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The original plan for my internship with International Federation of Women Lawyers-Ghana (FIDA-Ghana) was a research project regarding the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, which was passed in May 2007. However, the course of my internship changed considerably once I arrived in Ghana for several reasons. One major factor was that the law was passed only a year ago, and the movement of cases through the judicial system is slow. Moreover, while the *National Plan of Action to Implement Domestic Violence Legislation* had been developed by the government, progress on the activities outlined—including gender sensitivity training for the police and judiciary and the setting up of domestic violence shelters—has been very limited because funding had not been fully worked out. In a developing country like Ghana, a year is a very short amount of time in which to implement a new law.

I did complete a more limited research project on the same issue towards the end of my internship, but focusing on the Domestic Violence Secretariat of the Ministry of Women and Children (MOWAC) and the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Services rather than the courts. These two implementing agencies are of particular importance to FIDA since DOVVSU is the police unit responsible for handling and investigating crimes of domestic violence and the MOWAC Domestic Violence Secretariat is responsible for coordinating the execution of the National Domestic Violence Policy and the National Plan of Action. Thus, focusing on case law and the court system would have been of more limited use to the organization. Also, since the bulk of domestic violence cases are never reported, the goal of the Act is far more than form the basis for prosecution of domestic violence cases. Rather, the Act creates a political and social climate in which there can be change in societal attitudes towards domestic violence as a purely private matter.

To understand the challenges and barriers to implementation, I conducted semi-structured interviews at DOVVSU and MOWAC, and used statistical data from DOVVSU as well as analysis of the text of the Domestic Violence Act and the National Plan of Action. I also considered reports on the South African experience in implementing domestic violence legislation with a number of similarities to the Ghanaian law. Finally, based on my research and experience with FIDA as a whole, I made recommendations how the organization can develop its existing projects to facilitate implementation work and gave ideas for new projects and programming.

Since my research project was much smaller, a lot of my work at FIDA was related to ongoing programs to promote legal education and literacy in rural communities. The projects were aimed at improving access to justice for women and children by raising awareness of their rights under Ghanaian law. A major part of these projects were presentations to and dialogues with community leaders on the legal framework protecting women's rights, including the domestic violence law. Most community leaders had knowledge of the law only because it was very controversial when introduced as a Bill and the period of debate was lengthy and high profile, and were generally not aware of

the Act's contents. While FIDA has set presentations on a variety of topics, there was no such presentation for the Act and most materials on domestic violence were quite dated. I was responsible for putting together a presentation and brochure that simplified the Act for the legal literacy programs and updated other presentation materials. I also traveled to several regions of the country with the Programmes Director and FIDA lawyers to conduct the workshops and seminars. One of the highlights of my summer was a workshop for traditional rulers, where FIDA had a very candid dialogue with the chiefs about the legal system and their role within it. In particular, some chiefs felt that Parliamentary legislation and the development of the judicial system often took away from the roles and responsibilities of traditional rulers. For example, the alternate dispute resolution mechanisms in the Domestic Violence Act that made no mention of traditional courts. The legal education and awareness projects gave me the opportunity to experience the complexities and competing interests in the process of implementing domestic human rights legislation.

I also completed smaller projects at the office, mostly on reports to donor organizations and drafting new funding proposals. One such project involved using data and informational about the cases received by FIDA paralegal centres in regional capitals to write up an analysis of the strengths, challenges and opportunities at FIDA's legal aid centres for the organization's annual report. A more interactive assignment was acting as a group facilitator at a series of workshops teaching women with small businesses basic business skills and strategies, through group work and problemsolving. The workshops were a pilot project under FIDA's new economic empowerment for women program, launched largely because the organization saw that true access to justice for many women would not be possible without the ability to secure financial resources on their own.

I also attended conferences and events, the most interesting of which was a workshop presenting recent research findings on trokosi. Trokosi is the practice of sending young girls into ritual servitude at a shrine in atonement for a wrong committed by a family member. Often the priests at the shrines subject the girls to hard labour and sexual abuse. The workshop was interesting because it highlighted the fact that despite the criminalization of trokosi and the liberation of many of these girls, the practice continues in some rural communities.

I thoroughly enjoyed my summer with FIDA—the work I ended up doing may not have been what I intended to do, but in my experiences I have gained a multi-faceted understanding of on the ground development work from the context of a legal NGO. At the office, I worked with a dedicated group of Ghanaian staff as well as local and international interns coming from different backgrounds (social work, international development, law), each contributing their own perspective. Moreover, I learned a great deal about law and development. In a country where the enforcement mechanisms, including the courts, remain quite basic, legislation is only the first step leading to a change in actual practices. Knowledge about rights and the available legal protections and how to access the legal system are also essential elements to access to justice.