

PAHO GHANA

MONTHLY REVIEW

January 2013

SOCIAL JUSTICE				
HR CLUBS	SOCIAL WELFARE	SLUM	HR FOCAL	POLICE ADVOCACY
	BOYS REMAND GIRLS CORRECTIONAL	HR DEFENDERS TEACHERS' TRAINING SLUM LEGAL DESK		SCHOOLS COMMUNITY
PRO / PLACEMENTS		RESEARCH		OFFICE RESEARCH
LEGAL AID SOCIAL FACILITY		CHILD TRAFFICKING WITCHCRAFT		RIGHTS OF WOMEN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



January's Volunteers



A team meeting at PAHO

SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

1. HUMAN RIGHTS CLUBS

The Human Rights Clubs Project was created by the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) through an Amnesty International initiative. It involves teams of our volunteers visiting Accra high schools to lead the student members of their respective Human Rights Clubs in discussion and debate on a broad range of past and present human rights issues. With the New Year came two new Human Rights Clubs, one at Teshie and another at Nungua, joining the existing and highly successful club at Accra High School. Most of January was spent brainstorming topics and preparing discussion materials in preparation for the first sessions that began in the last week of January. Some topics that were proposed include the death penalty, the right to life, the right to education, terrorism, domestic violence and rape, armed conflict and humanitarian aid. On the 25th of January the lead volunteers of each club visited Accra High School to have a preliminary discussion on how the classes would run and to find out which subjects were of most interest to the students. It was



Josh Franz (Ger) leading the Accra High Human Rights Club

obvious that the students were passionate about this project and expressed a desire to pass their knowledge on to other members of the community, particularly the older generations who had not have the benefit of such programs in their youth.

2. SOCIAL WELFARE FACILITY

The Social Welfare Facility is an institution for Ghanaian children who are in trouble with the law, who have found themselves in a dire situation. It is located just around the corner from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office and is split into three separate facilities. The Boys' Remand Centre is a detention centre for boys awaiting trial, while the Girls' Correctional Centre is detention centre for girls who have already been convicted of a criminal offence, and the Children's Shelter is for the boys and girls who have been abused or who have run away from home. January saw our Girls' Correctional team spend four hours each week filling the gaps in the education that the inmates of centre receive, including lessons on basic English language skills, mathematics and fundamental human rights. The Boys' Remand team followed a similar lesson plan.

It has become apparent that the children in this institution have had a varied exposure to education, but that in each case that level is substandard. The PAHO teams are able to give the children the one-on-one support in their lessons that will hopefully encourage their enthusiasm to learn and their potential for a more promising future. This project remains ongoing, and the plan is to improve the lesson structure and record keeping so as to better monitor the progress of the students over the course of their detention.

3. THE SLUM PROJECT

Perhaps the most popular and physically demanding project currently in operation at PAHO, the Slum Project sees two teams of volunteers visiting the Old Fadama slum in the west of Accra, a shanty town of nearly 100,000 residents, on a weekly basis in conjunction with WISEEP (Women In Slums Economic Empowerment Organisation).



Lachlan Bongers (Aus) addresses the HR Defenders in Old Fadama

Our Human Rights Defenders branch discusses a wide range of topics with members of society who have a passion for the protection of human rights in their fragile communities. The Teachers' Training branch provides a similar service to school teachers working in the slum, with lessons focussed more on discipline and the rights of children. PAHO intends for this outreach to operate for six months, and will lead to accreditation for the attendees who are committed to learning and who successfully complete our regular examinations. January

saw the first sessions of this outreach, with introductory lessons outlining what will be taught and our expectations of the attendees.

Our teams are currently looking at ways to encourage more interaction and questions during the sessions, including stronger links between the material that will be taught and contemporary Ghanaian life.



The Human Rights Defenders with the PAHO team



The Human Rights Defenders with the PAHO team

4. LEGAL SERVICES DESK

Another PAHO operation in the Old Fadama Slum, the Legal Services Desk is a rudimentary drop-in legal service for a community with effectively no access to legal resolution. It is again run in conjunction with WISEEP, and where possible at least one team-member will be a law graduate or final-year law student. In January the team completed summaries of the Criminal Code, the Marriage Ordinance Act, the Labour Act, the Intestate Succession Law Act and the Persons with Disability Act. It is intended that these summaries improve the accessibility of the laws of Ghana to underprivileged citizens, and make it easier to understand the substantive law and recognise breaches.

The Legal Services Desk team hope to increase their client intake in February, with some mediation sessions already booked in. The team members will also work independently on continuing their summaries and developing a strategy to better advertise the Desk in the community it serves.

5. HR FOCAL

Our HR Focal project provides human rights education to focal members of the community, such as elders or religious leaders, in the hope that their particular influence in society will see our message trickle-down to those who hold them in such high esteem. Our current 'focal group' is school teachers – an obvious choice in our attempt to reach younger Ghanaians in the hope that they grow up with a strong sense of humanist values. Though it took a while for this project

to gather momentum in January, waiting for schools to reopen after the New Year, the team developed the program they intend to follow for the first outreach in early February, which

will take place at the Vision Intellectual School. The first lesson will cover the basic concept of human rights, the rights and responsibilities of children and teachers, and the role of the teacher in the monitoring and protection of children at school and at home.





Images from the HR Focal session

6. POLICE ADVOCACY

The Advocacy project is a new initiative jointly coordinated by PAHO, the Ghanaian Police and the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DoVVSU), a police department established in 1998 to respond to cases of domestic violence. The purpose of this project is once again concerned with awareness, and our volunteers visit communities and schools in various villages outside of Accra, with members of the above institutions, to educate citizens on basic human rights, and crimes involving domestic violence and rape. The Advocacy team conducted their first outreach at the very end of December, addressing a large group of students aged between 10 and 16. Following a discussion of the key areas listed above, the team proceeded to provide practical information regarding what to do should any of the attendees become victims of domestic violence, rape or defilement, and the penalties that perpetrators can expect to suffer if they are caught.

Building a relationship of trust between the communities and the Police / DoVVSU is a target of this project. Many citizens hold the Police in low regard for various reasons, such as corruption and past failures to protect their families and friends against criminal activity. This forum gives the Police a chance to understand the concerns of the communities and explain what they are doing and will do in the future to address them.





Images from the first session of the Police Advocacy Project



LEGAL AID

Volunteers requiring a law-focused internship and supervision from an experienced Ghanaian lawyer often join the Legal Aid Placement. This involves full time participation at a government-funded drop-in legal aid clinic in Accra, where interns will shadow and work closely with the co-ordinating lawyer, meet clients, attend court and mediations, draft documents and assist in any other way that is required. Our volunteers deal with legal matters ranging from property disputes to criminal defence to constitutional matters.

PAHO sent three volunteers to Legal Aid in January. All three thoroughly enjoyed their time at the clinic, but also formed opinions on how it could be improved, especially the need to overcome procedural deficiencies, poor communication with clients, and the 'Ghana Maybe Time' mentality. They all appreciated the opportunity to spend some days on outreaches through the PAHO office to complement their Legal Aid internships.

RESEARCH

In January we said goodbye to our two long-standing researchers Isabel and Lisanne, who spent three and a half months investigating Witchcraft and Child-Trafficking respectively. Isabel's research delved into the causes of the continued existence of witch camps (such as the lack of understanding regarding mental illness in Ghana), the relationship between Christianity, witchcraft and the law, and the stigma that attaches to affected individuals. Lissane's task was to report on the legal processes and procedures involved in fighting child-trafficking in the Volta region, and in particular the steps that a victim of child-trafficking has to take to see a conviction of his or her aggressor. It was a pleasure to have these enthusiastic researchers with us for such a long time and we look forward to reading their research papers at the conclusion of their studies.

The Human Rights Office also began group research tasks for all Social Justice volunteers to investigate the public perception of and laws relating to the rights of women, the rights of children, and the rights of people living with disabilities. Preliminary planning has begun and the teams intend to hit the streets in early February to conduct public surveys.

CONCLUSION

A slow beginning to January (due to the Ghanaian New Year celebrations that tend to grind to a halt very gradually, as well as the inauguration of President Mahama early in the year) was followed by a rapid acceleration of activity in the PAHO office during the second half of the month. All projects are now in full swing, and one glance at our Project Plan reveals that next month will be a very busy one indeed. We also say farewell to many volunteers from the southern hemisphere returning to the start of the university year. Thank you for your time, your dedication, your enthusiasm, and we wish you all the very best in the future.

Warm regards,

Oliver Shepherd

Human Rights Co-Ordinator
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A young girl of the Old Fadama slum