

**Empowering Black Immigrants - An Innovative
Approach
in Developing Community Leaders and Mobilizing
the African and Caribbean Diaspora**

Senait Admassu, MSW

Febrary 9th, 2017



AFRICAN COMMUNITIES PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION

“Empowering Africans to Improve the Community Health & Wellness”

ACPHC MISSION IS “TO IMPROVE PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS WITHIN THE AFRICAN COMMUNITY.; INCREASING THE AVAILABILITY OF CULTURALLY-RELEVANT PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; PROVIDING EDUCATION TO REDUCE THE STIGMA OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG AFRICAN PEOPLE; AND FACILITATING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH ADVOCACY”

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Martin Luther King

Introduction to African Communities Public Health Coalition (African Coalition)

- African Coalition is a non profit organization, founded in 2009, in response to the growing challenges of mental illness in African communities, and to the lack of culturally competent outreach and educational mental health services.

Introduction to African Coalition cont.

- Although African Coalition started work in the mental health sector, it eventually grew to encompass outreach and education on immigration issues which was central to the experience and survival of all first generation African immigrants residing in Southern California.

African Immigrants in the United States (US)

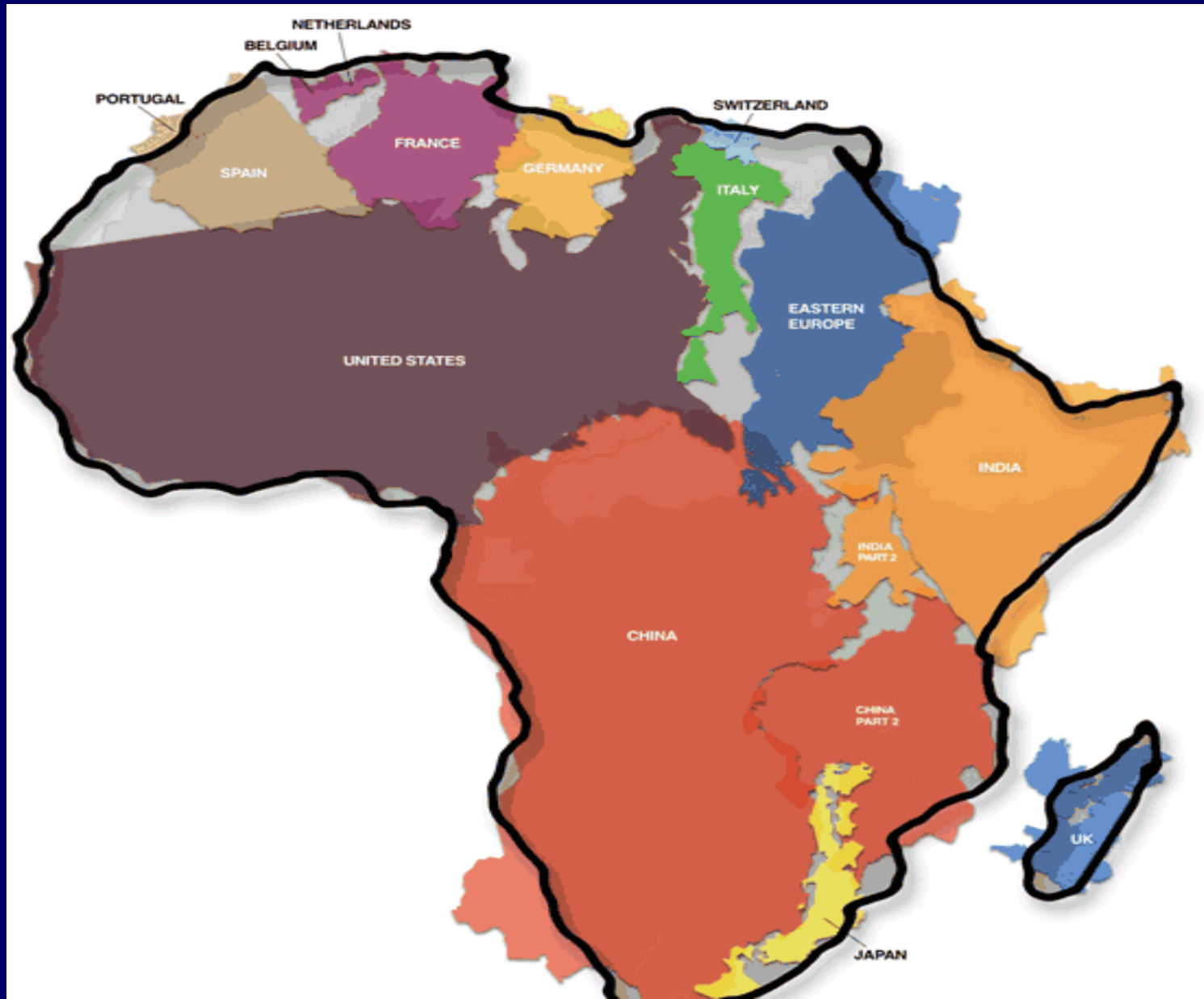
- The number of African immigrants in the United States grew 50-fold between 1970 and 2012, from 80,000 to 1.6 million, about 4 percent of the total foreign-born population.
- The top countries of origin for African immigrants were Nigeria (221,000) or 14 percent , Ethiopia(164,000) 10 percent , Egypt (143, 000) 9 percent , and Ghana (121,000) 8 percent, together constituting 41 percent of the African – born total.

▪ *American Community Survey (ACS) 2014*

African Immigrants in US cont.

- Four states have more than 100,000 African– born immigrants: New York (164,000), California (155,000), Texas (134, 000) and Maryland (120,000)
- Approximately 68,000 African born immigrants residing in Greater Los Angeles area. Of those, the ones who recently (past 10 years) immigrated are predominantly refugees (27%) who escaped civil war and ethnic conflicts in their various countries of origin

True Size of Africa



**“THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT
MENTAL HEALTH”**

UNITED NATIONS, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Attribution of mental illness

People in cultures that are individualistically oriented tend to attribute cause of mental illness to something within themselves—personal responsibility

People in cultures that have a collectivist orientation tend to attribute cause of mental illness to something outside the self—the responsibility of forces beyond their control

Stigma, Discrimination & Abuse

- For most African Black immigrant communities in the United States, stigma and lack of knowledge about mental illness and resources have contributed to limited access and poor utilization of appropriate mental health services.
- Stigma and discrimination are of the daily lived experience of the mentally ill and their families in the US.

Demographics of African Descendants in Los Angeles County

- Los Angeles City
Service Areas: 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8
Population: 3, 623
Estimated Prevalence of SED/SMI: 351

Los Angeles County
Population: 5, 848
Estimated Prevalence of SED/SMI in
Los Angeles County: 567

■
Place of Birth for Foreign Born in the United States.
B05006: American Community Survey ACS 2011 5 Year Estimate (2007 – 2011) U.S. Census Bureau

Stigma, Discrimination & Abuse

- Culturally competent resources are perceived to be important, yet systematically in short supply.
- Development and dissemination of mental health information and resources must acknowledge culturally respected strategies and representatives.

Village Healing Ways (VHW)

Evidence of Effectiveness

- The African Coalition created a leadership development project (VHW) that assist communities beyond the core mental health services. This practice is an initial effort to train the community lay-person and disseminate information about a service-oriented approach that focuses on treating and addressing individuals' or family members' mental health challenges, signs and/or symptoms and root causes from a culture specific perspective.

Engaging the African Immigrants

- Engaging the African immigrants is focused on a culturally competent leadership development and advocacy approach to find new solutions to reduce persistent health disparities and improve health outcomes of the African Diaspora.
- This new application is a promising practice, culturally appropriate and inclusive, includes the hands-on involvement of community leaders, and is an approach that has been successful in African community in Los Angeles County.

Why engaging the Community's lay-person ?

- To directly tackle the weakness in community capacity by building a highly competent community leaders/advocates
- Create public presence and pressure on public officials to take action
- Expand the base of community support for an issue or organization.
- Help a community overcome denial of a health issue.
- Increase cross-sector collaboration and shared resources
- Promote local ownership and decision-making about a health issue.

Our aim is to:

- Mobilize key influential African community leaders
- Recruit and train community volunteers to function as agents for change
- Develop culturally and linguistically competent curriculum
- Production and delivery of community workshops for African born and African descendant families and professionals

Learning from the Ethiopian Community Project

81% of the interviewees felt **MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE** in talking about mental health after participating in the workshops.

44% felt **MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE**, and 50% felt **MORE COMFORTABLE** in identifying a mental health problem.

69% felt **MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE** and 19% felt **MORE COMFORTABLE** knowing where to go for mental health services.

Learning from the Sierra Leone, Guinean , and Liberian Project

- **90%** of the interviewee reported that they learned something new from the program
- **60%** indicated that their ideas about mental health had changed as a result of the program
- Interviewees reported that they turn for help to family members **83%**, a friend **58%**, a religious leader **50%**
- **60% to 70%** interviewees reported that they are “more comfortable” to seek for a service than prior this program.

The Roles of Community Lay-persons in Mental Health Care

- Identify, develop rapport and support those persons that need services access services, both to mental and social services.
- Supporting persons with mental illness and their families in the community by providing a listening ear, providing vital information on services in the community.

Roles cont' d

- Encouraging people with mental illness to follow recommended treatment e.g. medication intake
- Provision of information on mental health and social services.

Remember strength exists in
numbers and community
involvement leads to community
empowerment.

Thank you
African Coalition
(2130_909-0985
www.africancoalition.org