the study is provided below.

Changes in Psychosocial Life Skills (N=132)



Changes in Physical Life Skills (N=132)



There was a **statistically significant positive effect of participating in playgroups**, controlling for preschool attendance and socio-economic status, on both physical ($p=0.014$) and psychosocial life skills ($p=0.001$). **Playgroups participation appeared to raise the life skills scores of the most vulnerable children to the same level or higher than that of higher income households.**

Key lessons & observations:

Since playgroups can be established with relatively few resources in places where most children cannot yet access pre-school, **this model can be a cost-effective approach to increasing young children's life skills.**

To **ensure that playgroups are inclusive and sustainable**, future programs should (1) explore a family-based playgroup format in which several neighboring households host the playgroup on a rotating basis; (2) offering guidebooks at two levels: a basic start-up version, and a second version with an expanded range of alternative activities for more established groups; and (3) avoid placing emphasis on games and activities that require special equipment.

Summary of Program Reach (2009-2015)

Expanded community-based services

- **137,009** individuals served.
- Reached over **75,125** vulnerable households.
- Built capacity for household economic strengthening in **23** districts.
- Established **5,561** new community-based service points.

Household Economic Strengthening

- **61,448** parents & guardians of OVC benefit from economic strengthening.
- **50** groups supported to transition into cooperatives.
- **2,661** savings groups created and supported.

Education Support

- School materials & health kits are distributed to **52,763** children.
- **18,792** children receive education subsidies.

Life Skills Strengthening & Peer Support

- **242** School-based clubs established.
- Annual leadership seminars in **180** schools.
- **12,193** youths receiving peer support.
- Holiday camps held in **20** districts to serve **13,399** youths.

Vocational Training

- Scholarships for 1-year vocational programs provided to **6,542** youths.
- **5,949** Youths supported with industrial attachments.
- Life skills strengthened among **1,058** adolescents in **33** schools.
- Career and Life Management seminar delivered to **982** graduates.

Early childhood care and development

- **304** volunteers are trained to lead playgroups for young children.
- Playgroups served **10,853** children and established in **14** districts.
- **20,000** parents/guardians receive positive parenting messages.

Food Security & Nutrition

- **790** Farmer Field Schools created in schools and communities.
- Community growth monitoring sessions benefit **17,164** children.
- **738** Positive Deviance Hearth Groups are established.

Psychosocial Support

- Trained **2,157** volunteer counselors in Helpful Active Listening.
- **646** community-based service points established.

