

Youth Volunteers in Community Policing (RYVCP) together with Rwanda National Police (RNP) have built 223,104 organic gardens across the country in a campaign dedicated to promoting a healthy diet and fighting malnutrition and stunting.

The month-long campaign supported by the National Child Development Agency (NCDA), which concluded this Monday, June 6, saw more than 100 organic gardens built in each of the 2,148 cells across the country.

The aim of this initiative is to promote a healthy diet while fighting malnutrition and stunting.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Teddy Ruyenzi, the deputy commissioner for Community Policing in RNP, said that the initiative is part of human security activities that bring together the force and members of youth volunteers to support various national development programmes.

“Stunting and malnutrition are both health and security issues, and ending it is a collective responsibility,” said ACP Ruyenzi.

The World Health Organization “(WHO) also indicates that around 45 per cent of deaths among children under five years of age are linked to undernutrition, and mostly occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Eric Bayisenge, the executive secretary for Rwanda Youth Volunteers in Community Policing, said that fighting stunting falls under the renewed partnership with the NCDA.

“Youth volunteers were founded on the ideology of patriotism to create a selfless and responsive generation that supports the national development agenda. So, this specific campaign, which we conducted jointly with Rwanda National Police was to implement our renewed agreement with NCDA against stunting and malnutrition, child protection and to monitor Early Childhood Development centres,” Bayisenge said.

He added that some ECDs in communities are not utilized by parents and that the awareness campaign will continue to sensitize parents on the importance of the centres, which provide children with holistic access to early learning, good nutrition, hygiene and protection.

Adeline Ufitinema, the food and nutrition specialist at NCDA, said that kitchen

gardens provide foods rich in minerals and vitamins such as VitA in cabbage, carrots, broccoli, spinach and other leafy greens or vegetables complementing the other available food at households level to make a healthy balanced diet.

“Kitchen garden provides diverse fresh fruits and vegetables addressing the agricultural role in improving nutritional outcomes at household level through own production and own consumption. They are easy to construct and maintain in the backyard, and in case of surplus, they can be the source of income when sold to buy other nutritious foods,” Ufitinema said.

To ensure a healthy growth of a child, medics recommend that maternal and infant feeding starts from the conception until 2 years of age to prevent stunting; early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding from birth through the first six months.

They further recommend consumption of iron supplements by pregnant women, dietary diversity for women with emphasis on food sources of iron and foods that enhance iron absorption; dietary diversity for children 6–23 months, with emphasis on food sources of iron and vitamin A and foods that enhance iron absorption; and optimal meal frequency for children 6–23 months of age.