

## **BURUNDI: IRIN Feature - New hope for the malnourished**

GATUMBA, BUJUMBURA RURAL, 2 July (IRIN) - One by one, the new arrivals step out of the van, some very weak, needing a helping hand from the nurses at the Gatumba therapeutic feeding centre in Bujumbura Rural province, near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The 14 malnourished and ailing old women, mothers and children, from different parts of the province, will spend the next 20-30 days at the centre receiving treatment and food. "This is another opportunity to bring hope to people whose lives are wasting away because of malnutrition," Aimable Kavuye, a medical worker at the centre, told IRIN. "Malnutrition has become another big problem in this area," he said, adding that in recent years, it had been exacerbated by war, poverty, malaria and the existence of large families.

Bujumbura Rural province has a total population of 456,891 people. It has 16 supplementary feeding centres (SFCs) which, by 31 May, benefited 6,498 people. Gatumba is the only therapeutic feeding centre (TFC) in the province and was helping some 661 people by the end of May.

The centre, officially launched in 1999, is run by the Italian NGO Groupe de Volontariat Civil (GVC). Nutritional experts from the centre regularly screen the nutritional condition of patients in the provincial SFCs to identify the severely malnourished, who are then taken to Gatumba for treatment.

"They are sometimes also identified by social workers at various dispensaries within the province who send them here," Kavuye explained. "Some come here in critical condition. Some of them are almost naked, so we have employed a tailor who makes clothes for them."

"On arrival, they are registered, examined and then treated accordingly and put on diets recommended by our nutrition experts," the camp manager Jean-Patric Pilipili told IRIN. "The examination sometimes includes carrying out tests in the laboratory which is situated within the centre."

In between the meals and treatments, the patients and their caretakers keep themselves busy making bags, ladies purses, and decorations from the wrapping paper used for food and medicine. "They also help in keeping the centre clean," Pilipili added.

Between 60 and 70 percent of the patients at the centre are aged 14 and above. The total number of beneficiaries in the centre is about twice as high, as each patient is normally accompanied by a family member. The centre does not take in men for fear of being accused of "helping the rebels". "At the end of the treatment, the patients are discharged and some

basic items like cooking pans, plates, cups, a pail, a hoe, soap and food rations are given to them to carry home," Pilipili said. They are also given a bus ticket.

"They are usually grateful to the centre at the end of their stay when they look at the changes in their bodies or in those of their dependants," he noted.

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