THE HUNGER PROJECT – GHANA (ZONE 1)

CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

THEME: “A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women”

DATE: FRIDAY 8TH MARCH 2013

VENUE: NSUTA – AWEREGYA EPICENTER

International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments, and more importantly, for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await present and future generations of women.

It is in this regard that The Hunger Project – Ghana (Zone 1) marked the 2013 IWD celebration with a morning show program on Life Fm at Nkawkaw and a durbar at Nsuta-Aweregya Epicenter in the Kwahu West Municipality.

THP partnered with the National Commission for Education (NCCE) to create awareness on the IWD and its relevance as this special day for women is usually not hyped as other observable days. The sensitization covered historical background to the celebration of IWD and the adoption of March 8, as a day set aside by UN to recognize women’s achievement, looking back on past struggles and accomplishment as well as prospects for the future. The opportunity was used to condemn all forms of violence against women and girls adding that there had not been any development initiative or achievement that is without the contribution of women. The significance of the celebration of the IWD was emphasized as women organize, they are finding others with whom they feel safe to reveal their secrets of abuse. They can act
collectively to demand justice from the state agencies mandated to uphold and protect their interest. As women get connected, they draw public attention to cases; and this glimmer of a chance for justice is encouraging more women to step from the shadows. Victims of VAW are breaking the silence and forcing society to confront these acts of violence committed in private against women and girls. The campaign against VAW is yielding results and the momentum for combating gender violence is growing.

**Durbar at Nsuta-Aweregya Epicenter to commemorate IWD 2013**

THP Zone 1 organized a durbar to mark this year’s International Women’s Day Celebration. THP staff, some Heads of Departments, WEP Animators, Chiefs, Queen mothers and Teachers among others attended and addressed young girls from Aweregya basic schools. They shared various challenges women have to go through every now and then. They also discussed opportunities available to girls as well as the task ahead, to grow into women leaders in future to help develop their families, communities, the country and the world as a whole.

A total of one hundred and thirty-nine (139) people made up of 113 Basic School children (28 boys and 85 girls), 15 adult females and 11 adult males participated in the community durbar held at the conference hall of the Nsuta-Aweregya Epicenter to commemorate IWD – 2013.

The Project Officer for Zone 1, Rockson Dutenya in his welcome address thanked the participants for honoring the invitation to be part of the celebration. He gave a brief background of the international women’s day celebration. He said the day has been set aside to celebrate the contributions or achievements of women in the development struggle agenda worldwide and for that matter Ghana. The theme for this year’s celebration is “A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women”.

He emphasized that THP believes in the rich potentials of women and that most of our programs are aimed at empowering rural women to take up strategic positions in society. He cited an example that the Epicenter Banks are being managed by women which clearly shows that when women are given the opportunity they can perform beyond expectation. Lack of equal opportunities for women under to pretence that women do not have the capacity to perform has made women susceptible to the various forms of violence perpetrated against them. As a result, THP’s programming consciously offered women equal opportunities of representation and participation in decision making. In pursuance of this commitment, Women Empowerment which is one of the three Pillars of THP’s interventions builds the capacity of selected rural women and men in Human and Child rights, Domestic Violence Act, Intestate Succession Law, Wills Act, Marriage Law, Sexual and Reproductive rights and
Leadership to provide paralegal services to their communities. He noted that though some progress is being made in the fight against violence against women, victims of such inhuman acts covering up for the perpetrators by failing to give evidence making the prosecution of gender-based violence challenging.

A documentary on Violence Against Women (VAW) was shown for the audience to visualize the various degrees of VAW, emphasize the seriousness of the issue of VAW and the fact that it has become a topical National issue of concern for all. He appealed to teachers and traditional leaders to help eliminate socio-cultural practices which hinder the empowerment of the girl-child right from the school level. He cited the practice of schools having ‘School Prefect -SP’ who is a male in charge of both male and female students and ‘Girls’ Prefect – GP’ only in charge of girls to buttress the fact that violence against girls and women has been institutionalized right from the basic school level and called for the practice to be abolished to give girls equal opportunities to nurture their leadership skills right from the basic school level.

The Project Officer in conclusion highlighted the top ten interventions outlined by THP for women’s empowerment and gender equality. These interventions include; Gender analysis, reducing drudgery, rights awareness, equal leadership and organizing women. Others include financial services, functional adult literacy, health services, halting child marriage and prosecuting gender-based violence.

**Address by Partners:**

*Women Empowerment Project (WEP) Animators*
• Agnes Pokuua, a WEP animator in the Nsuta-Awerega Epicenter educated the school children on gender-based violence and the various types. She asked the students what are the kinds of violence against women going on in their communities? The students gave varied answers which includes; wife beating, corporal punishment by teachers etc. Agnes Pokuua grouped the violence into various types namely; physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence, sexual violence – rape, defilement etc and other cultural practices such as ‘trokosi’, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, widowhood rites and many others.

She advised committers of these heinous crimes against women to desist from such acts and called on the law enforcement agencies to deal ruthlessly with such offenders.

• Comfort Kisiwaa, a WEP animator also from the Nsuta-Awerega Epicenter engaged their students in a discussion on gender roles. She explained to the gathering what gender is? She indicated that gender is socially constructed roles assigned to different categories of males and females. Comfort further asked the students to identify roles assigned to girls and women. The students listed a number of them which included; cooking, sweeping, washing bowls, washing of clothes, fetching water, emptying of waste bins among others. On the other hand, she asked the students to outline the roles discharged by boys and men in their communities. The responses provided were providing housekeeping money, playing football, weeding, pounding of fufu etc. She emphasized the fact that gender roles could be changed unlike sex roles and that to what men could do women could equally do even a better way. She gave examples of women in higher positions as Municipal/District Chief Executives, Members of Parliament, Ministers, Speaker of Parliament, Chief Justice and many others who have distinguished themselves creditably in handling strategic positions in Ghana.

Comfort ended her session by urging the students to take up their studies seriously in order to occupy high places of authority in the near future.

• Last but not the least, Linda Asantewaa, a WEP animator from Nkawanda Epicenter also educated the school children on teenage pregnancy. She advised the girls to shy away from any lifestyle that could lead them into this unfortunate situation and rather concentrate on their education which will secure their future. She enumerated some dangers associated with teenage pregnancy which could lead to school dropout, abortion, death, poverty etc. Linda also advised the students to do away with bad company or friends and not heed to peer pressure.
Department of Social Welfare

- The Director for Social Welfare in the Kwahu West Municipality, Mr. Patrick Oppong thanked THP for celebrating International Women’s Day with our rural women and children. He indicated that previous speakers have extensively dealt with the issues affecting the forward movement of women. He asked the gathering why do people suffer violence and yet do not report? Responses were; people do not know where to report such cases, people do not have confidence in the system and many others. He said the constitution of the republic of Ghana 1992, Article 5 makes provision for fundamental human rights and freedoms for all Ghanaians and therefore people should not allow their rights to be violated. He urged participants at the gathering to do away with fear and report such violent cases against women in their respective communities. Mr. Patrick Oppong gave a list of institutions that handle cases of human rights abuses could be reported to for appropriate redress e.g. the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service, National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Commission for Human Rights and Administration Justice (CHRAJ), Department of Social Welfare etc. He urged the participants not to hesitate to go to any of these offices to seek redress if their rights are violated upon.

National Commission for Civic Education

- The Director of National Commission for Civic Education in the West Municipality, Mr. Arthur Wilson, on his part also thanked THP for their contribution in helping to empower women in rural communities. He urged the women to get involved in decision making process especially at the unit committee level. He further admonished the women to believe in their abilities that they can also do it when given the opportunity. Mr. Wilson advised the female pupils to look up to women in higher authority as role models and in that way they will aspire to greater heights.

Open Forum – have your say on violence against women in your locality.

An opportunity was given for the students to ask questions and interact with the speakers.

- A school girl asked what they could do if the boys touch their breast and other private parts?
- A teacher indicated that a man defiled a girl below sixteen years in his community. The victim tried to cover up for the perpetrator when the case was reported to the police and claimed she was eighteen years. The teacher wanted to know what could be done when such controversy happens.
- A female teacher in her contribution advised parents not to use their daughters as money making ventures by taking money from men who make advances at their daughters. She
encouraged parents to work very hard to take care of their children so they can benefit from their daughters in the future and not at their tender ages.

Responses to questions

- On the issue of defilement and age, the Social Welfare Director indicated that when such cases come to his office with such controversies over age they have a way of investigating further to know the truth.

In her closing remarks, the chairperson for the occasion, Nana Okyeame Nyarkoa of Aweregya, admonished parents to stop buying funeral clothes and channel those resources in the education of their children. She said when they look after their children at the tender age, their children will also grow up and take care of them when they are old. Emphasis was placed on desisting from covering up and condoning violence against girls and women in any form by the chairperson. She expressed appreciation to THP for such a forum to talk about VAW and urged the school children to focus on their studies to justify the investment of their parents.