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BasicNeeds-Ghana Newsletter

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UK High Commissioner to Ghana, His Excellency Iain Walker inspecting a stool made by a member of the Tolon SHG



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Editorial:

BasicNeeds-Ghana on Rights of The Mentally Ill

BasicNeeds-Ghana, a mental health and development advocacy organisation, recognises the need to promote the rights of people with mental illness and epilepsy. This is because human rights issues are also developmental issues. It is for such reasons that the organisation is continuing its work of influencing traditional and faith-based healers to bring about improved respect of the rights of their clients, especially those with psychosocial needs. This is against the backdrop that a section of society perceives the non-formal mental health service sector to be guilty of abusing the rights of people with mental illness and epilepsy. While this assertion may indeed be true of some traditional and faith-based healers, the fact remains that the informal mental health service providers form an integral part of Ghana's general mental health care system. Various categories of people, most of them poor, continue to patronise their services.

Respect for rights of vulnerable people is an important consideration within the development space. This is because abuse of the rights of any individual is an affront to the whole of society. It is, therefore, incumbent on everyone to respect the rights of others and demand others do same. If society fails to protect the human rights of its members, especially the most vulnerable, it fails in its mandate to protect and harness the full potential of all its members for development.

To address this situation, BasicNeeds-Ghana, with funding from UKaid, is implementing various interventions aimed at equipping traditional and faith-based healers to appreciate human rights issues and improve the rate of referral of clients to formal mental health facilities for management. These interventions form part of a project, titled "Support Mental Health Services in Ghana". The project seeks to increase access to formal mental health services by people with mental illness or epilepsy who seek treatment from faith-based and traditional healers. These interventions have led to increased community-based collaboration between informal mental health practitioners and mental health professionals.

Dr. Kwaw Armah Arloo, Specialist Psychiatrist and former Medical Director of the Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital has this to say about the new development: "When I was posted to Ankaful for the first time in 2003, I came here (a prayer camp) to render services; I was prevented from getting access to clients. I was allowed on my second attempt and what I saw, I wept bitterly. I am happy that now we can come here and render services in a friendly environment. All these are as a result of the engagements you (BasicNeeds-Ghana) have had with them (prayer camps) in the past."

Through these engagements, many faith-based healers and traditional healers have also committed themselves to stop chaining and shackling their clients. This has significantly reduced the incidence of chaining at the prayer camps and traditional healing homes, and instead, increased the rate of referral of people with mental disorders to formal health workers for treatment. Some traditional and faith-based healing centres have openly invited mental health professionals to carry out outreach treatment services for their patrons.

BasicNeeds Supports Maamobi Hospital, Others

BasicNeeds Ghana has donated a computer and computing accessories to the Psychiatric Unit of the Maamobi General Hospital. The donation was in response to a request made by the hospital to BasicNeeds-Ghana for support in the processing and storage of hospital records. The items, which were presented at a short ceremony at the hospital on December 20, 2017, comprised a desktop computer, a color printer and an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) unit.

Presenting the items, Atua Anaba, Projects Officer at BasicNeeds-Ghana, said BasicNeeds-Ghana was very much interested in the development of mental health at the community level. He said supporting community-level mental health development would effectively ensure that mental health services were available and accessible to people with mental health needs. The Projects Officer further asserted that within the last two years, BasicNeeds-Ghana had demonstrated its commitment to developing community-based mental health care in the Maamobi area by donating medicines, conducting specialist psychiatrist outreaches and helping to furnish the psychiatric unit. These, he stressed, have been done with the support of UKaid. He implored the unit to make good use of the computer system so as to improve mental health service delivery within its area of operation.

The Administrator of the Maamobi General Hospital, Charles Banafo, received the items on behalf of the hospital. He thanked BasicNeeds-Ghana for the continuous support given to the hospital's psychiatric unit. He acknowledged that this had improved service delivery at the hospital. Mr. Banafo further stated that BasicNeeds-Ghana's assistance to the hospital was not only material in nature but included capacity building of most of the hospital's staff. This, he stressed, had enriched the hospital's human resource and enhanced their ability to deliver health services. The head of the psychiatric unit at the hospital, Kofi Danso, also thanked BasicNeeds-Ghana for the donation. He assured BasicNeeds-Ghana that "we shall make very good use these items to improve mental health services in the hospital. We are indeed grateful to you (BasicNeeds-Ghana) and your donors and we are very motivated to put in our best."

In a related development, BasicNeeds-Ghana has donated computers and accessories to the psychiatric unit of the Yendi Municipal Hospital and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation office in the Bolgatanga. These donations form part of the organization's commitment to promoting community-based care and sensitizing communities to promote the rights of people with mental illness and epilepsy.



Atua Anaba of BasicNeeds-Ghana (arrowed) presenting the donation to Administrator of Maamobi General Hospital

UK High Commissioner & DFID Director Visit Tolon Self-Help Group

The United Kingdom (UK) High Commissioner to Ghana, His Excellency Iain Walker on February 7, 2018, visited mental health service users and their primary carers in the Tolon District of the Northern Region of Ghana. The visit was facilitated by BasicNeeds-Ghana and its implementation partner in the Northern Region, Gub-Katimali Society (GKS). The High Commissioner was accompanied by Philip Smith, Country Director for UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in Ghana and Liberia based in Accra and other officials.

The visit, the High Commissioner's first since assuming office in Ghana, provided him with the opportunity to meet members of a Self-Help Group (SHG) of people with psychosocial needs based in the Tolon District. It was also to enable him assess the impact of UK's investments in SHGs.

The Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Badimak Peter Yaro, in his address, expressed BasicNeeds-Ghana's appreciation to the government and people of the United Kingdom for their continued support for mental health development initiatives in the country. He said through UK's aid, BasicNeeds-Ghana has implemented projects aimed at improving access to community mental health services. It has also built the capacity of PWMIEs to take advantage of livelihood opportunities and to be advocates.

The SHG members, who were obviously delighted by the visit, took turns to exchange views with the High Commissioner' and his team. For instance, they briefed the High Commissioner on how their membership of the group has improved their health seeking behaviour and given them an avenue to openly talk about the issues which affected them. They also showcased some of the artefacts they had produced.

The High Commissioner expressed his appreciation for the group, particularly for making time to meet with his team. He said he was encouraged that his government's contribution was bringing about real and positive changes in the lives of people with mental health needs in Ghana. The DFID Country Director, on his part, expressed his appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the vibrance and activeness of the Tolon SHG.



Iain Walker (5th from right) and Philip Smith (6th from right) at a meeting with the Tolon SHG members

Learning Event for BasicNeeds International

BasicNeeds Programmes and Partners from the United Kingdom (UK), Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya recently met in London to exchange views on the most effective ways of supporting people with mental illness and epilepsy in Africa. The organisations in attendance were BasicNeeds-Ghana, Voice Ghana, BasicNeeds in Kenya, Caritas Nyeri from Kenya and Gede Foundation from Nigeria - along with staff of BasicNeeds UK and CBM staff

BasicNeeds UK led the consortium to implement the Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) funded Social Franchise



Members of BasicNeeds UK, Kenya and Ghana with partners from Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria in a pose at the workshop at the Commonwealth Foundation in London.

project titled “Scaling up of the BasicNeeds Mental Health and Development model through a social franchise approach” in their respective countries. The five-day meeting was from January 16 - 22, 2018.

Godwin Etim of Gede Foundation explained during the meeting that attitudes towards mental health were a particular issue: “It was an eye opener for us in Nigeria. Overcoming barriers – stigma and discrimination. It was the first programme in our province on mental health. Now people are openly coming forward.” He was happy about the opportunity to learn from other organisations in Africa during the workshop in London: “We have learned so much about interconnected projects. Great to hear the positive results of these projects – that they are working and promoting community response [to mental health].”

Helen Karimi of Caritas Nyeri, in her contribution, said “It was a fantastic week, that we were able to evaluate the work we have done with GCC, looking at the successes and achievements we make and challenges along the way and the lessons learnt.”

BasicNeeds CEO Visits Ghana

BasicNeeds-Ghana was privileged to host the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of BasicNeeds UK, Adrian Sell, from December 15-21, 2017. This marked his first visit to Ghana since he took over from Jess McQuail, the immediate past CEO, about a year ago.

During his visit, the CEO interacted with key stakeholders of BasicNeeds-Ghana and undertook field visits to selected project sites. He also interacted with members of BasicNeeds-Ghana Board of Directors, staff and partners.

Welcoming the CEO to Ghana during a briefing meeting, Peter Badimak Yaro, Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, expressed gratitude on behalf of staff and Board of Directors of BasicNeeds-Ghana to Adrian Sell for making time to visit Ghana. He expressed optimism that the CEO's visit would enable him appreciate BasicNeeds-Ghana's project implementation environment.

Adrian also visited self-help groups of people with mental illness and epilepsy and their care-givers in Gushegu and Tolon and participated in their meetings. He found out from the groups' members their experiences in the group and what impact the work of BasicNeeds-Ghana had had on them.

He was hosted by the chiefs of Gushegu and Gbrumani when he visited them to pay homage. The chiefs said that since they had been sensitised on mental health issues, they were using the knoweldge gained to promote the rights of people with mental illness and epilepsy in their communities. Afa Dawuda, a traditional healer who had participated in a workshop held for non-formal mental health service providers, explained to Adrian his method of treatment and referral. This took place when Adrian visited him at his place of treatment to see for himself the level of collaboration that existed between trained traditional healers and formal mental health workers.

The CEO further held a meeting with frontline staff of the Northern Regional Health Directorate of the Ghana Health Service. The Medical Superintendent in charge of the Tamale Regional Hospital, Dr Mahamadu Mbiniwaya, acknowledged the support of BasicNeeds-Ghana in the continuous running of the hospital's psychiatric unit. He also elaborated steps he has taken to ensure that the psychiatric unit becomes integrated into the general hospital structure.

He said his visit has afforded him the opportunity to know and appreciate the challenging environment in which BasicNeeds-Ghana operates. He remarked that "the grassroots is where the most important work is done." He enjoined BasicNeeds-Ghana not to relent in its effort.

He added that he was impressed about the work of Afa Dawuda, the traditional healer who has created an enabling environment such that people with psychosocial needs were taken care of and felt welcome. Adrian further entreated the mental health teams to continue to build on the gains of BasicNeeds-Ghana.



CEO of BasicNeeds UK, Adrian Sell

BasicNeeds, Partners Hold Review Meeting

BasicNeeds-Ghana and its implementation partners held a Programmes' Implementation Review and Planning Meeting in Tamale from February 21 - 23, 2018. The meeting which took place at the International Conference Centre (ICC) of the University for Development Studies (UDS), took stock of programme implementation of the 2017 project year and plan for 2018.

Partners at the meeting were the Mental Health Society of Ghana (MEHSOG), Gub-Katimali Society (GKS), Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), Centre for People's Empowerment and Rights Initiatives (CPRI) and Mission of Hope for Society (MIHOSO) International

Peter Badimak Yaro, Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, in his welcome address, thanked the partners. He acknowledged that despite their busy schedules and the distance involved, they had still managed to be present. This, in his view, showed the importance of such review meetings to the success of project implementation.

Each partner had the opportunity to present his organisation's work in the year under review. Opportunity was also given for clarifications. Generally, partners' reports indicated that project targets had been met with some challenges. These challenges, however, provided learning opportunities for the organisations involved.

The 2017 review was special for another important reason. A consultant with vast experience in development work, Shamwill Issah, was engaged to train participating organisations in project proposal writing. The training was crucial since BasicNeeds-Ghana was in the final quarter of its five (5) year project funded by UK aid. Participants gave very positive feedback on the training notwithstanding the short duration (2 days) it took.



Staff of a partner organisation presenting results from activities carried out during the year under review

Regent of Dagbon Supports Mental Health Initiates

The Regent of Dabgon, Kampakuya Naa Andani Yakubu Abdulai, has declared his support for people with mental illness and epilepsy and called for improved efforts by all stakeholders to ensure that their rights are respected. He made this known at his Palace in Yendi when a team of mental health advocates led by BasicNeeds-Ghana paid a courtesy call on him to thank him for his patronage of a durbar organised by BasicNeeds-Ghana for the chiefs and people of the Dagbon Traditional Area on September 12, 2017. The durbar was sponsored by UK aid.

The Overlord expressed concern about the irregular supply of psychotropic and anti-epilepsy medicines in public hospitals in the country as one of the most critical issues that needed urgent attention. He said that this state of affairs had contributed significantly to increasing spate of relapse of people with mental illness and epilepsy. Other patients, he observed, have also defaulted in their treatment since they were required to buy their medication.

Earlier, BasicNeeds-Ghana held a durbar titled “Support Mental Health Services in Ghana” for the chiefs and people of Dagbon at which the Overlord was the special guest of honour. Aside from the chiefs, those who attended included the Yendi Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), the Chair of the Board of Directors of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Self-Help Groups and people with mental illness and epilepsy.

Dr Edward Gyader, Chair of BasicNeeds-Ghana’s Board of Directors, in his welcome address, thanked the chiefs and people of Dagbon for turning out in their numbers at the durbar. He drew the attention of everyone present to some of the simple everyday occurrences that predisposed people to mental illness and epilepsy. Dr Gyader acknowledged that while much was being done by organisations such as BasicNeeds-Ghana and its partners to improve mental health care in Ghana, it was incumbent on the community to respect the rights of people with mental illness and epilepsy.

The Yendi MCE, Alhaji Ahmed Abubakari Yussif, who read a speech on behalf of the Northern Regional



BasicNeeds-Ghana BOD Chair (left) and Chiefs of Dagbon Traditional Area were among those who graced the occasion

Minister, said “It is clear that people suffering from mental illness are often denied their dignity and an opportunity to live quality lives as a right.” He acknowledged the work of BasicNeeds-Ghana in improving the capacity of people with mental illness and epilepsy in the Region. He said that “as a result of this, they have gained a better understanding of their conditions.” Mr Yussif assured the gathering of Government’s commitment to ensuring that District Assemblies included people with mental illness and epilepsy in government’s social intervention schemes. He promised to ensure that people with psychosocial disability would receive fair consideration in the disbursement of the District Assembly Common Fund allocated to persons with disability.

In a statement read on his behalf by the Kasuli Lana, Naa Bukari Yakubu, the Regent of Dagbon noted with concern some reported cases of abuse meted out to people with mental illness and epilepsy by a section of society. He said that it has come to his attention that some herbal treatment homes and prayer camps forced their mentally ill clients to fast against their will while others were chained or their legs encased in wooden pinions. Such negative behaviour, he observed, was unacceptable. He, therefore, indicated his commitment to doing all within his power to work with relevant bodies to ensure that all such abuses stopped in Dagbon.



Courtesy call on the Regent of Dagbon, Naa Andani Abdulai II (arrowed) at his palace



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