

Indian Association restores

By Patrick Okine

They sat quietly in rows. Some had arrived as early as 7:00am. One by one, they were called inside. The others patiently waited for their turn.

It was a crowd that spanned all ages - from children as young as just a few months to octogenarians. The usually quiet Lira Mental Unit at the main referral hospital has been a beehive of activity since last week, thanks to a medical camp organised by the Indian Association of Uganda in conjunction with Indo-Africa Charitable Society in Canada (IACS) and Indo-Africa Trust of the UK.

The medical camp has become an annual event on the Indian Association calendar. However, this year's camp is special in that it's not only the 10th, but is also a gift to Ugandans in celebration of India's 70th independence anniversary.

Rishor Dattani, the Indian Association Secretary, said the medical camps and related activities such as heart surgery projects and blood donation drives give the Indian community in Uganda immense pleasure.

"We as a community have many activities in Kampala but felt there was a huge need in faraway places. Lira was chosen to meet that need. The best part of this camp is not only the financial aid this team is bringing, but the experienced doctors and medical personal from western world working with local doctors, paramedics and nursing staff to help build capacity in rural Uganda. In the same spirit, next year's camp will be held at Gulu," said Dattani.

CAMPS GROWTH IN NUMBERS
IACS founder and president, Vasant Lakhani, said over the past decade, the charity has aided 106,865 patients through the medical camps in Uganda. They also built a vocational

Lira residents waiting for medical attention during the camp at Lira mental unit. Photos by Patrick Okine



Patients from the neighbouring districts of Otuke, Kole, Oyam, Dokolo, Apac and Amolatar have flocked the camp

school in Tororo.

He estimates that 30,000 patients will be treated in Lira, making it the highest turnout ever registered in a single camp. At Lira, patients came

from the neighbouring districts of Alebtong, Otuke, Kole, Oyam, Dokolo, Apac, Amolatar and Pader.

Lakhani said the number of patients visiting the medical

camp has risen from 6,000 in 2007 to 13,000 in Tororo, 16,000 in Iganga and about 21,000 in Kamuli in the subsequent years.

"This means the charity

has created a positive impact judging from the momentum the medical camps have gained yearly," Lakhani said.

Lakhani disclosed that the financial outlay for the medical

Sh181m
The amount of money that will be spent on the Lira camp

30,000
The number of patients expected to be treated during the camp

camp has risen from \$8,000 (sh28.9m) during the first camp in 2007 to \$44,000 (sh159.2m) while \$50,000 (sh181m) will be spent on the Lira camp, which will be started on August 8 and will end this Friday.

The major sponsors for this year's camp are Nile Agro Industries Ltd, MMF Agro Industries, Indian Association of Uganda, Charwood Licensors, Lions Club, Aileen Uganda, Impex Ltd, Translink, Lajana Pharmacy and Keshwala Group of Companies.

"The money is used for procuring medicines or drugs, facilitating medical workers and patients where necessary," Lakhani said.

The camps bring together 20 medical specialists in various fields, who conduct operations or surgery, admit and make referrals where necessary.

"We have so far referred four patients to Mulago Hospital for further investigation and treatment," said Dr John Bosco gynaecologist from Mulago Hospital, who is part of the medical team.

John Maril, the assistant mobilisation officer Indo-Africa, said the common ailments registered at the Lira camp include malaria, Hepatitis B, dental problems, diarrhoea, cough, flu and eye conditions. However, severe and complicated cases related to gynaecology, paediatrics, orthopaedics and cancer have also been recorded.

Health minister Dr Aceng listening to the founder of IACS, Lakhani after opening the medical camp in Lira



health of Lira residents

DISEASE INCIDENCES

While opening the camp on Friday, the health minister, Dr Jane Aceng, said malaria disease and healthy burden in Uganda. She regretted that many diseases in Uganda are caused by ignorance.

"Many sicknesses in Uganda are preventable, people fall sick because they do not wash their hands after visiting toilets and some do not have toilets in their home," Aceng said.

"People are also falling sick because they have deserted vegetables in preference to fatty meat, which is dangerous for human health," she added.

Lira district health officer, Dr Patrick Ocen, corroborated the minister's statements, saying about 60% of the diseases registered at the health facilities are preventable.

Aceng commended the Indian Association and Indo-Africa, saying there is need to concentrate in Lira district since the overwhelming number of

BETWEEN THE LINES:

The camp in Lira started on August 8 and will close this Friday

patients who turned for the medical camp was testimony of the need for medical services.

Lakhani said the camps are a big undertaking, co-ordinating and seeking local and international volunteers, pharmacists and nurses, securing medical supplies and seeking partnership with local hosts and hospitals, he said.

"Initially, the main objective was to lead medical and dental to communities that would not have access to doctors and medicine, but we decided to come to Uganda," Lakhani explained.

"But we later spread out because we cannot see people dying or suffering, we need to do something to save life," he added.

According to Lakhani, health is a priority in life, education comes second, followed by access to clean water.

James Opiyo, a resident of Kole district, said he frequented Alebtong health unit for medical service, only to be told the drugs had run out of stock.

"I wish they could continue for one month, people would be treated well because our health facility is better and does not have healthworkers who reside at work stations," he added.

"And above all, sometimes, there are no drugs," Opiyo said.

Indo-Africa relies on donations and efforts of volunteers to conduct the much needed medical camp.

"This shows that people are sick, but could not get treatment in the government health units because there is always shortage of drugs and poor services," said Richard Oim, a resident of Abii sub-county in Alebtong.

Oim came to seek treatment over his long time body pain.



IACS founder Lakhani, addressing the patients



Over 20 specialists were assembled for the medical camp



Patients lining up for medicine after the free checkups

Voices



Gloria Opiyo
We have a serious problem of poor medical services so health services are badly needed in the community. Abject poverty forces people to suffer quietly.



Margaret Engola
I had an eye problem for a very long time. These people have given me drugs and I hope my sight will be restored.



Jamilah Bua
I am from Abako sub-county in Alebtong district. I had an eye problem, but I have been given reading glasses and drugs. If they could continue for two months, people will be relieved.

INDIAN WOMEN ASSOCIATION

The Board of Trustees, Executive committee and members of the Indian Women Association congratulate the Prime Minister of India Hon. Shri Narendra Damodhar Modi, the Indian High Commissioner to Uganda and all the Indian Community in Uganda upon celebrating the 70th Independence anniversary.

Jai hind!!!

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