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Better than Building a Bridge...

Since registering as a charity some twenty years ago, Ashanti Development has sent less than two million UK pounds to Ghana. A little goes a long way in Ashanti and, as we are all volunteers taking no salaries or expenses in the UK, one hundred per cent of all the money we receive goes to Ghana, whether it comes in the form of donations, grants or is generated by (personally-financed) fund-raising events.

We're lucky to have highly motivated (salaried) staff in Ghana, who progress our work with great efficiency. With their help we have improved the lives of people living mainly in the Sekyere Central District of Ghana to the point where they seem comfortable and no longer tell us of their overriding desire to seek a better life overseas, whether legally or illegally.

Only small amounts of money are needed to make Ashanti lives tolerable, even happy. There are 216 Districts in Ghana, some richer, some poorer than ours. Do you know of anyone who would like to make a mark on the world, who would like to take on a District, part of a District,

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.

or sponsor a specific piece of work to leave as their legacy? They would get no reward other than the eternal gratitude of the Ashanti people.

Some of the things we've been able to accomplish since 2004:

- Provided clean water, sanitation, and training in health and hygiene to nearly 50,000 people in seventy villages. This puts an end to the diarrhoea and dysentery most suffered for five days in seven and gives them energy to work their way out of poverty.
- Strengthened their community institutions and made sure they operate smoothly together. This enables them to maintain improvements independent of us.
- Built six primary health clinics, renovated wards in our local hospital and built a Mother and Baby Unit. The hospital estimates this saved some 360 babies' lives in the first year alone.
- Built one big eye clinic that has issued 10,000 second-hand prescription spectacles and carried out 1,000 cataract operations.
- Created a farm support scheme, providing agricultural and marketing training, and loans, across 52 communities. It eradicates hunger within a year and is spreading rapidly.

- Treated thousands of children for worms and provided food supplements and free school meals for hundreds of malnourished infants.
- Revolutionised teaching methods in our District. At one point our benchmark exam results averaged 89 per cent, second highest in the Ashanti Region.
- Built computer centres, a centre for the disabled and seven schools.
- Established a microcredit scheme, a dressmaking school, a beekeeping project, a tree planting scheme, food processing plants and much more.



Conversation with elders

Teenage girls in Ashanti

By Dr Liz Styan

For several years now, Ashanti Development has been working with the education and health departments in Sekyere Central District to help girls successfully complete their Junior High School education. Often girls miss out on schooling due to poor access to sanitary wear, or drop out completely due to teenage pregnancy or early marriage. We have provided some of the more needy girls with packs of reusable sanitary towels and provided advice on menstrual hygiene. During these sessions it became evident that little information or advice was given to the girls by their parents, and that there was a lot of variability in the provision of information on sexual and menstrual health and relationships by the school and local health nurses.

With the support of Sekyere Central health and education departments, we started a new project earlier this year focusing on the villages with the highest teenage pregnancy rates. Each of the sixteen communities would be visited twice during the year by a team of two nurses and two teachers. They would work with the headmaster and child welfare lead at each school and offer separate education and discussions for parents

and girls. This would cover sexual and menstrual health, healthy relationships and family planning.



Dr Liz Styan on a school visit

So far only one round of visits has been completed due to lack of funds. The cost of living, including fuel, has doubled over the last year.

The report from the villages is quite challenging to read at times. Poverty is a large factor - parents cannot afford to provide sanitary towels for their daughters. A fairly common scenario seems to be that the girls engage in

“transactional sex” to be provided with the money by a “boyfriend”, or even by an “uncle” who is meant to be looking after them. Both parents and girls report mutually poor relationships and communication. Girls often look to older boys to provide for them and think that if they get pregnant, the boys will continue to support them – inevitably, this is rarely the case. Some girls use “charms” from the traditional healer mistakenly thinking they will be able to attract boys and stop them getting pregnant.



Girls with pads



Dr Liz Styan with school students

On a positive note, in one village with a very proactive family planning nurse, many of the girls were using a Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive, which, despite the same difficult mix of social and economic problems, at least prevented any unplanned pregnancies. In another village, the headmaster was supporting six girls through the provision of school equipment, food and sanitary towels. One of those girls was to be sent away by her parents for early marriage, or to leave school and work on the farm but she had refused to do either



Teaching adults

and the headmaster supported her desire to finish her education. Whilst this very generous act by the headmaster is to be welcomed, it also highlights the importance of a female advocate in each school, reducing the risk of yet more abuse. In yet another school, the child welfare lead made re-usable sanitary towels for the more vulnerable girls. There are very many generous, hardworking and compassionate individuals making a difference, but there is always much more to be done.

The communities were very grateful for the help and support and welcomed repeat visits. The girls appreciated the sanitary towels and opportunities to ask questions and learn more. Thirteen of the villages had been visited before. The team felt there was already a positive shift in behaviour. More girls had managed to complete their end of school exams. There were eight pregnancies over this period.

Talking openly about relationships, menstrual and sexual health can break down barriers, address misunderstandings and help people to make informed decisions about their own future.

- Access to a female mentor, not necessarily a teacher, at each school would also be a great help.

What next?

We will complete the planned return visits to these sixteen communities

We will trial showing the neediest girls how to make their own reusable sanitary towels using locally available materials with a view to rolling this out more widely.

We would like to promote:

- A girl friendly toilet facility available in each school (separate toilet with a door that locks, waste disposal and handwashing equipment). This would help girls to attend school during their periods.

News In Brief

So much seems to be going on in Ghana at present that we thought we'd substitute an extended News in Brief in place of a third article.

We were honoured to be presented with a special award by the Sekyere Central district assembly. They said that Ashanti Development was the best charity to have worked in the district, and chief after chief made speeches in our support.



Farmers Day, at the start of December, saw two Ashanti Development-trained farmers winning awards:



Razak Kwamang Frimpong of Amoaman won the best Youth Farmer Award in Sekyere Central District.



Johnson Agyei Douglas of Bobin won the best municipal carrot farmer in Mampong Municipal District.

Special thanks to Margaret Ferguson (on the right), who organised a fund-raising gala in Edinburgh in mid-November.

She's seen here with Martha Boadu and Penny David, who went to Edinburgh for the occasion.



Building work at Dome is well underway. All the bricks have been made and a new borehole has been drilled.

The new clinic should be operational by the middle of next year. It will stand on the main route used by migrants from the north, who are coming south to avoid the effects of both climate change and war.



We're very grateful to the children of Lantern Home Education, who ran a charity stall for Ashanti Development.

They worked hard and made different things for the stall including beaded bracelets, and a vast array of cakes. They also knitted small bags and donated secondhand books. We think that was a great result considering they are ten and eleven years old.

We're organising a Cross Channel Relay Swim in August. Please let us know if you're interested.