

The Dialogue convened in Burera District, supported by Caritas Byumba and World Vision Rwanda, was a dynamic and meaningful gathering focused on addressing child malnutrition through the Positive Deviance Hearth (PD/Hearth) approach. Bringing together health workers, local leaders, caregivers, and community volunteers, the event created a collaborative space where shared experiences, challenges, and practical solutions were openly discussed.

From the onset, the atmosphere was one of respect and mutual learning. Participants were eager to engage, reflecting a genuine commitment to improving child nutrition in their communities. The introduction framed the discussion within the local context—highlighting poverty, seasonal food insecurity, and traditional beliefs as significant factors influencing malnutrition. These contextual realities resonated strongly with attendees, setting the stage for honest and focused dialogue.

The core discussion centered on how the PD/Hearth model harnesses existing positive behaviors within vulnerable households to foster sustainable nutrition improvements. Through real-life stories and practical examples, participants recognized the value of peer learning and community ownership. This model's strength lies in empowering families to identify and adopt effective feeding and hygiene practices already proven within their environment.

Nutrition challenges raised included limited access to diverse foods, poverty, and lack of resources for consistent child growth monitoring. Health workers shared concerns about inadequate supplies and understaffing, while local leaders highlighted the difficulty in changing long-held cultural practices that sometimes conflict with nutrition advice. Caregivers expressed the struggle to provide balanced meals amidst economic hardship.

Despite some differences in emphasis—whether on resources, behavior change, or cultural barriers—the dialogue maintained a collaborative spirit. Participants proposed practical actions such as expanding community training, increasing resource allocation for health workers, and promoting income-generating activities to improve food security. The consensus was clear: multi-sectoral collaboration and community-driven solutions are vital.

Overall, the event felt inspiring and hopeful. It was not just a technical meeting but a genuine exchange where voices at all levels were heard and valued. The PD/Hearth approach was appreciated not only as a program but as a community movement fostering resilience and ownership. The energy in the room underscored a shared belief that ending child malnutrition is possible when local knowledge and support are combined.

From my perspective, the dialogue exemplified effective engagement—balancing respect for local realities with the urgency of nutritional needs. It reinforced the importance of inclusive conversations that allow diverse stakeholders to contribute, learn, and commit to action. The event highlighted the power of community-led change and left me optimistic about the ongoing efforts to build healthier futures for Rwanda's children.