REPORT ON

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP ON DRUG USE AND HIV RISK AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN WEST AFRICA

ORGANISED BY ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

1 – 5 NOVEMBER 2011
ACCRA, GHANA

Prepared by The Gambian Delegation:

Anna Jobe – Ministry of Youth and Sports
Mariama Fofana – Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
Abdoulie Fye – The Gambia National Youth Council
INTRODUCTION

We were able to attend this workshop upon receiving an invitation from the ECOWAS and we represent our Country as delegates though from different Institutions. This was a Regional Stakeholders Workshop on Drug use and HIV Risks among Young People in West Africa that took place in Accra, Ghana from 1\textsuperscript{st} to 4\textsuperscript{th} November 2011. The workshop was conducted mainly to increase the awareness and understanding of the existing and potential relationship between drug use and HIV risk behaviours and recommend responses needed to address drug driven HIV risk in West Africa and particularly in our countries.

This convergent drew participants from 13 ECOWAS Member States listed below:

- Republic of Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Republic of Cote D’Ivoire
- Republic of The Gambia
- Republic of Ghana
- Republic of Guinea
Republic of Guinea Bissau
Republic of Liberia
Republic of Niger
Federal Republic of Nigeria
Republic of Senegal
Republic of Sierra Leone
Republic of Togo

**ECOWAS** has extended an invitation to the following organisations/institutions to share their knowledge and experience with the participants and this was well demonstrated at the four days meeting.

**The other Institutions presences at the workshop were:**

- ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre
- African Union – AU
- World Health Organisation Africa Regional Office for West and Central Africa
- Centre for Research in Substance Abuse – CRISA
DAY ONE OF THE WORKSHOP

OPENNING REMARKS:

The Principal Programme Officer of Youth in ECOWAS Commission welcomed participants on behalf of ECOWAS President and informed the delegates the purpose of the meeting to carefully look into drug abuse in Africa especially the hard drugs which have many chemical combinations and have almost destroyed our region and it is high time to address this problem in our region and they urged the commitment of all stakeholders in this fight. The Director of ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre, Mr. Francis Chuks Njoagani underscored the relevance of issues to be tackled by the workshop to the development of youth in the region.

For her part, the Director of ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre tasked the participant to make best use of the workshop in the fight against this menace. The Representative of African Union Commission, Dr. Kyari Mohammed gave a Goodwill messages who said that it is imperatively necessary, and is becoming a centrally practical, moral and social challenge of our time to address drug use
and HIV risk he also reiterated the commitment of all stakeholders to see an end to this menace in Africa as a whole. He said that there is a link between drug and HIV/AIDS since the outbreak of the epidemic one can be transferable to another through using of instruments. According to him, 30.4% are infected with the virus and Africa became the largest region with this infection which the youth are dominated and counted 45% of our labour force.

The Representative of World Health Organisation (WHO), Mrs. Fereira Carina Borges thanked ECOWAS for inviting her organisation to the youth meeting which focuses on very significant issues of drug use and risks associated with HIV. She said, WHO is willing to partner with ECOWAS and other stakeholders to come up with measures to address challenges confronting youth especially in health related matters she further told the meeting that communicable and non communicable diseases are many in Africa and the use of alcohol and illicit drugs are increasing so it is time to look into these issues with seriousness.

ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Gender, Dr. Adrienne Diop was represented by Dr. Sintiki T. Tarfa, the Director of Gender, Youth, Sports, Employment, Civil Society and Drug Control gave the keynote address. She disclosed that it is expedient that the workshop which draws participants from various stakeholders in the region, will equip leaders from youth organisations and Non-State Actors engaged with youth development challenges issues with
priced knowledge to share with their peers. According to her, this is the first time for ECOWAS to bring youth stakeholders’ together with the intention of sensitizing them on effects of illicit drug. She said that youth are facing challenges which need concerted efforts critical of which are drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, she buttress this by referring to 2002 survey reports which indicated drug abusers are between the age bracket of 15 to 23 and half of the people with HIV/AIDS virus are infected before they turn 24 years with such figures, ECOWAS countries cannot turn blind eye on it these are some of the factors that trigger this workshop and stakeholders should ensure that youth concerns are mainstream in their policies. She tasked the participants to make best use of the workshop to enable us realize our dreams in fighting this epidemic.

The Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports of Ghana, Mr. Nii Nartey Dua, who deputized the Honorable Minister, Clement Kofi Humado, gave the opening remarks. In his welcome address, he stated that the epidemics of drugs that transit through the sub region and use by our young people and all the community in the sub- region, has experience both HIV and drug epidemic and become regional, national and local concern in view of its adverse effect on the human socio-economic development efforts. He urged all stakeholders to join hands with the governments of the region to halt drug driven HIV risks.

ELECTION OF BUREAU
The bureau of the meeting was elected as follows:

Chairman: Federal Republic of Nigeria (being current chairman of ECOWAS)

Rapporteurs: Republic of Cote D’Ivoire
            Republic of Ghana
            Republic of Guinea Bissau

PRESENTATIONS

Alcohol/Substance use disorder and HIV related sexual risk behaviours

The presentation was made by Prof. Isidore Obot, Director of the Centre for Research in Substance Abuse – CRISA. The presentation outlined Alcohol and HIV/AIDS situation in Africa, mechanisms linking substance use to HIV/AIDS representative major studies and findings, research and interventions.

Global strategy to reduce the harmful effects of
Alcohol

The presentation was made by Mrs. Ferreira Borges Carina, Technical Officer for Substance Abuse, and WHO Africa Regional Office for West and Central Africa. Her presentation gave an overview of alcohol consumption worldwide and in the West Africa Region, global and regional strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol, and current global and regional actions.

Preventing drug Use and Related Harm

The third presentation was done by the Lead Facilitator, Prof. Isidore Obot. The Paper dwelt on strategies for dealing with emerging threats of increased drug abuse and associated health and security problems.

Methodology and Tools for assessing the effectiveness of prevention and treatment efforts

This presentation by Mrs. Ferreira Borges Carina, highlighted
issues on why people use drugs (Risk and Protective Factors), prevention approaches, supply control and improvement of related social conditions, building drug dependence treatment dimensions e.g. modality, principles, setting, stages and target groups

**Issues on HIV AIDS in the ECOWAS Region**

**UNAIDS** Ghana Country Director Dr. Leo Zekeng shared trends on HIV/AIDS in the region generally. He underscored the strong linkage between HIV/AIDS and drug use. He informed the meeting that youth who account for 90% of the HIV infections in the world are located in the middle and low income countries of the world. Empowering the youth therefore is a very important issue. He urged the youth and partners to move from strategy to action in programming, pledging the willingness for UNAIDS to provide needed support.

The discussions that ensued brought out the following issues:

- There is the need for governments to strongly regulate the production and consumption of alcohol in their countries. It is incumbent on governments to balance the economic benefits derived from taxation of production companies and overall health and social implications.
• Need to conduct evidence based research on drug use and HIV related issues to bridge the knowledge gap.

• ECOWAS should step up education and awareness activities and campaigns on the negative consequences of drug use.

• Education programmes should be developed primary and secondary school levels to inculcate knowledge on drug use.

• Youth organisations should involved in policy development process on the control of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

• The overdependence on global funds and donor partners should not becloud the need for increased domestic resourcing of programmes by member states and organisations.

• Stakeholders and programme implementers should move from strategy to practical action in programme development and implementation.
COUNTRY REPORTS PRESENTATIONS

Member states present at the meeting presented country reports focusing on young people and the reports were basically on the following areas:

- Measures in place to reduce drug demand reduction
- Nature and character of drug and substance abuse
- Drug use and risks associated with HIV/AIDS
- HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment approaches

Discussions that followed the country presentations brought to light the following:

- It was observed that most country presentations were silent on the activities of rehabilitation and treatment centres for drug abuse victims and HIV/AIDS patients. Member states without such amenities should ensure their existence.

- Youth organisations should proactive enough to be involved in evidence based research and advocacy for the implementation of youth based programmes
• Member states need to network and share best practices in youth development programmes and implementation strategies.

• ECOWAS should devise strategies to support youth organisations with regional programme implementation

• Monitoring and evaluation of programmes should be encouraged to add value to our programme implementation.

**DAY TWO**

**PRESENTATION OF ECOWAS DOCUMENTARY ON THE DRUG ABUSE SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA**

A television documentary titled “Emerging trends in consumption of illicit drugs in West Africa”, by Mr. Wilfred Ewaleifoh of the Nigerian Television Authority – NTA, was screened at the workshop. The documentary filmed in four countries; Cape Verde, Guinea, Ghana and Nigeria provided practical information on the challenges of drug abuse in the region. The documentary also presented case studies of drug rehabilitation and treatment centres in the four countries.
• The meeting commended the production and requested copies of the documentary to be made available to the participants.

• The documentary underscores that fact that the situation of drugs in the region is serious and underestimated.

• It will be necessary to step up law enforcement activities to curb the menace of drug abuse and trafficking in the region.

**PRACTICAL EXERCISE**

A practical exercise session was undertaken by the participants at the workshop to acquaint them with planning and delivering research based prevention and treatment programmes at the community level. A synthesis of the key issues raised based on a Strength, Weakness, opportunity and threats (SWOT) and we were divided into four groups two Anglophone and two francophone.

**DAY THREE**

**GROUP WORK - ACTION PLANNING**
Participants at the workshop were engaged in Action Planning group work intended to review all issues presented and discussed in the workshop, and propose a work programme of activities which can be implemented by various stakeholders and institutions after the meeting. The work programme proposed will be shared as soon as the final version is submitted to us by ECOWAS.

**DAY FOUR**

**FIELD TRIP**

A field trip was organised to Korle Bu Hospital Addictive Diseases Unit and Patang Hospital. The two hospitals provide specialist comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation programmes for drug victims. Participants also visited the International Health Care Centre, a private HIV/AIDS centre which provides treatment and counselling services to clients. The field trip was organised to acquaint participants at the workshop practical knowledge and information on rehabilitation and treatment centres to inspire member states without such facilities to learn.

**CLOSING CEREMONY**
The meeting came to an end at 19:15 with the normal procedures; Mr. Kennedy from ECOWAS Commission chair, a Ghanian delegate did the closing remark and the vote of was given by Senegalese delegate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Countries should establish functional rehabilitation and treatment centres for drug abuse victims. Member states without such amenities should ensure their existence.

• Governments should strongly regulate the production and consumption of alcohol in their countries. It is incumbent on governments to balance the economic benefits derived from taxation of production companies and overall health and social implications.

• Countries should conduct evidence based research on drug use and HIV related issues to bridge the knowledge gap.

• ECOWAS should step up education and awareness activities and campaigns on the negative consequences of drug use

• Education programmes should be developed for primary
and secondary school levels to inculcate knowledge on drug use

- Countries should formulate National Policy on Drug and Alcohol Use.

ECOWAS PRESENTATION ON DRUG USE AND HIV RISK- THE GAMBIA PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

- The most commonly abused drug in the country is marijuana which is locally grown and sometimes smuggled into the country from neighbouring countries.

- The negative effects of drug abuse, include the altering of one’s performance academically, depression, elation (depending on the individual), and loss of motivation. It also affects the limbic and autonomic part of the nervous system resulting in paranoia, anorexia and sleeplessness.

- Excessive usage of Drug causes economic breakdown, corruption, violence and acts as a tool in spreading
diseases, causing misery for the abusers, their families and the community.

- Of recent, this West African region is being used as a transit point in illicit drug trafficking especially cocaine and heroin. Without proper intervention it will destroy our youths, affect the country’s socio-economic and human development

**MEASURES IN PLACE TO REDUCE DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION**

- The Gambia Government has taken bold steps in the fight against the “drug menace” and drug-related crimes, by strengthening its drug laws in other to make it more stringent and stiff to discourage drug cartels who intend to abuse the hospitality, peace and tranquility of The Gambia.

- The establishment of the National Drug Enforcement Agency (NDEA) speaks volumes about the giant strides taken by The Gambia Government.

- There is strong collaboration among Security Forces, Students, Teachers, Youth Organizations, Journalists, UN Agencies and Civil Society to ensure The Gambia a “drug free nation”.

- We also have in place the Narcotic Court in Banjul which is currently overburdened with drug cases, while the prison is filled-up with drug inmates and trial prisoners.
NATURE AND CHARACTER OF DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

• The statistics on drug seizures in The Gambia show 323 cases of Cannabis Sativa from January-December 2010, forming 90 percent of the overall seizure of drugs registered for that year.

• Out of the 323 cases, 36 percent involves youths between the ages of 13-25 years.

• According to NDEA 371 people were arrested last year in connection to dealing in cannabis, 352 of them are Gambians, while others include Senegalese, Malians, a Nigerian, and Guineans (Conakry).

• 37 people, nine of them Gambians were also arrested for allegedly dealing in Cocaine; others are Nigerians, a Cameroonian, an Estonian, a Bissau Guinean, a Ghanaian, Deutsch nationals, a Mexican, a Swedish, and Venezuelans.
On June 4, 2010, the Drug Agency registered its biggest drug seizure of cocaine, amounting to more than two tons (worth more than 1 billion US dollars) at a warehouse at Bonto village in the West Coast Region of The Gambia.

Seven South Americans, a European and an African have since been arrested in connection to this catch and are currently serving 50 years jail term if they fail to pay at least 50 million dalasi.

The cannabis was destined to the most densely populated area in the country, the Greater Banjul, and the seizure drastically reduced the supply trend in this region, automatically reducing the demand in the market for both whole sale and retail.
• Therefore, young people arrested in connection with cannabis abuse are increasing at an “alarming rate” which raises grave concerns and need concerted efforts.

• In The Gambia, 75 percent of the patients in the only Psychiatric Hospital had their illness caused or precipitated by drugs and 80 percent of relapsed cases are due to drugs (cannabis and alcohol) abuse.

DRUG USE AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH HIV and AIDS

• First drug use is not the main cause of HIV Transmission in The Gambia but has associated risk

• There is an increased in the intake of alcohol and smoking among young people and this makes them vulnerable to HIV through unprotected sex

• It has also being revealed that some of the young people with mental illness due to drugs are also infected with HIV

• Drug users who raped young girls also increased vulnerability to HIV among young people

HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND TREATMENT APPROACHES
• With support from Global fund ARV drugs are provided free for those people tested positive.

• Providing Nutritional and Financial support to People Living with the HIV and AIDS

• The creation of youth centres in the country. The youth centres are use by young people to interact and share ideas in order to have a positive healthy life

• Free Voluntary Counseling and Testing on HIV services and currently new VCT sites are setup in the country

• Conducting training using the following methodologies Life Skills, Stepping Stone, STAR and Kalibo. All these have a training manual on them

• Conducted Risk and vulnerability mapping for MARPS in order to strengthen our response to HIV/AIDS

• Condom supply and distribution at free of charge to people in need and most risk areas

• Providing PMTCT Services and increasing the sites to address the high demand by the people

• Supporting Sex Workers to conduct lay counselling with their peers and increase condom use among themselves

• Continuous community sensitisations on HIV and AIDS
and the fight against discrimination and stigma

FINALLY

- African young people make up the largest and fastest growing proportion of the population.

- The continent boasts a large reservoir of youth talent and will continue to enjoy this bonus for the next 15 - 20 years.

- Therefore, Young People can make a difference let us empower them now

THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF GAMBIAN YOUNG PEOPLE:

- Government of The Gambia
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Ministry Of Health and Social Welfare
- The Gambia National Youth Council
- UN System (UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS, WFP, UNDP)
- Raid – The Gambia
- National Drug Enforcement Agency
- ECOWAS
- Global Fund
- National AIDS Secretariat
- Act!on Aid The Gambia
- Child Fund The Gambia
- Local Government Authorities
• HIV Support Groups
• All Youth Organisations and Structures and other stakeholders