

# 'Share-Learn-Share'

BasicNeeds Ghana Newsletter

Issue 11

June, 2020



**Cover photo: Osu Mantse, Nii Okwei Kinka Dowuona IV, President of the Greater Accra House of Chiefs making a submission during engagement with key influencers in Accra**

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# CSO Coalition, BNGh Support People Living with Mental Illness, Epilepsy During COVID-19

On April 30 and May 1, BasicNeeds Ghana distributed food and other items worth GHS 50,000 to 110 persons living with mental health disorders or epilepsy and their caregivers in six (6) districts of the Greater Accra Region. The items, which were donated by the Ghana Civil Society Platform on Sustainable Development Goals, is meant to augment government's efforts in the fight against COVID-19 by helping poor and vulnerable people with mental illness or epilepsy and their families to cope with the undesired effects of the government's response to the pandemic.

Beneficiaries were drawn from peer support groups of people with mental illness or epilepsy in the Ga North, Ga West, Ledzokuku and Krowor municipalities in the Greater Accra Region. Each beneficiary received a bag of rice, cooking oil, vitamin C, soap and bags of purified drinking water.

Sunday Anaba, project officer at BasicNeeds-Ghana explained to the beneficiaries that the reason for the intervention was to help them cope with state-instituted measures to fight against the spread of COVID-19 because "during crisis periods, vulnerable

persons living with mental health conditions risk being further disadvantaged and driven into further obscurity." He thanked the coalition of CSOs for the donation and expressed the hope that their action would encourage other well-meaning individuals and organisations to support poor persons with mental health conditions and other vulnerable groups during this crisis period.

Ibrahim Musah, the Community-Based Rehabilitation Advisor at BasicNeeds-Ghana, used the opportunity to remind the self-help group members to continue to observe health and safety measures instituted by government and health authorities. He encouraged them to regularly wash their hands with soap under running water or use hand sanitizers as often as possible. He strongly recommended to them the need to practice social distancing and avoid physical touch with others while using face masks

when they leave home.

He also appealed to the general public to stop stigmatizing against people infected by the corona virus disease and instead, support them with words of encouragement and to meet their basic needs. He likewise saluted front-line health workers for their great service and sacrifices during these difficult times and appealed to the general public to take public health advisories seriously in order to flatten the curve of the spread of the pandemic.



*BNGh officer (left) taking delivery of the donated items from a rep of the CSO coalition*



*LEKMA SHG members receiving the donated items at a small ceremony at LEKMA*

# Pregnant Women, Nursing Mothers In Upper East Receive Livelihood Support

Pregnant women and nursing mothers in the Bolgatanga Municipality, Bolga East, Bongo and Talensi Districts of the Upper East Region have received small cash grants to undertake income generating activities. The women, 112 in number, were previously assessed to determine their interests and suitability to undertake economic activities of their choice. This initiative was made possible with funding support from UK aid under the Maternal Mental Health Project.

Out of the total beneficiaries, 30 were people with lived experience of mental illness; the remaining being primary care-givers of people with mental health disorders. Through this intervention, 100 of the beneficiaries have now taken up basket weaving while the other twelve (12) are currently engaged in cloth weaving.

Earlier on, the women received training on how to start and manage a business. The facilitators introduced them to the nature of a business, types of small-scale businesses, resource mobilisation, business management



*Anytime is a good time for members of the Asungtaaba SHG to weave their baskets*

skills, product marketing and branding, among others.

BasicNeeds-Ghana, with funding support from UK aid, is implementing a multi-year Maternal Mental Health Project in the Upper East and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. The project seeks to improve the maternal health

and livelihoods status of pregnant women and new mothers in target districts. The key modes of Interventions are therefore designed to enhance the quality and accessibility of maternal mental healthcare services, as well as behaviour change communication and income generation strategies.



*Clement Akudago, mental health volunteer, passing on business management knowledge he received from a train-the-trainer workshop he attended to members of the serving the Atel-taaba SHG in the Bawku West District*



# BasicNeeds-Ghana Engages with Key Influencers and Political Parties

BasicNeeds-Ghana held a forum on Mental Health on 13th February 2020, with key influencers and leaders of Political Parties in Ghana at the Alisa Hotel in Accra. The forum was part of activities of the UK aid funded project titled: “Improving Mental Health Policy and Service in Ghana”, and was intended to influence policy and legislation for sustainable mental health financing in Ghana.

Participants were drawn from the Ministry of Health, the Ghana Health Service, Mental Health Authority, the Ghana Prisons Service, National House of Chiefs, religious groups, faith based Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, political parties and the media.

The Programme Manager of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Mr. Dokurugu Adam Yahaya on behalf of the Executive Director, welcomed and thanked participants for making time off their busy schedules to attend the forum. He stated that mental health is an important segment of Ghana’s health care delivery



*Dr. Samuel Kaba Akoriyea, Director - Institutional Care Division of the Ghana Health Service, addressing the stakeholders*

system and contributes to the burden of disease in the country. He however indicated that, the Government of Ghana and other key stakeholders least prioritize mental health

care and services. Therefore, the forum was part of efforts at mobilizing prominent citizens and institutions to broaden the frontiers for mental health advocacy in Ghana.



*The Minister of Health was represented at the forum by Head of Quality Management at the MoH, Dr Ernest Konadu Asiedu (left)*

Mr. Yahaya expressed optimism that as eminent people and institutions in the Ghanaian society, participants will add their voices to influence the calls for sustainable funding for mental health care and services in Ghana. He intimated that with sustainable funding mental health care and services would be improved nationally especially in the era of universal health care.

He extended the appreciation of BasicNeeds-Ghana to the Government of the United Kingdom through the Department for International Development for their continuous support to mental health endeavours in the country. He also expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Health of Ghana, the Mental Health Authority, the Ghana Health Service, the religious bodies, traditional rulers, Civil Society Organisations and the media for their cooperation and partnerships.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Mental Health Authority of Ghana, Dr. Akwasi Osei, gave the mental health situation in Ghana. According to him Ghana's mental health evolved from a century ago with a combination of orthodox care, traditional and faith-based healing practices. Human rights abuses, superstition, under-resourcing, dwelling too much on biological model leaving out other psychosocial components of mental health care remain some of the main challenges of mental health care in Ghana.

According to Dr. Osei, Ghana's mental health system has for many years focused on institutional care and there was the need for a paradigm shift to focus on community care. He indicated that as many as 98 of every 100 people who require mental health services do not receive it because of the focus of institutional mental health care.

The keynote address of the forum was

delivered by Dr. Ernest Konadu Aseidu on behalf of the Minister for Health, Honourable Kwaku Agyemang-Manu. He emphasized the Government of Ghana recognizes mental health issues as key to the health and wellbeing of people in Ghana. The mental health issues are not just confined to health but also extend to the social sectors. And to champion mental health and well-being of Ghanaians, Dr. Ernest Konadu Aseidu stated that the Health Sector Medium Term Development Plan (2018 – 2021) prioritized mental health for individuals, families and the community.

Dr. Samuel Kaba, the Director of Institutional Care Division of the Ghana Health Service acknowledged the contributions of BasicNeeds-Ghana in mental health care and services in Ghana. He stated that BasicNeeds-Ghana has a good track record of mobilizing stakeholders and partners to influence policies, public perceptions and attitudes towards persons with mental illness.

He indicated that based on the principles of promoting quality health, prevention of diseases, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care, the Ghana Health Service has established mental health wings in regional and district hospitals. Through the Community Health Based Planning Service (CHPS), he added, the Ghana Health Service is extending services to households as part



**Dr. Akwasi Osei - CEO of the Mental Health Authority, addressing the stakeholders**

the years.

The President of the Greater Accra House of Chiefs, Nii Okwei Kinka Dowuona VI, who represented the National House of Chiefs was more concerned about the rate of drug abuse in communities across the country. He emphasized that abuse of drugs including Tramadol is one of the causes of mental illness in Ghana and families, community members. He called on the law enforcement bodies to join forces together to control and fight the menace of drug use.

Nii Okwei Kinka lamented the current state of funding for mental health care and services and indicated that much is expected from the Government of Ghana on budgetary allocations for mental health issues in the country. He however pointed that the Government of Ghana alone cannot fund mental health care and services in the country and therefore called on development partners, private sector and other stakeholders to contribute in diverse ways to implement the mental health strategy for Ghana.

There were discussions on various themes which generated varied views from the participants on Funding for mental health care and services in Ghana, Stigma and discrimination against persons with mental illness, Human Resource Capacity for mental health care and services and Community Based Rehabilitation

Various items and artefacts made by people living with mental illnesses were also in display for stakeholders to have appreciation of what people with lived experiences of mental illnesses are capable of doing if given the opportunity and the support.



**DSP (Dr.) Lawrence Kofi Acheampong, Medical Director, Ghana Prisons Service, making a submission during the forum**

of the policy of people, family and community centered care, championing mental health as part of core business. He concluded his statement by congratulating BasicNeeds-Ghana for its sustained and continuous community mental health work throughout



# Gender Minister Visits Mental Health Service Users in Jamestown

The Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Cynthia Mamle Morrison on Friday, February 7, 2020 visited self-help groups of people living with mental illness and epilepsy living in and around Jamestown in the Greater Accra Region. The Minister explained that the purpose of her visit was to interact with the peer support group members in order to better appreciate issues affecting people living with mental health conditions. She added that this would inform her ministry's efforts at ensuring that government's pro-poor and social interventions such as the Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) truly benefitted

poor and vulnerable people, including those with psychosocial challenges. Also present during the visit were Susan Mensah, DFID-Ghana's Social Development Advisor and Uzoamaka Gilpin (Uzo), DFID-Ghana's Health Advisor.

The Minister's visit took her to some mental health service users and self-help groups located in the Jamestown area where she interacted with them. Millicent Otoo, one of the people who the Minister visited at Jamestown, explained to the Minister that "the Self-help group is where we meet and discuss about our issues, and support one another. In times of need, we encourage each other and go for outreaches. The group also enables us to participate in community

activities such as national sanitation day without any fear of being stigmatised".

The Minister went on to inspect some of the artefacts the self-help group members had made using beads with the support of UK aid. The products included bracelets, bags, necklaces, among others. After her interactions with the peer support group members, the Minister remarked that "I'm impressed that you can do a lot with the little support you have received. It would be good for us to have those of you doing the beads as master trainers so that you can train others." She further expressed her gratitude to BasicNeeds-Ghana for letting her see what people with lived experiences of mental health conditions could offer.



*A member of the Jamestown SHG (right) interacting with the Gender Minister (left) and Deputy CEO of Mental Health Authority (2nd left)*



# Philanthropist Supports MH Staff Development and Service Users

**N**ana Ama Buckman Tima, author of the 'Adventures of Naughty Kofi' series, and Publishing Manager at Buck Press Limited, presented a cheque of GHC 30,000 to BasicNeeds-Ghana to support the organisation's efforts. Ms Buckman said that the donation was part of proceeds she realised at the launch of her latest book titled 'Confessions of an African Christian' on September 7, 2019. "After I finished writing the book," she said "I wanted to use the proceeds from the auction to support mental health. I asked a friend and he said I should contact BasicNeeds-Ghana. I am happy I did."

Sunday Atua Anaba, project officer of BasicNeeds-Ghana, received the cheque on behalf of the Executive Director. He assured Ms Buckman that the money would be used judiciously. He further thanked Ms Buckman for her kind gesture and the support she had extended to people with mental illness.

Therefore, on February 27 and 28, 2020, BasicNeeds-Ghana used part of the donated funds to organise refresher training workshops for 85 health professionals, comprising community mental health

officers, community psychiatric nurses, registered general nurses, midwives, community health nurses, and disease control officers from the Ledzokuku and Krowor Municipalities. The training took place at the LEKMA Health Directorate Conference Hall and was facilitated by Dr Amma Boadu, a psychiatrist at the Accra Psychiatric Hospital.

Both Ms Buckman and the Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Peter Badimah Yaro, made time to join the nurses during their refresher training. In his welcome remarks to the workshop participants, the Executive



**Nana-Ama Buckman (left) presenting a cheque of GHC 30,000 to BasicNeeds-Ghana's Sunday Anaba**

Director applauded Ms Buckman for showing such interest in mental health issues. He commended the health workers for availing

themselves to be trained. He expressed the hope that the training would further advance efforts of fully integrating mental health into the general healthcare system within the municipality.

The remainder of the money has since been used to purchase psychotropic medicines for thirty (30) people with mental health disorders who needed such support. The medicines bought and given at no cost to the beneficiaries included Olanzapine, Haloperidol and Artane.



**Executive Director of BNGh, Peter Badimah Yaro (standing) welcoming the health professionals to the training workshop**



# Families Support Each Other to Address Childhood Disruptive Behaviour

**B**asicNeeds-Ghana, with the support of the School of Public Health of the University of Ghana, Legon, is implementing a study project titled *'Strengthening mental health and research training in Africa'* (SMART-africa). The project is funded by the National Institute Of Mental Health (NIMH) and led by the Brown School of Social Work of the Washington University in St Louis and the school of public health of the University of Ghana. The project, which seeks to address childhood disruptive behaviours among children aged 8 - 13, is being implemented in the USA, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya And Ghana. In Ghana, three (3) schools in the Tamale Metropolis are participating in the study.

The study in Ghana has adapted the multiple family group (mfg) manual for use by the study participants. In this way, families of children experiencing childhood disruptive

behaviours come together every week to discuss particular topics of concern. These weekly sessions are moderated by trained facilitators who are either parents or teachers.

BasicNeeds-Ghana is actively collaborating with the regional and district officials of the Ghana Education Service (GES), headteachers and teachers from the target schools and teachers from the special education division (sped) and School Health Education Programme (SHEP). The weekly sessions have been ongoing for 16 weeks with high levels of attendance and participation.

Abukari Abdulai and his son are both participating in the study at Tishigu Anglican primary school a in Tamale. He said that "I have been enlightened by the discussions. I am now able to communicate effectively with my family members and this has helped us to

build a stronger bond at home." Rahinatu, a pupil participating in one of the study arms said "by participating in the weekly sessions, i have learnt that every member of the family needs to work together to solve problems instead of blaming others, especially the children."

These feedback from participants indicate that the study is helping families to address childhood disruptive behaviours. There is deepened understanding of child disruptive behaviours among the study population and school authorities. The study has contributed to reduce stigma of child behavioural and health issues in the schools and families.

This intervention adds to the set of initiatives to improve mental health of young people. Building on promotive and preventive mental health of children, adolescents and the wider society.



*Trained facilitators moderating a weekly MFG session*

# Stakeholders Meet to Discuss Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Information Rights for Persons Affected by Mental Health

BasicNeeds-Ghana commenced implementation of the “Building a stronger movement for enhanced inclusive sexual reproductive health and rights information and service project for poor and vulnerable women and youth affected by mental disorders in Ghana” with a stakeholder meeting in Tamale. The project simply referred to as ‘SRHR for Mental Health in Ghana’ is a 24-month project funded by AmplifyChange Fund under its network grant. The objective of the project is to enable the ‘Alliance for Mental Health and Development’ strengthen its ranks and capacities to contribute towards an enhanced and inclusive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services for persons living with mental illness or epilepsy in Ghana.

The purpose of organizing the stakeholder meeting at the very start of the project implementation was to facilitate a cross-learning session between organizations already working on issues of SRHR and BasicNeeds-Ghana and partners who were well acquainted with approaches to meeting the needs of persons affected by mental health conditions. It was also to enhance collaboration among key actors and build synergies for joint actions in addressing essential needs of persons affected by mental health conditions through policy dialogue and other development interventions.

Participants were drawn from the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA), Northern Region Health Directorate of Ghana Health Services, Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana, and Marie Stopes International. Other

participants were from BasicNeeds-Ghana, CPRI, NORSAAC, MEHSOG and GKS. Self-help groups (SHG) were also represented by two community health volunteers from the Tamale Metropolis and Sagnarigu Municipality.

In his opening remarks, the Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Mr. Peter Yaro explained that vulnerable groups such as women, men and youth affected by mental health disorders were often stigmatised, marginalised and specific needs such as sexual and reproductive health care and rights to information neglected. This had life-long consequences as these people suffer sexual abuses leading to unwanted pregnancies infections, sexually transmitted

reproductive rights of persons with mental conditions and epilepsy.

Sharing their perspectives on SRHR information and services in Ghana, participants agreed that discussions of topics related to sexuality and the reproductive system was culturally sensitive. Sexual and Reproductive Health information and services were however human rights issues that were crucial for all persons.

The Reproductive Health Programme Specialists and Head of Tamale Development Office of UNFPA, Mr. Mammah Tenii explained that UNFPA as the United Nations agency on population, sexual and reproductive health had three transformative goals of achieving

‘Zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices’ With a mission ‘to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled’ its targets were women and youth. UNFPA worked with government, service providers, civil society organizations on policies and programmes to achieve this global vision. It was a welcome initiative by BasicNeeds-Ghana to facilitate SRHR

services to a segment of society that many actors did not have the expertise to work with. It was a learning point for the agency and others collaborating to address SRHR issues. UNFPA had materials and literature that could be assessed to support training and information sharing. These points were also re-echoed by the CAO of Marie Stopes International, Yahaya Fuseini and



*Mr. Mammah Tenii, Reproductive Health Programme Specialists and Head at UNFPA's Tamale Development Office shares the agency's goals with participants*

diseases, among others. The SRHR for mental health project would contribute towards addressing the unmet sexual and reproductive health needs of vulnerable adults and adolescents through awareness creation, established contacts with service providers for inclusive SRHR service delivery and public sensitisation of the sexual and



Project Officer Of PPAG, Adam Abugbila. They indicated that their services were a contribution towards the UNFPA vision and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. Their services were open to all. Both Maries Stopes International and PPAG had strategies of networking with other service providers, private health centers to provide training to midwives and other health personnel and facilitate access to services and information. They however had no strategy of reaching out to people affected by mental health conditions. The organizations were willing to collaborate with BasicNeeds-Ghana on the project to reach out to more people and learn how to work with persons with special needs such as persons living with mental health illnesses.

The programmes Manager used the opportunity to sensitize participants on different mental health conditions which affect people. He revealed that ten percent (10%) of the Ghanaian population was living with mental health disorders. The general perception that persons living with schizophrenia and psychosis were the only persons with mental health disorders was limiting. This perception had impacted on development programming and policy implementation which continue to marginalize the needs of persons affected by mental health conditions. The five models to mental health adapted by BasicNeeds-Ghana's, had an integrated approach of facilitating capacity building, community mental health care, livelihood, policy engagement, research and collaboration. This

approach helps to facilitating access to medical care, empowering persons with mental health conditions to realize their potentials and contribute to their wellbeing, facilitated research and influencing laws and policies to enhance inclusive development for all.

The SRHR was yet other intervention that sought to empower persons affected by mental health conditions with information, enhance collaboration and facilitate access to social services. BasicNeeds-Ghana will work with three region-based chapters of the Alliance for Mental Health Alliance and Development to strengthen its capacity to be better organised a Civil society movement to lead on policy dialogue and advocacy. Training will be conducted to empower 60 SHGs to facilitate peer-learning for at least, 3200 members, 2000 of whom are female, to assert and realise SRHR across four (4) administrative regions – Upper West, Upper East, Northern and Greater Accra Regions. This will bring about increased sexual knowledge, maximisation of options for family planning,

decreased Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), pregnancies and stigma, as well as general behavioural and attitudinal change towards SRHR education and initiatives in Ghana. Maternal mental health will be enhanced, among pregnant women and girls, mothers and their infants.

The meeting was an engaging one and participants agreed there was the need to widen the scope of education of SRHR to other segments of society. This would help address issues of continuous stigma associated with seeking SRHR information and services. Participants encouraged detailed documentation and sharing on the project implementation processes which could serve as guide in the scale-up and replication of interventions to other marginalize groups in society.



**Executive Director of BNGh, Peter Badimah Yaro (left) conferring with BNGh's Programmes Manager, Adam Dokurugu (middle), and SRHR Project Coordinator Lilian Kuuriero (right) during a breakout session**



**SRHR Project Coordinator, Lillian Kuutiero, briefing the project partners on implementation strategies**

# BasicNeeds-Ghana Supports Alleged Witches in Northern Region

On Thursday, June 19, 2020, BasicNeeds-Ghana, led by the Executive Director, Peter Badimah YARO, and key staff of the organisation, donated a cheque of the sum of GHs35,000 and a motorbike to the Missionary Sisters of the Poorest of the Poor, also called the Anawim Missionary Sisters, to support their project which seeks to serve the needs of women accused of witchcraft in the Northern Region of Ghana. Rev Sr. Monica Yahaya received the donation on behalf of the Superior General of the Anawim Missionary Sisters at the BasicNeeds-Ghana head office in Tamale.



The Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana explained that the donation was meant to support a farming project for inmates of the camps. According to the Executive Director, “the money is meant for ploughing a field that the alleged witches can cultivate for their own use and secure a tricycle and some fuel to support their farming activities whereas the motorbike is to enable the Sisters to go on outreach.” Rev Sr. Monica, on her part, described the donation as “the largest the Anawim Missionary Sisters had ever received in Ghana from any person or organisation to support their work.” She thanked the Board and Management of BasicNeeds-Ghana for their thoughtfulness and support to the poor and vulnerable inmates of the witches’ camps.

Explaining their mission, Rev. Sister Monica Yahaya said that the Anawim Missionary Sisters, have committed their lives to serving the needs of the poorest of the poor. In Ghana, they provide care and resettlement services to ostracised women accused of witchcraft and educational opportunities to girls who have lost their family support after refusing forced marriage. They also provide access to medical care, food, clothing, and adult

*Executive Director of BNGh, Peter Badimah Yaro (2nd left), presents the cheque and motorbike to Rev Sr Monica Yahaya (middle)*

skills education to hundreds of impoverished individuals in the communities where they work.

The Anawim Missionary Sisters were invited to Ghana from Nigeria by the Bishop of the Yendi Diocese of the Catholic Church, Most Rev Vincent Sowah Boi-Nai, S.V.D in 2012. Currently, they support camps of alleged witches in five towns in the Northern Region, namely, Kpatinga, Gushegu, Nabuli, N’gani and Kukuo – all located within the Yendi Diocese of the Catholic Church. There are more than 80 people in these camps. Women are in the majority in these camps of alleged witches. The Anawim Missionary Sisters run a school nearby for children found in some of the camps. The Sisters stay at their Convent in Gushiegu and conduct outreach visits to the camps thrice a week to attend to the needs of the inmates. According to Rev Sr Monica, “we use our social work as a means of evangelisation in order to show Christ’s Love to the poor and rejected who are all God’s children. We teach them, recreate with them and take care of their health needs, especially their emotional and psychological matters.”

Explaining how they fund their activities, Sr Monica said “we rely on divine providence and the contributions from the lay faithful of the Catholic Church of the Yendi Diocese, our father – the Bishop of the Yendi Diocese, and other benevolent individuals outside the Yendi Diocese, particularly in Tamale. We give ourselves, freely, making use of our God-given talents and our academic qualifications and professions”.

The Sisters’ work has also contributed to changing public perception and improving public behaviour towards those accused of witchcraft. The communities have begun to support the work of the Sisters. According to Sr Monica, “relatives of the camps’ inmates sometimes come to take them (inmates) home for treatment when they are sick. When some of the inhabitants die, their relatives also step forward to properly lay them to rest. In the last two (2) years, we have succeeded in getting 25 of them (camp inmates) receiving the three sacraments of initiation into the Catholic Church which are baptism, Holy Communion and confirmation. This has encouraged them to join the local church community in worship.”







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