

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.

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Dispensing Water to the Community

By Leon Barrington

Maji Dispensers is a company manufacturing electronic taps that allow people to collect their water using prepaid WaterCards. The people of Gyetiase, where Leon has just installed the system, rate it 'Excellent'. They tell us it has put an end to disputes about collecting and banking money, and allows them to spend the water profits on something that can benefit everyone. Leon describes the system below.

As a software and electronics engineer working in the water sector, I have first-hand experience of the difficulties involved in community water provision in West Africa. Collecting money from water customers in rural areas is, without exception, a difficult task that requires a great deal of oversight in order to ensure that funds for maintenance and repairs are collected reliably. It was this experience that led us to build the Maji Dispenser.

In September 2022, we were very fortunate to be invited by Ashanti Development to a village in Ashanti that required upgrades to its water system. We were cordially greeted by our host, Nicholas Aboagye, who helped us to tour some

of fantastic Ashanti Development projects that are being worked upon. Having a great deal of experience dealing with charities in Africa, we were quite astounded by the scale and quality of work that had been done on such a small budget. I can state with confidence that Ashanti Development is the most effective charity that I have seen in terms of value for money. Of particular merit is the way that the charity engages the community and requires their involvement with and contribution to any project – an absolute must for sustainable development and something that the charity does exceptionally well.

The arduous, six-and-a-half-hour bus journey from Accra is relieved somewhat by some spectacular scenery as we approach Mampong from Kumasi. Arriving at the delightfully friendly and welcoming village, we noted a few familiar sights. Water collection points are adorned with padlocked brass taps – a sad but necessary evil, as a caretaker must ensure that each water user pays 20 pesewa for each bucket of water that they collect. These collection points unfortunately spend most of the day locked and idle, as water is only available at set times - once in the morning and once in the afternoon. This is a typical, albeit well-run, answer to the problem of water revenue collection. It is a manpower intensive operation to ensure that all the money is collected and accounted for, and in my

experience, it is prone to error and loss of funds. Until now, there didn't exist any reasonable alternative.



Our electronic dispenser is designed to replace these taps, allowing customers to collect water 24/9 at a set price, paying only for what they use. They pay for their water by inserting their Maji WaterCard, which means that no human operator is required, and every penny of revenue can be collected and accounted for. Ashanti Development, in conjunction with the village water committee, were kind enough to partner with us in order to trial this system, and have gone above and beyond in helping us to ensure its success. Thanks to the “can-do”

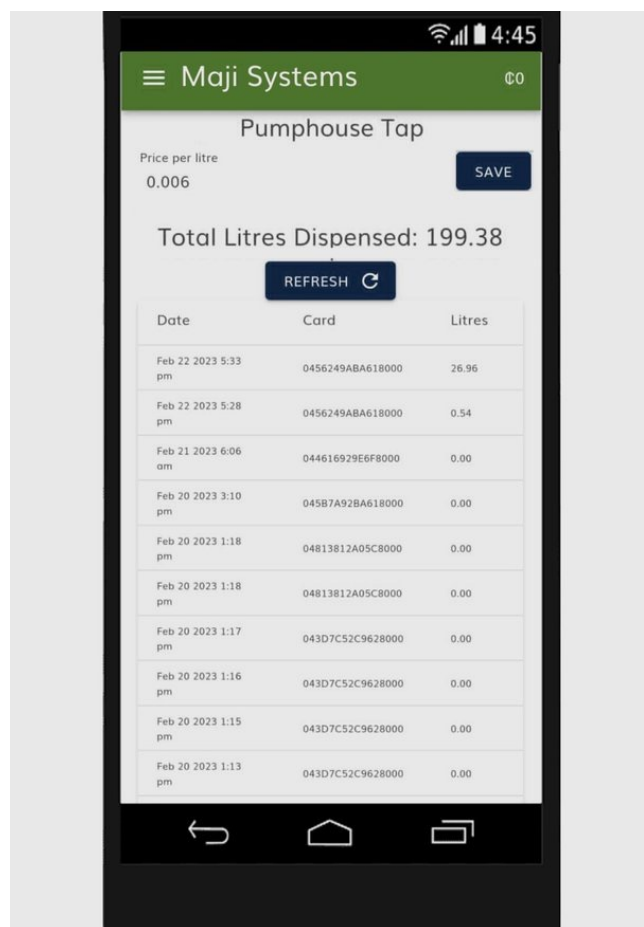
attitude of Nicholas and his team, we were able to install the system quickly and without any problems. Warding off the throngs of friendly and exceptionally curious children was the only impediment! After installation, the community was very keen to begin collecting the water, and the operation of the WaterCard and dispenser came very naturally to them.



A local, charity employee and one shopkeeper are given the job of “reselling” – that is topping up peoples' WaterCards with credit in exchange for cash. At the end of the month, all this cash can be collected and accounted for providing a sustainable way to ensure that there is always money to pay for repairs and maintenance of



the water system. WaterCard reselling is a great bonus of the system, as it allows anybody with an NFC smartphone to make a small income from commission on water sales. It is a fantastic way for single mothers, shopkeepers, or those with health impairments to earn some money. It also provides an incentive for them to watch over and take care of the water system.



All transactions and statistics are available online and via the Maji app, as the meters are connected to the internet and report data to the cloud. I am delighted to report that in the first five days alone, over 40,000 litres of clean water have already been dispensed to customers in exchange for 125 cedis worth of water revenue - revenue that is now fully accountable, and can be used for breakages and repairs to the system. This is much higher than anticipated, and proves the value of being able to collect water in any amount, at any time of the day. We are so grateful to the people of the village, to Nicholas, and to Ashanti Development for making this vision a reality. We hope that the dispensers will serve the community well for years to come.

Saving More Lives by Health Screening

By Helen Hartley-Sharpe

Helen is honorary consultant physician at UCLH and a director of Ashanti Development.

The well-known phrase 'a stitch in time saves nine' describes the aim of health screening. Preventing ill health through education, early identification and management of diseases can improve quality of life, saving lives and money. Ashanti Development, with sponsorship from the Dorset village of Cerne Abbas, have been working with the local Ghana Health Service (GHS). Together they have visited villages in rural Ashanti which have limited access to healthcare services, to provide education and testing for a variety of conditions.

The conditions that are screened for are the infectious diseases tuberculosis (TB) and HIV, and for tropical skin diseases. Cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) is a significant problem, as it is world-wide, so villagers are also screened for diabetes and hypertension. Incidence of breast cancer is increasing, often presents at a late stage and is the leading cause of cancer deaths in Ghana. Guidance and encouragement to do monthly breast

self-examination is provided at the screening sessions.



So far, over four hundred villagers have been screened in five villages: - Atonsuagya, Nyinampong, Ankamadua, Jansa and more recently Amoaman. One case of TB and three of HIV have been identified. Although this may seem a small number of cases, TB is 33 and HIV is three times the UK rate respectively for these diseases. Early identification reduces the risk of infecting other people and effective free treatment is available. Surprisingly, perhaps, high rates of high blood pressure have been

found. We are working with GHS to understand whether this is a true finding, and if so why and how best to advise and manage people with hypertension. Nearly one in five women did not know about the recommendation to do regular breast self-examination and report any concerns early, underlining the importance of public health education.



In summary, the pilot community outreach health education and screening exercise undertaken jointly between Ashanti Development and GHS has proved to be feasible, effective and acceptable to the local population, providing valuable insights into their health needs. It is

planned to roll it out every three months to other rural villages. Francis Kodie, who oversees screening in Sekyere Central, sent a WhatsApp message after the recent screening: '....is worthwhile as a result of the distance between our hard to reach communities and our health centres....moving to the communities to screen them is a good measure for them to have easy access to health service'.



Helen is fourth from the left. The second person to her left is District Director of Health Suzanna Nkrumah.

Helen adds: On behalf of Ashanti Development, I would like to thank Ms Suzanna Nkrumah, Director, Sekyere Central District Health Directorate for her collaboration. Many thanks to Mr Francis Kodie who oversaw the recent screening and to the Ashanti Development team: Nicholas Aboagye (Country Director), Belinda and fellow volunteers Chris Hartley-Sharpe and Liz Styan and to the people of Cerne Abbas for their continued support.

Ashanti Visit

Professor Richard Black, our newest director (see news in brief), visited Ashanti in February. The following text is based on notes taken by him and his partner, Christina Oelgemoller. Any mistakes may be caused by poor interpretation or misunderstandings, but they will definitely be down to us rather than them.

Zongo village

The Zongo have a historical presence since precolonial times in Ghana. Zongo, a Hausa¹ concept, refers loosely to the presence of far distance or cross border trade communities in market areas of urban places. One of those 'Zongo villages' is a neighbourhood of Mampong where newcomers to the town – and

sometimes to the region – come when they first arrive. Those who live in the neighbourhood include people from around ten different ethnic groups from further north, mostly Muslims, each with their own spokesperson, often referred to as 'chief.' There is also a 'Zongo chief' who represents the wider group, and an assemblyman. It is not an exclusive community since some Ashanti also have their homes in the settlement.

We visited an old man who has lived in the settlement for over fifty years – he said he came to Mampong from the north in 1976 [which was after the first of the major Sahelian droughts]. He said people have continued to come to the settlement throughout his time in Mampong. The Zongo community is important as it negotiates mobility of people with those settled in their respective areas. Anyone who arrives and is part of a specific group will find shelter and support there. Those who cannot claim membership will fall under the responsibility of the Zongo chief. This is in line with Islamic principles of the welcoming of strangers. Local areas have benefitted from the presence of Zongo villages as they facilitate change and integration.

The expectation is that people will soon engage in economic activity and the community helps to place them for example in construction, trade, or in farming in a village outside Mampong. From

there moving on is manifold; some are displaced and go back as and when possible. Some are seasonal workers who move on to farm jobs and return after the season is completed. Some settle. Yet others will move on without coming back. The Zongo village is thus a hub of care and facilitation. It is deeply integrated not only in the relations and economies of the urban spaces but also in relationships and exchanges of the wider rural area of Mampong.



Mampong Zongo

¹ A group of people mainly in Central and West Africa.

The assemblyman recently appealed to Ashanti Development to fund a WASH² project in the 'village'. In rural areas, the unskilled work of digging pits for the latrines is usually done by those who will benefit in order to make sure that they have the knowledge for maintenance once the building is completed, but this proved impossible in the urban environment of Mampong. Instead, the assemblyman procured funds that enabled hired labourers to do this work. 10% of the cost of establishing latrines was raised by the assemblyman to make up for input in-kind. Our old man, who cannot walk easily any more, had benefitted from the WASH activities and was clearly very proud of his new latrine. He said that he would not let anyone else use it!

Three New Villages

Monday saw us visiting three villages – Aframso 1 and 2, and Nkwanta. All three are villages that have not yet benefitted from latrines nor received hygiene training, though all already engage with Ashanti Development in the farm support project and so are aware of their approach. All three have asked Ashanti Development for their engagement. The purpose of the visits was to hear how people are doing at the moment and form an impression of the conditions that people find themselves in.

All three villages are off-grid, which is not ideal, but which sees people improvising – for example we saw a number of small solar lighting units being recharged. All are farming villages which grow maize in addition to rice, yam, cassava and vegetables. The land is considered very fertile in the area and all villages benefit from water sources, though this also poses a problem.



The first village we were hosted in was Aframso One, which is slightly larger than Aframso Two but the conditions are for all intents and purposes the same. Aframso One is home to about fifty households, Aframso 2 to about 45. Both have water supply by borehole and Aframso Two has a solar-powered water pump

built in 2022. There is also one hand pump built by Ashanti Development but the stream is still used for drinking and cooking. When asked why people didn't use the pump for drinking and cooking and the stream for other water needs they told us that one pump wasn't enough for all the population.

Questions about health, and especially diarrhoeal disease, were met with some embarrassed chatting and laughing. All agreed that a new disease had emerged in the past three years involving swelling and very painful legs, which has not yet been reported to the District Health authorities. When asked if there was a pattern to the circumstances under which this appeared, people were not sure. It certainly needs investigation by the relevant authorities³.

The governance system seems mainly to mirror that of many villages around this area, except that in Aframso One information on elections for the unit committee which serves a cluster of six to seven villages came too late, so no one in the village was able to stand. They have formed their own development committee instead. There is also a parent-teacher committee for the nearby primary school which

² Water, sanitation and training in health and hygiene.

³ We have reported it to the District Health directorate.

has six classrooms, one for each year group. The three remaining classrooms, which were supposed to host a junior school, are instead used for accommodation by the seven primary school teachers, as the village lacks teacher accommodation. The school is attended by around one hundred pupils.

More generally the governance of the village is that the chief chooses one elder from each of the peoples who form the population of the village. Selection is based on suitability rather than size of the ethnic group – even if there is only one person of a particular people, that one person could still be made an elder. No women serve either as elder or on the committees yet the cleaning of the village falls to the women.



The village was founded about fifty years ago when the king granted land to an Ashanti chief, who relocated from the nearby Nsuta area with his family. Since then it has grown, mainly because the land is good. In the interim many Ashanti have offered their land to newcomers, often from the north of Ghana, either for rent or for sharecropping. Many of those who have moved to the village since it started said they were still in touch with places they moved from through annual visits and phone calls. They reported that many elderly people were left behind but are supported by those in the village. As elsewhere in the region there is a diversity of religions that co-exist.

Asked about their priorities for the development of their village, they made clear that teachers' accommodation is urgently needed, followed by latrines and at least a second borehole for water. Solar energy was discussed briefly. People invest in this privately already and this is a good mechanism, as it will hopefully lead to more people training to service the panels.

We only briefly looked at Aframso Two but spent more time in Nkwanta. This is a large village of around six hundred people, where again the Ashanti Development farm support project has already started. In this project, all grow maize and at least one additional products of such as yam, groundnut, cowpea or vegetables. The

villages also has cashew trees, and cocoa. Plantations of cocoa are only possible along water courses as otherwise it is now too dry. As the quantity of cocoa is low, villagers must bring the produce to the Cocoa Board themselves, rather than having it collected.

The village has two boreholes but because one is very close to the government-run health clinic there was a discussion as to whether or not the people could use it, or whether it was only for the clinic. There are no latrines in the village. People reported that three members of an extended family might need to visit hospital every month. Common health problems included intestinal problems, malaria, typhoid and headaches. The village has had a school for the past thirty years, which includes a kindergarten, primary and junior school, from which some children have gone on to secondary school and university.

The governance of the village differs insofar as it makes use of a village general assembly though which nominations are sought for the range of committees that need to be staffed for the running of the village. Nominations will be accepted unless there are ten counter-voices. Women form part of most committees in this village. In addition, there is a women's cooperative mandated to engage in funeral and marriage planning but also active in conflict

management and mediation, including for married couples. Their activities cover a wide range of social and economic policy.



This village is large and as such the population has a variety of peoples. As a result it has a Zongo chief who forms part of the group of elders. Many people were born into the village, some arrived many decades ago, some more recently. More broadly there was an observation that there has been a steady stream of newcomers in the past fifteen years. Many of the newcomers are people who have arrived by way of two or three interim places where they have stayed years rather than months.

Asked about their priorities, it was clear that latrines were urgently needed as well as more water. They also said that it was urgent to be connected to the grid, to which we said that this was a job for the government. They also pointed to the need for teacher accommodation. Once of the teachers arrived at the end of our general meeting with village people and said that the school needed a laptop, as without it, it was impossible to teach children about ICT.



Following this more general session, the Zongo chief and his wife kindly agree to talk to us. The chief came from northern Ghana some 36 years

ago. His wife's family was from the area, had briefly moved to Cape Coast but had come back to meet her husband some time ago. On marriage she consented to adopt Islam as her religion along with her husband. They are proud parents of seven children. We were told that he came as a boy with his family to follow their father who had arrived in the village some 38 years ago in search of fertile land.

As Zongo chief he holds extra responsibility to vet newcomers and induct them into village life. If there is a lack of what he described as compatibility it is also his role to ask the person to leave. If newcomers cannot be hosted by their own peoples, the Zongo chief hosts them in his guest room. His wife assists in the reception and vetting of newcomers. We did not have time to learn more about what is expected of newcomers who are invited to stay in the village. Such a role of receiving, hosting and vetting is in addition to the responsibilities of an elder to mediate in land disputes, regulate in the case of debt, judge in cases of theft, or intervene in broken down marriages, alongside wider village business.

News in Brief

Save The Dates – exact timings and locations to be confirmed.

Our Annual Summer Party – when Ghanaians cook us an Ashanti meal to thank us for our work during the past year, will be held in Holborn on Saturday, July 29. More details including the timing for A Taste of Ghana will be sent later.

Our sponsored walk – down the canal to Limehouse will be held on Saturday 30 September.

Details of our annual auction – for Wimbledon tennis tickets will also follow.



Akwaba

Welcome to Ashanti Development's newest Director, Professor Richard Black of Birmingham University, where he is Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Social Sciences. We're delighted to welcome him aboard.

Thank you

Finally, we want to say thank you to all those anonymous donors who've left money – sometimes quite a lot of money – on our website. We're very grateful and would write and tell you so if we knew who you were.