

On August 2nd, 2025, Caritas Byumba in collaboration with World Vision Rwanda convened a Nutrition Dialogue at Musenyi Health Center, Mutete Sector, as part of World Breastfeeding Week. The event brought together parents, caregivers, health workers, community leaders, and representatives of local organizations to discuss child nutrition, maternal health, and breastfeeding practices, with a particular focus on the critical first 1,000 days of life.

The dialogue was framed within the local context, recognizing the multiple challenges that rural communities face, including poverty, limited access to diverse and nutritious foods, seasonal food insecurity, climate variability, and environmental health risks such as water pollution and poor sanitation. Participants were invited to reflect on both personal and community experiences with malnutrition, stunting, underweight, and micronutrient deficiencies among children. This framing helped to contextualize the discussion, making it both practical and relevant to everyday realities.

The discussion topics and open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their experiences, challenges, and solutions. Key topics included exclusive breastfeeding, timely introduction of complementary foods, maternal nutrition, dietary diversity, and community strategies to support child health. Participants expressed concern over socio-economic constraints, cultural practices, and knowledge gaps that affect feeding practices, and discussed the roles of local health services, community education, and peer support networks in promoting optimal nutrition.

Several urgent actions were identified during the dialogue. Participants emphasized the need for enhanced community education on breastfeeding and child nutrition, the promotion of maternal nutrition, and practical strategies to increase access to diverse, nutrient-rich foods. Community-driven solutions, such as local gardens, small-scale poultry and livestock projects, and peer support groups, were proposed alongside interventions from government programs and NGOs, including nutritional supplementation and health service support. Strengthening health systems, training health workers in nutrition counseling, and ensuring regular follow-up and growth monitoring were highlighted as critical steps. Multi-sectoral collaboration, engaging local authorities, women's groups, and faith-based organizations, was identified as essential for sustainable and inclusive solutions.

While participants largely agreed on the importance of addressing malnutrition and supporting breastfeeding, some divergences arose around cultural practices, implementation strategies, and resource allocation. Caregivers emphasized practical and affordable solutions suited to their context, whereas health workers focused on adherence to recommended health practices. Negotiating these differences fostered a rich and inclusive dialogue, allowing participants to balance local realities with scientific guidance.

Overall, the event felt dynamic, engaging, and highly participatory. There was a strong sense of shared commitment among participants to improve child nutrition outcomes and support mothers in their caregiving roles. The dialogue provided a valuable platform for exchanging experiences, learning from diverse perspectives, and co-developing actionable strategies that are locally relevant, culturally sensitive, and sustainable. Participants left the session with renewed motivation, a clearer understanding of the critical role of breastfeeding and maternal nutrition, and concrete steps to take within their communities.

This Nutrition Dialogue not only reinforced the importance of community engagement in addressing malnutrition but also demonstrated that inclusive, evidence-informed discussions can generate practical, context-specific solutions while fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The insights from this event will contribute to the synthesis report for the Nutrition for Growth Summit in March 2025, offering guidance for policy and programmatic interventions aimed at improving child nutrition in rural Rwanda.