

The dialogue convened brought together a diverse group of stakeholders deeply engaged in addressing child malnutrition in Northern Rwanda, particularly through the Positive Deviance Hearth (PDH) model implemented by Caritas Byumba and World Vision Rwanda. Participants included community health workers, local leaders, caregivers, nutritionists, and implementing partners, all committed to sharing experiences and insights on improving nutrition outcomes for children under five.

The event was characterized by a strong spirit of collaboration and mutual respect, with participants openly exchanging knowledge and challenges encountered during PDH implementation. The dialogue was anchored in the shared recognition that malnutrition remains a critical public health issue linked closely to poverty, limited access to diverse foods, sanitation challenges, and cultural practices. Many expressed hope and motivation drawn from the tangible progress seen in their communities—children moving from underweight to healthier nutritional statuses thanks to the hearth sessions.

The discussion topics focused on the effectiveness of the PDH model in rehabilitating malnourished children, the importance of using local, affordable foods, and the critical role of caregivers and community volunteers in sustaining these efforts. Participants valued the practical nature of the hearth sessions, where learning was combined with hands-on cooking demonstrations and hygiene education. This approach empowered caregivers with knowledge and skills that they could immediately apply at home, fostering sustainable behavior change.

Key nutrition challenges highlighted included the scarcity of certain nutritious foods during some seasons, ongoing poverty limiting household food security, and gaps in water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure that exacerbate malnutrition risk. Cultural food taboos were also noted as barriers that need sensitive but deliberate addressing.

Views diverged mainly on prioritization of interventions. While consensus existed on the importance of community-led nutrition education and support, some advocated for scaling up food production activities, others emphasized hygiene and sanitation improvements, and some called for enhanced training and resourcing of community health workers. These differences reflected the diverse roles and experiences of participants but also enriched the dialogue by introducing multiple perspectives.

The dialogue underscored the critical importance of partnership—between local authorities, health workers, NGOs, and communities themselves—in designing and implementing nutrition programs. Many appreciated the strong cooperation between Caritas Byumba and World Vision Rwanda, which was seen as a model of effective collaboration that enhances resource use and community trust.

From a personal perspective, the dialogue felt inspiring and hopeful. Despite the challenges, there was a palpable sense of shared purpose and determination. Participants were not just discussing problems but actively contributing to solutions, learning from each other, and building networks of support. The event fostered openness, trust, and a collective commitment to improving child nutrition sustainably.

Overall, the dialogue provided a rich platform to reflect on progress, confront challenges, and strategize future actions. It highlighted that nutrition interventions are most successful when they are community-based, context-sensitive, and inclusive of all stakeholders—from caregivers to policy makers. As preparations continue toward Nutrition for Growth 2025, the insights and relationships forged in this dialogue offer a strong foundation for continued progress in the fight against child malnutrition in Rwanda.