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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.

May Project Staff

HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

HR Director: Edward Tetteh
 HR Coordinator: Matthew Andrew
 Supervisors: Ebenezer Nii Adjetei Sowah,
 Ernest Adu, Listowel Nyemi-Tei
 Office Assistant: Evans Boateng

SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

GENDER EQUALITY OUTREACH :DODOWA

Supervisor: Ernest Adu
 Karin Heidenreich
 Anna Goll
 Surabi Para

FADAMA LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Supervisor: Listowel Nyemi-Tei
 Cassie Aprile
 Rebecca Maggs
 Gabriel Valdes- Browning

SLUM PROFILING

Supervisor: Listowel Nyemi-Tei
 Cassie Aprile
 Karin Heidenreich
 Surabi Para

CHILD MARRIAGE ADVOCACY

Supervisor: Ebenezer Nii Adjetei Sowah
 Karin Heidenreich
 Gabriel Valdes-Browning
 Surabi Para
 Anna Goll
 Cassie Aprile
 Cynthia Lake

HUMAN RIGHTS CLUBS

Supervisor: Ebenezer Nii Adjetei Sowah
 Rebecca Maggs
 Gabriel Valdes-Browning
 Anna Goll

HUMAN RIGHTS JOURNAL

Coordinator: Matthew Andrew
 May Editor: Cassie Aprile
 Karin Heidenreich
 Gabriel Valdes-Browning
 Rebecca Maggs

PRO PLACEMENT: LEGAL AID

Supervisor: Listowel Nyemi-Tei
 Katherine Pocha.
 Cedric Croonen

PRO PLACEMENT: SOCIAL WORK

Supervisor: Ebenezer Nii Adjetei Sowah
 Charlotte Rottier

Contact the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office

Koi Street, Osu-Ako Adjei,
 c/o Projects Abroad, PO Box 226, Accra North, GHANA.
 Office Number: +233 302 766 514

ghanahumanrights@projects-abroad.org

<http://www.projects-abroad.com.au/destinations/ghana/law-and-human-rights>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.hro>

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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 80,000 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).

The Fadama Legal Assistance Project

The Old Fadama Slum in Accra, Ghana, is home to approximately 80,000 Ghanaian people¹ and is characterized by poor quality housing and inadequate sanitary facilities, increasing the vulnerability of its residents to the effects of economic, social, political and environmental insecurities and stressors.² Despite its size, it is an informal settlement and does not receive any government recognition, aid or infrastructure.³

On 19th September 2013, the Fadama Legal Assistance Program (FLAP) was established as part of an ongoing initiative aimed at increasing

awareness among Old Fadama residents of their basic legal rights and protections. FLAP was founded by Mr Frederick Opoku, President of Women in Slums Economic Empowerment Ghana (WISEEP), with the support of volunteers from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) and the PAHO Director, Mr Edward Tetteh.

Since its inception, FLAP has reached out to many residents of Old Fadama to provide education and advice on human rights issues and to equip them with crucial skills necessary to fight for the legal rights and protections to which they are entitled. It also offers residents a place to engage in formal dispute resolution processes, such as mediation, to find concrete and workable solutions to disputes between them.

FLAP Community Outreaches

Volunteers with PAHO aim to visit the FLAP centre once each week in order to conduct community outreaches with the residents of Old Fadama. Mr Opoku selects the participants and topics for discussion in each session, in consultation with the PAHO office. The participants in any given session typically share demographic characteristics, which make them more vulnerable to particular human rights abuses and the volunteers aim to tailor the content of each session to the chosen participants. The areas of focus for the sessions generally include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, child maintenance and custody, rental disputes and government forced eviction, inheritance rights, intestacy and the rights of suspects.

Mr Opoku facilitates the PAHO volunteer outreaches, gathering the participants and translating the presentations. Mr Opoku lives among the residents and commands their respect and attention. Accordingly, his presence is often vital to ensure that the participants attend and engage in these sessions.

Due to poor weather affecting conditions at the Slum, the PAHO

volunteers conducted only 2 outreaches in May. These outreaches, on the 15th and 22nd of May, covered the broad topics of domestic violence and the rights of suspects and detainees, respectively.

Domestic violence

Women living in slum conditions, characterised by chronic overcrowding, lack of security, anger and frustration over lack of income and unemployment have been found to have heightened vulnerabilities to gender-based and marital violence.⁴ The lack of access to alternative housing also traps many women in domestic violence situations.⁵ With this in mind, on the 15th of May the PAHO volunteers conducted an outreach to Old Fadama to meet with female residents and lead a discussion on the topic of domestic violence.

The presentation was held in the FLAP office and was attended by approximately 10 women; all of whom stayed for the entire duration. After the presentation had concluded, the volunteers were informed that this group of participants had been specifically selected to participate in the session because they were sex workers in the Slum and were therefore considered at a high risk of encountering violence of this kind.

The key themes of the discussion focused upon:

1. the nature and manifestations of domestic violence, including physical, sexual, economic and emotional violence;
2. agencies to whom the women could report instances of domestic violence (including the police, FLAP and the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit); and
3. various measures that the women could take in order to preserve evidence of a crime of domestic violence, such as not bathing immediately after a sexual assault or retaining articles of clothing that they were wearing during the assault.

When canvassed at the beginning of the session, all of the women present indicated that they had never before

¹ Natalia Ojewska, "Ghana's Old Fadama Slum: 'We Want to Live in Dignity'", Think

² Raymond Asare Tutu, "Self-related resilience among young migrants in old Fadama, Accra, Ghana", *GeoJournal* 78 (2013): 709.

³ Ibid, 712.

⁴ Georgina Yaa Oduro, Sharlene Swartz and Madeleine Arnot, "Gender-based violence: Young women's experiences in the slums and streets of three sub-Saharan African cities", *Theory and Research in Education* 10 (2012): 276.

⁵ Ibid, 276.



The FLAP team talks with teenage boys on suspects rights

heard the term “domestic violence”. This immediately highlighted the crucial purpose served by these information sessions and the need to reach as many focus groups as possible in order to further disseminate the message among the residents of the Slum community.

The women seemed to be engaged during the presentation. However, only one participant asked a question after the conclusion of the session. The participant asked a question that focused upon whether a verbal exchange or argument could ever be considered a form of assault. Even though only one participant asked a question, this did not appear to be due to lack of interest in the material, but could be attributed to the sensitive nature of the subject matter.

Rights of Suspects

The second FLAP outreach was conducted on 22nd May and was focused upon the rights of a person during an arrest and detention. The target group for this session comprised approximately 10 young male residents; an audience well suited to the subject matter for the discussion.

Principally, the session focused upon:

1. the circumstances in which an arrest may be made;
2. how an arrest must be conducted;
3. a person's right to remain silent during an interrogation and to insist upon a lawyer and an interpreter; and
4. the concept of bail and the nature of the conditions which are ordinarily imposed.

The participants were all very focused in the discussion and asked a number of questions following the conclusion of the presentation, indicating that they had actively listened and considered the material presented.

A Critical Perspective

The language barrier between the volunteers and the participants has proven to be a challenge to conducting effective presentation-based outreaches at Old Fadama. While the PAHO volunteers prepare the material and lead the discussion, it is necessary for the discussion to be facilitated by Mr Opoku who, rather than translating the content presented by the volunteers verbatim, seems to use the seed of an idea planted by the volunteers to speak with the participants and more effectively engage with them on the subject matter. The role of the PAHO volunteer in these discussions can therefore sometimes oscillate between voyeur and discussion-leader. Whether the perception of that divide was experienced by the participants is unclear. What is clear is that the sessions could certainly not run without the assistance of Mr Opoku, who aids to bridge the divide and garner the trust and confidence of the participants. It will be important for volunteers on future outreaches to devise ways in which they can continue to remain active leaders and thought-provokers in the discussion in spite of the language barrier.

Looking Forward

The PAHO volunteers will continue outreaches throughout June on topics that are of central importance to the residents of Old Fadama. With each session, the volunteers have the opportunity to learn new techniques to enable them to better disseminate an understanding of human

Slum Profiling: Health

A picture of health: identifying critical issues for the residents of Old Fadama

In January 2014, the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) launched a project aimed at developing a community profile of the health and sanitation conditions of the residents of Old Fadama, Ghana's largest slum and home to approximately 80,000 people.

The focus of PAHO's investigations is upon sanitation conditions; available health facilities and the general health and wellbeing of members of the Slum community. The project is conducted by way of research and qualitative fieldwork; the findings from which will form the basis for recommendations for new health-based initiatives to be implemented by future PAHO volunteers.

The PAHO Slum Profiling Project

The Old Fadama Slum in Ghana is the largest of its kind and has long been a focus of initiatives driven by the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) in Accra. The Slum is home to 80,000 Ghanaian people,⁶ all of whom live a precarious existence atop the largest electrical waste dump in sub-Saharan Africa.⁷

Housing characteristics, community and neighbourhood environments have been found to correlate with human health. Specifically, substandard housing, such as a slum, has been associated with a diversity of health conditions including asthma, tuberculosis, lead poisoning, injuries and poor mental health.⁸ However, different slums have been shown to exhibit a considerable range of vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities.⁹ Accordingly, it has been

⁶ Natalia Ojewski, “Ghana’s Old Fadama Slum: ‘We Want to Live in Dignity’”, Think Africa Press, 7 August 2013.

⁷ Matthew Akormedi, Emmanuel Asampong and Julius Fobil, “Working conditions and environmental exposures among electrical waste workers in Ghana”, *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* 19 (2013): 279.

⁸ Emilia Asuquo Udofia, Alfred E Yawson, Kwesi Adu Aduful and Francis Mulekya Bwambale, “Residential characteristics as correlates of occupants’ health in the greater Accra region, Ghana” *BMC Public Health* 14 (2014): 1.

⁹ Marta M Janowska, John R Weeks and Ryan Engstrom, “Do the most vulnerable people live

posited that if slum improvement campaigns are to be effective, one must consider the variability of the physical and sociological characteristics that define the slum.¹⁰

With this in mind, the impetus behind PAHO's Slum Profiling Project was to construct an accurate profile of the Old Fadama Slum, focusing on many facets of life across a demographic cross-section of the community. Since January 2014, the Project has focused on building a profile of the health of the residents in the community. The findings from the study will form the basis for recommendations for new health-based projects to be implemented by future PAHO volunteers.

Methodology

Throughout May, PAHO volunteers conducted weekly visits to the Old Fadama Slum to collect data from a cross-section of residents from the Slum community.

Each week, the PAHO volunteers identified and targeted a particular 'focus group' of respondents. These focus groups were comprised of persons who shared specific characteristics, such as their means of employment, or other demographic markers, such as age or sex. This enabled more meaningful results to be collated, which identified the health and safety needs shared by particular sub-groups within the community, as well those common to the whole community.

The focus groups during May were:

1. workers at the Old Fadama Slum e-waste site;
2. pregnant women; and
3. traditional birth attendants.

4.
Data was collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted in person with the residents by a number of volunteers. The interviews collected information regarding the demographics of the individual respondents (where possible) and focused on issues relating to the health and wellbeing of the respondents; sanitation levels in the community and access to healthcare facilities and health education.



Tradition vs modernity. The Slum Profiling team meet with community nurses and traditional birth attendants to discuss access to health in Old Fadama.

Translators were required to facilitate the discussions. Because of the informality of the settings in which the discussions took place, the volunteers perceived that exact translations were not always given and that the translator would often paraphrase or summarise the content of the discussion for the other party. The use of an intermediary in this manner has the potential to subjectify and weaken the accuracy of the results of the qualitative study. Unfortunately, this seems to be an unavoidable consequence of the language barrier coupled with limited resources which prevent, for example, the recording of interviews and the preparation of an accurate verbatim transcript of the discussion.

Findings & Analysis

Old Fadama e-waste site: where economic imperatives take a back seat to health and safety

Ghana's e-waste dump at the Old Fadama Slum is reportedly the biggest in sub-Saharan Africa¹¹ and has attracted international scrutiny. Despite this, there remains a lack of reliable data on the processes involved in e-waste recycling and on the health and working conditions of the e-waste workers.¹² This made it a primary target for on-the-ground research by PAHO volunteers.

On 6th May 2014, the PAHO volunteers attended the e-waste worksite with the aim of conducting qualitative interviews with the workers and recording observations of the work practices being undertaken and the general conditions of the worksite. On this occasion, the volunteers' ability to collect data was significantly impeded by the reluctance of the workers to participate in the study. Only one worker agreed to be interviewed and was questioned 'on-the-spot' at the e-waste site. Due to the informality of the setting, the breadth of questioning was restricted and the volunteers were not able to record responses contemporaneously.

The interviewed participant reported moving to the Old Fadama Slum from the north of Ghana in order to find work. He had been living in the community for approximately 4 years and lived in very close proximity to the e-waste worksite. The participant earned his living by retrieving and selling the copper from the inside of the electrical cords and other electrical waste. He also sent a portion of the money he earned back to his family, who remained in the northern region. When questioned about his awareness of the health risks associated with his work, the participant remarked that he knew that there were risks but that he considered there to be no alternative job prospects where the pay was comparable to that which he earned at the e-waste site. The participant also reported that, while the workers were aware of safer ways to conduct the

in the worst slums? A spatial analysis of Accra, Ghana" *Annals of GIS* 17 (2011): 221.

¹⁰ Ibid: 221.

¹¹ Matthew Akormedi, Emmanuel Asampong and Julius Fobil, Opt. Cit., 279.

¹² Matthew Akormedi, Emmanuel Asampong and Julius Fobil, Opt. Cit., 279.

retrieval of the copper and other metals, the e-waste was burned because it resulted in more efficient retrieval. The worker reported experiencing regular headaches, coughs and a general lack of wellness. He frequented a local pharmacy for any medical treatment he required but was not covered by the National Health Insurance Scheme.

During the site visit, the volunteers observed a significant amount of electrical waste piled around the worksite; specifically computers, refrigerators and televisions. The workers were also transporting new waste to the site in makeshift wheelbarrows. The waste was placed in piles and burned until only the copper and underlying metals remained. The burning piles emitted a thick black smoke that was carried back towards the Slum. Once the waste piles had burned, the workers would douse the piles with small packets of water.

Notably, the workers wore no protective clothing and no enclosed shoes and handled the smouldering piles of waste with large sticks. The workers at the site were exclusively male; although there were some females in the immediate vicinity, most of whom were selling food and water to the workers.

The site visit enabled the PAHO volunteers to identify a number of critical health hazards for the workers at the e-waste facility. One disconcerting theme that emerged from the study was that, while the health hazards of the work being conducted were often plainly evident and, in the case of the one participant interviewed, known to the workers, the economic imperatives outweighed any desire to cease the work altogether or to take simple precautions against obvious health risks. Accordingly, it is apparent that any strategies aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of this demographic will need to, at least in the short term, be aimed at mitigation rather than eradication of an industry which seems to be a lynchpin of the Slum economy and source of employment for many. However, before any concrete recommendations can be issued, attempts should be made to supplement the results of the study which, at present, are limited to observations recorded by the volunteers and the responses given by the one interviewed participant.

Pregnancy and childbirth in Old Fadama: a solitary journey

On the 13th May 2014, PAHO volunteers conducted a further outreach to Old Fadama with the purpose of gaining an insight into the health related issues experienced by female residents during pregnancy and childbirth.

There were seven primary participants in the study; although onlookers frequently offered insights into the discussion. These insights were also recorded. Due to the number of participants, the volunteers divided the participants into two separate focus groups in order to more effectively engage in the discussion. The participants were pregnant females aged between 20 – 30 years and had all moved to the Slum from the North of Ghana. The duration of their current residency in the Slum varied between 4 months and 8 years.

The respondents were evenly split insofar as their preference was for a hospital birth versus a birth with the aid of a traditional birth attendant (with four respondents indicating they would attend the hospital and three respondents preferring the assistance of a birth attendant). The reasons offered in favour of the traditional birth attendant included monetary considerations; an established relationship and community ties. Those who preferred the hospital gave reasons which included previous miscarriages and complications with earlier pregnancies and also cited a belief that the decision to use a traditional birth attendant was 'old-fashioned' and 'out-dated'.

Although some participants preferred the use of traditional birth attendants, all reported using the hospital in the case of an emergency, serious illness, or for post-natal care. Encouragingly, 5 out of 7 participants also reported having health insurance under the National Health Insurance Scheme. It was therefore apparent that the women evidenced a willingness to avail themselves of health facilities where necessary but they reported experiencing consistent logistical barriers to efficient and effective access. For example, a number of the participants described making the journey to the hospital as one of the key challenges involved in childbirth; the hospital being a 30 minute walk from the Slum or, where walking was not possible, a 15 minute ride by

whatever means of transport the woman could procure.

The overriding theme that emerged during the discussion was the fact that there was a notable absence of effective and consistent education and informal support offered to the women in relation to what they could expect during pregnancy, childbirth and their child's infancy and a distinct lack of awareness of health issues relating to infant children. The cumulative knowledge of the participants on these issues seemed to have been developed organically; either having been passed down by word of mouth or from learned experience or observation. The limited education that the participants did describe receiving was sporadic and often only came after previous births. For example, some participants described having received minimal education and support from local nurses. Another participant reported having been provided some information and education following her previous miscarriages, but not during her current pregnancy. Many of those questioned emphatically advocated for the establishment of a permanent nurses station in the Slum which they could regularly access for their health concerns and problems. It was quite clear that most of them had no conception of the health risks of living in a slum, as malaria seemed their only concern when questioned about the potential health risks for infant children.

Interestingly, a greater number of participants appeared to have received some form of family planning education and, indeed, were receptive to using family planning methods, despite the strong religiosity of Ghanaian society. However, the implementation of family planning techniques among the participants (including the reported use of contraception) was limited due to complications and a desire by the husband for more children. There was also a degree of scepticism among those participants who had used family planning in relation to the effectiveness of the methods prescribed, with one participant indicating towards her stomach and commenting to the effect that "this was supposed to be family planning".

What is clear from the focus group discussions held with the pregnant women is that future recommendations for this community group need to centre upon improving formal

education for women; strengthening informal support mechanisms and developing means to remove logistical barriers to accessing available healthcare.

Traditional Birth Attendants at Old Fadama: the crucial intermediaries

A further community outreach was conducted at Old Fadama on the 20th May 2014. The target group for this session was the traditional birth attendants who assist in the delivery of many of the children of Old Fadama. The PAHO volunteers interviewed two of the reportedly five known practising attendants in the Slum and also spoke with a community nurse from the Ghana Community Health Service who accompanied the group during the discussions. The participants each had significant experience as traditional birth attendants; participant one had been practicing for 28 years and participant two had been practicing for 18 years. Both participants had also been attendants prior to arriving at the Slum and reported a current average delivery rate of 4 babies per month.

The lack of education or formal training of any kind was conspicuous between both participants. Participant one reported having received no training and had simply become an attendant after assisting on a childbirth many years ago. She reported having a “natural talent” for the job and knowledge that was innate, rather than learned; it was “just there; it just exists”. Similarly, participant two reported having received a dream many years ago that the gift had been passed to her by her recently deceased Aunty. Both participants expressed a desire to have more training and support. In particular, participant two remarked that, only recently, had she learned about the importance of using disinfectant and other equipment during the birth and that, traditionally, in her culture, the birth was simply facilitated using her bare hands.

The women also reported a crucial lack of resources to assist them to adequately perform their role. Neither woman was paid a consistent or reliable fee for their services. Participant one received “whatever the mother could pay”; which often amounted to very little. Participant two also stated that, as part of her culture, birth attendants were not paid a fee. However, sometimes she requested

certain items, such as soap, or received a small gift or token of appreciation.

Clean delivery (including clean hands, clean surfaces and clean cord cutting) is a key intervention for reducing infections in newborns.¹³ Comfortingly, the women each reported taking steps to maintain sanitary practices during the childbirths; although these could be described as rudimentary at best. Participant one seemed more adept at taking these precautions and maintained a facility where women came to give birth. While this was cramped, she reported being able to keep it clean and dry, even when it rained. By contrast, participant two facilitated the births at the mothers’ homes and did her best to disinfect the space prior to delivery with provisions she bought with her to the home. Both participants reported wearing gloves during the procedure and using soap and disinfectant to clean before and after birth. Participant one seemed more cognisant of the need for cleanliness and used a new disposable razor and methylated spirits to cut the umbilical cord during each birth; which was discarded after use. Alarmingly, both women reported having to pay for the resources required to facilitate the birth, such as disinfectants, gloves, medicines and sheets, out of their own pocket. It was apparent, therefore, that the sanitary conduct of each birth was tenuously dependent upon the generosity and financial capacity of the attendants themselves.

The most encouraging theme to emerge from the discussions with the attendants was the fact that they appeared to have a strong relationship with the community nurses and understood the limitations of their service and when it was appropriate to refer the expectant women to a hospital. The attendants recorded the births in a notebook which, at the end of each month, was given to the community nurses, so that they could keep track of all of the children born at Old Fadama. The nurses would then visit the women to assess the health of the babies and encourage the women to attend the hospital to receive adequate post-natal care and

vaccinations for the newborns. Each of the attendants also reported encouraging the mothers to attend the hospital post-delivery for these reasons. Similarly, both attendants advised that they would refer the mother to a hospital if they considered that the birth was likely to be complicated, rather than attempt to deliver the child themselves.

Overall, the interviews with the traditional attendants revealed that these women act as crucial intermediaries between the uneducated Slum community and formal healthcare providers; such as the community nurses and the hospitals with whom they connect. There is an ongoing demand for their services, particularly by those residents who come from traditional backgrounds and who are reluctant to attend the hospital to give birth. However, worryingly, the attendants shared a conspicuous absence of education or training of any kind and often lacked the resources required in order to facilitate safe and sanitary births. Accordingly, initiatives in this area need to be directed towards increasing support for these attendants through the provision of educational programmes which focus on maternal and infant health and basic skills training sessions (such as CPR and first aid courses). In addition, fundraising initiatives should be developed with the aim of procuring financial support for the attendants so that they may purchase the essential resources required to facilitate sanitary births. This will ensure that the continuance of sanitary birthing practices in the Slum is no longer tenuously dependent upon the financial resources of the attendants themselves.

Looking Forward

The Slum Profiling Project will conclude in early June 2014. Ideally, before the project is completed and the report issued, the volunteers would like to:

- 1) Supplement, with independent research, the qualitative data collected from the limited enquiries made, and observations recorded, at the Old Fadama e-waste worksite. It is important that a more fulsome study be conducted in relation to this group of residents, given the emergence of e-waste scavenging as a fundamental livelihood strategy and income generator for many residents in the

¹³ Cheryl A Moyer, Raymond Akawire Aborigo, Gideon Logonia, Gideon Affah, Sarah Rominski, Philip B Adongo, John Williams, Abraham Hodgson and Cyril Engmann, “Clean delivery practices in rural northern Ghana: a qualitative study of community and provider knowledge, attitudes and beliefs”, *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 12 (2012): 2.

Slum.¹⁴ Ideally, the independent research should focus on exploring the relationship between health and safety at the e-waste site; the economic imperatives of the workers and whether the latter will always take precedence over the former.

2) Expand the scope of the qualitative analysis to target and interview additional sub-groups within the Slum community. Specifically, in the coming weeks, the volunteers will aim to engage in discussions with community leaders and representatives from the National Health Insurance Scheme who work in the Slum community to gather information about the health and safety issues that these groups perceive to be of greatest concern to the Slum dwellers. These more detailed findings will enable future PAHO volunteers to develop projects which are better equipped to address the needs of the Slum residents.

Once these issues are closed out and the study finalised, the findings will be used to compile a detailed report with recommendations for new, targeted, health-based campaigns aimed at remedying the critical health issues revealed by the results of the qualitative study.

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 a 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. The Human Rights Club is part of the school's extra-curricular programme, so the students attending the Club are there voluntarily and thus have a latent interest in human rights issues.

Ghana has long been at the fore of African human rights and despite many

remaining problems, especially concerning resources and cultural barriers, much progress has been made in Ghana where many people have an awareness, if not an understanding, of human rights issues. Indeed, many NGOs operate in the country and focus on advocacy-based work, much like the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office. As such, the Human Rights Club project is building on this existing awareness and focusing on the importance of human rights advocacy during education. It takes a group of students already interested in human rights, pushes their ideas and gets them discussing the various topics facilitated by PAHO volunteers.

The volunteers on this project, Anna Lena, Gabriel Valdes and Rebecca Maggs, brainstormed and decided on topics that were of interest. For the month of May these topics included: trafficking and slavery, mental health, and sexual consent and marital rape. At the time of writing, the last session has yet to occur. Preparation for the sessions consisted of reading relevant articles from Human Rights Watch and other humanitarian organizations in order to give the volunteers the necessary background information, and more importantly, a picture of the situation in Ghana. It was decided early on not to bombard the students with facts or legal jargon but, rather, to approach the sessions through discussions and debates on ideas, to help them really come to grips with fundamental human rights principles. Certainly, the students already have a basic understanding of human rights laws and issues, given the circumstances of their involvement with the Club, so it was thought that it would be more useful to push these existing conceptions of human rights.

Trafficking and Slavery

Given the uncertainty of the volunteers in their first session, the workshop went very well, with the students engaged in the activities and willing to discuss and demonstrate their knowledge of, and passion for, the topic. The session began with an icebreaker game where everyone threw an orange around a circle and the person with the orange had to say a word or phrase indicating what slavery meant to them. This was an interactive way to see what the students thought about slavery and trafficking and, after some prompting, there were some very intelligent responses; such as

'economic hardship' and 'restricts freedom of movement.' The session progressed by each volunteer taking a group of six students and giving them a case story about a person trafficked and forced into slavery; for example, a girl tricked with the promise of an education into working as a house maid and then a sex slave. Each group discussed the story with reference to several relevant clauses of international human rights treaties that Ghana has ratified; such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Each student had two laws cut up on pieces of paper and they had to explain why each law was being violated in the story. Intertwined with this was a discussion of why people are trafficked and the students correctly identified the underlying cause as poverty, as well as recognized the secondary causes, such as deception and money. They were also able to articulate why human rights were being violated. Some of the girls got very passionate about discussing the proper way to conduct and enforce immigration and border checks to help prevent trafficking, showing their enthusiasm and knowledge about such issues. The session finished with some quick mind-mapping of different forms of trafficking in Africa, such as prostitution, agricultural labour, domestic workers etc., and some map-plotting of different routes through which trafficked persons travel.

Mental Health

Mental health is not a topic often discussed or well understood in Ghana. Despite this, the students were very engaged in what the volunteers had to say, especially given their unfamiliar Western perspectives. The session began by showing the students images of people chained in the prayer camps and they correctly identified them as mentally ill, but cited their crime as 'violence.' Indeed, throughout the session it became evident that they associated all mentally ill people with violent and dangerous behaviour. The students then discussed what was 'normal' in a person, and whether they would still be a 'proper human' if certain physical, personality features or abilities were added or subtracted. They agreed that a mentally ill person deserved all the rights that a 'normal' person did and correctly identified these as being rights such as freedom of movement and of choice. However, it quickly became evident that their

¹⁴ Martin Oteng-Ababio, "When Necessity Begets Ingenuity: E-Waste Scavenging as a Livelihood Strategy in Accra, Ghana", *African Studies Quarterly* 13 (2012): 15.

understanding of mental illness was very limited, so the volunteers improvised and gave a quick crash course in explaining a couple of mental illnesses (such as bipolar disorder and epilepsy) and the scientific reasons behind mental illness. The session ended with a debate relevant to the students: should mentally ill children be admitted into normal schools or should they be segregated? Both sides became very heated and defended their arguments vigorously. While they recognised that most mental illnesses could be controlled with medication, it was pointed out that the lack of money for healthcare means that this is not viable in Ghana. They also countered the argument that it would be better for both 'normal' children and mentally ill children to mix for educational and social purposes by their belief that all mentally ill people were violent without medication; clearly a cultural misconception.

The session was very interesting because it was on a topic that the students knew very little about and it showed that the little information the students did know was tainted by cultural misconceptions about mental illness. Even after the volunteers had explained (albeit briefly) some of the scientific reasons behind mental illness, several of them argued that it was sometimes because of possession by evil spirits, neglect or lack of attention. While the latter cases can lead to violent children, they are not in the same category as illnesses such as epilepsy. Nonetheless, the attention the students showed was encouraging, as they were eager to learn and actively participate in the discussions and debates. Furthermore, they all emphatically agreed that the prayer camps were a violation of human rights and that mentally ill people deserved the same rights as others. However, given that most of them thought that mentally ill people should be put in hospitals and that they were inherently violent, one wonders how much of their human rights theory would actually translate across the cultural barrier into practice. Overall, though, the session was encouraging and it certainly gave the students something to think about.

Conclusion

Both workshops were well received and, each time, the students demonstrated their knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, human rights issues. Given that they already had a fairly

thorough understanding of the standard human rights and violations in West Africa, the volunteers enjoyed pushing the ideas of the students further. However, this same knowledge made it evident that what was most beneficial for them, in terms of furthering their understanding of human rights, was to discuss issues that are perhaps controversial culturally, or are issues not considered 'standard human rights,' as this was where the most debate and thinking was done. They all knew about the immorality of human trafficking, for example, but they were more engaged in the session about mental health, as it was something new and more controversial to them. In focusing on more niche topics, the Human Rights Club can progress and go from strength to strength.

Gender Equality Outreach: Dodowa

Focus group discussion on gender equality.

As part of the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) Gender Equality Project, a set of questions on various issues related to gender equality were discussed with two groups of Ghanaian residents in the Dodowa region. The views expressed by the residents at these sessions will enable PAHO volunteers to prepare specific educational training programs on the topic of gender equality to deliver to the residents during the month of June.

From the idea to the project

The Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) has been active in the Dodowa region for a number of years. In 2013, PAHO volunteers conducted a week-long training session for several subgroups there; including women, students and Human Rights Defenders. In April 2014, a delegation of PAHO volunteers went again to Dodowa to meet the assembly men. The purpose of the meeting was to gauge community need and interest for new educational sessions to be run by PAHO volunteers in the community. The topic of 'gender equality' was mentioned as one priority.

Based on the outcome of the meeting with the assembly men, the volunteers from PAHO agreed to look next into the topic of gender equality. Since the issue of gender equality is

Gender Equality

According to the United Nations Population Fund, gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and have equal opportunity to develop personal ambitions.

In December 2012, the Vienna Policy Dialogue on Gender Equality took place in Vienna, Austria. At that conference, the Director of External Resource Mobilization at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of Ghana outlined the following key gender issues that are prevalent in Ghana:

- gender discrimination in access to, and control over, productive resources and social services (which exacerbates women's vulnerability to poverty);
- high incidence of domestic violence and human trafficking;
- high maternal mortality rates of approximately 350 deaths per 100,000 live births (the second most common cause of death);
- high incidence of breast and cervical cancer;
- inequalities in female access to education; and
- low representation of women in the legislature and at the local government level.

multifaceted, the volunteers decided to first conduct question and answer sessions with focus groups in certain sub-communities of Dodowa to get a clearer picture of the exact issues people face in this respect and,

accordingly, the issues on which the training program should focus. The groups consisted of representatives of

the community with an interest in the topic who had been asked by the assembly members to participate.

Focus group discussions

In May, the PAHO volunteers met with two focus groups within the same sub-community in Dodowa. A third focus group discussion was cancelled due to heavy rain. The first group was comprised of approximately 20 people aged between 15 and 25 years; most of whom were men. The second group was comprised of 8 women and one man; all of whom were aged between 30 and 50 years.

Due to the different ages and experiences as between the focus group members, both discussions went very differently. The members in the first group were very outspoken and engaged. The group presented themselves to the volunteers as dynamic people with modern ideas that met the standards of gender equality. For instance, the volunteers posed a question about whether a woman should have the right to make personal decisions regarding how many children she wants and when. The spontaneously given answer was that both spouses should be responsible for decisions about family planning, child care and family management. Similarly, when the men were asked if they could cook, they started listing meals they thought they were able to cook well.

Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defenders are persons who have volunteered to engage in human rights issues with other members of their community. They may be members of human rights organizations but they may also belong to youth groups, churches and women's or development associations.

Human Rights Defenders aim to ensure that the principles laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights conventions are upheld. They are a crucial link in the chain of human rights protection; whether they are campaigning on behalf of the victims of human rights violations or lobbying at the highest levels for improved mechanisms for human rights protection.

One point that was extensively discussed with the first sub-group was discrimination in the workplace and, specifically, discrimination during the hiring process. Some male participants believed that women get jobs easier than men because they are women and "could offer themselves or their bodies to their future boss"; while men could not. Men considered this as discrimination against men. Conversely, some female participants felt that this was a form of discrimination towards women because they considered that, if a woman did not want to engage in an affair with her (future) boss, she might not get the job, or could lose it. One woman suggested the establishment of a committee consisting of trustworthy community representatives (such as Human Rights Defenders) who could help facilitate communication between the community and the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service in order to reduce and, ultimately, stop this type of discrimination in the community.

Compared with the first group, only moderate discussion took place in the second group. The volunteers were told that, in traditional Ghanaian society, men do not help in the household but leave it completely to their wives. That is, there is a clear pattern of roles that are filled by men and women at this age. However, the women did not seem to see any gender inequalities in this scenario and there were nearly no controversies between the participants.

The only issue on which the men and the women were not completely aligned related to the question of whether a woman could, or should, one day become a president of Ghana. Some participants said 'yes' and others said 'no' because they considered that women tend to be too proud when they occupy such positions and would not therefore make good leaders.

The volunteers got the impression that the women in this focus group were quite satisfied with their lives; where they were expected to play a certain role that had been pre-defined for them by society. There was a lot of emphasis on family. It seemed that the view taken by the participants was that a woman's role in society is exclusively family management and nothing else. Back in the office, the volunteers agreed that any attempt to promote deviation from this traditional

pattern of women's roles in the community would require concentrated effort and educational programs which emphasize the different roles women can fulfil in society and the fact that they should have free choice as to how they live their lives. It may be that this is an idea that they see as possible for the next generation.

Assembly members

All assembly men and women are elected by their communities and represent a political and administrative link between the people in the community and the upper levels of the government. They play a significant role in the socio-economic development of communities and in implementing development projects; such as drainage systems and rural electrification.

At the conclusion of the session, one of the female participants remarked that she had learned something from the session. This may mean that some of the questions made them think about issues they were not really aware of before. Overall, it was helpful to receive a different perspective on the topic of gender equality as compared with those voiced by the participants in the session the previous week.

For the third session, the volunteers had planned to meet a group of residents of mixed ages and genders in order to verify some of the learnings from the previous sessions. Unfortunately, this discussion did not take place due to wet weather. Therefore, the learnings from the two meetings will form the basis of the upcoming training.

Next steps

In light of the outcomes of the first focus group discussion, the volunteers consider that there is a need for training to enable young women to cope with issues in the workplace and in the hiring process. However, the training should be conducted for both young women and men and should therefore meet the needs of both gender groups. In addition, the volunteers recommend further consideration be given to the establishment of a committee of trustworthy women (such as Human Rights Defenders) who may serve as

first contacts in cases of gender-related discrimination.

PRO Placement: Legal Aid

Experiencing Access to Justice in Ghana

Volunteers at the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) with professional legal experience are given the opportunity to undertake a 'Pro-Placement' at the Legal Aid Scheme in the Greater Accra Region (Legal Aid). The purpose of this placement is to give these volunteers the opportunity to use their professional skills in an appropriate environment, whilst also furthering their knowledge of the operation of their field in Ghana.



Volunteers working side by side with the staff at the Legal Aid Centre.

In Ghana, the cost of going to court results in many members of society being unable to participate in the justice system and present their case. It also leads to attempts by some to independently resolve their disputes through adverse means. However, Legal Aid aims to ensure that all citizens have access to justice and the ability to participate in the legal system by providing legal representation to those who cannot afford it.

In order for Ghanaian citizens to be eligible to receive services from Legal Aid, they must first meet a means test. The means test indicator takes into account a potential client's income and assets, which serve as a guide to help Legal Aid assess whether they may be financially eligible. A means test takes place during the prospective client's intake interview at the Legal Aid office. Generally, legal services are available free of charge in both criminal and civil cases for citizens who earn less than, or equal to, the minimum wage.

When a client first arrives at Legal Aid, they are greeted and sent to room eleven, where an interview will take place in order to determine the validity of their legal dispute. Workers must give careful attention to the applicant during client intake in order to properly assess the legality and prospects of their claim.

Legal Aid tends to persuade most parties to opt for mediation as a dispute resolution mechanism, as it is more economical and efficient than going to court. However, it is highly important to solicit specific facts from the client because not all cases are suitable for mediation. If mediation is both suitable and elected by the client, an appointment will be made and a letter will be issued to the respondent party, inviting the respondent to appear for mediation. Sometimes, police assistance will be required in order to compel the respondent to attend mediation. This is requested by the client using a police assistance form. Mediation sessions take place at the Legal Aid office and will typically last 30 minutes; with all mediation sessions conducted by a trained mediator.

Although Legal Aid deals with virtually any legal issue, property and domestic disputes are the most prevalent. This is because there is no concrete system in Greater Accra that registers property title or land interest. Most of the cases that mediators dealt with in May involved situations where multiple people claimed an interest in a piece of land. In a typical property dispute, one person may assert that they were gifted the land from a Chief, another person may assert having received the same piece of land from the Chief's nephew, and so on. In these cases, many difficult legal questions arise, including who is even entitled to give away the land in the first place.

Language barriers are a significant obstacle for foreign interns. Interns depend greatly on the help of the local Legal Aid employees; most of whom can speak multiple languages including Twi, English, Ga, and Fante. Without their aid, mediation and client intake would be difficult for PAHO interns, especially since clients prefer to speak in their local tribal language, despite being bilingual. However, as the PAHO interns became more comfortable, it became clear that, as long as a willingness to be engaged in the

mediation was displayed, or interns asked for interpretation and responded in English, clients would often become more responsive and begin to discuss their issues in English as well.

PRO Placement: Social Work

Social Welfare: Protective Behaviour Program

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.

The Shelter Centre

The Shelter Centre is a government-run organization which provides housing for children living on the streets and children who have been forcibly removed from their homes because the Department of Social Welfare (the Department) has assessed that it is unsafe for them to remain there. The children can be taken to the Shelter Centre for a variety of reasons, including abuse at their homes or exposure to harmful practices such as child trafficking, child labour and forced marriage. The children placed in the Shelter Centre are all over the age of 8 years. Younger children are housed at a separate facility; the Osu Children's Home. The purpose of the Shelter Centre is to provide a safe place for the child to reside while further investigations can be undertaken into the child's home environment and the unsafe practices leading to the child's removal.

While residing at the Shelter Centre, the children partake in activities in the day-room, including singing sessions, group activities and basic education. However, as the children are all at different developmental stages and education levels (with some children having had no prior education) this can prove to be a difficult task. This month,

there were five children who took part in the lessons. Another four children at the Shelter were unable to participate because of various learning disabilities (one child was mentally disabled; one child was blind and two children were mute). Nevertheless, all of the nine children remained in the classroom during the lessons, which sometimes made it very chaotic.

Every Thursday, a PAHO volunteer attended the Shelter Centre and lead sessions with the children in the dayroom. The sessions were about talent development. The first session focused on sport. The volunteer spoke with the children about the different kinds of sport. The children were then given the opportunity to show the others a sport that they were good at. The most popular sport among the boys was soccer and among the girls; dancing. After that, the children were tasked with drawing a picture that showed something about sport. They really loved drawing; you could see that. The volunteer concluded the session with a ballgame outside.

The topic for the second session was music. The session began with a discussion around the different types of instruments and how music is made. The children knew a lot about the instruments commonly used in Africa. The children also made clay figurines and did drawings; all of which were focused on music. The children also showed that they love to sing and that it is something that they do every day. It was clear to the volunteer leading the session that when the children were singing they were engaged and were really trying to do the best that they could.

In the third session for the month, drama was the main focus. Again, the session began with a discussion around 'What is drama?' The children responded in saying that actors are persons who use drama. This was a good example and showed that the children knew the topic well. The volunteer spoke with the children about how you can use drama to express your emotions and to communicate even when you do not speak the same language. For example, the volunteer explained that you can use your body, expressions and gestures to explain something. The discussion then turned to the different kinds of emotions. There were pictures showing different emotions and the children had to guess the emotions that the pictures

expressed. They did it very well and liked to express the emotions in their own way. After the discussion, the children acted out various scenarios presented to them by the volunteer. At the end of the session there was some time for drawing and playing a game outside.

The last session of the month was a special session. The volunteer who had been leading the discussions for some time was moving on and so there was cake and drinks to say farewell. At the very end, the children sang songs for the volunteer.

The Boys' Remand Centre

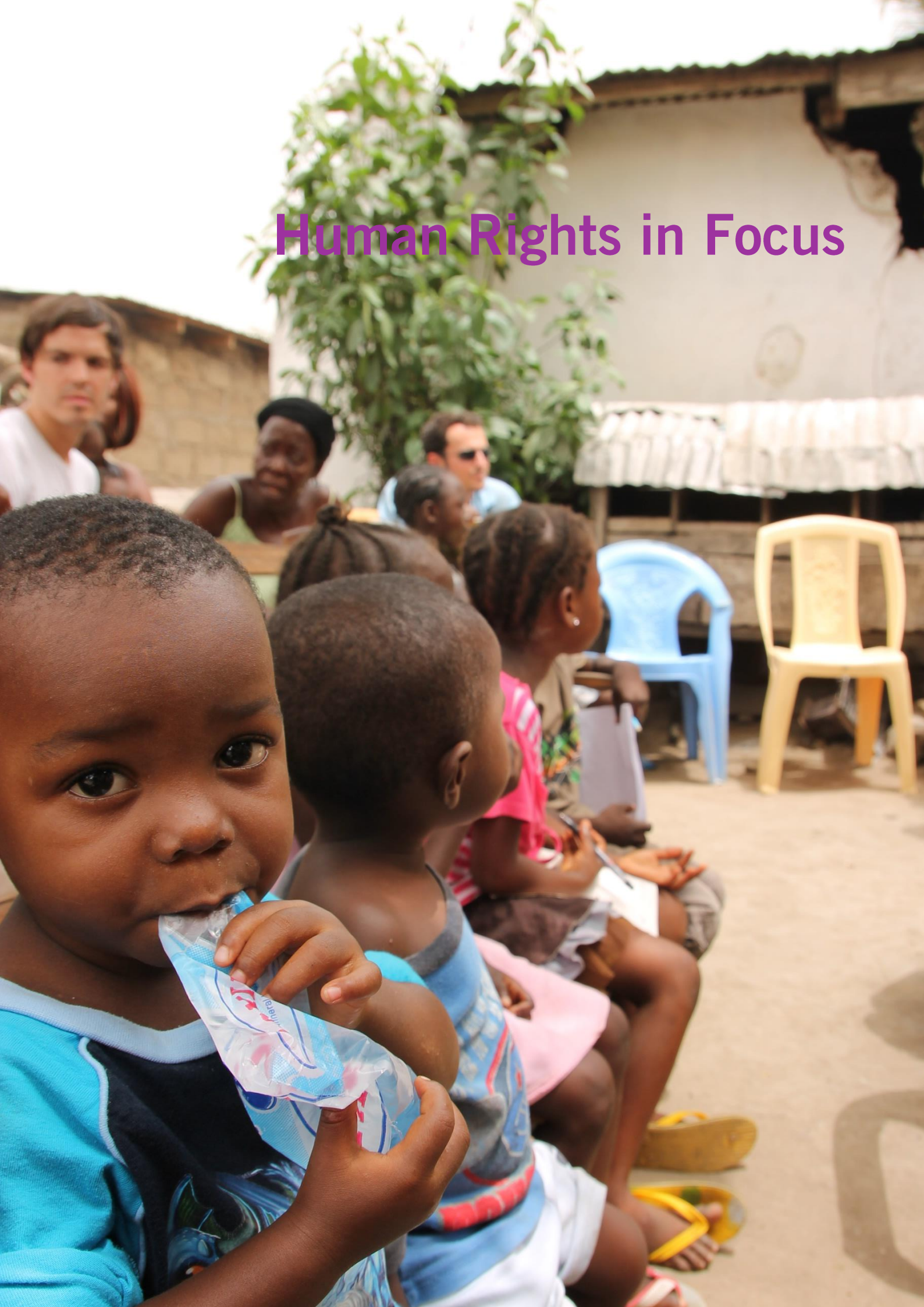
The Boys Remand Centre is another government-run scheme. It was established for boys under the age of 18 years who have been charged with a criminal offence; which can range from petty theft to murder. All of the boys are awaiting trial and will be moved to a Senior Correction Centre if they receive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

The PAHO volunteer conducted sessions at the Remand Centre every Wednesday and Friday. On Wednesday, the focus was on literacy. The literacy levels varied between the children; making it difficult to teach them at the same time. Some could not speak English; while others did not even know the alphabet. Many had never been in school. The main focus of the literacy sessions was to expand the vocabulary of the children. There was a subject every week (for example, clothes) and the children were taught words that related to the subject matter. Each week the volunteer went over and repeated the words taught to the children in the previous week. This gave them the opportunity to really know the words and every week they showed improvement. In the final week the children knew almost every word that they had been previously taught.

On Fridays, the sessions led by the volunteer focused on social and moral education. The first session was about giving and receiving compliments. The volunteer spoke with the children about what compliments are; the different types of compliments; and how to give and receive compliments. At first, it was difficult for the children to give

compliments because they did not understand exactly what they were. However, at the end of the session the children understood the concept. The second session was about emotions: the various kinds of emotions and how to recognize these emotions when they are displayed by yourself or others. The third session looked at the concept of law in the society and the volunteer spoke with the children about the kind of rules required in order to promote a well-organized society. The final session looked at aggressive regulation. The volunteer asked the children how they felt when they became aggressive; how they acted and how they wanted to act. The social and moral education was very difficult for a number of the children because their English was not sufficient for them to participate. However, they contributed to the conversation as best they could.

Human Rights in Focus



Forced Child Marriage

By Gabriel Valdes

Throughout the ages, traditions have been handed down from one generation to another. Traditions often become so culturally engrained that some may actually create cultural norms. Conversely, many traditions also die when they become incompatible with contemporary beliefs, attitudes, and evolving societies. Child marriage is a tradition that results from poverty and, as such, it has become part of the culture in certain areas of West Africa. However, as the region develops and education levels increase, this promotes awareness and a broader understanding of the consequences of child marriage for the family, the wider community and the nation. In some places, this has resulted in a decrease in child marriages.

In Ghana, forced child marriages are illegal by law and are taboo. Moreover, Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international covenant to which Ghana is a signatory, states that "*Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.*"¹⁵ Unfortunately, as is often the case, principles written on paper do not always apply in reality. In some regions of the country, forced child marriage is therefore still found. The practice thrives in poverty-stricken areas where the inaccessibility of resources creates ignorance; where there is leniency against perpetrators; and where the perceived opportunities and gains resulting from child marriage lead parents to pursue the practice.

According to Plan UK, a non-governmental organization which sponsors children in the poorest countries of the world, forced child marriage is caused by 5 main reasons.¹⁶ These are worth considering.

Gender inequality is cited by Plan UK as the first major factor contributing to forced child marriage.¹⁷ Women and girls are perceived to be of lesser value to the family and hence occupy a lower social status. For example, a family will not often give land to a daughter since she will be married and the land will vest in her husband's family. In this respect, female children are considered to be a burden.

According to Plan UK, poverty is the second major reason for forced child marriage.¹⁸ Again, in some communities, girls can be perceived as economic burdens. By marrying them early, their families believe that they are relieving themselves of that burden and also believe they are protecting their child (as the husband is normally expected to protect and provide for his wife).

The third major contributing factor is said to be traditional customs and religious practices, which dictate that the honour of the family and the sacred virginity of girls can be protected by early marriage.¹⁹ Therefore, some parents opt to rush their daughters into marriage to safeguard their purity and avoid potential rape and stigmatization.

The fourth reason cited by Plan UK is a failure by law enforcement officials to enforce laws.²⁰ Slow bureaucratic procedures deter children and concerned family members from contacting the authorities. Furthermore, a lack of awareness about the law itself may prevent families from fully appreciating the harmful consequences of child marriage.

Lastly, conflicts, disasters, and emergencies can play a significant role in precipitating child marriage.²¹ Unexpected events such as these place significant economic pressures on families who may, out of desperation, turn to child marriage; even where those families would not have considered such actions before.²²

The consequences of forced child marriage are felt by many: the individual being forced to marry; the

family; the wider community; and the nation as a whole. The consequences for the child may be broadly categorized into three sub-groups: health, education, and well-being. First and foremost, there are significant health consequences. Due to their physiological immaturity, girls under the age of 20 years who give birth have a much higher risk of maternal mortality.²³ Furthermore, they may experience complications during their pregnancies which can lead to high mortality rates for their unborn and infant children.²⁴ Obstetric Fistula and HIV/AIDS cases are prevalent among under-aged brides, many of whom are incapable of practicing safe sexual intercourse due to a lack of education or the fact that the intercourse is often forced.²⁵ The consequences of child marriage for a child's education are also significant. Child brides are usually denied schooling and proper education, which not only separates them from former classmates but also inhibits their chances of earning a livelihood.²⁶ The children involved in child marriages also suffer consequences that can have an impact upon their general well being. A lack of protection from the law, family and community can lead to mental infirmity; particularly where the child is secluded and loses contact with family, friends, and classmates. This seclusion can also lead to domestic abuse, depression, and diminished psychological development.²⁷

As aforementioned, forced child marriages do not only affect the child. Rather, they act to entrap people and communities in cycles of poverty. As education is inaccessible to the young girls who are involved in the marriage, employment and economic opportunities become scarce and prevent the child from escaping poverty. This inability to substantially contribute to the family income obliges the child to continue the traditional house-wife lifestyle; something that is also likely to be perpetuated by her

¹⁵ United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop>.

¹⁶ Plan UK, "Early and forced marriage – facts, figures and what you can do".

<http://www.plan-uk.org/early-and-forced-marriage/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Plan UK, Opt. Cit.

¹⁹ Plan UK, Opt. Cit.

²⁰ Plan UK, Opt. Cit.

²¹ Plan UK, Opt. Cit.

²² Plan UK, Opt. Cit.

²³ United Nations Population Fund, "State of World Population 2004: Adolescents and Young People".

<http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2004/english/ch9/page5.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United Nations Population Fund, "Marrying Too Young; End Child Marriage". 2012, <http://unfpa.org/endchildmarriage>

²⁶ United Nations Population Fund, 2012, Opt. Cit.

²⁷ United Nations Population Fund, 2012, Opt. Cit.



Our Volunteers met with leaders of Youth Groups to discuss the issue of Child Marriage in the community.

own children.²⁸ This not only affects the welfare of the community but impacts upon the entire country, as it means that the nation's women are unable to reach their full potential and participate fully in the workforce and future development.

Because forced child marriage is a symptom of poverty, it is not easy to establish culpability. Nor should the focus be solely upon establishing culpability and criminality. Rather, the focus should be on preventing child marriages by improving access to education and protecting already wedded children by helping them to aspire to brighter futures. The practice stems from poverty and so punishing families by way of fines or imprisonment does not solve the issue; it merely pushes it deeper into underground networks.

Projects at a community level empower youth through education. Safe havens for children at risk can ensure a child's future by providing crucial information about marriage, health and opportunities in education. With this awareness, a child may opt for a different route and may even influence others to follow their path. However, there must be support from the community, government involvement and funding for these projects in order for real change to take place. An example of such a project is "Time

with Grandma", a project run by the United Nations Population Fund, which involved reaching out to community elders and giving them materials to teach and guide youngsters on issues relating to maternal health, sexually transmitted diseases, family planning and sexual education.²⁹ Although this program did not necessarily touch upon the issue of forced child marriage, it had far reaching impacts; for example, the increased awareness it promoted within the community resulted in children having more control over their lives and their future. By increasing opportunities for young girls and women, it can lead to them choosing another future and slowly change the traditions and culture built around forced child marriage.

Mental Disabilities in Ghana

By Anna Goll

*"As soon as you get a mental disability, you nearly lose all your rights, even to give your opinion."*³⁰

The existence of humanity is often considered a natural wonder. Our bodies are complex and contain a great number of microscopic structures, all working together and making mankind what it is; the highest developed species on mother Earth. Only a slight modification of one of these structures can affect the whole interplay of the body's building blocks of life. As soon as there is a noticeable drift from the norm, people start talking about "disabilities" or "handicaps". But what are we defining as the "norm"? And is a "handicap" really a handicap, or is it just a sign of the diversity of life?

Defining "normal"

Every Friday, volunteers from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) lead workshops with the student members of the Human Rights Club at Accra Senior High School. During recent workshops, the volunteers asked the students to close their eyes and imagine an ordinary human being. The students considered that a "normal" person has all of the physical attributes which define a human body; such as arms, a nose, legs, and so on. Being either black or white was considered "normal", as was having little or no hair. The volunteers then asked the students what would happen to their imagined person if they received an added chromosome or many more nerve transmitters to the brain, without telling them that these little changes would lead to the disorders known as "down-syndrome" and "bipolar disorder". According to

²⁸ International Center for Research on Women, "Too Young to Wed: Education and Action Toward Ending Child Marriage", (Washington: International Center for Research on Women, 2005).

²⁹ United Nations Population Fund, "'Time with Grandma', Increasing access to Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Information and Services in the Central Region of Ghana". 2011, http://ghana.unfpa.org/assets/user/file/TIME_WITH_GRANDMA.pdf.

³⁰ Doris Appiah as cited in Human Rights Watch, "Ghana: People with Mental Disabilities Face Serious Abuse". 2 October 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/02/ghana-people-mental-disabilities-face-serious-abuse>.

the students, the imaginary person was still a “normal” human being. For experimental purposes the volunteers randomly chose two students and put a paper hat on their heads. Their classmates still spoke of them as “normal” students.

But, what if the paper hat were to symbolize a mental disability? Would the person still represent a “normal” human being? In circumstances where only one characteristic has been changed, does it really make the whole person different?

Every student will face difficulties at some point in school. For most of the girls it is mathematics or physics and, for the boys, language or drawing. Students with mental disabilities simply face challenges in different areas of their lives; however, this does not make them any less valuable than any other student.

The controversial

Bearing in mind that people with mental disabilities are challenged in different areas of their lives, such as in expressing their opinion and in communicating more generally, communities and nations have a social responsibility to support them to exercise their human rights. This has been recognized by the United Nations under the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; the provisions of which afford persons with mental disabilities special protections. Signing in 2007, Ghana became the 119th country to ratify the Convention.

Although Ghana is obligated under international law to treat the 5 million Ghanaians living with disabilities (including the 2.8 people with mental disabilities)³¹ as equal citizens with equal rights, there does not yet appear to have been actual ratification of the Convention. According to Human Rights Watch, research into the living conditions of disabled people in Ghana has revealed some terrifying results. Despite passing the Mental Health Act in 2012, Ghana has dedicated less than 1 percent of its national budget to mental health.³² The country provides

the opportunity for mental health treatment in only three psychiatric hospitals; all of which are overcrowded and face problems with staff shortages and poor hygiene. There are only 12 practicing psychiatrists and 600 psychiatric nurses nationwide.³³ Moreover, Human Rights Watch reports on cases where patients have been treated against their will or even beaten by the nurses for complaining about pain.³⁴ Most shocking, however, are the Human Rights Watch reports on human rights violations in the prayer camps, spread through the country.

Torture on a new level – the prayer camps

Prayer camps are found throughout the country. They are privately owned by Christian religious institutions and are established for the purposes of prayer, counselling and spiritual healing. People with disabilities are institutionalised at prayer camps against their will, brought in by either family members or police because of their offensive or “abnormal” behaviour. The camps operate outside of government control and it is not known how many of these camps exist, or how many people are instituted there, because they do not often use registers.³⁵ Because there is no governmental control or oversight, human rights abuses are more likely to happen.

The myth that evil spirits or demons possess people with mental disabilities is widely spread in Ghana. The patients at prayer camps are often forced by self-proclaimed prophets to fast for the purpose of being cured. It is believed that making the evil spirits fast will make it easier for good spirits to enter the body.³⁶ At the prayer camps, disabled and mentally ill people are isolated from the others and are chained, with a movement space of 2 metres. They have to eat, bathe, sleep

and defecate in the same area. Sometimes they are chained for a day, but Human Rights Watch also reports that there have been cases where people have been chained for nearly a year.³⁷ These torturous methods are used until the prophet receives a message from God and, until that time, the administrators deny people with disabilities access to leave the prayer camp.³⁸

People institutionalised at the prayer camps have to buy their own medication, which is very expensive. If they cannot afford to do so, they do not receive any form of therapy because, according to the prophets, the “angels don’t allow taking medicine”. Instead of using proper medication, the prophets try to cure diseases like malaria with traditional methods, such as the application of palm oil.³⁹

Discrimination, as well as physical and verbal abuse, is daily fare at the prayer camps. The opinion of the patients is not considered because it is assumed that they do not know what is best for them. Referring to the quote at the beginning of this article, the research certainly supports the view that people with mental disabilities lose nearly all of their rights once they are institutionalised in either a psychiatric clinic or a prayer camp.

What needs to change?

Violations of the rights of people with disabilities can no longer be accepted or ignored. Human rights abuses need to be monitored in a greater number of areas; particularly in the prayer camps, where there is a lack of clarity about what is happening. Further, there has to be more education on this topic. When conducting the workshops for the Human Rights Club, the volunteers were struck by how little the students knew about disabilities. Education is the key to abandon myths which state that disabled people are possessed by ‘evil spirits’ or that they are violent, or useless. Outlining the scientific reasons for the behaviour of disabled people will raise awareness and create a more tolerant society in Ghana. But, nevertheless, the Government has to

³¹ Human Rights Watch, ‘Like a Death Sentence’ Abuses Against Persons with Mental Disabilities in Ghana, (United States of America: Human Rights Watch, 2012): 25.

³² Ibid, 10.

³³ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 13.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 17.

³⁵ Foundation Harcourt, “African Prayer Camps: Advocating against Abuses.”

<http://www.fondationdharcourt.org/t-he-projects/african-prayer-camps-advocating-against-abuses>

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 50.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 17.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 17.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch, Opt. Cit., 50.

work hand-in-hand with society. There needs to be more investment in the mental health sector. If more money is provided, more psychiatric clinics can be established and more nurses and psychiatrists can be trained to provide professional and adequate treatment.

The human rights abuses against people with disabilities should be treated as an international problem, since they violate both national and international law. Western countries should raise more awareness on this topic, which will ultimately help to uncover even more human rights violations.

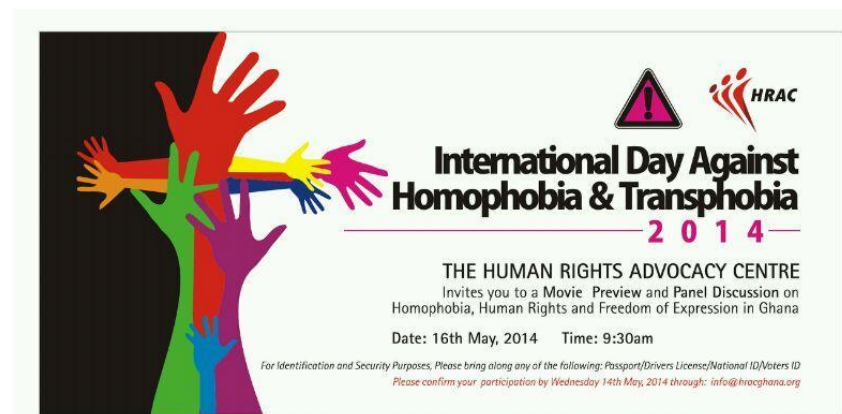
Homophobia, Human Rights & Freedom of Expression in Ghana

Tara Nazaryan

On Friday the 16th of May, volunteers from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office were invited to attend a seminar hosted by the Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC) at the United States Embassy in Ghana. The topic that was discussed was homophobia, human rights and freedom of expression in Ghana. This day also marked the anniversary of 'International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia,' which is celebrated every year on the 17th of May. The reason why this date is so significant among the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community is because, on the 17th of May 1990, the World Health Organization (WHO) delisted homosexuality as a mental illness.

Situation in Africa

The nations of the western world are slowly legalizing gay marriage, however the majority of the African nations are further behind; they are still advocating for recognition of the right of sexual preference (including homosexuality) as a basic human right. According to Amnesty International, homosexuality is still illegal in 38 African countries:



Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia,

Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.⁴⁰ In some countries, such as Mauritania, Sudan, northern Nigeria and southern Somalia, the penalty for a person found guilty of engaging in homosexual activity is death.⁴¹ There are only 16 African countries that have no criminal law against homosexuality. These are Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda and South Africa.⁴²

South Africa is the only nation in Africa that has legalized gay marriage. In 2006, the Constitutional Court of South Africa, in the case of *Minister of Home Affairs v. Fourie*,⁴³ held that gays and lesbians must be granted marital rights because this is consistent with the right to freedom against sexual

orientation discrimination contained in South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, made law by then President Mandela. At the time, South Africa became the fifth country to legalize same-sex marriage.⁴⁴

Situation in Ghana

In Ghana no such movements have been made. In fact, section 104 (1)(b) of Ghana's *Criminal Offences Act 1960* stipulates that, "whoever has unnatural carnal knowledge of any person of sixteen years or over with his consent is guilty of a misdemeanor." The Act defines unnatural carnal knowledge as "sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner." This has been interpreted to include homosexual activity. Homosexuality is not viewed in a positive light in Ghana and it is common for heavy prison sentences to be handed down to persons found guilty of this provision of the Act.⁴⁵

In 2011, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, pledged that if Ghana did not remove its ban on homosexuality, he would withdraw aid for the country. However, this did not change matters in Ghana. In fact, President Atta-Mills of Ghana responded to the position taken by Mr

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, "Making Love a Crime: Criminalization of Same-Sex Conduct in Sub-Saharan Africa."

http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/making_love_a_crime_-_facts_figures.pdf.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Amnesty International, Opt. Cit.

⁴³ *Minister of Home Affairs and Another v Fourie and Others; Lesbian and Gay Equality Project and Others v Minister of Home Affairs and Others* 2006 (3) BCLR 355.

⁴⁴ Ayodeiji K. Perrin, "Gay Marriage in South Africa: A Human Rights Legacy? An (Anti-) Apartheid Legacy? Or Both?"

http://www.academia.edu/5234647/Gay_Marriage_in_South_Africa_A_Human_Rights_Legacy_An_Anti-Apartheid_Legacy_Or_Both

⁴⁵ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, "Laws prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation".
<http://ilga.org/ilga/en/countries/GHANA/Law>.

Cameron in saying, “no one can deny Prime Minister Cameron his right to make policies, take initiatives or make statements that reflect his societal norms and ideals. But he does not have the right to direct other sovereign nations as to what they should do especially where their societal norms and ideals are different from those which exist in the Prime Minister's society.”⁴⁶

Discussions at the seminar

The seminar itself highlighted the many issues that are occurring across the African nations. The HRAC decided to showcase a video documentary by British radio DJ Scott Mills called, “World's Worst Place to be Gay.” The documentary followed the journey taken by Mills to Uganda, where the suffering of the LGBT community was easily evident. Both Uganda and Nigeria passed anti-gay laws earlier this year. The western world viewed this act as a ‘*step backward*’ in terms of human rights around the world. The aim of the HRAC, as expressed at the seminar, is to try and spread awareness and come up with solutions to prevent Ghana following in the footsteps of these nations. Even though man-to-man relations are illegal in Ghana, the situation is not as bad as it is in Uganda or Nigeria and it is hoped that it will never reach that stage.

During the viewing of the documentary, the atmosphere felt somewhat light-hearted, despite the severity of the issue under discussion. Among the many guests that were invited were the Dutch Ambassador Hans Docter and the United States Ambassador Gene A. Cretz, both of whom were present to show their respective nation's support for the LGBT community of Ghana. Both Ambassadors offered their assistance to the Ghanaian government in coming up with legislation to legalize gay rights.

The video was followed by a discussion led by a carefully selected panel of three: professor of anthropology, Kwame Edwin Out; journalist, Nana Yaa Ofori Atta and social worker and artist, Nii Kwartelai. The panel members clearly held influential positions in Ghanaian society. The

panel members each discussed the concepts raised in the video and spoke more generally about the LGBT community in Ghana. The discussion then turned to an examination of the ways to raise awareness about gay rights in Ghana and how to push an agenda for the legalization of homosexual activity and gay marriage.

Ms Atta, in particular, emphasized that, if concrete change is to occur, a well thought-out advocacy plan and securing the support of the right stakeholders are critical. She also recommended that the advocacy take a broader focus; not on (male) gay issues alone but to team up with other groups that are at the edge of the society. She illustrated her point by describing her own status as a divorced Ghanaian woman with a child who also works full-time and holds sufficient status in the society. In the eyes of many Ghanaian people, she is perhaps pushing the boundaries in terms of what society expects of a woman. However, she said that people need to try and shift the spotlight from a person's personal life and refocus it on other matters because, “it is nobody's business what I do in my personal life”.

Demonstrations and lobbying were some examples mentioned by HRAC as being ways in which activists and organizations can make a difference. The HRAC also needs help from other organizations and external bodies to further campaign and make a stand. One thing that was clear from the seminar was that it is essential to maintain pressure and try and push the message through the right channels for it to be heard.

E-Waste

Gabriel Valdes

The definition of e-waste encompasses all items with electrical components that are now broken, beyond repair, or simply no longer of use. This could be due to the release of newer models, or upgraded technology. The e-waste may come from items such as computers, entertainment electronics, mobile phones, household appliances (such as refrigerators and air conditioners) and less obvious items, such as spent

fluorescent tubes, batteries and battery-operated toys.⁴⁷

Considering the recent birth of computing technology and its world expansion in the 1990's, e-waste is a relatively new environmental issue. It is also an area in which we have seen initiatives and efforts to reduce the production of e-waste. Corporations, for example, used to do as they pleased; they created, transported and sold products but seldom showed any interest in a product's disposal at the end of its life-cycle. However, current trends, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), have put pressure on corporations to improve initiatives directed at disposal methods for products nearing the end of their life-cycles. Some corporations, such as Windows and Apple, for example, have dedicated huge sums of money to recycle, manage and dispose of their e-waste.

Even though some corporations are actively engaged in improving this situation, e-waste is still not properly disposed of in many places around the world; especially where poverty and a lack of environmental regulation prevail. It is still common to find e-waste burners in some regions of Asia and in the slums of Western Africa.⁴⁸ Sadly, if e-waste was not an issue in recent decades, it has become a much more serious issue since technology use has increased and technology has become more accessible. This increase in demand and supply in the market is producing more e-waste.

Improper disposal of e-waste can be dangerous. Burning e-waste indiscriminately produces toxic fumes that not only affect the children and young men who work at the disposal sites, but also the young girls that sell water next to the sites. All of the nearby inhabitants are also affected; people who have no choice but to live there, either to make a living from sales to the e-waste burners or because they have no better placement for their homes. The toxicity is due, in part, to lead, mercury, cadmium and a number of other substances contained in the e-waste.⁴⁹ The burning of these metals has been linked to neurotoxicity, carcinogens, problems in pregnancies, intellectual impairment in

⁴⁶ Peter Clotey, “Ghana Parliament to Review Legal Status of Homosexuals,” *Voice of America*, 2 November 2011.

⁴⁷ “Welcome to Ewasa.” E-waste Association of South Africa, <http://www.ewasa.org/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ E-waste Association of South Africa, Opt. Cit.



E-waste Workers in Agbogbloshie

children and has also been found to affect the male reproductive system, the central nervous and blood systems, kidneys and bones.⁵⁰

E-waste is an issue today because of three main reasons: profit, ignorance and indifference. First, there is ignorance. The donation of old equipment, such as used cell phones, by more developed countries to less developed countries might make people feel good about themselves but the truth is that old equipment is normally just that; old and obsolete. This equipment may end up being thrown away by the receiver, which means it usually ends up in a dump, as there is less access to disposal sites. It is then collected by children and young men working in these zones who sell the scraps of zinc and copper. Next, there is indifference. Often, people just throw their unused or broken equipment away, without any concern as to where it ends up. This is the case even though most electronic devices can be sent to specialized disposal sites to be properly recycled. That waste will then most likely end up in one of the clandestine e-waste sites. Finally, there is profit. People who have no other income find that they can make money by, for example, burning the e-waste and recuperating the metal. Corporations which are not forced to comply with expensive recycling regulations also prefer saving money that they would otherwise have

to pay for the proper disposal of their products.

In Europe, e-waste is increasing at a rate of between three to five percent a year, almost three times faster than the total waste stream. Developing countries are also expected to triple their e-waste production over the next five years.⁵¹ As technology becomes more accessible and advanced, we will continue to create more e-waste. It is crucial to work towards establishing strong solutions to the e-waste problem, so that we can avoid a flood of uncontrollable e-waste disposal sites.

Switzerland has an advanced e-waste disposal and recycling program: the Swiss E-waste Competence Program. Regardless of what, or where, consumers buy in Switzerland, they pay a fee as the item is brought, called an advanced recycling fee, which covers all of the unprofitable disposal processes that the given item will have to go through.⁵² Then, the consumer can return, free of charge, any of the items they wish to dispose of. Retailers are obliged to collect all types of products they sell, regardless of the brand. For example, if one retailer sells computers, they must accept all computers returned to them, regardless of whether the brand is a brand that

they sell.⁵³ Once disposed of, the product is then sent to the “detox” stage, where toxic components are separated to prevent contamination.⁵⁴ The shredding of these materials is the next stage. This is done to collect the metals to prepare for their reuse.⁵⁵ The last step in the e-waste cycle is the refinement process, where the shredded material is burnt; scientifically separating the metals.⁵⁶ The metals are then sold to companies that need the given metals such that, “the steel from your old computer case could be used in the manufacturing of your new car.”⁵⁷ Although this is not feasible in every country, especially in less developed countries, more attempts at minimizing the environmental impact of our materials should be made.

Visits to e-waste disposal sites, such as the site based in the Old Fadama slum in Accra, Ghana, are often unwelcome. The workers do not permit photographs. Some of the workers are accusatory; stating that visitors come to the workplace, tell the workers they are breathing toxins and harming the environment but then leave with their pictures and no solutions. This is not an honorable job and those that do it, know it the most. Sadly, these workers are at the end of the capitalist chain and are ignored by those who can make a difference: consumers, governments and corporations.

The approach taken by people towards e-waste disposal needs to change. Principally, there needs to be a legal framework with regulations that are made and respected; proper collection systems that enable ease of disposal; and intensive logistics which raise awareness of the e-waste life-cycle.

⁵⁰ Greenpeace, “What’s in electronic devices?” Greenpeace International, 27 June 2005, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/toxics/electronics/the-e-waste-problem/what-s-in-electronic-devices/>.

⁵¹ Greenpeace, “The e-waste problem.” Greenpeace International, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/toxics/electronics/the-e-waste-problem/>.

⁵² E-waste, Swiss E-waste Competence, “Buy,” <http://www.e-waste.ch/en/buy/index.html>.

⁵³ E-waste, Swiss E-waste Competence, “Return,” <http://www.e-waste.ch/en/return/index.html>.

⁵⁴ E-waste, Swiss E-waste Competence, “Detox,” <http://www.e-waste.ch/en/detox/index.html>.

⁵⁵ E-waste, Swiss E-waste Competence, “Shred,” <http://www.e-waste.ch/en/granuler/index.html>.

⁵⁶ E-waste, Swiss E-waste Competence, “Refine,” <http://www.e-waste.ch/en/refine/index.html>.

⁵⁷ “Electronic Waste, what is it all about?” Effortless Recycling, the Electronic Waste Specialists, 2014, <http://www.erecycling.co.za/>.

From the HRJ Coordinator

Expanding the reach.

May 2014

The increase in volunteers over the past month has allowed us to expand on current projects and restart some of the things set out at the beginning of the year.

In particular, the restarting of slum profiling is a reassurance to those who worked so hard on this in December and January. As we speak, volunteers are in the process of developing a full report detailing the human rights situation in the slums, and there is an heir of hope that this can be used to create some positive change.

Off the back of this work some volunteers have been inspired by the work at FLAP and have doubled efforts to help out there. This finally includes the creation of the slum school book drive team and fundraising plan, training on human rights for batik workers in Old Fadama, a slum campaign which will begin to work with partners and government ministries to address the rights violations, and the creation of several proposals for the other volunteers sent through Projects Abroad to lend their support.

As I sit here now the signs of busy season are already beginning to show. It's our hope that we can maximise on the increased manpower- use our budding and enthusiastic volunteers while we have them and get results for the project partners who so greatly deserve our support.

Matt Andrew

HRJ Staff

Coordinator

Matt Andrew

May Editors

Cassie Aprile
Karin Heidenreich
Gabriel Valdes
Rebecca Maggs

Project Report Contributors

Fadama Legal Assistance Programme

Cassie Aprile

Slum Profiling: Health

Cassie Aprile

Human Rights Club

Rebecca Maggs

Gender Equality Outreach: Dodowa

Karin Heidenreich

PRO Placement: Legal Aid

Katherine Pocha

PRO Placement: Social Work

Charlotte Rottier
