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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.

A year in the life of the farm support project

The following farm report is the first of a set of reports that will follow farmers through a year of work. We hope to report their activities, good news, and bad news where applicable.

Ashanti Development Director Nicholas Aboagyie reports that the farm support project is going well.

The main rains normally start in April and this is the time for planting. March is the time of preparation in the fields. This year has been different.

The main rainy season was late this year. This had created some doubts and concerns for the farmers. There had been some rain in early March which is earlier than normal for the main rains. Nicholas persuaded farmers to delay planting until late April or early May unless they were located close to water bodies and able to carry or pump water to their fields.

Right now (mid-May) many of the farmers are in the early stage of the planting season. Those that were lucky enough to be close to water sources and planted in March are almost two months ahead and will start harvesting in early June.

Crops such as corn, cassava, yam, groundnut, rice and vegetables are being grown.

All the farms visited are doing well and the farmers are very happy that their crops are developing.

The major concern of most farmers is the unpredictable weather. They attribute this to climate change. The timing of the rainy seasons has changed, and the farmers are having to try to guess when there will be regular rain so that they can plant. Planting too early with irregular rain and the crops will die in the fields.



Dwormoh in his carrot field



Kofi Asanti with his corn (maize)

The photos show corn and carrot crops. The carrot farmer is called Dwormoh, the corn farmer is Kofi Asanti. They both have farms located close to a stream from which they can pump water during the dry periods. They were able to plant in March after the early rains and their crops are well on the way to an early June harvest.

Climate change in the Ashanti Region

By journalist Angela Cobbinah

Ashanti Development is helping farmers to thrive despite the impacts of climate change to the Ashanti region of Ghana

GLOBAL warming in Africa is usually seen through the lens of catastrophic extreme weather events, flash floods and prolonged drought that require rapid humanitarian intervention. But there is another side to climate change, the insidious shift in weather patterns over the decades that has turned savannah into desert and forests into savannah, leading to the loss of productive agricultural land. Poverty, migration, and food insecurity inevitably follow.

The region in which Ashanti Development works has borne witness to this process as people migrate from Northern Ghana to escape desertification and settle in an area where loss of forest cover has led to the demise of the main income earner, Cocoa. “Temperatures have been rising steadily since 1982,” explains Nicholas Aboagye, project manager for the charity Ashanti Development, that has been working in the area

for the past 15 years. The maximum temperature in Ashanti Region has increased from 35°C to 40°C over recent years. The Ashanti region now suffers wildfires every year due to a combination of these new high temperatures and careless bush burning by farmers and hunters. Wildfires even take place in protected forest zones and further contribute to the deforestation already taking place due to land clearance and logging.”

Cocoa has been wiped out as a commercial crop in the Ashanti region and, in place of secondary rainforest that once blocked one’s line of vision, a type of wooded savannah has emerged. The process began in 1983 following the uncontrollable wildfire that engulfed the country, not least in the Mampong area, where 80 per cent of the cocoa farms were destroyed by fire. The crop eventually rallied but never regained its former strength, leaving local people destitute.

“I was shocked by what I found,” recalls Ashanti Development co-founder Martha Boadu of her visit to her village of Gyetiase in 2000 after 18 years in London.

“Farmers didn’t know anything about climate change, just that rainy and dry seasons were becoming more and more unpredictable, making it difficult to grow Cocoa. It used to be a thriving place. Without Cocoa people had nothing and were so poor they were going hungry,” she says.

Some moved their farms to neighbouring Western Region and Brong Ahafo, others tried to make a living out of former subsistence crops like yam and cassava, but not very successfully. Yet more villagers joined the migration trail to the cities and further afield to Europe.



Climate change and farming

At around the same time, a steady stream of people from northern Ghana began settling in Ashanti. They had started arriving in their numbers around 40 years ago, initially to work on Cocoa farms and later to set up their own farms because of the changing weather back home.

The convergence of migrants settling in an area struggling to get back on its feet, prompted Ashanti Development to embark on its ambitious farm support programme, which aims to adapt farmers to the new climate order.

“Savannah does not support Cocoa, so we have to have crops suited to the new climatic conditions, like yam, cassava and maize,” explains Aboagye. “We have varieties of maize developed in Ghana that give you two harvests a year, while cassava is highly versatile because it can be processed in different ways, for example into gari and flour; the tubers can also stay in the soil for a year. All this makes it an important food security crop. There is also a focus on vegetables like carrots, green peppers, cabbage, garden eggs and tomatoes, which can be easily grown on small plots of land through crop rotation and bring in a lot of money.”

More than 240 farmers have participated in the farm support programme since it started seven years ago, each one receiving a small loan, training and inputs like fertiliser and seed as well as items like Wellington boots to protect against snake bites.

“Our farmers have the experience but not the technical knowledge,” continues Aboagye. “We monitor their progress for five years and if there are any problems, we help solve them. We judge the effectiveness of the programme by increased

yields and the higher standard of quality of the crop as well as the overall change it brings to the lives of those taking part.”

One of its beneficiaries is Shaba Tinkani, who travelled the 300 or so kilometres from northern Ghana 15 years ago and is now a prosperous farmer, having produced bumper harvests of yam, rice and maize and won the 2019 Best Farmer of the Year award for the Sekyere Central local government area.



Shaba Tinkani talks about his successful farming year

“In 2018, I produced 15 bags of rice but last year I was able to increase this to 35 bags. I bought a [motor] tricycle for 7,000 Ghana cedis [about \$1,300] with the proceeds,” he says proudly.

“I have learnt a lot,” he adds with a modest smile. “One of the lessons I have learnt that it is better to plant rice rather than broadcast it, as I did before. It was a surprise to me to be told that, but the results have been very good.”

Mentioning that he has three wives and 20 children, he said the extra money in his pocket has also enabled him to send some of the family to live in the Ashanti capital, Kumasi, opening up other avenues for income.

“We want a village to concentrate on two main crops that they can supply all year round,” explains Aboagye. “In that way they will develop a brand that is abundant and will attract traders.”

Although the local government runs its own farm support programme that likewise encourages the cultivation of so-called savannah crops like yam and cassava, it does not include any training, he points out.

“The training element is very important,” he insists. “Without it, farmers will continue to use traditional methods of farming and get lower yields.”

The dressmaking training school in Gyetiase

The following report was prepared by Master Kofi Boampong, who runs the dressmaking training school in Gyetiase.

In summary;

- Master Kofi currently has twenty two apprentices from 5 different villages in and around Gyetiase.
- Five apprentices completed their training over the past 12 months and a further nine are expected to complete in the next 12 months.
- The school has recently been provided with an additional ten chairs and tables by Ashanti Development.

They have five hand sewing machines, 4 electric and 1 industrial. All are well used. Master Kofi is appealing for help to replace some of these machines which require very frequent repairs and to buy a knitting machine which would help them to “beautify” the dresses they make. Master Kofi has attended 2 courses to develop his dress making and training skills.

The photo shows Master Kofi and apprentices presenting protective beekeeping clothing developed by Master Kofi and supplied to the beekeeping project by the school.



Master Kofi and apprentices

Covid face masks and water at Mosi-Kura

Tony Shah, a Director at Ashanti Development and Kofi Boampong who runs the dressmaking training school in Gyetiase have been working together to make and sell face masks.

This enterprise is generating income for both Kofi’s team and for Ashanti Development while satisfying a real need and providing very striking masks for sale. The Ashanti Development portion of the income has been used to provide latrines and hygiene training to Mosi-Kura village. Previous issues of Ashanti News have covered this story but the following is an update to the project.

In addition to the previously reported latrines and hygiene training, Ashanti Development was donated funds by Softwire to provide a borehole in the village. The stream had dried up and villagers were having to collect water from another stream 5 miles distant from Mosi-Kura. The geophysicists found that there was ground water underneath the village. The bad news was that the water was approximately 200 metres below ground. This was too deep for our planned borehole, but we discovered a 32 year-old abandoned borehole just

outside the village. Mechanics were sent to see if the old borehole could be refurbished.



Mosi-Kura borehole

The good news is that the old borehole has now been repaired by our engineers and the initial results look promising. The old pipes have been removed and will be replaced and a hand pump installed if the current water quantity and quality test proves to be good.

Solar power in the villages

Three years ago Swiss charity BasAid helped us run a major drive to tell people about the climate change and materials waste impacts of using battery-powered and kerosene lamps in the villages. BasAid funded the distribution of solar lamps as an alternative.



Solar panels

Today, the lessons seem to have been learned. Many people have switched to the more sustainable lighting solution of solar powered lamps. An additional benefit of the solar power is that people are able to charge their mobile phones using excess energy generated by the sun.

Worms and health

By Ruth Simpson – Ashanti Development Volunteer

Ruth Simpson was part of the last group that visited Gyetiase in January 2020 before Covid restrictions made such visits impossible in March 2020. During her visit, Ruth returned to Esereso village. She had previously been to Esereso together with Nicholas in 2016 and had seen children with extremely large tummies. Those tummies were the stimulus behind the De-worming Project that Ruth has led.

The following is her Esereso and Dagati report from January 2020.

When I first visited Esereso in 2016 the children looked uncomfortable and lethargic. Many had problems walking because of their grossly enlarged tummies. This excluded many children from attending school as they could not manage the long walk.

After spending time fund raising and after the delay caused by the burning down of the drug storage building in Accra, we finally started the worm treatment in 2018.

During my 2020 visit I met some of the Esereso children and their mothers. I was delighted to “bump” into some of them as the children ran along the road. I asked mothers and children if the de-worming treatment had helped. One mum who spoke no English but had probably attended a mission school because she knew the word “MIRICLE”, shouted it out loud and the others joined in.

The de-worming treatment is ongoing with initial years of larger dosages followed by an annual maintenance dose given at school. Esereso now has latrines and clean water which will play a large part in reducing the worm problem.

While in Esereso I went to see the Community Based Agent (CBA) to ask about health issues in the village. He told us that about 100 children lived in the village and about 10 were suffering malnutrition. Weanimix, a highly nutritious mix of boiled water, ground nuts, beans, and maize, was being given to these 10 children. The Weanimix formula was developed by a doctor from UCLH (University College London Hospital) who visited Ghana about ten years ago to assist Ashanti Development. She found a high death rate in babies and under-fives. Weanimix has since saved the lives of many children and reduced the infant mortality rate to virtually nil amongst the Ashanti Development supported villages.

We also asked the CBA about hygiene. The CBA confirmed they teach everyone to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Likely as a result of the new latrines and clean water, there have been no diarrhoea cases in Esereso in the past twelve months.

While we were in the village one mother came to see us with a child that appeared to have a scalded hand. The wound was very muddy. I asked her to wash it. The nurse was due to visit Esereso the next day so the mother was asked to keep the wound clean and to show it to the nurse. I gave the CBA several packets of Panadol and some sterile dressings for this type of minor wound.

Next we travelled to the villages of JY and Dagati. The mums there told me that worm tablets had been given to the children by the community nurse. This had been our objective. The best way to achieve a consistent and thorough distribution is to involve the community nurses.

The project has been such a big success. In fact the government has now started providing worm tablets for the children in school, but that still leaves a lot of children who are unable to get to school without treatment. This is a particular problem for remote villages.

During 2019, 842 children who were not attending school were given de-worming tablets. For these children we still pay for the worm tablet and reimburse any community nurse travel costs to remote villages.

A nurse told me of one village she visited to supply de-worming tablets that didn't have road access. She left her car at the road and walked along a bush path to the village to ensure the children had their tablets. That is the sort of determination that is making a success of this project.



A small boy with enlarged tummy typical of child with worms

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Ashanti Development is now registered on Amazon Smile. So, when you buy anything on Amazon, please buy it through Amazon Smile and use Ashanti Development as your chosen charity. This link will take you to the sign up page. <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/gp/chpf/homepage?q=ashanti+development&orig=%2F&ie=UTF-8>

0.5% of your net purchase price will go to Ashanti Development.

Dates for your diary

Taste of Ghana

Join us for our annual summer party in central London on Saturday 24 July. The Ghanaian community in London is going to cook us all a Ghanaian meal, and there will be music and raffle prizes.

Sponsored Walk

Our annual sponsored walk from Old St Pancras Church will be on Saturday 11 September.

Further details at www.ashantidevelopment.org and on facebook.