OUTREACHES

International Human Rights Day

On 10th December 2019, HRAC with funding support from ViiV Positive Action and in partnership with the Royal Netherlands Embassy organized a community durbar at Yendi in the Northern Region to mark the International Human Rights Day 2019. The theme of the celebration “Stand up for Equal Rights: Say no to discrimination” aimed to sensitize members of the community to their rights and to educate them to respect the rights of others. The Chairperson for the occasion, Chief Bindana Ayuba Ziblim Ahmed, representative of Yaa Naa in his acceptance speech beseeched the audience for their full participation. Alhaji Hammed Abubakari Yussuf, the Yendi Municipal Chief Executive, in his welcome address, stressed that the durbar, the first of its kind in the district, seeks to sensitize the people of Yendi on human rights to generate community support for promoting human rights as well as initiate processes towards protecting human rights for all persons, especially the vulnerable. The Executive Director of HRAC, Ms Cynthia Nimo-Ampredu in her declaration of purpose of the event urged the durbar participants to partake in the free HIV testing and screening services provided by the Ghana Aids Commission at the durbar. Two hundred and fourteen (214) invited guest and schoolchildren and other community members participated in the event.

Various leaders in the community who were invited to grace the occasion also gave solidarity messages. They all emphasized the need to respect the fundamental human rights of every citizen. The ocassion was marked with traditional dance performances and educative an skit by traditional dance and drama groups. Performances highlighted human rights issues including stigma and discrimination. Chief Bindana Ayuba Ziblim Ahmed and Ms. Cynthia Nimo-Ampredu lighted a symbolic flame to signify traditional authority and civil society commitment to human rights protection.

In his closing remarks, the Chairperson called on the people in Yendi and Ghana as a whole to rise up and uplift the human rights of the people in their communities. He also reminded the schoolchildren to indulge in good behaviour in order to reap a better future.

World Mental Health Day

The HRAC in partnership with MindFreedom Ghana (MFGh) organised a panel discussion at the Accra Technical University on 16th October, 2019 to mark World Mental Health Day 2019. The event is part of activities toward the implementation of the STAR Ghana Foundation funded project “Promoting quality access to mental healthcare and rights of persons with mental disabilities in traditional mental health centres in Ghana”. The theme for the event “Suicide is not an option: Seek help!”, was aimed at educating and raising awareness on suicide to sensitize students and remove stigma; creating safe space for students to openly discuss their concerns in relation to their mental health; and empowering students to identify mechanisms, strategies and social support systems for suicide prevention. The Co-Director of MFGh, Nii Larrey Addico in his opening address stated that, suicide is a mental health condition and it is unfair and psychologically distressing to further subject anyone who attempts to kill him/herself to prosecution as the current law stipulates. He therefore reiterated HRAC and MFGh’s call for attempted suicide to be decriminalized and that anyone who attempts to kill him/herself must be provided the needed psychological
The event had one hundred and four (104) students and staff in attendance.

The panelists comprised. Etornam Gblende, the Regional Coordinator of Mental Health Authority, Dr. Seth Mawusi Asafo (Clinical psychologist), Pastor K.B. Odoom (Clinical Counselor, Accra Academy Senior High), Ms. Cecilia Ashalley (Suicide survivor), and ACP Lydia Donkor (Greater Accra Director for Legal and Prosecution, Ghana Police Service).

The Panel discussion enriched the students with knowledge on mental health conditions including suicide and identified avenues for support and early detection. Topics such as academics, social media and relationships were factored into the discussion to tailor it to the needs of the students. The students were enthused to learn of treatment possibilities and to hear the real life experience of a survivor which contributed greatly to demystifying mental health among them. The students received resources including places to seek mental health care and hotlines to facilitate their easy access to mental health care.

Although mental health conditions are predominantly health related, students were also enlightened about the legal consequences of attempted suicide. In her submission, ACP Donkor indicated her support for the decriminalisation of attempted suicide and medical and psychological treatment for survivors.

Health outreaches for MSM

HRAC in collaboration with the West Africa AIDS Foundation (WAAF) conducted three mobile STI/HIV screening sessions for MSM in Tamale on the 17th and 19th of November 2019 and 13th December 2019 as part of interventions under the “Creating MSM Human Rights awareness to improve access to health” project. The three sessions were conducted over three days with two different approaches. On 17th November and 13th December 2019 the WAAF team comprising of a nurse and a field coordinator, organized a “Gathering night” with the MSM community in Tamale for 47 MSM out of which 31 were screened. WAAF’s field coordinator engaged the participants in exciting and educative discussions on health alongside STI screening and HIV testing for participant.

On 19th November, 2019 the WAAF team was present during HRAC’s Security training for the MSM community in Tamale. team.

ADVOCACY

Biannual meeting with focal points, community network/peer educators and security officers

As part of activities towards the implementation of the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor (ALCO) Project “HIV/AIDS prevention for Key and Vulnerable Populations along the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor”, HRAC conducted a meeting to discuss human rights, stigma and discrimination, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and case reporting for ALCO focal persons, community Networks/PE and security forces. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the impact of the network on addressing GBV and human rights abuses against Key Populations (KP) as well as the security, legal and psychological services available to KP and also discuss the sustainability of the Network as the project comes to a close.

Eleven (11) representatives from the Ghana Police Service, Ghana Immigration Service, PPAG, Ghana Health Service, FM station, CSOs, the ALCO Information Unit and the MSM and SW communities participated in the meeting held on 20th August, 2019. The event also provided the platform for participants to share experience on their work with MSM with focus on successes, lessons learnt and challenges.
HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEGAL EDUCATION

Know your Rights and Responsibilities training for MSM

The HRAC in collaboration with CEPEHRG successfully conducted a supportive supervision of mass sensitization activity towards the implementation of Abidjan-Lagos Corridor (ALCO) Project “HIV/AIDS prevention for key and vulnerable populations along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor”, in Aflao on 21st August, 2019. The HRAC leveraged on the activity to conduct a “know your rights and responsibilities” training and sensitization for MSM at Aflao. **Twenty-seven (27)** MSM participated in the training and sensitization. The purpose of the “know your rights and responsibilities” training and sensitization was to empower MSM to protect their rights and report cases of human rights abuses against them as a result of the improved knowledge in human rights and responsibilities.

Security Workshop for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)

The project team successfully held a Security Awareness workshop for **twenty-seven (27)** MSM in Tamale on 19th November, 2019. The primary purpose of the security awareness training for members of the MSM community is to educate and sensitize them to be conscious of their vulnerability in the context of the homophobic society they live in and take action to create a safer environment around themselves. In addition, the training informed them of the services available to them when their rights are abused to improve the protection and promotion of the rights of members of MSM community in Ghana. An officer from the Ghana Police Service facilitated the workshop. The participants were encouraged to report cases of human rights abuse against them to the police.

The HRAC informed the participants about the presence of trained police officers in Tamale to handle MSM rights related issues and encouraged them to contact their peer educators to assist them report cases to stations immediately they happen. Some of the experiences shared include blackmailing by peers, violence against MSM by the public and structured stigma and discrimination against MSM when accessing health and justice.

Impact Assessment Meeting and Post-Training Impact Assessment

On 20th November 2019, the HRAC in collaboration with West African AIDS foundation (WAADF) held a post-training assessment to assess the impact of the Know your Rights and Responsibilities, Case reporting and health trainings held in March 2019. The event evaluated the participants’ knowledge on human rights and health; and how they have applied the knowledge gained from the training when accessing health care and justice. **Eleven (11)** participants out of 18 MSM trained participated in the post-training assessment.

Human Rights workshop for Nurses and Operators of Traditional and Faith-Based Healing Centres

Under the Star-Ghana funded project “Promoting quality access to mental healthcare and rights of persons with mental disabilities in traditional mental health centres in Ghana” HRAC conducted **six (6)** workshops each for nurses and operators of traditional mental health centres in the Western, Bono, Ashanti, Upper East, Upper West and the Northern Regions of Ghana. The aim of the workshops is to improve human rights conditions at the TMHC through effective collaboration between the orthodox and unorthodox service providers. The purpose of the trainings is to build the capacity of mental health service providers on rights-based approach to mental healthcare within the context of the Mental Health Act 2012, the national Guidelines for Traditional and Faith-based Healers, which was launched in December, 2018 and national and international human rights laws. **Eighty-one (81)** nurses and **one hundred (100)** operators of traditional mental health centres were trained.

RESEARCH

Validation of Research Report

The STAR-Coalition under the “Promoting quality access to mental healthcare and rights of persons with mental disabilities in traditional mental healthcare centres in Ghana” project funded by STAR-Ghana embarked on a research to explore the role of traditional mental health centers and their impact on promoting quality mental healthcare and human rights in Ghana. The research assessed the quality of care offered by operators of TMHC, variation in service provision, regulations and their adherence to human rights practices for the treatment of persons with mental disabilities in TMHC. The research was conducted in **ten (10)** districts selected from **six (6)** zoned regions of Ghana.

The STAR-Coalition on 27th November, 2019 held a validation meeting with stakeholders and partners at Coconut Grove Regency Hotel, Accra as part of the process towards the finalization of the research report. The event had **twenty-seven (27)** participants from both State and non-State stakeholder institutions who critiqued the findings and made recommendations in response to the findings.
COMMUNITY DURBARS

Mental Health Sensitization Durbar

The Human Rights and Advocacy Center (HRAC) and MindFreedom Ghana (MFGh) embarked on a community durbar in Yendi and Wéchial in September 2019 and November 2019 as part of community awareness activities under the project “Promoting Quality Access to Mental Health Care and Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities in Traditional Mental Health Centres in Ghana”. The aim of the durbars was to sensitize the communities and garner support for protection for the rights of persons with Mental Disabilities under the theme, “Promoting the wellbeing and rights of persons with mental disabilities”. Six hundred and eighty-eight (688) community members were reached with information on the law on mental health in Ghana, causes of mental disabilities, and available health facilities for treatment of mental illness at community/district and regional levels.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

The 20th International Conference on AIDS and STIs held in 2019 was hosted by Rwanda from 2nd – 7th December 2019. The Conference was held under the theme, ‘AIDS-free Africa- Innovation, Community and Political Leadership’.

The conference drew participants from across Africa and all stakeholders both State and non-state to examine the sustainability of the 90-90-90 UNAIDS goal post the SDGs, highlighting the key role of human rights within the context of strengthening the application of science-based evidence. This was achieved through sharing of various interventions being implemented in African countries. The Conference focused on 4 main areas- basic science (biology and pathogenesis); clinical science, treatment and care; epidemiology and prevention science; law, human rights, social science and political science; and health systems, economics and implementation science.

The Human Rights Advocacy Centre successfully submitted an abstract on ‘Addressing Key Populations’ Legal and Human Rights Barriers to Health Care’ on which it made a poster presentation to Conference participants. The Human Rights Advocacy Centre also participated in other sessions at the conference including sessions that addressed stigma and discrimination, and financing for gender equality in HIV/AIDS as well as sessions that showcased some remarkable interventions targeting adolescent girls, young women and the youth generally like DREAMS and Africaid Zvandiri.