

Savannah Education Trust Newsletter



Educating Ghana's most needy children ▪ Charity No. 1104896 ▪ Issue No. 9 ▪ Summer 2011

This is a newsletter of the Savannah Education Trust, a charity set up to provide an education for some of the most needy children in West Africa. The first school in Bagri, northern Ghana, opened in 2006. Further Christian schools are now being built in nearby villages called Pavuu and Gberi. The Trust also provides each schoolchild with a meal each day and is funding a number of teacher training scholarships to attract teachers to this remote and poor area.

Buildings nearly complete

We are very pleased and thankful to report that, as the pictures show, the new school building in Gberi is now complete. The new school building in Pavuu is reaching its final stage, as the workers apply a coat of paint.

If the Lord will, both schools will eventually have an associated nursery and toilet block. Gberi school has been built in the traditional u-shape, whilst Pavuu has been constructed in a single line of classrooms.

Each of the new schools has been painted in the striking two-tone blue that has become synonymous with the Savannah Education Trust in north-west Ghana.





Focus on Food

Across the three villages in which the charity is now working, well over 600 children now attend school.

One important element of our work is to provide each of these children with a meal each school day. These are villages where people are often hungry and, even in years of good harvests, there is hardly enough food to feed each family.

Without the provision of a school meal the poorest children would often have to miss school to help with domestic chores. Especially during the harvest period (at the end of the rains from August onwards), children would be required to help their parents in the fields. During the long, barren, dry season (from October to May), the village children would be out looking for food. As well as fruits and nuts, the children also look for rats, mice, birds and even snakes to eat. The shocking need was brought starkly to light when we visited a school just outside Lawra during the time when we were conducting research before our first school was built at Bagri. We were told that a child had collapsed in class the previous week and had been rushed to the medical clinic in Lawra.

The medics had discovered that the boy was not suffering from a specific illness but was severely malnourished.

Throughout these villages the children show classic signs of malnourishment: swollen stomachs, thin arms and legs, discoloured hair and a listlessness. Interestingly, the word universally used for malnourishment in the tropics (particularly protein deficiency) is a Ghanaian word: 'kwashiorkor'. In the Ga language, it loosely means the disease 'of the displaced child', or the disease that the first child contracts when the second child is born. In short it is the result of children being weaned on a poor and inadequate diet.

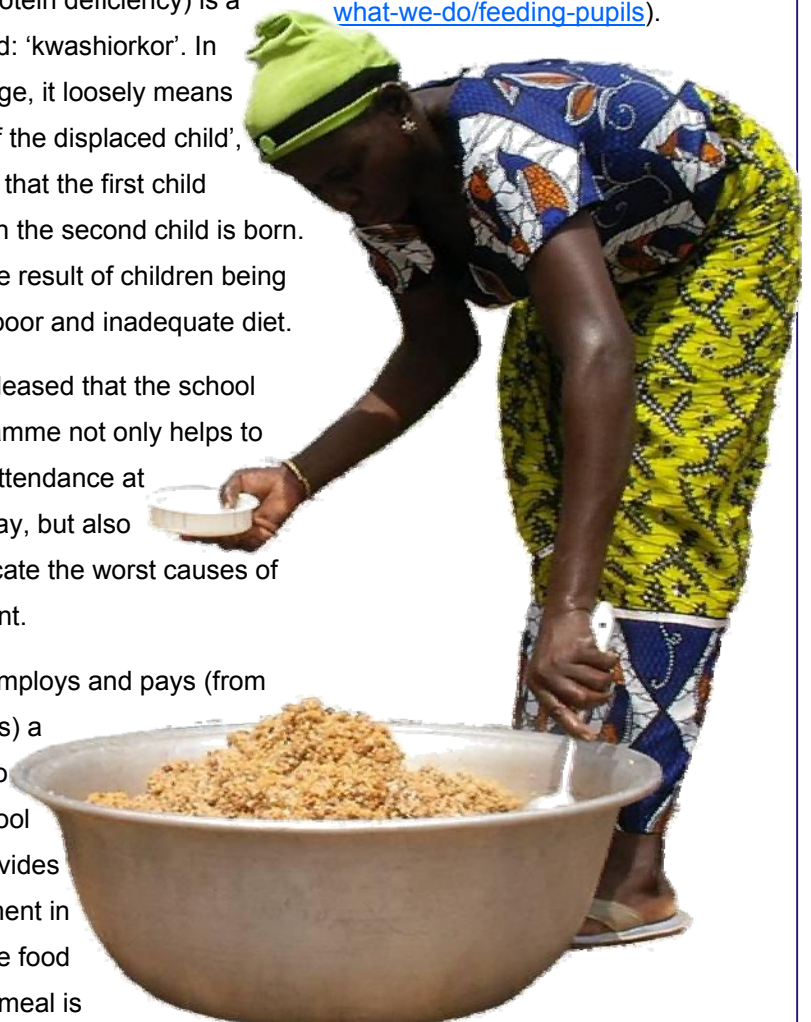
We are very pleased that the school feeding programme not only helps to ensure a full attendance at school each day, but also helps to eradicate the worst causes of malnourishment.

Each village employs and pays (from their own funds) a local woman to act as the school cook. This provides extra employment in the village. The food for the school meal is

purchased at the weekly market in Lawra, so the programme also helps local farmers. Food generally consists of local produce, including beans and tomatoes.

It is quite a logistic challenge for the Savannah workers to transport large quantities of food to three different sites – and it makes the vehicle that the charity owns absolutely essential. The feeding programme in Pavuu started at the beginning of the year and, following some difficulties in employing a cook, started in Gberi in May.

The feeding programme at Bagri has just completed five years, including an extended feeding programme to aid the whole village during the famine of 2007-08. There is some short video footage on our website about the feeding programme: (<http://www.savannaheducationtrust.org/what-we-do/feeding-pupils>).



Parent Teacher Association

Each of our three schools has a Parent and Teacher Association (PTA.) to support the work of the schools. It might be interesting to supporters (as an example of the activity of one of our PTAs) to know what happened at the first such meeting in Pavuu.

The meeting was held on 16 November 2010 and started with the election of a seven member PTA Executive Board. In their first meeting, they noted the high level of enrolment (95 pupils) and the appointment of the first headteacher (Mr Peter Vuochery).

It was agreed that, like Bagri, every child/pupil should contribute twenty pesewas (about 10 pence) to support a cook to prepare meals for the School. They also appointed a woman from the village as the school cook. The headteacher was asked to introduce her to the District Education Office for approval. She has subsequently undergone the necessary checks (largely relating to her knowledge of food hygiene) to declare her fit for the job.

A new initiative for unqualified teachers



During the Spring our programme manager in Ghana, Pastor Charles Karbo, convened a meeting of all the teaching staff and Parent Teacher Association chairmen of the three savannah schools (Bagri, Gberi and Pavuu). They were joined by local officials: three circuit supervisors and two senior officers of the Ghana Education Service. The intention was to evaluate the activities of Savannah Education Trust.

It was a very productive meeting. One particular challenge identified at the meeting was that faced by 'untrained teachers' (teachers who do

not have professional qualifications and who form the majority of the staff in schools in this area). Teacher Training Colleges are introducing a distance training programme for untrained teachers already working in schools.

On the back of this conversation, Savannah Education Trust invited five untrained teachers to attend an interview at Tumu College of Education. If successful, the Trust will support them through the four year period (during which time they will continue teaching). By the end of the course, they will be fully qualified teachers.

The need for resources

The schools in northern Ghana are generally very poorly equipped, and children do not have many of the resources or toys that are taken for granted in wealthy countries. Generally we try to source materials - such as notebooks and pencils - locally where possible, in that way helping the local economy and also saving transport costs. An exception is Abi Izzard's initiative to create 'siren sox': fun creatures for children made out of socks. A network of helpers created 400 toys which arrived in Ghana in early 2011. The excitement on the children's faces tells the rest of the story! For most this is the first time they have held a toy in their hands.

Our supporters will also be interested to see a tricycle in use in the nursery in Bagri - purchased from the proceeds of a brunch in the Luton area.



Notebooks and pencils



A tricycle in the nursery at Bagri

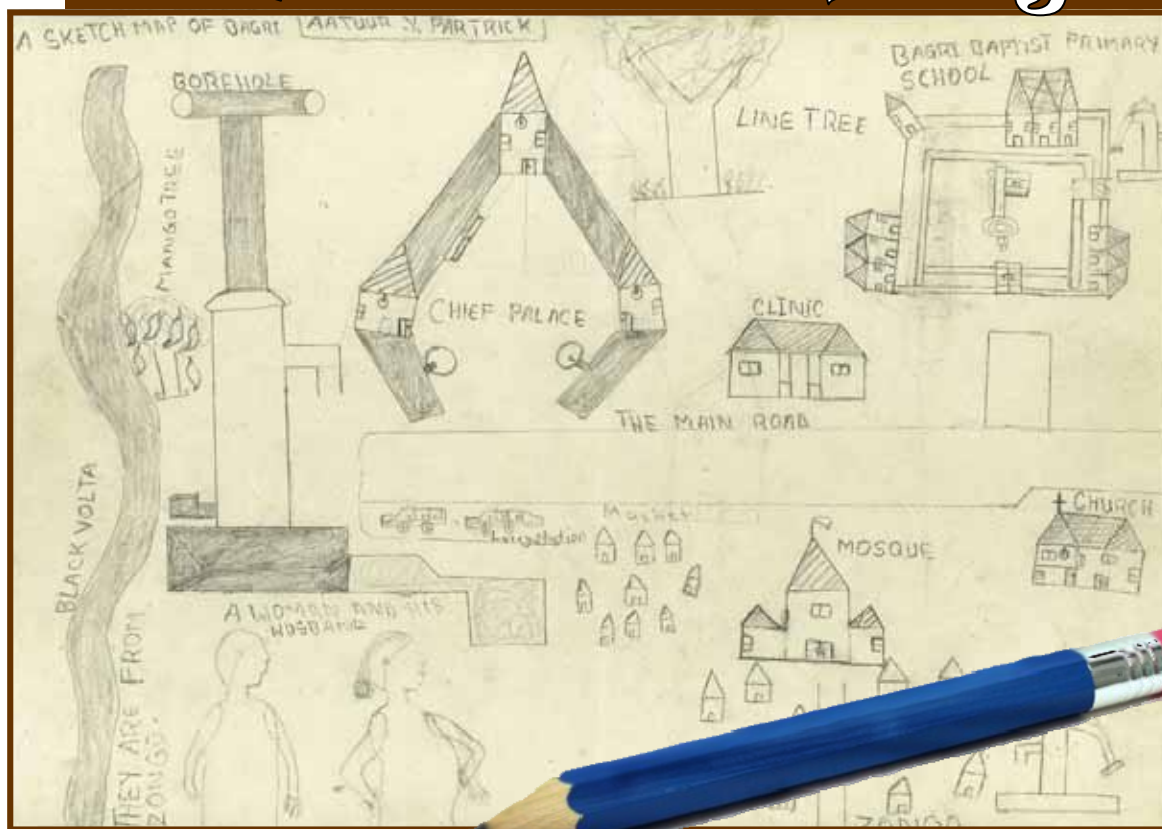


A class receiving 'siren sox'

A child's view of Bagri

Of necessity most of the material in our newsletters provides a British view of these villages in northern Ghana, but it was exciting to receive recently some drawings produced by children attending our first school in Bagri.

The picture shows a schoolchild's own portrayal of Bagri village and his school. A version of this drawing can be enlarged in the 'news' section of our website .



A new classroom block for Bagri

It seems amazing that the school at Bagri is now five years old. The school currently takes children up until the age of 11. This however means that any child at the school, no matter how able, would be unable to take the national school exams at the age of 14.

Our programme manager, Charles Karbo, the villagers and the Ghana Education Service are all very keen for children to extend their education to the age of 14.

We are very grateful to report that we have received funding specifically to fund a new classroom block at Bagri, and that building is about to start. We will therefore be in a position to offer children in Bagri the opportunity to stay at school until they have completed the national level of basic education.



Agricultural teaching

The intention has always been for the Savannah schools to have a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of local children. Given that the majority will become farmers – and in a community where farming is very challenging – agriculture teaching is very important. Each school has a small farm. These pictures show the 22 acre site at Bagri School, where the farm is now fully functioning as a practical aid to teaching children agriculture (or 'agric' as it is known), as well as basic lessons about nutrition and diet.

