



A REPORT ON
FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AND STIGMATIZATION OF PERSONS
LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

THEME: **“FIGHTING STIGMATIZATION –EVERYBODY’S
BUSINESS”**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *HIV/AIDS* pandemic has become a human, social and economic disaster with far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, churches, organized bodies and countries in general. Infact, no other disease has so dramatically highlighted the current

disparities and inequities in health-care access, economic opportunities and the protection of basic human-rights.

By the end of 2002, 42 million people were estimated to be infected with HIV. In 2002, the HIV/AIDS pandemic claimed more than 3 million lives and 5 million people became infected with the virus. Each day, there are some 14000 new HIV infections; with more than half of these occurring among young peoples less than 25 years of age; a WHO HIV/AIDS estimate.

Apart from the other modes of transmission of the virus, research has shown that, globally, the major mode of transmission is through sexual intercourse. However, the negative effects of stigmatizing and discriminating against persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) can not be under-estimated.

It is in line with this that ALLIANCE FOR AFRICAN WOMEN INITIATIVE (AFAWI-GHANA,) realizing the rate at which the virus was spreading, adopted these outreach programmes as a way of complementing the efforts of other stakeholders in fighting what has become a serious world menace.

BACKGROUND

AFAWI GHANA, with support from its partners undertook a baseline survey in 2006 in identifying the role stigmatizing and discriminating against persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) play in the spread of the HIV virus. The survey was conducted in some selected communities within the Accra Metropolis after which critical issues of concern were recommended for consideration.

One major revelation that emerged from findings of the survey was the fact that though efforts, the world over, are being made by stakeholders in fighting HIV/AIDS, this is being pursued with an attitude which under-estimate the negative consequences discriminating against PLWHA can pose to the fight against the spread of the disease.

AFAWI GHANA then launched a pilot project as a strategy of organizing chains of outreach programs to advocate against discrimination and stigmatization of PLWHA in selected communities within its (AFAWI's) operational districts. Venues earmarked for such programs were the Churches, Market places, Social gatherings and on one-on-one counseling.

PROGRAMM OBJECTIVE

Findings from the survey described the knowledge, attitude, behavior and practices of people and depict their misconceptions in relation to HIV/AIDS.

The general objective of this project therefore was to stimulate as many as possible medically proven facts, with regards to the contracting of HIV, unto the public domain so as to change people's misconceptions about HIV/AIDS and as such, go a long way to positively affect the behavior and attitude of societies within AFAWIS' operational districts (OD's) towards persons living with the virus.

PROGRAMME DETAILS

A pilot project was thereby launched with some churches (the Church Of Pentecost, Dome District; Methodist Church of Ghana, Taifa; Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Dome) and a few Major market centers within the Accra metropolis. This was done after arrangement between leadership of these bodies and AFAWI GHANA.

The organization made public the following overview on the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and prevailing statistics in Ghana;

- Almost two thirds (63%) of all people living with HIV globally live in sub-Saharan Africa- an estimated 24.7 million in 2006
- Some 2.8 million adults and children became infected with HIV in 2006, more than in all other regions of the world combined.
- The 2.1 million aids-related deaths in sub-Saharan African represent 72% of global aids deaths.
- Within the sub region, there is a strong evidence of stable spread of the HIV infection among the populace, along with signs of growing epidemics (especially among children, the youth and women) in a few countries.
- New infections for some countries currently ranges between five hundred and thousand five hundred. E.g. South Africa.
- The prevalence rate which stood at 3.4% in recent time past now stands at 3.7%; a disturbing and worrying development for all.

Notwithstanding the fact that several HIV/AIDS prevention advocate groups are putting up their best in championing the cause of “reducing HIV transmission”, complacency should not be allowed to decline the diseases’ preventive mechanisms that has been employed over the years.

Guinea and Zimbabwe is showing a smaller and declining National adult HIV prevalence rates. This implies that with a collective effort, Ghana can do better.

The issue of stigmatization and the general perception of the public against HIV/AIDS patients were addressed by Resourced AFAWI GHANA PLWHA *clients*. The targeted audiences are cautioned that stakeholders all over the world have committed a lot of resources into the fight against the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus and if care is not taken, discriminating and stigmatizing persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) will end such efforts in vain.

Further instance was cited where a female PLWHA intentionally and angrily infected an uninfected person with the virus due to discrimination.

“Society, will be failing miserably if, in its fight against HIV/AIDS infections, does not make conscious efforts to reduce stigmatization of person’s living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)”, unquote.

Considering the gravity of the HIV epidemic, advice also went to the targeted audience, especially the clergy to give more relevant and accurate HIV prevention messages anytime they mounted the pulpit. Christians were urged to do away with judgmental attitudes towards HIV positive people, and instead offer them *Love and Compassion*. “I urge the church to spread hope through counseling, practical help and prayer”, unquote a resource person

Within the project period under review, AFAWI Ghana's resource persons were much particular about the devastating effects stigmatizing and marginalizing people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) can cause to societies and even the global effort in trying to combat the virus. People were advised to show compassion and care to both infected and affected persons through whatever possible means they can.

Although there is currently no cure for HIV infections, the greatest remedy the world can offer is Love, Compassion and change of negative attitude towards PLWHA.

In response to questions that bothered on;

- ⇒ The mode of transmission of the HIV virus,
- ⇒ How long PLWHA's could stay with the virus in-between infection and death,
- ⇒ If one could eat a meal prepared by an HIV patient,
- ⇒ If an HIV infected person could get married and to whom,
- ⇒ How dangerous and destructive could the HIV virus be to the body,
- ⇒ Etc,

Our outreach medical team ensures that the targeted audiences are educated to the fact that the HIV virus transmits fast in fluids. Hence apart from encounters with PLWHA involving the circulation of fluids (e.g. sex- vaginal and anal, blood transfusion and in some cases kissing), it was impossible for anybody through handshakes, embracing, sleeping together in the same room, etc. to acquire the virus.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Persons living with HIV/AIDS have contributed tremendously to the amazing success chalked in our outreach programmes geared towards fighting marginalization and stigmatization of PLWHA.

AFAWI GHANA, in addressing its targeted audience, used efficient public addressing systems (PAS). With this, the organization was able to support its advocacy on discrimination of its *clients* with the showing of related videos.

AFAWI GHANA, by conducting this pilot project, has been able to build strong partnership with other strategic stakeholders in its quest to reduce stigmatization of PLWHA's in particular and fighting the spread of HIV in general.

The attentiveness and cooperation we receive from such gatherings and organizations suggests that Alliance for African Women Initiative (AFAWI Ghana) is fighting and championing a wealthy course- *this is our source of inspiration*.

FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

In all, the project was a success with an estimated audience of over one thousand two hundred (1200). However, recommendations for consideration are that;

1. A strategic work plan should be developed for effective campaigns in the future.

2. Partnership should, as much as practicable, be built with other stakeholders to empower a collective effort in the fight against the spread of **HIV** with discrimination/stigmatization as a priority.

CONCLUSION

The commitment of **AFAWI-GHANA** that emerged from the baseline survey on the role stigmatizing and discriminating against **PLWHA** play in the spread of **HIV/AIDS** in its operational districts is helping to motivate the involvement of people and stakeholders from all walks of life. The desire and momentum to do more in combating **HIV/AIDS** is clear. The challenge now is to keep that momentum alive and to capitalize on the many opportunities it provides. The way forward for adopting this strategy of fighting **HIV/AIDS** may not be easy. Nevertheless, we should draw encouragement from the massive impact this pilot project has made on the lives of the targeted audience within our communities and operational districts.

All over the world, there are many examples of real progress resulting from determination, innovation and partnership. Till our societies attain, if not zero, the minimum **HIV/AIDS** recorded cases **AFAWI-GHANA** perceives', effort towards its prevention must not rest!!