

North India Cultural Association to give 200 free eye surgeries

By Billy Rwothungeyo

As India marks 70th Independence Day today, members of the North Indian Cultural Association of Uganda are in final preparations for yet another community health engagement; a three-day free cataract surgeries camp in Kampala.

The camp, which will start on August 26 at Mulago Hospital, will be the 15th that the Indian community has held in Uganda.

Dharmendra Agarwal, the chairman of the North Indian Cultural Association of Uganda, says 215 Ugandans will receive free cataract surgeries at the health camp. The Ministry of Health, upon request, provided Mulago Hospital as a venue for the surgeries.

"We offer treatment to people with visual impairments and optical surgeries to those who are on the verge of blindness, especially children," Agarwal says.

"Many Ugandans have sight problems. On average, we receive about 300 people at our health camps; about 50% of these need spectacles and 15 to 20% require cataract surgeries," he says.

The association has previously held camps in Rushere, Lugazi, Mityana and Kampala suburbs such as Kamwoyaka and Naguru, among others.

Agarwal wants the medical camps to be expanded in the near future so that they can reach other parts of the country. Already, Luwero is slated to have one eye camp in September.

More sensitisation needed

Agarwal says many eye conditions can be prevented through proper hygiene practices and,

thus has called on partners to join hands with the association and sensitise Ugandans on how best to take care of their eyes.

"Even something as simple as washing eyes, many people do not do. There are people who use herbs on their eyes. There was this boy who sought treatment at the Rushere camp, the cornea in his eye was damaged, but his father was insisting on using herbs," he says.

Dharmendra Agarwal, the chairman of the North Indian Cultural Association of Uganda

300

■ The number of people who attend health camps with eye-related problems

15

■ The number of health camps by the Indian community



Why Indians are charitable?

Under the Mother Indian Association of Uganda, there are about 30 other associations in the country. One common trait among these associations is their charitable activities, mainly in the area of health.

The North Indian Cultural Association of Uganda has scanned 5,000 people with eye complications and distributed 2,449 spectacles. Dozens of Ugandan amputees have been given free limbs by Narayan Seva Sansthan Uganda, which has also carried out corrective surgeries on children's limbs.

So why are the Indian associations doing these charitable deeds? Dharmendra Agarwal, the chairman of the North Indian Cultural Association of Uganda, says these actions are part of what they believe in as a community.

"In our culture, we believe that it is not enough to only look after yourself, but those you live with in the community as well," he says.

"I have been living here for 15 years, so if I see that someone needs help that I can offer, help that could save someone's sight, why not?" he adds.

In a recent interview with the *New Vision*, Dr Rajni Tailor, the president of the Hindu Council of Africa and past chairman of board of trustees of the Indian Association of Uganda, says indigenous Ugandan businessmen who are in privileged positions in society should also be more charitable.

HAPPY INDIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY