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Human Rights Advocacy, Monitoring and Abuse Resolution

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

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Table of Contents

October Project Staff	2
Monthly Project Updates	4
Fadama Legal Assistance Program	5
Generating publicity and addressing the conflict between cultural beliefs and the law	5
Gender Equality Outreach: Abokobi.....	6
Empowering women to take control.....	6
Alsuna Community Outreach.....	8
Human Rights in an Islamic Community	8
Human Rights Clubs	9
Accra High School	9
Human Rights in Focus.....	12
Trafficking : One of the Most Horrific Human Rights Issues of Our Time.....	13
By Carole Howlett.....	13
FGM in Ghana	14
By Carole Howlett.....	14
From the HRJ Coordinator	17
HRJ Staff.....	17
Project Report Contributors.....	17

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).

Old Fadama's residents, as well as 188 million African people who live in slums¹, have one thing in common: they are poor, marginalized in society and not aware of their rights. Throughout the month of October, three volunteers, Carole Howlett, Giulia De Paoli and Rioja Gwynne-Porter, held five sessions in the slum about suspects' rights, domestic violence and child maintenance. The PAHO's team collaborated with Frederick Opoku, the Executive Director of WISEEP-GH (Woman in Slums Economic Empowerment Ghana) which is the NGO that set up FLAP together with PAHO. According to these organizations, increased understanding and awareness of fundamental human rights at Old Fadama are essential



since they enable the slum's residents to report violations of rights and encourage legal conformity and access to justice.

Two outreaches at Old Fadama had the aim of educating women about domestic violence and child maintenance.

Since domestic violence is a serious problem in the slum and is often overlooked, excused or denied, the volunteers aimed at stressing the importance of a life free from violence which is the right of every individual. Therefore, for example, behaviors such as taking or even threatening to take someone else's money or belongings as a form of punishment, or isolating someone from other people, have to be considered as forms of violence, which are never justified. In addition, volunteers encouraged women to report domestic violence either to the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), which is a section of the police that offers free services to the victims, or to the FLAP.

As regards child maintenance, the PAHO's team provided a group of young women with some general rules for maintaining a child. For instance, according to The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been signed by the Ghanaian Government, daughters should have exactly the same rights than sons. The volunteers explained what should happen when parents do not agree on child maintenance, namely how custody and payment for the child are supposed to work. In particular, women should be aware that if the father fails to pay child maintenance ordered by the Family Tribunal, the court can fine him and even order a term of imprisonment.

Furthermore, "In all actions concerning children [...] the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration²". During this session, the volunteers made women aware of the existence of the Interstate Succession Law (1985) which forces men to provide for their widows and children and explained to them the importance of making a will, which helps to ensure women's rights.

The aim of both sessions seemed to be achieved even though the women preferred to listen to the presentations rather than to share with the group their feelings, questions and personal experiences. This reaction may be justifiable because of the sensitivity of both topics, the lack of confidence in the governmental institutions and, especially as regards the session on child maintenance, because the members of the group, also including prostitutes, probably do not know each other very well. At the end of both sessions, supervisors and volunteers agreed that it would be a great idea also to raise the awareness of men on these two topics in the future.

Throughout the month of October the PAHO's team held two sessions, this time aimed at men, which proved to be extremely successful. Since many people in Old Fadama are not aware of their rights, it is very likely for them to become victims of police corruption. Suspects' rights are, indeed, abused by the Ghana police to a considerable extent. For this reason, the volunteers raised awareness of suspects' rights, with the aim of stopping human rights infringements, certain that, until the Ghanaian citizens know and understand the law, the police will

¹ Paul D. Ocheje, "In the Public Interest": Forced Evictions, Land Rights and Human Development in Africa", *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2007): 176

² Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 3, Clause 1

continue to abuse their fundamental human rights with impunity. The volunteers highlighted the fact that even though a person is suspected or even arrested, number of basic rights and protection should be afforded to that person. In case of arrest and detention, for example, police should use only reasonable force, since "No person shall, whether or not he is arrested, restricted or detained, be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"³. Every person also has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, the right to a lawyer and the right to apply, in most cases, for bail. At the end of the sessions some handouts giving the contact details of the main organizations to contact concerning violations of suspects' rights were distributed. Besides being aware of their own rights, the slum's residents were encouraged to report infringements of rights, because only in this way can justice be done.

Both groups attending these two sessions were particularly attentive. This was probably due to the fact that lots of the slum's male residents are regularly stopped by police and suffer unjustified arrest. The majority of them asked lots of questions on a range of topics including how to report a crime, whether the police can take payments, and whether complaints of a crime could be made to a spiritual leader in the community rather than to the police. Lack of knowledge about the topic and lack of confidence in most governmental institutions seem to be the basis for these questions. Indeed, Old Fadama's residents have to face not only the problem of the ignorance of the law, but also that of corruption in the Ghana police. As an example, when exploring people's daily experiences with corruption in Ghana, the GCB 2009 (Global Corruption Barometer) found that, on average, more than 5 in 10 people reported paying a bribe⁴. The problem of corruption is really serious as it can bring the downfall of a nation, creates poverty and tends to worsen the economy.

The last session at Old Fadama was again about child maintenance but this time it was intended for teachers. The

team tried to outline the responsibilities of both parents towards all their children, the importance of the Family Tribunal when speaking about payment for the child and custody, and the legal rights that divorced and widowed women have according to national statutes such as the Matrimonial Clause Act as well as international statutes such as The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Especially during this session, volunteers realized how difficult it can be to raise awareness in a society where violations of human rights are too common. The volunteers aimed at emphasizing the message that there is always an option to address infringements of human rights, which is the law that applies equally to everybody.

At the beginning of one session, three young women came into the FLAP's office telling the Executive Director that the police had asked them for some money in order to register their report about an allegation of abuse. The three girls perceived the police's request as a violation of rights. After having verified that the request was actually an infringement, the FLAP office helped the women to get their money back. This was only possible because the girls were aware of their rights and found the courage to report the abuse. In conclusion, even though the fight against human rights' violations in Old Fadama is just starting and much has to be done in the coming months, the FLAP project is already achieving benefits for the residents. Raising awareness is a slow process that needs time, and tangible change is hard won, but small steps are being taken that will lead to positive outcomes for the residents of Old Fadama.

Gender Equality Outreach: Abokobi

Empowering women to take control

In 2009, PAHO volunteers conducted outreach sessions to a women's action group in Abokobi, where a number of topics were explored, such as domestic violence, sexual health, and access to education. In response to monitoring work in the area, PAHO began working with a partner, a local NGO for empowerment of local rural women to continue the work begun here. The two organisations agreed that the focus of these discussions should be gender equality and women empowerment, and has continued to run with several different groups throughout May – September.

Abokobi is a little town about an hour away from Accra. It is a small community with traditional standards in Christianity. Volunteers, after discussion with community workers researched a variety of topics of particular concern to local people; one which is of particular importance in Ghana is health. Health is of substantial significance in Ghana because the life expectancy is considerably lower than the majority of other countries (the average worldwide is 70 and Ghana's average is 62⁵). Physical and mental health can be affected by many factors; one factor which is rife in Ghana is the traditional values held by religions. These values can sometimes hinder what is actually best for someone's health, such as practising safe sex or getting a divorce, which, are frowned upon by the Catholic Church. Therefore, the aim of the Projects Abroad volunteers is to raise awareness. It is hoped that through raising awareness, the standard of living for the average Ghanaian will improve and life expectancy will increase.

It is worth noting that Ghana's health care system has been complimented and described as the most successful healthcare system on the Africa continent⁶. However, a lot of rural areas often have no modern healthcare, resulting in many citizens finding it

³ Republic of Ghana Constitution Act 1992, Article 15, Clause 2

⁴ Vitus A. Azeem, Press statement to launch transparency international's global corruption barometer (GCB) (2009): 4

⁵ World Health Organisation, Global Health Observatory Data Repository, 2012 <<http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.688>>

⁶ "These are the countries where I'm the least known" – Bill Gates visits Ghana". *Thejournal.ie*. TheJournal.ie. Retrieved 24 June 2013



Abokobi project team after their session on personal hygiene

very difficult to access facilities due to the distance and the price of travelling. The majority of the local people in rural areas like Abokobi cannot afford to do so. Therefore, traditional methods are relied upon which are not always sufficient for treatment. Consequently, the volunteers made it their objective to visit Abokobi once a week for four weeks with the aim of educating a group of about 10-20 locals on how to maintain and enhance health within a Ghanaian context. The first session was designed to focus on setting up a business, to better the standard of living in such rural communities. Health: general health, maternal health and sexual health formed the basis of the second session, while the third extended health care by covering personal hygiene as well as family management. The fourth and final session concentrated on domestic violence and how to stay safe.

In the first session, the volunteer's discussed with the participants how to set up a business. This is important in such a community because access to healthcare is limited in rural areas and so travelling must occur. However it is expensive to travel, so a family needs to have a certain amount of money to travel and to pay for healthcare if needed. In previous years, Ghana's unemployment rate reached around 20%⁷! Although, this has started to decrease, helping communities to start their own businesses will achieve a higher level of employment throughout the country. This in turn will lead to a

better quality of life and a healthier style of living. At the end of the session an interactive activity took place where the attendees split into groups and prepared a presentation in which they had to explain what their business was about, how they would attract the infrastructure, and explain the financial implications. This was very successful and created a great deal of energy and interest. When the participants were asked at the end of the session what they had learned, their answers indicated a depth and breadth of appreciation of the topic. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for setting up a business is financing, therefore an applicant will need to have good health and present themselves well in order to succeed in getting a loan. The group made it clear that health is a subject that they would be very interested in covering.

This led to the second session which focused on health, volunteers aimed to inform local Ghanaians on general health, maternal health and sexual health. In Ghana there is a very low standard of nutrition. For example in children under 5-years-old, 70% of deaths are caused by an infection compounded by malnutrition⁸. This demonstrates the need to stress to attendees the value of good nutrition. In addition, an activity took place where volunteers showed the participants a few simple exercises that they could do at home. This was very successful. All the participants enjoyed

taking part and asked if the exercises could be run every week.

Following general health, the volunteers made a presentation on maternal health. This was essential because 1 in 66 pregnant women die from pregnancy in Ghana⁹, which is usually due to lack of family planning and lack of medical facilities. Therefore, volunteers stressed the importance of family planning to try and address such statistics as: 750,000 teenagers aged 15 to 19 years old became pregnant in 2012¹⁰. This is a very high number so the group which consisted of mainly women, were informed about the various forms of contraception and how to plan for a family. All members of the group were very interested in what we had to communicate about contraception; both males and females asked a lot of questions and we were able to correct some skewed views on the use of condoms such as: you cannot wear two at a time. The final part of this session focused on sexual health, in particular HIV/AIDs and how to prevent the spread of STDs. In Ghana around 230,000 people have HIV¹¹ so this was a very important topic to cover. Furthermore, because of the more traditional and religious values that are in place in Ghana, some forms of contraception, if not all, are frowned upon as it is believed that it is not the way God intended. This is why it is imperative to educate Ghanaians on the importance of using protection in order to prevent the spread of STDs which can be life threatening.

The third session focused on family management, covering topics such as child maintenance, relationships within the family and family budgeting. This was covered in order to help locals to improve their standard of living by planning to have children only when they can afford to. This is largely linked to maternal health. Child maintenance issues were also covered because a lot of Ghanaian women struggle to get maintenance from the fathers of their children. They are left as single mothers trying to provide for many children, with whom the fathers are legally obliged to help. The issue is

⁹ Ghana Web, *Health Statistics*, June 2011

¹⁰ International Journal of Women's Health, *Experiences of pregnancy and motherhood among teenage mothers in a suburb of Accra, Ghana: a qualitative study*, Dove Press, 2013

¹¹ Supra 5

⁷ Index Mundi, Historical Data Graphs per Year, 1 January 2011

⁸ Unicef, *At a glance: Ghana*, 2012

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ghana_statistics.html>

many women do not know their rights. Volunteers therefore discussed issues such as the non-payment of child maintenance which can lead to health implications regarding the children and the mother herself. The mother alone will not usually have adequate resources to provide for basic needs such as sufficient health care and even a hygienic environment. Consequently, it is important to cover the subject of personal hygiene, which the group had requested from the previous session. The volunteers provided tips on how to keep the body and house clean in order to prevent infections and disease from spreading. Many of the personal hygiene tips were not known to the locals so it was a successful session in raising the awareness of how to maintain a healthier style of living.

The final session covered domestic violence particularly: the different types of violence; why women tend to stay in such relationships and; what they can do to report abuses. In Ghana, one in three women are subject to physical violence.¹² This has huge health consequences as women become withdrawn from society. This isolation can lead to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety which in turn can affect a country's human, social and economic development. It was therefore relevant to cover personal protection to give women tips on how to escape such violence. The participants thoroughly enjoyed the demonstrations about self defence, where to aim on an attacker's body and how to use one's own body to best effect.

An activity took place where statements were read and the attendees had to agree or disagree. This was extremely interesting as the group had differing viewpoints, for instance half still believed domestic violence is justifiable in certain circumstances. This shows the importance of educating people on the subject in order to spread awareness to finally stop this violence. Domestic violence is a crime and no one should accept it as a normal way of living. Finally, the group were asked to explain what they had learnt over the past four sessions. All of them had a contribution and many got very excited about sharing

what they had learned. This demonstrates the success of the project as every topic that was covered was then mentioned by the participants when asked what they had learned.

After the final session, the volunteers met with Miss Felicia, a member of our partner NGO on the project and all agreed that the sessions had been successful in raising the awareness to the group on why it is important to stay healthy in all aspects of life, which in turn will lead to a much happier and successful style of living. Participants showed a great understanding of what was covered and many insightful questions were asked, showing the interest they had in the topics. The ongoing issue of health in Ghana is improving and hopefully the group will pass on the knowledge they have acquired to relations and friends so that more people will become aware of how and why being healthy is so important. It was agreed that due to success of the project, it will continue next month with a similar format, but delivered to a different section of the community. The more these subjects are covered, the more knowledge will grow among Ghanaians, which will in turn lead to a better standard of living and quality of life.

Alsuna Community Outreach

Human Rights in an Islamic Community

In September 2014, the PAHO introduced a new programme running at a girls' school within the Muslim community of Al Sunna. These sessions were designed to educate the students on a range of human rights topics identified as particularly relevant for the girls, considering their age and Islamic culture. The subjects addressed were: gender equality, child marriage, domestic violence and leadership. The main objective of this programme was to empower the students with knowledge of the rights they are entitled to as children and women and how to address violations of these rights.

The girls knew each other before the sessions started, but they didn't know the volunteers of the PAHO and visa versa. It was necessary to play games in the first session to get to know each

other and to build a relationship with the girls.

The first session was about general human rights, enshrined in the The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The aim of this sessions was to encourage the girls to think extensively about human rights issues and to increase their knowledge and understanding of global issues. A handout with all the rights of the declarations was given to the students and the rights were discussed.

Afterwards, statements were given to the girls and they had to choose the 'agree', 'disagree' or the 'both/unsure' side of the room. Examples of statements:

- It is okay for a parent to cane their child if the child is being difficult?
- Males and female are of equal status.

The girls came up with different opinions and grounds for their opinions making for a very interesting and interactive game.

Some girls were very intelligent, that was immediately obvious, and it was encouraging to see that the girls already had knowledge about human rights. For the young girls this was the first session a little bit overwhelming. They were quiet and shy. Luckily this became better in the second session about gender equality.

The third session was about domestic violence. A very sensitive subject for the girls, so volunteers had to approach things carefully.

Research done in 1998 by Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre showed 1 in 3 women suffered physical violence, 27 per cent of women had been sexually abused and five per cent of women had been circumcised in Ghana. More than a decade after the research, the situation has not changed. Statistics from the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) indicate there were 986 defilement cases in 2010. This figure jumped to 1,176 in 2011. In 2012, the country recorded 10 spousal murders, the majority being husbands killing wives.¹³

¹² Womankind Worldwide, *Effects of violence against women in Ghana*, Blog Archive
<<http://www.womankind.org.uk/2013/03/effects-of-violence-in-ghana/>>

¹³ Lisa Jones, "Effects of violence against women in Ghana", Womankind,
<http://www.womankind.org.uk/2013/03/effects-of-violence-in-ghana/>.

It is likely all the girls knew examples of domestic violence in their own family or community, but they were shy or scared to talk about that, which is understandable. But, during the games the girls became a little bit more confident. Many girls wanted to do the role play activity. After the role play they had to say which form of domestic violence was being enacted in the role play. Finally the girls had to draw something that made them feel safe. A good task considering the age of the girls. Most of them drew their family, their house or a policeman.

Afterwards, one of the girls told the volunteers that her friend was drugged and after that had to have sex with a man. This is very shocking to hear from a girl around 13 years old, but was encouraging to see that volunteers effort to build trust had worked, through this they could start to identify human rights issues and intervene where possible, and is therefore a positive step for the project,

The teacher of the girls talked with the girl and will continue to monitor this.

As is shown, domestic violence happens a lot in Ghana and also against the girls of the Al Sunna group. Its important that girls are educated at an early age as to how they can protect themselves. One of the volunteers of the PAHO is a retired police officer from England who worked a lot on cases about domestic violence and she gave a lot of presentations about personal protection. This was a great opportunity to use her experiences to educate the girls about basic steps to take to make yourself feel safer and actually be safer. A demonstration and made it very understandable for the girls.

A 2003 study produced the following estimates on children aged 5-17 years:

- Approximately two of every five children were engaged in usual economic activity;
- A total of 20 per cent of all children were engaged in child labor in Ghana.¹⁴

We therefore aimed our sixth session towards discussing child labor. The girls were initially shy and the volunteers therefore introduced an activity to break the ice. The girls had to spread the 24 hours of a day into sleepinghours, school/homeworkhours,

workinghours and playinghours clocks. Luckily there were no cases to be worried about, if they spread the hours honestly. The majority of the girls spend no more than 2 hours on working each day. Some said they were hawkers or they had to do household chores. Considering their age it is not a perfect situation, but it is in the realities of Ghanaian life and culture.

The last session, the girls had to teach the volunteers. The girls had to prepare a presentation, poem, song, play of whatever they like about one of the topics.

Different topics such as child labor, child marriage and role models were used. Because of the session about leadership and role models they know what to do and what to practice to become a great leader! They got a certification (and cake of course) for their participation in the sessions about human rights

Human Rights Clubs

Accra High School

HR-Clubs is an Amnesty International initiative whose intent is to work in cooperation with local partners to develop after school clubs dedicated to human rights education in various schools. The goal is to eventually have 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.

The Human Rights Club was again held at Accra High School during the month of October. A group of students between the ages of 14 and 18 voluntarily attended the sessions and contributed to all the discussions enthusiastically.

During the first meeting, volunteers facilitated a discussion on the broad topic of human rights, with the aim of

engendering a better understanding of what human rights are and how they relate to every-day life. Volunteers outlined the history of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, explaining how the atrocities of the Second World War triggered this most important and far-reaching of protocols. It was important for the students to appreciate that human rights are the universal rights and freedoms that should be enjoyed by everybody in the world regardless of nationality, culture, religion, age or gender and that these rights are underpinned by the core values of fairness, respect, equality, dignity and justice.

Although the UN Declaration is not legally binding on all countries, its fundamental rights and freedoms are invariably enshrined in other international human rights treaties and national conventions and constitutions. This was discussed within the context of the Constitution of Ghana 1992, which guarantees certain fundamental rights to every individual in the country. The most important of these is that everybody is free and equal in dignity and rights. In addition, students learned that everybody has the right to life and to personal liberty; to rights when under arrest for an offence; to freedom from slavery and forced labour; to freedom from discrimination; to the right to own property and to freedom from compulsory possession of property; to freedom of speech, thought, religion, association and movement; to freedom to join a political party; and to the right to work and to education. Specific rights related to spouses, women, mothers, children and the disabled are also detailed in the Constitution.

The Ghanaian Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAS) has a broad mandate to protect universal human rights and freedoms especially those vested in the Ghanaian Constitution, and covering civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Its broad responsibilities encompass promotion/prevention, public education, research/monitoring, protection and enforcement, although recently, a number of public scandals involving its senior staff have tended to damage its reputation.

¹⁴ Unicef, "Children in Ghana", Accra: Unicef, July 2009, p. 123.



The HR Clubs volunteers with students from Accra High

It is encouraging that on 20 October this year, Ghana was elected to be a member of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world. Its three year term begins in January next year. This is a real coup for the country as the UN General Assembly took into account Ghana's contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights as well as their voluntary pledges and commitment. The UNHRC addresses important human rights issues like freedom of association and assembly; freedom of expression, belief and religion; the rights of women; the rights of lesbian, gay and transsexual minorities; and the rights of ethnic minorities. The election of Ghana to the Council will hopefully help to promote a stronger focus on human rights throughout the country. During the remaining sessions, specific issues related to the broader area of human rights were addressed. In the second session, volunteers discussed bullying, cyberbullying and internet safety; topics of particular relevance to the students and related to human rights principles of freedom of expression, thought and belief; the right to be free from discrimination; the right to live safely and happily; and the responsibility an individual has to allow others to live freely. The students learned that it is only in recent years that bullying has been recognized and recorded as a separate and distinct activity. It is often hidden, but is insidious and frequently long-term. It can have devastating physical and psychological effects on the victim, who may be reluctant to report the offender because of fear of reprisals, a belief that nobody can do anything to help, or fear of not being

believed. The digital age has seen the growth of an even more harmful form of bullying; cyberbullying. This is the use of information technology repeatedly to harm or harass others in a deliberate manner. It is increasingly common, and is devastating because it goes on twenty four hours a day; it damages the reputation of the victim and turns others against him/her; it goes undetected because of lack of parental and authority supervision; the bully can remain virtually anonymous; and it remains visible to a wide audience for a long time.

The computer literacy of teenagers coupled with their limited awareness of the dangers inherent in chat rooms and other social networking sites make internet safety an important issue for young people. Volunteers led a stimulating discussion with the students about what steps to take to ensure they stayed safe when on the internet.

A further topic which the students wanted to discuss, was domestic violence, which is a problem prevalent throughout Ghana. Despite the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act 2007, and the Ghanaian Constitution's specific commitment to women's safety, research indicates that one in three women is likely to be subjected to domestic violence and that two spousal murders are committed monthly. Violent practices against women, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), are also still a problem in parts of the country, particularly the north, and are carried out in the name of tradition. Volunteers stressed that although domestic violence can be woman on man, violence against women is much more common and is partly due to the

inequality of men and women in traditional Ghanaian culture, with women, in the main, still being considered subservient to men. However, it tends to be a hidden problem, because it frequently occurs in private. It can continue for months or even years before the victim reports it. One of the major difficulties in combating it is that women tend to deny it is happening, either because they have been brainwashed into believing that it is their fault; because they feel ashamed; because they are afraid; or because they have neither the resources nor the knowledge to do something about it. With the help of short role plays, volunteers described the nature of domestic violence, its harmful impact on the victim and other family members, and how and where a victim can seek help.

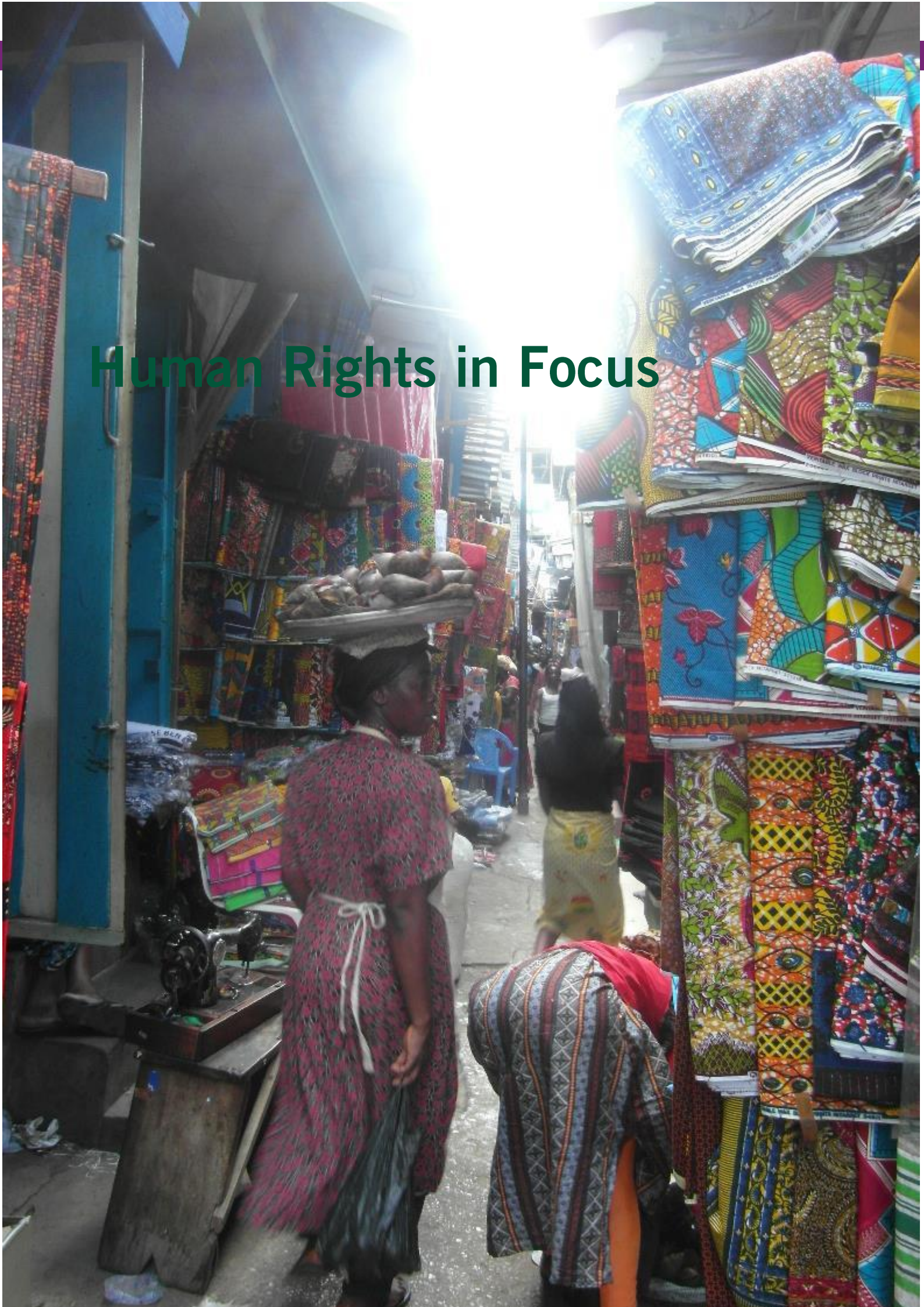
In the final presentation, students were exposed to the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, an important subject for young people. Whilst drugs are not produced in Ghana, it has become a transit point for narcotics. Transnational traffickers do not like to pay cash to people who help them traffic drugs from Ghana. They pay the middlemen in parcels of narcotics and the middlemen sell the drugs to people who can afford them within Ghana, triggering a rise in both internal drugs trade and use. Cannabis, cocaine and heroin have become the drugs of choice for young men between the age of 15-24. In addition, Ghana has become associated with the trafficking of cocaine to Europe, as international, particularly South American, criminal networks have turned their attention to Ghana.

Whilst abuse of alcohol is not new in Ghana, there are increasing concerns about alcohol dependency particularly in rural Ghana and amongst pregnant women. Traditional alcoholic beverages such as pito (local brew made from millet), palm wine (produced from sugary palm saps), akpeteshie (local gin distilled from fermented palm wine or sugar-cane juice) and burukutu (prepared from sorghum grains) are all popular. There are however few specialist services available to combat alcohol abuse especially outside Accra. The final area for discussion with the group was personal protection; the right to live freely and safely being the driving force for this particular topic. Tips are on how to feel and stay safe when out and about were shared with

the students, the emphasis being that if attacked, a person has a moral and legal right to defend him/herself. Volunteers stressed that the odds of survival or of not being badly hurt are much greater if an individual fights back and that there is every chance that an attacker can be fought off even if he is bigger and stronger, as when a person is threatened and feeling fearful, he/she experiences an adrenalin dump which gives the body extra strength and speed. The main lesson was not to believe an attacker when he suggests that if his victim does as he says, he/she will not get hurt. This is never the case and is no more than a ploy to gain control over the intended victim.

It was apparent over the duration of the course of presentations that the students were eager to gain a broader understanding of human rights and of the particular topics covered. There is still much to be done in terms of improving the rights of ordinary people in Ghana, particularly women, children and the disabled, and in combating the corruption that is endemic in many public institutions. Judging from the responses of this small sample of Ghanaian youth, however, the future is promising.

Human Rights in Focus



Trafficking : One of the Most Horrific Human Rights Issues of Our Time

By Carole Howlett

Introduction

Ghana is a country of origin, transit and destination for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking, although the trafficking of Ghanaians, particularly children, within the country is more prevalent than the transnational trafficking of foreign migrants. Ghanaian boys and girls are subjected to conditions of forced labour within their own country in fishing, domestic service, street hawking, begging, portering, gold mining and agriculture. Ghanaian girls and to a lesser extent, boys, are subject to prostitution within Ghana, with child prostitution and child sex tourism prevalent in the Volta region and on the increase in the oil producing Western regions.

As far as transnational trafficking is concerned, Ghanaian women and children are recruited and transported to Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, South Africa, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, France, the UK, Germany and the United States for forced labour and prostitution. In 2013, there was evidence of an emergence of fraudulent recruitment agencies advertising locally for jobs abroad, generally in the domestic service and retail sectors. As a result there have recently been increased numbers of Ghanaian women migrating to the Middle East to work, some of whom are subsequently forced into prostitution.

In terms of immigration, women and girls voluntarily migrating from China, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Benin are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation after arriving in Ghana, whilst citizens from other West African countries are subjected to forced labour in agriculture or domestic service.

Child Trafficking In The Fishing Industry In Ghana

A particularly Ghanaian issue is the trafficking of Ghanaian boys from their home villages to work in the country's fishing industry. It is estimated that 7,000-10,000 fishing boys work on the shores and in the waters of eastern Ghana's Lake Volta. Living in meager conditions and working 14 plus hours every day, these children are exploited by fishermen desperate to eke out a living. The depletion of fish stocks is one of the key reasons why children are needed as workers in the fishing industry. In addition to being cheap labour, their small fingers are useful in releasing the fish from the smaller nets. A task that the boys often perform is diving to disentangle the fishing nets from tree stumps that are scattered throughout the lake. This, of course, is a dangerous job with frequently dire consequences for the boys such as infection from water-based diseases like bilharzias and guinea worm, or even drowning. The challenge in combating the problem is that deep-rooted traditions support the prevalence of the practice. It is common in Ghana for children to become apprenticed to a relative or family friend. Many people believe that going away to work is a route to a better life. Child trafficking is a distortion of this old cultural practice. Many parents do not understand the value of education and think that it is more valuable for their children to learn how to fish. Even the fishermen do not understand that they are doing something wrong; quite the opposite for they claim that they are teaching the children a trade.

Legal Framework

The 2005 Human Trafficking Act – amended in 2009 to align its definition of human trafficking with that of the 2000 UN Trafficking In People Protocol – prohibits all forms of trafficking and prescribes penalties of 5 to 20 years' imprisonment for all trafficking offences. There is general consensus that the law, as it stands, is sufficiently stringent to deal with abuses, and that the penalties are commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes such as rape.

The Government of Ghana, although not fully complying with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, is making efforts to do so, and there is optimism that Ghana will

ratify the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in the near future. On 21st October this year, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection stated that the Ministry had finalized its human trafficking regulations bill and that it was being forwarded to Parliament – a positive step forward.

In addition, the Government has drafted a five-year national action plan, 2013-2018, and continues to conduct information/education campaigns throughout the country. The Ghanaian Police Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) conducted training for 30 police officers, but did not receive an operating budget, relying on support from international and local donors. No specialized anti-trafficking training has been provided for prosecutors, despite repeated acknowledgements that such training is desperately needed. Consequently, in general, police and prosecutors still lack the training and resources to prosecute trafficking cases successfully.

Prosecution

The Government has demonstrated increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts in the past year, conducting 140 trafficking investigations, initiating 20 prosecutions and securing 6 convictions – a significant increase on the previous year; the AHTU being responsible for the majority of these investigations. The traffickers received sentences ranging from 18 months to 15 years imprisonment.

Victim Protection

Sadly, during 2012/13 the Government decreased efforts to protect victims. The AHTU identified 182 victims, a significant decrease of 80 on the previous year. Although the Government referred 157 of these victims to Government/NGO-run facilities offering protective care, it is unclear how many victims received direct support from the Government.

The Ghanaian Police Service also maintains a 24 hour hotline for reporting crime, including trafficking, but it is not known how many trafficking related calls it receives.

In partnership with an international organization, the Government operates one short-term open shelter specifically for trafficking victims. It was equipped to take both child and adult victims,

but in practice, adults were often placed in hostels. The Department of Social Welfare also maintains a multi-purpose shelter for abused children. Both shelters however only provide short-term care, generally only three months, although extensions can be granted on a case-by-case basis. However, they do at least receive medical treatment, psychological counseling and basic education whilst in the centre. Funds are a real problem however. There are insufficient funds within the Human Trafficking Fund, which was established by the Human Trafficking Act, to finance protection efforts and consequently, shelters operate in sub-par conditions without the resources to make simple repairs, or provide basic services or security for residents. In some cases, Government officials have had to use their own personal funds to assist victims.

Prevention

This is not an encouraging picture. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) which was responsible for overseeing the Government's anti-trafficking efforts, did not receive any Government funding to carry out anti-trafficking activities. As a result, the MGCSP was unable to fulfill its mandate to conduct monitoring and evaluation, data collection and research relating to trafficking.

The Human Trafficking Management Board (HTMB) which was chaired by the Minister for Women and Children's Affairs and comprised government agencies and NGOs has now folded due to lack of funding.

However, there is some good news, and with support from international organizations and NGOs, anti-trafficking information and education campaigns have been held throughout the country, including sensitization programmes in the Volta region and cocoa-producing communities. State-owned radio and TV programmes have also aired trafficking issues.

Challenges facing law enforcement agencies and NGOs

Targeting traffickers is a huge challenge. This is not only because of the often international nature of this crime, but combating trafficking crosses at least five areas of responsibility: social policy, immigration issues, organized crime, international policy issues and victim

support. In addition trafficking is big business and huge profits can be made from the exploitation of vulnerable victims. It is one of the fastest growing enterprises in the world, and is closely linked to money laundering, drug trafficking, document forgery, human smuggling, rape and torture.

Trafficking thrives on a cycle of abuse which is difficult to break. The primary control factor is often fear: fear of violence against themselves and their families, and fear of exposure in their country of origin, bringing shame upon their families. Consequently, a victim may be reluctant to give evidence. Such fear is exacerbated by the victim being unfamiliar with the country in which he/she is living, unable to speak the language, and ignorant of how to seek help. The challenge is how to create an environment in which victims can feel confident enough to speak to the police and to give evidence in court.

Meeting the welfare needs of a trafficked victim is also complicated as it often involves immediate health and emotional care, as well as securing housing and financial support, and formalizing the individual's legal status in the country. Even if the victim is willing to provide sufficient evidence to make an arrest, the next challenge is to present him/her as a credible witness. It is too easy to discredit such a witness particularly when that person may not be in the country legally. There is still a propensity to treat the trafficked person as a criminal.

Conclusion

Efforts to prevent trafficking in Ghana have achieved some success, but much more needs to be done. In general terms, anti-trafficking still does not have the focus it deserves. Awareness raising, Government commitment, and adequate and sustained funding are crucial. Monitoring and data gathering remain patchy, training is ad hoc at best and the regulation of the growing number of recruitment agencies non-existent. The quantity and quality of shelters for victims are both extremely limited.

The reinstatement of the Human Trafficking Management Board (HTMB) would send out an important message about Government commitment, but it would need resourcing adequately to implement the national plan. Indeed, with so many other pressures on its finances, the Ghanaian Government needs external assistance from the international community if it is

effectively to implement the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

In relation to trafficking in the Ghanaian fishing industry, the International Organisation for Migration and Apple both rescue children from trafficking situations and return them to their families. The IOM has also provided micro-credit to traffickers who have subsequently released some children, and have made micro-credit available to the families of some of the children. However insufficient resources limit what these organizations can do; transport and counseling are real challenges. Only a properly funded, multi-pronged approach involving support and care for the children, financial support for the fishermen, and financial help and education for the victims' families is likely to be effective.

FGM in Ghana

By Carole Howlett

Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 125 million girls and women from Africa and the Middle East have suffered female genital mutilation (FGM). Often carried out for so-called 'cultural' or 'religious' reasons, FGM involves either the total or partial removal of healthy genital tissue of girls typically aged between four and fifteen. It is traditionally carried out by people with no medical training, often using basic tools such as knives, scissors, glass or even thorns, and without anaesthetic or antiseptic precautions being taken.

Apart from the immediate trauma, pain and loss of blood, FGM can lead to long-term psychological problems and other physical health problems such as tetanus, infection within the reproductive organs, infertility and even AIDS due to the use of unsterilized instruments. It can also result in complications in child delivery later, as the mother is weakened due to the scars left behind, and is prone to infection and excessive bleeding during delivery.

The Law in Ghana

In Ghana in 1989, the President issued a formal declaration against FGM, and in 1992 Article 39 of

Ghana's constitution provided, in part, that traditional practices injurious to a person's health and well-being should be abolished. The Criminal Code was amended in 1994 to outlaw FGM and the law was strengthened in 2007. Also in 2007, Ghana ratified the Maputo Protocol which had been adopted by the African Union and which promoted women's rights, including a call to end FGM. Those who perform the operation currently face a prison sentence of at least three years, far less punitive than in Burkina Faso where offenders can be imprisoned for up to 10 years if the victim bleeds to death.

A Ghanaian Update

The UNICEF report of July 2013 reported that Ghana is among those countries reporting a positive decline in cases of FGM being reported and that in general, girls are less likely to be cut than thirty years ago. Data indicates that only four percent of Ghanaian women and girls between the ages of fifteen and forty nine have gone through FGM and although this is a welcome trend, it still translates to several hundred thousand women and girls who are being mutilated. Of those who have undergone FGM in Ghana, the data indicates that thirteen percent support the practice. In terms of the total female Ghanaian population some two percent also favour the practice, with some 93% stating that they wanted the FGM practice to be stopped.

However, these national figures mask wide variations between provinces with FGM being much more popular in the Upper East, Upper West, Northern and Brong Ahafo regions. It has always been rare in the more heavily populated south of the country, where it was never a tribal tradition. In the Upper West region, some sixteen percent of girls between fifteen and nineteen have been reported cut, although this compares to 60% of women aged forty five to forty nine, so even in those areas where the practice is more prevalent, there is an encouraging reduction in the number of cases identified.

Doctors, nurses and other health workers were listed in the UNICEF report as having performed only 1.2% of the FGM procedures, while traditional practitioners, known as "wanzams" accounted for 89%. The data also showed that eighty percent of

those girls who had undergone FGM had experienced the process before their fifth birthday.

Why is FGM Practiced?

Research by Action Aid Ghana (AAG) and Belim Wusa Development Agency (BEWDA) indicates that there are a number of reasons why some women still favour FGM:

- Married women who have not undergone FGM are ridiculed by those who have been cut
- It is seen by some as an initiation ceremony and a route to adulthood for young girls and women
- There is a belief that FGM increases a girl's chances of getting married, firstly because she is 'cleaner' and secondly because she is more likely to be faithful as it reduces her sexual desires. (However it can also lead to problems within a marriage – sexual intercourse can be painful for the woman, leading to a low libido!)
- There is also a belief that FGM can help to prevent the death of first born babies and prevent disease of the clitoris

However, the situation is changing as women are being educated about FGM. Both AAG and BEWDA have carried out sensitization programmes, ensuring that women and girls are aware of the medical realities of what FGM entails. In an interesting development, girls and women who have been through the practice, have organized themselves to become ambassadors to help stop FGM and have formed girls' clubs to support their peers.

Recommendations

FGM needs to be given greater focus and opened up to greater public scrutiny. It is a problem that no one organization can solve by itself. It will take the co-ordinated efforts of Government, police, medical profession, NGOs and local groups to make this crime unacceptable.

It will also need a combination of approaches:

- Raising community awareness and persuading traditional chiefs and local Imams publicly to condemn the custom as 'inhuman and

degrading' would send out a strong anti-FGM message;

- Improving protection for, and empowering, girls at risk is a key challenge;
- Vigorously prosecuting those who carry out FGM illegally is crucial in acting as a deterrent to potential practitioners. Greater commitment to law enforcement is important. There are now very few prosecutions and the law does not punish accomplices such as parents, family and community members who help the FGM practitioner. Nor are the sentences available to the courts severe enough.
- The law should also make it an offence for parents to send their daughters to neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Faso to be circumcised, as, at present, the law does not deal with cross-border FGM offenders.
- Education is crucial in bringing about necessary changes, particularly education of mothers, but also of men and boys, and incorporating education about this practice into the public school health curriculum is recommended
- Raising awareness of police, Government, prosecutors and the courts so that they can become more proactive in attacking the problem is a key issue. It is at least encouraging that the National Director of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, has recently condemned the practice and called for better enforcement of the law.

More comprehensive and accurate data gathering is also important. Much of the FGM prevalence data currently available is based on verbal surveys and self-reporting. Clinical examinations are uncommon. The assumption is that women respond truthfully when asked about their FGM status. However, many FGM procedures are performed at a very young age, many cultures feel a taboo about such discussions and a number

of such factors raise the possibility that the validity of survey responses might be incorrect or potentially underreported. A study in Ghana before and after a law outlawing FGM was enacted, showed that thirteen percent of women who reported before the law that they had undergone FGM denied it after the law had been introduced.

Local and regional civil society organizations, which are already doing much to eradicate FGM at a local level, need to be given improved public support and increased financial assistance. Such investment is essential if the current efforts are to be effective and sustainable in the long run.

From the HRJ Coordinator

October 2014

Slum School Book Drive update

The money for the book drive has now been collected, with a total of \$2,700 from online donations, and a further donation yet to come in from a recently departed volunteer (thanks Carole!)

Listowel and the slum school volunteers will begin the assessment of the school in Old Fadama in November and December to look at the distribution of much needed resources for Old Fadama, hoping to help where its needed most. More on this in the upcoming months.

Staff change

It is with sadness that we announce the departure of one of our supervisors from PAHO. We'd like to take the opportunity to thank Ebenezer for all his amazing work over the past few years and wish him all the best in his new endeavour.

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