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Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international nongovernmental organisation, mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth. In 1987, several Commonwealth professional associations founded CHRI. They believed that while the Commonwealth provided member countries a shared set of values and legal principles from which to work and provided a forum within which to promote human rights, there was little focus on the issues of human rights within the Commonwealth.

The objectives of CHRI are to promote awareness of and adherence to the Commonwealth Harare Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognised human rights instruments, as well as domestic instruments supporting human rights in Commonwealth member states. Through its reports and periodic investigations, CHRI continually draws attention to progress and setbacks to human rights in Commonwealth countries. In advocating for approaches and measures to prevent human rights abuses, CHRI addresses UN, the Commonwealth Secretariat, member governments and civil society organisations. Through its public education programmes, policy dialogues, comparative research, advocacy and networking, CHRI's approach throughout is to act as a catalyst around its priority issues.

The nature of CHRI's sponsoring organisations allows for a national presence and an international network. These professionals can also steer public policy by incorporating human rights norms into their own work and act as a conduit to disseminate human rights information, standards and practices. These groups also bring local knowledge, can access policy-makers, highlight issues, and act in concert to promote human rights.

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Introduction

The concept of justice is difficult to define. Over the centuries, many scholars like Plato, Aristotle, John Rawls among others have given various meanings to the concept. Although its meaning may vary to these scholars, the concept of justice has been equated severally with notions of fairness, rightness, equity and equality. The Black's Law Dictionary, Standard Ninth Edition defines justice as the fair and proper administration of laws.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana in chapter 5 makes ample provision for the constitutional safeguard of human rights and the proper administration of laws in relation to the individual. Article 12(1) provides that "the fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in this chapter shall be respected and upheld by the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary and all other organs of government and its agencies and, where applicable to them, by all natural and legal persons in Ghana, and shall be enforceable by the Courts as provided for in this Constitution." The rights in chapter 5 include among others the rights to life, liberty, dignity and fair trial.

Justice and fairness cannot be said to be upheld unless it is protected and made accessible to all. Access to justice involves the protection of personal liberty, an independent judiciary, the right to be heard, representation in court, legal aid, fair trial etc. Since it is intertwined with the proper administration of law, there should be a system of law in which every person is able to ensure the exercise and access their right to justice. Beyond the constitutional safeguards therefore, institutional safeguards are also a necessity. These include the court system, the Judiciary, the enforcement agencies like the Police Service and the Ministry of Justice.

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for legal matters in relation to the exercise of executive power of the State and also legislative drafting in relation to legislative power of the State. Article 88 of the 1992 Constitution provides among others that:

- ➤ The Attorney-General of Ghana is the principal legal adviser to the Government.
- The Attorney-General is responsible for the discharge of such other duties of a legal nature as may be referred or assigned to him by the President, or imposed on him by the Constitution or any other law.
- > The Attorney-General is responsible for the initiation and conduct of all prosecutions of criminal offences.



➤ The Attorney-General is responsible for the institution of all civil cases on behalf of the State; and all civil proceedings against the State shall be instituted against the Attorney-General as Defendant.

The Ministry carries out its mandate through agencies and departments, one of which is the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). The AGD has three divisions which are the Civil division, Prosecutions division and Legislative Drafting. The Prosecutions division is responsible for all criminal prosecutions including prosecutions by the Police and other Public Prosecutors appointed under Section 56 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1960 (Act 30). The Division therefore advises the Police on Criminal law and on their case dockets and exercise general supervision and control of Criminal Prosecutions by all.

As the name connotes, the Ministry is primarily responsible for ensuring delivery of and access to justice with respect to its mandate.

Background

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative Africa Office has since 2008 been implementing a project dubbed the "Justice Centers Project" to promote increased access to justice and protection of the human rights of the poor and indigent within the criminal justice system in Ghana and by extension West Africa. CHRI has been working to increase availability and accessibility of legal assistance services to indigent persons accused of crime, increase awareness of fundamental human rights, especially fair trial rights and also reduce the number of pre-trial detainees and consequently avoid overcrowding in police cells and prisons.

This is mainly through the training of paralegals and in some cases law students who visit designated police stations to offer legal advice to suspects and their families and educate them on their rights upon arrest. Where feasible, CHRI with the help of pro bono lawyers litigate on behalf of suspects. The team also engages with police officers and monitors police compliance of the law, with the Attorney-General's Department, the Legal Aid Scheme, the Ghana Bar Association, individual lawyers and other stakeholders.

Over the years CHRI has been successful in ensuring that Police stations that form part of its target area have been decongested by 50-70%. In certain cases paralegals do not find new cases when they visit the police stations. Over the past two years hardly would one find a suspect who is in police detention beyond the stipulated 48 hours rule without haven been remanded by the court. However, many police stations still have a high number of inmates in pre-trial detention due to claims by the police that those dockets have been sent to the Attorney-General's Department for advice. According to



some suspects, they have been waiting as long as 5 years. The Police have confirmed some of the claims and have added that some of the dockets cannot be located.

The A-G's Department on its part suggests that as much as there may be some delays, in some cases, the dockets are not sent to the Office as claimed by the Police. This back and forth has resulted in suspects' rights being unduly trampled on, especially when there is no well-structured system in place to track such case dockets.

In addition, there are cases in court that have been continually adjourned for months due to the absence of state prosecutors and/or judges or even suspects. However, because the three institutions are not really communicating with each other some of these suspects end up falling through the cracks and are forgotten by the system.

This paper documents the outcome of CHRI's monitoring activities at the police stations it visits. Specifically, CHRI monitored:

- a) dockets at designated police stations that have been referred to the A-G's Department for six months to find out the average turn- around time for cases referred by the Police
- b) cases under trial which have been consistently adjourned to find out the reasons for the persistent adjournments

The objective is to produce an evidence based report on the average turn-around time for cases referred by the Police to the A-G's Department which will be used as an advocacy tool to support demands for improved case management structures to enhance justice delivery.

Limitations

The monitoring exercise took place in only 14 police stations (Accra and Kumasi) and was for only six months. Also, because paralegals were not going to the police station everyday it was difficult to really monitor the cases. They therefore had to rely on the Investigators at the various police stations to provide data. Most of the stations, especially those in Accra were unwilling to give out information.

Again it was difficult getting data from the A-Gs Office. In fact we were not able to get any data directly from the A-Gs Department.



Dockets Monitored at designated police stations that have been referred to the A-G's Department

When this project was conceptualised, the idea was for CHRI's paralegals to directly monitor at the level of the police station cases that they will identify in the course of their visits as having been referred to the A-G's Office for advice. The idea was to document such cases, track the progress and note how long it takes for the police to receive feedback on those cases.

During the implementation it became apparent that such cases will be difficult to track, especially when the project was only for 8 months, and also paralegals do not attend police stations daily. Also suspects were sometimes remanded to prison custody making it difficult for paralegals to keep in touch. To solve that challenge the project team decided to request for information on such dockets from the various police stations. However, many of the police officers and their Commanders engaged were not willing to provide information. Various reasons were proffered these include the unavailability of officers working on collating the data, unavailability of Commanders to give approval among others.

The Office therefore wrote to the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) Headquarters requesting for information on the cases.

It must be noted that although the request for information stated January to June as the cut of points, due to delays in response, the data collated went beyond June. Also the information was not only for cases sent from January but rather cases that have been pending as well. This account for situations where the data shows that response to some cases are still pending after one year.



CID Headquarters

According to the data provided by the CID headquarters, from January to June 2018, 31 dockets were sent to the A-G for advice from the selected police stations. As indicated in table 1 below feedback had been received on only 5 of the dockets at the time of reporting. Most of the dockets (13) were from Tesano, followed by Madina (6), Nima, Odorkor, La (3 each) and one each from Dansoman, Sakumono and Mile 7.

Table 1:

Police Station	Total	Feedback Received	Feedback yet to be received
Tesano	13	3	10
Nima	3	0	3
Sakumono	1	0	1
Madina	6	1	5
Dansoman	1	0	1
Mile 7	1	0	1
Odorkor	3	1	2
La	3	0	3
Total	31	5	26

Break down of cases

The detailed break -down of cases indicated that most of the offences for which advice were being sought for (12) were traffic offences

Γable 2

Police Stations	Murder	Road Traffic Offences	Use offensive weapons	Causing unlawful damage
Tesano	1	12	0	0
Nima	2	1	0	0
Sakumono	0	0	1	0
Madina	0	5	0	1
Dansoman	0	1	0	0



Mile 7	0	1	0	0
Odorkor	0	3	0	0
La	0	3	0	0
Total	3	26	1	1

Police Station Records of Referred Cases

In addition to trying to collate data on dockets referred to the A-G directly from the police stations through the police station visits, CHRI wrote to each station requesting for information same. As indicated earlier, only three (Dansoman, La and Madina) out of the eight police stations CHRI provides paralegal services to in Accra willingly gave out information on dockets that have been referred to the A-G

Tesano, Sakumono, Nima and Odorkor Police Stations did not provide information.

With regards to Mile 7, the team was informed that most cases were dealt with summarily so they have not referred any cases to the A-G during the period.

As per the table below, nine dockets made up of cases on murder (5), rape (2), defilement and causing harm (1) each had been referred to the A-G's Office at the time of collating the data. The A-G had given feedback on only one docket which was a murder case.

Table 3:

Type of cases	Total	Feedback received	Feedback yet to be received
Murder	5	1	4
Rape	2	0	2
Defilement	1	0	1
Causing Damage	1	0	1
Total	9	1	8



Breakdown of cases from Dansoman, Madina and La Police Stations

The table below shows how cases are spread across the three police stations and how many have been responded to. The data indicates that none of the cases from Dansoman and Madina have been responded to. Of the two dockets sent from La, advice on one has been given, the other is still pending.

Table 4

Police Stations	Murder	Defilement	Rape	Causing unlawful damage	Feedback received	Feedback yet to be received
Madina	1	0	0	1	0	2
Dansoman	2	1	2	0	0	5
La	2	0	0	0	1	1
Total	5	1	2	1	1	8

Kumasi

In Kumasi only Suntreso police station provided information directly to paralegals. The rest Central, Zongo, Asokwa and KNUST indicated that they needed permission from the Regional Legal and Prosecutions Department (LPD) before they can provide the information. The data for those stations was therefore provided by LPD upon request.

The Airport police station however indicated that none of their cases had been referred to the A-G over the period request for information was made.

According to the information received as indicated in table 4 below, 33 dockets were referred to the A-G's Department for advice. Feedback was given on majority (28) of the cases. Only 5 cases were pending as at the time collation.

Table 5:

Type of cases	Total	Cases with Feedback	Yet to receive feedback
Robbery	11	10	1
Murder	2	2	0
Assault	7	5	2
Causing Harm	1	1	0



Stealing	3	1	2
Threat of Harm	1	1	0
False declaration of marriage	1	1	0
Fraud	3	3	0
Manslaughter	1	1	0
illegal mining	1	1	0
Abetment	1	1	0
Threat of Death	1	1	0
Total	33	28	5

Break down of cases per police station

Information gathered reveals that most of the dockets referred for advice in Kumasi were robbery cases (11), out of which advice has been given on 10 dockets.

Table 6

Cases	Asokwa	Central	KNUST	Suntreso	Zongo	Feedback received	Feedback not received
Robbery	1	5	1	4	0	10	1
Murder	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
Assault	0	3	0	3	1	5	2
Causing Harm	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Stealing	0	0	0	3	0	1	2
Threat of Harm	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
False declaration of	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Marriage Fraud	0	2	0	1	0	3	0
Manslaughter	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Illegal Mining	0	1	0	0			



					0	1	0
Abetment	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Threat of							
death	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total	1	17	1	12	2	28	5

Turn-around time

Accra

It was difficult to collate how long it takes for advice to be given on dockets referred for advice from the data collated. However the letters requesting for information stated the period January to June 2018. It is therefore safe to assume that for most of the dockets it took more than six months for advice to be given. This assumption is based on the fact that Table 1 above shows that most of the requests for advice, 26 dockets, had not been responded to.

The feedback time from the three police stations (Dansoman, Madina and La) as provided in the table below gives a better picture and supports the above assertion. The information shows that the average turn-around time for cases those stations referred to the A-G, is between 9 and 10 months.

Table7.

Interval for Responses	Feedback received	Feedback yet to be received
1-2 months	0	1
3-4 months	0	2
5-6 months	0	1
9-10 months	0	4
11-12 months	1	0
Total	1	8



Kumasi

In Kumasi the turn-around time was very short. On the average it took the A-G's 1-2 months to respond to requests for advice on case dockets. Table 8 below which deals with response intervals indicates that 22 out of the 28 dockets advice was sought for were responded to between a month and two months.

Table 8

Interval for Responses	Feedback received	Feedback yet to be received
1-2 months	22	0
3-4 months	3	0
5-6 months	2	0
7-8 months	0	3
9-10 months	1	2
Total	28	5

Monitoring Cases under trial which have been consistently adjourned to find out the reasons for the persistent adjournments

Efforts were made to find out the number of cases under trial which are consistently adjourned and the reasons for the persistent adjournments. Paralegals tried to monitor such cases at the level of the police station however this exercise yielded very little results. It was difficult if not impossible to keep track of the cases and how long they have been ongoing because many of the suspects were very vague on how long their cases have been ongoing. Here again, the same reason adduced for the turnaround time monitoring came into play. Investigators were not willing to provide information and many suspects could also not say much. However some reasons were recorded from conversations with some police officers, lawyers and suspects. Key among the reasons r were:

Absence of prosecutors (6)

Unfinished investigations (6)

Absence of witnesses (5)



Stakeholder interviews

In a bid to enrich the report interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to incorporate their views into the report. These include the Director of Public Prosecutions at the A-G's Department, the Director of the Legal Aid Scheme, Police Officers and Legal Practitioners. They all seem to agree that it takes at least six months for most dockets to be responded to, especially in Accra. They also felt that:

- The number of people working on the case dockets is inadequate. Moreover and they are the same people who go to court to prosecute other cases.
- The number of channels cases go through before they get to the AG's office also leads to the delays in working on the cases i.e cases move from the: District to Divisional to Regional to Headquarters before arriving at the AG's office

"Cases sent to the Attorney-General Office take about 5month and more before advice is given on this because cases have to be sent to the divisional, regional and headquarters before it is sent to the AG all these processes causes delay in justice delivery"

- Lack of proper supervision at the various levels also leads to delays, i.e if cases are worked on properly right from the onset and well supervised, there will be no back and forth on the cases before they are sent to the AG's office.
- Some officers have just decided not to work on the cases so the cases take a longer time before they are worked on.
- Proper investigations are not done on the cases leading to cases being done without the needed details.

With regard to the initiation and prosecution of all criminal offences generally, the causes of delays identified are as follows:

1. **Being detached from the persons seeking justice**: all criminal offences in principle are committed against the Republic itself; the complainant or victim can only be a witness in the case. The accused persons are arrested and detained by the police who are also in charge of criminal investigations and commuting accused persons from detention to court and vice versa. Unlike in private practice where lawyers directly represent the interests of their clients in a case, Attorneys represent the Republic and are therefore detached from both sides of a criminal case. Both sides have no control over how the prosecution is carried



other than through prayers to the court by the accused person. The detachment mentioned above may explain the lack of urgency in the prosecution of some cases, some of which take many years to be completed.

- 2. **Bureaucracy**: as a department of a Ministry, the AGD is plagued with winding bureaucratic processes which cause delays in the filing and service of court processes among others. The bureaucracy affects the Police Service and Prison Service as well as the hospitals and other institutions who in various ways contribute to the investigations (autopsy, vehicle examination etc.) and the prosecution (field tests, expert evidence etc.) of cases.
- 3. **Being understaffed**: the division does not have enough Attorneys to prosecute all criminal cases that come to the AGD. Recent demands for the increase in the number of attorneys have led to the employment of a number of new attorneys in September 2018. It cannot be said that the division does not continue to remain understaffed. Attorneys have too many cases to work on at every point in time. Being overworked undermines the welfare of employees and has its own drawbacks on efficiency, some of which include the inability of Attorneys to attend all trials especially when two or more coincide in different courts. This leads to many adjournments in trials which have already started and delays in trials which are yet to start. The problem is compounded when some Attorneys have to go on official leave (education, maternity or annual). The number reduces and the cases of those on leave have to be re-assigned to other Attorneys who will have to start preparing for the case from the very beginning in order to properly prosecute the case from the point it has already reached.

The current Minister of Justice, Ms Gloria Akuffo recently confirmed that the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's Department has half the number of state attorneys required to effectively carry out its mandate. https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2018/02/14/attorney-generals-department-requires-over-600-state-attorneys-minister/

- 4. **Insufficient logistics**: These include stationery, books and law reports all of which are essential for the efficient execution of their mandate. Attorneys sometimes have to make provision for themselves or go outside of the office to find supplies. These contribute to delays in preparing for cases or even in filing processes for the continuation of the trial.
- 5. **Inadequate office space**: Attorneys at the AGD at all levels share office spaces, in twos and sometimes threes. This contributes to delays in access to justice because Attorneys do not have enough room to organise themselves properly,



interview witnesses or have privacy to adequately prepare for trials. It is easy to be distracted when other people share small spaces with an Attorney and they get visitors. There is no provision for conference rooms or witness meeting rooms at the Ministry.

- 6. Insufficient resources: This accounts for the insufficiency in providing office stationery and supplies and employing more Attorneys. Other problems are difficulty in getting fuelled vehicles for official duties and getting enough staff at the Registry for the prompt filing of cases and service of filed processes. Attorneys have to use their own means of transportation to go to and from court every day.
- 7. **Delayed and incomplete investigations**: Criminal investigations are carried out by the Police Investigators. Considering the lack of resources and facilities to aid in the investigations as well as the challenges facing the Police Service itself, it is unsurprising that investigations sometimes fall short of the required standards with respect to the time it is completed and the content itself. Investigations may go on for several months. Until investigations are complete and case dockets are handed over to the AGD, the Attorney has no option than to wait. Attorneys may direct for further investigations or for further information on aspects of the case already investigated leading to further delays.
- 8. **Difficulty in finding or bringing prosecution witnesses**: It is in the interest of justice that cases are properly prosecuted with all the available evidence. There are times when witnesses refuse to give testimony for one reason or another, fail to show up for examination due to financial constraints (transportation) or the inability to get time off work to appear especially when examination has dragged on for many days. An Attorney confronted with such a case may buy time with prayers for adjournment or decide that the witness be removed from the witness list if it becomes to get the witness to give testimony.



Inputs from Stakeholder Round Table Discussions

The report was shared and discussed at a stakeholder's round table. Some stakeholders were of the view that in addition to all the issues raised above most of the delays affect cases of indigents who do not have lawyers. The result is that there is no one following up on the dockets and it is easy for such dockets to fall through the cracks or even get lost.

It is a known fact that Ghana has a challenge in terms of its lawyer population, a situation which is common to many Africa countries. Unfortunately paralegals who have been used extensively in other jurisdictions to support the work of lawyers in justice delivery are not recognised in Ghana although many CSOs use them to support indigents in various ways.

Recommendations

- Ghana Bar Association should lead discussions in enacting and enforcing a paralegal act for Ghana. This will help improve access to justice to indigents
- The bureaucratic channels through which dockets are passed must be revised.
- There should be maximum cooperation and communication among the institutions and stakeholders involved in forwarding and reviewing of dockets along the various levels.
- More legal practitioners should be afforded the required training to supplement the increasing demand of legal services in the country.
- Official ways of using private communication channels like phone calls and emails should be structured to authorize their usage







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