



Nyarkoa Foundation

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P.O. Box 80993, Fairbanks, Alaska 99708

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Introduction

Welcome to the third 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. The name of the symbol in the Akan language means "chain" and 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 is currently working on projects to improve access to clean water in villages in the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District of the Central Region of Ghana, about 50 miles west of Accra, the capital. Our partner is the Rural Education and Development Programme (REDEP), whose executive director is Mr. James Addo. Members of REDEP's Board of Directors and its volunteers have roots in the District through personal history and family associations or current employment. All are familiar with the particular problems and needs of the people of the District.

Accomplishments to Date

The Nyarkoa Foundation was incorporated on January 31, 2007, and the end of our 3rd fiscal year of operation (June 30, 2010) is a good time to review our progress, discuss our successes and disappointments, and describe the projects planned for the near future.

First, it is important to point out that, because of the generosity of the donors, the Foundation has been able to provide access to convenient sources of clean water for household use to many people in the District. To date, the Foundation has arranged for the installation of running water into a health clinic and the buildings where its staff reside, and has conducted health education programs and repaired broken hand pumps in 7 rural villages with populations (including children) ranging from about 150 up to several hundred people. The health benefits of clean water are obvious, but convenience is also important. Freeing women and children from the need to walk long distances to collect water gives children (particularly girls) more time for school, and provides adult women more time for child care and economic activities. These results represent real progress, and everybody who is involved in the program should be pleased at what has been accomplished. Still, there have been disappointments and there is always room for improvement.



Children collecting water and playing at a stream in the District

The Foundation uses its funds to repair broken pumps in existing wells, and to assist the villagers to organize to maintain the pumps in the future. A village with a broken, non-functioning pump is no better off than one that has no well and must rely on unclean streams for its water supply. Drilling wells is expensive, and the Foundation can help 3 or 4 villages by repairing their broken pumps and teaching basic health, sanitation and organizational skills to the people for the cost of drilling one new well. This approach fills a real need. There is a government program to drill deep wells or hand-dig shallow wells in rural villages as the only practical alternative water supply to unclean surface water. However, the program doesn't include any provision for repairing the pumps when they break down (which all do eventually) so the villagers must do that for themselves. Most rural villages are poor, and those that might be prosperous enough to quickly raise funds for repairs are often not organized to do so. In addition, many people simply do not understand why it is important to use clean water from a well, rather than unclean water from streams as they have traditionally done. The result is that repairs are seldom

made and even people who know better, are forced to go to streams for water.

The Foundation is attempting to educate villagers on the importance for health of using the clean water a well provides. In addition, we offer to maintain pumps we repair for 3 years as an incentive for the people to save to make future repairs themselves. We are not aware that this type of incentive has been offered before, so the approach is experimental and the response has been mixed. The health clinic has been able to raise funds from its staff to make repairs to its water system when needed, and some villages have started savings programs. However, the programs are probably too modest to accumulate enough funds in 3 years to maintain the pumps. We were probably too optimistic about the rate of saving that could be achieved, so the 3-year limit will be extended for some of the villages. Another problem is that many people prefer to drink water from the streams because the taste is familiar and they do not understand the health risks. Thus, they see no reason to save to repair a pump. Converting them will require education about the benefits to health of drinking clean water from the wells, and patience. To help in this regard, REDEP will use a new, full-time volunteer to make frequent visits to the villages to continue the educational process and monitor the progress of the project. Improved cell phone contacts are also being established so that REDEP can be alerted quickly when problems arise. As in the past, the Foundation's representative in Ghana, Vera Thompson-Mensah, will continue to make un-announced visits to the villages to conduct independent evaluations.



This muddy stream the only source of water for a village about a half mile away.

Two of the seven villages we have worked in have been less successful than the others. In one, the well was producing poorly, and the problem was thought to be that the wrong type of hand pump had been installed when the well was drilled. The Foundation replaced that pump (and used it to replace a broken pump in a different village) but, unfortunately, the new pump did not improve the situation. The conclusion is that the well will only produce a limited volume of water. This was disappointing, because the village chief had worked hard to have the well drilled, since he knew of health problems among the people that were caused by the lack of clean water. We were anxious to help him, but all we could do was recommend that the well water be reserved for drinking only. The chief agreed, and the village will plan to do that in the future.

We had limited success in one other village. The pump there had been broken for a few years, but after we repaired it many people still go to a stream for water. The reason is that the well was drilled at a site that is inconvenient for most of the people and is almost inaccessible during rainy weather. The

villagers objected to the site when it was selected, but the well was put there anyway and so it was not used much even before it broke. We hope that through education, more will make the effort to use the well for drinking water because of the health benefits. For the present, however, there is little more we can do to help.

Future Plans

REDEP and the Foundation have identified 5 villages to work with in the near future. The initial educational and organizational meetings are in progress at the first of these, and the others will follow as funds become available. Because of the structure, population, and organization of these villages, we hope to introduce some modifications into our program that will improve the results over time.

The next village to be done is small and isolated. Its main source of water has been a narrow hole a few feet deep that dries up during the dry season. At those times, the villagers got water from a stream some distance away, that frequently resulted in parasitic infections and other medical problems. Two years ago a government contractor was hired to dig a shallow well for the village. However, he left without completely covering the well and installing the hand pump. Both are needed to keep the water clean and free of contamination. We plan to finish covering the well and then install the hand pump that was purchased and is at the village.

The water supply at the third village comes mainly from a shallow open well some distance away, supplemented by rainwater. There is a deep well at the

village but the pump has been broken for several years. It is a type that we have found difficult to repair so we will replace it with a new, more reliable model. We are optimistic about the future for this village, because the leadership is young men who have remained in the village to help develop it, rather than leave as often happens.

The fourth village is large and has two wells with pumps. Both are working, but in danger of failing and need repair. Depending on funding, the repair of one pump may wait until the next fiscal year.

The last village has both a shallow, hand-dug open well and a deep well with a hand pump. The hand pump needs to be overhauled, but one part in particular should be replaced as soon as possible. The village is large, and not as isolated as others we have assisted and we, and our NGO partner, believe that they are capable of doing more to maintain the pump. We plan to replace the critical part of the pump so that it continues to work, but then encourage the village leaders to take the initiative to save and complete the repair. REDEP will be available to assist them, but we believe that if they do it themselves, it will develop a sense of village ownership of the pump that will be important in the future.

One new issue appeared in two of the villages this year. In other villages where we have worked, the pumps are easily accessible, but in these two villages, they are located down long, steep, winding paths that have been deeply eroded by the rains. The exposed rocks and roots make them difficult to walk on for the women (often with babies on their backs) and children who carry heavy

loads of water back from the wells on their heads. The paths need to be improved and, since one of our goals is to ease the burden on women who supply the family with water, we will encourage the villagers to maintain the paths so that they are safer to use.



Youngster carrying water home.

Conclusions

On balance we are pleased with the progress we have made over the first 3 years of operation. Some of our projects have been truly successful, and we have tried to learn from our mistakes. We have tried to make wise use of the funds that our donors have generously entrusted to us and, as from the start, all of the funds donated have gone directly to the projects in Ghana. The administrative and travel costs have always been paid by the Foundation's directors and that practice will continue.

Donations to the Foundation are always welcome. Checks can be sent, payable to the Nyarkoa Foundation at the address shown on the first page.