

Hand in Hand Homepage- Reisebericht Bernward

During a delegation trip of the Catholic University of North Rhine-Westphalia to Ghana, we also visited the institutions supported by "Hand in Hand - Friends for Ghana e.V.". The goal was to get to know the various partner organizations and to gain more insight about the networking in the educational and health sector.

After a long journey from Düsseldorf via Amsterdam, we finally arrived in Accra. After all the formalities concerning Visa had been done and after staying one night in Accra, the delegation had a detailed talk with the director of the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) responsible for Ghana. The GIZ has been running an office in Accra for more than three decades and can therefore provide the best information about the current situation and about the developments in the country. It is important to mention that the GIZ confirmed that there are also positive and promising developments when considering the economy and politics of Ghana. Our conversation at the GIZ was followed by a long overland journey from Accra to Sunyani, which is located in the western part of the country. This almost took us nice hours for about 400 kilometers. It shows that traveling through Ghana cannot be compared to traveling through Europe, because every journey is interrupted by frequent control stations, tollbooths, chaotic traffic around the cities such as Kumasi and last but not least the miserable driving conditions.

Sunyani, that is located in the Brong-Ahafo region has about 62,000 inhabitants and has been grown rapidly in the past few years. More than 250,000 people are living in the wider Sunyani Municipal District. The Catholic University College of Ghana (CUCG) is located in the Fiapre district of Sunyani. The university was founded in 2003 by the Ghanaian Bishops' Conference and has about 3,000 students nowadays. We signed a cooperation agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Rector of the Catholic University. With that we are aiming to advance the exchange between both institutions on several levels.

Our program in Ghana also included both a visit to the Catholic Secretariat of the diocese in Sunyani and to Dr. Matthew Kwasi Gyamfi, the Bishop of Sunyani. He had a lot of time for us and was very inspired and pleased about our different ideas. In order to obtain an overview about our work and its effectiveness and sustainability, it is very important to gain some insight about the work of other NGOs (Non-Governmental-Organizations). That's why we visited the "Mission of Hope", an NGO that is primarily being supported by the United Kingdom and also cooperates with the CUCG. The "Mission of Hope" focuses on supporting young women and younger people in general.

Our trip continued in Abafour. After our arrival, Father Reverent Peter Kwasi Sarpong welcomed us very friendly (as he always does!). Our main office in Abafour is still located in his vicarage. We also had time to meet our local administrator, who is called Anita Komele. She is very committed in working for our projects. Together with Peter Sarpong, who is our main project partner, we talked in detail about all levels of our work. To ensure a sustainable and effective work, we do need his support, because he knows best what's going on in Abafour and Ghana in general.

Due to changes in the school policy implemented by the government and the suspension of school fees for the first year at the St. Jeromes Senior High School, the number of students has grown rapidly. During my last visit at St. Jerome School at the beginning of the year around 800 students were visiting school. Now almost 2,300 students attend school. Therefore, ensuring that all pupils receive a meal at school is an even bigger challenge than before. Besides, the school has no additional buildings, the classrooms are lacking a roof and there are no dormitories. Hence the most essential equipment is missing.

It is very positive to note that Peter Sarpong has got some support by Anthony Darko. He is working as a second priest in the parish of Peter Sarpong from now on. Anthony Darko was ordained a priest in July 2017 and has already supported the work of Peter Sarpong as a deacon in the past.

Besides visiting the St. Jerome-school, we also visited the "Offinso College of Education", which is a teacher training college. We are also financing sponsorships there.

Our trip also included a visit to the very poor areas, so called „compounds“ near Abafour. These compounds, in which Peter Sarpong also works as a pastor, can only be reached via passing rough roads. For a distance of about 10 to 12 kilometers we needed more than an hour. Generally, the compounds are defined by immense poverty. There is almost no development and opportunities for advancement are not given. Electricity is lacking and there is no water supply. Only a few people have the opportunity to work on the fields and the children have to walk very long distances to reach their schools. For us it is very important to support these compounds. Therefore we started buying solar lamps (400 up to now) by „Villageboom“ and to sell them based on the so called Microcredit system. Providing the people with electricity should be one primary goal in advancing the development. The solar lamps can be charged using the sunlight during the day and will provide light as soon as it gets dark.

In opposition to the very slow development in the compounds we are very happy to announce that there are a lot of positive developments happening at the St. Patricks nursing and midwifery school in Offinso, which is a city with about 40,000 inhabitants. The St. Patricks nursing and midwifery school is another institution that we are supporting, which is being led by Dora Lumor who is doing an amazing job. Since the demand for nurses and midwives is very large in Ghana, we are proud that the St. Patricks nursing and midwifery school is facing this demand by educating a lot of nurses and midwives every year. The cooperating hospital also plays a crucial role here. At the moment about 1000 students are doing their internship to become a nurse or midwife. We know that the St. Patricks school is providing one of the best internships in the whole country. Every time we visit this place, we realize that there is no better investment but investing in education. Educating people increases their chances to find a job and to ensure higher living standards for the people and their families. Therefore investing in education is very sustainable. In addition to it we think it is of great importance to support the exchange and cooperations between other local social and health institutions.

There is still so much we can do, should do and will do! Our motivation to continue our work in Ghana can definitely be explained by the fact that every time we are coming to Ghana it feels a bit like coming home!

„Akwaaba in Ghana!“