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Ghana

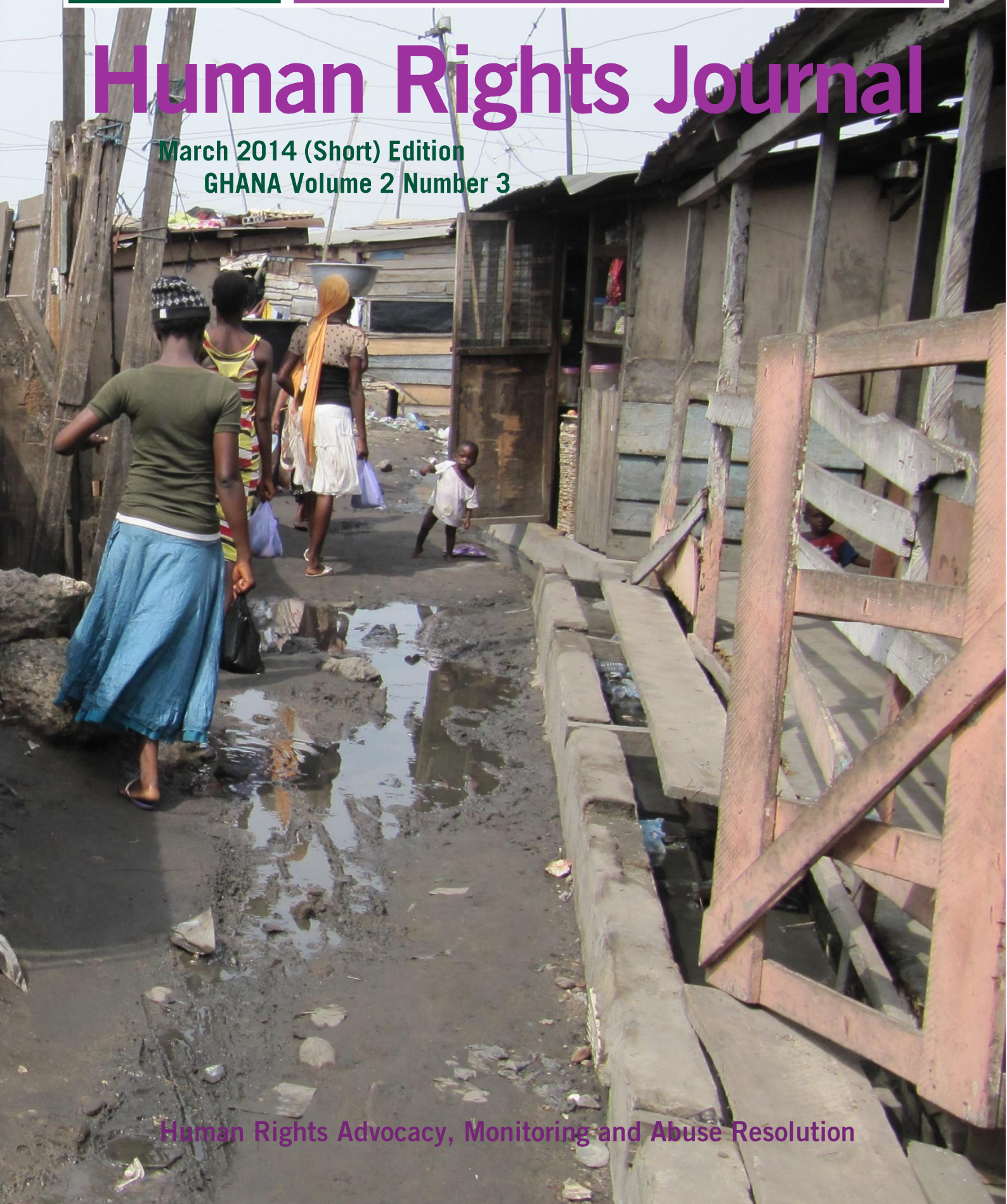
HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE



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The Projects Abroad Human Rights Office ('PAHO') is an independent, non-political, non-religious NGO. Through primarily grassroots funding, PAHO was founded to promote and protect the human rights of the people of Ghana. We are here to help people understand their rights and empower the population; to speak out and to seek justice against human rights abuses. Through advocacy, monitoring and legal assistance PAHO seeks to improve the awareness and enforcement of basic human rights in Ghana.

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Monthly Project Updates



Generating publicity and addressing the conflict between cultural beliefs and the law

Old Fadama is the biggest slum in Ghana, and is situated between Agbogbloshie market and Korle Lagoon. This lagoon has been cited as one of the most polluted bodies of water on the planet, due to the government sanctioned dumping of Western electronic waste within the lagoon. The government also owns the land on which the slums are situated, so the estimated 100,000 people living in the slums have settled there illegally. Thus, the government refuses to give them any services, such as, electricity, water, sewers, roads, or schools. Crime rates are high living conditions are poor; there is abject poverty and appalling literacy rates. The people within the slums are often unaware of their basic human and legal rights or do not know how to seek a resolution if these rights are violated. This is an area of Ghana which is in desperate need of help, so PAHO, in conjunction with WISEEP, has decided to set up a free legal assistance centre there. The goal is to set up a permanent, self-sustained fixture in the Old Fadama slums called the Fadama Legal Assistance Program (FLAP).

FLAP is based in a building located in the midst of Old Fadama and one of its aims is to educate the people of Old Fadama of their human and legal rights as applied to a variety of topics.

The outreaches are generally a talk by volunteers with a group of people put together for the purpose of the talk. The talks need to be translated into Twi, although some of the people visibly respond to the English portion of the talk but if the question is asked as to who can understand English, no one will publicly acknowledge same.

In March 2014, there were three such outreach sessions. Two were directed to men who have had or may have interactions with the police. With these men, the topic was "Suspect Rights", which generally covers one's rights in the event of an arrest by the police. This is an important topic due to the flagrant disregard of rights by

the police. The topics covered were the use of force during an arrest; when the police may make a legal arrest; the suspect's rights once in police custody; the right to a prompt court hearing (within 48 hours); and bail. Also covered were ways to file complaints in the event an arrestee's rights are abused.

Both of the talks on suspect rights were well received, and the men posed questions or mentioned abuses they have witnessed or sustained themselves. One listener spoke of a time when he was held for thirty days after an arrest before getting his initial court hearing. Another told the team of brutal use of force by the police that did not involve an arrest. The questions and the comments are a sign of particular interest in the topic. Many of the questions showed a lot of frustration with the police. People wanted to know how knowing this information would protect them in the future. They wanted a way to stop the abuse at once.

The volunteers had difficulties to provide a satisfying response to such remarks. It was explained that it is much more difficult for the police to abuse a population if everyone is aware of their human and legal rights. Unfortunately, it will take time to teach everyone and for the police to learn arrestees are aware of their rights. Thus the audience was told to explain any abuses to their attorneys and make it a part of their case. Moreover, they were told about filing complaints with two different police authorities that are supposed to govern such abuses. Again, this will not result in any immediate change, particularly for anyone arrested soon, but it can have an effect over time, especially if more people complain than not.

Lastly, cases can be filed against the police for corruption, illegal detention, illegal use of force and other abuses. Incidentally, just this month, a lawsuit involving a rather extreme case of police abuse was completed in the human rights court. A motorcycle mechanic was arrested as a suspect to a murder based on the statement of another suspect. He was then held for 14 years in prison without ever having a chance to be charged or appear at court, notwithstanding the fact that the person who first named him as a suspect later recanted his story. In March 2014, the court ruled in the man's favor and awarded him 200,000

cedi's for the 14 years lost from his life, during which time his wife died and his 6 year old child grew up without any schooling due to a lack of funds from his parents. Cases like these should have an effect on police and prosecutorial practices and will hopefully result in positive changes.

The third outreach was to a group of young mothers who listened to a talk on child maintenance. Most of the mothers appeared young and were very likely child brides. Almost all had young children with them either nursing, sleeping or musing themselves as we talked. Child maintenance is another important topic in Old Fadama. It is not uncommon for a woman to be on her own caring and supporting for her children. Few women take it upon themselves to enforce their right to receive child maintenance from the fathers.

In contrast with the other two talks, the mothers listened but did not ask questions after the talk. One mentioned that most of them had husbands from the north and did not receive support or sufficient support. Old Fadama is predominately made up of people who have emigrated from the more economically depressed northern areas of Ghana to Accra to find work. These women are likely to be sellers in local markets or head porters (people who carry wares on their head). It is a common sight in the markets to see women working while carrying young children on their backs held in place by a sheet of brightly colored cloth.

It was presumed that the women were unwilling to discuss any problems in front of each other. The women come from small communities, where arranged marriages are very common. It could become difficult for a woman if the families of the husband and/or wife learned the woman was complaining about support. Part of each talk is always to explain how FLAP can assist people with their legal issues. It was hoped that after the talk, the women would come on their own to discuss privately with FLAP any issues of concern to them.

Of all the talks this one was one of the most frustrating. It was immediately clear that these women have very limited resources, while at the same time they are burdened with child care and the need to support themselves and their children. They are at an age when western girls are exploring life

options or going to school. Even if they were willing to file actions for child maintenance, the husbands will probably feel no need to comply with an order from a court located in Accra, as long distance enforcement seems impossible.

Mediation Training

Dispute Resolution in Old Fadama

It has been a goal of FLAP since its inception to be a place for members of the Old Fadama community to come for dispute resolutions. This service would fill a very important need for Old Fadama, as access to the courts is extremely difficult, if not impossible for many of the community members. This project aims to train a group of people to be mediators, who can then be a resource for the community that can continue without any outside aid or assistance. Once a core group of mediators are trained and gain sufficient experience, they will be able to train others, thereby allowing this service to grow as needed and to continue indefinitely.

Mediation training met weekly throughout March 2014. The trainings generally lasted all morning, which is a big time commitment for the people who must work each day to earn enough money. One of the more promising students dropped out for health reasons and other students came and went. This is the nature of teaching a long-term course like this in Old Fadama. The participants do not get paid for their time at the course and they are taking time away from work for classes that will lead to voluntary work as mediators. The last two sessions in March consisted of a core group of three men, one being the director of FLAP (Fadama Legal Assistance Program), the others are a weaver and an Arabic teacher.

The purpose of the mediation training is to allow FLAP to expand its mediation services to the community. The people of Old Fadama have little opportunity to use the courts as a way to resolve disputes due to lack of funds and the fact that the courts are very inefficient and require many hearing dates before any action can take place



Our PRO Volunteer, John, talks with members of the Old Fadama community as part of FLAP Outreach

on a case. People of Old Fadama do not have the luxury of taking time off from work on several days as they hope to see their case progress through the courts. FLAP seeks to provide an alternative to the courts through its mediation services. Mediation is free, local, and can often be completed in one or two short sessions.

The goal of the training was to create a self-sustaining mediation center that can continue to train additional mediators once the original trainer has left Ghana. The trainings covered best techniques and practices to effectively run a mediation. The trainer introduced basic law concerning child maintenance, domestic violence, landlord/tenant and inheritance rights, which covers the majority of legal topics presented in the mediations. Training also included running through

scenarios and fact patterns and having the trainees consider what information they need to know and what are the possible range of settlement options. Some fact patterns were based on actual problems faced by the trainees and were good learning tools.

For the most part, the two outside trainees appeared able to follow along with the training. They listened intently and responded to questions. However, with the exception of one trainee, they were very passive. They did not ask questions on their own and were unable to express themselves well when asked an open question. Even though they always said that they understood each concept presented, if they were later asked to explain the concept, they had a hard time describing it in anything more than simple broad strokes.

The last training session focused on writing up Agreements. It was the goal of every mediation to have the participants sign a written agreement fully describing the terms of their dispute resolution. During this training, it became evident to the trainer that, other than the director of FLAP, the trainees lacked enough education to write a proper agreement. This is not an uncommon situation in Old Fadama.

The residents predominately come from poorer regions of northern Ghana. Extreme poverty in Ghana often results in a lack of education as parents either cannot afford the cost of books, uniforms and school fees, or they require their children to work to support the family instead of attending school. Finding people interested and willing to train and serve as mediators was difficult and working was only possible with those few who stuck with the training. It is not clear how these two trainees will work out as mediators until the volunteers get them some cases to work on. They will be working with members of their own community who they interact with daily, so it cannot be said that literacy is a requirement for an effective mediator. Only by watching them in action it can be seen if they are effective.

PAHO hopes to begin working on actual mediations for the next trainings, because mediation is a skill that can only be honed through actual practice.

Human Rights Focal Persons Training: Teaching

Sparing the cane

Focal Persons Training is dedicated to engaging with important members of the community and providing them with different perspectives, and further insight into various human rights issues. It aims to discuss current practices, beliefs and thinking within Ghanaian institutions and looks at how these can be adapted, improved and generally better informed of their human rights responsibilities.

HR Focal Persons Training consists of talks given to primary school teachers regarding the efficacy of using the cane for discipline, providing alternative methods of discipline that do not use

the cane, and describing alternative teaching methods that will promote better classroom results with fewer behavior issues.

There were three such talks in March 2014. Each took place around Tema, which is the major port city for Ghana. The schools are in poor areas, are privately owned, and run on fees paid by the students. The schools are generally cinder block structures containing classrooms, built around two or three sides of a rectangular school yard. All have cinder block walls with no doors or windows and with simple desks for students. One school appeared more complete due to painted walls in the classrooms. The lack of doors or windows makes for distractions when people are moving about outside and creates a lot noise when the school has one of its two daily breaks. Lastly, it did not appear that two of the schools had bathrooms. Boys do not seem to have any problems, but it is unclear how the girls handle this issue.

The teachers are generally very young and have little formal training. The prevalent form of discipline is the cane, a very narrow wooden rod that can be whipped through the air. Lashes are generally given on the hand or the backside. Teachers say they give up to six lashes at a time. It is not uncommon to see teachers walking around with a cane in hand. Raising the cane or striking the desk is a common way to command attention. The cane is clearly the symbol of authority in these schools.

Talks were given to groups of teachers, from about a dozen to twenty at a time. The talks were given in English and the schools teach their classes in English. The teachers were asked when they use the cane and they acknowledged using the canes for tardiness, undone homework, incorrect answers to questions, unruly behavior and so on. The talks were aimed at getting the teachers to think about themselves as role models and consider what the children learn from seeing teachers using canes - that problems can be solved with violence. Children pick up on this lesson creating the situation wherein caning leads to more violent students and, therefore, more caning. Caning also has an interesting effect on children in that they often feel that once punished with the cane for some transgression, they have paid the price and are free to misbehave once again.

The talks pointed out the negative emotional effects from caning, such as humiliating children in front of a classroom and creating angry, scared or withdrawn children who must overcome these feelings in order to learn. A teacher that relies on the cane is using fear and intimidation to drive students to complete tasks. For these students, school and learning are a negative experience. If a child struggles with a subject matter and gets caned for doing poorly in that subject, that child will likely hate that topic for the rest of his or her life. Caning shuts down many minds.

Most classes are taught in a passive style, with teachers talking and children listening. The Focal Person presentation introduced the teachers to a more active form of teaching that will engage the children and lead to less behavior problems from children struggling to sit still and listen. Often children act out in an unruly way because they are bored. Active teaching tries to keep kids busy writing, reading and answering questions, in addition to just listening. By simply showing some excitement for the topics, the teachers can get more children engaged in the work.

The teachers were also told about positive reinforcement and the use of rewards as a great way to induce better outcomes academically and behaviorally. Lastly, it is understood that teachers will not give up use of the cane completely. The presentation offered alternative punishments or actions to avoid caning. An effort is made to make caning the very last resort of punishments. Where a teacher feels he or she must cane, the volunteers provided better strategies for its use, such as waiting for the class to be completed when the teacher can calmly talk to the child away from the others or by removing themselves from caning altogether by sending the child to the headmaster to carry out any sentence.

It was not uncommon to see heads nodding in agreement during the talks but there were always questions from the group regarding the hardened nature of some of the children they deal with. Also, there was generally a sense among some teachers that the techniques presented may work fine with western kids, but Ghanaian kids are different. One teacher pointed out that sometimes parents ask them to

give their child a beating for something that happened at home. Others indicated the parents' request was not so uncommon. The discussions have been lively, and comments like these are good ways to review and emphasize some points made in the presentation. The presentation was not intended to change teacher behavior overnight. They were asked to try out the methods presented and the talk ended with a request to use the internet as a source to read up more on each of the topics presented.

Headmasters or other administrators from the schools listened in on the talks and the response from them has always been very positive. One of the schools has asked that the team come back and give a related talk to some of their students. This will be an interesting challenge and fascinating to hear the student's thoughts on the topic. It will also be a chance to fully integrate the ideas of the focal person training into the whole school.

Human Rights Training: Child Marriage and the 'NCCE'

Combining cultural understanding with human rights work.

Early in March the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office began a new project within the established Child Advocacy department, regarding child marriage. The project worked together with the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), an independent Commission set up under the Ghanaian constitution. The Commission works to promote and sustain democracy and teach the awareness of rights and obligations, through civic education¹. The purpose of collaborating with the NCCE was to educate a group of staff members on the issue of child marriage with the aim of providing the relevant information to allow them to go into the field themselves and educate the community.

As a human rights and development issue, both the NCCE and Projects Abroad believe that child marriage in Ghana needs to be addressed in terms of its causes and consequences so as to help prevent its occurrence. It is the hope that increased education will lead to greater awareness of child marriage as a human rights issue.

Child marriage is said to be one of the most prevalent forms of abuse and exploitation, one that predominantly affects girls. In terms of the law in Ghana, the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines early marriage as any child younger than 18 years old. From a worldwide point of view 36 per cent of women aged in their early 20s were married before they were 18 years old. This estimates as 51 million girls aged 17 or younger being married². If action isn't taken to stop this practice the research suggests that 25 000 girls will be married every day for the next 10 years.

West Africa is one of the most prevailing areas of child marriage in

the world next to South Asia, with 25% of Ghanaian women aged in their 20's being married before the age 18³.

Working in collaboration with the director Mr. Nicholas Atiogbe, a three week advocacy plan was established and the team went to visit the NCCE staff at the LedzokukuKrowor Municipal Assembly (LEKMA) in Nungua every Tuesday beginning the 11th March.

A great deal of time and research went into the preparation for these sessions and a plan was organised regarding what would be discussed in each session. The team began the first session by providing an overview of child marriage and its causes, including statistics from both Ghana and worldwide. There were several topics that were focused on, including poverty, tradition and education. A discussion forum was then opened up in order for the staff to interact with the volunteers and each other, so as to gain a general idea of their understanding on the issue. The staff members were then asked to consider what consequences child marriage has on both the child and the greater community and write down their ideas.

Following the first session, the team met to discuss the ideas written by the staff from LEKMA so as to incorporate them into the next session which focused on the consequences of child marriage. The same presentation and discussion dynamic was used in the second and third sessions; the second focusing on the consequences and discussing the effects; and the final session designed to present options and solutions to child marriage. It was further discussed what other countries have done to successfully achieve an end to the occurrence and what may be done in Ghana.

The team used the final session to present two short online videos, one showing a girl from Niger who had been forced into early marriage⁴ and the second a girl from Yemen who had fled her home to prevent the same fate⁵. The idea was to highlight the important difference education can have on a young girl's ability by showing both

¹http://nccegh.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=304

²http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html

³http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html

⁴http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K69c_yI05v0

⁵http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykZgv0Tb_bJQ

sides, and observing how the young girl from Yemen knew what was happening and took control of her future.

Education is acknowledged world wide as the most powerful means of empowering girls and women and protecting them from the violation of their human rights. Education sets in motion a cycle whereby young girls gain greater knowledge, skills, self-confidence and capabilities; improving their own life prospects. As such education is one of the most powerful tools to enable girls to avoid early marriage.

Research has shown that almost half of uneducated girls are married at a young age, compared to 15% of girls who have attended secondary school. In all West African regions, girls with higher levels of schooling are less likely to marry as children. In particular, girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education⁶.

The three sessions spent with the LedzokukuKrowor Municipal Assembly of the National Commission of Civic Education were successful in educating the staff while providing open discussions about options for ending child marriage in Ghana. The team felt as though they had made an impact on the way the staff members viewed child marriage and from one point of view it was stated that it had been..."a very fruitful discussion and it's my hope that the necessary plans be put in place so that we can educate the populace, especially those ignorant of its effect on the child". The child marriage advocacy program will continue in the months to come, and in April the team will be presenting the issue to the leaders of Muslim communities in Accra.



PAHO at Queensland School

SOFAID: Slum School Outreach

Schools of Old Fadama Adequacy Improvement Drive

In a yearlong project, PAHO is profiling Old Fadama, Ghana's largest slum with a population of approximately 80,000 people.

In December 2013 PAHO began profiling the schools of Old Fadama, and conducting an Educational Needs Assessment of eight of the twelve schools within the boundaries of the Old Fadama Slum. All of the new PAHO projects that will derive from this Educational Needs Assessment will fall under the umbrella of the Schools of Old Fadama Adequacy Improvement Drive (SOFAID).

In accordance with the recommendations of that report we began running the Slum School Outreach with the aim of broadening children's understanding of Human Rights through an interactive form of education amongst the students that attend one of the schools in the slums

Once a week volunteers visited the Queensland School in Old Fadama. The team discuss important human rights issues with a selected class of approximately 30 children, aged from 12 to 15; aiming to improve the students' knowledge about their rights.

To illustrate the main elements of the selected topics (child marriage and gender equality), three posters were provided by the volunteers. Despite the expectations of the volunteers, the students' English was very good so that it was possible to have more detailed and meaningful discussions with class.

Because the lessons were limited by the constantly high noise coming from other classrooms and outside, the team involved the students in a more interactive session, instead of a more formal lecture style.

Firstly, the children stated their opinion about child marriage and worked with the posters provided by the volunteers to identify the consequences of early forced marriage. Each poster focussed on one of the three main sections that are affected by child marriage (health, emotion and education), so that the students could collect their ideas for each topic. An interesting fact was that the students considered the decrease of development of Ghana as a consequence and mentioned it as an important reason for stopping child marriage.

When the volunteers visited the school one week later, they were happy to see that the students liked the discussion of the week before, evident from the students pointing proudly to the

⁶<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/globalpartners-key-messages.pdf>

posters about child marriage hanging on the wall.

For the second sessions the team was asked to talk to other students who were waiting for their lunch, as oppose to the session already planned. Since the volunteers noticed that the topic 'environmental pollution' was discussed before, they continued it by asking questions about different types of pollution, their causes and consequences.

In Old Fadama the air pollution is extremely high due to the burning of electronic waste which is sent from countries all over the world. Although the students were aware and educated about the high level of pollution in Ghana, they admitted that they would not change their behaviour, stating that it is customary and that there are almost no alternatives to littering and burning waste in Ghana. Although this lesson was not planned, the outcome was positive, particularly because the background noise was not affecting the session negatively.

Using the experience gained from the first session, the volunteers decided to base the third session discussion, about gender equality, mainly on interactive parts. The team started by asking if the children think men and women are the same and should be treated equally. Volunteers were pleased to hear about positive answers that men and women should have equal rights, because they are both able to walk, eat and talk.

When the volunteers asked if the students would rather have a daughter or a son, surprisingly there was no majority who preferred to have a son, however all reasons they provided for their preference were related to money. Most of the students who didn't want a daughter pointed out that a daughter would leave the family to get married, so all money invested in her would be a waste. On the other hand some students argued that a girl would know how to take care of the household and the family if the mother gets sick.

Thereafter the volunteers started to talk about common stereotypes, which were acknowledged by the whole group, for example, that men are not able to help in the household or women shouldn't start their own business. Responses to the question 'what difference would the full implementation of gender equality have in your lives?' were

particularly discouraging and unexpected after the constructive opinions stated in the beginning. Although some of the children said the level of education for girls would rise, causing a direct impact on the development of the Ghanaian economy, one boy voiced an unusual concern that some women may die because had different blood to men.

Despite this, the overall the level of involvement was successful and made the students share their interesting views with the volunteers.

During all these lessons the students gained a general understanding of the topics and the team achieved the aim of educating and make them think about their basic rights.

Human Rights Clubs

Accra High School

HR-Clubs is an Amnesty International initiative whose intent is to work in cooperation with local partners to develop after school clubs dedicated to human rights education in various schools. The goal is to eventually have an HR Club in every school across the globe. PAHO acts as Amnesty's partner in Accra. Volunteers from all over the developed world come here to give lessons in local schools on human rights. Each club has a supervisor, but the students organize a majority of the activities by themselves. There are also student club-executives who act as the leaders of the HR club and are monitored by a volunteer. Violence Against women

Continuing the work done in February, a group of volunteers went to visit the Accra High School for weekly sessions in March. Volunteers examined current human rights violations and taught the students how to express themselves freely and improve their knowledge and understanding of these issues.

While looking at current news in Ghana, child marriage appeared to the volunteers as a significant human rights abuse considering the fact that 25% of the Ghanaian women between 20 and 24 were married before 18.

The team therefore wanted to discuss this issue in the HR Clubs, keen to gain the opinions of the youth, on a topic which directly affects people of their age group.

During the lesson about early forced marriage the volunteers were again impressed by the children's knowledge, who were giving examples about servile marriage, which occurs for example in the Volta Region, where girls are pledged to priests to atone for an offence committed by a family member.

To make the general overview more attractive and involve the students from the start they were asked about their opinion as to why child marriage occurs and what impact it has or may have on the child bride or groom.

Students were immediately able to identify some of the main reasons, including poverty, a lack of education, and the parents intention to prevent pre-marital sex.

A debate then developed about whether a mother, who was a child bride herself, would marry her daughter off early. One group argued that after the mother had experienced all the consequences herself, (for example, being forced to drop out of school and taking care of the household chores as well as children while being a child herself), no mother would let her child suffer as a child groom or bride. Others were convinced that the mother would believe in the custom of marrying girls at a younger age. This highlighted the common problem that traditional customs, predominantly in the northern parts of Ghana, regarding the appropriate age for marriage, can exert a great deal of social pressure on parents to marry their daughters at young ages, because girls reaching their 15th or 16th birthday may be considered past the desirable age of marriage.

In the second lesson of the month the focus was set on prisoners' rights, which according to research carried out by Amnesty International in 2011 are regularly violated in the highly overcrowded Ghanaian prisons. Reports indicate that prisoners have to sleep on the floor in dark, poorly ventilated cells, where they have to deal with poor sanitary conditions. Instead of participating in different activities and exercises, imprisoned people are locked up for twelve hours a day. Moreover, the money given by the government to feed the prisoners is not enough to provide meals for everyone, even though the amount of money

spent increased from 0.60 to 1.80 Ghana Cedi per day per prisoner.

In order to prepare the mock trial about prisoners' rights to vote the class was divided in two groups, despite the fact that all students were of the same opinion. The volunteers wanted the children to improve their debating and advocacy skills by being forced to argue for a different opinion than their own.

After the experience during the lesson about mental disabilities in March, where the students didn't participate, the team was worried about the students' interest in this topic. Since haven't been involved in elections themselves, due to their age, nor have they ever been imprisoned, volunteers were concerned that the topic may not, at first seem relevant to students.

Despite the teams expectations the mock trial led to a lively discussion, where it was proved that all students accepted the decision of the Ghanaian government to change laws. In opposition to many countries, for example Luxemburg, Russia and the UK, where prisoners have restricted rights and are automatically banned from voting, Ghanaian prisoners have been entitled to participate in elections since 2012. However, the students were also aware of the difficulties to verify the identification of all inmates since most of them used fake forms of identity in the prisons.

Following on from the success of this session, the team decided to end the month by discussing capital punishment. Although the death penalty exists in Ghana and has been in the legislation since the application of English common law in the country in 1874, no executions have taken place since July 1993. Nevertheless, 138 persons are still on death row either for armed robbery, treason or first-degree murder. However the current Ghanaian government supports a recommendation of the Constitution Review Commission which wants the death penalty to be abolished and replaced by life imprisonment instead. Since the death penalty is an entrenched provision in the Constitution of Ghana, a referendum is necessary to change the constitution. Considering that the students are keen to discuss issues that are relevant to the Ghanaian society, the volunteers used the coming referendum on the death penalty in Ghana as a reason for



Interactive Workshops to discuss 'FGM' at the Human Rights Clubs

a debate. In the beginning of the debate none of the students wanted to argue for the use of death penalty, but during the discussion it was evident that some children believed in death penalty as a useful way to deter people from committing further crimes.

At this last session of the month the team was joined by a member of Amnesty International who summarised the work done in March and encouraged the students to use the knowledge and experience they gained in the HR Club in their everyday life to strengthen the human rights in Ghana.

Projects Abroad PRO Social Work

Return to the Osu Welfare Centre.

The Osu Welfare Centre consists of three main institutions: the Children's Shelter, which house abandoned, run-away homeless, or abused children; the Girls Correctional Facility, where girls who have been convicted of crime are imprisoned; the Boys Remand Centre where boys awaiting trial are held in custody and have been denied bail. After several months we were unable to send volunteers to the Centre our PRO volunteer Social Worker, Shona, has begun conducting sessions with the children and assisting the staff in their day to day activities.

This month is the first time that PAHO has been back into both of the centres for a couple of months.

Shelter is a government run scheme for children who are deemed to not be safe to be in their current accommodation or have run away from home. The children are all aged 8 and above as younger children are taken to the Osu children's home. They are placed at the Shelter by the Department of Social Welfare through contact from the police, which can be for a variety of reasons, including abuse at the home, child trafficking, labor and forced marriage. The purpose of the shelter is to provide a safe place for the children whilst investigation and discussion can be had around the presenting issue.

On the child's arrival they are allocated a worker from the shelter who meets with them to provide counseling and works with anyone involved in the child's life, with the aim of supporting them back to community living. The procedure for this is to have meetings with the family and set up contracts to prevent certain issues from occurring again, e.g. if a child has been forced to marry, then the family will need to sign a contract to stop the marriage and prevent the child from marrying until they are of age and willing to enter into the contract. If a child is unable to return home then an alternative option will be need to be sought, this includes placing the child with a family member in the first instance. If this is not an

option then they will be moved into the children's home for a foster/ adoption placement to be considered. However, with limited staff and resources it is difficult for the staff to enable this to be followed up and monitored. The Shelter is the only facility of its kind in Ghana and children are brought from all across the country.

The Shelter is supposed to have a maximum stay period of 3 months; thereby aiming to have a high turnover and short term intervention, with some children only staying for a night or a couple of days. However this is not set in stone and some of the children have stayed, and will continue to stay, past this time frame.

Whilst at The Shelter the children partake in activities in the day room – this is run by one “auntie” who organises singing sessions, group activities, as well as basic education. However, as the children are all at different developmental stages and education levels this proves to be a difficult task, with some of the children not previously being involved in education. Alongside this, children are also taken out for one to one sessions to have counselling and to plan for their discharge from the Shelter.

As part of PAHO's involvement it has been agreed for the volunteers to run sessions with the children in the day room. The first couple of sessions with the children have been around ‘talent development’, and have included a basic introduction to talents as well as developing colouring and ball games. They have provided the time to gain a better understanding of the children's needs and the opportunity for volunteers at PAHO to re-build a relationship with the staff at the centre.

Working alongside the staff has also highlighted the difficulties of their work. Specifically, the centre has welcomed a new child who displays needs associated with a learning/ physical disability, if not both. Staff at the home are doing their best to try and support the child; however, without training, specific adaptations and appropriate equipment at the centre, this is difficult. They took on the child as there was not anywhere else for him to go that would enable him to be safe and cared for. The staff are aware that this is not the appropriate environment for him to be, but without any paperwork being passed to them and not even an awareness of his name,

there is little they can do. They are fighting to get this information, waiting for his case to be addressed and for a decision to be made.

Another child was taken to the centre because he was “lost”. He fell asleep on his journey home from school and was taken to the shelter, as they were unable to track his family. He is 8 years old. He was unable to remember his specific address and could only remember the town he lived in, an area seen as too big for them to be able to find his family. With technology being limited it was a difficult task. A variety of methods for gaining this information were tried, including, phoning the number on his school book (which was incorrect), researching on google to track down the school and area, and making various phone calls to other agencies. Despite their efforts, they were still unable to gain any further information on this boy's family. It was, therefore, a case of waiting. He was eventually picked up by his family, who had also been trying to find him, but with a lack of communication and no clear process this had taken almost a week.

Without Shelter vulnerable children would be staying on the streets, increasingly scared, and at further risk of harm or malnourishment. With PAHO re-working with the scheme it is hoped that the two organisations will be able to work together to develop skills and coping mechanisms for supporting the children using the service.

The Boys Remand Centre is another government Scheme. It was established for boys under 18 who have been charged with a criminal offence, which can range from petty theft to murder. All the boys are awaiting trial and will be moved to a Correction Centre if they are charged with a custodial sentence. In the mean time they continue to receive lessons from the staff at the centre in order to continue their education, learn life skills, and prepare themselves for life outside of the Centre.

PAHO is supporting the staff at the Centre and run sessions with the children around social development. This included a session on self-esteem and identity; which involved the boys completing an exercise highlighting their personalities, important factors in their lives, and their future ambitions. The boys participated well in this

exercise and they all have some high ambitions for the future, including a doctor, pilot, religious speaker and a soldier.

The second session was on labelling and stereotypes. This was specifically run as requested by one of the boys who had just been sentenced to 3 months in the detention centre who was concerned about the way he will be perceived when he is released. The boys were able to pick the issues they would like to discuss and requested for rape and defilement to be on the agenda.

The boys were very well behaved and participated well during the sessions. The sessions so far have been a great insight into the governmental support in Ghana and the issues that face young people.

It is hoped, that with PAHO working back in both the centres, that further understanding of the social issues that many residents are presented with can be better understood and that the staff at the centres can gain knowledge from various professionals who will be involve

From the HRJ Coordinator

March 2014

March saw PAHO's return to the Osu Welfare Facility, representing a great success owed to the efforts of the staff in restoring this relationship. This relationship has been enhanced with the help of Shona, who was able to assist the centre with her experience in Social work, delivering those important first sessions to the children there.

The lower number of human rights volunteers this month exposed some of the limitations of PAHO, as without the extra workforce some projects had to be prioritised and others put on hold. The silver lining to this is that the volunteers were really able to focus, build a strong team, and make projects their own; enhancing our existing research and resources, and really perfecting our outreach work for FLAP, Focal Persons Training, Human Rights Clubs and the Slum School.

At FLAP, the revelation that volunteer mediators were unable to write effectively, demonstrates a huge frustration and barrier to further development. Such frustrations are a symptom of the poverty faced in Old Fadama, and highlight the vast work needed to be done ensure residents achieve their basic rights ; work that we will continue to focus on in the coming months.

More positively, the establishment of a project with the NCCE also offers PAHO and its volunteers an opportunity to meet with religious leaders on the issue of Child Marriage in April. With the causes of this problem deeply rooted in religion and culture, the impact that these religious leaders can have on the attitudes and beliefs of their community cannot be overstated. In short, it provides a much sought after dialogue with people that can create change, and is an immensely worthwhile project to continue.

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March Short Edition

Human Rights in Focus.

Due to the lower numbers of our slightly overworked volunteers this month, it was agreed with the HRJ team that the usual 'Human Rights in Focus' section would be omitted for the March Edition.

We'll be returning the journal back to its full glory when volunteer numbers pick up soon.