

FINAL REPORT OF A PROJECT UNDERTAKEN BY MINDFREEDOM GHANA – January-December 2009

Introduction:

In response to a Request for Proposals meant for specified countries sent out by the Disability Rights Fund (DRF) in June 2008, MindFreedom Ghana (MFGh) in August 2008 submitted its proposals for a project titled, *“Creating Awareness on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ghana”*.

In October 2008, DRF approved our proposals with a concomitant budget of \$17,000 (seventeen thousand United States Dollars) to undertake the year-long action from January to December 2009. Payment was effected in November 2008. It needs to be mentioned that additional funds of \$6,000 was granted by the World Health Organization for execution of the project.

The focus of the project was on creating awareness on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Ghana Disability Act (Act 715). It was undertaken in partnership with Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD) and Self Help Groups (SHGs) of persons with psychosocial disabilities in the four sub-metropolitan areas of Accra.

The overall objective of the project was to ensure that the basic rights of all persons with disabilities are respected and their basic needs within the context of the CRPD coupled with Ghana’s Disability Act are met. Specific objectives of the project were inter alia to develop pragmatic programmes designed to ensure the creation of awareness on disability, the fundamental human rights and dignity of persons with disabilities against the background of the CRPD and Ghana’s Act.

Plan of Action:

Having already made some ground work on its own and some in consultation with project partners, MFGh hit the ground running in January with the two activities on the time line viz.

- ✚ Recruitment of volunteers
- ✚ Workshop with the project partners.

Its needs to be mentioned that contacts had already been made with the people/organizations penciled down as resource persons / participants for some of the activities outlined. The outcomes of these had been to secure their participation in some of the activities that would involve them. Considering that all our activities were done in Accra, we made contacts with the media for coverage so that these can be disseminated nationwide.

Scope of Work:

Upon resumption of work from the Christmas and New Year break on January 5th 2009, MFGh within that week recruited a total of four volunteers to assist in some aspects of the projects. Among these were two persons with disabilities.

Workshop with Project Partners:

On January 21st this workshop with project partners to share proposals, agree roles and secure commitment was organized at MFGh office premises.

There were two representatives from GFD and two representatives each from SHGs in the four sub-metro areas in Accra. MFGh was represented by five members.

The workshop had Mr. Evans Oheneba Mensah, Policy & Research Officer of BasicNeeds Ghana, as the resource person. He took participants through all the aspects of the proposals indicating inter alia where direct and indirect actions had to be taken. He observed that even though the proposals were submitted to the funding organizations upon which they gave the grants, modifications could be made where necessary as and when prevailing circumstances would determine.

Participants at the end of the workshop agreed on roles to be played and committed themselves to these. These related to media workshop and coverage, venue booking arrangements, development of posters, fact sheets arrangement of meetings with policy makers etc.

Workshop for Media Personnel:

The next activity scheduled for January but pushed forward to February 26 was the workshop to raise awareness of media personnel on disabilities and mental health issues. This was due to some difficulties in securing a venue which cost was relatively cheaper.

Object of the workshop was to enable journalists from both the print and electronic media have a better understanding of the CRPD and Ghana Disability Act as well as mental health issues so as to publicize these clearly on their networks.

There were a total of forty-five journalists, one representative of Ghana Media Commission and the two from Network of Journalists for Disability who participated in the workshop held at Coconut Grove Regency Hotel, Accra for close to three hours. Resource persons for the workshop were Dr. Bashiru Koray (a lawyer with a visual disability) working at Ghana's Attorney-General's Department and Mr. Tuinese Amuzu, Director of the Legal Resource Centre, Accra.

The former made submissions on the CRPD on which he took participants through all the fifty articles of the Convention. He used a number of known instances in Ghana and elsewhere to exemplify some portions of his submissions. Some of these are non-accessibility to public places and buildings, public transportation networks, inadequate Braille materials, non-provision of sign language at public gatherings and education facilities. He also regretted the issue of superstition which often had been traced to the

cause of many if not all disabilities in Ghana where such persons are either shunned or socially excluded.

Dr. Koray strongly advised them to desist from using stereotypes, name-calling and all manner of descriptions mostly demeaning that go against the rights and dignity of persons with disability.

He concluded by calling on the journalists to use their networks to pressurize government to ratify the Convention and therefore asked them to rally behind advocacy groups to lobby for ratification of the CRPD.

Mr. Amuzu in his submission dwelt on Ghana's Persons with Disability Act (Act 715) which was passed by Parliament in August 2006.

He took participants through the eight sections of the Act which are:

- ✚ Rights of persons with disability
- ✚ Employment of persons with disability
- ✚ Education of persons with disability
- ✚ Transportation
- ✚ Health care facilities
- ✚ Miscellaneous Provisions
- ✚ Establishment and functions of National Council on Persons with Disability
- ✚ Administration and financial provisions.

Mr. Amuzu reiterated the need for media personnel to avail themselves with the Act noting that some sections spell out punishments to be meted out to any person or persons who violate them. He advised them to as much as possible include persons with disabilities in their programmes on air / write more articles on disabilities in the print media.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Amuzu called on the Government to immediately inaugurate the National Council on Persons with Disability stating that this would facilitate implementation of provisions in the Act.

Ms Lisa Kodmur, Care Health Plan Program Manager for services to seniors and people with disabilities in Los Angeles, USA, then volunteering with ProLink, an NGO operating in Ghana, also addressed participants. She likened certain situations she had come across since arrival in Ghana to the US and noted that there are varied differences in both countries. Saying she was not too surprised considering the cultural cum social backgrounds of both countries.

She observed that it was imperative that as journalists, they must gain much insight into the CRPD and educate the public adequately on it, noting that being an international Convention it is binding on all member states. She stated that implementing portions of Ghana's Disability Act would not come easy because sections of the public would still find it hard to come to terms with the fact that persons with disabilities deserve any rights and recognition. Ms Kodmur was however hopeful that with time and consistent education, this perception would gradually change.

One striking feature that showed up during the question and answer time was the dearth of knowledge and information on the CRPD and especially Ghana's Act on the part of majority of the participants. Their questions and concerns were adequately addressed by the resource persons.

Radio and Television Programmes:

Representatives of MFGh and SHGs were at Hot FM, a radio station in Accra to talk about the CRPD and Ghana Disability Act. It is pertinent to mention that their submissions were in some of Ghana's local languages. There was also a slot on TV3 (one of the TV stations in Ghana) 'Sunrise Show' for representatives of MFGh and SHGs to talk about the CRPD and the Act.

Some persons with disabilities belonging to the Ghana Federation of the Disabled were interviewed on TV and they gave their impressions and views about the ongoing Project. They used the opportunity to talk about the CRPD and Ghana's Disability Act as to how these have brought a vista of hope in their lives especially in their rights and dignity.

On November 10th, the Director of MFGh and some members of MFGh were interviewed on Asempa FM, a local FM station in Accra as part of the sensitization activities on the project.

Development of Posters, Fact Sheets Etc:

Fact sheets briefly outlining the articles of the CRPD and Ghana Disability Act were produced and distributed nationwide. The posters, with eye catching images and descriptive messages were also produced and distributed nationwide.

Public Awareness Programmes:

The first public awareness programme was organized on May 21 at La, a suburb of Accra. Resource persons were Mrs. Janet Amegatcher, Director of MFGh who spoke on the Convention and Mad. Grace Johnson on Ghana's Act.

The programme was interspersed with Ghanaian cultural drumming and dancing. Also there was a drama sketch depicting the topics spoken about.

Some of those present were given the floor to ask questions and answers were satisfactorily provided to them.

Due to financial constraints especially as the cost of organization shot up, it was not feasible to organize the second public awareness activity at another suburb in Accra in August. It needs to be mentioned that this was mainly due to the fall in the rate of the Ghanaian currency against some foreign currencies like the US Dollar.

Advocacy and Influence Training Workshop:

This workshop organized to impart advocacy and influence training for self help groups of persons with psychosocial disabilities and other disabilities took place at MFGh offices. In all there were ten participants at this programme which came off on April 22. The participants were taken through various aspects of advocacy especially as related to the CRPD and Ghana's Act. Among these were writing memos to Ministries / Agencies

responsible for matters, direct contacts with persons / authorities responsible for formulating policies, courting support from human rights organizations etc.

Self Help Groups and Disability Groups Make Presentations to Sub-Metro Council Regarding the Rights Of Persons With Disabilities:

The first presentation made to the Osu Klottey Sub-Metro Council took place on May 26 with MFGh members and the SHGs being the main actors in this case. Copies of the fact sheets, posters, CRPD and Ghana's Act were given to the Council to be used for any public education and sensitization activities it undertakes.

The next presentation was made to the Kpeshie Sub-Metro Council on August 20 by the same actors as in the initial case. Copies of the posters, fact sheets, CRPD and Ghana's Act were again given to the Council for its public education activities.

The third presentation was made to the Ablekuma Sub-Metro Council on October 28 by the same actors. Copies of the posters, fact sheets, CRPD and Ghana's Act were given to the Council for its public education activities.

Advocate for Incorporation / Mainstreaming of Mental Health / Disability Issues in National Programmes:

Going by the activities undertaken in this project and the report thereof, a memorandum will be sent to most Government agencies advocating for the incorporation and mainstreaming of psychosocial and other disability issues in national programmes. Copies of the memorandum will be circulated to media organizations to get them to highlight these on their networks.

Conclusion:

It can be said that with activities undertaken, some level of awareness raising have been achieved.

Monitoring radio stations in Ghana, we realize that a good number of them are delving into matters of psychosocial disabilities and other disabilities. Instances are that some of the radio stations have given space to their listeners to call to make contributions to such programmes. Some radio stations have called us and our partners for interviews on their networks about the work being done and its impact. These we believe are changing trends of the general populace on matters of disabilities in Ghana.

That the involvement of civil society organizations such as MFGh has changed and influenced certain negative perceptions of most people cannot be gainsaid. Some situations that we have come across in our work form the basis for coming out with this assertion. The milieu seems to be gradually transforming to one of accepting disabilities

as inevitable issues of life situations which one has to cope and live with regardless of what form they are and be accorded due rights.

We are pleased with the partnership forged with GFD and the SHGs had certainly made our work smooth with many lessons learnt and experiences shared.

It had been a hard road to travel this far with the adoption of the CRPD which has brought its weight to support and give recognition to all manner of persons with disabilities globally. As continue to push for the ratification of the CRPD, it our profound expectation that something positive will come of our sustained efforts no sooner than later.

Our projections are that in the coming years when the impact and lessons of this project are manifesting themselves, there would be marked departure from situations in the past where persons with disabilities are maltreated, disregarded, treated with disdain, socially excluded and simply not respected.



JANET AMEGATCHER
DIRECTOR