



Nyarkoa Foundation

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Introduction

Welcome to the second newsletter of the Nyarkoa Foundation, a non-profit corporation chartered in the State of Alaska. Its mission is to assist in the development of rural Ghana through projects that improve the lives of the rural poor.

The symbol in the banner above is an "Adinkra" symbol. It is one of many ideographs (pictures that represent ideas) that are used by the Akan (the dominant ethnic group in Ghana) in their art and as decorations on buildings and everyday items. Its name in the Akan language means "chain" or "link of a chain." It symbolizes unity, brotherhood, and a sense of responsibility and cooperation between people. We have adopted this symbol as our logo because that idea represents our views and objectives.

The Foundation works mainly in the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District of the Central Region of Ghana, about 50 miles west of Accra, the capital of Ghana. Our partner is the Rural Education and Development Programme (REDEP), a local non-government organization whose executive director is Mr. James Addo. Members of REDEP's Board of Directors and its volunteers have deep roots in the District. Some work there in local government or education, and all are familiar with the particular problems and needs of the people of the District.

Accomplishments to Date

In its first year the Foundation installed a running water system into a health clinic in the District, but some follow-up work will be done in the coming year to complete that project. For the second year, the Foundation began a program to repair broken hand pumps to improve village water supply. People in villages where pumps are broken must draw their water from open streams or ponds, thereby exposing themselves to serious medical conditions (such as dysentery and cholera) as well as numerous parasites. People in such situations are no better off than those in villages that have never had a well. Thus, repairing a broken pump is a way to bring good water to people who need it without the expense of drilling new wells.

In the first newsletter, it was noted that we hoped to repair pumps in 4 villages in the second year and that goal was reached.

As our program developed, working with a village to repair a pump has come to involve several steps with the aim of preparing the people to maintain the pump themselves in the future. First, we contact the village chiefs and elders to introduce the project and get permission to hold a public meeting with the people. The meeting is conducted by REDEP with additional resource people as needed. At that time, the villagers are informed that the Foundation is willing

to repair the broken pump and make any additional repairs needed during the next three years. However, in return, the people will need to pay for water from the pump and deposit the money in a bank account that REDEP opens for them. REDEP explains that this will give the village time to save money so they can make repairs to the pump in the future, and establish a tradition of saving for future needs. The people of the village need to agree with this requirement or the project will not go forward.



Meeting with village chiefs.

During the meeting, the importance of drinking clean water pumped from a well rather than untreated stream water is also discussed. We have found that in some cases, people prefer traditional water sources even if they can get clean water from a well. This may be a matter of convenience or a preference for the taste, but we have found that many of the rural villagers believe that if water is clear, with no visible foreign material in it, then it is safe to drink. Teaching them otherwise is not easy, because they have no idea of the causes of various diseases and the pathways that bacteria and viruses follow as they are transmitted between people. That topic will be part of a continuing educational effort by REDEP that will also include basic information on personal and community sanitation (see below).

If the village does not have a committee to oversee water and sanitation issues, then one is organized as part of the program. REDEP then holds a one-day workshop for the committee members to instruct them in how to run the program, conduct meetings, collect funds and keep records. They also receive additional instruction in water and sanitation issues so they can explain and reinforce those ideas to other people in the village. After the workshop, REDEP opens a bank account for the village and arranges for the pump to be repaired.



Committee training session.

Research has shown that projects to improve water supplies in rural villages in developing countries often fail in a relatively short time. The reason is that once the work is completed, the villagers are left to maintain and repair the system on their own, but they seldom have the knowledge and resources to deal with problems that arise. Finding money for simple necessities is the main concern of village people, and the idea of saving to fix a pump years in the future is foreign. The Foundation is attempting to address this shortcoming in two ways. First, the three-year guarantee gives the villagers the time and incentive to save so they can repair the pump themselves in the future. Second, both REDEP and the

Foundation's representative in Ghana make periodic visits to the villages to help with management issues and check that the bank accounts are growing, as they should. Interaction with the villagers also helps them to maintain their enthusiasm for the project by showing that they still have support and are not left to fend for themselves.



Pump repair.

The four villages where we worked to date have an estimated combined population of about 2000 people. Two of the villages had water committees in place, so only two needed help to organize. In a departure from tradition, we encouraged the villages to include women as equal members of the committees in terms of both number and responsibility. This is important because household water supply is traditionally the responsibility of women, and studies have shown that village supervision of water issues improves when women are in decision-making roles. We are pleased to report that our effort to increase women's participation has been successful and the committees are gender neutral.

As noted above, during the course of our work it has become clear that we need to educate the rural people not only about

the quality of the water that they drink, but about the importance of maintaining good sanitary conditions around their homes and villages. In fact, education has to begin with the simple step of teaching people how to properly wash their hands and when it is important to do so. Further, it isn't enough to teach only at the organizational meetings. Frequent follow-up sessions with the villagers must be part of the education process and we plan to implement such sessions. REDEP is well qualified to take on that responsibility because one of its board members, Madam Hannah Obeng, is the District coordinator for the school health education program. She participates in the meetings with the villagers, and will be a great asset in our efforts at continuing education. REDEP has also been active in promoting awareness of both personal and community sanitation issues through its network of clubs in the Junior Secondary schools and other outreach efforts. Our program is thus a natural complement to what REDEP is currently doing.

Future Efforts

For the future, there are many pumps in villages around the Ajumako Enyan Essiam district that need repair. The villages vary in size, but each pump repaired improves the lives of at least a few hundred people. We will continue to repair pumps, but in addition, there are villages in the District that have never had a well with a pump and have always used a stream or a pond as a water source. In some of these, a simple system for filtering drinking water could make a significant difference to the health of the people. We intend to look at the possibility that we can help some of the villages in that way.

The issue of personal and community sanitation is also a major factor in disease transmission, and again, particularly for children. That is why our meetings with the villagers include instruction on personal sanitation. However, in many villages the nearby forest substitutes for sanitation facility and that is obviously a means to transmit diseases through a community. The people are aware of the need for better facilities but often their concerns are more about privacy than community health.

The government of Ghana discourages villages from constructing "community" latrines because they quickly become unusable from lack of maintenance and cleaning. Instead, families are encouraged to construct their own latrines. However, most families seem to lack the incentive and/or the funds to do that. This is clearly an important issue and we plan to work with REDEP to help the people improve local sanitation in ways they can afford and also satisfy government guidelines. We will need to devote some of our resources to this effort, but we believe that it is necessary if our goals of sustainability and improvements to health are to be realized.

The training/educational sessions the Foundation sponsors also support REDEP's goal of strengthening village organizations so they can provide leadership in the future. The successful operation of the committees that oversee village water and sanitation are critical to maintaining and improving the health of the people. Monitoring how the committees perform and assisting them

to improve their methods will be part of our educational work.

Our New Representative in Ghana

The Foundation has a new representative in Ghana because the previous representative, Josie Sam, is now in the U.S. working on a Master's degree in Natural Resource Management at the University of Alaska. The new representative, who has been with us since, early January is Vera Thompson-Mensah. Vera has a bachelor's degree in Law and Sociology, and is currently completing an MBA with an emphasis on Human Resource Management. She has attended the meetings with the last two villages we worked with and also made independent visits to the other villages. Her reports have been detailed, and she has shown that she is certainly well qualified and prepared to be our representative.



Josie and Vera

For further information about the Nyarkoa Foundation and its work, please contact Lewis Shapiro at the mailing address on the front page or by email at shap@mosquitonet.com.