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Savannah
Education Trust

Newsletter



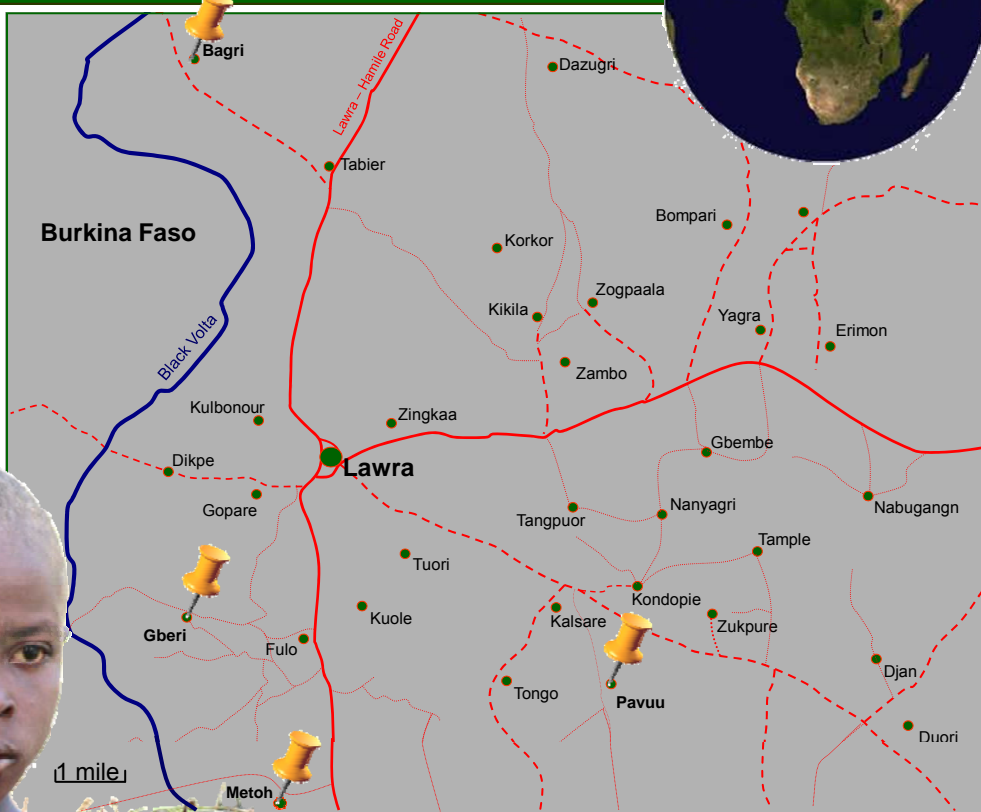
Educating Ghana's poorest children ▪ Charity No. 1104896 ▪ Issue No. 10 ▪ Summer 2012

This is a newsletter of the Savannah Education Trust, a charity set up to provide an education for some of the poorest children in West Africa. We now have three Christian schools in northern Ghana in the villages of Bagri, Pavuu and Gberi. The charity 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.

A NEW SCHOOL AT METOH VILLAGE

Right from the earliest days of the charity, we have been concerned about the poorest children in the villages of northern Ghana beyond Bagri, where our first village school is located. We have extended the work into other villages as we have felt convinced that it was the right thing to do - and as funding has been provided and opportunities in Ghana have arisen. The desire to help as many children as is possible continues. We are, however, very conscious that each new school makes us reliant on kind donations, not just for the initial costs but also for ongoing costs which of course increase with every school.

We are therefore pleased to be able to report plans to build a Christian school in the village of Metoh. If the Lord will, this will be our fourth school and has been made possible by funding from a Swiss company, u-blox. We are grateful to them for their support through their Corporate Social



Responsibility programme and their willingness to work with us long-term. One reason that the company was willing to provide this funding was because they could see the fruits of support from so many of our loyal supporters over a long period.

As the map shows, the village of Metoh is the furthest south of the villages with Savannah schools. It is about six miles south of the main market town of Lawra, and quite near to the road that leads south from Lawra to the regional capital of Wa. A survey earlier in the year showed that there are at least 250 children scattered across this village: a whole generation growing up without a Christian education and in desperate need. We are very thankful to be able to have this opportunity to help them, even though the increased responsibilities can sometimes feel rather daunting. We hope that building work at Metoh will be ongoing throughout 2012.

A VISIT TO GHANA

During the autumn, trustees of the Savannah Education Trust visited our 'Savannah schools' in northern Ghana. It was an important, busy and memorable visit. We landed in Accra, Ghana's coastal capital, late in the evening and, after a welcome meal and a few hours rest, set off for the north of Ghana soon after dawn.

We were again reminded of the remoteness of the region, spending 16 hours travelling – initially through attractive hill country and past stalls of bright and exotic produce. Once past the bustling city of Kumasi in the centre of the country, the classic jungle eases into grassland ('savannah'), the roads empty and the villages become noticeably poorer. The roads are dangerous, and we were thankful to arrive in the market town of Lawra – the chief town of this area - late in the evening.

The work of the charity is in the countryside surrounding this market town and most of our week in north-west Ghana was spent in its scattered villages. We had many aims: to attend the commissioning of our new schools in the villages of Gberi and Pavuu; to spend time during an ordinary school week at our first school in Bagri; to meet key local partners, including government officials; to visit villages currently without a school; and to discuss the current and future work with the Savannah workers, principally Charles Karbo, our Programme Director.

Commissioning of the schools

Both schools were commissioned in one very full day: Gberi in the morning and Pavuu in the afternoon. The drive to Gberi is only some 4 miles from the regional town of Lawra, but the charity's robust vehicle was never more necessary. With no proper road, the approach to the village passes through long grass. Between the straggly green grass we had glimpses of a brilliant blue: the new school. As we arrived we were surrounded by a large crowd of women from the village and the harmonious sound of their song as they danced towards us.



Top: the commissioning of Gberi School; **Bottom left:** walking to unveil the plaque with the Paramount Chief; **Bottom right:** a happy school boy banging his drum during morning break

Events at the two villages followed a similar format. We sat under a large canopy on armchairs in front of a table thoughtfully draped in a Union Jack flag. In the burning heat, there were 16 or 17 speeches and short performances by the children who looked very neat in their blue uniform.

Both occasions were graced by the Paramount Chief of Lawra. He sat under a huge umbrella in his full ceremonial dress including a large medallion from colonial days bearing the head of George V. The government was also well represented with officials from the regional office.

We spoke last, directly before the unveiling of a plaque. It was an opportunity to express many of our heartfelt feelings: thankfulness to God, gratitude to our kind supporters and shared excitement with the children and villagers.

A school in action

On two days during the visit we travelled soon after dawn along mud red tracks to the village of Bagri. It was an opportunity to see our first school in action. Bagri School is now five years old and has nearly 400

children. It is, in every sense, a fully functioning school.

It was a thrill to see children in striking blue uniform appearing from behind deep grass or walking alongside acacia and baobab trees as they snaked their way to school.

The children gather in the courtyard at the start of each school day and we had the privilege of speaking to them before watching them march – to the beat of a drum and in careful formation – into their classes. Some of them had been there even before assembly to help with chores around the school: cleaning and laying out of foodstuffs to dry in the sun in preparation for lunch.

We enjoyed attending classes, meeting teachers (and seeing their accommodation on the ridge overlooking the school) and viewing the small farm alongside the school in action. We were impressed with the standard of the teaching, and with the teachers that had passed through Savannah's teacher scholarship programme. Without the benefit of these scholarships it is likely that they would be unemployed.

A school day at Bagri is not all hard work. We enjoyed hearing the children sing and play the Lobi xylophone. We even had opportunity to watch a game of football and various activities, including a competitive tug of war, on the school field. The morning ended with the free school meal that Savannah provides to each school child. Having started early, the afternoon (as the temperature continues to rise and rise) is a relatively short part of the school day.

On our second morning in the village we were invited to a community meeting with the villagers to hear their thoughts about the school and to give us opportunity to speak to them. They were kind enough to express their delight with the school (partly in song!) and to present us with gifts: three small wooden stalls.

Contrasts with other villages

More sobering was time spent north of Bagri in another village known in the local Dagaare tongue as 'the crossing of the stream'. Here children were working long hours with their parents in the fields, helping to pick nuts. The signs of malnourishment were clearly present in many of these children: wasted arms and legs, swollen stomachs and discoloured hair. At a community meeting the villagers expressed their strong wish for a village school.

While to see such poverty is difficult, even distressing, the most striking thing we witnessed during our visit was the profound

change seen in villages which enjoy a Savannah school. The daily meal provided for schoolchildren has all but eradicated malnourishment, and healthy and well-clothed children are enjoying the benefits of a Christian education. We chatted to many of the schoolchildren who spoke simply but with conviction about the difference a Savannah school has made to their lives.

Meetings with Ghanaian partners

Perhaps less evocative than time spent at the schools – but certainly no less important – were the meetings that we held. At the start and end of our visit we were greeted in the fading pomp of Lawra's Royal Palace by Naa Puowele Karbo III, the Chief of the area. He expressed his strong support for the work.

On the edge of Lawra, we also visited local government officials, including the District Director of Education. The meetings were very cordial and the government are genuinely pleased to be working in partnership with Savannah. The charity provides the buildings and the government provide the ongoing teacher salary costs. It is interesting to note that of the five schools opened in this district over the last six years, three have been Savannah schools.

During our visit we stayed at a basic guesthouse in Lawra. We used the large sitting room at the guesthouse as a base for some of our meetings: including providing a meal for local government officials and for all of

the teachers at Savannah schools. Both occasions were memorable: with lots of short speeches and opportunity for conversations.

Perhaps above all, time spent with those working on behalf of Savannah was crucial: Pastor Charles Karbo (Programme Director), Alfred Sugsuo (Finance Assistant), Pastor James Kori (who was involved with the founding of the work) and various other helpers. It was an opportunity to talk about the current work, to talk about the future and simply to spend time together.

At the end of a particularly hot and busy day we stood outside one of our new Savannah schools. The school, which had been full of activity during the day, was now still. The setting sun shed a soft light over the savannah. Villagers were using the school's borehole.

In the calm of the twilight we looked at the blue building in its beautiful, remote savannah setting and felt very thankful – thankful to God, and grateful to our kind and loyal supporters.

As we reflect on our visit we are also thankful for safe journeys and for the opportunity once again to see the work – and the significant impact that the work is having on the lives of some of the poorest children in Africa.

A version of this article appeared on our website during December. More photographs of the work and the visit are available from the site.

Below left: a malnourished boy, with tribal scarring on his stomach, in a village without a school;

Below: assembly at Bagri School



Building work at Bagri



The original school at Bagri (including the nursery) provides for children aged 3-11. While a Christian education to the age of 11 is enormously beneficial to these children, it leaves them three years short of standard school leaving age (14). This is also the age that the national examination is taken (the equivalent of British GCSEs).

A new school block is being built on the Bagri School site, very kindly funded by an individual donor. The

building has reached roof level. The new classrooms will allow children to remain in education until the age of 14 and will create what is called in Ghana a 'Junior High School' (JHS). We hope that some of the more able children will then be able to continue their education after 14 by moving to boarding school in one of the towns in this region. In due course, we will give consideration to a small number of scholarships to help village children who would benefit from education beyond the age of 14.

A new trustee

We have been very aware for some time of the rapid way in which the responsibilities involved in the work of Savannah have increased. In Ghana, there are now four direct employees and, if the Lord will, once all the schools are full there will be some 30 teachers (albeit salaries paid by the government) and about 1500 pupils, each receiving a meal each day. The scale of the work is much greater than we could perhaps have imagined when the charity started in 2004-05 and we stand amazed at all that the Lord has done.

We have been prayerfully concerned for a long time about the appointment of further trustees for the UK Board. We are thankful that Joe Sayers has agreed to join as a trustee. Joe, who will be known to some of our supporters, is a self-employed businessman running a business development consultancy - having spent much of his career in corporate sales. He has previously been a school governor, and is currently involved in the work of the Trinitarian Bible Society in the west of England.

Joe lives in Oxfordshire, and is married to Gill. They have four children and three grandchildren.

Children of the Savannah

Abu is a young boy living in a village near the Black Volta river in northern Ghana. He has no school to attend and his life is extremely difficult. His days are generally spent helping his parents, with household chores, with farming and with fishing. In periods when there is little food (particularly during the 'dry season') he is out in the savannah hunting for small animals to ease his hunger.

The story of Abu, and way in which Savannah Education Trust aims to help children like him, is told in a new DVD. Called *Children of the Savannah*, it is available free of charge to supporters. Orders can be placed through the 'Contact' link on our website: www.savannahtrust.org/contact-us/ or by telephoning 01444 483884. It can also be streamed at www.savannahtrust.org/children-of-savannah.

