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**REPORT ON HIV SELF-TESTING PROJECT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT  
MEETING WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS HELD FROM 1ST TO  
3RD JUNE, 2023, @ SPLENDOR HOTEL, KUMASI.**



**GHANA HIV AND AIDS NETWORK (GHANET)**

# INTRODUCTION

The Stakeholder Engagement Meeting was held from 1st to 3rd June, 2023 at Splendor Hotel, Kumasi in the Ashanti Region. The engagement meeting was organized by Ghana HIV and AIDS Network (GHANET) in partnership with the National AIDS/STIs Control Programme (NACP) and Ghana Health Service (GHS) with funding from The Global Fund (GF).

## ATTENDANCE

In attendance were Chiefs Queen Mothers drawn from all fifty (50) implementing project operational districts. Also, officials from NACP were in attendance.

## OPENING REMARKS

In his opening remarks, the President of GHANET, Mr. Ernest Ortsin, warmly welcomed all the participants and thanked them for making time to be part of the programme. He introduced the team from NACP, made up of Dr. Stephen Ayisi-Addo (Programme Manager), Dr. Anthony Ashinyo (Deputy Programme Manager) and Dr. Kwadwo Kodua Owusu (Head of Clinical Care and Procurement and Supplies Management). He also introduced other National Executives of GHANET: Mrs. Victoria Araba Dadzie-Dennis (National Vice President), Mr. Yilob Embireh Andrew (General Secretary), Mr. Louis Acheampong (Treasurer) and Mr. Patrick Anamoo (Public Relations Officer).

Mr. Ortsin expressed his heart-felt appreciation to the Chiefs and Queen Mothers for their interest to join the fight against HIV and AIDS epidemic in Ghana. He enlightened participants on the "HIV Self-Testing Project" which is being implemented by GHANET, in partnership with NACP and, funded by The Global Fund.

Mr. Ortsin recalled the impact that has been created in past projects with the involvement of traditional leaders and besieged them to use their influence to support the NGOs in their various communities. He indicated that collaboration was very paramount in the achievement of the project goal. He concluded by urging them to actively participate in the Self-Testing initiative to support Ghana to achieve the objectives of the project.

## PURPOSE OF MEETING

Mrs. Victoria Araba Dadzie-Dennis expressed GHANET's appreciation and gratitude to all the participants present for making time to honour the meeting. She then informed the participants that the purpose of the meeting was to share some results and challenges of the pilot phase of implementation and to also solicit their support for the success of the project. She concluded by urging everyone present to use the



**Mrs. Victoria Araba Dadzie-Dennis**  
Vice President, GHANET



**Dr. Stephen Ayisi Addo**  
Programme Manager, NACP

meeting to work together as one for the implementation of the project to benefit all and sundry.

## Overview of HIV and AIDS Situation in Ghana

Dr. Stephen Ayisi-Addo made a presentation on the "History and Overview of HIV and AIDS Situation in Ghana." He discussed some Key HIV/AIDS topics which include the history and the difference between HIV and AIDS, mode of transmission and the meaning of some common acronyms and phrases.

Dr. Ayisi Addo revealed to the participants that the first reported case of HIV in Ghana was in 1986. He, however, expressed worry of the current records of over 300,000 cases as in the 2022 statistics. He further indicated that from the statistics, there are about 200,000 of these cases on ART, care and support across various centres throughout Ghana. He expressed his displeasure on some worrying reports that point to the fact

## Open Forum

that some clients travel to health centres outside their communities of residence to access ART services because of stigma from health workers and some members of the community.

Dr. Ayisi Addo expressed concerns that these would not help Ghana's interventions towards meeting the 95-95-95 target by the year 2030 if not addressed. This is particularly necessary due to the fact that there is no cure or vaccine for HIV worldwide. Dr. Ayisi Addo admonished participants to disregard misinformation on viral load suppression often used by some unscrupulous pastors and herbal practitioners to deceive the public. He emphasized that if a client on ART treatment achieves viral suppression and stops taking the medication, complications set in and the conditions become worse.

### Key Populations (KP)

Dr. Ayisi Addo further took participants through the meanings of some key terms in the HIV and AIDS Community. Some of them include the following:

**Key Populations:** refer to populations whose behaviours place them at relatively greater risk to HIV infection and transmission of HIV. Key populations at high risk of HIV infection include:

- Female sex workers (FSWs)
- Commercial sex workers (CSWs)
- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Injection drug users (IDUs)
- The sexual partners of the above groups

### The Role of Traditional Authorities (Chiefs and Queen Mothers)

Dr. Anthony Ashinyo, presented on the role of Chiefs and Queen Mothers in the HIV self-testing project. Dr. Ashinyo intimated that the Chiefs and Queen Mothers have a key role to play in the project by making sure that people are well sensitized on the HIVST project so that they can be encouraged to take the test.

Traditional authorities play a critical role in ensuring that we get these services and they are delivered to people who need them. He mentioned that traditional leaders can mobilize communities and groups, as well as create platforms to sensitize people about HIV Self-Testing. He urged participants to be involved in community radio, TV and social media sensitizations to promote the HIVST gospel and also organize routine health campaigns to create awareness.

**After all the presentations were done, there was an open forum during which Chiefs and Queen Mothers were encouraged to:**

- Train their peers
- Participate in community radio, TV and social media to promote the message
- Organize integrated health campaigns etc.

**Other issues included the need for:**

- Bans on children staying in the public space after 9:00 pm in the community.
- Control of labourers like scrap dealers (condemn), galam-sayers, My Bets, etc before it influences children in the community.
- PrEP and PEP should be made free
- Circulation of scary stories and pictures about HIV and AIDS should be intensified in order to serve as an advice and a warning to others.
- Pastors and their wives are to be reached with this sensitization messages for them to disseminate to their numerous followers, most of whom are the vulnerable women and youths.
- A WhatsApp platform should be created for Chiefs and Queen Mothers for sharing updates on HIV& AIDS issues.
- Traditional Authorities to be provided with some of the test kits and condoms for demonstration and promotion.
- Modifications of some traditional and cultural norms that negatively influence women and children in their areas.



**Dr. Anthony Ashinyo**

Deputy Programme Manager, NACP

## Closing Remarks by the President

The President of GHANET in his closing remarks indicated that GHANET has worked very successfully with the traditional authorities and other key partners in addressing HIV issues in the past. He therefore urged the Chiefs and Queen Mothers in Ghana to give GHANET same support on the HIV Self-Testing project to enable identify and link clients to treatment, care and support.

Mr. Ortsin reiterated that there is the need to intensify anti-stigma and discrimination messages in the communities in order to give hope to people affected by the disease. He expressed appreciation to participants for the time they spent to attend the programme, and assured that their contributions and recommendations would be put in use towards realising the goals and objects of the project in an effort to achieve the 95-95-95, 2030 target set by the World Health Organization. He mentioned that this will demand the collective efforts of all stakeholders such as the participants at the programme.

He further indicated that GHANET has repositioned itself and, so far, development partners and donor agencies are showing interest in the Network. He therefore stressed on the need for GHANET to demonstrate that it has the capacity to deliver on issues of HIV and AIDS. He assured participants that GHANET is open to partnering and collaboration with key community institutions such as the traditional authorities to work towards eliminating HIV and AIDS by 2030.











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