

After a grey, mild December the thought of bright, warm sunshine was quite appealing. It was only a week later that the whole of the UK was blanketed in snow; it is now 7 years that we have been coming to Ghana in January. Somehow, this time I really missed it and could not imagine being that cold. We were sent photos of the grandchildren playing on sledges and throwing snowballs. It is at times like that, you realize the cost of being out in Ghana and how homesick you can feel.

Before we left, we were asked why we still needed to go; that if they could not manage without us, we were not really making a difference. Sometimes you have to stop and assess the aims and the results of what you are achieving, are you impacting the people? Are you making a difference and is there an improvement?

When we arrived, we rapidly met with the communities and for the first time nearly all of them attended the meeting. We were very impressed by their enthusiasm and their commitment to continue and to change their circumstances. On travelling round the villages, we can now see that so many of them have made huge improvements and really understand why they need to keep their environments clean and their water and food covered. It is one thing to tell them, but it is far more meaningful when they do it for themselves. It is about empowering them not just instructing them.

It was, as always, a challenging time. Even back at home, our property was broken in to, and the agent did not inform us. It can be very distracting when you are so far away and unable to be in proper communication.



Many of you will remember the beginning of our journey with the Nutrition Centre began with the twins Alhassan and Fuseina who arrived in January 2007 together with their Grandmother, Sukina and her last-born daughter Fatima. Two years ago we made the decision to house them permanently at the King's Village both for their safety, and to allow the children the chance of having an education.

The twins being quite young went to the King's School but Fatima, who we discovered was older than we thought, was sent to a local school to allow her to be with her peer group.

Fatima was a child of grace, she smiled all the time and whenever a new baby arrived at the Nutrition Centre Fatima would be found with the child strapped to her back.

On Monday the 21st January I received a call from Norma the Nutrition Officer saying 'Fatima had passed out can you come' I was totally unprepared for what I found, there lying dead on the bed looking as though she was just resting I found Fatima. As I held her hand and cradled her head in my arms my heart broke.

All of us felt concerned about the speed and circumstances surrounding her death. She had returned to her village to attend a funeral with her mother and the twins, unfortunately over the months there had been several threats to their lives owing to them no longer being Muslims.

Less than 24 hours ago she had been perfectly healthy; the consensus of opinion was that she had been poisoned, apparently a common way of killing someone, a warning to her mother, what a price to pay.

As we stood round the graveside watching them dig and then lower her fragile frame into the hole wrapped simply in a rough piece of cloth we wept. Her Headmaster who had seen many children die sobbed as he told me he just could not understand it, she had always been such a healthy happy child.

It was a blessing that they allowed us to hold a Christian service round the graveside, while we all knew she had gone to a far, far better place where she was no longer hungry or in pain our hearts broke for the loss of one so young and one who had such love compassion and grace.

The challenge for us all is, are we happy to die for our faith, are we prepared to stand firm for what we believe. For her Mother it was a huge sacrifice, what bigger price is there to pay than to lose your youngest child in this way. It has shocked all of us but her legacy will remain, we plan to rename the Nutrition Centre, 'The Fatima Centre for Nutrition' in the hope that none of us will forget.

This time we had a very important team from an international construction company coming out to assess infrastructure needs both within the King's Village and in the 'overseas' area across the Volta. The process by which they had agreed to come had been quite remarkable and we were very excited about what the future held. The team was led by Brad, who is the Director of Operation Orphan the charity that we work under. It was to be a very full and challenging 5 days with two journeys across the Volta to visit some of the most remote and desolate villages in the whole of Ghana.

As the Chief of one of them said 'even our own government takes no interest in us we are just left to survive all alone' The 15 minute canoe journey was followed by a ride on a motorking (motorbike and trailer) over hard, dry, dusty ground for 45 minutes and the second time for over an hour and a half. My word, the bottom took a real pounding!



They saw the incredible need for restoring a mainly unused and badly maintained clinic that had been built several years ago. Whilst the condition of the clinic was very poor, it remained the only facility for over 8,000 people.

Our aim is to redevelop it including a maternity section, a small inpatient area, a dispensary and a treatment area. In addition, we would like to develop accommodation for staff including a senior nurse and hopefully in time a midwife.

The team was completely overwhelmed with the welcome they received together with the obvious incredible need.

Quite amazingly, when we had arrived in the King's Village a male nurse came to see us, telling us he felt called to serve the people of Singa and the Overseas, both in a medical capacity and as a preacher. He was part of the team that went regularly and held services in some of the small local churches in the area. We were so shocked as we had been told previously 'it will be very hard to get anyone qualified to run the clinic in Singa as it's so remote' We were completely stunned, and delighted, that without any effort on our part, well except prayer! Someone was willing to go, complete with his wife and three children.

Interestingly his wife was trained in the preparation of the porridge that we give to the malnourished children, a skill that will be invaluable to the overseas as they too have many needy children

In addition, we are hoping to provide soakaways to every household, which will start to rapidly diminish the cases of malaria. It is important to be proactive in reducing the cause of much of the illnesses. Malaria and dysentery from dirty water and dirty environments is the main cause of sickness and death.

This is going to be a long-term project over the next 5-8 years but the impact of it will be massive. It will bring not only a disease reduction it will also bring hope to the people of this area.



Amudu, aged 4 ½ months weighing only 6.6 lbs, brought in from a distant village at the point of death.

The week after the team left there was much excitement when the national paper 'The Daily Graphic' printed a full centre page article about the King's Village.

Interestingly the area they majored on was the Nutrition Centre, with large colour photos of some of the children. Apparently, on the national television that day there was a 5-minute discussion about the article in particular about the children! The outcome was that several agencies and individuals rang wanting to help and support the work!

Burkina Faso

This was our second visit to Burkina Faso, which by road took us 6.5 hours, nearly the same length of time it takes to fly to Ghana from the UK! Our purpose was to link in with Pastor Philippe Ouadraogo, of AEAD (Association for Evangelism and for Development) which has built over 100 churches, 10 schools together with literacy classes for adults and several vocational training centres. We had been asked to visit six villages round the country where local Pastors and their churches had asked for help with the many orphans in their communities. The aim was for us to devise a strategy to present to aid agencies for the infrastructure costs, the setting up costs and the running costs. It was a new experience for us and

we were not sure if it was within our capacity to undertake! As Terry said even at nearly 69 he is still learning new skills!

We journeyed over 700km in 3 days to the various churches. It was to be an experience that neither of us will ever forget. We met some couples whose humility and sacrifice was so overwhelming, it made us cry.



One couple we visited Elizabeth and Philemon lived in a very poor typical Burkinabe village 50km north of the capital. They told us they had no children of their own but had cared for 16 orphans in their own home. Their total commitment and passion to help the orphan was inspiring and humbling. A new church had recently been built for them with two floors. Their hope was that they could use the upper floor to house 20-25 orphans from the surrounding villages. At present, they lived with the extended family but in most cases, there was not enough food for their own children so adding more mouths to feed brought great hardship to the whole family. In addition, it was impossible for the families to pay the small fees required to support these children in the local government run school. They were truly devoted and prepared to make such huge sacrifices on behalf of the orphans. To be able help them, would be a real privilege.

The furthest village we travelled to 80 km from the Mali border; was so remote and so poor. It was dry and sparse; the whole area not unlike the desert, even the local housing was in such need of repair. We sat under one of the few trees and shared with Pastor George and some of the leaders of the church.

The Pastor was a tall willowy man wearing a western pair of trousers and jacket both covered in dust and dirt from the farming. As he lent forwards I noticed the label on the inside of the jacket said 'Marks and Spencer's quality wear'! I wonder if they would ever have thought their clothes could reach to such a remote place!

The stories they told had us quite overwhelmed us and brought us to tears. There were over 20 orphans living in extended families within the church, one elder had eight children from his dead brother living with him.

The main problem was that many of the men had gone in search of jobs to the Ivory Coast but had died of hunger, disease, Aids and from the fighting, thus leaving so many orphaned children with mothers who had no means of caring for them. They told us that many times in the rainy season children would be found sleeping in the grain barns, as they had no homes to go to.

The Pastor and his wife Fatima are so poor and yet they shared the little they had regularly with the children. He told us that during the last big drought of 2010 he would call the orphans together at the end of the day and share their meagre grain with them often going without but ensuring the children at least had a little in their stomachs.

When we asked how many he shrugged his shoulders and said '200' we were completely shocked it reduced us again to tears to see this humble simple man describe the desperate plight of so many children from babies up to teenage.

They truly are fulfilling the scripture from Isaiah 58v10 'and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed' they are giving most of what they have and holding little back for themselves, a true sacrifice, who of us can say that we are doing the same?

So as we reflect on the last 6 weeks again, we can truly say this time has been one of the most fulfilling trips, though tinged with sadness over the death of Fatima, the potential development in the overseas area has yet again inspired us to continue. To think that we can bring both medical and spiritual support to such a needy area is so exciting and fills us with such a sense of destiny.

In addition, the developing of the work in Burkina Faso, bringing hope to so many desperate children is something that has burned in both our hearts for so many years. So as we look to the rest of the year we are both very willing to continue serving the needs of the poor and the hungry, the widow and the orphan.

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