

lunga

Newsletter 5
May 2014

Friendship Association, Youth Home Cultural Group, Tamale, Ghana

In this news letter Lise Drewes Nielsen and Annemarie Grüner tell about their experiences and reflections from their trip to Ghana in March 2014. The purpose of the trip was to have a good time, visit the group and Abraham's family, and to attend TYHCG's performances at Alliance Francaise and The Danish Embassy in Accra.



*Editors: Annemarie Grüner and Lise Drewes Nielsen
Lay out: Ian Brodersen*

foto: LoAnNi

Youth Home is something special

Contact to Playing for Change and Bizung

Life in Abraham's compound

How men boost the lives of women

The stay in Accra

Award evening at the embassy

Youth Home is something special

We arrived at Youth Home Friday the 14 of March after a nice journey via Istanbul to Accra and the next day further on to Tamale. Youth Home is the "home" of our group, and they have really managed to make the place full of life. There is a club house, a stage, a volleyball ground, storerooms for instruments and costumes, a bathroom and different workshops. At the area there is a brand new ICT-center too. At our arrival IPC (International Peoples College, Denmark) visited Youth Home. About 12 students had lessons in dancing and drumming, afterwards a performance took place. The next day after a trip to Mole Park, the IPC- people returned. They bought a lot of clothes, bags and drums. The leader of the group, Klaus had a talk with Abramam about their future co-operation. In a speech he told that Abramam often was mentioned as a model student at IPC.

Tuesday the 18 of March an important meeting took place at Youth Home

Mille Brandrup from The Danish Embassy, her husband and mother visited Tamale. At 11 a program at Youth Home started. The group had spent all Monday cleaning the place. To be honest, it was needed. Now it looked very nice. The Danish guests including us sat at a big table, Abramam at the head of the table. People from the drumming and dance group, the sewing girls, the tailors, Margaret (batik), Dale (a volunteer from US) people from different projects in Bolga, Hafiz (højskole) and Prince Mohammed a blind musician were at the meeting too. Abramam asked everyone to tell about their activities, ideas and future projects and what the implemented projects had meant to them. Many people told about their personal experience and ideas. Some of them praised Abramam because he had called on them to apply for grant at GCDF. After a lunch break the meeting started again at 1630. TYHCG made a fine show with traditional as well as contemporary dance. Mohammed and his band played Highlife music at the new instruments. Everybody had a good time and a lot of people were dancing. The guests from Accra were very impressed and touched by meeting TYHCG and experiencing the special atmosphere of the place.

Every time we visited Youth Home we got impressed by all the activities taking place. On Wednesdays a group of 19 women called Happy Ladies has a meeting. One of the members from TYHCG is the chairman. They arrange weddings, outdoorings and funerals. They work like a kind of cooperative and pay fees every time they meet.

A group of people from NGO's get lessons in dancing late in the afternoon once a week. We have further more seen scouts, break dancers, acrobats , basket ball players and education in batik. The nearby ICT-center was perfect ,it had new computers and nice facilities. It costs 1 Cedis an hour. Even the spot, the small bar had extended and improved.

The sewing workshop has been upgraded.

The sewing workshop now has 5 electric sewing machines and is producing products for sale at the homepage of " Playing for Change " in the US. Playing for Change has donated 5.000 US dollars for the workshop and Dale, a volunteer, is staying 4 weeks in Tamale to start the production of head bands and small bags for passports. She is at Youth Home every day to give advice, check the products and work together with the people. The batik workshop produces the material with the logo of Playing for Change.

The tailors don't just teach the girls from Youth Home but also give lessons for women from all over Tamale who are going to pass the final test for graduation the next month. The lessons take place at the stage. We counted around 25 young women. According to Abramam these lessons give a lot of credit to TYHCG. Let us give a big hand to Bjarne and Jens Arne who has made this possible through their donations . Thank you so much.



Wednesday the 19 of March we went out to the land donated by our association.

The land is about 8000 m2. It is situated 10- 15 outside Tamale in a rural area close to a small village. It can be cultivated but not until the rain is coming. Abramam and his people had prepared everything. A huge signboard telling people to keep out of the property and 4 big poles had been made. These were going to be placed in the very dry and hard ground. The day was very hot, we gave up following the workers and ended up sitting in the shadow watching the work from a distance. Luckily people from the village helped digging holes and carrying the very heavy poles. In the future the idea is to build a center for music and culture from North Ghana at the land.

In the afternoon we went to Global Platform, connected to an organization called Action Aid, started by MS. They were just to start new workshops for NGO's that day.

Friday the 21 of March we had asked the leaders of TYHCG to come for a meeting. We wanted to tell them about the association and work on the future strategy for the homepage, Facebook and a new brochure. Three groups were made and the result after half an hour's work was impressive. We got a lot of input and ideas to bring back to the board. We decided who was going to be responsible as well. The group again showed how well organized, structured and focused they work and with precise and good ideas. Before the meeting ended Annemarie read aloud her fairytale about TYHCG. It is written with inspiration from "The Ugly Duckling" by Hans Christian Andersen. We use the fairytale when we give lectures about the group in Denmark. The reactions were obvious: "We are touched".



Contact with Playing for Change and Bizung

Friday evening we had dinner together with Dale Mendoza from Playing for Change. Abramam was not together with us, he was out of town hunting with some friends. They do that in the dark with torch lights to attract antelopes and rabbits.

We had a very nice time exchanging ideas and talking about our future plans. She has worked as a designer and we talked about new ways of using smock- weaving and batik. Dale expressed that she likes the way our association works, because we work in a practical and concrete way. She was very impressed too about the cooperation we'd had with TYHCG about the homepage, the brochure and Facebook. Especially the intensity during the group work had been fantastic. .

Below we tell about life in Ghana. This will be used in our future lectures.

LIFE IN ABRAMANS COMPOUND

When you approach the compound, the horn in the car is tooting, and at once someone will come to open the big and heavy gate. We had a feeling of entering the royal palace in Copenhagen. The compound has been extended over the years. It was founded in 2002 after a visit to Denmark - in the beginning a house built in an angle with more rooms. The roof was put on in 2003. After more visits abroad, the house has grown and now has a big wall around it with a roofed gate where one of the taxis can park. A small shop and an apartment for rent have been built in the wall too. Abramans' family lives in the big house. It has a nice kitchen, two rooms, two bathrooms and a big hall. His family consists of his wife, Awulatu, three daughters and his wife's little sister. In the old house is inhabited by his nephew, a young couple and a family from the North. All together 7 adults and 6 children. Every day lots of friends and neighbors pass by. It is a popular compound with a lot of life and things going on - especially in the evenings and on Sundays.

These are examples of the nice life in the compound: One night when we were about to leave after having played with the children inside the house (just the two of us, the other adults were sitting outside) we went out to the car to get a ride back to our guest house. The compound was full of people lying on the floor on mats and mattresses ready to sleep outside because of the heat.



Wouw, the stars and the moon were shining - It looked really nice.

After dinner everybody from the compound hang out outside, children, neighbours, friends.

They talk, relaxe, wash the dishes, shout a little and laugh a lot. In the hall there is a television from Vordingborg in Denmark. Children and friends of Kausada, Awulatu's little sister watch cartoons and series from Nigeria. The place seems safe, calm and with a good atmosphere.

Abraman is the head of the compound. He's the one who decides and is responsible. He can however act in a less patriarchal and dominating Ghanaian male way as well. We had that experience a Sunday afternoon. A lot of kids from the area were invited to watch the movie, The Lion King, which Lise had brought to the family. Abraman served minerals and biscuits for the 15 children, a very nice time for them as well as for us.

Awulatu, his wife has indeed changed from being a small girl ten years ago when he married her in 2004 till now. She is a strong and busy woman. Every morning she gets up at 5 and starts cooking stew for her shop in Tamale. She helps the children getting ready for school and feed them. Between 8 and 9 Abraman brings her to the shop. In the shop she sells minerals, water, telephone cards biscuits and other things. Outside the shop she cooks yam and plantain which is sold together with the homemade stew. In the evening she returns to the house bringing a lot of bowls and pots for the dishwashing. After school the children join her in the shop or are picked up by their father.

How men boost the lives of women

It is difficult for us to work out the relations and power between men and women in Ghana. It is obvious that they live in quite separate worlds, economically as well. We have throughout the years noticed that Abraman and the male members of YHCG have been ready to, and intensely concerned about how they can support and give opportunities to the women in Tamale.

They have often said that young women have to be supported to avoid prostitution and teenage pregnancy.

When we today look at the group, we find that a lot of activities concerning the lives of woman has been started by men: the sewing workshop and the running and development of it, the further development of the batik work shop, the cooperation with other NGO's like Playing for Change, training for the tests for sewing girls from all over Tamale, the possibility for women like Happy Ladies to have meetings at Youth Home. We also know that the men have supported their wives by giving them money to start a little business or to extend the one they already have and by buying a motor bike which can be used by both husband and wife for transportation of the family and different articles.

The stay in Accra

The trip to Accra the 25 of March went well. We stayed at a hotel called Blue Royal which is situated in the heart of Osu, a part of Accra full of life and with a mix of traditional and modern Ghana. An interesting and in many ways different place from where we have stayed during our previous stays. The next evening we met the group at Alliance Francaise. They had an amazing performance, including the male dance with sticks, Jara Bamaya and Tora. In between children and adult models presented clothes made of the famous northern Ghanaian Kente fabric. YHCG acted as a kind of wing during this part of the show. A very good and interesting effect. Wuza Wuza Dance Theater made a beautiful and very professional contemporary dance performance. Their leader, Yusa who has been a member of YHCG, was the lead dancer. We got the chance to say hello to John Owoo and Madam Kokor from the embassy who were in charge of the cultural festival. Most of the guests during the evening were white expats and we understood why, the restaurant was very exclusive and the prices very high. After the show you could buy paintings, baskets and artwork from the Bolga area.

AWARD EVENING AT THE EMBASSY

After our arrival 27 March we walked about in the nice garden of ambassador, Margot Thomsen and watched her house with Danish design furniture. Impressive. Around six pm the guests started arriving. The reception was very nice with different tapas, wine and beer ad libitum. The atmosphere was relaxed and the group obviously enjoyed the evening. For us it was interesting talking to people from the embassy and some trainees too.



TYHCG made a performance at the lawn just before a heavy rain started. The ambassador invited everyone to enter her house and stay in her living rooms and a group called Hewale started playing and people danced. Very nice. When the rain had stopped YHCG continued their performance at the terrace. Incredible how these people can adapt to the situation and surroundings. Respect. In the living room a female poet read aloud a short story and a poem of her own. Finally the time for the award which everybody had been waiting for had come. A jury had decided that there were three candidates for the two prizes. TYHCG got the first prize including 35.000 cedis, Footprints from Cape Coast the other one.

The ambassador told about the three claims for the award given by GCDF before telling who the winner was. She mentioned:

1. Danish and Ghanaian exchange of arts and culture
2. Work of excellence
3. Work that is vibrant and groundbreaking. Works which support or provide opportunities and participation in art experiences through audience, development in the deprived communities.

The jury had found the three candidates for the prize and like in “ You have got talent “ she said very slowly: And the winner is-----YHCG!!!!

Everybody was screaming and like a soccer coach Abramman was lifted up in the air. What an evening.

The group danced a Bamaya and that was the end of a fantastic evening. TYHCG went back to Yusa´s house and got the early bus back to Tamale next morning. Happy and proud. We still had days in Accra for relaxing and a good time together with Abramman and Mutala.

Another fantastic and interesting trip to Ghana.

Annemarie Grüner og Lise Drewes Nielsen

