



UN Under-Secretary General and UNFPA Executive Director, Dr Babatunde Osotimehin and HE John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana

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Dr. Osotimehin and his delegation together with some members of Parliament

Opening Lines



BABATUNDE AHONSI, UNFPA Representative

Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health in the SDGs Era

The Sustainable Development Framework (Agenda 2030) that was adopted by world leaders in September 2015 provides a new global development vision that fully interconnects social, economic and environmental equity as the basis for eradicating poverty, empowering people, and safeguarding nature. The SDGs are thus really about eliminating inequalities in life chances and well-being, with no one left behind. And nowhere is this most pertinent today than in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH&R) where huge regional, gender, sub-national, age, rural-urban and other differentials persist despite the significant progress achieved in the last two decades in reducing reproductive morbidity and mortality, unintended pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence and HIV transmission.

Agenda 2030 speaks with equal force to both developing and developed countries. It also demands far greater resources (*trillions of dollars*) for its operationalization than did the MDGs (*millions of dollars*) and therefore requires new types of partnerships and more robust population data collection and analysis to track and respond to persisting inequities so as to better address the needs of the hard-to-reach and marginalized and usher in a world of dignity for all. Central to this quest in countries like Ghana in early-stage health and

demographic transitions are gender equality and the empowerment of women and young people.

Given how far-reaching the SDG framework is, its pursuit must necessarily be country-led and nationally owned, capacitating all peoples as both agents and beneficiaries of the sustainable development process. We can therefore no longer work for the advancement of SRH&R as we did in the pre-SDGs era. Efforts have to be more strategic as we are required to achieve more faster and with less; they have to be more equity-driven as everyone is deserving of a life of dignity; and they have to be largely paid for from national and local resources as they demand long-term and sustained action that the so-called donor countries can hardly afford to offer given the new challenges and threats that confront them internally.

Readers of this issue of the UNFPA-Ghana Newsletter will find that the stories and articles therein reinforce the point that in the context of the SDGs, advancing SRH&R can no longer be done in the business-as-usual mode. They highlight ongoing efforts with our partners to do things differently and to bring some innovation even to the ostensibly tried and tested approaches like policy dialogues, capacity building, agenda-setting conferences and workshops, and action-oriented stakeholder engagement.

7TH ACSHR: A BAR-RAISING AND AGENDA-SHAPING REGIONAL DIALOGUE

After being previously held in Johannesburg, South Africa (2004); Nairobi, Kenya (2006); Abuja, Nigeria (2008); Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (2010); Windhoek, Namibia (2012); and Yaoundé, Cameroon (2014), the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (7ACSHR) was held in Accra, Ghana from 8 – 12 February 2016, where it raised the bar in the area of organization and output for future ACSHR conferences.

The conference theme “Realizing Demographic Dividend in Africa: the Critical Importance of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights”, was part of a long-term process of fostering regional dialogues on sexual and reproductive health and rights. These dialogues enable concrete actions and enhance stakeholders' ability to influence policy and programming for a sexually-healthy continent.

For the first time in the conference's twelve-year history, it was organized by Curious Minds – a UNFPA supported Ghana based organization, made up of entirely young people, who advocate on sexual and reproductive health issues. They have been highly commended for very successfully coordinating a regional conference of such magnitude. The success of *Curious Minds* gives credence to the fact that when young people are mentored and supported they are able to produce positive results that empower their generation.

The conference objectives included identifying best practices on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health; facilitating knowledge management and programming to enhance youth agency; enhancing adolescent and youth policies /programmes in various development agendas and proposing actions to promote youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in the implementation of the ICPD Beyond 2014 Agenda, and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. These were all met.

Starting with a two-day youth, women and media pre-conference programme, the conference used a variety of delivery modes such as plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, skills-building workshops and exhibitions among others to deliberate on Sexual and Reproductive

Health of early, middle and late adolescents and youth sub-types – those living with HIV, those in conflict situations and those living with disabilities. Discussions focused on vulnerable, excluded and marginalized populations, sexuality education, youth-friendly services, forced/early marriage, adolescent motherhood, abortions, gender-based violence as well as maternal



A section of participants at the conference

morbidity and mortality.

The 7ACSHR was formally opened by President John Dramani Mahama at a colourful ceremony in Accra which was graced with traditional performances by the National Dance Ensemble and school children from the Accra Metropolitan Area. It was attended by Ministers, the First lady of Ghana, Dr. Lordina Mahama (Patron of the Conference) and First Ladies from Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya and Swaziland. Queen Mothers and Chiefs from all over Ghana participated to demonstrate their commitment to young people's development. The First Ladies were present to also support the ALL IN Campaign against HIV which was launched on the platform of the conference. President Mahama commended the First Ladies for: supporting their husbands and governments in the fight against HIV and AIDS; promoting the empowerment of women; fighting against cancer; and promoting social protection. He pledged his government's commitment to the girl child's attainment of her full potential and strongly condemned violence against women especially the girl child. He urged all to stand up against child marriage and be

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proactive in its prevention. Her Excellency Lordina Mahama called on all to increase their efforts in providing young people with their needs and to ensure that their support systems work well. She reiterated that young people excel when given the opportunity, and commended the hard work and achievement of Curious Minds for their successful organization of the conference.



Young people provide information on SRH to peers at an exhibition

In the keynote address delivered by Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, the United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, he explained that education goes beyond literacy training. Africa needs to equip its young people with the right information, skills and opportunities to enable them fulfill their full potential. He added that if community action supported the existing laws then we can collectively prevent men from impregnating or infecting young girls. He joined the representatives of women and youth as well as the African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, and Dr. Uwemedimo Esiet, Convener of the Conference, in appealing to governments to increase their health and education budgetary allocations as a means of helping to realize the Demographic Dividend and the transformation of Africa by 2063. Feedback from participants of the 7ACSHR indicated that the conference was the best held so far, with a conference outcome document which was described as “appropriately worded and straight to the point.”

The Obstetric Fistula Burden in Ghana: Showcasing Stakeholders' Involvement in Eliminating the Condition in Ghana

Obstetric fistula (OF), from a purely medical view, is an abnormal 'hole' between a woman's vagina and her bladder (VVF – Vesico-Vaginal Fistulae) or the vagina and rectum (RVF – Recto-Vaginal Fistulae) resulting from prolonged obstructed labour which leaves a woman incontinent of urine or faeces or both. For afflicted women, it is a social and psychological devastation and a largely neglected issue in reproductive health.

However, it is a preventable condition that women should not have to be at risk of if everyone is aware of the causes. Access to skilled attendance at birth is one of the surest ways of preventing OF. Women in labour with signs and symptoms of any obstruction must have access to emergency obstetric care, specifically caesarean section.

To address this issue which until recently had no statistics for the burden to be known, a National Taskforce was established in 2014 with support from UNFPA to coordinate all programmes aimed at eliminating OF in Ghana. The Taskforce is multi-sectoral with representation from the Ministries of

Gender, Health, Education, Chieftaincy and Local Government and Rural Development. Others include the media and the OF Surgeons from the teaching hospitals. The Family Health Division of Ghana Health Service coordinates the work of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce chaired by Prof Anyetei Lassey, a fistula surgeon from the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, has facilitated the conduct of a first rigorous national study on the burden of OF in Ghana. The results confirmed the prevalence of Fistula in all ten regions of Ghana with a significant number of cases between 711 and 1,352 occurring yearly. This is a large number of women becoming victims to an avoidable condition in which one victim is already too many.

Since the launch of the national campaign in 2005 to eliminate OF under the project “Strengthening Fistula Prevention Activities and Access to Treatment in Ghana”, led by MoH/GHS with support from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, over 2500 women have had their fistula repaired and their lives restored with dignity.

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The multisectoral taskforce has been assigned to develop a national strategy to enhance efforts for the elimination of the condition, through the optimum use of resources and prevention of duplication of efforts with information sharing on who is doing what, and where.

Currently, the Mercy Women's Catholic Hospital Mankessim in the Central Region and the Tamale Fistula Centre in the Northern Region are the main centres for fistula repairs although repairs are conducted at various facilities all over the country. Despite being preventable and curable, fistula will most likely remain a major public health problem for some years to come if the insufficient funding and infrastructure for adequate

obstetric health care delivery throughout the country persists.

It is acknowledged that members of Task Force are all well-meaning Ghanaians who have freely volunteered their energy and expertise to work to end OF in Ghana. It is therefore important that everyone is on board because OF is not just a health issue. Its effects permeate every aspect of the social and economic lives of affected communities. Now is the time for everyone to join the campaign to end OF in Ghana. This campaign is essential to meeting Ghana's aspiration of eliminating the burden of obstetric fistula in the country and the global target of making fistula in developing countries as rare as it is in the developed world.

Ghana delivers a high impact visit by UNFPA's Executive Director

His message consistently focuses on *Women and Young People, with emphasis on Adolescent Girls*. This has been his hallmark since 2011 on assuming office as the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA. His acceptance to be Guest Speaker at the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights held in Ghana was therefore not surprising as this conference was led by young people – the *Curious Minds* of Ghana.

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin was not only going to speak at the event of the young people but he was also scheduled for a working visit to UNFPA Ghana. The challenge for the country office was how to balance the various competing engagements of the UN Under-Secretary General and his delegation which included Mr. Mabingue Ngom, Regional Director, UNFPA West and Central Africa (who was making his first visit to the Ghana country office), Mr. Kwabena Osei-Danquah, the Director, Division for Governance & Multilateral Affairs and Ms. Catarina Furtado, the Goodwill Ambassador for UNFPA on one side of the coin and the First Couple HE President John Dramani Mahama and HE Mrs. Lordina Mahama on the other side.

The challenge was enthusiastically accepted by UNFPA Ghana, and with backing from the West and Central Africa Regional Office, the three-day visit which

initially generated a lot anxiety for all staff of the office became very successful with everlasting beautiful memories.



Participants at the opening ceremony

On the very first day, the Executive Director moved straight from the airport upon arrival to participate in a panel discussion on the topic “Demographic Dividend”. Other panelists included Catarina Furtado - UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Lookman Tidjani, Beninnoise Youth Activist and Eliya Zulu, of AFIDEP, Nairobi. The session was moderated by Prof. John Anarfi, University of Ghana.

The next duty stop of the ED was at the official opening of the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights. The conference was co-hosted with HE Lordina

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UNFPA Executive Director in a group photo with the First Couple and other dignitaries after the opening ceremony of the conference

Mahama, the President of the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA). The conference attracted over eight First Ladies from Africa and other national and international dignitaries. The UNFPA Executive Director had a closed door meeting with HE President Mahama, where he called for Ghana to take advantage of the window of opportunity presented by its fertility transition to invest in education, health, employment/economy and leadership /governance so as to realize the demographic dividend.

Then came noon. Work had to continue. This time, it was a lecture for the Parliament on the theme “Ghana and its development prospects with focus on the linkages between the country's population dynamics, sexual reproductive health and rights, the demographic dividend and achieving the 2030 Agenda in the context of Ghana's development vision.” In summary, this lecture highlighted that in Ghana, young people comprise one-third of the population or over 7.8 million people and that by 2020, the proportion of young people in the total population will fall to a little over 30 percent, but the absolute number of young people will be close to 9 million. Dr. Osotimehin then gave words of counsel to the honourable members of Parliament saying “the unprecedented number of young people calls for urgent attention, planning and action to ensure the emergence of a new generation of empowered, knowledgeable, healthy and motivated individuals.” “This is the way out of poverty else let us forget it”, he concluded. This packed day in the month of

love finally ended at 22 hours after the official launch of the “Ending Child Marriage in Ghana Initiative” by HE President Mahama.

The second day started with a high level ministerial meeting to deliberate on “Risks and Opportunity in Ghana's Harnessing of the Demographic Dividend”. It was an interesting session as participants were selected from the public and private sectors as well as development partners with the media high in attendance. It was another packed day. Dr. Osotimehin and his entourage continued by participating in the launch of the United Continental Adolescent “All-In HIV Prevention Campaign” by OAFLA & Global “All-In” Partners whose President is HE Mrs. Lordina Mahama, First Lady of Ghana.

On same day, ED made a field visit to the Sexual and Gender Based Violence Response Centre at the Mallam-Atta Market in Accra. It was an exciting moment as the Executive Director and his delegation toured the market with the Gender Minister, Mrs. Nana Oye Lithur. The market centre project is supported by UNFPA and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. The day ended with a dinner hosted by the Minister of Health Mr. Alex Segbefia in honour of the ED. As the old adage goes “all work without play, makes Jack a dull boy.”



Honourable Nana Oye Lithour, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection explaining a point to ED and his delegation at the Mallam Atta market.



Minister for Health, Honourable Alex Segbefia, ED and DG of Ghana AIDS Commission Dr Angela El Adas taking some steps to Ghanaian Highlife music.

As part of the three day visit, Dr. Osotimehin paid a courtesy visit to Professor F. T Sai, a renowned public health physician and founding chairperson of the September 1994 Cairo ICPD . The ED also participated in the commemoration of the appointment of H.E. President Mahama by the UN Secretary General to co-chair a group of Eminent Advocates for the SDGs.

The high point of the visit was Dr. Osotimehin's time with the staff of UNFPA Ghana. Like the nucleus family, the ED and the Regional Director interacted with the staff, with those in the decentralized office Tamale participating via video conference. It was full of “edutainment” (education and entertainment) as questions were asked on the slash of funds to the Country Office. The answers with gestures simply indicated that

Executive Director felt Regional Director should give detailed explanation and vice-versa. Then came the (wow moment) moment when through the rendition of a poetry recital pointing to his hallmark “WoYAG” (Women, Youth and Adolescent Girls). Dr. Osotimehin's portrait was painted within five minutes by a 28 years old man, Mr. Patrick William Doodo. He painted the portrait upside down and while he was at it, few knew what he was painting till he turned it the right way up when he finished. Both process and output were simply WOW.

The “WoYAG” visit, was quite a hectic but joyful one. It was stressful as various incidents occurred including the crashing

of the Representative's computer at the eleventh hour. A joyful one because it was full of laughter amidst team work and a defining moment for the CO to prove its capabilities as a thought leader in issues regarding Demographic Dividend in Ghana. Indeed, the CO made the most of the joyful stress of the ED's visit in the month of love; February 2016 will forever be remembered.

Overall, the success of the visit could be attributed to its careful planning, and the support of several key figures in the government, the Presidency, Office of the 1st Lady, strategic and implementing partners especially Curious Minds, the media, and UNFPA HQ and Regional Office. Key to its success also was the engagement of a highly experienced event planner and the hard work, dedication and solid team spirit exhibited by all staff of the country office throughout the planning and execution of the programme of the visit.



ED and Country Representative, Babatunde Ahonsi watching young Patrick sketch ED 's portrait.

GHANA COULD BE A PACESETTER FOR AFRICA IN ACTUALISING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND POTENTIAL

The sustainability of every country is its human resource, and Africa including Ghana has a large youth base currently and to be able to gain economic freedom, there is the need for the continent to consciously invest in its human resources especially the youth which is its largest asset. It is the reason for which the Executive Director, (ED) of UNFPA and the Under Secretary General of the UN Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin interacted with the honourable members of parliament during his three-day working visit to Ghana in February 2016.

The planned lecture actually became a conversation as the topic was very stimulating and of national interest. Following established protocol, the Under Secretary General was officially introduced to the honourable members. “He is the fourth ED since the establishment of UNFPA and was a Minister of Health in Nigeria, a Professor, at the University of Ibadan, and Chair of the National Agency on AIDS Control where he introduced many major reforms” said Mr. Mabingue Ngom the UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa who did the official introduction.

The lecture focused on matters such as harnessing the youthful population of Africa for sustainable development, building the capacity of girls to boost economic growth, skills migration in technology as an essential among others. Dr. Osotimehin reminded the house that the SDGs have come to replace the MDGs and stressed the interconnectedness of the 17 goals and 169 targets. From his assessment, African countries to date rely on natural resources in basic exports of minerals and precious stones, but in general natural products are unstable in terms of earnings for national development.

He pointed out that there was currently a glut in the world market for oil. The price of oil had plunged from \$105 a barrel to \$35. Oil can therefore, no longer be relied upon for national development, he advised. “So the best prospects lie in Africa's people”, he concluded. It is easily seen from history that most of the countries that have made progress within the last 40 or 50 years have done so by relying on greater investments in their people. He therefore announced that he expected parliament, the representatives of the people, and the most important institution and powerhouse of the democratic process to lead the way. According to him, his expectation in this regard starts with the Ghanaian parliament.

The ED observed that of the 1.8 billion young persons in the world, most were in Africa and this represented a huge potential. According to Professor Osotimehin, young people will create a new environment as they don't obey old rules and are adventurous. Africa should tap into this potential. The Executive Director stressed that African countries should not do anything without the youth. Illustrating in terms of SRH issues, he revealed that adolescent girls have the highest prevalence of unwanted pregnancies, which often times create barriers for them to achieve their potentials, as they die or end up with fistula. He therefore urged Ghanaian parliamentarians to work with CSOs in their various constituencies to put in controls to ensure that girls are not forced to marry too early. He observed that a high percentage of maternal mortality is from unsafe abortions contributed largely by adolescents. The ED was emphatic that fistula can be eradicated when Ghana stops early marriage. Putting the issues under discussion into an economic perspective, the ED revealed that \$500



Executive Director of UNFPA



A section of parliament.

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billion can be added to African economies by building the capacity of girls. This, according to him, must come with adequate investments in their education and health.

From his perspective, the right education must involve the building of skills that lead to self-employment. Skills migration was therefore required to engage the young African population. He cited India and China that have or are undertaking skills migration from similar backgrounds. Africa has to decide, and now is the time.

Africa must close the digital divide. The UN Under-Secretary General insisted that Africa has to “Let the young people compete; let them work and bring money and Ghana can show the way.” He was confident that Ghana could lead the way given the country's track record in leadership around development initiatives.

Contributing to the discussion, an MP raised a concern on limited markets with suggestions on opening up intra-African markets. The Under Secretary General stressed that African countries were not sufficiently trading with themselves. “We were not producing enough for Africa” he lamented. The limited market illusion is due to the fact that free trade does not happen enough in for instance, ECOWAS. Africa needs to break down barriers and create markets. He gave examples of Denmark, Norway, and Ireland which have surmounted the problem of small markets with interconnectedness.

According to the ED, Sexual and Reproductive Health was at the centre of all that he was talking about. Comprehensive sexuality education is needed. Women must have family planning. Too many women are with six children when they wanted two. Those families with women who have six to nine children are precisely the ones who cannot afford to have them. Emphatically concluding, he rejected the situation in which Ghana allowed itself to depend on UNFPA and USAID to provide funds for so important a need as reproductive health and family planning commodities and declared it unacceptable. He called for it to stop.

In an audience response, the majority leader admitted that they had received more than they expected and been sufficiently challenged. One MP remarked that the lecture was practical and straight to the point. She agreed



ED and Speaker of Parliament, Honourable Edward Doe Ajaho

Ghana could be a pacesetter for Africa but would need increased skills development since Ghana has not been investing in the required skills. She suggested the need for a more practical approach. In his comment on this observation, the ED indicated that human capital investment was greater over every asset class. Talent in football can exceed cocoa; and so can creativity in technology.

Despite his tight schedule the ED was able to extend question time in order to accommodate the contributions and questions from members of Parliament. An MP who was a former Minister of Health stated that the ED's lecture “has gingered us today and the issues raised would be deliberated upon in making policies, especially education for the girl child”.

The August interaction was so practical and thought provoking that Honourable Richard Anane MP for Nhyiaeso Constituency, another one-time Minister of Health asked the Under Secretary General : “how often will you send someone, or come every year to give such a lecture?” He followed up this very important question by the suggesting they as members of parliament will work with other arms of government and with President and the executive in the lead, to ensure that Ghana turns up quality young people by 2030 as envisaged. The ED was presented with a monument of parliament to signify their appreciation of time spent with them to increase their knowledge while the ED also expressed his appreciation to Ghana's parliament for being the first ever to open its doors to the UN leadership for such an interaction.

THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS SUPPORT UNIT (DOVVSU)

Violence against women is a global phenomenon and has over the past three decades occupied a central position in international discourse. From the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs Conference in 1985, the United Nations Conference on Human Rights in 1993, through to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the issue has been regarded as a source of concern resulting in the formulation and agreement of international conventions and charters. Recent United Nations reports indicate that at least one in three women will either be physically or sexually abused during her lifetime, globally.

Domestic violence involves physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse of vulnerable persons by persons who exert power over them and infringes on the human, sexual and reproductive rights of vulnerable persons. The majority of domestic violence victims are women and children who are assaulted, molested, raped, denied access to food and medicine, subjected to demeaning living and domestic working conditions or are girls who are forcibly married off. Such abuses have long-lasting effects on the victims maiming them for life, instilling fear, making them lose their sanity or self-confidence, or becoming destitute. A few victims even commit suicide as a result of domestic violence.

The Women and Juvenile Unit was created as a unit of the Ghana Police Service in October 1998 to deal with domestic violence. In 2005 the name was changed to Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) to make it applicable to all forms of violence perpetrated within the domestic setting to all people.

DOVVSU aims to make domestic violence unprofitable for perpetrators in order to reduce its occurrence. The unit helps to investigate all offences against the vulnerable in society, especially women and children. The unit takes steps in preventing, protecting, apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse.

PROGRAMMES

Six hundred police officers work in DOVVSU spread over all police units and report over 15,000 cases of domestic violence yearly. There is therefore pressure on officers in the unit.

To assist the effective running of the units, UNFPA supports DOVVSU technically and financially in various capacities. UNFPA has supported seven regional

DOVVSUs namely Bolgatanga, Wa, Tamale, Sunyani, Kumasi, Cape Coast and Accra.

In terms of capacity building of personnel UNFPA has supported one workshop yearly since 2013 for police officers drawn from various regions and units. The training programmes focused on the following in relation to domestic violence: the legal framework; Management; Evidence gathering; Prosecution; and Networking with other stakeholders

UNFPA has also provided two training sessions for DOVVSU personnel each year to update their knowledge in domestic violence laws and evidence gathering. So far, about 210 officers have received this training. Such trainings have since resulted in a decrease in the number of grievous offenses reported in the refugee camps in the country.

DOVVSU has been supported by UNFPA to undertake general public education and information sharing on domestic violence. Public perception of domestic violence has begun to change. The number of cases of domestic violence reported therefore increased consistently year after year. The DOVVSU Coordinators of Northern and Upper East Regions recounted some experiences from their regions:

“In the Northern Region, for example, case reporting increased between 2012 and 2013 from 337 to 514, and further increased to 667 in 2014. Non-maintenance was the most reported form of domestic violence.” - ASP Emmanuel Holortu, Northern Region Coordinator of DOVVSU

“Domestic violence was perceived to be a traditional norm and a private affair. Currently, it is understood to be a crime. Victims feel free to report cases for intervention.” - DSP Kwadwo Appiah, Upper East Region Coordinator of DOVVSU

Increased awareness of citizens about domestic violence through public education conducted by DOVVSU also led to increased confidence of citizens in the police in general.

In terms of information and logistics, DOVVSU regional offices supported by UNFPA received computers, printers, digital cameras and megaphones. With these, community mobilization and education, evidence gathering, case reporting and transmission were enhanced. DOVVSU officers organized

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community interactions in each region, reaching the public (especially women and children) with sensitization on what domestic violence is, how to avoid it, where and how to report such cases.

The following UNFPA strategic support activities have made or are making a difference in the operations and results of DOVVSU:

- UNFPA refurbished Central and Ashanti Region DOVVSU offices by creating smaller offices with partitions to provide more privacy for victims during case reporting and counseling. Such privacy has increased the confidence of victims to narrate their stories to the police.
- DOVVSU is currently being supported by UNFPA to enhance its data management system to ensure well-structured, credible and easily accessible database and accurate reporting to be used by all stakeholders for policy planning, advocacy and community engagement to end sexual and gender based violence.
- UNFPA has also supported the development of a training manual on domestic violence and its related issues in reproductive health and rights. One major outcome of UNFPA's support is that the Ghana

Police Service decided to include domestic violence in the general curriculum of the Police Training Academy from 2016. By this decision, all police recruits would be knowledgeable on the Domestic Violence Act and its implementation before they are posted to various stations.

It is important that, government and other stakeholders prioritize such needed support to DOVVSU. Passing the DV law and the establishment of units alone would not solve the issues at hand.



The DOVVSU Ho building with support from UNFPA being commissioned

GIRLS DREAM BIG THROUGH CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOOD TRAINING

“Now I understand the hazards of child marriage” says Amina Abdulai (19), a beneficiary of the programme who hails from Kumbugu in the Northern region. She was one of the 165 Kayayee participants in a training session conducted as part of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, jointly launched by UNICEF and UNFPA to reaffirm the United Nation's commitment to move towards collective action.

Amina currently works in Mallam Atta market in Accra as a Kayayoo. She does not go to school and makes her living by sewing upon the customers' requests. What triggered Amina to participate in the programme was her wish to empower herself and achieve a better life. During her participation in the programme, she learned about the hazards of child marriage and her right to refuse a forced marriage.

She shared what she had learned with her parents, siblings, and friends, who accepted her right to choose her own marriage partner after the age of eighteen. Amina dreams of becoming a fashion designer. She wishes to open her own fashion design shop, where she

can also train other seamstresses as well. Amina knows her plan: “In order to accomplish my dream, I need further training – thus, I will participate more in training programmes,” Amina said with a determination in her eyes.



Amina (left) and Anifa (right)

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"In the Northern region, men give gifts to young children or to their parents to marry them. The girls are forced to marry around the age of fifteen and sixteen especially by their parents. Before the programme, I had not known of the appropriate age for marriage. However, having received the training, I understand that marriage before the age of nineteen or marrying an old man can cause financial and health troubles, especially if he dies early and leaves nothing behind."
– Amina

Anifa Abdulai (16) is another Kayayoo girl trained through the UNFPA funded programme. Anifa, from the Northern region, lives alone in the Mallam Atta market without parental care. She earns her living by head portorage, and the income she generates goes to her mother's sister who brought her to Accra. Head portorage work is too hectic for a young girl like Anifa to engage in. Now that she learned the livelihood skills through the programme which she enjoyed very much, she is hoping to convert to slipper making business. However, she understands that this is not easy. "This change cannot happen in a short period of time, for I need more skills and money to invest in my new business," Anifa explains.

Nevertheless, Anifa is more than ready to slowly make improvements as she observes, "Up until now since the programme, I sold one pair of slippers and is continuously making pieces of her own design. I hope I can make a living through a better method, not head portorage." She advised other girls who had not had similar opportunity as follows:

Other girls who have not had the chance for the training must not underestimate the value of the training and must not consider their participation as a waste of time. I hope more opportunities would be offered to the other girls as well so that they could also experience change in their lives. – Anifa

Amina and Anifa experienced a positive change in their lives through the training programme. However, there are still countless number of young female Kayayei living in harsh conditions and under the pressure of child marriage in Ghana. UNFPA, in partnership with the government, gatekeepers, and other partners, will sustain efforts to reach out to more girls and protect their rights.



The slippers made by the trainees



Bags and hair accessories made by trainees

Ghana Launches the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Ghana has joined other countries by officially launching activities geared towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This event took place when the UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNFPA Babatunde Osotimehin paid a working visit to the country in February 2016. The occasion was also used to commemorate the appointment of Ghana's President, His Excellency, John Dramani Mahama as Co-Chair of the Eminent Advocates Group for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

President Mahama, in January 2016, was appointed alongside Ms. Erna Solberg, the Norwegian Prime Minister, by the UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon. The two have been tasked to promote the universal SDGs, raise awareness of the integrated nature of the SDGs and foster the engagement of stakeholders for their implementation.

Speaking at the event, UN Under-Secretary General and UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin emphasized that all UN agendas are intertwined – the SDGs, Financing for Development and the Climate Agenda. By appointing President Mahama, the UN Secretary General has shown that Africa has the potential to also lead the process. He added that there is a critical need to invest in young people and make sure that they are skilled to lead as “Africa's time has come.”

Norway's Ambassador, Ms. Hege Hertzberg, speaking on behalf of the other Co-Chair of Eminent Advocates for the SDGs, Norway's Prime Minister, Ms. Erna Solberg, said there was cause for celebration as the international community has agreed on a framework that will leave no one behind. She explained that the SDGs call for effective partnerships among the world's nations, not just aid, and that it is a holistic sustainable agenda, where gender equality is essential to most of the goals. She added that it is not enough to just establish the goals, but that there is also need for



Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director UNFPA shares a joke with his Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana during the event

action that can be funded for example by improving tax revenues, combating illicit financial flows, and fighting corruption. She reiterated that crisis and conflicts are our enemy and needs to be combatted.

The Director General of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), Dr. Nii Moi Thompson stated that the SDGs could be an enabler for Ghana's medium- and long-term development plans. The NDPC he said, is working on aligning Ghana's plans with several different frameworks, such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and now the SDGs. Dr Nii Moi Thompson, said the SDGs if well incorporated into the national development framework and implemented accordingly, would help transform Ghana's economy

The Minority and Majority Leaders in Parliament, Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu and Hon. Alban S.K. Bagbin (respectively), made brief remarks on the substantial progress Ghana had made on many MDGs, even though many challenges remained. Both parliamentarians promised the support of Parliament in implementing the SDGs.

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Ms. Christine Evans-Klock, United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in Ghana, spoke on the support from the UN for SDGs implementation and impact in Ghana. She commended President Mahama for Ghana's lead in the MDGs and hoped the same support will be given to the SDGs. She further added that the UN will work with the NDPC and the Ministry of Finance to develop an action plan that integrates the SDGs at the local level. She described the President's appointment as a reflection of Ghana's leading role in Africa towards achieving the SDGs.



ED, Ms Hege Hertzberg (Norwegian Ambassador), and Dr Christine Evans-Klock (UN Resident Coordinator)

Giving the keynote address, President John Dramani Mahama shared his thoughts on why the UN Secretary General (SG) had selected him as Co-Chair. The SG, he said, had praised Ghana for its leadership role on the continent, the work on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Rule of Law and Human Rights. The President added that his nomination could only be attributed to the people of Ghana and that it was an honor for Ghana, ECOWAS and Africa. Ghana's involvement with the UN dates back to peacekeeping in the 1960s and more recently to UNMEER during the Ebola crisis. Ghana had done well on many MDGs, but there were of course still many challenges, especially with under-five and maternal mortality as well as sanitation.

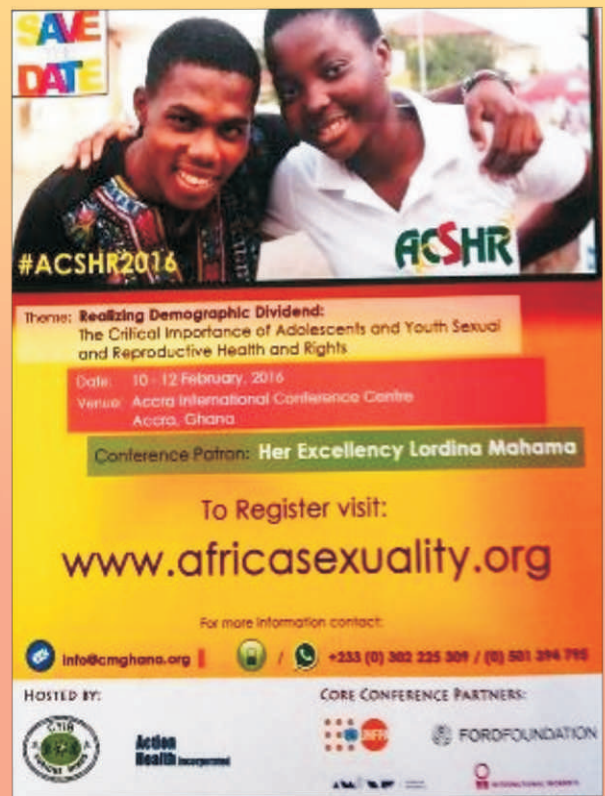
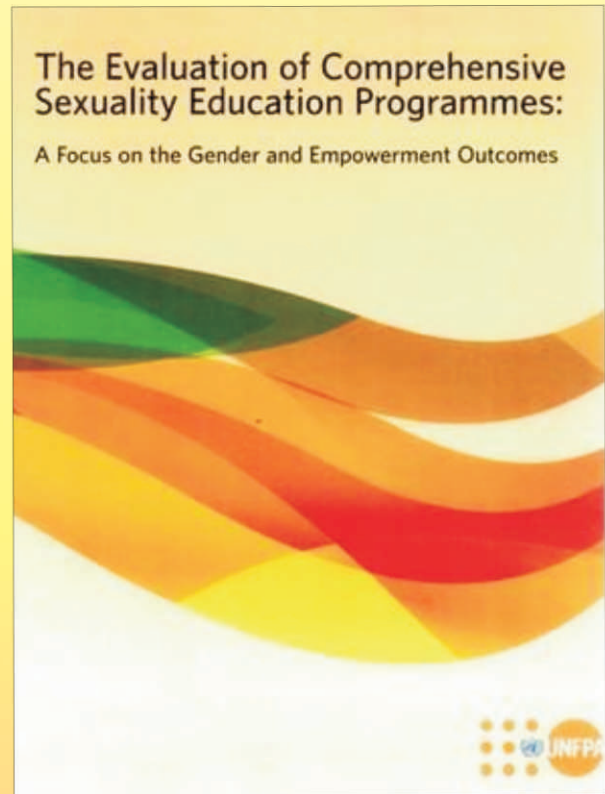
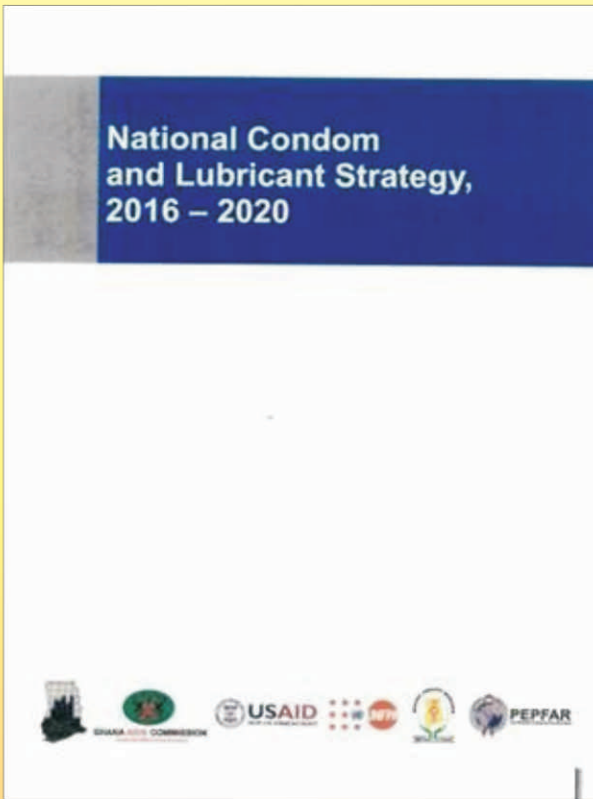
President Mahama said that he believed the SDGs contained some of the qualitative areas that were missing in the MDGs. Ghana has played an important role in negotiating the establishment of the SDGs.

He said he had constituted a high level inter-ministerial committee where the National Development and Planning Commission (NDPC) and relevant line ministries would provide technical advice on the implementation of the SDGs in the country.

Each of the 17 goals has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years through the collaboration of governments, the private sector, the UN and CSOs.



Participant at the lunch



Access to safe, voluntary family planning is a human right. Family planning is central to gender equality and women's empowerment, and it is a key factor in reducing poverty.

Yet some 225 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe and effective family planning methods, for reasons ranging from lack of access to information or services to lack of support from their partners or communities.

Most of these women with an unmet need for contraceptives live in 69 of the poorest countries on earth.

UNFPA works to support family planning by: ensuring a steady, reliable supply of quality contraceptives; strengthening national health systems; advocating for policies supportive of family planning; and gathering data to support this work.

UNFPA also provides global leadership in increasing access to family planning, by convening partners – including governments – to develop evidence and policies, and by offering programmatic, technical and financial assistance to developing countries.

<http://www.unfpa.org/family-planning>



Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
Executive Director, UNFPA

UNFPA Ghana Staff and Partners



Executive Director with Prof. Fred Sai when he called on him



Executive Director in a group photograph with staff of Ghana country office and Regional Office



Executive Director with the little girls welcoming him to the Mallam Atta market as tradition demands



Executive Director in a group photo with people who make it happen at UNFPA: Cleaner, security and receptionists



...because everyone counts
GHANA

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