

Looking Out For The Children

by journalist Angela Cobbinah, who reminds us to keep checking whether local toddlers are adequately fed.

It is a familiar sound the world over, the excited whoops of children as they rush out of class to get their school dinners. It is no different at Gyetiase School, where children are lining up for lunch in an orderly fashion as they can muster. Today it's 'red red' – beans and gari with plantain.

Whereas meals for the primary and junior school pupils are funded by the government, those of the infants – two to four year-olds – come compliments of Ashanti Development.

“Before, the toddlers were always very hungry. Their parents would give them a packed lunch but this was often very basic, like rice mixed with oil,” explained infant teacher Leticia Asare.

“Added to this, they would often attend without having had breakfast. Having a hot, nutritious meal at lunch time has made all the difference and you can see the children are looking good and healthy.”

A Set Menu

There is a set menu for every day – tomorrow it

will be rice with meat or fish stew – and meals are freshly cooked on the premises by two cooks using local produce. On average about seventy children benefit from the scheme daily.

“It definitely encourages them to come to school,” added Leticia, whose post is funded by the charity.



Free school meals

“Sometimes when you stop a child on the road and ask them where they're going they will tell you 'I'm going to eat' rather than 'I'm going to school'," she laughed.

Ashanti Development is a volunteer charity, paying no wages or salaries in the UK. It was set up by London-based Ashantis who were concerned at the quality of life of people in their home villages.

The free school meals scheme at Gyetiase was one of Ashanti Development's early initiatives. However, it discovered that toddlers weren't gaining weight because mothers were saving the family food for their older children, so free breakfasts were introduced as well.

The Government Roll Out

In 2005, the government began rolling out its school feeding programme for pupils aged five and upwards as part of a nationwide public health initiative. As a result, the charity eventually ended the free breakfasts. Now it is considering re-introducing them.

“The youngsters often come to school feeling hungry as they may not have had a good breakfast at home,” said Leticia.

“They are at an important stage of their development and need all the nutrition they can get.”

The Doctors' Findings

In our part of Ashanti, most of the people are hungry most of the time. To combat this we teach villages better ways of farming and lend cash for farm inputs (see AD 41). In the meantime, to inform our decision on the future of the feeding

programme we asked our medics to carry out a proper medical check on the nutritional health of the toddlers.

In March, Dr Helen Booth, Dr Liz Styan and Chris Hartley-Sharpe spent a day taking height, weight and mid-upper arm circumference measurements of fifty-one of the seventy children who attend Gyetiase Infant School.



Weighing the children

Twenty-seven (53 per cent) of the children were female. The median age was three years six months, and the range was two years to four years

five months. Only one child had no available date of birth.

Afterwards the medics commented “In general the children seemed healthy and happy. We saw the school dinner being given out and it looked nutritious. There is a different meal for each day of the week providing dietary variation.

“There were no overweight children. The median weight for age was below the 50th centile suggesting that the school lunches provide important nutritional support to these children, they said,” they said.

The survey identified three undernourished children, one of whom had already been identified by our cook. In case there are safeguarding issues involved, all three children were referred to the village elders, and Ashanti Development will monitor progress.

The medics overall recommendation, which we accept, is that school lunches should continue, that it was unnecessary to reinstate school breakfasts at present and that volunteers should be asked to undertake a nutritional survey regularly every one to two years.

Masks for Mosi-Kurah

by Director Tony Shah

Before lockdown last year, I was privileged to visit Ghana to see the great work that Ashanti Development had completed in the region, and on my return to the UK had planned to spread the word so that more people learned about our charity. However covid19 arrived and changed the world so that everything was put on hold.

We have seen how this deadly virus has transformed all of our lives. The impact on Third World countries will be even more profound as villages do not have the same care support that we take for granted. Fortunately ‘case’ and ‘death’ numbers in Ghana are still relatively low as the virus has not yet reached the Ashanti villages but when it does arrive there will be little or no defence.

Covid19 has also made a significant impact to the incomes of all aid organisations, including Ashanti Development’s, which last year dropped by over sixty per cent with projections for 2021 not looking good. This means we had to review projects so we could concentrate our efforts on villages’ immediate needs.

We have also had to come up with new fund-raising activities and over the past six months have been selling Ghanaian face masks which are made by a small team based in our head quarters village of Gyetiase, in Ashanti Region. This team is led by a young disabled man, Kofi, who contracted polio when young but was not put off by his condition – he even rides a bike around the village – and who is now the head trainer in Ashanti Development’s dressmaking school.



Kofi

The masks were an instant success. They raised so much money that we decided to use some

to sponsor the migrant village of Mosi-Kura for latrines and hygiene training. With luck and continued sales we may even be able to give them clean water as well.



Masks for Mosi-Kurah

Mosi-Kura is a village of refugees from climate change, who came south because it was too difficult to survive in their home villages. There are around three hundred people divided into thirty households living in the village all of whom are farmers, growing crops including beans, cassava, plantain and other vegetables and tomatoes. Latrines and hygiene training will make a world

of difference to the community, enabling them to throw off water-related disease and giving them much more energy to work their way out of poverty.

As for the masks, we’re still offering a wide range for sale. They have eye catching designs and make ideal presents for friends or family, or indeed any occasion. For birthdays or easter they are an ideal way to say that you are thinking of people. They sell at £5 each or - £20 for five or - £30 for ten.

If you’re interested, please contact info@ashanti-development.org.uk. If the masks keep selling who knows – we may be able to sponsor a second village.

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Fund Raiser

by Helen Cross

I started fundraising for Ashanti Development by asking friends to pay to come to dinner. I would also give talks to groups and show slides of my first two trips to Gyetiase. As everyone will understand, neither of these have been possible recently!

In September, I became aware of an online challenge to walk and/or run the equivalent distance of Lands End to John o'Groats within a year – and that appealed to me. I thought if I made it just a bit more challenging, and decided to complete the “journey” in 6 months, it might be worthy of asking for sponsorship!



Helen Cross

So – I decided that I would walk (with a little running) the distance, of 874 miles, between 28th September when the current challenge started and the end of the Easter weekend, on Monday 5th April. I am just on target, but not as far as I hoped!

I still need to cover an average of almost 4.5 miles a day until Easter.

I hope that readers of Ashanti News might like to sponsor me to finish this challenge! Every penny per mile you can offer will cost you £8.74 in total (or £4.06 if you start from tomorrow rather than the beginning – writing on 2nd January). If you would like to sponsor me, please email me at helen@crosspurposes.co.uk and tell me, as that will help to keep me motivated through the colder weather! Just after Easter I will confirm how many miles I have completed, (hopefully the full 874) and then I will ask you to pay the money to Ashanti Development, through the donate button on the website. You can follow my progress, if you would like to, at <https://www.endtoend.run/lejog-6-map/>

You just need to enter my name (Helen Cross) in the box at the top of the leaderboard, and it will tell you how many miles I have covered, how many I still have to do, and where in the country I have reached (currently Penrith!)

I am not raising this money for a particular project, just to help keep the funds up to help pay wages while we are in this difficult year.

News in Brief

- Here's a picture of one of the big problems facing the villages we work with in Ashanti. Badly kept rubbish tips and communal latrines result in the ground being covered with plastic waste, while plastic recycling is little more than a pious hope in Ghana.



Example of plastic rubbish

The result isn't just dirty: it's also dangerous. Snakes can hide under pieces of plastic, and

rainwater collects in them providing mosquitoes with a perfect place to lay their eggs.

- Like many of us, Martha has suffered from the side effects of lockdown and put on some excess weight. To encourage her to lose this and raise much needed funds for Ashanti Development, we are asking you to sponsor her in her ambitious efforts to lose a stone.



Martha

You can do this by visiting <https://paypal.me/pools/c/8wt79vEMAn>

- Not only are we providing latrines and hygiene training to the villages of Krobo and Mosi-Kura, with Gyamtokorum village hard on their heels, but we've also got orders for a record five boreholes, three of which are to be funded by our amazingly generous sponsors, Softwire Ltd.



The borehole at Esereso