

ProjectsAbroad

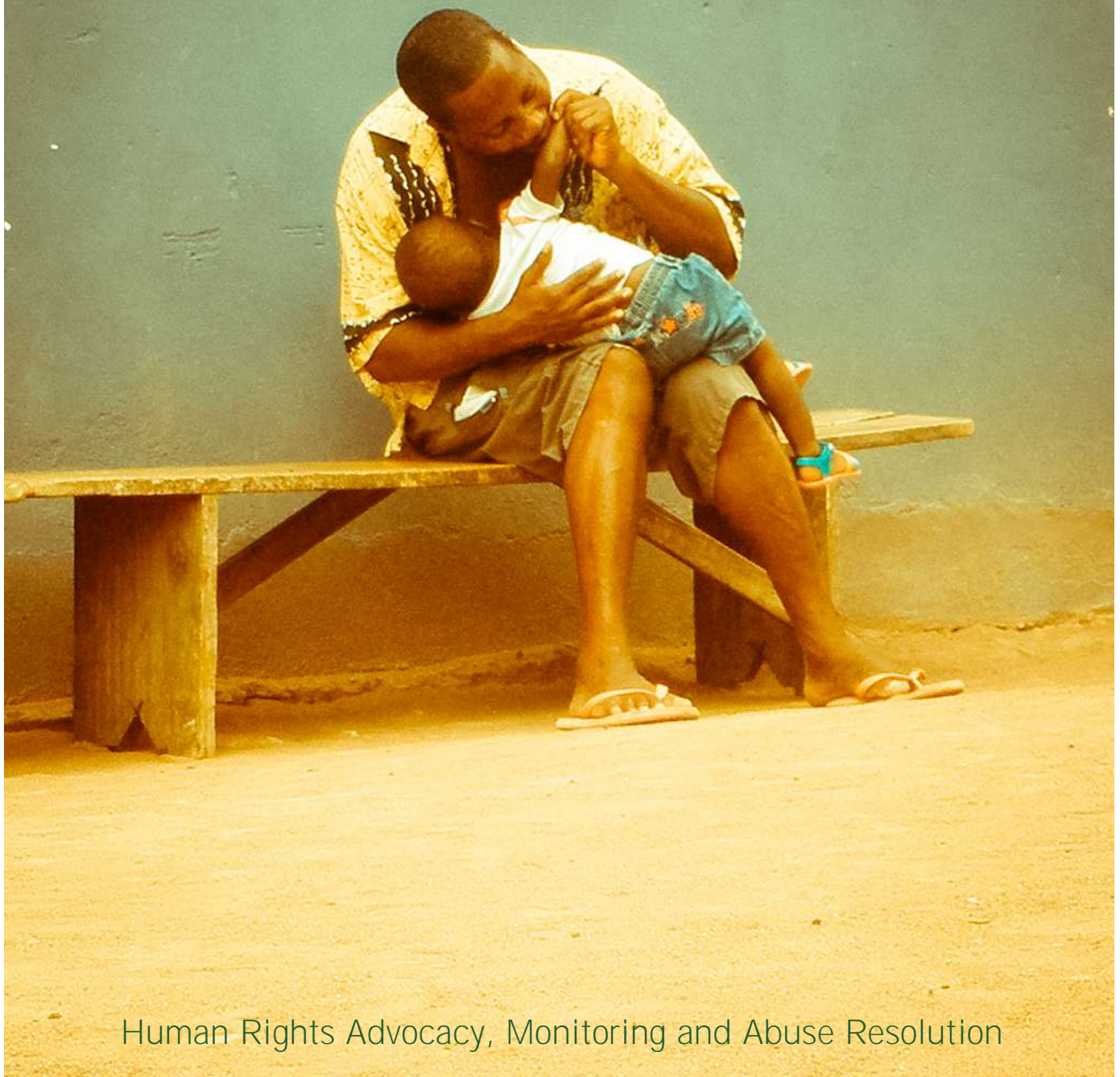
Ghana

HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE



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

Through advocacy, monitoring and legal assistance PAHO seeks to improve the awareness and enforcement of basic human rights in Ghana.

JUNE OPERATIONS		
<u>Boys Remand Center</u> Christopher Frostrup Carolina Sandell Samuel Myhill Charlotte McBay	<u>Girls Correctional</u> Katie Brown Maryann Verghese Cassandra Bennet Hannah Ridzuan-Allen	<u>Childrens Shelter</u> Erik Sjodin Simon Holmes Rachel Savage
<u>Community Advocacy</u> Kristine Mikkelsen Christopher Frostrup Erik Sjodin Samuel Myhill Katherine	<u>Gender Equality</u> Carolina Sandell Christopher Frostrup Erik Sjodin Katie Brown	<u>Capital Punishment</u> Lydia Leather Caitlin Harris Clara Muscat Charlotte McBay Carolina Sandell
<u>HR Defenders</u> Mariell Kempf Katie Brown Jessie Poon Cassandra Bennet Charlotte McBay Hannah Ridzuan-Allen	<u>Fadama Legal Assistance Program</u> Jennifer Croker Rachel Savage Isak Selander Kristine Mikkelsen Sofie Thorkildsen	<u>HR Clubs</u> Isak Selander Mariell Kempf Jessie Poon Lydia Leather Erik Sjodin Christopher Frostrup Samuel Myhill Maryann Verghese Simon Holmes
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Monthly Project Updates



Some of our volunteers educating people on their human rights in the slums of Old Fadama.

Community Advocacy

Our Community Advocacy Project goes on outreaches to various villages and enclaves within Ghana to give educational presentations on Human Rights and Ghanaian Law. Many of the people attending these presentations are unaware of the specific human rights issues that affect them on a daily basis, so the purpose of the Community Advocacy project is to empower people through information. This month we have been working more specifically in rural communities in order to educate people on human rights violations, and resolutions to various abuses.

This past month, the Community Advocacy project has focused its outreach in the rural community of Dodowa, which is a 2 hour drive from Accra. One presentation was on Marriage and Intestacy; the other seminar focused primarily on Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse.

The first community advocacy presentation was on Wednesday the 19th and it was divided into two parts. The first portion of the presentation focused upon Marriage and Marital law, and the second part concentrated upon Intestacy and Succession. The audience consisted of around 60 people, and they had a large PA-system set up outside for the presentation. As with many of our projects, we introduced ourselves by our Christian Names, where we are from, and our Ghanaian names. It has become clear that Ghanaians respond positively to Westerners when they are introduced by their local name. Our Advocacy Project had some concerns prior to the presentation, as intestacy and succession are uncomfortable topics. Local custom often dictates succession, but the succession laws of Ghana do not necessarily act in accordance with those customs. It is also regarded as bad luck to speak about death.

The presentation ended as quickly as it had begun when our Advocacy Group was interrupted by the heavy rainfall that is characteristic of this season. There was a small break before the villagers setup some chairs under a roof. Everyone from the village packed into the somewhat cramped quarters in order to hear the remainder of the speeches. From then on the presentation went according to plan. Overall the outreach went very well, and the audience was interested and eager to learn. The Advocacy group didn't sense any real discomfort or distress over the various topics being discussed, despite the superstitions concerning speaking about death. During the presentation the people of Dodowa seemed receptive and even curious. However, the Advocacy Group noted that the topic of Muslim marriage might have been a little taboo, perhaps since it was an overwhelmingly Christian community. The presentations were intended to be fairly basic, and were accompanied by illustrated statistics regarding the distribution of the estate of the deceased utilizing pie charts in order to make the information easier to process.

After the presentation, the group opened up the floor to audience questions. As this was the first time many members of the group had given a presentation of this sort; and as many members of the group had never utilized a translator prior to this experience, it was—needless to say—a bit frustrating. People began asking both general and personal questions about the presentation, information, and legal issues that had been presented. Many questions were answered by the translator, and were never related to the Advocacy Group. As part of the goal of Community Advocacy is to resolve legal issues, this was not an ideal scenario. Upon revisiting this issue later, our group decided to re-

organize the question and answer structure. In the future they agreed to open up the floor to general questions after the conclusion of the seminar, but encourage people to see them about personal legal matters afterwards. It was a structure that was successfully implemented during our next visit to Dodowa.

On Thursday the 27th, the Community Advocacy Group went to the small



Volunteers speaking to community members about domestic violence

village of Wedokum for the second presentation of the month. Wekodum—also located in Dodowa—bore many similarities to the village where the first seminar was held. The intent of this visit was to discuss Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence. They once again introduced themselves in the standard fashion, and went on to discuss basic human rights with particular emphasis on Domestic Abuse. Once again, our Group faced a small hiccup on the outset of the presentation. They were disrupted by a village member who was under the influence. He was asked to leave by the villagers and did so moderately quietly. The interaction of the audience members protecting the group, and the Advocacy Group responding in kind, gave a new validity to the presentation that followed.



The High-Priestess of Wedokum was present at our seminar

The presentation specifically focused on the four kinds of domestic violence denoted by Domestic Violence Act of 2007. Issues of physical abuse, sexual abuse, economical abuse and emotional abuse accompanied with ardent denial formulate a cycle of violence that is perpetuated in Ghana. The women appeared to be most engaged whilst discussing forced sex in marriage. It seemed that this normally taboo subject was a commonplace issue. Many of the women applauded and cheered when our group asserted that a woman has the right to say no to sex, and that rape can occur in marriages. However, some of the men seemed unconvinced. There was also an onus on what to do when domestic violence occurs. Information on DOVVSU as well as other practical knowledge in the case of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse was received with gratitude.

During the presentation we also showed some statistics on domestic violence in Ghana. We made a poster to present these statistics as clearly as possible to the

audience. In 2011 there were 2,474 reports of domestic violence towards men and as many as 15,495 reports on violence against women. Furthermore, a national survey conducted by the Gender Centre on Violence Against Women and Children in Ghana asserted that 8% of women admitted to having been raped, but only 5% of these women reported the incident to the police.

The group had the opportunity to answer any questions before they left, implementing the aforementioned structure. This was productive as many members of the community utilized this time with relevant queries which the group was able to address collectively. Some members of the audience also asked very interesting questions which highlighted the complexity of the issue of domestic violence. For example, one woman said “My husband and I love each other very much, but sometimes, when we argue, he hits me. I know domestic violence is wrong, but I don’t want to send my husband to prison.” Though a difficult issue we were able to provide the necessary advice. Domestic Violence is always unacceptable, and if unreported, it will only be exacerbated over time. That same woman knew of a family in which a child had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of an uncle, but the family was reluctant to report the matter to police. The group was able to explain how detrimental this lack of justice is to both the victim and the family, whilst also noting that anyone aware of defilement of any kind is legally culpable if they do not report it. Another member of the community asked, “If my wife refuses to have sex with me for 3 weeks...isn’t that a violation of my rights as a man?” This question caused quite a debate and highlighted the worrying view of some that women are under a duty to satisfy their husbands. The group tried to answer the question as diplomatically but as firmly as possible—You have the right to your own body, but you do not have the right to anyone else’s.

As this was a presentation on domestic issues, there were also many questions about child maintenance. One of our pro-placement volunteers was on hand to give legal advice on such matters.

After the presentation, all of the members of the group agreed that the community appeared to have enjoyed the presentation and gained valuable knowledge on a topic of which they did not have much prior knowledge. This made the trip extremely worthwhile.

Fadama Legal Assistance Program (FLAP)

Old Fadama is the biggest slum in Accra, and is situated between Korle Lagoon and the Agbogloshie market. The government owns the land, so the estimated 100,000 people living there are doing so illegally. The government refuses to give them any services. There is no electricity, water, sewers, roads, or schools. The inhabitants have to take care of everything for themselves. Crime rates are high and living conditions are poor; there is abject poverty and appalling literacy rates. Due to the 'undesirable' status of the slums and the people therein, the area is sometimes referred to as the biblical "Sodom and Gomorrah". This is an area in desperate need of help, so Projects Abroad Human Rights Office has decided to set up a legal service desk there.

The goal is to set up a permanent fixture in the Old Fadama slums called the Fadama Legal Assistance Program. The desk should be self-sustaining in the long run and able to run without Projects Abroad or other volunteer involvement. We aim to achieve this by teaching some of the locals how to intake clients and mediate disputes, as well as, refer people to Legal Aid should their situation demand it. FLAP also strives to create awareness of human rights issues and abuses that are pertinent to this community.

June marked the inception of this project. Along the way we have made a many changes to the initial plan, but the idea has stayed the same. We have an incredibly important resource in the form of Frederick Opoku. He is a lifelong resident of Old Fadama and has started a small NGO there called WISEEP (Women in Slum Economic Empowerment). He does a lot of administrative work within the slum and has also created a draft of issues he feels need to be raised. He has been the point-person on the inside, and has aided in the introduction of FLAP to the people of the slums.

In the month of June we've had three presentations in Old Fadama. With the presentations we aim to create awareness about Basic Human Rights, Sexual Violence, Domestic Violence, Rent issues, Child Maintenance, and Succession Law. From the first presentation we learned that we can't discuss all of the subjects at the same time—as the subject matter is rather dense and then the presentations last longer than the attention spans of the audience. It's also quite a lot of information to process in one sitting. The following two presentations were adjusted on a case-by-case basis so that the information was in accordance with the import to the specific audience. Since there was a majority of female attendants present for the final two seminars, we focused on Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, and Child Maintenance. We've also learned to be perceptive to what the people of Old Fadama want. If a question occurs more than once, we've found it effective to add the answer to the core information within our presentations. We continually adjust and adapt in order to be as understandable, pertinent, and efficacious with the people of Old Fadama. Through this method we have also gained insight into the types of questions and issues that could potentially arise.

The volunteers that work with FLAP learn more with each presentation they give. Not only have we made the presentations shorter and more comprehensible, but we have also received our first clients. By handling real cases we continue to recognize which issues are the most pressing. Furthermore, we are gaining traction within the community. By knowing the people and the community better it is easier to solve their problems. The most notable obstacle that FLAP has faced is the mistrust that has been bred for NGOs in Old Fadama. Many organizations have come to the slums making sweeping promises, never to return. The people of Old Fadama want hope—not false hope. Our continued presence throughout the month has allowed them to begin to know us and trust that our intentions are not only good, but permanent as well.

One of the greatest strides that FLAP made this month was an official introduction and welcoming ceremony with the chiefs of Old Fadama. There were 16 chiefs present for a formal meeting with the FLAP volunteers, Projects Abroad staff, Frederick Opoku, and the Country Director of Projects Abroad—Emmanuel Abaaja. Frederick made a speech endorsing our work in the slums so far and our continued commitment to the people of Old Fadama. To further formalize the occasion, Projects Abroad donated rice, Milo, Malta, chairs, and other useful items as an offering to the

chiefs in order to ask for permission for us to continue our work in the slums with their blessing. Our request was granted and FLAP was officially welcomed into the Fadama community.



The Fadama Legal Assistance Program team received great exposure from the local media whilst meeting with the chiefs of Old Fadama's tribes

Back at the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office we've been working on logistical issues. A logo has been created—which perhaps sounds like it should be the least of our concerns—but is incredibly important when trying to create awareness. As most people in Old Fadama cannot read, having a visual reference for the Fadama Legal Assistance Program is incredibly important. By having a name and a logo we have something people can relate to.

Another step that has been taken towards the path to sustainability is the creation of a manual for intake personnel, general flap volunteers, and mediators. The manual will be a compilation of detailed information about everything concerning Human Rights, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, Rent, Child Maintenance, Succession, Mediation etc., in order to be a reference for the locals working at the legal service desk. It will also include directives and instructions for each facet of the programme. Since creating such a manual is quite a comprehensive process, there is always work to be done on this project. Right now we've started gathering information to the Human Rights part of the manual. We're also trying to predict future obstacles and issues that could arise in order for the manual to have solutions ready for when real problems are encountered

Despite the fact that our presentations and seminars are becoming more and more effective each time FLAP

goes to the slums, we've begun to realize that a couple of presentations a week for 20 people at a time is a slow method of creating awareness. As we have many more volunteers coming in the upcoming months, FLAP will be utilizing these volunteers to do two or three sessions at one time in order to exponentially increase awareness. The increased presence will help to make Fadama Legal Assistance Program a resounding, permanent, and sustainable success over the course of the next few months.

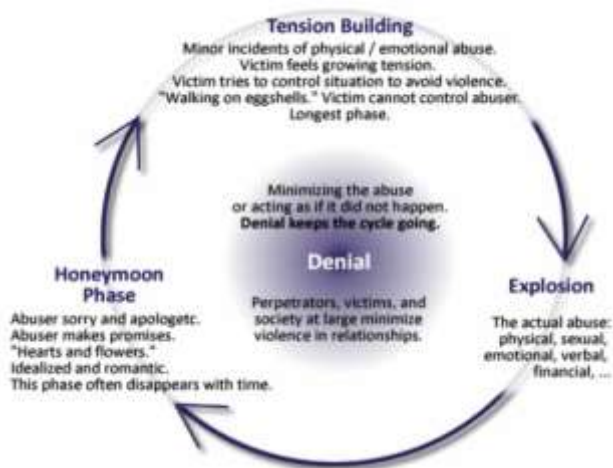
Human Rights Defenders

The Human Rights Defenders—more commonly referred to as the HR Defenders—go to under privileged villages and speak with different members of the community about human rights. The project that has been on going in Dodowa is divided into three sessions with three different subjects. The presentations are given for about fifteen audience members. After having participated in all three sessions they receive a certificate of their successful completion of the programme, and are then dubbed HR Defenders. Once they earn their certificate, they are entrusted with the duty of distributing the information they gleaned and begin educating others. The goal is to reach as many people as possible and increase awareness about their rights and empower those who have sought to increase their own knowledge on the subject. In this way, they are one step closer to improving their situation and surroundings. With knowledge comes the power to change.

The first session was held on the 19th of June on the topic of domestic violence. We arrived in Dodowa and were shown into a small room where 15 curious adults were waiting for us to begin. They all spoke English, so we did not need a translator to communicate with them. As this was our first attempt at presentation for HR defenders, we were uncertain of the knowledge or education level of the audience, thus the presentation was quite basic and very easy to understand.

The sessions all begin with a presentation of the topic, followed by a movie or a movie clip for them to discuss. This discussion allows us to expand on the topic at hand. Afterwards we are able to go into more detail on the problems, abuses and rights of the people in the community. We also conducted group exercises and group discussions where the community members become directly involved in the complexity of the topics. At the end of the presentation they get an information pack that goes into more detail and includes all the information we have been given them so that they can begin disseminating that information throughout their community.

The presentation specifically focused on the four kinds of domestic violence that the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 describes—issues of physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, and emotional abuse. We also talked about the cycle of violence in order to help them recognize the earmarks of domestic abuse so that they can intervene.



The Cycle of Violence

The presentation went really well though we had underestimated the prior knowledge that the audience members had about the topic. During our debrief, we resolved to make the next session more complex and detailed. We were also requested by our new HR Defenders to do a short introduction to human rights and what human rights really are. We happily complied, as human rights are the cornerstone of all of the other rights we enjoy and the abuses we discuss. It is also an issue with many complexities and is not nearly as simple as it might seem. Thus it's crucial for our HR defenders to both understand and be able to explain. Therefore we included a section about human rights in the next session.

The second session was held on the 25th of June on the rights of suspects. As requested, we began with a short summary of human rights. They raised many good questions and angled the trajectory of the discussion towards parental responsibilities and child maintenance. They also discussed parents who do not have the financial ability to provide for their children and whether or not this violates the United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child. Though this discussion deviated from the originally intended topic, we eventually refocused and began our more formal presentations on suspect's rights. The main topics covered were the rights of a person during an arrest, whilst they are in custody and in interrogation, and finally how bail works. We also explained how they could receive free legal assistance and where they can go if their rights have been violated. This portion of the presentation was well received, however, when the topic of police rights and limitations arose, the HR defenders became visibly agitated as they are sceptical of the intentions of the police and do not believe that the police would ever come to their aid should they need it.

One of the most prevalent issues that we, at PAHO face is the police corruption. At its core, it's a human rights issue, and the overarching effect is that progress cannot be made when people do not trust those who are supposed to protect them. The police in Ghana are extremely corrupt, and the people have very little confidence or respect for the police. There are many reports of excessive force and police brutality—some of which end in death. Many of our own volunteers and staff have witnessed police pull over drivers without any infraction having been committed and demand money in order to be allowed to continue on their way. Due to this lack of trust for the police, local vigilante groups—in different locations across the Ghana—are taking the law into their own hands. When they find those suspected of a crime they have been known to beat and sometimes kill people without ever having a trial.

Those suspects who actually do make it to prison suffer appalling, and sometimes even, life-threatening conditions. In many cases, the conditions could potentially be described as violations of the UN's International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A significant proportion of those detained are dubbed "Awaiting Trial Victims". They are detained for long periods of time while awaiting trial. The Constitution prohibits torture, but there are still reports of ill-treatment and abuse in custody.

The Parliament reintroduced the *Habeas Corpus Act* of 1964, which gives the courts the right to request written statement about the circumstances of an arrest, and to request a court hearing. Under the Constitution, a suspect can be detained in custody for a maximum of 48 hours after which they must either be brought to court or be released. Despite the Habeas Corpus Act, people are often arrested arbitrarily or for relatively trivial offenses and detained significant durations of time without judicial review. According to the yearly prison report of 2008, 30% of the country's prisoners are awaiting trial.

In order to exhibit police brutality as a global issue, we showed a video of a famous case in the U.S. wherein Hope Staffey called the police for help and then was violently taken into custody where she was strip-searched by force, against her will, and without warrant or reason by 7 male officers and one female police officer. These same officers also filmed the "investigation". We felt that the participants had a great interest in this subject. They were involved and focused, yet understandably critical. We concluded our seminar with information on how to report rights violations and police corruption and brutality.

After this presentation, our volunteers and staff debriefed as a group and deduced that for upcoming presentations, it might be beneficial to have a hand out or informational packet. The HR Defenders might gain some more insight from the ability to follow us as we speak. Even though all of the members speak English, we can sometimes be hard for them to understand, and we need to amend our speech patterns and speed so that we are as comprehensible as possible. There was also a great demand for the contact list with

information about where they can turn to if their rights are violated.

The third and final session of the Human Rights Defenders in Dodowa was held on the 2nd of July and focused on the death penalty. This subject is as significant as it is sensitive. The death penalty has existed legislatively in Ghana since the application of English common law in 1874. Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana states:

"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 is the sentence for those who have been convicted of armed robbery, treason, or murder in the first-degree. According to human rights activists, as well as, The Ghana Bar Association, at least 155 people were executed between 1984 and 1993 during the rule of former President Jerry Rawlings and his iron-fisted military government. The last execution to take place occurred in July of 1993 when 12 prisoners, who had been convicted of armed robbery or murder, were executed by firing squad.

Executions can also be carried out in Ghana by hanging, but the last hanging was performed in 1968.

This seminar had the same structure as the other two sessions but with an onus on discussion. Our intention in this final session was to encourage a deep

examination of their personal

opinion and potentially introduce a different way of thinking. The video we chose for today portrayed Ron McAndrew, a former executioner from the U.S. prison system. He spoke about how he had been in favour of



Jessie and Katie with the new HR Defenders after completing their training

capital punishment, but he eventually changed his mind when he scrutinized himself and his faith after working for numerous years as an executioner. He addressed the argument that many proponents of the death penalty employ: An eye for an eye. He contends that this argument is flawed in many ways, but most importantly that guilt is never truly beyond a shadow of a doubt. There are countless people who have been found innocent after their execution. The question McAndrew then posed was whether or not the executioner then be killed for ending the life of an innocent.

The presentation went well and facilitated some interesting discussions; however, at the end of the presentation, the majority of the HR defenders were still unconvinced about the abolishment of the death penalty. Many actually asserted that the death penalty was too mild and rapid of a punishment. They argued that the state should ensure that the condemned die more slowly. However, the current debate is not for or against the death penalty. The fact of the matter is that no one has been executed for over twenty years. Thus, the question is whether or not to remove and inoperative article from the constitution, thereby disassociating Ghana with the death penalty. Once this was explained a bit more thoroughly, many of the HR Defenders expressed agreement that the death penalty should be abolished in name as it has already been abolished in practice.

On reflection of the three sessions that were held in Dodowa, it can be concluded that much progress was made. All those present demonstrated a good level of understanding of the material covered and were interested in retaining the information that was given to them so they could pass it on to other members of the Dodowa community. Many interesting situational questions were posed over the course of the three presentations, which proves that the material covered was both relevant and intriguing to the people in this community. This was particularly apparent during the suspect's rights seminar. We will be returning to Dodowa on the 22nd of July in order to assess the progress of the HR defenders in educating the community, as well as, to assess the effect of our programme.

The next step for the HR Defender project will be a course of seminars in the slums of Old Fadama. We will be presenting on the rights and responsibilities of citizens and suspects on July 11th. The goal will be to

improve the relationship between the police and the community of Old Fadama.

Children's Shelter

The Children's Shelter is part of the Social Welfare Facility, which also encompasses the Girls' Correctional and the Boys' remand centre. The majority of children have been abused and are either orphans or are runaways. There is a vast range in abilities among the children; as well as, ages ranging from 7 up to 17. This new project aims to engage the children in activities in order educate them, mainly in English. As most of the children do not have a stable background, it has been essential to build up a relationship with them so that they feel comfortable with us. This gives them an opportunity to open up about personal matters and issues in their lives, as the staff at the shelter are neither the most accessible nor the most comforting.

We have only been in contact with the children for a couple of weeks; however, in this short period of time, we have already seen small signs of progress. This has been exhibited through individual participation and confidence levels.



Ghanaian children

Despite the fragmented nature of the first few lessons, we structured them around spelling their names and the names of their friends. Although a vital and relatively basic skill, there were only a handful of

children able to spell their own names. After distributing name badges, we cleared the classroom and split the children into two teams. Each child was asked to race to the board and write their name, which would result in a point being scored for their team. The realization by some individuals that they had the ability to write their name and identify different letters resulted in excitement-both on their part and on ours. However, it did beg the question as to why they had not been taught prior to our involvement.

Our participation in the activities in conjunction with an exceptionally 'hands-on' approach has fostered a rapport between the volunteers and the children within the classroom. Some of the other sessions included lessons on body parts and fruit, in which we incorporated a game called 'fruit salad' –which is an African version of 'Simon Says'. As they are quite young, the two-hour slot that we have been allotted three times a week does seem rather long and it has been difficult to keep the children fully engaged for this period of time. Recently, we have left half an hour at the end to give them an opportunity to sing, which is incredibly refreshing. Throughout the singing, the children are absorbed and engaged in an activity that they clearly enjoy. We perceive it to be of paramount importance that the children get a chance to express themselves in this way.

Due to the range of ages and abilities it is incredibly difficult to teach all the children at one time. Individual attention given to children is invaluable and is certainly something that needs to be addressed and taken into consideration by future volunteers. One girl in particular, after having been unable to write any three-letter word, was able to recite the alphabet and write a simple sentence after being taught alone for only 20 minutes. Additionally, taking time out with the older children to teach them more advanced English was helpful to not only gauge their abilities but to assess what they want to learn. Towards the beginning of our second week, a handful of the older girls asked whether they could be taught verbs. The fact that they felt able to request a lesson desired to be taught was so rewarding for us. It is examples like this which demonstrate the raw impact of our presence within this establishment.

Yet despite this, the detriments of the system have begun to affect the lessons. Unfortunately the merits of special education here is questionable at best. This seems to be merely one example of a widespread issue. This is an area which requires a greater distribution of

information to society and individuals in this profession.

One of the other issues we've faced is responding to children who disclose information about their background, especially when there seems to be a lack of support. We think that, for future volunteers, it would be helpful to be aware of how to deal with a child who has been abused. Giving them the opportunity to divulge in issues at their own pace and letting them know who to raise concerns with should these issues need to be addressed. There have been a few occasions when children's backgrounds have been exposed either by themselves or by other children. Some of the violence and corporal punishment in the classroom is an example of this in itself. Building up rapport with the children will allow them to talk about their families and experiences at the shelter. From our experience at the children's centre, it is this connection and the resulting discussions that help a child to come to terms with their situation.

Overall this new project has incredible potential. Despite the challenges from facility staff, the children, and the system in general, the fact that progress seems to have been made in such a short period of time is truly an example for what can be developed. With the continuation of this program we will be able to give structure, education, and enjoyment to the day's of these children while they remain at the children's shelter.

Boys' Remand Centre

The Boys' Remand Centre is one of the many Social Justice projects carried out by the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office. It is situated in the Osu Social Welfare Facility and shares the complex with a Children's Shelter and a Girl's Correctional Facility. The boys in the Remand Centre are all awaiting trial for crimes with which they have been charged. These crimes range from petty theft to serious offences, such as, gang rape. As the nature of the charges varies, so does the length of time the boys spend in the facility. For this reason we may see some of the boy's once though others may be present throughout our time with PAHO.

Our task is to educate the boys about basic human rights, a topic of which they have very little background knowledge. It has become clear that many of the boys have not received an adequate education. We at PAHO speculated that this could be one of the primary factors as to why they turned to crime, which resulted in their detention at the Remand Centre. We therefore took it upon ourselves to teach simple Maths, English and other topics on top of the continual foundation of human rights.

We started the first session by giving a basic introduction on human rights. This entailed what human rights are and why they are important. We focused on rights, such as, the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The boys seemed to understand these topics and exhibited their interest by partaking in various discussions regarding why human rights are important and the fact that everybody is entitled to human rights.

During the next session we taught the boys about the apartheid and institutionalized racism in both the US and in South Africa with the overarching questions as to whether this was a violation against universal human rights. The topic of apartheid led to a discussion of Nelson Mandela and his fight for equal rights. This session culminated in another very interactive discussion with many of the boys sharing their various opinions. The next session involved teaching them about the Ghanaian political system and the fact that Ghana is one of the strongest and oldest democracies in Africa.

After the first three sessions it became apparent that the boys were very interested in our lives back home and how it differs with the traditional Ghanaian lifestyle. They took a special interest in Scandinavian nations, such as, Sweden and Norway, which are the nationalities of two of our volunteers. We took this as an opportunity to explain the difference between the Scandinavian culture and their own. This included sports, food, weather, and we even had the opportunity to teach them a few phrases! Though we try to let the boys' interests and requests dictate the trajectory of the conversation, we try to tie everything into the overarching theme of human rights.

At the end of each session we gave all the boys a questionnaire relating to each relevant topic. These questionnaires consist of simple multiple-choice questions. This structure of a presentation, followed by

a discussion, then a questionnaire was effective, as it allowed the participants to improve both their discussion and writing skills.

All of the boys were eager to complete the questionnaire, and they used their gained knowledge to answer at a high standard. The more competent boys even prepared a short essay, which exceeded our expectations. For example, one of the boys explained that human rights are a 'god given right to all members of society'.

It was interesting to see the attitudes of the boy's during the sessions. People might assume that young boys who had been charged with a crime would be disruptive, uninterested, or even intimidating when compelled into a classroom environment. However, the boys were engaged, attentive, and showed the utmost respect towards the volunteers during all of the sessions.

With regards to the academic teaching, it became apparent that the boys thoroughly enjoyed maths. Due to that fact we prepared addition, subtraction, and multiplication. We thought that—outside of the issues of human rights—this was the most useful topic to teach the boys for reintroduction to society.

The main struggle continues to be the different levels of education that the boys possess. Some of the boy's English and reading were at a relatively high standard, whereas others were almost illiterate. Thus we decided to help these boys on an individual basis. This more independent style of learning encouraged those who possess a higher level of education to do more, while still supporting those who are not at that same level. However, it is important to note that the volunteers must be equipped with extra work for those who finish more quickly.

On a number of occasions we were told that we would not see some of the boys again as their court dates were fast approaching. We would then be shocked to see the boys on our next visit. They would ultimately explain that a lawyer or judge had failed to turn up to court. We found that on these occasions the boys would seem distracted and dejected, which was understandable given the circumstances. The work that we have done, and will continue to do, in the Boys Remand Centre has been extremely rewarding. The background knowledge they have received in human rights, as well as, the basic education in maths and English will be an asset to them in the future. We hope

that will serve them well as they are reintroduced to society.

Girls' Correctional

The Girls' Correctional Centre is located in South Labone Girls' Vocational Training Centre, a five-minute walk from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office. The juvenile girls present have been convicted of an offense, and are serving their sentences in the Centre. While they are there, the girls attend classes in basic mathematics and English, as well as training in vocational skills, such as sewing. Volunteers from the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office visit the Centre twice a week for two hours at a time to conduct additional classes with the girls. PAHO has been running this project since June 2012.

Our primary aim is to provide the girls with further support in the skills that will allow them to sustain themselves outside of the Centre without resorting to criminal behavior. In order to achieve this we teach basic mathematics and English, as well as broader topics, such as geography and history. We also address issues that can affect young people in general, particularly young offenders, such as domestic abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse. Finally, we ensure that the girls are aware of their fundamental human rights, as well as their rights as juveniles. Our objective is to encourage the girls to become aware of an alternative to the criminal path, and plan for a better future.

As the girls come and go regularly, and their competence at maths and English varies greatly, it is challenging to plan for lesson difficulty. Among the girls who were present from the beginning of June 2013, two could speak English confidently, and read and write when encouraged, while the other two struggled with very basic sentences.

Volunteer Spotlight: LYDIA LEATHER (UK)

Time at PAHO: March – June 2013

Background: Recent high-school graduate, accepted to study law at Nottingham

Projects: Girls' Correctional Facility, Death Penalty, Police Advocacy, HR Defenders

Lydia worked at PAHO for four months, and brought with her a level of calm professionalism and commitment that served as great inspiration to the short-term volunteers. Thanks to her leadership, the Girl's Correctional Facility project enjoyed a period of stability, with volunteers being able to make more meaningful connections with the inmates.

"When I arrived the girls had lessons twice a week. They had already been engaged in geography lessons, and these progressed to sessions on 'role models' by the previous lead volunteer.

We made the lessons more interactive and engaging. The subjects we covered included Ghana's independence, sex education, maths and geography, 'what to do in an emergency', accounting, the political system and voting, positive thinking, the human body, persuasive language, hygiene, newspapers, the Olympic Games, dance, famous speeches, and a range of other educational or recreational subjects.

Most of the content of these lessons can be found on the Human Rights Office network, and we introduced a reporting procedure for each lesson. This was something of positive step – before, there had been no consistent reporting, nor many resources to show future volunteers. Now every volunteer has access to the past lesson resources since March 2013 so that they can improve on these lessons.

There was also progress in how we approached the girls and their situations. Thanks to the continuity of my time at the Facility, I formed a stronger attachment with the girls than the short-term volunteers could. You could really see them opening up much more as the months rolled by. It is vital for the creative and interact side of the lessons to continue. The girls need academic skills but it is their happiness and wellbeing that should be our main focus. For a few of them, with no education at all, it is ridiculous to assume that with a few lessons from us they will be literate. Instead these girls need to gain valuable skills for the outside world & have general contentment and self-worth."

The staff at the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office would like to sincerely thank Lydia for her invaluable contribution, and we hope that our paths cross again in the future.



In order to ensure that all of the girls got the most out of each lesson, we generally split them into two groups. As volunteer numbers have increased, we have recently been able to work with the girls on an individual basis. English language topics covered in recent sessions have included the future tense, in which we showed the girls how the future tense is formed, and asked them to write about what they would like to be when they grow up. Other topics have included speeches, in which we showed the girls some speeches given by Ghanaian presidents, and encouraged them to try to give a speech to the group. We also had a lesson on giving instructions, in which we went through the purpose of instructions, and asked the girls to write us instructions for how to make their favorite recipes.

Although our main aim is to teach the girls, it is important to remember that they are still children, and that fun activities and play ought to be encouraged, and incorporated into our lessons. Every few sessions we aim to teach the girls something a little more light-hearted. Last week we had a lesson on volcanoes, after which we made a volcano using flour, water, washing liquid and baking soda. This month we also dedicated one session solely to playing with the girls. We brought arts and crafts materials to session, and taught them how to make origami cranes. We aim to have relaxed lessons like these at least once every three weeks. These more relaxed sessions were fantastic for building trust, an essential factor in the relationships between the volunteers and the girls at the Centre. As PAHO volunteers are often only in Ghana for months at a time, it is important for us to make every effort to get to know the girls as well as we can, so that the girls can gain a maximum benefit from our time there.



School-girls of Old Fadama enjoying the novelty of the camera

In the coming weeks we aim to focus some sessions on contraception and sexual health, as the girls requested. This topic is particularly important for them, as we are aware that some of the girls in the Centre have been convicted of prostitution. We also aim to split planning for English lessons entirely, so that we can go completely back to basics with the two girls whose English is the weakest, without the other two girls getting bored. A key aim of the next month is to show a marked improvement in the speaking, reading and writing of these girls.

Human Rights Clubs

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 an 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. Each club has a supervisor, but the students organize a majority of the activities by themselves. There are also student club-executives who act as the leaders of the HR club and are monitored by a volunteer.

In 2011, PAHO started HR Clubs in three Senior High Schools in Accra: Accra High School, Presbyterian Boys Secondary School (PreSec), and Accra Girls High School. Our relationship with the Accra Girls School ended in February 2012. Currently, we have two strong HR Clubs holding lessons in Accra High and Teshie PreSec. Lessons in Accra High have been relatively constant for almost 2 years now. It is the school with the longest history of cooperation with PAHO. Unfortunately, they have just appointed a new Headmaster who does not seem interested in making HR Clubs a priority at Accra High. He has made it very difficult for us to meet, but we are keeping in touch in hopes that we will be able to once again run successful HR Clubs there soon. Thus we have decided to add two more schools, which we will kick off next month. The new schools will include the Accra Academy near Kaneshie, and another as yet unidentified school.

In Accra High the students have been very engaged and eager to learn. They are smart and creative, so the lessons have been both detailed and somewhat demanding. They proposed going on fieldtrips and having HR-activities both in school and all over Accra. It has been encouraging and validating for us that they are so excited about the prospect of bettering themselves and the community around them. As it is an extracurricular activity, attendance may vary between 20 and 30 students. Generally students are on time in Accra High and the attitude towards human rights is very supportive, open, and progressive. It seems to be common belief that the perpetuation of human rights will ensure peace and prosperity in Ghana.

The students in PreSec are clever and creative. The school is located outside of Accra in Legon (behind Accra Mall), so field trips have been quite difficult to execute. Attendance may vary between 15 and 25 students. The attitude towards human rights is supportive, but minutely more conservative than in Accra High. Logistically speaking, we have found it most effective to have a staff meeting on Monday morning to discuss the last lesson and set a draft of what to do in the next session (activities, handouts, statements). We research the needed materials and give ourselves a deadline of Tuesday around noon and meet after lunch to set a final draft. We then write the descriptions for activities, the handout and an opening and closing statement (to be given by us). We print off the materials and have enough time to make any corrections or adjustments if necessary before our Friday sessions. It is important that volunteers are as prepared as possible concerning materials and content to be delivered. Lessons consists of an opening statement, one or two activities for the students, a closing statement and a handout summarizing the information we've given that day. Each meeting we introduce the topic in a few sentences from a human rights perspective. This is a statement, not a speech or presentation. The activities should be interesting and interactive. Open discussions and allowing students to prepare their own presentations, posters, speeches, and essays are fun but demanding activities for them to do. We attempt to make all lessons very similar in each school to ensure they are all on the same level and this simplifies keeping track of what has been done in the past. The lessons should culminate in a final event every two months (e.g. a debate between the schools). Thus the topics for the lessons should be done in 8 week increments. Even if there is no final event, a collection of lessons under a

united headline gives the programme a direction and unification.

There have been two lessons at Presec this month. The first one was an introduction where we asked the students questions about which human rights topics they wanted to delve into and discuss. The students were very excited to have the option to choose the issues and wanted us to address prostitution and the sex trade for our next session. We intended to have a loose format for the session that would be targeted at the legislative aspect of the sex trade. However the religious aspect of this issue overwhelmed the trajectory of the discussion. As developed as they are, we have to remember that the members of the HR Clubs are still young and need more direction. Having such a loose structure was a detriment to the session, so a question and answer format might be more beneficial, especially when the topic is so sensitive. This will also help students to explore the complexities of these issues while still expressing their opinions. The topic for our next session will be corporal punishment.

Capital Punishment Project

The purpose of this project was to collect information about people's views on the death penalty through an advocacy group that was coordinated by Amnesty International. The team was involved in assessing the opinions of individuals in a variety of communities. Our group led the discussions through question and answer sessions about the role of religion, cost, prison conditions and Ghana's international image and the effects that these sub-topics have on the capital punishment debate. The Capital Punishment Project concluded at the end of June.

We had four final discussions in June, which concluded our work on the death penalty. In our research, we not only learned about Ghanaian's opinions of the death penalty, but also the inner workings of Ghanaian society and the values of the people therein. The participants of the focus group discussions showed brilliant engagement and passion about the topic. Everyone acknowledged the importance of the issue and wanted to take their time to reflect on the subject.

During the discussions, all the participants were willing to accept that everyone had different views. All of the discussions had a peaceful ending and the participants were thankful for the opportunity to contribute their opinions to the debate. The research showed that the death penalty was already a topic which people had been thinking about; they had structured reasons for their views. Our findings are positive in revealing that there is definitely a platform for future discussion on the death penalty in a widespread forum.

Whilst conducting the investigation on the public opinion of the death penalty we identified one theme that was paramount. This

was the justice and legal system, as well as, the prison system and the conditions therein. Concern for the prison systems was something that was brought up in every discussion, usually without our encouragement. The concern centred on the inability of the prisons to fulfil their purpose. Those

in favour of the death penalty, and even many of those against the death penalty, had a concern that prisoners could always be released. One person stated, "We are in a country where anything is possible". Another individual supported the 'eye for an eye' principle portrayed in the bible. This was not uncommon, as religions seemed to be the primary reason why individuals supported this issue.

Another common concern was the early release of inmates sentenced to life in prison. The participants' concern was that the release of prisoners—through bribery and corruption—could have a negative impact on the younger generation. The people felt helpless in resolving their issues; the death penalty seemed like the only solution. Many participants thought the death penalty deterred people from committing crimes and abolishing the death penalty will influence society in a negative way. Instead of trying to convince people that the death penalty does not deter people from committing crimes, the focus should be on how to prevent crime through alternative methods, such as alleviating poverty, increasing access to education, and improving living conditions.

Religion was another overarching theme, which seemed to dominate the discussions. This was unsurprising

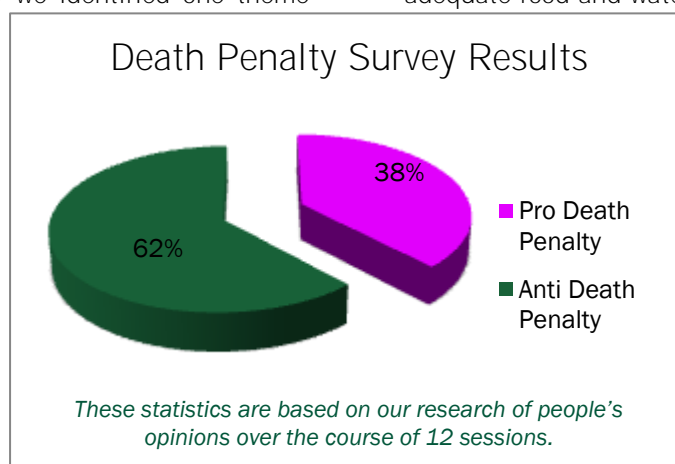
because of the inherent role religion plays in Ghanaian society. Some of the participants of the discussions formed rational reasons for their

The theme that seemed most irrelevant to the participants of the discussions was Ghana's international image. They saw Ghana as independent from the international community. Since Ghana has a democratic government, it is their decision as a society. The participants also raised concerns regarding the economic argument. There was general opposition to the fact that criminals with a life sentence receive adequate food and water to live on, while others are not

guaranteed nor provided such accommodations. We found it challenging to persuade the participants that the cost of execution would be higher than a life sentence. This may not be the case in Ghana, but we failed to obtain statistics or studies that had been done here. Thus, the argument based on the differing cost of punishment did not seem

significant to them. There were many suggestions of structured labour in prisons to contribute to society. Of course, this can only be achieved with an improvement in the prison conditions.

Advocacy work on capital punishment in the future should not be solely focused on an informative campaign, but potentially on a grassroots programme that puts additional pressure on the government to reform the legal system and prison system. This will consequently reassure the people of the validity and efficacy of these systems. The focus will need to be on gaining the public's trust, so that the death penalty will no longer be seen as the necessary solution. For the death penalty to be abolished from the Ghanaian Constitution, the structures of the Ghanaian society need to be improved so that we can begin to change peoples minds.



Legal Aid

The Professional Legal Placement is a section of the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office that is geared specifically to volunteers who are already in possession of their law degree. In this way they can utilize their skills to benefit the people of Ghana, while also giving them critical practice in the legal field. We currently have one Pro Placement volunteer, Jen Croker, who wrote the following report of her month working with Legal Aid and the Fadama Legal Assistance Program.

My placement to date has consisted of two separate but conveniently related tasks. I work as a lawyer to assist at the offices of The Legal Aid Scheme at Ministries in Accra, and I am also working on developing the Fadama Legal Assistance Program.

Most of my time thus far has been spent at Legal Aid. The Legal Aid Scheme was formally established by the Legal Aid Scheme Law in 1987 to provide legal services to the poor and indigent. It is cited as being a practical application of Articles 17(1) and 17(2) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, which speak of equality before the law and refute discrimination on economic grounds.

I consider the work I do at Legal Aid to be much different than anywhere else. I attend to clients and take instructions from them—whilst preparing the Court documents or letters they require— then send them to file their documents or deliver the required letters. Expediency is crucial.

The most common legal area that I encounter is family law; specifically divorce applications / responses, as well as, custody and child maintenance applications. In my first week at Legal Aid, one of the staff said to me, “If the man is doing the right thing we don’t see them”. Many of the family law disputes involve situations of abuse. Family law issues also frequently involve tales of local customs and beliefs. One client to which I attended believed that her mother-in-law had made her barren by giving her a sewing machine for the purpose of “sewing her womb”. Evidently she was informed that by repairing the machine and sewing with it, she would prepare her womb for children.

It is interesting comparing the practice of Family Law in Ghana with the practice of Family Law in Australia, which is the area in which I have spent the bulk of my last 5 years of practice. The overall principle governing the grant of a divorce is similar: that the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation. However, the method to reach that conclusion is vastly different. In Australia, either party to the marriage may determine that the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation of their own volition, and the Court will grant the divorce – provided that the Court’s procedure has been followed correctly and the applicant has made a vague statement to the effect that the maintenance of any children has been dealt with. Whereas in Ghana, it is for the Court to determine whether or not the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation. This position requires the parties to state their reasons for requesting a divorce, a procedure which frequently involves accusations and arguments in the divorce petition and response. It will never cease to amaze me that I can spend twenty minutes taking instructions from a woman regarding the reasons she wants a divorce before she thinks to mention that repetitive instances of domestic abuse are a contributing factor in her desire for a divorce.

Outside the area of Family Law, I also attend to clients regarding land disputes, failed visa applications, small claims (usually involving microfinance companies), insurance claims, intestate succession disputes, rental disputes, and whatever other issues that might arise. I’ve even drafted a defense to a defamation claim.

The contrast between my work at home and my work in Ghana is great. I have swapped my corner office with water views for a small corner of a room filled with people with a ceiling fan that doesn’t work. I now strain to hear clients above ten other voices, struggle to find a stapler, and have to swap cords to connect to a printer. Clients are churned through very quickly and documents are prepared with haste. For the most part, we prepare the Court paperwork, but do not attend Court with the clients, as the resources do not currently exist.

Presently, there are only fourteen government-employed lawyers in The Legal Aid Scheme nation-wide, serving a population of 24 million. I work with three of them. The low level of resources available to The Legal Aid Scheme obviously impacts its ability to provide a pivotal service to the people of Ghana and has prompted one Professor of Law to frankly state that “The Scheme does not have adequate resources to

make a meaningful impact on society as a whole.” The under-resourced Legal Aid Scheme, therefore, whilst noble in its purpose, is only able to address the need for the poor to have access to the legal system of Ghana in a very small way. However, the people that Legal Aid has benefitted outweighs the pessimism bred by lack of resources. Small change is still change.

Some of the poor who do not have access to the legal system are the residents of Old Fadama. This is an issue that I hope the Fadama Legal Assistance Program will be able to address, not only by creating awareness within the community of legal rights and available services, but also by relieving some of the potential workload from The Legal Aid Scheme.

Although Fadama Legal Assistance Program is in its infancy, I am heartened by the impact we are having. I am assisting a woman who has been raising her daughter for the past 6 years without any financial assistance from the girl’s father because she could not afford to pay the filing fee at the Court for a maintenance application. She had no idea that she could apply for assistance from Legal Aid, which would exempt her from paying the filing fee. But now she does. I am assisting another woman who spent eight years being abused both physically and sexually by the father of her children and who, this week, for the first time, reported the matter for DOVVSU.

The work may not be glamorous but I am beginning to wonder how I will swap back my huddled corner for my corner office.



Jen giving legal advice during a client intake session in Old Fadama

Upcoming Projects



Local women of Dodowa wearing bright African printed fabrics

Human Rights Vacation School

The Human Rights Vacation School is a new initiative by the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office to broaden the reach of Human Rights education amongst local high school students. The program, consisting of 6 interactive sessions across 3 weeks, focuses on fostering knowledge, skills and attitudes consistent with recognised human rights. By equipping young people - citizens now and leaders in the future - with knowledge and skills, the program plays a significant role in encouraging students to live their lives according to human rights values, and to take action on human rights issues affecting themselves and their communities.

As the Human Rights Vacation School Project, is at its inception, we have been in the preparation stages this month. The focus for the Human Rights Vacation School Project this month has been to prepare for the commencement of the pilot program on Tuesday 9th July. The first group of participants consists of 18 students from the Osu Manhean Junior Secondary School – a school within the local catchment of the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office. It is intended that the program will expand during the Ghanaian school holidays to other local educational institutions, which will broaden the reach of human rights education. In preparation for the commencement of the program, contact was made with each student via phone and an orientation session has been organised for Friday the 5th July. This will present a valuable opportunity for PAHO volunteers to meet students who will be taking part in the program for the next 3 weeks. We will also be having an informal discussion with students to identify areas within human rights in which they may already be interested and wish to explore further over the course of the next 3 weeks.

Content for the program will focus on principles derived from the International Bill of Human Rights – which consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). The preliminary program structure consists of 5 discrete modules, covering topics including Civil

Rights and Responsibilities; Economic, Social and Cultural rights, as well as Gender Equality. The program will take a holistic approach to personal development, incorporating aspects of career planning such as CV writing, interview and presentation skills.

The primary objective of the first HRVS session is to introduce students to the concept of fundamental human rights. In order to understand how human rights affect us in our daily lives and to acknowledge our responsibilities in recognising the need to balance those rights with the rights of others, we require an understanding of what human rights are. Information sheets and activity sheets have been drawn up with the aim of providing students with basic information about the concepts encompassed by the term 'human rights'. The objective of this is to establish whether students have already had some form of exposure to human rights education, and if so, the level of knowledge of individual students. At this stage, students will be introduced to some key human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A number of activity sheets have been drafted and will be used to clarify student understanding regarding individual human rights and facilitate discussion within the group. The session will further incorporate various case studies relevant to human rights in the modern Ghanaian context. It is intended that students will have an overview of how human rights are incorporated into the Ghanaian legal system and how human rights are relevant in everyday life, providing the foundation to future sessions.

Gender Equality Campaign

PAHO has decided to initiate a Gender Equality campaign, which was proposed by a group of our volunteers. It is our intention that through discussions and question and answer sessions, we will be able to get to the core of gender roles, stereotypes, and other gender issues. The inspiration for the gender equity programme we intend to run is largely attributed to the media and the discussions therein. We want to emulate these discussions on a local level in order to extinguish

ignorance and encourage discussion, understanding and respect between the sexes.

We at PAHO have seen gender issues in the media at various occurrences. However, two of the most notable shows in the scope of this programme are “the Morning Show” and “Boys Boys.” The Morning Show introduces a topic and then allows the hosts to interact with callers in order to express, assert and defend their various opinions. One show, they discussed strong women, whether or not women should be financially independent, and if the man should help the woman with the house hold chores. During the course of the show, various callers mentioned the bible, as well as idea of men being the “head of the family”. However, the main view amongst the four hosts in the studio (three men and one woman) was that women who are independent will be respected.

The show that really sparked the whole idea of the gender equality project is called “Boys Boys”. On this programme, men discuss matters which they don't discuss in the presence of women. One example was fear—the fact that men were afraid of not being able to put food on the table for the family. This concept of men being in fear of something was met with a great deal of surprise. Women are not aware of what men fear, think, or feel and vice versa—thus prejudices thrive.

Ignorance and prejudice has historically been the foundation for mistreatment and abuse. For this reason, we at PAHO want to create an understanding between the two sexes, which in Ghana are very clearly separated. We intend to ask basic questions concerning different issues and how each group responds to those issues will allow us to show people the differences and similarities between the sexes. We also want to encourage debate as to whether or not these disparities should result in different treatments. Our aim will be to tear down the great wall between men and women in order to make them see that we all have the same human rights.

The questions we have asked in order to create a base for future work has shown which arguments are popularly employed by both sides. We have also learned that male and female discussions cannot be held at the same time or in the same place; they need to be separated otherwise the men tend to take over. At our initial meetings we were able to get an understanding of the issues on which the people would like to receive an education. We will be holding educational seminars

on legal marriage documents, child maintenance, and questions concerning property ownership. Lastly, we saw that there is a notable difference in attitude between the different communities. We intend to use this to our advantage by having some mixed sessions where people from different communities meet.

The presence of gender issues in the media, and the debates that occur therein are beneficial for the progress of gender equality; however, it is not nearly prevalent enough. The visits to communities outside of Accra (Abokobi, Boi and Divergah), the shows where women are abused and objectified, even the commercials on TV, reflect a world where the vast majority of women have accepted an inferior roll in society. They are subservient to men and afford them much greater respect than they have for themselves.

The sentence “the man is the head of mantra. We were able to procure a schoolbook in which there was a chapter called “The Father”. The first sentence is, “The father is the head of the family, he buys things for you and lifts heavy objects”. The fact that this is such a common way to look at the family is a hindrance to gender equality. We're going to be combatting ideals imbued in people from extremely young ages. A woman in one of the communities said that a woman cannot become a president because “the man is the head and is the only one with the power to be a leader”. It is not just the men subjugating the women, but the women subjugating themselves.

Our hopes are that the questions will result in a discussion, and those discussions will sow a seed in someone's mind about the reason for the difference in treatment. Perhaps gaining knowledge about the other sex will help build the road towards equality. During the foundation work for the gender equality project we have begun to understand that one of the most important weapons we have in the fight against inequality is to have comprehensive knowledge of the bible. In order to effective conversation with people whose main arguments and reasoning have their foundation in the bible, we have to be able to utilize the bible to our advantage. Not only for the group discussions and education sessions with the men, but also when working with women who sometimes hide behind the words of the bible. We need to supply them with counter arguments that encourage gender equity.

We, at PAHO are very excited to be kicking off this project on gender equity, and look forward to supplying updates in our future HRJ editions.

Human Rights in Focus



Swedish volunteer Mariell Kempf with a local child

Human Rights in Current Events

President commutes death sentences to celebrate Republic day

On 1 July 2013, President John Dramani Mahama granted amnesty to 870 prisoners across the country to commemorate the 53rd Republic Anniversary in accordance with Article 72 of the Constitution of Ghana and based on the criteria laid down by the Prisons Service Council.

A statement signed by the Minister for the Interior, Kwesi Ahwoi, listed beneficiaries of the amnesty, which includes 804 first offenders, who have served at least half of their sentences.

About 33 prisoners, who have been on the death row and served ten years and above, have had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

Amnesty is part of the Republic Day celebration and successive governments have engaged in amnesty on Republic Days. A statement by the Minister for the Interior detailed that the rationale behind granting presidential pardons to prisoners stems from the belief that the purpose of imprisonment is to punish people who engage in crime; however, it also serves as a means through which people's lives can be corrected. Prisoners recommended for amnesty were selected through consultations and discussions with Prison authorities who have had sustained contact with the inmates.

This event follows an entreaty by UN secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Jun 2013 at a New York occasion organised by the UN human Rights office, urging countries who still uphold the death penalty to join the global coalition in ending this practice. Earlier in April 2013, the Ghanaian government received commendation from international human rights community regarding its acceptance of recommendations from the Constitutional Review Commission's (CRC) to abolish the death penalty in the revised constitution. Action reflective of this acceptance however, is yet to be implemented.

Human Rights in the Courts

In the past month, three separate groups of volunteers visited the High Court of Human Rights. Each group sat in on a court session and observed the judge preside over many cases. After, all the volunteers had the opportunity to ask Justice Kofi Essel Mensah questions about the case.

Though three separate groups visited the court, there were similar thoughts and observations from each group. For example, all three groups noted differences between the legal system of Ghana and the legal system of their home states, especially in the lack of formality in the court. Also, each group noticed that the machine to assist the judge in taking notes was broken. Therefore, court proceedings were time-consuming, fragmented, and inefficient. Despite this, each group found the trip to court to be an interesting look into the Ghanaian judicial system.

The first group of volunteers who visited the Human Rights Court this month included Christopher, Isak, and Carolina. While at court, they saw an interesting case regarding money laundering where a bank was the defendant. The main issues surrounding this case related to whether a witness' testimony was admissible as evidence, and if the bank was guilty of obstruction of justice by delaying the trial. The case was rather complicated but the group was impressed by the quality of the lawyer representing the bank. They also saw a case regarding an employee's claim of wrongful dismissal.

The second group included Kristine, Erik, and Hannah. The first case they heard was about the kidnapping of a Nigerian boy. The subsequent case was about a man who was suspected of committing robbery in 2009. His lawyer was filing for a writ of habeas corpus, while the opposing lawyer was filing an order to have the man present at the relevant trial. However, the court and the lawyers were not sure where the individual was actually imprisoned, which is relatively standard in the Ghanaian prison system.

The final group that attended court this month was Maryann, Sam, and Rachel. Most of the cases were

simply about setting or postponing dates for trial. However, they did see one police superintendent testify on an arrest of a man accused of threatening to kill a woman. The police claimed that the man was the individual that the woman had accused, but later the woman claimed that she had never specifically accused this man of threatening to kill her.

After viewing the court sessions, each group had a chance to meet with the judge to discuss his views on Human Rights and Ghana. The judge talked to Chris, Carolina, and Isak about Zimbabwe, where the government is seizing land from white farmers to give to the black majority. They also discussed the economic collapse and inflation that has resulted from this practice. Later, they questioned the judge on his opinions regarding capital punishment. While he was not keen to speak on the subject, he stated that he did not think it was a pertinent issue for Ghana because no one is currently being killed by the state, only sentenced to death. Despite this, however, he believed that abolishing it would make Ghana appear friendlier to the international community. Additionally, they discussed the problems with overcrowded prisons and the ineffectual juvenile detention centers. The judge expressed that juvenile detention centers are a good concept, but can often turn into places where children can broaden their knowledge on crime.

CHRAJ and the Supreme Court



Kristine, Erik, and Hannah talked to the judge about his appointment to the Human Rights Court. He stated that despite the fact that he had not asked to be appointed, he felt that he has made a difference. They also discussed gay rights in Ghana. While there are laws against homosexuality in Ghana, it was noted by both groups that there are limited instances of prosecution on the issue. The judge believed that homosexuals could live free lives, so long as they are not open about being homosexual. He did, however,

stress that negative attitudes towards this issue may change as Ghanaian people become more educated and thus aware of global views on the issue. He expressed a cautious optimism for progress, however long a process it may be.

Maryann, Rachel, and Sam conversed about the increased awareness of human rights in Ghana through programs such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and other human rights advocacy groups. The judge believed that education has made a crucial difference in knowledge of rights, especially among children, who are taught their rights in schools. Also, they compared Ghana's state of Human Rights compared to other African countries. The judge thinks that Ghana is progressing well for West African standards, but is still behind East African nations in terms of attitudes and standards.

Another main issue that was common in discussions between all three groups included police misconduct and corruption, which the judge perceived as the biggest human rights issue in Ghana. While police brutality and disrespect for human rights is a problem in Ghana, the judge also mentioned that social media could be an effective tool to place pressure on the government to be more active in combating issues with the police. When someone captures police brutality and posts it online, it pushes for more accountability in the system.

The judge spoke about gender equality in the legal system. While Ghana is not praised for its gender equality, it was interesting to learn that Ghana's legal system involves an equal involvement of men and women. The judge stated that more and more women are becoming lawyers. While all of them might not always practice law, the fact that there is increasing numbers of females in this profession shows some increased aspect of gender equality, at least in the legal realm.

Another such common topic was the influence of Ghanaian culture on human rights. The judge believed that the two are compatible for the most part. Yet, he also cautioned that Ghana has only recently developed the concept of human rights in 1992 with the adoption of a new constitution. He thinks that over time, human rights will merge with traditional practices in Ghana.

Overall, it was an enlightening experience to both see court proceedings and speak with the judge in order to

better understand the role of the judicial system in the realm of human rights issues.

The Ampain Refugee Camp

In commemoration of World Refugee Day, the Human Rights Advocacy Centre, which is located next door to the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office, presented their report on human rights compliance in the Ampain Refugee Camp in Ghana. A team of PAHO volunteers attended the conference to assess the viability of a new social justice project for refugees and perhaps a collaborative effort with HRAC. The conference involved the Ghanaian Refugee Board, Amnesty International, and the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees who responded to the report presented. The issues presented included the extensive lack of knowledge in the Ghanaian community about the refugee camp situation, hesitation from local chiefs and communities to donate land for camps, and the presence of discrimination and social isolation of refugees in Ghana.

Presently, many notable human rights violations occur in Ampain. In the camps, 78% of refugees rated the sanitation as being “bad”. This is because of issues like a 1:33 ratio of toilets to people. Additionally, there is overcrowding as well as a lack of electricity, food, and safe drinking water. The report focused largely on the forty-two refugees who were arrested at Ampain camp and transported to the maximum-security prison. These arrests were seen as unlawful, and violated many rights of the suspects arrested.

Approximately thirty people were returned to camp after their refugee status was verified, however one of the suspects still remains in prison, and to the knowledge of HRAC, he has not yet been formally charged. An additional prominent issue was minor females working as prostitutes for as little as one cedi in neighbouring towns.

The HRAC Report called for three key actions. Firstly, any suspected ex-combatants should be formally charged or released if they are currently in the

maximum-security prison. Those who are charged must be placed under court supervision to safeguard their human rights. Second, the allegations of prostitution in Ampain Camp must be thoroughly investigated by the Ghana Refugee Board. Finally, food rations must be increased as well as increasing access to clean drinking water to reduce the occurrence of diarrhea caused by unsafe drinking water.

Mr. Veton Orana, a Protection Officer from the UNHCR highlighted that a large amount of asylum seekers, particularly from Liberia and Cote D'Ivoire, have sought refuge in Ghana. To support these refugees, the Ghanaian government has implemented a few national programs. For example, they have made important documentation such as ID cards available, created a database for registration with the Ghanaian Refugee Board, and provided access to medical care via the National Health Insurance Scheme. However, the UNHCR still sees the prevalent challenges in the camps that need to be addressed based on reported statistics. The UNHCR's 2012 Global Report documented 45 million persons displaced in that year alone. 35% of these people come solely from five war-torn countries (Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somali). 81% of all refugees are hosted in developing countries. From these statistics, the UNCHR demonstrated the continual need for support and funds from donors.

The Chairman of the Ghana Refugee Board, Mr. Kenneth Dzasah spoke mostly on Cote D'Ivoire government's resolution to allow the refugees to return home and denied many of the HRAC report findings. In regards to the unlawful arrests, Mr. Dzasah stated it was founded in legitimate international practice referring to Australian and UK refugee management in particular. The aim of the arrests was to alleviate hate crime and deep-seated tension between Ivoirians, as well as ensure the safety of women and children. The Board claimed that the ex-combatants were sent to 'state-of-the-art' prison facilities for reviewal and detainment. They also supported the practice of DDR – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Mr. Dzasah was adamant that no violations of rights had occurred, because none of the ex-combatants reported misconduct. The response went on to state that the refugees were at fault, not the facilities. The Board was adamant that more funding and donors would resolve the challenges.

Mr. Lawrence Amesu the Director of Amnesty International Ghana stressed the importance of

respecting the rights of people who have escaped conflicts. Additionally, his broad stance drew attention to the impact refugees have on Ghanaian society, especially as youth employment is low and in many places there is inadequate education and training for state police to cope with refugees.

The conference drew attention to broad refugee political issues present in society. In particular, the stark contrast between refugee policy in Australia and the UK compared to that of sub-Saharan Africa and the precedent this sets for refugee and asylum seekers rights in the international community. Discrimination, social isolation and public awareness are important issues that need addressing, particularly in a country hosting so many refugees. PAHO projects should be tailored toward facilitating education and public awareness of the refugee situation and addressing the social isolation and discrimination of refugees.

A Glimpse into the Slums

In order to gain a better understanding of the structure and conditions in Old Fadama, a group of 12 Projects Abroad Human Rights office volunteers embarked on a tour of the slums this month. The following is a first hand account of what they saw.



Volunteers navigating the waste in Old Fadama

We left the office at 8 am and boarded a tro to the slums. On the drive over from the office we passed the grand Human Rights Court of Ghana as well as several huge multi-story banks and business buildings, standing tall and promising in the epicenter of Accra. Five minutes later, we were bearing witness to something much different. On our approach to the slum the smell, noise, traffic and our nerves increased. We parked in the centre of a market which lines the entrance to the slum; a bedlam of fruit baskets, piles of yam and people carrying items to sell on their heads, weaving in between the cars, buses, bikes and trucks. We could hardly hear ourselves think let alone hear the "Obruni!" calls from the traders.

In single file line we were lead into the slum after a short introduction by Frederick, who was our tour guide, and one of the few people who is working at grassroots level in the slums to try and make a difference to their lives. He has also been working closely with PAHO to set up the Fadama Legal Assistance Program. He warned us not to take photographs of people and that he would let us know when it was alright to use our cameras. Frederick told us that the people would think that we were ridiculing them.

The path was dark grey, almost like lead, even at the entrance of the slum; those who wore open shoes were already regretting it. On almost all the paths a stream of stagnant liquid ran along the centre and we found ourselves shifting along the edges and hopping from one side to the other. After we reached a junction the path began to open up revealing run down shacks and sheds, which serve as peoples' homes. As we walked the smells varied from the cooking of fish in oil, the excrement of goats, to the fumes of the motorbikes which managed to wind their way around the slums. At several points old doors and wooden planks had been placed across the pathways to provide as bridges over the impassable mud baths and black soups of litter and dirt which lay underneath. In the rain the pathways and sheds become flooded, and it would be hard to imagine how we would get through. We were all very relieved to make it to the end of our tour without the threatening skies opening up.

Frederick eventually led us to an opening on the edge of the slum where the shacks lined up along the lagoon. On the other side we could see green grass, free from litter and mud, but on the slum side, the waste was unbelievable. As far as we could see, both up and down the lagoon, the banks of the river consisted of mountains of garbage. Much of the trash is both

electrical waste from an array of Western countries, many of which we called home, as well as waste from Accra itself. The lagoon was a murky black and there are entire islands of garbage that permeate the putrid water. We were not allowed to stand there for long because Frederick said it was bad for our health to breathe this air even for a little while. Before we left, he demonstrated how the wasteland was oozing out into the river, polluting the waters and how that toxic river then flowed back into and around Old Fadama. One of the girls in our group said that she found it truly 'sickening' that the pollution that was poisoning the people of Old Fadama consists of cameras and iPhones just like the ones we're using that are amassed by our "developed" countries and dumped here.

Despite this hellish environment in which we found ourselves, the spirit of the people in the community was quite remarkable.

The whole of our journey the people would shout "Hello! How are you?". They reacted with happy surprise when we turned, smiled, and replied "good, how are you?". It was clear that the people were doing their best to create businesses and improve their lives despite their abject poverty and terrible conditions.

The most amazing thing was the children. Even though they were growing up walking barefoot in putrid mud, breathing toxic air and sleeping on the ground in shacks, they had glowing smiles that were absolutely infectious. They all wanted to shake our hands, say hello or cuddle our legs. We visited three schools, which were located around the very small area of the slum that we covered. The first was in one tiny shack which was more of a dark cave than a classroom. It was filled with far too many kindergarten-aged children who were eager for us to come in and join them. To the delight of the children, Frederick allowed us to take photos at this point. They would swarm around the camera lens with huge grins, and when we turned the cameras round to show them the picture, they jumped and shouted, "YEH!!!!" When I took photos of some of the quieter children who hovered around the door and were shy to have their photo taken, they burst into giggles as soon as I showed them their photo.

The second school was an unfinished shell two-story building, housing hundreds of pupils who we could see obviously wanted to learn. In one classroom, I asked the girls what they were learning. They told me—with great pride—that it was a science class and the topic was the pollination of plants. I was quite surprised at

this level of study. In the third school we arrived during the chaos that was break time. I could hardly make my way to the front of the very small courtyard which they called their playground, and I began to talk to the children who were surrounding me. When I asked them what games they were playing they immediately pulled me over to the jump ropes and explained how to play. Before I knew it, I jumping around, trying to emulate their patterns. When I finally got it right, all the kids around me cheered. I was absolutely exhausted! By the time I turned around my group was out of sight, and I had to quickly catch up with them.



The lagoon that borders Old Fadama

Walking back to the tro, we still were greeted by children along the paths of the slum who were sitting by their parents' side while they cooked or cleaned. For those children, the joy and promise of school was a privilege beyond their parents' means.

It was incredible to find so much happiness in such a truly miserable place. Many of us spoke at the end of the tour of how little awareness there was in our home countries of the existence, let alone the conditions found in this kind of slum. The reality of the situation in Old Fadama cannot be truly comprehended from what I write here or the pictures I took. It is a place in which the human rights violations are rampant, and the government turns its back on people so desperately in need. The environmental issues, the sanitation and hygiene, the health issues, HIV/AIDS rates, violence, domestic abuse, rape, defilement, the lack of education; the lack of recognition as citizens of Ghana, and all the civil and political rights which should be accorded to them as human beings, as well as, citizens according to international law are incredibly daunting issues. However, we left the slum with more motivation than ever before to do something about these issues and improve the lives of the people of Old Fadama who,

for so long, have been ignored and mistreated. The question for us is what do we do next.



British volunteer Jenny Mill at a school in Old Fadama

Final Thoughts

June has, as always, been a huge month for PAHO. We saw the conclusion of the first phase of our campaign to **abolish the Death Penalty, and eagerly await Amnesty's** conclusions.

From the dedication of our volunteers, and the quality of their work, I have no doubt that we will be called upon again.

At PAHO we are not driven by the credit we might receive, but by the outcomes we *must* achieve. On that note, I would like to thank all the volunteers that have contributed to the projects and to this the first edition of the Projects Abroad Human Rights Journal (Ghana).

I wish everyone a happy and prosperous July.

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