

[BALANCED]

Promoting & advancing integrated population, health, and environment approaches

BALANCED PHE Champion

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Reaching Rural Rwandans with Integrated Health and Livelihood Messages

Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries on the planet, with more than 11 million people in one of Africa's smallest countries, most of who depend upon the land as subsistence farmers. The country has diverse mountain, lake and savannah landscapes, and the Virunga Mountain chain in the northwest part of the country is home to one-third of the world's threatened mountain gorilla population. At the same time, the population throughout the country suffers from high rates of unmet need for contraception, and three percent of the adult population lives with HIV/AIDS. In a land under such intense pressure on natural resources, rural livelihood initiatives are critical to ensuring people have options for meeting their daily health and well-being needs.

For the past three years, Jeanne Nyirakamana has served as the Head of the Health program of the "Sustaining Partnerships to Enhance Rural Enterprise and Agribusiness Development" (SPREAD) Project. Supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development through Texas A&M University, the SPREAD Project is integrating a dynamic coffee production and quality improvement program with health outreach to improve community well-being. The health component works to improve the lives of coffee farmers and cooperative members by providing them with health information and services related to family planning, maternal and child health, prevention of sexually-transmitted infections (STI), including HIV, and water and sanitation. Working closely with the coffee program, Jeanne's team has trained more than 540 men, women and youth peer educators who have reached more than 95,000 coffee farmers with education and services for family planning, improved health, as well as support for their coffee and livelihoods activities. Key communication messages highlight the links



SPREAD's Head of Health Program Jeanne speaks to farmers in Southern Province, Rwanda

between sound decision-making and health-seeking behaviors, productive farms and agribusinesses, and strong and healthy families.

The program also leverages and supports local health resources, through referrals to existing public health services, organization of mobile clinics, and community-based distribution of a socially-marketed water purification solution (Sur Eau) and condoms (Prudence). According to Jeanne, one of the project's greatest successes is the increased acceptance of family planning by farmers and their families, and the more than 7,500 farmers who have been tested for HIV. In order to draw in as many coffee farmers as possible, many of the health and livelihood activities take place at the stations where the coffee beans are washed, at other buildings used by the coffee farmer cooperative, or during combined community meetings or home visits. At the washing stations, Jeanne's team supports local health center staff to provide voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) and de-worming





Drying racks at a coffee washing station in southern Rwanda, where many health extension activities take place

services while at the same time SPREAD-trained peer educators and coffee/health extension agents disseminate family planning information. The cooperatives' buildings have clean water and hand-washing stations and small kiosks where condoms and Sur Eau are sold. These community health agents work with SPREAD to ensure that the greater community, not just the coffee farmers, has access to health knowledge and services. These agents learn how to teach the community about a range of health issues, and each month they submit reports showing how many people they reached and with what kinds of messages. They are also becoming increasingly engaged in coffee and agribusiness activities. Through the success of their health activities, these agents are seen as vital community resources.

By implementing this integrated Population, Health and Environment (PHE) approach, the SPREAD Project staff is

ensuring the health of the environment, and the success of the agribusiness, as well as the health of the people. According to Jeanne, "You cannot care for the environment without first caring for the people who live and use that environment, so when you transmit dual messages (agriculture and health) you are able to hit two birds with one stone."

According to a 2010 evaluation of the project (Kitzantides 2010), farmers and their families reported improvements in personal and household hygiene, an increase in understanding and acceptance of family planning, uptake of HIV VCT services, and use of condoms and other local health services. As well, they note shifts in gender norms affecting household revenue use, alcohol and reproductive health. The agribusiness stakeholders value the integrated approach as a means to more holistically meet farmers' goals of increased incomes, and improved lives and livelihoods.