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# **GET UP!**

## **BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR PRISONERS IN BURUNDI**

**DECEMBER 2016 - NOVEMBER 2017**

**PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS  
DECEMBER 2016 - PRESENT**

## 1.0 Introduction

Get Up! Building a Better Future for Prisoners, is a one year, sports for peace and development pilot project implemented in Burundi, from December 2016 to November 2017. The project supports the holistic development of male and female inmates (ages 16 – 30 years) to improve their wellbeing and develop essential life skills through participation in structured sports and play-based activities. The project has so far reached 2,178 inmates in the two prisons of Muramvya and Mpimba in Muramvya and Bujumbura Mairie Provinces respectively. Through collaborative efforts with the prisons' administration (Directors of Prisons, Deputy Directors and Social Affairs Officers), the project has facilitated the identification and training of 2 Head Coaches (one per prison, who are members of the Prisons' Administration) and 20 Coaches (13 in Mpimba and 7 in Muramvya). These Coaches were selected amongst the inmates, and support the Head Coaches with organising, training and implementing regular recreational activities in the prison facilities. Both Head Coaches and Coaches were trained in the use of sport and play-based approaches, to guide inmates towards self-improvement and attainment of life skills that enhance personal development as well as social cohesion amongst inmates and prison authorities.

## 2.0 Project Achievements for the period December 2016 - present

**Outcome 1:** Improved holistic development of inmates through play and sports-based activities.

### Regular access to developmental activities for inmates in Mpimba and Muramvya prisons.

Prior to the “Get up! Building a better future for prisoners” project, inmates had limited or no access to sports and play. Negative attitudes towards such activities centred on the environment of mistrust between the warders and the prisoners and the possibility that inmates would use these activities as an opportunity to escape. Challenging these ingrained attitudes towards prisoners and confinement, RTP's engagement and dialogue with prison authorities paved the way for the introduction of regular sports and play activities within prison facilities. Presently, sport and play activities have been integrated into the daily lives of inmates at the two prisons. As well, the methodology has been adopted into the prisons' management frameworks. Daily schedules feature structured sport and play activities and inmates overwhelmingly engage in these activities.

**Gaudence, 39**, Social Affairs Officer, Muramvya Prison

*“I am in charge of all services provided inside the prison. Since the project started, my duties now include the facilitation of the play-based activities; I store and maintain the sports equipment, I have authorised the participation of female inmates alongside their male counterparts. The introduction of this project has added a new dimension to my work and to the lives of the prisoners we supervise.”*

### Improved health outcomes as a result of sport and play-based activities

Previously, confinement without regular activity resulted into many health challenges for inmates, ranging from cardiovascular diseases (like hypertension) to numbness, weight gain, respiratory infections, body aches etc. The introduction of regular sport and play activities has resulted directly in improved health and wellbeing of inmates and decreased incidence of disease in the two prisons. This unique benefit of increased physical wellbeing is complimentary to the psychosocial benefits recorded amongst inmates participating in RTP programs. Inmates report proactive efforts to adopt improved health practices, attitudes and ultimately change their behaviour towards other inmates.

Prison authorities have observed improved mental health conditions among inmates previously managing conditions such as stress, depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); most of the inmates are detainees from the 2015 political crisis in Burundi.



**Odette, 33**, Chief Nurse, Muramvya Prison

*“The medical profession is aware of the benefits of regular exercise; I used to see many patients who were suffering as a result of lack of exercise and isolation, with stress-related complaints and pains which did not respond to medication. Now those who participate in the sport and play activities make less frequent visits or have no disease at all. When I counsel the prisoners, they speak more positively about the future and are adapting better to their circumstances.”*



**Boniface, 26**, Inmate since December 2015

*“The first year I was in prison, I suffered terribly from ankle pains, and general body weakness. I went to see the Nurse several times a month, but the medicine did not work. My family has not visited me because they live far off, and this puts many thoughts in my head. But I have been playing football and volleyball four times a week, and I feel so much better; I have not been to the infirmary in seven months. I always liked sports, and I am glad I can still play in here, especially since there is not much else to do.”*



**Jean Bosco, 21**, Inmate since December 2015

*“During my first months here, I fell ill and was hospitalized for a day; smoke inhalation from the wood fires gave me respiratory problems. My back ached constantly and I was so stressed, I was determined to escape. For me, participating in sports has taken away my headaches and back pains; I feel healthier and much less stressed because I have made many friends. I hope to be free one day, but I am no longer planning to escape.”*

### **Enhanced social interactions and leisure time for inmates.**

Participating Inmates in the two prisons utilize sports and play activities to socialise and interact with each other. Teams developed as part of the organizational structuring of the activities compete good-naturedly as other inmates watch and support with enthusiasm. Games and activities are structured to fit the improvised play spaces in the crowded prison. Through trained coaches, inmates are organised into small teams, playing several rounds of each game so that all inmates have a chance to participate. After each event, coaches guide the teams through discussion and debate of relevant issues, using the Reflect-Connect-Apply (RCA) approach which is unique to play-based learning. Inmates examine their experiences, relate those experiences to what they already know and apply those lessons to their daily lives. The approach has strongly supported social cohesion and trust among inmates.

### **Improved relations amongst inmates, and warders**

The existing political environment in Burundi has resulted in the incarceration of prisoners based on their political and ethnic affiliations. Prisoners include ex-soldiers accused of mutiny and treason, youth and minors caught in riots, expectant mothers, ex-policemen etc. Mistrust is part of prison life because inmates from each side of the political and ethnic divide are thrust into a situation where they must interact in a contained space. The introduction of sports and play activities offers unique opportunities for inmates to interact neutrally and get to know each other better. It is through activities such as sports that inmates develop skills of teamwork, cooperation and collaboration, positive communication and social cohesion based on mutual trust and respect. As well, there have been improvements in the relationships between inmates and the prison cadre. Traditionally fraught with tension and conflict, interactions between the two groups have been transformed by the introduction of sport and play activities, specifically because new bonds are required to facilitate sports and games.

**Samuel, 37**, Deputy Director Muramvya Prison

*“In a crowded space like this, interpersonal conflicts are common. The prison was built to accommodate 100 prisoners, but currently has 600. Violence and aggression between prisoners tended to occur several times a month, but we see only one or no altercations per month since the program became well established. Regular sports have led to more positive interactions between all of us; there is more tolerance of differences, increased cooperation and avoidance of conflict amongst the inmates.”*

**Improved prison’s infrastructure and administrative frameworks**

Buttressing RTP’s sport and play based approach in Muramvya prison, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has constructed a quality, permanent play space customized for handball, basketball and volley ball games. The space can also be adapted for other learning activities, and is a vast improvement on the existing space which could only accommodate a few prisoners at a time. Successes in the two prisons have led to growing demand by other prisons to introduce similar programs in their administrative frameworks. Muyinga and Ruyigi prisons have formally expressed their interest in the introduction of sport and play based activities at their facilities. They have also requested for inter – prison Sports competitions that will inevitably nurture collaborative relationships between prison facilities and, hopefully, improve prisoners’ environment.

**Outcome 2: Improved life skills of Mpimba and Muramvya prisoners through context-specific, socio-educational activities.**

**Improved life skills of inmates**

In the prisons, trained coaches and coach-trainers were equipped with didactic materials to facilitate a transfer of knowledge and life skills through recreational and socio-educational play and sports-based activities which empower inmates with improved self-esteem, confidence, collaboration, communication, leadership and cooperation skills. Inmates who have co-opted these skills see the benefits in improved ability to function optimally despite their circumstances. For example, several inmates have demonstrated excellent leadership qualities, and have undertaken major roles and responsibilities in a prison agricultural project.

**Improved communication transforming attitudes and behaviour**

Sport and Play activities have proven to be a successful vehicle for facilitating communication amongst inmates, and between the inmates and prison authorities. Every sporting activity includes a Reflect-Connect-Apply session that allows teams to discuss themes of social cohesion, mutual coexistence and health related information. Inmates communicate candidly to express their dissatisfactions and complaints and Prison authorities have also acquired skills to respond aptly to these complaints, provided solutions, thereby peacefully resolving potential conflicts. As a result of this exercise, inmates learn to communicate proactively to resolve differences and maintain peaceful coexistence with other inmates.

Youths in the two prisons benefit from the communication sessions which render them less susceptible to engagement in delinquent behavior during and after their jail terms. There is less occurrence of violence and other risky undertakings such as escape and/ or suicide.

**Diana, 25**, Incarcerated December 2015

*“Being in prison is very difficult; it took me a long time to accept my sentence and during those months, I avoided conversation, kept to myself and didn’t see the benefit of making friends. I have since started playing volleyball and found myself taking part in the discussions afterwards. I listened to others and realized they are struggling just like I am, that we are all in the same situation together. These days my mind is more relaxed; I have accepted the reality of my situation.”*

**Outcome 3:** Progress towards Gender Equality in access to beneficial prison services for inmates at Muramvya and Mpimba Prisons.

### Gender sensitive approaches adapted in the prisons

Female inmates actively engage in sport and play based activities alongside their male counterparts, and are thereby equally exposed to the positive benefits of the program. As a result of this culture of equality, women in both prisons confidently participate in football and volley ball games with male inmates. Female coaches lead and organize male-dominated teams, also guiding them through the Reflect-Connect-Apply sessions. This has set the stage for female representation in all other aspects of prison life.

## 3.0 Sustaining project gains

Project sustainability is dependent on the adoption of the Right To Play sport and play-based approach into the existing administrative framework, with prison authorities planning and implementing the sport and play based activities. A member of the prison's administration is the head coach in each of the prisons and RTP has an informal understanding with prison authorities to minimize transfers to other prisons of trained coaches in order to sustain the delivery of project activities.

## 4.0 Lessons learned

- Sport and play-based activities serve as a rehabilitative tool for inmates. The approach cultivates positive behaviour, changes inmates' attitudes towards their situations and fosters social cohesion. Sport and play pre-occupies inmates and gives them a platform to share their innovative experiences, shapes their development focus and harnesses their productive contribution to the economy. Inmates discover and develop hidden talents and also shape their leadership abilities, setting them on a rehabilitative course.

## 5.0 What Next?

-  **Advocacy:** RTP intends to embark on a policy influencing campaign to ensure integration of sport and play activities into the management framework of prisons in Burundi.
-  **Creating and strengthening collaborative partnerships and networks:** For sustainability purposes, RTP plans to pursue collaborative partnerships and networks to build on the successes of the pilot. Engagement in a Public private partnership (PPP) will leverage resources, promote learning, scale up activities and also sustain sport and play-based activities.

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COUNTING PROJECT GAINS (DECEMBER 2016 - PRESENT)