

LIBRARY PROJECT FOR THE GIA-KAJELO COMMUNITY
Ghana
Brown University
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United World Colleges Red Cross Nordic

Section I

b. Our project was to create a textbook-equipped study space for pupils from grades one through twelve and to provide an Information Technology (IT) literacy program for all members of the community and its environs. These efforts, we hoped, would reduce the barriers to out-of-school studying and help alleviate the low rates of educational attainment.

c. This project was primarily funded by the project grant. The expenses over the amount were covered by the project team.

d. I spent my high school days in the Gia-Kajelo community which is my hometown, and I got very involved in the everyday life of the people. Living there was hard but one root cause for the vicious cycle of poverty was that there was a chronic lack of study materials and access to electricity. After sunset there is no source of lighting. All children had to either do their studying, homework, and chores within the limited time between the close of school and sunset, or wake up early to get them done. I thought that if the root cause of the cycle could be addressed then we could expect to increase academic performance and low attainment could be improved.

e. Access to electricity in such rural areas is crucial to academic output and performance as is access to study materials and spaces. Without these, all studying will be limited to the time spent in the classroom during the day. This has long term effects on educational attainment, which is the root cause of the vicious cycle of poverty in most rural areas. If there were access to study materials and electricity, then there could surely be an expected increase in academic performance and educational attainment, which could help to break the cycle of poverty and improves the livelihoods of people in rural areas.

f. The community is part of the Kasena-Nankana district, which is among those with the highest rates of student failure in the national junior and senior high school final exams-- the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) respectively-- as well as the highest student dropout rates. Another reason why I chose this community was because I am very acquainted with the members and knew what help was needed. I hoped that this would make it very easy to work with the people.

g. The community was very welcoming of the idea and gave me a lot of support. I felt the project was necessary and their affirmation supported this. The reception was warm and the people even offered to have a thanking ceremony, which everyone attended. Fortunately, I was familiar with the language and the people so communication in the language (Kasem) and with the people was very smooth.

h. I faced some challenges with the project because it became more political than I expected. There were three assemblymen, all of whom were elected by the people for the community, and all of whom all wanted the project to be led by them. This affected communication among them and also with me. They only began to cooperate after a couple of sessions that explained that the project only sought the good of the community and that good would not be achieved if carrying-out the project became political. My mentor was very helpful in dealing with this area and we managed to resolve the issues.

i. Although it was a great to be a speaker of the Kasem language, I had been away from the village for a while so my Kasem had become a little rusty. But this was not a hindrance since all matters were effectively communicated and worked on. Another challenge was the hierarchical nature of the society which often required that I paid explicit respect to all who were older than me regardless of the fact that I was the project leader. This made it quite impossible at times and dragged the plans for the project since all community elders had to be visited and personally be informed and have their suggestions sought. We managed to work around that issue by calling several meetings where elders were collectively told about

the project, although in some instances we had to individually meet with some of the others at the expense of the project time.

j. Peace is the presence of harmony that exists within an individual's state of mind and also in the events that occur around them. With peace people are able to maintain a positive attitude and outlook on the world and live a desirable lifestyle.

k. With the presence of the right resources, the children will be able to effectively invest in their education and be on par with their counterparts in the cities who have more access to information and study materials. This was the short-term goal--to help even access by provision of infrastructure.

In the long-term, the project sought to create a facility that augments educational attainment and helps the children of the community pursue their intellectual passions. A lack of uniform access to quality education, mentorship, and training perpetrates existing inequalities in the community and the widening of the gap between rich and poor. Unlike children in cities or relatively well developed areas, these kids tend to grow up with a great deal of uncertainty about their future careers and remain uninformed on the wide range of opportunities and career paths that they could pursue. This inequality creates an imbalance and takes away the ability of people to pursue a desirable way of life.

Also, education is a key way of preventing conflicts, even war. With education people are exposed to knowledge that can challenge or reinforce ideas. This way they learn to develop empathy and understanding and tend to make informed decisions. Thus this is another way in which peace is contributed to by this project in the long term by improving access to knowledge and educational attainment.

l. I used to think that money was a huge determinant of happiness and growth --be it individual or societal--, and that with money all problems could be solved. I had this notion because I grew up in a very modest family and all our problems were money centered. After getting this grant, I was amazed by what I would be able to do and how big the opportunity would be for my village. With the money, I could start to fully tackle the issue that I set out to solve. Once the project began, I realized that it took good leadership and wise spending to go about the project, and all would have gone haywire if my team were not up on their feet. Also I had to communicate with the team and the people in the village about all that I wanted to do and my ideas on how the plan should be carried out. The communication was sometimes difficult due to the hierarchical nature of the society, and as described earlier, it tended to slow the project plans. I had to empathize and follow their way of thought to be able to communicate the usefulness of my ideas in ways that were effective but also respectful of the elders. Doing this I was also able to build sound relationships which helped me to get great deals on purchases. Also, with these relationships I am sure that I can trust the people with whom I have left in charge of the facility.

Basically, I learned a new way of thinking about the world. I learned that people need to be involved and respected as much as they need to be led and that sound relationship building is very useful for harmony and peaceful coexistence. This taught me that money could help solve people's problems but acknowledgement and leadership makes those solutions last.

m. "Access to information and quality education is very crucial to breaking the vicious cycle of poverty that most rural communities face, and this is what the project sought to do - to provide an equipped space for such access. Through this project, I learned that the most effective solutions not only require money but leadership and empathy as well "

- Bruno Felalaga



Assembly of pupils from the community and its environs at the opening/thanking ceremony.



The facility during the opening day.



The facility at use during the night.