On June 20, VHW Founder and CEO Deogratias (Deo) Niyizonkiza led the joyful three-day opening ceremony for the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion (WHP). This milestone event featured the participation of President Évariste Ndayishimiye and Minister of Public Health Dr. Sylvie Nzyemana, and was attended by local and regional officials that included diplomats such as U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Keith R. Giles, Public Affairs Officer Karin M. Ehlert, the Dutch and Kenyan Ambassadors to Burundi, and thousands of local community members. Many friends and supporters traveled from faraway parts of the world to Kigutu to join in the celebrations. Although unable to attend the event in person, messages of support were sent by longtime supporters of VHW, Melinda French Gates and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Several members of VHW’s Board of Directors traveled with family and friends to mark the start of this new and critical chapter. Those present included Sharon Jacob, Anne Peretz, Dennis Hanno, Leonce Ndikumana, Jonathan Goldberg, Larry Goldberg, and Board Chair Rishi Narang.
Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you and all your loved ones healthy and well and that the last few months have been as energizing for you, our incredible supporters, as they have been for me and the inspiring team at Village Health Works.

I am energized because, after over a decade of hard work and innumerable challenges, I can finally share that the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion (WHP) is open!

On June 20th, the opening ceremonies for the WHP brought together the many friends, supporters, and partners that made it possible. Our growing partnership with the government of Burundi was unmistakable as we were extended the extraordinary honor of hosting President Évariste Ndayishimiye and the Minister of Public Health, Dr. Sylvie Nzeyimana, at the event. We are proud to support President Ndayishimiye’s strategic vision to provide each commune in Burundi with access to a comprehensive hospital and health care by providing urgently needed maternity, neonatal, and preventive pediatric care at our facility. We further appreciated the presence of members of our Board of Directors, whose leadership during some of the most difficult times in recent memory was essential in enabling this long-held dream to become a reality. Words of support from friends that included Hillary Clinton and Melinda French Gates highlighted the extensive community we have been able to build throughout the world, while representatives of our community bore witness to what is just as equally their hospital and spoke of what will now be possible for themselves and their neighbors. Together with thousands of local community members present, we celebrated this new chapter for Village Health Works, for the community of Kigutu, and for Burundi and beyond, where the best-trained medical practitioners provide dignified care to their patients in the most incredible and welcoming environment.

I knew the day WHP opened would be one I could not forget, but I couldn’t imagine how truly beautiful the occasion would be. The weather itself seemed to be part of the celebrations as music and dance performances that included Kigutu’s award-winning drumming team provided an introduction to the day. As I walked with the President through the halls of the hospital, I felt immense pride in the many colleagues who worked together to bring us to this point. From the construction workers who overcame countless challenges to the technical experts who oversaw an efficient use of resources while ensuring the building fully met our needs to those whose planning and coordination brought every piece into place, each played their part. They worked alongside the many friends and supporters from around the world who contributed resources, financial and otherwise, to accomplish this transformational change. I am grateful for every one of them. And to each community member who, working alongside their families and children, picked up a shovel, carried bricks, cut the brush, and built the foundation of the hospital years before the building stood: you have my heart.

As we celebrate this remarkable achievement, I see the changes it will make possible in lives saved and futures forever changed for the better. The hospital is open, and the vision we have had for nearly a decade is now a reality. We have an incredible new resource to rectify the many conditions and circumstances that negatively impact life in Burundi — and that means the real work is just beginning. I can’t wait to share what this new chapter brings.

With deep gratitude,

Deo
CEO and Founder
The June 20th Official Opening of the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion

Thanks to loyal supporters from all over the world, the official opening of the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion finally became a reality on June 20!

The cutting of the ceremonial ribbon by President Évariste Ndayishimiye.

President Évariste Ndayishimiye greeting Board Members and donors.

Traditional drumming and dancing.

Young community members waiting with anticipation for the opening ceremony.

Melinda French Gates presenting a heartfelt speech in support of the hospital opening.

Watch this video of the opening ceremony highlights.

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Proud community members enjoying the celebration.
# Health Care

## Training and Teaching at the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion

In June, VHW held a training and teaching workshop for the Chief Nursing Officer, nurse managers, and new nurse midwives in preparation for caring for patients in the new Women’s Health Pavilion. The workshop included communication techniques, on-boarding, patient handovers, use of medical simulation for learning, newborn examination, information on breastfeeding, and more.

*Photos from top: Dr. Laura McCarthy demonstrates how to distribute oxygen to a newborn during the training session.*

*NICU doctors provide an overview of the functionalities and capabilities of the bubble CPAP newborn resuscitator — the first in Burundi.*

*Team photo after the completed workshop.*

Watch this video of Dr. Patrick McCarthy sharing the training opportunities of the new hospital.

WATCH ON YOUTUBE →

<table>
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<tr>
<th>9,791</th>
<th>20,031</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>127</th>
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<td>patient consultations</td>
<td>home visits by Community Health Workers, leading to 208 referrals to the VHW facilities for medical services</td>
<td>of children identified as acutely malnourished on treatment</td>
<td>pregnant women screened for HIV and syphilis in their first antenatal care appointment</td>
<td>of HIV patients on ARV treatment</td>
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The Importance of Innovative Education

The upcoming school year will be a landmark one for the Kigutu International Academy (KIA), with the school finally achieving its full size as the fourth class joins in September and the first graduates completing their studies the following June. Looking forward, KIA’s Head of School Dr. Alice Rwamo shared some thoughts and perspectives about what makes the school unique.

"KIA is challenging the educational system in Burundi. In the past pedagogy was centered on the teacher, but KIA is bringing a new experience; we are more learner-centered, and this brings us to the core of what education is. Education comes from the Latin word 'educare,' which means watching the birth. So we are midwifing students, watching them being born from the talents they have. We expose them to the skills, but work to bring out what they have inside of them. We believe they are knowledgeable, and can be teachers as well as students as they participate in the discovery of knowledge."

KIA also provides an exceptional preparation for the future its graduates will encounter, providing preparation in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) as well as 21st century skills. Dr. Rwamo continues, "It’s a STEM-based school, but it also focuses on the forces of the 21st century, which are creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Unfortunately, the education system in Burundi has been based on memorizing what you have been told, and this is something that is very problematic because you have a generation of people who are so-called educated, but who are unable to problem-solve. It’s believed that in 20 years, 40% of the jobs that we have today will be lost. So how are we imagining the future? How are we reinventing the jobs of tomorrow? That’s why critical thinking is important. It brings our learners to be analytical, to question, to relate to concepts they’re exposed to and merge..."
what they learn with what they have inside them. At KIA a teacher is not the source of knowledge, but serves as a guide, as a monitor in the discovery of skills and competencies. Students are encouraged to pursue their interests in extracurricular activities. Our students can be creative in painting, they can be creative using a 3D printer, in robotics, in dancing. They have a wide range of clubs and extracurricular activities that help provide hands-on experiences. In the lab KIA lab students can see what a chemical substance looks like, and then see what happens when two substances merge. This is quite a unique experience in Burundi, even the University of Burundi doesn’t have a scientific laboratory and I learned lately that even the medical school people finish without having seen a scientific lab. So I would say our students are very lucky to be here.”

The students at KIA are also demonstrating their commitment to supporting a new future for their country as well. Dr. Rwamo shares, “There is no way we can prepare the next generation of humanity if we are not basing our education on a series of values. KIA is rooted in five values, which are excellence, ethics, resilience, service, and compassion. Burundi has suffered a lot of corruption; if someone is placed in an office and that person keeps on stealing the government money, how are we moving forward? So it’s amazing how these students have taken these values at the real core of their being. It touched my heart to see that these students don’t need anyone to supervise them when they’re sitting for exams. They don’t cheat. Why? Because ethics are at the core of what they’re doing. Compassion is also a core value that has inspired the founder of Kigutu International Academy, which is that you cannot lift yourself unless you lift others. We are so glad that they are really being taken seriously. You realize that society has been what it is, in part because no one has midwifed them to be the best they can be. And we hope that KIA is doing its best to be able to raise that future generation of transformers and problem solvers.”

We are looking forward to the opening ceremonies in September, which will include the participation of government officials and other friends of KIA and VHW in celebration of the momentous occasion.
VHW’s Malnutrition Program

Dr. Joelle Bukeneza, the head of VHW’s Malnutrition Program, has been with VWH for four years. She joined us after working at a public hospital, and was immediately struck by the large number of children that were malnourished; at the hospital she had only seen the most severe cases, with most children seen in smaller health centers.

As she explains, “I saw a high number of malnourished children in our outpatient setting, and even saw families that had more than two malnourished children. I began to learn more about the causes, and found there were many — a lack of arable land, a high fertility index coupled with no adherence to family planning, low educational levels, a lack of fixed sources of income, not enough clean water, and insufficient sanitation. In addition, the price of basic foods such as beans has doubled recently, leading most families to decrease the amount of food they eat, both in quality and quantity. The impact of malnutrition is great, and in the long term it ends up creating a vicious cycle of diseases, malnutrition, and poverty.”

Dr. Joelle has been spearheading efforts to break that cycle. In addition to screenings of children and pregnant women, VHW provides treatment through nutritional support. A team of Community Health Workers (CHWs) checks in on children previously identified as malnourished, and VHW connects nutrition to education by providing food to the students at our schools. Dr. Joelle has seen a positive impact from these efforts. “We don’t have so many children coming from the school now because we have a system in which we do a screening at the beginning of each trimester. It has been helping the children to stay in school, because if they do not eat at home, they come to..."
school. As a result, the number of dropouts has been decreasing."

However, Dr. Joelle is very aware that different interventions will be needed in the long term. "It will take a long time for us to end malnutrition because it has been a generational problem, with few easy solutions. We have to do things in the short term, like providing fortified porridge and Plumpy Nut, but when once they are discharged from the program they return to eating as they did before, and often relapse. We have seen cases where nutritional support meant for one child was shared with the whole family – and as a mother, how can you give food to one child and not the others? In the long run what can help is finding a way for the families to get income, or grow their own food. Even if a family doesn't have land, we are thinking of linking multiple families together into a cooperative to work with model farmers [trained by VHW in improved agricultural techniques], where they can work together to grow food to either eat or to sell."

The challenges are many, but Dr. Joelle tries to keep a positive outlook: "I know I'm doing what I can. Although I can't change things as quickly as I would like, I try every day to do better. Even small changes help — that's what I try to tell myself."

Photos from top: A mother and her child visiting the campus for a checkup.

Fruits and vegetables grown on campus for patients, students and the community.

Bread baked on campus for patients and students.
Community Engagement

4,498 instances of children participating in cultural and sports activities, supporting community cohesion, health and wellbeing, and the continuation of Burundian traditions

171 individuals attended Twiyigurure sessions on parenting skills and conflict resolution

The Community Forum at the Three-Day Celebration of the Opening of the Kigutu Hospital and Women’s Health Pavilion

The three-day inaugural celebration included a two-day Community Forum on health and education held at the Kigutu International Academy (KIA). The celebration was open to the public and attended by members of the community.

Photos from top: Dr. Alice Rwamo, Head of School at KIA, presenting on some of the challenges facing education among members of our community.

Visitors to the VHW campus, including US-based staff members and friends, listen to a presentation at the Community Forum.

VHW musicians performing at the Community Forum, preserving Burundian cultural traditions while contributing to the festive, energizing atmosphere of the occasion.

VHW CEO and Founder Deogratias Niyizonkiza speaking at the Community Forum.

Watch this video of VHW CEO and Founder Deogratias Niyizonkiza sharing what the hospital means for our community.

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Strengthening the Future of Entrepreneurship in Burundi

Dennis M. Hanno serves as Treasurer on VHW’s Board of Directors and is a higher education leader, educator, and social entrepreneur. He has filled numerous senior leadership roles at institutions of higher education, including a recent seven-year term as the president of Wheaton College. A passionate advocate for engaging students in experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom, he is the founder and CEO of IDEA4Africa, which educates, mentors, and incubates young entrepreneurs strengthening society in several African countries. Since 2000, Dennis has led hundreds of college and university students, alumni, staff and professors to Sub-Saharan Africa to teach entrepreneurship to community members, small business owners and high school students — including students at VHW’s own Kigutu International Academy (KIA)!

2023 will be the second year that Dennis has supported KIA students in developing their entrepreneurial potential. During the summer of 2022 Dennis leveraged the workbook he co-wrote, From Ideas to Action, to first provide the then-two classes of KIA students with an overview of the entrepreneurial process and then guide students as they developed their own business pitch in teams. This summer, the program will be broken up into two sections. The first year students who have never gone through the program will have an experience similar to that of last year, but the second and third year students will be immediately placed in teams and begin working on their pitches. In addition, the 18 student teams (eight in the first year, ten in the second and third years) are also being paired with a mentor this year — a professional or college student with an interest and expertise in entrepreneurship that will meet with the students five or six times over the summer session. The coaches come from several different countries and all are excited about connecting with the KIA students. For every student, the goal will be to achieve sustainability by developing a business model that can support itself, offering something of value to stakeholders and providing a return to its owners. The more advanced students will pitch their ideas at the end of the seminar - with cash prizes awarded to the top three teams. The hope is that the cash prizes will enable them to move forward with their ideas.

Dennis sees a great deal of potential in supporting these efforts — both for the students, and for the nation of Burundi. He shares, “To me, entrepreneurship is hope. Entrepreneurship teaches people that they can improve themselves and their community — if they come up with an idea and take action. Mark my words, in five years, you’re going to see some of those KIA students graduating from the Harvards and the Oxfords and the best colleges and universities around the world, and then coming back to Burundi and making a huge difference, right here in the country.”
Join Our Team

We are hiring for a number of positions at Village Health Works. Come join our team of dedicated and passionate individuals committed to bringing dignified and comprehensive healthcare to thousands in Burundi.

See Current Openings →

Village Health Works is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Burundi and New York. All donations are tax deductible.*

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