

SSO Spotlight : Ghana



Background

Stroke Association Support Network Ghana (SASNET-Ghana) is a legally constituted non-governmental organization, with a Board of Trustees and a President, who are all volunteers. The organization has been in operation since 2012 and works at community level across Ghana.

SASNET-Ghana's work is currently focused on campaigning to raise the population's awareness of stroke signs and risk factors and to support stroke survivors in the community. Activity costs are currently borne by members of the Board. SASNET-Ghana works closely with carers, health professionals, and researchers to reduce the impact of stroke on the Ghanaian community.

Context

In Ghana there is an increasing burden of stroke, and it is the second leading cause of death (WHO 2012). Until recently, many believed stroke was a disease for which little or nothing could be done.

Community surveys, carried out in some parts of the country by SASNET-Ghana, found high prevalence of a number of stroke risk factors. Hypertension was recorded as the most common risk factor, followed by diabetes, alcohol intake, family history of stroke, obesity and atrial fibrillation.

SASNET-Ghana also link the the high burden of stroke in Ghana to poor community awareness. It's insights into community awareness indicate that Ghanaians have little or no knowledge about stroke signs and risk factors.

SASNET-Ghana is committed to helping to reduce the incidence of stroke, and to helping to ensure that everybody who suffers a stroke in Ghana has access to the treatment and rehabilitation services that they need.

Response

SASNET-Ghana has developed an annual awareness programme, by building on the Non Communicable Disease Alliance/Stroke community conversations and the Regional Stroke Month programmes.

SASNET- Ghana engages people at the grass root level, using various local languages to educate people on stroke signs and risks. It also carries out screening for hypertension, diabetes and cholesterol.



Advocacy

The organization has developed an advocacy agenda that complements its community awareness activities, to mobilize the public to call for changes in Government policy.

Currently, the key advocacy focus is on *Preventing Stroke*. SASNET-Ghana is calling on the government of Ghana to support its nationwide programme to educate the public on how to reduce their risk of having a stroke or a transient ischemic attack. It will collaborate with the state media in achieving this agenda.

Future advocacy calls; which require further sensitization of the Government, more data and an increase in the allocation of resources include:

- Recognition of stroke as a medical emergency, and resources to respond to medical emergencies such as ambulances and functioning stroke units
- Planned discharge and after-care, which will require professional resources and investment

- Medical care and management support for hypertension and diabetes patients, even without national health insurance
- The development of a national stroke register in Ghana where there will be proper monitoring of all stroke cases
- Availability of social programmes to support stroke survivors to integrate back into society and jobs. This could include the opportunity to connect with the Livelihood Empowerment Programme of Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

Successes

Since it began, SASNET-Ghana has cooperated with medical professionals and institutions for the successful implementation of World Stroke Day events. These include: Ghana Health Service; The Women's Medical Association and other private medical professionals. Including screening in the events has made them more meaningful to the public and resulted in greater engagement. These screenings have also been combined with presentations at town halls, where community members feel comfortable attending.

For more information:

Email: strokeghana@yahoo.com

Website: www.strokeghana.org

Twitter: [@ghbeatstroke](https://twitter.com/ghbeatstroke)

Challenges

The major challenge is lack of finance; funds are needed to employ staff and open offices to extend reach. SASNET-Ghana is also currently faced with a lack of political will to support stroke prevention and care, both in terms of partnership and funding. They need the Government to hear and understand the reality of the stroke burden; its human and financial costs and what it needs to do in terms of prevention, treatment and support.

Future Plans

SASNET-Ghana is planning to set up a national stroke fund. The fund is intended to support the treatment of stroke survivors, research and stroke education in the country.

Its long term aim is that the organization can help to support the refurbishment of stroke units and the setting up of physiotherapy centres in communities where stroke survivors cannot currently access these facilities.

