

# GRID and NEA: A Focus on Sustainability

Ghana Rural Integrated Development (GRID) and Northern Empowerment Association (NEA)

GRID and NEA share a remarkable history and unique partnership. Our focus on sustainability and our integrated approach to development have transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people in Northern Ghana.

## Our Focus

**Sustainability** is the focus of all of our poverty alleviation work. It has become part of our DNA and all of our programs must pass through that filter before any are implemented.

We plan for the **sustainability of program results for individuals**, so that after they complete a program or activity with us, they and their families can continue to benefit without ongoing assistance. We plan for **sustainability for communities**, considering the long-term

conservation of environmental resources and developing the leadership needed to encourage growth. We plan for the **sustainability of NEA**, so that they can continually reduce their reliance on outside funds to maintain core programs. **These goals are being achieved.**

## Our Approach

We know from experience that poverty is the result of many interconnected causes. Lack of food, clean water, sanitation, shelter, education, peace, health care – all of these things are both causes and symptoms of poverty. **Our programs are integrated** so that they address these different causes at once, including water and sanitation, food security, education, womens' co-ops, peacebuilding, environmental protection, and more.

## GRID and NEA's Development Model



## Our History

Our focus on sustainability and integrated approach spring from our founders' experience with poverty in Ghana.

In the 1970s, a group of Ghanaian high school students agreed that they wanted to make a difference in the lives of Ghana's poor. Each of these students had personally experienced extreme poverty and knew that it was almost impossible to escape without help. They wanted to help others as they had been helped and founded the non-governmental organization Northern Empowerment Association (NEA).

The Ghanaian founding members pursued different educational and career paths so that they could best serve the poor. One of these members, David Mensah, traveled to Canada in pursuit of his goals: education in environmental stewardship and theology. (You can read his full story in his book *Kwabena: An African Boy's Journey of Faith*.)

## Our Partnership

While David was in Canada, he received news that some family members in Ghana had died of starvation. Witnessing his suffering and wanting to help, a group of Canadian and American friends founded a Canadian charity, Ghana Rural Integrated Development (GRID). The purpose of GRID was, and is to this day, simple: **to partner with NEA to achieve the mission of alleviating poverty and suffering in Northern Ghana.**

GRID and NEA's partnership of thirty years has been characterized by mutual respect and accountability. NEA identifies needs, envisions possibilities, and implements development programs in a culturally-appropriate manner. GRID offers training, provides technical support, and raises financial resources for the ongoing work. Our strong relationship provides crucial stability for the long-term development programs that we implement.

## Our Motivation

**GRID and NEA are motivated by the love of Christ to serve the poor.** We have witnessed the power of God transform the lives of individuals in Ghana and in North America. We believe that God has called us to help the weak, to stand up for those without rights, to heal the sick, to comfort the brokenhearted. Our hope in Christ sustains us as together we tackle some of the most difficult causes of poverty.

## Our People

Today **NEA comprises about seventy-five Ghanaian full-time workers** who understand the culture of the people we serve. Our staff members have themselves struggled to achieve their educational and career goals, many with the support of NEA. They are knowledgeable and committed.

In North America, GRID maintains a very lean operation powered almost entirely by volunteers. Two people are paid for part-time work as needed, but one full-time staff and qualified volunteers do the bulk of our administration and fundraising in North America. The result is that nearly **93% of all donations have gone directly to helping the poor**; around 7% of funds have been used to sustain necessary administration.

## Our Commitment

Focusing on sustainability and using an integrated approach are absolutely fundamental to reducing poverty, but they are neither easy nor quick. It takes time to build the relationships with communities and individuals that allow for real changes. To help just one woman become a self-sufficient farmer requires a three-year commitment to training and supporting her. To help leaders resolve conflicts without resorting to violence requires years of dialogue and training in relationships of trust. **GRID and NEA are committed to seeing this process through with the people we serve.** We walk with communities for the years that it takes.

# Our Impact

Our unique history, partnership, motivation, focus, approach, and commitment have yielded amazing results. Some examples of these results include:

- **125 wells** drilled, providing 123,750 with clean water.
- **5,500 women** (primarily widows with dependents) become food-secure and self-sufficient.
- **11 health clinics** or compounds built or rehabilitated.
- **13 fish ponds** constructed for community management, providing sustainable food to 12,000 people. More are planned each year.
- **10 primary or junior schools** built.
- **44 church congregations** established under local leadership, and **23 church buildings** with more being built each year as congregations grow.
- **250 chiefs joined together** in a vibrant network that promotes peace and resolves conflicts across more than half of the country (in the four regions known as Northern, Upper East and Upper West, and Brong-Ahafo).
- **500 scholarships granted** to students to complete secondary school and tertiary education.
- **55,000 patients attended** by volunteer health workers from Canada and the UK.
- **2,500 successful hernia surgeries** performed by visiting surgeons.
- **many innovative businesses established** to provide funds for development initiatives and to provide employment for local people: commercial fish production, pig farming, seed production, tomatoes, poultry and cassava processing. New ventures are being tested regularly.
- **98% fewer infants dying in the first month of life** because of the efforts of trained health volunteers.
- **167 health workers trained** to resuscitate infants at birth with simple techniques and tools. In one year, these workers recorded saving over 125 non-breathing infants.
- **650 km of waterways voluntarily protected** against fishing with poison or fine nets. As a result, fish stocks are rebuilding and birth defects among people have dropped.
- **2,820 farmers increased their yam or cassava farms** and 30 farmers rearing sheep and goats.
- **Microenterprises for individuals**, including blacksmith, weaving, dressmaking, butchering, market stalls, beekeeping, village provision stores, welding, electrician's shop, and a tree nursery.
- **Income generating projects for communities**, including a large market gardening enterprise, which peaked at 20 miles of tomatoes along the White Volta; an equipment rental business for a community group; and ATVs with trailers for 21 villages.

## Our Influence

Our program has served as a model for others. We routinely have visitors from other parts of Ghana and the world who come to observe our work and learn how they might adapt these approaches in their own corner of the globe.

## Our Reputation

Our many years of service have been acknowledged by several development awards in Ghana. More importantly, however, we are regularly asked by community leaders of different faiths to serve in their communities. Government representatives at every level have acknowledged their appreciation of our programs, and many have asked us to extend our work or to provide advice about expansions.

GRID and NEA have implemented many projects that have received funding from the

Canadian government. In a government-initiated evaluation of our program, the evaluator observed that GRID and NEA consistently meet and exceed targets and that our program plays a vital and invaluable role in contributing to sustainable development in the Northern Region of Ghana.

## Our Future

As communities become self-sufficient, we exit as planned from actively working in them, and as resources allow, we move to other communities who have invited us. NEA has been structured so that they can maintain their current activity levels without external support, but new resources are needed to expand their work.

We envision helping even more people escape poverty and sickness, enabling them to be people who are full of hope for their and their children's future.

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