



Under the Office of the President

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP FOR QUEEN MOTHERS AND FEMALE TRADITIONAL LEADERS

LA PALM BEACH HOTEL

30TH OCTOBER 2019

ACCRA

1.0 Introduction

The Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC) in collaboration with UNDP organised a one-day capacity building workshop for queen mothers in the Greater Accra Region. The workshop took place on Wednesday 30th October, 2019 at the La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Accra. In all, 48 queen mothers from various traditional areas within the Greater Accra Region attended the workshop which was facilitated by Resource Persons from the GAC, UNDP and NACP.

Welcome Address

In his welcome address, Mr Kyeremeh Atuahene, Ag. Director General of GAC conveyed his appreciation to the Queen Mothers for their commitment to the national response and for availing themselves for the workshop. He submitted that, Ghana subscribed to the UNAIDS 90-90-90 Fast Track targets in 2016 to help afford an ambitious vision of ending AIDS by 2030. To achieve these targets, it was estimated that at least two million people be tested every year throughout the span of the 90-90-90 targets. However, he lamented the low uptake of HIV Testing Services (HTS) and revealed that since 2016, the highest number of persons tested for HIV within a year stands at 800,000.

He attributed the low uptake of HIV services such as testing, treatment, and PMTCT to stigma experiences by Persons living with HIV, denial, fear, and false claims of cure among others. He advanced that there is no basis for stigmatising a PLHIV because the risk factors for HIV are embedded in everyday life activities. Moreover, with the advent of ARVs, HIV has been significantly discounted from being a death sentence to a chronic disease. He declared that the national response acknowledges the enormous influence of Queen Mothers in the community and urged them to make their influence count for the national response. In furtherance of this agenda, he itemised some actionable points to the Queen Mothers to engender immediate action after the workshop. He urged them to use their various public platforms they mount to speak about HIV and encourage uptake of

HIV services; encourage antenatal attendance by pregnant women and their male spouses. He lamented the disproportionately high incidence of HIV among adolescents and called for decided action to stem the tide.

Solidarity Statement by UNDP

Nana Teiba Chinbua, Head of Governance at UNDP, emphasised the need to harness the strengths of already existing community and traditional structures to strengthen the national response toward achieving the SDGs. She made reference to the 2014 PLHIV stigma index study conducted in Ghana which noted that PLHIV in Ghana face high levels of varying stigma in the society thereby impeding their access to HIV services.

She then expressed optimism in the ability of Queen Mothers to help address the menace and invited them to respond with effective community-level interventions. She revealed that since 2018, Joint United Nations Team on AIDS (JUTA) has been investing in capacity building in HIV and is working actively with partners to promote and protect life. She concluded her address with a brief quote of a call to action by Antonio Guterres, former UN Secretary General, who submitted that “at this pivotal moment, we must renew our focus and shared commitment to a world free of AIDS.” She therefore called on all to work to make this vision a reality for Ghana.

2.0 The National HIV Response: The Role of Queen Mothers (Traditional Rulers)

The first presentation of the day was done by Dr Fred Nana Poku, Director of Technical Services, GAC. The presentation began with a brief description and history of the national response. He presented that the national response started as a health-sector response until the late 1990s. He continued that the GAC was formed in 2000 and has since implemented four strategic documents: namely, National Strategic Framework I & II, and National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plans 2011 – 2015, & 2015 – 2020. He highlighted some of

the high-impact activities as well as the critical social and programmatic enablers contained in the current strategic plan. On current programmatic initiatives, he mentioned the Free to Shine campaign and the four-pronged approach PMTCT interventions.

Queen mothers were presented as critical partners of the national response and among the roles expected of them include: advocacy against stigma; initiatives to improve adherence to treatment; working with traditional structures to integrate HIV matters into various community-level activities; creating a genial atmosphere to facilitate the work of staff of community-based organisations and community-based health workers among others. He concluded that Ghana has a huge potential to eliminate mother to child transmission of HIV, and called on all to contribute their effort to make it a reality.

3.0 HIV and AIDS: Basic Facts

This presentation was done by Ms Winifred Armah-Attoh, a resource person from NACP. She began with an expansion of the meaning of the letters forming HIV and AIDS. She proceeded to present on how HIV weakens the immune system by attacking the white blood cells and eventually rendering them incapable of protecting the body against pathological invasions. On modes of transmission, she indicated that sexual transmission is the most common and listed blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk as body fluids where the virus is highly concentrated in an infected person. Other fluids like saliva, urine and tears, she noted, have low and insignificant concentration of the virus rendering them incapable of effective transmission. She then addressed some common myths and misconceptions about HIV especially those related to modes of transmission. She also highlighted some economic, biological and socio-cultural factors and established their role in heightening vulnerability to the epidemic. Various prevention methods were outlined which were broadly categorised into biomedical (such as condom,

treatment-as-prevention, PrEP etc); behavioural (abstinence, partner reduction, delay in sexual debut etc); and structural (stigma reduction, addressing risky cultural and traditional activities). She also itemised some benefits of treatment, including helping with PMTCT, prolonging life and sustaining the health of PLHIV. The presentation ended with a memorable food for thought: HIV is preventable, but currently not curable.

4.0 Addressing HIV Related Stigma and Discrimination in the Community

Rita Afriyie, GAC's Technical Coordinator for Greater Accra Region began her presentation with a call on participants to reflect on scenarios she had carefully created to evoke memories of one's personal experience of stigma in one arena of life or another. She then went ahead to reference statistics from the 2014 PLHIV stigma index study and GDHS to convey a picture of the level of stigma faced by PLHIV in the Ghanaian society. With graphic examples, she gave a very simple but erudite definition of stigma, and discrimination. On the effects of stigma and discrimination she indicated that it causes both physical and mental suffering leading to isolation and deterrence from seeking or availing themselves for help. To address stigma and discrimination in the community, she called for attitudinal change by displacing ignorance and myths with the right knowledge and information. She outlined some basic rights of PLHIV and urged all to uphold and promote in their various communities. The presentation ended with a list of avenues, (both institutionalised and community-based structures) to which PLHIV may seek redress when facing stigma and discrimination. They include CHRAJ, DOVVSU, the law court, the GAC, Unit Committees, traditional and religious authorities. Queen mothers were exhorted to support anti-stigma activities in their various communities and to leverage various platforms to advance the anti-stigma agenda.

5.0 Demonstrations by Persons Living with HIV

Two Heart-to-Heart Ambassadors, Rev John Azumah and Gifty Torkornu, gave a testimony of their personal experiences with stigma and discrimination and the coping mechanisms which have helped them to survive the onslaught. Afterward, they did a demonstration on how to wear a condom using both the male and female genital models for the respective condom types. Each of the Queen Mothers was offered a pack of BCC materials for learning and distribution at their various communities.

6.0 Feedback Forum

At the feedback forum, participants were asked to state what they will be doing with the training they have just received. The following responses were volunteered:

1. Three participants indicated that they will focus on family-based education, starting from their homes to their neighbours.
2. Other participants indicated that they will disseminate HIV information during community meetings and festivities
3. Others indicated that they will focus on youth/adolescent HIV education

7.0 Conclusion

Participants also expressed high appreciation for the topic and objectives of the workshop, as very relevant to their work. They acknowledged their essential role in the national response and assure the Organisers of their willingness to engage in HIV activities in their communities to reduce stigma and help end AIDS by 2030.

Follow up of the queen mothers HIV related activities would be carried out by the GAC to provide technical support and ensure continued community engagement.

Picture Gallery

Mr Kyeremeh Atuahene
Ag. DG. GAC



Nana Teiba Chinbua,
Head of Governance at UNDP



Dr Fred Nana Poku
Director of Technical Services, GAC



Ms Winifred Armah-Attoh
NACP



Ms Rita Afriye
Technical Coordinator, Greater Accra



Heart-to-Heart Ambassadors



Group Picture



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