**Member Spotlight:** **Fighting COVID-19 and Empowering Communities in Uganda’s Rwenzori Mountains**

**By Jostas Mwebembezi**

The [Rwenzori Center for Research and Advocacy](https://www.rcra-uganda.org/) (RCRA) has been working in the Kasese District of Uganda to prevent the spread of and response to the COVID-19 pandemic through assisting with provision of personal protective equipment, including sanitizers, a hand washing shop, facemasks and aprons for health workers. RCRA also facilitated the training of 20 village health team leaders and communications of COVID-19 risks through door-to-door sensitization by village health teams in Busongora North sub-counties.

RCRA is an indigenous child health non-governmental organization founded in 2010 in Uganda’s Rwenzori Mountains. Working with global donors, civil society and local communities, the RCRA works to empower communities for improved livelihoods, health care and education through awareness, research, technology and innovation. RCRA held three pilot day clinics held in 2019. The clinics drew hundreds of people from the surrounding areas, and Ministry of Health clinicians provided free family planning counseling and supplies. RCRA then introduced a “backpack nurse” strategy to reach the most remote communities. A community health worker (CHW) calls on the backpack nurse once 20 women served by the CHW have requested family planning. Over 5,900 women have received the service as well as a family planning method of their choice.

In order to sustain community interventions, RCRA engaged in budget advocacy and expenditure tracking for improved financing for women, children and adolescent services in Kasese District. In 2019, RCRA published a scorecard on global financing facility and results-based financing implementation in the district. RCRA trained 20 civil society representatives in budget advocacy, including strengthening their capacity to engage in expanded district health management teams.

As part of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Accelerating Epidemic Control in the Fort Portal Region of Uganda, RCRA serves over 1,504 orphans and vulnerable children in Kasese living with HIV. RCRA assists with health/psychosocial support and basic care; economic strengthening through vocational training and apprenticeship, including income-generation activities; food and nutrition security; educational support through scholarships; and facility antiretroviral treatment clinics. RCRA has formed community drug distribution groups to keep clients on treatment and achieve viral load suppression. This support has been even more helpful during COVID-19 to keep clients on antiretroviral treatment, making them less vulnerable to the illness, as well as mapping pregnant women for antenatal visits and tracking to improve fourth visit attendance, establishing kitchen gardens to improve household nutrition security and reducing spending on market vegetables.

RCRA is a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; Girls Not Brides Global Partnership UK; the Uganda Reproductive Maternal Newborn, Child and Adolescents Health plus Nutrition Platform; host Kasese sub-national Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Coalition; Partnership of Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Child Health; Every Woman Every Child; Youth Advocacy and Development Network Uganda; Global Digital Health Forum; and the Uganda Healthcare Federation.

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