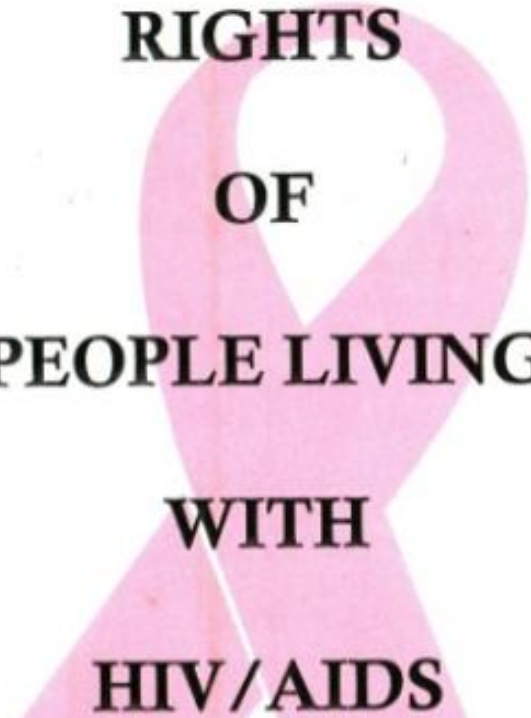




Rights of People
living with
HIV / AIDS

Facts, Interviews and Stories

A large, light pink awareness ribbon is centered on the page. The text of the title is overlaid on the ribbon.

**RIGHTS
OF
PEOPLE LIVING
WITH
HIV/AIDS**

Facts, Interviews and Stories

Title of Book: Rights of People Living with HIV/AIDS:
Facts, Interviews and Stories

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Acronyms

ART	- Anti Retroviral Therapy.
AIDS	- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AWDF	- African Women's Development Fund
CEDEP	- Centre for the Development of People
CHRAJ	- Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
GAC	- Ghana Aids Commission
GARFUND	- Ghana AIDS Response Fund
GDHS	- Ghana Demographic and Health Survey
HIV	- Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	- International Labor Organization
MCTC	- Mother to Child Transmission
NHIS	- National Health Insurance Scheme
PLWHA	- People Living with HIV/AIDS.
STD	- Sexually Transmitted Diseases.
STI	- Sexually Transmitted Infection
WHO	- World Health Organization.
WiLDAF	- Women in Law and Development in Africa

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Special appreciation to the project officer John Burke who coordinated the entire project. We are grateful to the co-team members comprising Paul Osei-Kuffour, Jasmin Osman and Jennifer Amoah who took time to interview so many people. To our esteemed staff of the Legal Awareness Programme in Takoradi and Ho, once again we thank you for your support for this project.

We also acknowledge the assistance offered by several doctors of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, Police Hospital, Effia Nkwanta Hospital and the Ho General Hospital. We also thank religious leaders, and heads of NGOs that work with people living with HIV/AIDS. We are grateful to our colleague lawyers and judges who also took time to answer our questions. Our special appreciation goes to those persons living with HIV/AIDS, and those affected by the disease who so willingly shared their stories with us.

Finally, WiLDAF Ghana acknowledges the invaluable support of Bernice Sam who conceptualized the project, spent time making input to every step of the interview phase and wrote the final report.

Forward

HIV/AIDS continues to spread throughout the world at an alarming rate and the widespread abuse of human rights associated with HIV and AIDS has emerged in the wake of the epidemic.

In our national coordinated response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, attention to the protection and promotion of human rights must be at the heart of our efforts. Human rights based approach to HIV/AIDS acknowledges that human rights abuse impact a population's vulnerability to HIV infection as well as the ability for those impacted by HIV and AIDS to access adequate treatment, care and support.

It has been widely documented that people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) and those affected by it will not seek voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) or treatment and support services if it is at the risk of stigma, discrimination, lack of confidentiality, or other negative consequences. Discrimination prevents those most in need of care and support from receiving services. This makes it difficult to track or monitor the spread of the virus.

Simply put, when human rights are protected, communities and governments can respond to the pandemic more effectively. HIV transmission is then slowed, and those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS can better cope with the disease.

I wish to congratulate WILDAF Ghana on the production of this important publication: **Rights of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Facts, interviews and Stories**. This literature will serve as a valuable educational tool for the organization's

legal literacy volunteers working with the Legal Awareness Programmed at WILDAF Ghana. The focus on the rights of PLWHA is both timely and important as Ghana moves forward with the second phase of the national strategic framework on HIV and AIDS for 2006-2010. The education and outreach WILDAF Ghana is doing in rural communities in the Western and Volta Regions of Ghana will serve to underscore national efforts in the area of policy, advocacy and the creation of enabling environments.

It has been said that while AIDS attacks the body, discrimination attacks the spirit, and that both are capable of killing. Through our collective efforts to preserve and promote human rights we will see meaningful progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS and significant improvements in the lives of those who have been impacted by this disease.

Sylvia J Annie, PhD, Csci
Director: Policy Planning, Research
Monitoring and Evaluation
Ghana AIDS Commission
January 2006

Introduction

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF Ghana) has over the past 10 years managed a Legal Awareness Programme in Ghana. Through this programme we have developed several publications on several topics that we have used for our advocacy work.

Our vision is an organization that symbolizes civil society's desire to promote, protect, and respect women's rights in Ghana. Our mission is to empower women by promoting their rights and increasing their participation and influence at the community, national, and international levels through initiating, promoting, and strengthening strategies which link law and development

Our core programme areas are:

1. Women's access to justice
2. Women's participation in democratic governance.

This report provides information for easy understanding of issues on HIV/AIDS, and some basic human rights of people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. It is a publication intended for use by several individuals and groups. Our legal literacy volunteers in the Western and Volta Regions will use this publication as part of their literacy tools as they tour various communities in their outreach work. It is also intended for use by many other organizations that carry out community education work. Information contained in the publication is ideal for the different professionals that were interviewed as guiding principles as they relate with people who have HIV/AIDS and those affected by the disease.

Services under our Legal Awareness Programme.

We provide legal aid services to men, women and children. We have two legal aid centers in Takoradi in Western Region and in Ho, Volta Region. There are lawyers at these centres ready to offer legal assistance on family related issues.

We carry out legal education activities to many groups including market women, various professional associations, churches, Islamic groups and schools. Important target groups for our outreach activities are the rural communities and towns within the Western and Volta Regions. Durbars, workshops and seminars are organized for these different groups on human rights generally, legal rights of women such as issues on violence against women and children, women and land rights, child maintenance, marriage, divorce and inheritance.

To reach out to very rural communities, WiLDAF employs the services of community legal educators called Legal Literacy Volunteers (LLVs) who having undergone training on many legal topics regularly provide educational activities. The Legal Literacy Volunteers include persons who have received formal education and are therefore literate, and others who do not have very high education but can read and write. Their level of knowledge in legal issues is basic and tailored to the felt needs within the community. Men and women have an equal opportunity of being selected as literacy volunteers. They provide 'legal first aid' to people in far away communities on issues involving non-maintenance of children, misunderstandings in marriage and inheritance among others. Cases that require the technical input of lawyers are referred to the legal aid centers in Takoradi and Ho.

Objectives of the publication

The overall objective of this publication is to contribute to literacy materials that will enable WiLDAF's legal literacy volunteers to educate communities in our geographical areas of operation Western and Volta Regions - on HIV/AIDS.

Specific objectives are:

- * Provide simple easy-to-understand questions and answers on HIV/AIDS
- * Provide information on perspectives of professionals (health, religious and legal) on HIV/AIDS as it relates to their work
- * Enquire how schools and orphanages treat children with HIV/AIDS

To get information for this publication we interviewed some experts and people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as those who have been affected by the disease. Interviews were done in three regions namely Greater Accra, Western and Volta Regions. People interviewed included medical officers, judges, lawyers, pastors, school heads and persons infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Health facilities visited are the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, EffiaNkwanta Hospital and the Ho General Hospital. Judges in courts in Accra, Sekondi/Takoradi and Ho were interviewed. Pastors who granted us interviews were from the Methodist, Catholic and charismatic churches. Heads of educational facilities and orphanages gave us an insight into their work with respect to children with the disease and those whose parents have it or have died from it. Many officials from NGOs with mandates

on HIV/AIDS education and policy development were interviewed.

This publication is structured as an informative tool that has some questions and answers, facts and stories of interviewees. Names of respondents whose stories are used have been changed to ensure confidentiality.



HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a global health crisis, with over 37 million people living with HIV worldwide. In the United States, approximately 1.1 million people are living with HIV, and about 25 million people have been infected since the beginning of the epidemic. HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death and disability in the United States, and it is a major public health concern in many other countries.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 1.1 million people in the United States are living with HIV. About 25 million people have been infected since the beginning of the epidemic. HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death and disability in the United States, and it is a major public health concern in many other countries.

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. It weakens the body's ability to fight off infections and diseases. If left untreated, HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), which is a life-threatening condition. HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death and disability in the United States, and it is a major public health concern in many other countries.

How is HIV/AIDS spread?

HIV is spread through contact with certain body fluids from an infected person. The most common ways HIV is spread are through sexual contact, sharing needles and syringes, and from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding. HIV is not spread through casual contact, such as hugging, shaking hands, or sharing food and drink.