



## Monthly Report April 2013



SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECTS				
Capital Punishment	Social Welfare Facility		Legal Services Desk	Police Advocacy
	Boys' Remand Centre	Girls' Correctional Centre	Old Fadama	Schools and Communities
PRO PLACEMENTS		OFFICE RESEARCH		
Legal Aid	Social Welfare Facility	Women's Rights	Children's Rights	People with Disabilities

# Akwaaba!

April is traditionally the last month of reliable sunshine before the wet season brings with it muddy rivers flowing through the streets of Accra. Our small but dedicated April team of volunteers needed plenty of stamina to manage the ongoing Social Justice projects, set up the new Death Penalty Project and cope with the power crisis currently dragging down the nation's industries and everyday life. They handled the pressure admirably, and made some valuable discoveries along the way.

## Social Justice Projects

### 1. The Death Penalty Project

Article 13 of the Constitution of Ghana states that *'[no] person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence under the laws of Ghana of which he has been convicted.'* The Death Penalty Project is PAHO's contribution to the Coalition for Abolishing the Death Penalty in Ghana ('the Coalition'), an advocacy group coordinated by Amnesty International. Our team is engaged in illuminating the perceptions and misconceptions of communities and institutions surrounding the ongoing threat of capital punishment.



Our Death Penalty

The Death Penalty Project was added to PAHO's operations board in early April. In July 2012, the Government issued a White Paper supporting the recommendation of the Constitutional Review Commission. This stated that the death penalty should be abolished in Ghana and be

replaced with life imprisonment. As the death penalty is an entrenched law in the Constitution of Ghana, there will need to be a referendum on the issue for reform to occur. Our aim in this project is to gain an understanding of the public opinion of the death penalty. Our findings will be used by the Coalition to design public educational activities with the aim of convincing the general public to appreciate the need for expunging the death penalty from the laws of Ghana.

Our first steps in the project involved creating a questionnaire designed to discover basic public opinions, asking such questions as "Do you agree or disagree with the death penalty?", "Does the death penalty deter people from committing serious crimes?" and "Which would you fear more; life imprisonment or the death penalty?". The distribution of these questionnaires are then followed by a focal discussion for community

members to debate the issues, ask questions, and really take the time to consider the consequences in depth.

After the first three group discussions and one street survey, our team had a pool of 69 respondents and the initial findings were interesting:

- 19 respondents had been victims of crime in the past, but only 7 agreed with the death penalty.
- Almost all Muslim respondents were for the death penalty, citing verses of the Koran in support.
- About half of the respondents believed that the death penalty was an effective deterrent against serious crime.
- Many respondents believed the death penalty was sanctioned under international law. Most respondents reached this conclusion because they believed that international law was synonymous with American law.
- Most respondents who opposed the death penalty did so on religious grounds.
- 33 respondents feared the death penalty more than life imprisonment, 25 feared life imprisonment more than the death penalty, and 11 were equally afraid of each.
- Most participants in the group discussions did not believe that it costs the state more to put a prisoner to death than to imprison them for life.
- No participants in any group discussion session changed their stance on the death penalty by the end of the session.

One difficulty that will need to be addressed in the future is the unwillingness of some people to participate in street surveys on such a sensitive issue. Others indicated they would be willing to complete the survey in exchange for food or money. Getting people's attention in the street was generally a difficult task.

The team attended various meetings coordinated by Amnesty International over the course of the month to discuss the structure of the campaign. The latest was the launch of the 2012 Death Penalty Statistics seminar at the Accra International Press Centre. Ebenezer, one of PAHO's highly dedicated supervisors, was elected to chair the meeting, at which notable addresses were given by representatives from the Ghana Police Service and the Ghana Prisons Service. Our team was astonished to find that these representatives were the most outspoken advocates for abolishment of the



death penalty so far. At the conclusion of the meeting, Ebenezer and our volunteer Maria were interviewed by television reporters on their opinions regarding the death penalty.

## 2. Social Welfare Facility

The Social Welfare Facility is an institution for Ghanaian children who are in trouble with the law, who have found themselves in a dire situation. The Boys' Remand Centre is a detention centre for boys awaiting trial, while the Girls' Correctional Centre is detention centre for girls who have already been convicted of a criminal offence, and the Children's Shelter is for the boys and girls who have been abused or who have run away from home.

In the month of April the Boys' Remand team focussed on their planned academic curriculum, especially mathematics and French, to profit from Caroline's presence before she leaves in early May. They also conducted comprehension lessons using contemporary music lyrics as a teaching tool, since music is a big part of the lives of young Ghanaians. It is always a challenge to engage the inmates of the Boys' Remand Centre, who are rightfully preoccupied with their pending trials. In a continuing effort to equip the inmates with relevant life-skills to complement their basic academics, the Team gave interactive presentations on drug and alcohol abuse. The boys always respond well to these sessions.

The Girl's Correctional Team have really branched out in their curriculum planning, and gave lessons on Ancient Egypt, fairy tales, and everything in between. There are not many inmates at present, so the volunteers have been able to give much more personal attention to the girls, who are typically reserved and struggle to engage. When we consider the possible causes for such young children being condemned in the eyes of the law it is little wonder that they are resistant and untrusting of strangers.

## 3. Legal Services Desk

Another PAHO operation in the Old Fadama Slum, the Legal Services Desk is a rudimentary drop-in legal service for a community with effectively no access to legal resolution. It is again run in conjunction with WISEEP, and

The Legal Services Desk did not take clients at the start of the month, and instead met with Frederick, founder of the Women In Slums Economic Empowerment (WISEEP) and proprietor of our Legal Desk Office in Old Fadama to discuss increasing our profile in the slum. This is to include the production and distribution of flyers in the days preceding Desk sessions, and forming a relationship with Kayayoo Youth Association, headed by founder and president Mr Mohammed I Salifu, to improve the legal outcomes of women and children working in the slums who suffer violence at the hands of other community members.

To ensure proper case management and accurate advise, the Desk only operates once a fortnight, but with increasing interest from the volunteers and the obvious importance of the service we provide, the Desk Team are looking at expanding operations to other communities - a circuit legal aid



clinic to mirror the circuit courts. Our initial expansion proposal will focus on communities where Projects Abroad already has a presence, such as Dodowa and Tema.

#### 4. Police Advocacy

The Advocacy project is an initiative jointly coordinated by PAHO, the Ghanaian Police and the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DoVVSU), a police department established in 1998 to respond to cases of domestic violence. The purpose of this project is once again concerned with awareness, and our volunteers visit communities and schools in various villages outside of Accra, with members of the above institutions, to educate citizens on basic human rights, and crimes involving domestic violence and rape.

April saw the Police Advocacy Team mostly engaged in impact assessments after three months of outreaches totalling more than twenty sessions. Feedback from the communities has been excellent, and many community leaders have been eager to point out the arrests of offenders subsequent to our presentations. This is a great indication that our Advocacy Team have successfully communicated their message to hundreds of people, despite the cultural differences and the language barriers that occur when no party is

speaking in their native tongue.



The month's first session was held in Dodowa with two local tribes involved in mediation concerning land boundaries. Our team gave its well-established presentation on rape, defilement and domestic violence before assisting with the mediation. The questions asked by the predominately male audience proved that they were paying close attention and were

interested in what our team had to say.

The following week's session focussed on sexually transmitted diseases and domestic violence, and was attended by 25 community members consisting predominately of male elders, but with some women and young men present. The translator for the session was not afraid to resort to use expressive body language to reinforce the team's information, and ensured the audience were engaged. Most of the attendees interacted and were keen to ask questions and assist in answering them where they could. To conclude the session, one young man stressed his concern regarding the incidence of incest in tight-knit communities, and proposed that our Team hold information sessions on domestic violence in one of the churches in Dodowa.

Results of the impact assessments conducted in Dodowa revealed some interesting and concerning facts -

- The headmaster of the primary school found that the children were more inclined to listen to our western volunteers than their own teachers.
- A video was circulating the community showing two young community members - one a girl of about twelve years of age sexually assaulting the other, a boy of about four. Yet it seemed no-one had shown the video to the police.
- After spending some time going door-to-door to interview community members, our volunteers found that the members had excellent retention of our information sessions, and were able to give detailed descriptions of the meaning of rape and defilement, and the processes that should be followed when domestic violence and sexual assault occurs in a community. The information they found most useful included our suggestions in how to speak to their children when they ask difficult questions on these topics.
- Many of the women in the community had grasped the methods of mediation taught by our volunteers, who themselves had been trained by Legal Aid in recent weeks. As such, some women reported that they had been able to resolve cases of domestic violence by talking, and seemed to imply that they were generally more confident and secure in themselves when handling such issues.

## 5. Research

The Human Rights Office conducts group research tasks for all Social Justice volunteers to investigate the public perception of and laws relating to the rights of women, the rights of children, and the rights of people living with disabilities.

Our research teams continued to distribute their questionnaires whilst on outreaches with other projects, but with fewer volunteers available in April development was put on hold to concentrate on setting up the Death Penalty Project. The Children's Research Team did have one breakthrough however, arranging to conduct an outreach in early May with the Projects Abroad Medicine Project volunteers. The Team will be promoting the importance of new parents registering their children at birth so they do not miss out on essential services and education later in life.



## 6. PRO VOLUNTEERS

### Legal Aid

Farewell celebrations for five volunteers

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

There were no Pro Law Volunteers present at PAHO for most of April, but we did have an experienced legal practitioner from Australia, Jennifer, join us at the end of the month. Jennifer has planned an extended stay in Ghana, and may help coordinate the PAHO Legal Services Desk if her workload at Legal Aid permits. We wish her much success and satisfaction in her work.

## Social Work

Qualified volunteers with professional experience in social work or psychology, or those requiring practical placements at postgraduate level, can choose to be placed at PAHO, where they are heavily involved with educating staff and monitoring children at the Osu Social Welfare Facility, which encompasses the Boys' Remand Centre, Girls' Correctional Facility and the Children's Centre. Those with an interest in early childhood learning and wishing to have more one-on-one contact with children may also attend BASICS International. BASICS is a thoughtfully structured after-school care centre in Chorkor (a large slum suburb of Accra) where underprivileged children are given the opportunity to do their homework, be tutored, ask questions, learn life-skills and get a square meal after the school day is done.

Janouk was our sole Pro Social Work volunteer for most of April, and spent time at the Boys' Remand Centre educating them on the importance of setting goals, how to achieve them, how to stay out of trouble and how to look after yourself from day to day. Health and hygiene was a focal point. She collaborated with our very experienced former volunteer Sandy over skype to discuss the complex framework established by previous Pro Social Work volunteers at PAHO, and continued to train local staff on report writing, interviewing skills and using the behavioural sheets she has developed. Janouk continued to attend BASICS twice a week to assist with teaching methods and group activity sessions until her time at PAHO ended on the last day of April. She was joined late in the month by our new Pro Social Work volunteer from Australia, Melanie, who has taken over Janouk's work plan and will continue to develop the Social Welfare Facility framework.

## A Final Word

Our highly successful Human Rights Club project will recommence once schools resume in mid-May. Our intention is to link it with the Death Penalty Project, leading the HR Club members in focal discussions on the subject, and culminating in a debate between Accra High and Teshie sometime in July. For the seventeen new volunteers joining us in June, it might be wise to do a little research into the death penalty in Ghana and the international community, so that you can confidently educate Ghana's next generation of human rights advocates during your time at PAHO.

You never know which one might be the next Kofi Annan...

**Warm Regards,**

**Oliver Shepherd**

Law and Human Rights Coordinator  
Projects Abroad (Ghana)

