

August 2020 Sustained Grantee Spotlight: Gardens for Health International

While health and nutrition remain the focus of GHI, the impact of the pandemic means, by necessity, efforts have shifted somewhat. GHI is providing direct nutritious food support to the most vulnerable families and partnering with local health clinics to provide maternal and child nutrition support at the point of care.



In Rwanda, COVID-19 cases are rising. Though normal field-level activities have been suspended, GHI office staff is working remotely and farm technicians are caring for the organization's farm headquarters while observing social distancing and handwashing measures. In addition, GHI is facilitating 48 savings groups in Musanze District, with an average of 25 members each. While social distancing, program graduates support each other by individually contributing to a collective hardship fund and encouraging each other to maintain healthy nutrition and agriculture habits. Dried corn, pumpkins, and a variety of nutrient-packed vegetables have been donated to vulnerable families of the Gasabo District community, and food has also been sent to front-line healthcare workers. Finally, additional vegetable seeds and additional funds for garden caretakers were provided to schools that expressed the need for them.

In late June, GHI's Executive Director, Solomon Makuza joined other NGO leaders operating in Sub-Saharan Africa for a webinar titled "Pivoting Programs in Community Development for COVID-19." The recording of the webinar is online [here](#).

From GHI's Executive Director, Solomon Makuza:

While most cases are in districts that share borders with neighboring countries, we've also seen an increase in cases in the capital city of Kigali. The Government of Rwanda continues to closely monitor the situation and enforce restrictions based on District. Here at GHI we are still in full COVID response mode. We're continuing to partner with local health clinics to provide support where it is needed most and meet mothers at the point of care. Our Field Educators continue to screen young children for malnutrition and deliver nutrition and COVID prevention trainings to expectant and new mothers. We've been able to screen and monitor the growth of more than 600 children while educating over 2,000 families with our nutrition and health curriculum. For many of the women we're meeting, this is their first exposure to topics like proper breastfeeding, family planning, and the makeup of a balanced meal.

I was particularly struck by the story of new mother, Rachel, whose newborn son, Ian, just turned one week old. Rachel attended a quick GHI training last week at Rubungo Health Clinic

when bringing Ian for vaccinations. I loved hearing about the most important lessons she learned in her own words:

“First, I learned how to practice family planning. Before, I thought that family planning methods were applied only once your child has grown a bit, but today, I learned that you can apply family planning even right after birth. Now, I can give enough care to my children and keep them healthy. Second, I learned that complementary feeding should start at 6 months because it compliments and adds nutrients for the baby. I can also now teach other mothers how to care for a baby while breastfeeding, and I can explain how to prepare a balanced diet.”

I’m extremely proud of the hard work and commitment of our field staff to deliver these vital messages, and I’m inspired by the eagerness of new mamas to learn and better the lives of their little ones.