

NIRA staff kick off wellness programme

By Kalungi Kabuye

Last year, the head of Public Service, Lucy Nakyobe, directed all government agencies to allocate at least two hours weekly for physical exercise to promote staff health and mitigate lifestyle diseases. The directive conveyed the importance of preserving staff health and mitigating the burden of diseases.

So, last Friday, the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) started off the programme with a WellFest, a wellness programme, at their headquarters at the Kololo Independence Grounds.

"The head of civil service asked that all government institutions prioritise the well-being of staff and all government employees," said Angella Bukirwa, the NIRA human resources manager.

"So, it is mandatory to introduce wellness activities in all organisations. At NIRA, amidst our daily lives and struggles, we work with the public. They project their worries on us and yet we have to serve them. So, we decided to launch a wellness scheme for our staff countrywide, so that we can maintain a healthy work environment and serve Ugandans better."

The WellFest NIRA programme was organised by Gem Zavama, a creative arts company headed

BETWEEN THE LINES

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by Sheila Katorobo Katumwa, wife of renowned jazz artiste Isaiiah Katumwa. It had sessions led by experts on psychological wellbeing, non-communicable diseases (NCD) prevention, gender mainstreaming and HIV/AIDS awareness.

The NIRA executive director, Rosemary Kisémbó, explained that it was necessary to pause and reflect on staff well-being.

"We want to explore the different aspects of our well-being," she said. "This includes mental health and key health parameters such as HIV, sickle cell, malaria, PSA, HPV, syphilis and RBS. We will engage in conversations about HIV/AIDS in the workplace, NCD prevention and also unlock the creative side within each of us."

Dr Daniel Byamukama, the head of HIV prevention at the Uganda AIDS Commission, led the discussion about HIV/AIDS and emphasised that the nature of the work of NIRA staff – engaging with many members

of the public – makes them especially high risk.

Phoebe Mutonyi, the gender mainstreaming and safe guarding advisor of Bayimba Foundation, discussed gender mainstreaming, while Dr Martina Kabenge addressed mental health in the work place. She explained that NIRA staff interact with millions of Ugandans, while often having to deal with their own issues.

Ivan Phillip Baguma, a registered dietician nutritionist, explained how healthy eating reduces the incidences of NCDs.

The programme ended with a dance session and Bukirwa was happy with how the day went.

"We shall also have an exercise session twice a week – every Tuesday and Thursday," she said.

Arts+ was the defining feature of WellFest NIRA. It is a framework that positions creative practice as a driver within broader sectors – in this case, workplace wellness. By combining dance, poetry, music and other arts, Arts+ can translate technical health knowledge into accessible, engaging experiences.

At NIRA, artistes acted as interlocutors in workplace wellness, bridging professional health information with everyday staff realities.