GRID & NEA

sustainable development in Ghana

NEA Staff

NEA Staff: Working Hard, Playing Hard

There is little doubt that GRID/NEA projects have been highly successful. God has blessed all our endeavours in His name, and we praise him for that.

Part of that blessing has been in bringing dedicated staff to form the formidable team that makes the NEA wheels turn. It's hard to believe that we now employ over 70 people, including a pastoral team of eleven people.

Our staff members are committed to seeing sustainable development take root in poor communities in Northern Ghana. Many work long hours for this cause, traveling dangerous roads and living very simply. Some of our team members work full-time during the week managing a development sector, and then spend their weekends as itinerant pastors for new churches in the area.

In February the Carpenter staff hosted the NEA Staff & Families Retreat. A whole busload of NEA team members from Janga and Tamale arrived to join the Carpenter staff and families for a weekend of evaluation, planning and FUN!

During this retreat, all of the staff met to discuss their 2009 achievements and to deliberate on issues pertinent to the work that they do. It was a time of celebration. Everybody enjoyed hearing firsthand the compiled results of the groups in the three locations. An open forum followed with the staff contributing creatively on how to improve NEA's performance.

Then the fun began. Games had been organized for all the children, men and women. There were some especially competitive soccer games that kept the referee on his toes! Each evening, the kitchen crew seemed to work even harder at providing delicious meals with ingredients supplied from the project site's farms, garden, fish tanks and kraals.

On Sunday we all squeezed together with the Carpenter congregation for a time of praise and thanksgiving: thankful for the way in which God has built us into a family and given us such meaningful work to do.

The competition was fierce in all of the games at the recent NEA staff retreat. Here the ladies are celebrating their victory over the men in the water-carrying race.

GRID (Ghana Rural Integrated Development) and NEA (Northern Empowerment Association) are partner organizations working to alleviate poverty in Northern Ghana. Motivated by Christ's love, our mission is to assist poor communities to meet their basic needs in a sustainable manner. You can learn more at grid-nea.org.

Christian Chiefs Conference

In Northern Ghana, a decision to follow Christ may not be well-received by a believer's family and community. New believers can face intense pressure to abandon Christ. Some are physically persecuted for their faith.

When a chief chooses to become a disciple of Christ, there can be additional pressures and consequences. Chiefs are often entrusted with overseeing some part of traditional religious practices, and abandoning those traditions can lead to concern and even anger among the powerful in their communities.

Despite initial tensions, participating chiefs soon relaxed and enjoyed their time together.

For several years, NEA has been learning of chiefs in Northern Ghana who have made the choice to follow Christ. Concerned about the isolation that many would be experiencing, and desiring to encourage these leaders, NEA dreamed of bringing Christian chiefs together for a time of teaching and sharing. It wouldn't be easy: tribal tensions alone could prevent many from attending such an event.

In February 2010, NEA's leadership sensed that the time was right for a conference for these Christian Chiefs. Originally 50 chiefs were expected, but when they finally met, there were 100 chiefs and 40 attendants. For many it was a two-day trip and they came from every corner of the north. One chief said he was 7 miles from Togo, another that he was 3 miles from Burkina Faso, and yet another that he was 4 miles from Ivory Coast! There were 11 or 12 tribes present and several of these have recently been in conflict. There is still tension between them, so their presence was a miracle in itself.

The testimony of this chief, who has suffered for his faith, was a powerful encouragement.

During the conference, NEA's Director, Dr. Mensah encouraged the chiefs with the story of Daniel, who lived in a pagan culture and remained true to God. The chiefs met together to discuss challenges that they faced and to consider ways of overcoming those challenges. They shared meals, stories, and songs together. By the end of the weekend, the fears they came with had been swept away, barriers had been broken down, and the body that had been fragmented was one.

One of the most moving events of the weekend was the testimony of the Dussi Chief, who has suffered for his faith but has remained true. (This chief's powerful story is available online at grid-nea.org.)

The chiefs found the conference so valuable that they want to make this an annual event! They were full of thanks for all that GRID/NEA has expended (both in funds and energy) to make this a reality. They have a vision that as they grow together they may have an impact on conflict resolution in their areas.

We can't thank God enough for how well this went. We are thankful for our hard-working staff who made this possible.

And thanks to each of you for keeping this in prayer. Once again, the Lord has done immeasurably more than we asked or dreamed.

GRID/NEA Scholars

Many young people in the Deg area cannot pay the fees for secondary or post-secondary education. Because of your generous support, GRID/NEA have been able to offer scholarships to some of these young people. We'd like to introduce you to three scholars whom you have helped.

Kate lost her father when she was very young. Her mother moved to Accra, while Kate moved in with her grandmother in the Deg area.

She dreamed of pursuing a trade, but could not afford the fees. NEA learned of her difficult situation and provided her with the fees to attend a trade school where she studied baking. When she finished school, Kate was given access to NEA's kitchen to bake bread for sale, in exchange for a commitment on her part to bake the bread for major NEA conferences.

Kate brought the income from her first sales to NEA's Director, David Mensah. She wanted to pay back the cost of her school fees. Rather than accept repayment, Dr. Mensah asked her to keep the money and to use it wisely.

She did, and has now started a small side-business selling cloth in Carpenter. We are proud of her and her accomplishments.

Linda, Kate's sister, faced the same distressing situation growing up. NEA paid for her fees to study Home Economics in high school in Tamale. Linda has returned to Carpenter and is a cook for NEA's project center. Her dream is to eventually further her studies in catering.

Linda contributes much to the NEA team. We are glad that we have been able to participate in helping her reach some of her goals and glad to see her employed in the field she has such a passion for.

We really can't say enough about our kitchen crew. At the recent chief's conference, they finished late every night and were up early every morning. Despite the demanding work schedule they always had smiles on their faces. We all know that without their contribution, many of the programs we want to undertake would be impossible.

Abraham has been trained in catering and hotel management at the college level. His parents are subsistence farmers and he came to NEA four years ago in need of help to pay his school fees.

After graduating last summer Abraham came to work for NEA and has become a linchpin for NEA's expanding project center, where he cheerfully cooks for and hosts more than 100 guests at a time.

With the new training centre in place, Abraham's skills will continue to be very valuable as he coordinates the logistics for the training sessions of women farmers, fish pond managers, environment monitors, chiefs and pastors in addition to conferences and the annual medical team's visit.

Thank you

On behalf of these young people, thank you for your support and prayers. Your gifts have had a profound impact on people's lives.

Ella's Corner

Spring is here with its promise of new life. Hopefully, it speaks to each one of us with a message of renewed dedication to the work of bringing hope to the poor.

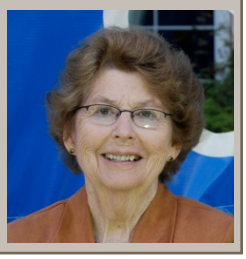
Let's stop and think what it would be like for you and I to live in a remote village of Northern Ghana where there was no church, hospital, doctor, school, supermarket, electricity or clean water. As we think about this and count our blessings, could we not also commit to share our blessings?

GRID/NEA thank God that His hand has been upon our work since its inception in 1984. We are so thankful for the many who contribute to this work. Because of the prayers and unceasing effort from you, our Support Team, many accomplishments have changed the face of Northern Ghana and the lives of the people who live there. We are thankful for each one of you. As you read this newsletter, we hope you may catch a glimpse of how much has been done. There is still much to do but we strive to give a sense of dignity of life and sustainability as we continue.

Others Lord, yes others, may this my motto be; Help me to live for others, that I may live like Thee.

May your hearts be challenged to keep the SPRING in your walk with God.

Ella



Ella Porter serves on GRID's Board.

A Tale of Two Trucks

A new truck for NEA

In 1992, NEA was looking for business ventures that would generate income in Ghana to augment the funds given by donors abroad. One of NEA's ideas was to purchase a cargo truck to take farm produce from the north to the south, and to bring much needed dry goods back.

After completing a market and feasibility study which clearly outlined the expected profit, NEA's proposal to a major funding agency was denied. It seemed that the dream of owning a truck would be put on hold.

That same year NEA hosted their first student team. A young married couple who were part of this special team wanted to do more to help NEA. When they learned about NEA's dream, they donated $10,000 to buy a truck. (NEA later learned that this was their entire savings for a down payment on their first home.)

A big DAF truck was purchased and has been the backbone of NEA's income generating ventures since. For many years it has hauled the 200 metric tonnes of shea butter produced by 11 northern women's groups annually for The Body Shop. It has also carried countless tonnes of sugar, flour and cement back to the north. After nearly 20 years of hard work it is now being semi-retired and has moved to Carpenter where its main role will be to distribute the women's peanuts each farming season.

In 2000, another team came from Canada and another young couple was moved by what they saw both in terms of the needs and NEA's impact. They, too, wanted to do something more to help. Learning of NEA's aquaculture program they saw that NEA could really make use of a refrigerated vehicle to haul the large quantities of fish that are now being produced commercially. Since they are involved in a trucking enterprise, they used their experience and connections to find a suitable vehicle and trailer for NEA. The result is that a big, shiny Kenworth with a refrigerated trailer has arrived in Ghana to be put to work.

GRID/NEA are very grateful for these generous partners and the contributions they have made which have enabled us to earn additional funds to help even more of Ghana's poor.

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Contact Us

PO Box 398
Milton, ON L9T 4Y9

T: 289-429-1099
F: 905-878-4597
E: grid@grid-nea.org
W: grid-nea.org