



## Chiefs: Leaders in Community Development

GRID and NEA often describe our work in Northern Ghana as *integrated development*, or *multisectoral development*. We use these terms because they remind us that all of the root causes of poverty, and their solutions, are connected.

For example, poor health is often the result of inadequate food, dirty drinking water, poor sanitation, limited education, and weak health care systems. That means that improving people's health requires us to work in the sectors of food security, water and sanitation, education, and health.

Just as the various development sectors are intertwined, so are the different community groups. We really cannot work with just one group in isolation and hope to see sustainable development take root in an area.

So while we usually begin working with women's groups when we partner with a new community, we do not ignore the other groups that make up that

community. We dialogue with men, youth, children, churches, government staff, and leaders to find ways of expanding development in their community.

The chiefs and elders of any community are key people for us to connect with early on in the development process. (In fact, usually we are invited to work in an area by forward-thinking chiefs who want to lead their people into a better future.) We continue to meet with these leaders regularly as we conduct our programs in their communities.

The chiefs and elders have many important roles to play in community development. They can allocate tribal land to women for farming. They can establish and enforce by-laws to protect the environment. They interact with other tribal leaders in a way that fosters peace in the region. They are the spiritual and cultural leaders that their communities respect.

Despite the enormous influence and responsibilities that chiefs have, they frequently do not have the resources to meet their people's expectations. They are often subsistence farmers like everyone else, yet they are expected to provide for many. This puts a great deal of pressure on chiefs and can create conditions where they are susceptible to bribes.

GRID and NEA have started several initiatives where chiefs are the main participants, from environmental protection groups to peace building groups. We want to use this newsletter to give you a better picture of who these leaders are and of the important work they are doing in their communities.

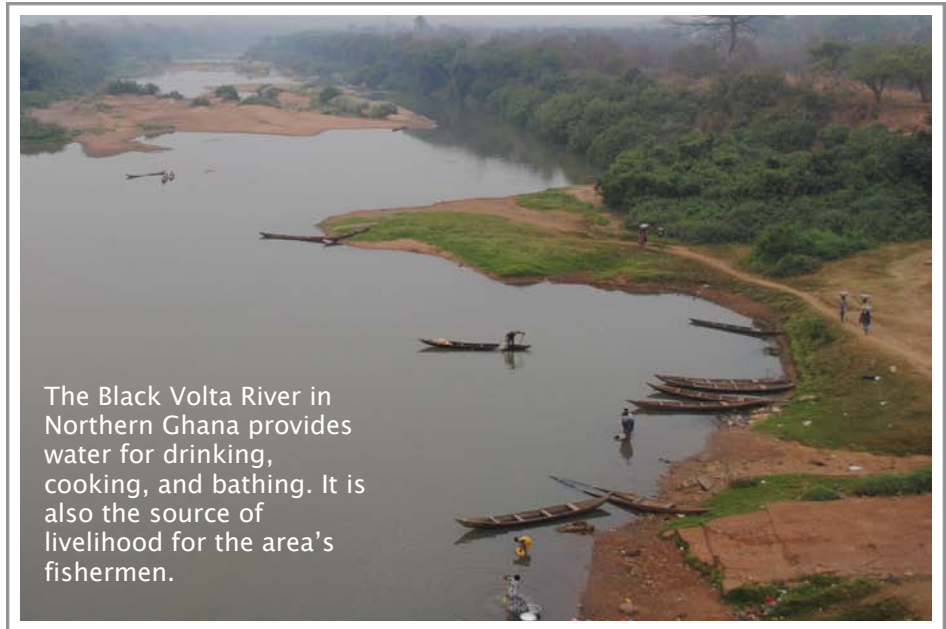
Most of all, we hope that you will see how your prayers and your generous giving are impacting leaders in Northern Ghana. Thank you for your continued support of GRID and NEA.

## Protecting the Environment

Several years ago, NEA helped fishermen and fish sellers form the volunteer environmental protection group called Nensom Environmental Watchdog. (Roughly translated, *Nensom* means “together we are strong.”) This group of about 600 volunteers monitors the Black Volta River to protect it from illegal fishing practices.

The support of chiefs has been crucial to the success of this group. Chiefs can enforce bylaws that protect waterways; they also can be bribed to turn a blind eye to illegal fishing practices.

In March 2011, Nensom volunteers reported that a new problem had arisen: gold had been discovered in the sand in a certain area. Within weeks a host of people had arrived to search for gold, and some were using motorized equipment to help them. Chemicals such as mercury are used in the process to help coagulate the gold particles. Since people drink, cook with, bathe, and fish from this river, this has been a distressing situation.



The Black Volta River in Northern Ghana provides water for drinking, cooking, and bathing. It is also the source of livelihood for the area's fishermen.

The Nensom volunteers were concerned that chiefs and officials may have accepted bribes to allow people to search for gold in that area. A meeting was organized involving NEA, Nensom, chiefs, elected officials, police and judges.

In attendance at the April 29th meeting were 30 chiefs from villages all along the Nensom-protected stretch of river. The meeting included training on the dangers and effects of these practices, and a reminder of the laws from the Regional Director of Fisheries.

An honest discussion followed where some leaders admitted that they had received payment for the privilege of searching for gold along the river. They had not been aware of the environmental hazards of the process, nor that it was against the law.

In an amazing act of humility and grace, the leaders apologized to the entire assembly and said that they would put a stop to the gold hunting in their area.

The importance and success of this meeting cannot be over-emphasized. Once again, cooperation has led to the greatest positive impact. GRID, NEA, Nensom volunteers, chiefs, assemblymen, the Ministry of Fisheries, and the police, by working together, have effectively stopped this dangerous environmental activity before too much damage was done.

*The Government of Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, provides funding for this environmental protection initiative as part of the Deg Community Health project. Your general donations to GRID are directed towards this project and are matched on a 3:1 basis by CIDA.*



Nensom Environmental Watchdog



## 2011 Christian Chiefs' Conference

by Brenda Mensah

Thank you for your prayers for the 2011 Christian Chiefs' Conference. About 120 chiefs from 13 different tribes attended the three-day event.

David spoke from this text:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

He remarked that it was a marvel to have representatives from so many tribes sitting together in Carpenter, surely one of the more obscure villages in Ghana!

Later on, the assembly broke into groups for prayer. This turned out to be one of the conference's special moments.

The Mamprussi and Kusassi tribes are still facing conflict in their areas. Many people have died in the sporadic outbursts. At one point last year they were under a 23-hour curfew, meaning they could only leave their homes for

one hour each day to get provisions. Although there is surface calm right now, the underlying tensions still remain.

But as the conference members were breaking into groups to pray, the Mamprussi and Kusassi representatives told us that they wanted to join together for prayer. David and I joined their circle.

It is hard to put on paper the depth of this meeting. Seeing these leaders bowed together before the Lord was a powerful picture of what it means to know Christ and to be part of his family.

Some of the conference time was dedicated to providing practical training in animal husbandry, led by Dr. Adam Harunah. Most of the chiefs are farmers, and they appreciated the ability to learn more about raising healthy animals.

The feedback from the weekend was that this should be an annual event. The impact on the chiefs' lives has been noticeable, so much so that some Muslim chiefs are asking to join!

Please continue to keep the chiefs in your prayers as they seek to be salt and light and to declare His praises in their communities.

## Positive Results from Peacebuilding Training

Although the Mo and Gonja tribes, who share land boundaries, have never fought with each other, a serious conflict nearly broke out in 1996. People were arming themselves and NEA quickly notified the Northern Regional Minister and the police of the situation in the Deg area. Government quickly sent in police to avert a clash and there has been tension in their relationship since.

Recently, a new Gonja Paramount Chief acceded to the throne of his tribe and NEA assisted in coordinating a visit of about 30 Mo chiefs to offer congratulations and hold talks with him and his elders. They went in traditional dress and took along their drummers and colourful chieftaincy umbrellas. The Mo chiefs' linguist gave the reason for the mission: "That they should live together in peace as their ancestors had done." The Mo chiefs asked that they be invited to any festivals they celebrate and said they would make sure that they did the same.

The Gonjas were thrilled with this visit and the restored relationship. They presented gifts of yams and a big bull, a prestigious gift indeed, to the Mo chiefs.

This also speaks highly of the Mo chiefs who are learning to make efforts to seek peace and healthy relationships with their neighbours.

*CIDA provides funding for chiefs' peacebuilding training as part of the Deg Community Health project.*



The Gonja Chief and his elders.

## *Ella's Corner*

In the very beginning of our work, a thousand acres of land near Janga was given to us by Chief Soa Naba. Many had tried to buy this fertile land, but a vision had been handed down from the Chief's forefathers that the land was to be used for the good of the people and that white people would be involved in its development. (This was an unusual vision at a time when there wasn't foreign involvement in Northern Ghana's development programs.) When our Ghanaian Director, David, arrived in Janga with his white father-in-law, telling of a plan to help this people, the old Muslim Chief felt the vision was fulfilled.

Chief Soa Naba continued to lend his support in every way—even asking for a Christian church to be built at Janga, which he supported until his death. When he died, GRID Board members visiting Ghana were honoured to attend the burial of this wonderful man.

We are so thankful for the work of all of the chiefs in our area. God has blessed our peacebuilding program and they have responded so readily. Daily they work together with NEA, resolving conflict where there are tribal differences.

Please remember to pray for these chiefs. Prayer really does change things!

God bless you,

*Ella Porter*

*Ella Porter serves on GRID's Board.*



## Deg Community Health Project

Some of GRID and NEA's development initiatives are part of the Deg Community Health Project and receive matching funds from the Canadian International Development Agency. In addition to the peacebuilding and environmental activities described on the previous pages, this project has enabled us to add 200 more women to our co-op program, start community health volunteer training, and facilitate community-wide discussions about the dangers of charcoal production. We are excited to see the changes that will happen as a result of this important project.

## 2011 Ghana Health Team

The 2011 Ghana Health Team plans to be in Ghana from October 29 to November 12 of this year. Please pray for the leaders and members of this team as they prepare for this grueling, but highly effective, time.



## Reminder: GRID Mailing Address

**We don't want to lose your mail! Please send all correspondence to our current address at PO Box 398 Milton, ON L9T 4Y9.**

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