

From our missionary in Ghana

A Day in the Life ...

May 2018 - letter #95

Back to Basics - Agriculture - Part 1

Dear Friends,

This is a 'back to basics' story about Akrampa. I'm going to explain the reason why education and agriculture are both so important to the village. One of the main objectives of setting up a school among the people is to provide and make available through education, the necessary skills and tools that can help 'liberate' them from unproductive, unprofitable economic struggles to survive.

The people of Akrampa, from the founding of the town to present, have for several generations been 'people of the land', that is making their living from tilling the soil and producing food for domestic use and for sale at the market. The nature of the land in Akrampa is mostly rocky with a very low amount of good loamy soil for cultivating crops. The soil does not produce as many crops as needed and the villagers are barely able to eek out a financial living. There is also an issue with 'free range' farm animals that eat crops that they shouldn't.

If any would have good crop yield he or she must go deeper into the 'reserved' forest, not too far from the village, to farm. The forest is reserved because the government considers it a source of endangered species of trees and other rare vegetation.

This forest also has become a source for harvesting firewood - from twigs that have fallen off the trees or to cut down a living tree or two - to sell at the local market to supplement their income. It is when they are caught with the 'fresh wood' that they get arrested. Because it is a restricted area, when one goes into the forest it is at the peril of his or her life. Years ago the Mom of one of our female school students was killed as a tree was being cut down. Other risks are the possibility of arrest by the Forest Officers and being handed over to the police for prosecution. I have had to intervene on two occasions, for the release of the town chief who was alive at the start of the mission, because he was arrested when his sons were arrested by the Forest Officers. Some of the school children also sneak into the forest to collect wood to sell at the markets, for themselves or for their homes, to support their parents.

I have over the last ten years seen the frustration of living on the land, which has caused a few individuals to relocate to other nearby farming communities. When such families move out, the education of their children is disrupted, because the little children cannot walk the long distances to come to school. That means their future becomes vain with very little prospects of survival in this highly competitive, global and technological age. In our Ghanaian education system the subject and teaching of agriculture is one of the core classes. After all, until recently, Cocoa (from which chocolate is made) was the main commodity exported from Ghana to bring in hard currency (dollars and pounds, etc). And Cocoa is a product of the land through agricultural activity.

Akrampa's land, as already mentioned, is not deep with the quality soil that can sustain crops like Cocoa, but it is able to support the production of cassava, plantain, and varieties of vegetables like peppers, tomatoes, onions, etc. Many of the people in the village are engaged in the growth and production of these items. This means their children know how to farm, even on this heavily over-used land, depleted of minerals because of working it over the years.

During my visit to Texas in 2013, I saw a new technique in gardening that Pastor Jimmy's brother, Gary Madsen, was using to produce vegetables in the backyard of his home. I was so excited about it because it was a technique that I realized could be adopted and applied to the Akrampa situation. He called them 'Garden on Wheels', or raised gardens. That's because they are boxes with wheels under them filled with soil. In these boxes I saw healthy vegetables growing!

The idea of bringing the 'raised' gardens into Akrampa caught my enthusiasm because the people raise goats and sheep in the free-range style where the animals cause a lot of destruction to crops, even on farms outside of the village. I was certain that the raised gardens could be made a part of the School situation for the children to benefit in two ways. On the one hand, it becomes an available tool to teach the children scientific agriculture. Also the children (and the school) could produce vegetables for sale, thus becoming a source of income for students as well as the school. Then students who are children of farmers would have a more scientific and modern knowledge of agriculture to make a living for themselves in the future. Children from non-farming families would also benefit from the knowledge.

This is what I mean by "Back to Basics". Education plus agriculture equals physical and economic survival for the current villagers and the children as they grow into adults. The government sees the importance of this and encourages it as classroom study. Our ability to bring raised gardens to both the school and the village will help them in many ways. Our first raised garden has been built. Next month I'm excited to tell you how it came to be.

In conclusion of this article, I need to ask for prayers and support from our FLC family and our many 'friends of the mission' at other churches & in cities and states across the USA. Mrs. Mercy Abbeyquaye, my assistant in running everything with the mission has been having serious issues with her hip. If you are not familiar with Mercy's story and her vital importance to our mission, please read online in the Ghana Archive, my January and February of 2012 articles.

Mercy was also the very first teacher at the beginning of our mission school in 1995! Her current role of helping me and the teachers with everything, including shopping for and preparation of breakfast for the students, has been greatly reduced. I have seen her x-rays and spoken to her doctors. She has difficulty walking now due to arthritic degeneration of her right hip, almost fused at the ball joint. Her own children are beginning to save and raise the \$11,400 that it will cost for her to have the hip surgery. This surgery will allow her to regain most of her normal life and help at the school without constant pain. I'd like to ask our 'friends of the mission' and FLC family for your ongoing **PRAYERS** for Mercy and her family. And if God leads you through your prayers to support Mercy and her family financially in this painful medical journey, there would not be enough words to say Thank You! Gifts can be sent to First Lutheran and clearly marked as "Mercy's Surgery". Please contact Pastor Rosy if you'd like more information on how you can help Mercy.

May the Lord bless and keep you,
Pastor Ben