

Aframano

by Mark Ryan

Mark Ryan is Professor in Computer Science at the University of Birmingham. He's visited Ashanti twice, and sponsors Aframano Village in Sekyere Central District.

Aframano is a village in the Ashanti region of Ghana, with about 518 people, of whom 269 are 18 years or less, divided into 68 households. The villagers are farmers, and their principal crops are cassava, plantain, corn, yam, groundnuts, and tomatoes. The crops mostly feed the community, but they sometimes produce a surplus to sell. Some of the people are indigenous to the Ashanti region, but a large number are migrants from northern regions that have become too dry for farming. There is a primary school with six classrooms and a junior school with three. There is a shortage of desks and very few books. Electricity lines pass through the village but the village is not yet connected to it.

At the time I visited in February 2019, the villagers had no electricity, no toilets, and only water from nearby Danyame, Nobuso and Afram streams. These streams do not dry up completely during the dry season, but they become very polluted, with agrochemicals and sewage. The community

practised open defecation. There were no latrines in the village, apart from two four-seat latrines in the schools. The most common diseases suffered by the villagers are malaria, diarrhoea and dysentery, probably mostly water or hygiene related. The community told us that about two out of ten babies die of water-related disease before age two.



Drinking water in Aframano

About half of the adults have mobile phones, though, and half of those were smartphones with the all-important WhatsApp, the de rigueur means of communication in Ghana. As they have no electricity, they have to bike the phones ten kilometres to the town of Kofiase to charge them.



A meeting near some houses in Aframano

My colleagues, friends and family were incredibly generous when I asked them in April 2018 to donate for sixty latrines (one per household), and for the repair of a borehole that had broken down some years before. My father delighted me by donating £400 as the first donation I received, and that may have helped set a good example. The largest single donation was from a friend who donated £1000. I couldn't help but ask him why he had decided to donate so much. He explained that, as a white person born in Africa, he felt he had a debt to that continent. But the bulk of donations

are the smaller ones. All told, including my matched funding and the gift aid we get on behalf of UK income-tax-paying donors, we raised £15581 by November 2018.

This week (on 4 February 2019) I went to look at the work that has been done and talk to the



Cecilia Danuomah and her house

villagers. Cecelia Danoumah has six children, so eight people live in her house. They are delighted with their latrine. The youngest child is four years old, and I was curious to know if he had learned to

use the toilet by himself. Yes, but I have to open the door for him first, she told me, and close it afterwards. I was concerned that a small child could fall through the hole, into the 3 metre pit. But I was told I need not worry about that ...

Sisoalice Dakonam says she has used her latrine every day since it was installed on 13 November 2018. So have the nine others that live in her house. In total, 61 latrines were built in Aframano. Because the soil is very rocky, it has been one of the most difficult latrine projects. Many holes had to be aborted after hitting rock at 2m, and the latrines re-sited.

By providing latrines and hygiene training about how to use them, the expectation is that the 20 per cent death rate before age two will decrease dramatically. Training is important, because people may be reluctant to change their habits if they don't understand the benefits. Without latrines, there is a very high incidence of diarrhoea in Ashanti villages. Most adults suffer from it for about five days out of seven. This is greatly reduced by the provision of latrines.

I talked with about six different households, including that of the village 'assembly man' (local councillor), Kwasi Alale. He's aged 32 and is in his second term of being the assembly man. Each term is four years, and there's an election next year. He struck me as a very calm and sensible person, so I hope he gets re-elected.

Ashanti Maps

Maps of Ashanti Development's area of operation are never satisfactory. Villages spring up and disappear as immigrants from the north settle, change their minds and move on. Communities swell, perhaps because a good water source becomes available, and then decline because the land is not as fertile as first thought. Little remains constant for long enough to map reliably.

At least the underlying geology is permanent, and volunteer hydrogeologists Simon and James drew us an excellent map some years ago. With its help we know where to drill boreholes with the best chance of success, and where to avoid. For example, no successful boreholes are likely to be drilled within 3km of the escarpment.

Sadly, this information wasn't available to earlier borehole drillers, who left many dry boreholes around the countryside. Worse, they left successful boreholes which no longer work for various avoidable reasons. We try hard not to fall into the same traps.

For example we do our utmost to encourage communities to pay for a caretaker, who can also sell the water for any borehole we drill. He charges very little – perhaps 20 peshewas a jerrycan in a typical village and less in one that is particularly poor. This money pays his wages and

News in Brief

Hardship Fund

Akua Gyami is a widow, bringing up twin daughters by herself. One of them, Penni, was diagnosed with diabetes at an early age, but recently the second, Kacra was also found to be a diabetic.

Akua works as a ka-ya-yo girl at Mampong market. This involves carrying huge bundles on her head, unloading lorries or carrying peoples' purchases home for them. In this way she manages to earn enough money to feed her children and provide Penni with medication. However, earning enough to supply two daughters with medication is beyond her, so we're adding her to our list of local hardship cases who receive a small monthly sum to keep them alive.

Unsustainable, unfashionable, and destined only for the utterly destitute, we think it's one of our best projects.



Bottle It Up

We're building a bottle latrine in Ashanti, but sadly it seems to be taking up more cement (the most expensive component) than an ordinary latrine. Never mind, it's fun doing something new and it looks wonderful



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Save the dates

Please join us:

on Friday May 31 for a film evening

on Saturday 27 July for our annual
party, Taste of Ghana

on Saturday 21 September from
around 2pm for our annual
Sponsored Walk

More information to follow