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**REPORT ON HIV SELF-TESTING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MEETING
FOR ASSEMBLY MEMBERS AND MEDIA PRACTITIONERS, HELD FROM
22ND TO 24TH MAY, 2023, @ SPLENDOR HOTEL, KUMASI,
ASHANTI REGION**



GHANA HIV AND AIDS NETWORK (GHANET)

INTRODUCTION

The Stakeholders Engagement Meeting, organized by Ghana HIV and AIDS Network (GHANET), in partnership with the National AIDS/STI Control Program (NACP), was held at Splendor Hotel, Kumasi, from 22nd to 24th May, 2023. The meeting was meant to educate stakeholders on the HIV situation in Ghana, the ongoing HIV Self-Testing (HIVST) project, and the role of stakeholders.

ATTENDANCE

Participants of the meeting consisted of Directors of Implementing Partners (IPs) on the HIVST project, selected Assembly Members and Journalists from Implementing Districts, representatives from NACP and GHANET National Secretariat, composing a total of 153 participants.

OPENING REMARKS

In his opening remark, the National President of GHANET, Mr. Ernest Ortsin, indicated that the engagement will introduce stakeholders to the HIVST project GHANET is implementing in partnership with NACP. He informed the participants that the project is being sponsored by Ghana Health Service (GHS) through NACP, with funding from the Global Fund (GF). He introduced the officials from NACP in the persons of Dr. Stephen Ayisi Addo (Program Manager), and Dr. Anthony Ashinyo (Deputy Program Manager). Mr. Ortsin also acknowledged the presence of GHANET National Executives; Madam Victoria Araba Dadzie-Dennis (Vice President), Mr. Yilob Embireh Andrew (General Secretary), Mr. Louis Acheampong (Treasurer), and Mr. Patrick Anamoo (Public Relations Officer).

PURPOSE OF MEETING

The Vice President expressed GHANET's appreciation and gratitude to all participants for being present despite their busy schedules. She observed that the participants present is an indication of a fair representation of the entire country.

Madam Araba Dennis informed participants that the purpose of the meeting was to introduce to them the HIVST project and what it entails, as well as solicit their support for a successful implementation. She urged both IPs and Stakeholders to use the meeting as a prerequisite to forge together as one towards the success of the project.

Overview of HIV and AIDS situation in Ghana

Dr. Ayisi Addo took participants through the overview of HIV and AIDS situation in Ghana. In his presentation, he discussed a number of key topics under HIV and AIDS which include the following;



Mrs. Victoria Araba Dennis
Vice President, GHANET



Dr. Ayisi Addo
Programme Manager, NACP

What is HIV?

He told participants that HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is a virus that only infects humans. It attacks the body's immune system and destroys the body's defence against sickness and diseases. There is no cure or vaccine for HIV yet.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The disease caused by HIV. This is where the body's immune system breaks down and is unable to fight infections. There is a collection of symptoms and signs of different illnesses (syndrome) at the same time due to a weakened immune system. Just like HIV, there is no cure for AIDS.

How is HIV transmitted?

- Through unprotected sex
- Through blood and blood products
- Mother to Child

How HIV is not transmitted?

- HIV can only live inside the human body and cannot survive outside the body because it dies as soon as it is exposed to air. It cannot pass through the skin on the outside of the body, unless there is an open cut, hence, not transmitted through sweat.
- HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact such as hugs and handshakes.
- HIV cannot be transmitted through saliva, tears, vomit, faeces or urine

Key Populations (KP)

Dr. Ayisi Addo explained that key populations refer to populations or groups of people whose behaviors or way of life put them at higher risk of being infected with HIV. These groups of people include:

- Female Sex Workers (FSW)
- Commercial Sex Workers (CSW)
- Injection Drug Users (IDUs)
- Prisoners
- The sexual partners of the above groups

Open Forum

A participant wanted clarification on whether or not condoms would be sold as part of the project implementation and he was assured that condoms would be free.

Another participant asked whether or not a baby born by an infected mother can be infected through delivery. Dr. Ayisi Addo explained that the child can be infected through the delivery process.

Finally, a Director from one of the IPs complained that his Volunteers do not have smart phones, making it difficult to use the software application for data entry. He pleaded to be provided with tablets or smart phones to make the exercise easy. Unfortunately, representatives from NACP said an attempt to get smart phones took their budget overboard and would not help the project.

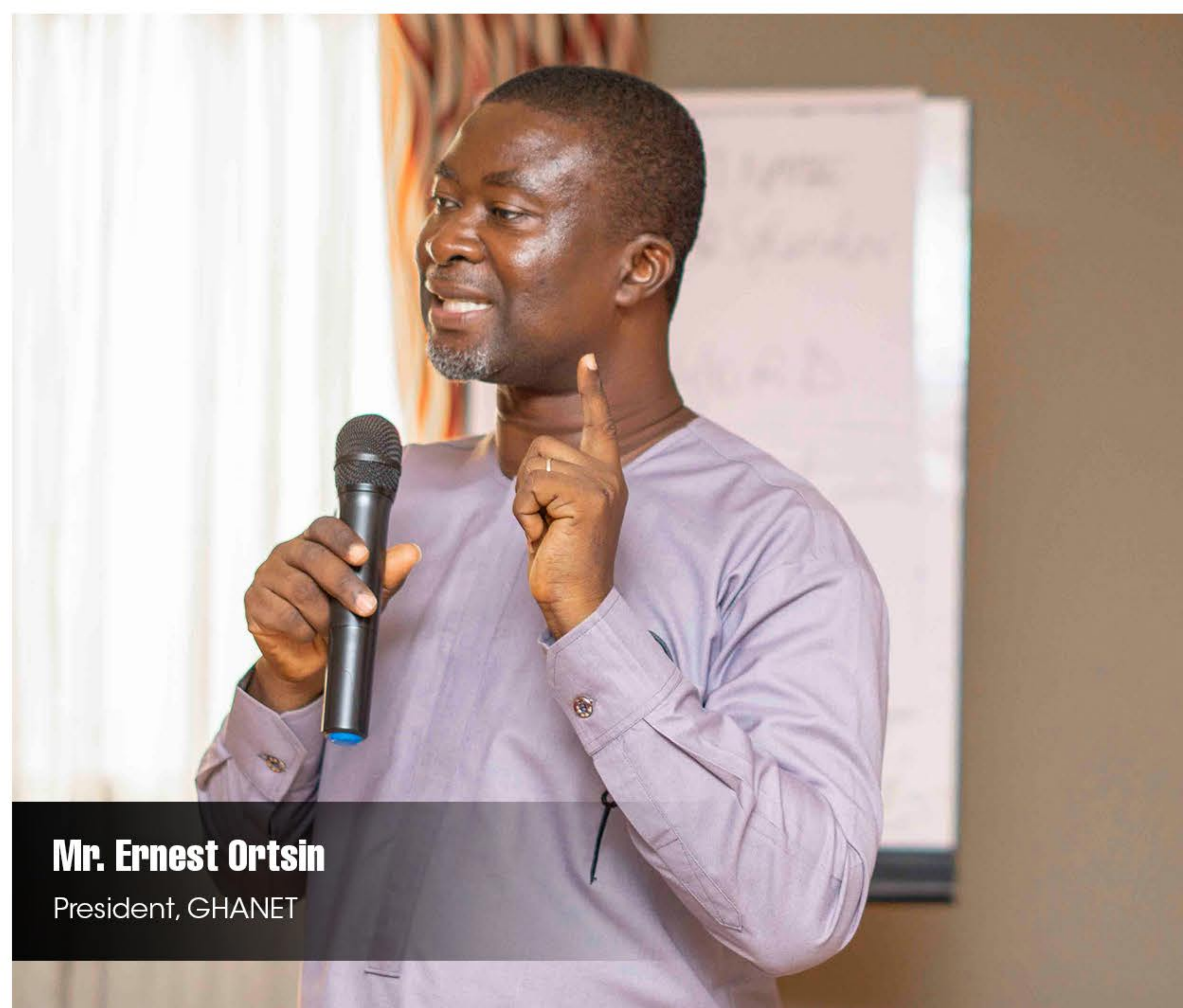
The role of Assembly members/ Journalists

Dr. Anthony Ashinyo touched on the role the Media and Assembly Members have to play to contribute to the success of the HIVST project. He mentioned that these stakeholders have a very key role to play, and if they do, would go a long way to help the project. He added that awareness creation is a very important factor as far as the goals of the project are concerned. He urged them to use their various platforms to speak to people about the HIVST project and also encourage them to use the HIVST kit in order to know their status. He further

pleaded with them to ensure that services are delivered to people who need them, by working hand-in-hand with the Directors and Volunteers in the various Districts. Participants requested that a platform should be created for them, where updates on the project and HIV-related issues in general would be provided.

Conclusion

Closing the meeting, Mr. Ortsin assured participants, especially Stakeholders, that since they are now 'ambassadors' for HIV, there will be more meetings like this in the near future in order to keep them updated. Participants pledged their unflinching and support towards the project and HIV at large.



Mr. Ernest Ortsin
President, GHANET



Dr. Anthony Ashinyo
Deputy Programme Manager, NACP











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**National Secretariat: DH43 Biakpa CL, GA-261-3553
AMA Greater Accra. Tel No. 0302261525**

**P.O.Box MB 533, Accra-Ghana E-Mail: info@ghanet.net
Tel: 0244669898 / 0541237088 Website: www.ghanet.net**