

An Impressive Visit to the Igihozo Integrated Model Early Childhood Development (ECD) Center

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Children singing at the Twiyubake-supported Igihozo integrated model ECD center.



Marjan Ehsassi, Senior Director of Governance & Global Health at Global Communities greeting the Stars of Twiyubake ([see video](#)).



Children washing hands.



Children in front of the Twiyubake-supported Igihozo integrated model ECD center.



A caregiver feeding children with a disability.

Children and parents at the USAID Twiyubake-supported Igihozo integrated model early childhood development (ECD) center recently received a group of 10 visitors to tour the facility and learn about its services. Upon their arrival in the classroom, the Executive Director of YWCA, a long-time partner of Global Communities, Pudentienne Uzamukunda, introduced Marjan Ehsassi, Senior Director of Governance and Global Health at Global Communities Headquarters; John Ames, Chief of Party; Theogene Mberwa, Executive Secretary of Kabare sector; Esperance Cybukayire, Executive Secretary of Cyarubare cell; and members of the USAID Twiyubake team.

“The Igihozo ECD center is one of 13 community-based ECD centers and 89 home based ECD centers which have been established by Twiyubake in Kayonza district,” said Ms. Uzamukunda. “The ECD centers support a total of 2,450 children as well as 2,400 parents in parenting groups,”

The Igihozo ECD center located in Kabeza village, Cyarubare cell, Kabare sector, Kayonza district serves 60 children, eight of whom are special needs children. The children are grouped in age groups 3-4 and 5-6. While the younger ones are more involved in singing songs, storytelling and play, the 5-6-year-olds are learning how to write, count, and prepare for primary school. To prepare for its opening, the Twiyubake team selected and trained facilitators, caregivers and community-based volunteers from Kabeza village on ECD policy, and in education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and positive parenting. The program has set up a Parenting Committee composed of seven members who gather once a week to develop positive parenting skills, take turns preparing porridge for the children



Jean D'Amour Ntezimana, a Community Based Volunteer who is managing the ECD.



Florence talked about her experience in the parenting group.

“The most important message I have received from the parenting group is that a 4-year-old child should definitely not weigh 10 kg, meaning we should carefully follow up on our children’s nutrition, growth and weight.”

–Florence, mother of a 3-year-old



Guests discussing services of the ECD with parents.

on a daily basis, and constructing handmade play materials for them. Parents even organize themselves to get uniforms for their children.

Jean D’Amour Ntezimana is a Community Based Volunteer (CBV) who actively supported USAID Twiyubake in establishing the ECD center back in September 2016. Back then, parents and children met outside on the lawn in front of a church until the sector offered them a classroom next to the cell office. Jean D’Amour manages the ECD center along with 15 facilitators and caregivers who take turns to volunteer one day per week to support and teach the children. The ECD allows the parents to work while their children are at the ECD; some take advantage of this time to cultivate in neighboring fields.

“In the parenting group we teach parents that education starts at home,” Mr. D’Amour said. “We teach children to wash hands before entering class and the importance of washing hands when they arrive home coming from school, before eating and after using the toilet.” The groups also discuss the basics of child health, nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and positive parenting, with an emphasis on the importance of a balanced diet, how to establish a kitchen garden, and how to plant a fruit tree to prevent malnutrition and stunting.

The testimonies from the parents were thoughtful and inspiring:

“The most important message I have received from the parenting group is that a 4-year-old child should definitely not weigh 10 kg, meaning we should carefully follow up on our children’s nutrition, growth and weight,” said Florence, a mother of a 3-year-old child.

Jeanne, who is expecting a child, thanked the parenting group for her new attitude toward the baby she is carrying. She sings to it every day to help them bond, and she knows that a balanced and healthy diet starts upon conception. “I often grasp a banana or another fruit in between my meals as I know that it helps the baby’s growth. Today I also attend regularly antenatal care at the health center,” she said. Five of the volunteers at the ECD are also parents. One of them, Divine, is amazed how quickly children learn but she is especially impressed with how much children learn from each other. She teaches them songs and the children teach their siblings at home, and then the siblings share them with their community.



A caregiver with her disabled child.



Parents volunteering in the ECD sharing their experience.

Ngirabakunzi recalled how grateful she was when local authorities called on the community to bring their children to the center. She was particularly impressed with one of the unique features of this ECD – that even children with a disability are fully integrated and accepted by other children. One of the volunteers added that before the ECD some of the children with a disability would never leave their home or socialize with other children.

In describing the change in parenting behaviors, Jean D'Amour summed it up this way: "Although I am a man, I am so involved in child-rearing that the children call me "matron" and I am proud of this." He explained that "now that the National Early Childhood Development Program (NECDP) provides milk to the ECD center – which the children get twice a week to fight malnutrition - every child in the village points at me and says look this is the man who gives us milk. The training I received and my work experience have transformed me. Today I easily approach and care for my own children and the children in the community, which is not usual for a man."

Addressing the parents, John Ames, USAID Twiyubake Chief of Party at Global Communities explained: "Your ECD center is representing one among the 199 established ECD centers and 1,030 home-based ECD facilities established by Twiyubake in the 12 districts of program implementation. All the ECD centers together gather 26,920 children."

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–Jean D'Amour



Marjan talking to ECD parents.

He thanked Igihozo ECD center for having received the guests.

"I am grateful that you have taken the time to share your testimonies with us today" expressed Marjan Ehsassi. "Watching your children and hearing the extent to which you have each grown, as parents and members of your community, is powerful. It is especially touching to hear that you have learned the benefits of good nutrition, you sing to your unborn baby and that, Jean, you don't mind being referred to as a Ms." She added that Global Communities is pleased to work with strong partners such as YWCA in supporting the Igihozo community.



Theogene Mberwa, Executive Secretary of Kabare sector in his closing remarks.

In conclusion, Theogene Mberwa, Executive Director of the Kabare Sector, thanked Global Communities for implementing the Twiyubake program through YWCA in Kayonza district. “This ECD became a model center because of its achievements. In the name of the parents, the community, the district, we thank you for your great support. Thank you to the parents who came to discuss with us while interrupting their farming and other income generating activities. And thank you to the volunteers who commit themselves to support and educate children.”

[Read more about the Twiyubake Program here.](#)