



DKA Study-Tour



Foreword

From the 8th of June until the 9th of August a group of eleven Austrians had the opportunity to take part in the so called "Lerneinsatz", a study tour to Ghana. Coming from different parts of Austria, having different occupations and being of different ages and in different stages of our lives, we all had something unique to carry into the group.

During this intensive month in Ghana we had the chance to see a lot of the country, learn new things, meet interesting people and get to know a bit of the Ghanaian culture. It is hard to put all our experiences into words, but the trip definitely affected all of us and broadened our horizons. At this point we want to say a big THANK YOU to the DKA- team Elisabeth, Karin, Clemens and Ute who not only made this trip possible, but also prepared us well and supported us throughout our journey. Thank you also to all the people we met in Ghana who made our trip so unforgettable!



Hannah



Most useful item in Ghana:

my scarf. During the daytime I mostly used the scarf as a turban to protect my head from the sun and in the evening I often used the scarf as a blanket to protect myself from mosquito bites. But the scarf was also useful when I felt cold (which can happen when it rains) and also to protect my shoulders from getting sunburnt during the day. I never left the house without my scarf!

What I could have left at home:

my third pair of shoes. Sandals and one pair of solid footwear is definitely enough.

What I should have brought along to Ghana:

a solar charger. As there is no electricity in the village, you might want to bring a solar charger to recharge your phone, camera, iPod,....

My favourite Ghanaian dish:

fruits. I am sorry to say that I am not a very huge fan of Ghanaian dishes but the fruits (mango, bananas, pineapple) are definitely a lot tastier than in Austria.

What I liked most about Ghana:

the smiles on the people's faces.

I came back to Austria thinking that...

I wish we Austrians were as welcoming and friendly towards strangers.

Basti

Name: Sebastian Poltschak Age: 28 Occupation: Research assistant at JKU Linz



Most useful item in Ghana:

My camera, even if it is only possible to capture a small portion of what we experienced. ... and Nutella!

What I could have left at home: My rain jacket kept dry.

What I should have brought along to Ghana:

A benefit of a group travel is, that you can hardly forget anything, since there is always someone else who brought it!

My favourite Ghanaian dish: Fried yam and fish, because you cannot eat bofruits all the time ;-)

What I liked most about Ghana:

This is actually very hard to tell. It is the overall impression, the friendly people and the many surprises that made the experience unique and special. Getting to know the lifestyle of people, which live only a few hours away (by plane) and the interesting question of how this lifestyle equals and contradicts to ours. The way how we got to know Ghana: not only as tourists who scratch the surface, but as divers into Ghanaian culture and lifestyle.

And not to forget: crocodiles, elephants, monkeys and the milky way

I came back to Austria thinking that

Aha. Good question. Apart from lots of memories and impressions, lots of things to think about: How easy and complicated things can be – on both sides. Open-mindedness in many different points of views, how quick time passes, if it becomes less important and many photos.

Will I come again? Let's see - anytime from now. Dasiba. Naa.

Pia



Name: Pia Matkovich Age: 58 Occupation: work with children

Most useful item in Ghana: headscarf/scarf

What I could have left at home: windbreaker

My favourite Ghanaian dish fried plantain, yollof rice

What I liked most about Ghana fresh fruits like pineapple and mango sold on the street

I came back to Austria thinking that...

Ghana is very versatile in its regions, a country rich in nature , rich in contrasts like sometimes feeling like here in the middle ages before industrialisation and at the same time very modern and who knows maybe I'll come back again.

Franziska



Name: Franziska Okolo Age: 25 Occupation: Student

Most useful item in Ghana: The magic stick (against mosquito bites)

What I could have left at home: half of the clothes I brought with me

What I should have brought along to Ghana: Schnaps

My favourite Ghanaian dish: grilled red fish

What I liked most about Ghana: The people

I came back to Austria thinking that, I had an amazing time with amazing people

Rosi



Name: Rosi Schöffmann Age: 29 Occupation: teacher, social worker

Most useful item in Ghana: my scarf (protection against almost everything, including mosquitos, sun, cold, etc.)

What I could have left at home: my second pullover (just bring one for the plane)

What I should have brought along to Ghana: a soccer ball for our stay in the village

My favourite Ghanaian dish: Palaver sauce with yam and fried plantain

What I liked most about Ghana: the people, the colourful country and Ghanaian approach to time

I came back to Austria thinking that... where are all the people?

Karin

Name: Karin Kiss – alias "Mother" Karin Age: 45 years Occupation: Teacher



Most useful item in Ghana: snaps (I liked to have a sip of snaps after meal so I didn't get ill)

What I could have left at home:

my warm jacket, not so much sun lotion (1 bottle is enough because it's very cloudy in July), no bite (the local products are also very good)

What I should have brought along to Ghana: I missed nothing and I could have bought nearly everything

My favourite Ghanaian dish: beans with fried plantains, fresh pineapples, mangos, bananas, shandy (Radler)

What I liked most about Ghana:

The Ghanaians. They were always compassionate, accepted and helped us in any situation. And they were also very interested in our country and especially the way we live in Europe. Even in the smallest villages we met very openminded people.

I came back to Austria thinking that

most Austrians are rich in material things but rather poor when it comes to love, lust of life or friendliness to strangers compared to Ghanaians. Ghanaians are always in a good temper, laughing and singing – even if the struggle for survival. In relation to the difficulties most Ghanaians deal with, my problems are quite trivial.

Mari



Name: Marianne Bäck Age: 26 Occupation: Student of Dance Science

Most useful item in Ghana: Head torch (for the evenings in the village) and Iberogast Medicine for the stomach ; -)

What I could have left at home:

My hat - a scarf is much more useful to protect the head from the sun and also to prevent Mosquitobites.

What I should have brought along to Ghana:

more games to play with the kids and traditional Austrian dances to teach them

My favourite Ghanaian dish: Vegetable Rice and fresh fruits

What I liked most about Ghana:

The warmth and kindness of the people

I came back to Austria thinking that

I've learned a lot about other people, another culture and also about myself on the journey. I would have liked to take some of the serenity, the smiles and happiness of the people in my luggage back to Austria.

Franzi



Name: Franzi Age: 21 Occupation: Economics Student

Most useful item in Ghana: Bohnanza game (:

What I could have left at home: mosquito net; I was too lazy to put it up for staying 1 night in the hostels

What I should have brought along to Ghana: more bacteria for my stomach (;

My favourite Ghanaian dish: Banku :b

What I liked most about Ghana: the helpful and caring friends we made

I came back to Austria thinking that... everything is suddenly so clean again

Bianca

Name: Bianca Stadler Age: 23 years Occupation: I am studying social work in Linz and will graduate my bachelor this year.

Most useful item in Ghana:

The no-bite spray, some flip flops, my scarf and the washing soap are very important for the journey.

What I could have left at home:

Oh actually I had far too many things with which I did not need, for example, my book- I had no time to read. Another thing was my thick vest because it was also warm in the evening. I could have also left a few shoes at home ... and much more ;)

What I should have brought along to Ghana:

A means to prevent the itching of the mosquitoes and more long-T-shirts so that you can protect yourself better. And a bottle of good schnaps ;)

My favourite Ghanaion dish:

Banku is the food of the locals, which I did not like at all! But Bo-Fruits are very good. You can compare them with baked mice and they are offered as a snack.

What I liked most about Ghana:

The friendly open-minded people and their cordial kind.

I came back to Austria thinking that... I will come back to Ghana ;)



Michi



Name: Michaela Bäck Age: 24 Occupation: Pianoteacher

Most useful items in Ghana: Guitalele + Songbook, Nutella, headtorch and scarf

What I could have left at home: some of my clothes and some of my fears

What I should have brought along to Ghana: a small English dictionary and Bob Marley sheet music

My favourite Ghanaian dishes: fried Yam and all sorts of fruits; and for small snacks in between: Tiganuts and Bofruits

What I liked most about Ghana:

the friendly smile and warmth of the people, the lovely children, the beautiful landscape, the drumming and dancing and that all kinds of religions can peacefully live together

I came back to Austria thinking that...

we can learn a lot from the people and their attitude to life, but also can be glad to live in such a beautiful country like Austria.

Anna



Name: Anna Pührerfellner Age: 24 Occupation: Student

Most useful item in Ghana: A pair of glasses with which you can change your view on different kind of topics and a lot of courage to look behind the scenes.

What I could have left at home: the second long T-shirt

What I should have brought along to Ghana: online dictionary and offline map

My favourite Ghanaian dish: Fufu and fried plantain

What I liked most about Ghana: the feeling of freedom and peace and the way how locals are treating foreigners

I came back to Austria thinking that

I have learned a lot. Travelling opens your mind and gives you different opportunities how your own life could look like. I am sure that I will remember some feelings I had, because of some experiences in Ghana. It is a perfect chance to learn something about yourself and the system we are living in.

Group Travel versus Single Experience



The cultural exchange trip to Ghana is organized as a group travel, which means that you are staying with the group during the official program. Some of you may worry about less privacy, conflicts with group members or that you always have to do everything with the whole group. Because of this reason I want to discribe my personal experience of traveling with a group of amazing Austrians through Ghana.

First, I want to inform you about properties of group travels, because I think that traveling in a group has a general meaning. I want to talk especially about the group and the borders that can arise. Furthermore, my article is about the benefits I had because of traveling with the group - sharing knowledge, experience, skills, laughs and adventures. I want to give you an example of my most memorable experience.

Traveling in a group means, that you will feel very safe all the time. The whole trip is well organized, so you don't need to worry about a place where you can sleep or what to do if you get sick. There is always somebody who takes care of you. But now let's talk about the group as a border. We were at a school, where many children were around. At first, we stood together and it was like a border for the children, so that nobody came closer. After a while, one of us left the group and kneeled down to the children, so the border was gone. This is just one example, but if you do a cultural exchange you will recognize many of these situations, where you are able to choose your own position, close to the locals, or to the traveling group.

So, the group consists of positive and negative parts. It is a place where you feel safe but sometimes the group is also an obstacle in evidence of meeting locals. There was another situation on our trip which dicribes this situation perfectly. We were at a shea butter production in the north and there was a lecture for us. The whole group listened to the official informations. They talked about the process of making shea butter. I was more interested in how the women felt about their work. So, I left the group and tried to get the information from the women themselves and I got it. I can say, that if you are interested in personal opinions, feelings and inofficial information you must leave the group, otherwise you will not get the information. You need to have a lot of courage to look behind the scenes. Otherwise you will just see what they want to show you. But if you decide to do the cultural exchange, you must realize, that it is not always possible to leave the group, because you are with them.

Nevertheless, I absolutely enjoyed the trip with my travel buddies. We shared a lot of experiences, ideas and thoughts and so I got the chance to have a big aha moment for which I am very thankful. When I left the group at the shea butter production, I suddenly had a very strange feeling. It was a feeling I had beforehand, but it was impossible for me to discribe it. The group talked to me and asked me if I don't want to stay with them. They felt rejected because I left the group and then I felt this rejection as well. It was a horrible situation, but the group helped me to find the right words to discribe the feeling and we talked about the reasons why I sometimes prefer to stay outside the group. Not because oft the members or because I didn't like somebody, just because I am interested in what is behind the facade.

So, we could solve the conflict and for me it was one of the most important experiences in my life. Because of the group you have the chance to reflect your feelings and experiences during your stay in Ghana and this makes you grow and understand yourself better than before.

In the end, I want to share three wisdoms with you, so you do not have to worry about traveling in a group.

- If you are afraid of having less privacy, inform your group about it and I am sure they will give you the time you need for yourself.

- If you have a conflict with somebody in your group, talk with him/her about your feelings and ask him/her about the feelings, because relationships are about feelings.

- If you are afraid that you always have to do what the group wants to, realize, that you have some free days and free hours. But if you decide to do the cultural exchange you should know that there is a program that you agreed to join. If I should summarize, I would say that the group experience was calm, instructive and funny. I am happy that I got to know so many critical and loving guys and hopefully some of our relationships will keep up. Thank you for the exciting discussions and the lively situations we had together.



Daily Life and Food in Ghana

For the students and the late risers, the day began very early. The breakfast we got between 7 and 7:30. This usually consisted of eggs, bread (which tastes like a sweet brioche) and alternatively tea or Nestle coffee / cocoa.

Afterwards, our varied day program or the bus tour started. With lots of singing, riddles and sleeping, the long bus tours passed very quickly.

In Tamale we spent most of our time in TICCS, so I tell you about an ordinary day in TICCS.

After breakfast the day program started. Usually we had lectures in the morning with different experts and a daily language lessons. At 11 o'clock there was a short tea break, with biscuits and bo-fruits, which were the favorite food of the group and are similar to baked mice. At 12:15 the courses ended and lunch was ready for us. The food was mostly rice or yam with a sauce and a choice of fish or chicken. Simple, but still tasty. After lunch, free time was n the program. This was always needed be it for resting or doing your laundry. Our group loved playing card games and singing and thanks to Michi bringing the guitar and a few musical talents among the group we always had entertainment.

The afternoon program was very different and usually lasted from 3 o'clock to dinner. We went on different field trips that had to do with the topic we dealt with in the morning sessions.

Dinner was around 18:15 and was comparable to lunch.

After that, we ended the evenings comfortably. Mostly in the jungle bar, singing, playing games or simply having a good conversation and a beer ;)



The Role of Chiefs in Northern Ghana

A Chief in the northern region of Ghana is seen as someone, who leads a group of people, who belong to the same tribe, the same culture and are located in a specific area. In Northern Ghana there are two different groups of people. On the one hand, there are the so called "chiefly people" who live in a centralized state. On the other hand there are the "non-chiefly-people" who live a segmentary life without chiefs an organize themselves as an "acephalous society" without a central leaderchip.

These people of authority have political functions on the one hand and spiritual functions on the other hand. If you want to become a Chief in Northern Ghana, you have to belong to a royal family. In this family, only one person is qualified to become a Chief and take part in a contest. The elders and the diviner are responsible for the selection. Most of the Chiefs are male, but there are also some female Chiefs in the Northern Region. Our group was lucky to meet one of the female Chiefs near Tamale After our lecture in the morning, we got a short briefing in the afternoon, before we went to the Chief's place. We learned how to behave in front of such an important person and were taught about the Do's and Dont's. For the greeting ritual you have to bend your knees, squat and clap your hands. Because it's not allowed to directly speak to the Chief, there is a "translator", who interacts with visitors. You have to introduce yourself and explain the reason why you are here, than you can ask guestions to the Chief. In our case, the Chief was a tiny old muslim Lady, who sat with stretched out legs on a kind of podium. During the whole visit, she was not allowed to talk, but when we said goodbye, we shook hands and she gave us a smile. In the end of the visit, we took a group foto with the Chief and her grandchildren, who also joined us there.





Shekinah Clinic

My personal highlight of this year's DKA study tour was the visit to the Shekhinah clinic. The Shekhinah Clinic is a clinic for the poor and destitute where they are treated free of charge. The clinic survives solely on donations. Its philosophy is that emotional support and feeling that someone is there to care for you is just as important in the healing process as medical treatment. Shekhinah Clinic was originally founded by the charismatic Doctor David Abdulai whom I had the pleasure of meeting four years ago. When I heard of his death in October 2016 I was not only sad but also worried about what would happen to his clinic. Before going to Ghana I saw that the Shekhinah Clinic was still part of the DKA programme and I was very uncertain of what we would find there: I wasn't even sure there would still be a clinic. When we got there, I was very happy to see that the clinic is still fully functioning because his wife Mariama has taken over the place with the same love and devotion as Doctor Abuldai before.

It is impossible to describe the Shekhinah Clinic to someone who has not seen it with his own eyes. As soon as you enter the clinic's ground you just feel that the place is filled with love. The way the workers interact with the patients is heart-warming and you feel that everyone there is at peace with himself, God and the world.

It was fascinating and very emotional to listen to Mariama's stories about some of the patients at the clinic and of course to listen to her stories about the late doctor. Doctor Abdulai is missed by everyone but in a strange way you could feel that Doctor Abdulai is still also very much present on the clinic's grounds.

The Shekhinah Clinic surely adds to making this world a better place.

Cocoa Farm

Near koforidua we had the opportunity to visit a cocoa field.

There were three types of cocoa pods: green, red and yellow. When the plant is small it needs shadow, which is provided by the big leafs of banana trees. The farmer hat to visit his field almost every second day to keep it clean so as to remove ill leaves. On the other hand to harvest the pods in the proper degree of growth. The white and soft beans have to be fermernted after harvesting and opening the pods for 6 to 8 days. This takes place on the ground beneath the trees under a cover of banana leafs. The beans are roasted and dryed before they are packed in big bags and stored in the house oft he cocoa community. It was impressing to see the various kinds of pods on the trees and to taste a fresh unfermented white bean. We realized that it is really much time the farmers have to invest until the cocoa beans are ready for selling!



Kakum National Park

The first National Park in Ghana we visited, was the Kakum Rain Forest in the Central Region of Ghana, close to Cape Coast and Elmina Castle. It was founded in 1992 and covers an area of about 375 square kilometers. Visitors have the chance to experience the feeling of beeing in a tropical rainforest on the Canopy Walkway. That's a unique way of seven bridges, where you can walk in about 40 meters over the ground and at a length of 330 meters in between the treetops. It was very impressive to see, how high the trees can get here (allegedly about 70 meters), to hear all the surrounding noises by the variety of animals, that live here and to have an overview about a part of this beautiful National Park.



Mole National Park

My personal highlight was the safari in mole game park. Not the safari alone but that we really saw an elephant. And not only one but all in all eight bull elephants! We left damongo in early morning so as to be at mole at seven o`clock . Our group had two cars. We climbed up the ladder to the top of the car and took our 'seats'.

Each car had a guide. When the guide ordered to walk on – in a row, one behind the other – I did not expect anything. The more I was surprised to face suddenly a bull elephant! My feelings were really mixed and I admit that there was also fear. It was somehow like stopping to breath and a deep awe knowing at the same time that I am completely weak in comparison the elephant facing us.

But this was still topped when we arrived at a lake seeing three bulls taking their morning bath. One of them smaller and according to the guide about sixteen years old, lets say a teenager. We even saw the two oft them leaving the water and putting dust on their wet skin again.

The guides were very competent and knew a lot oft he behavior of the animals, especially the elefants. When I asked the guide walking through the bush, why he knew that there were an elephant he said, he had heard it. And really, I could also listen the wood breaking while the elephant walked on. We saw varios kinds of antilopes and monkeys as well as a pig.

The safari in mole was like an additional gift we got during our stay in Ghana! I may only compare the moment facing the first elephant in his natural home without any fence to the solar eclipse I saw in 2000. Both events will stay unique in my life.

Dance in (Northern) Ghana



Dancing and Drumming play a huge role in political, recreational and religious events in Northern Ghana. It brings people of all generations, professions, religions and origins together. At the Tamale Youth Home Cultural Group, nearby TICCS, children and teens learn the traditional drumming and dances of this region. Transporting the cultural heritage from one generation to another is very important to the Ghanaen people. During our stay in the village, we were invited to a funeral at the village "Gumo". Funerals in Ghana are very different from the ones we're used to in Austria. They seem to be more like a celebrating ceremony, where music and dancing is all around the place to get people together and make them happy again.

Furthermore we were lucky to get a dancing lesson with guys of the "Nbagba Cultural Group". There we were confrontated with the importance of the masterdrummer, who always gives the impulse for new steps in the dance. For us, it was not easy to listen carefully to the drum, to get a sign, when we had to change our moves.

Nevertheless we had a lot of fun when we got to know the feeling of African dance. We also enjoyed a performance of traditional Ghanaen dances and drummings, where we've seen the "tora" (a recreational women's dance-drumming), the "baamaava" (danced by men, dressed like women, to honour them and show them respect and also to celebrate the gratitude to god for letting rain fall down to the earth) and the "fume fume" (a non-traditional westafrican dance) The dancers and drummers were dressed in traditional clothes (according to the several dances) and performed barefoot. The interaction between the performers (male and female) in a circle and the acrobatic-like moves and jumps are characteristic for these dances. The overwhelming enthusiasm and joy, the dancers spread all over the place, were amazing. To our surprise, we were also invited to join the group and to perform some moves together with them. We didn't know, if it was more fun for us to dance with them. or for them, to see us trying to dance like Ghanaian people.

Music in Ghana

Ghana – the home country of "Drumming and Dancing".

On our journey through Ghana we got in touch with music several times. The first experience with typical Ghanaian instruments was at the Art Centre in Accra, where we had the opportunity to try out drumming on a Djembe.

Another situation, where we could hear, see and feel the difference to Austrian music was at the church. Every Sunday a gospel quoir supports the church service and in some churches they also wear special clothes for this occasion. The church people are dancing, clapping and sometimes screaming to the music and you can feel the spirit, the quoir spreads with their voices, drums and xylophones. Goosebumps!

In one of the villages we had the opportunity to take part in a funeral. There we got to know the sound and function of a "Talking Drum". You can change the tune of the drum by pressing and releasing the cords, which keep the drum together. There are certain people, who have learned to and are allowed to play the Talking Drum at funerals. So if you hear someone playing on a talking drum, he does not play, he actually talks.

We also could enjoy native music and dances of a traditional music group in Tamale. They use several drums and a cowbell to support the dancers in their polyrhythmic way of making music. There is always a leader of the drumming group called "Masterdrummer". When he changes the rhythmic pattern, everybody has to listen to him and follow.

My impression of the traditional music culture in Ghana is, that there is no seperation between drumming, singing and dancing. These art disciplines are seen as one. Every drummer should be able to dance and every dancer should be able to play the drum. What we could also make out in the time, we where in Ghana, is, that a lot of the locals love Bob Marley and his Reggaemusic.



Only Coincidence? Ghanaian Diviners

Imagine you are a foreigner in a big city and hiring a taxi. There are thousands of them and you wave one of them to stop and pick you up. The driver is very friendly and you talk to him about your plans visiting the country. The driver tells you the places you should not miss in any case during your stay. The situation is not special at all, after the driver has dropped you at the place you wanted to go, you soon will not remember the taxi drive anymore.

People in Ghana have a strong sense for tradition and, unlike us, the question "Why?". In our culture, it is more likely that we ask "how" things happen, and not why. As we learned during our courses, Ghanaians don't like unresolved cases and if there is a thing they can't explain, they find a way to get an answer. One possibility is to ask a diviner. A diviner is not exactly what you call a teller of the future, but close to that and he helps in clarifying things. Examples are diseases, illnesses or maybe the death of a Ghanaian which cannot be explained. The diviner follows a ritual where he calls your ancestors for help in clarification. According to Ghanaian tradition, they can help in clarifying mysteries.

You have already been to Ghana? I'm sure you met lots of people, people you would

like to see again if you come again. Come again? And one day you come again. Some years later, things have changed. As it is the way of life, people move to other places, they change their job and you will not be able to meet them where you expect them. We went to the diviner to ask him about our future. It is common, that the diviner does not always tell things in a direct way, but to use symbols to describe things. Therefore you may need a translation (although he talked in English) to understand what he said. Besides from that, he also said things that are very clear, and he predicted lots of children to us (some of them will become very famous), success in the business life, health and a long life. And he added some comments individually to all of us, which suited quite well. Although it is up to every individual how to interpret the comments of the diviner, we had to admit that in some cases he hit the nail, without being superstitious. As an example he predicted twins to two of us, and both of them actually have twins in their kinship. Was this just a guess?

No matter where on earth, in my opinion I think that all of us have thought about coincidence more than once, without being superstitious. Sometimes our daily life stops us back for a moment because things happen, which existed only in our minds before. People say things that you just wanted to say, as if they would read your mind. Familiar people appear at places just the same time as you are there. It happened also to us more than once that we thought about coincidence in Ghana. Let me finish the stories above. It was the second time for Hannah to go on study tour to Ghana. Some years back, the group was also accompanied throughout the trip by someone, but since then, he moved to another place in Ghana. But nevertheless, he passed a street in Tamale exactly the same time as Hannah went alongside the street. Without knowing that she was in Ghana, they were at the same time at the same placed and they even recognized each other immediately and he stopped for a chat. It was a chat as well, which made me recognize the taxi driver immediately as we jumped into the taxi. More than two weeks later, at a completely different place in town alongside the road, at a different time. How big is the theoretical possibility to get the same taxi twice? Possibly rather low. We continued the chat we had during the previous drive, he asked me how our stay goes and if we enjoyed our visit to Mole national park, as I told him the last time. He remembered exactly correct. When was the last time you experienced an occasion like that?



Interreligious Dialogue

In contrast to the presence of religion in our daily life in Austria, religion is very present in the daily life in Ghana. This starts very early in the morning, at 4 o'clock when the muezzin wakes up Muslims, so that they can prepare for their first prayer of the day. In total, Muslims pray up to six times a day. They resemble in one of the numerous, and partly very old or very big mosques. But not all people are Muslims in Ghana. The partition between Muslim, Christians and traditional religions differs from statistics to statistics from 20%-60%-20% to 30%-30%-40%. If you have ever asked someone, how many people live in his village, you know why the numbers are so variable – nobody knows.

Other symbols of the belief in god can be seen if you look at the back screen of cars of the holders of the number plate. Messages differ one from the other, but they often cite the bible or say something like: "there is hope", "thank you Jesus", "showers of blessing" or "praise him". All in all, it is very apparent in the Ghanaian society, that there is an extremely peaceful interreligious dialogue. It is very much accepted that others have other religions. Sometime even religious festivities are celebrated along with people who have other religions.

One of the reasons for the peaceful dialogue in between religions can be found in history and the fact, that there were no missionaries in Ghana. As an example, I will describe how Islam came to Ghana. Originally, traditional religions were spread over the country. Islam came to Ghana by traders. In the time of Trans Sahara Trade. Islamic people from northern African parts came for trading to western parts of Africa and the gold coast (Ghana). Since travelling took a very long time back then, they built communities along their trade paths. They had no interest in doing missionary work, but local people got interested in their religion, since they were practicing it and people from west Africa thought that the Muslims have a good power to win wars. Further on, Muslims brought a higher standard of education and new jobs to the country and they built more education centers and mosques. This how the Islam was peacefully introduced in Ghana. It is often the case, that people from dif-

ferent religions live alongside without knowing much of the others religion – like a closed window. The interreligious dialogue which is practiced in Ghana opens these windows and they are very well aware: there is only one god, independent of the religion, so why should god, who is connecting all religions, be the reason for conflicts?



Witch Camp

Before we visited the witch camp we learned a lot about witchcraft in Ghana. One Sunday we got up early and went by bus to GNANI, a small town in the North-Eastern Region of Ghana near TOGO. It was a three hours ride from TAMALE and we got a warm welcome by the priest of Gnani. After church service we visited the witch camp of Gnani, one of 6 camps in the North of Ghana where also male residents live. This is because men are economically better off and their status in a patriarchal society is more important than that of women.

Women who are accused of witchcraft, are usually older, widowed, childless or living alone. The women are blamed for droughts or fires in a village, causing sickness or death or even just appearing in someone's dream. Then they are no longer wanted in society.

Once a woman is accused of witchcraft she is normally banished from the village, abandoned by their families. She has to flee to a witch camp otherwise she would be faced with bad discrimination or even death in her village. A lot of them leave with absolutely nothing and sometimes with wounds because they have been beaten. Sometimes family members are sent with them.

The place we visited in Gnani is called "Tindan Witch Camp" and has mud huts with thatched roofs for approximately 100 persons. Tindan looks like all the other village we have seen before. It is not fenced off but everybody knows where the boundaries are.

We first went to the local chief to get the permission to visit the village. He welcomed us in his palace, a round and empty hut. First the 3 speakers entered the palace and announced the chief. When the chief entered his palace we first had to hunker down and clap our hands. It's a kind of greeting. Then we sat down and Moses explained in what mission we came to the village. Then we could ask a lot of questions, only to the speaker - never directly to the chief.

We were told that the alleged witches and wizards are subjected to rituals to prove whether they are innocent or guilty. The ceremony is performed by a diviner who is believed to possess supernatural powers. A common ritual is to sacrifice a chicken and throw it into the skies. If it dies with its face down it means the accused is guilty of being a with or wizard. If it dies face up the person is innocent.

People living in such ghettos are ashamed of the situation. They lose self-respect and get traumatised. They have limited access to food, shelter and education. Children are allowed to attend school but most of them do not because schools are far away and belong to other communities. Children from witch camps suffer stigmatisation and discrimination by their classmates and teachers.

The government wanted to close down the camps but NGO's fought against the closure in that short time. Witch camps are the only places where women can live in safety.



Elmina Castle

The Portuguese arrived and settled in Elmina in 1471 led by their captain Juan de Santarem and Pedro d'Escobar. The Name Elmina comes from the Portuguese word for village. They started to trade with the people of Elmina. In 1481 King John II ordered the construction of a fort in Elmina as a storage for the trading goods. In 1482 the fort was finished. Early sixteenth century the Portuguese started to trade with slaves, also known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. They brought the slaves to Brazil and other Portuguese colonies. The Dutch attacked the Portuguese at the coast the first time in 1596 But the Dutch were defeated. By the 1630s the Dutch were gaining strength in their colonies in South America, but they had challenges with their labour forces on their plantations. So they felt the need to get slave labour. The final attack was in 1637 by the Dutch on the Portuguese in Elmina. The Dutch extended the dungeons, in order to hold more slaves and to continue the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Dutch continued the slave trade until 1814, when the slave trade was abolished. In 1872 the British took over the territory of the Dutch and therefore also the castle. The used the castle as a police training school.

The castle is divided into three courtyards: the main, the inner and the service courtyard. All the rooms, except two cells, on the ground floor of the main courtyard were dungeons for captives. Male and female captives were held separately. The dungeons were poorly ventilated, with no space to lie down and very little light. There was no water or sanitation. The floor of the dungeon was littered with human waste. Because of that many captives felt seriously ill.

One of the cell was used for European soldiers who got drunk or misbehaved. The other cell was used for captives who fought for their freedom. They were held there without water and food until they died. In the castle could be Up to 1,000 male and 500 female slaves captured. Above the dungeons were the residences for the soldiers, merchants and priests. On top the merchants' rooms was the residence for the Governor. In the middle of the main courtyard stands a Catholic church.

Behind the castle was a pier, where the ships docked. From there small boats were sent to the "Door of no return" to bring the captives to the ships.





Gold mining in Ghana

The very interesting and problematic theme of mining and resource exploitation was already the main topic on out preparation weekends and continued reappearing throughout our journey. Unluckily it is forbidden by the Ghanaian law to see gold mines, which we would have been very interested in seeing and therefore we tried to gather information on Galamsey, the act of mining gold in Ghana, from people affected by mining. Our first encounter with a Ghanaian expert on mining was already on the second day in Accra. Madame Hannah is the leader of the NGO WACAM, who do advocacy work for communities affected by mining and she introduced us to the history of Galamsey, the act of mining gold in Ghana and the troubles affected communities face. Originally gold could be found all over Ghana and could just be picked up from the floor. Mining today does not resemble this in any way. Mining the way we know, developed during colonial times, where gold mines, initially belonging to the communities, were appropriated by the foreigners. Mining became illegal and heavy machinery was introduced to extract more and more gold from the soil. Not only are the working conditions in the mines terrible, harming the health conditions of worker, but also the whole environment around the mines is destroyed and ground water polluted. Madame Hannah is convinced that mining should be stopped completely, as the notion of mining bringing development is simply wrong when mining destroys the soil they live off. Similarly the Saaman community, which was affected by a mine close to their community, feels that all mines should be closed. For me and I think also for many group members this was very surprising, as I thought mining is beneficial to some degree as it can be sold for a high price. But all profit is taken up by the international mining companies. Mining created conflicts and disputes in the communities rather than benefits. Seminars with WACAM taught them their rights and privileges and informed them on the rules and regulation of mining. But even though they know their rights, they felt unable to benefit from them, because the companies are too powerful and they cannot stand up to them. Since agriculture is the backbone of the Ghanaian economy, mining that destroys the environment, destroys the basis to live off. Also the land is taken forcefully away from people, who earn a living with the farming on this land. The chief of the community said something very powerful in my opinion: "the companies, they want us to sacrifice our lives for their profits". Something that was very important to them is that we not only inform ourselves in Ghana about the terrible conditions of mining, but demanded from us to do something at home to improve the situation.



WACAM:

- Community based advocacy group
- Education for empowerment of workers:
- What rights do workers have?
- Give tools to make the right decision
- Enable communities to speak for themselves of their mind



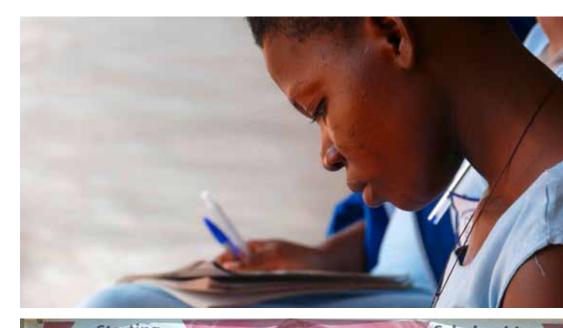
Bodies By Mining Companies MUST STOP.



Women Empowerment Projects: St. Mary's

We also had the chance to visit St. Mary's Vocational Training Institute in Tamale. It is a college for girls which offers training in dress making, cooking and catering weaving and secretarial training. Approximately 150 students live on campus and it takes the girls three years to be a graduate of the school. In addition to that, they offer courses in motorcycle repair and maintenance and solar installations training, in order to train the girls in technical professions.





Soon FEMALES ONLY MOTORCYCLE repairs & maintainance training, SOLAR INSTALLATIONS training









Women Empowerment Projects: Damongo

During our stay in Ghana we had the unique chance to visit different projects focussing on women empowerment.

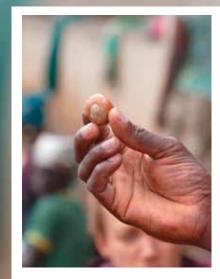
The aim of the women empowerment project in Damongo is to provide trainings and income possibilities for women in rural areas in order to prevent the migration, especially of young women, from the poorer North of the country to the more developed South. The project tries to tackle the most important factors why young women migrate, e.g. the different opportunities and disparities between boys and girls (in terms of education and wealth) and poverty.

The women are taught in four different areas: tailoring (dress making), bread baking, soap making and batik. When they graduate after their two years stay, they also get help with starting their own business. There are 4 to 6 centres in the region to train the girls, as the training is done at a very local level to prevent entrance difficulties with accommodation, transport etc. After our arrival in the local factory in Damongo, the women presented their excellent batik technique with really beautiful material and we were also involved in the production of bread. Furthermore, every one of us had the chance to create their own material under the supervision of the women. We really want to thank Antony and Rabi for this extraordinary experience in Damongo!





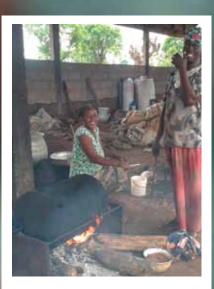
1. Shea butter is made from the nuts of the Shea tree and it is a very laborious process.



2. As a first step, fruit skin is removed and nuts are dried by placing them in the sun.



3. Once the Shea nuts are dry, they are broken into small pries using grinding machines...



 $4.\ \ldots$ and then they are roasted on fire.



5. The roasted pieces are then taken to the grinding machine again ...



6. ... and turned into a thick paste.



7. This paste is placed in big basins and pounded by hand for at least half an hour. Water is added gradually until the buttery oil separates from the rest.



8. The Shea butter is then put into a bowl on low fire, where it melts and is placed in big basins in a cool and dark place.

Shea butter production

Shea butter is one of the most important local products in Northern Ghana. During our stay in Tamale, we visited the Yumzaa Women Association, a Shea butter producing cooperative. Their mission is "to offer their customers quality and affordable Shea butter its related products under hygienic conditions using proper methods."

The Yumzaa Women Association can produce up to 40 tons of Shea butter, depending on demand and sells its raw product to buyers in Germany, Egypt, the UK and the US. Shea butter is used locally for cooking, as a fewer reducer, as a treatment for skin defects and they export it mainly to the cosmetic industry. All the women in the association produce their own Shea butter – they buy the nuts themselves and pay a small fee for using the facilities – and sell their products to the owners of the association. We also realised how little the producers of the raw product Shea butter get: One kilogram of Shea butter is sold for 10 Ghana Cedis (which is approximately $2 \in$). If you want to buy raw Ghanaian Shea butter online, you pay 15€ for 100g! Apart from the cooperative, Shea butter production also plays an important part in the villages we visited. As it is solely done by women, it leads to some economic independence and empowerment and contributes to a better overall living standard of women and their families. Furthermore, the production process has an important social role as women and whole families in the village work together.



9. After around 12 hours the oil turns thick and is ready to be used or sold.

Villages

Yong Duuni

Karin and I got the chance to stay in the village of Yong Duuni for some days. We expected that this experience would be the highlight of our cultural exchange. Many children were around to greet us, when we arrived. Our guest family gave us a warm welcome, so we felt very comfortable right from the beginning. Josef and Peter guided us during our stay. Our first challenge was the visit of the local chief. We brought him some cola nuts and Schnapps as a present. We were amazed to see how the eldest of the village liked our Austrian traditional drink. We had to tell the chief the mission of our stay in the village. The chief got to know us and then he allowed us to move around everywhere. The following days we visited Peters farm, played with the children, and went for a walk to a neighbouring village.

All in all, we can say that we got used to the living conditions very quickly and that our trip was not so spectacular as we thought before. Nearly everything seemed to be normal there. We tried to see life through the eyes of the locals and gradually we understood why things are sometimes different to the Austrian way of life. Nevertheless, we still can't imagine what it means to live in a village like Yong Duuni for years.

In the end, we really want to thank all the members of our guest family. They took care of us and we will never forget that. We hope to see them again. Karin and Anna





Gumo

In Gumo, we had a really great time. Moses, our helper and his lovely children took care of us and showed us everything around the place. We spent a lot of the time with the kids playing games, drawing with them or going to the shop together. We also were invited to help at the sheabutter production, to go to the fields and as well to take part in a funeral ceremony, that took place at the time we were in Gumo. This funeral was completely different to the ones we have been to in Austria. It was a colourful combination between drumming, dancing and screaming. I think this was the most impressive experience we have had in our village. But it was also great fun to have the shower outside or to sleep outside in the night under the protection of a mosquito-net. Thanks to our nice host-family and that we had this great opportunity to spend a few days in Gumo! Michaela and Pia







Napayili

Our village immersion in Napayili was very colourful. After getting introduced to the people in the village, we discovered that there is almost no privacy for us in Napayili. Whether we took a walk in the morning or a rest in the afternoon, everyone was informed.

We had a really great time in the village: we played a lot with the kids (UNO), made drawings with them, played with the ball and also learned them some clapping games and songs to sing... but we also took place at the sheabutter production and helped the women there (we tried to learn how to pound). We visited Simon's farm where they grow lots and lots of vegetables and even cooked fried plantain. We had a meeting with the chief, where we had a talk about the village in general, but also about the issues the people have to deal with in Napayili. For example the lack of (drinking) water in the dry season, is one huge problem, where there is no longerterm solution found, until yet. One special offer we got, was to visit a moslem diviner, who told us interesting things about our future and reminded us to never forget to pray for all the things we want in life. Thanks to our village helper Simon and his family, our guides Michael and Zacharias and to everyone else in the village! Mari and Rosi







Kukuo Yapalsi

We had a really great time at Kukuo Yapalsi. Thomas was a great host and thanks to him we always had a lot planned. We were able to help in the shea butter production, cycle around the area, try ourselves at cooking, see the work of some nurses in town, drive around on Thomas' motor bike and also visit the local bar where we had the most interesting late-night conversations. Most of the time of course we spent with the kids, flying kites, drawing on the floor, painting their faces,... - we enjoyed this part a lot but it was also good that every now and then the kids also respected our wish for some rest. In the night time Thomas took our beds outside so we could sleep under the stars- this was definitely a highlight of the trip.

Thanks for everything Thomas, it was an amazing experience staying at your village! Bianca, Hannah and Sebastian



Malshegu

Franzi(ska) and Franziska caused a lot of confusion in Malshegu because of the same lovely name we both have. We were welcomed very warmly all the time at David's and his family's compound and they all made our stay in Malshegu so enjoyable. Thanks to Kizito, who cared for us throughout our stay, we could explore every spot in the village with him and ask him all different kinds of questions on Gha-

naian life style and he liked to question us on how life in Austria is. We tried our best in improving our Dagbanli skills (special thanks to our patient teacher, Bibiana) and loved to respond to all people with an enthusiastic "Nnaa!". Thank you once again, David and Kizito for making this wonderful experience possible for us!! Franziska and Franziska



























