

# **Building trip Ghana 19 - 26 November 2011**

## **English/German version**

### **African Kick off**

Dear friends, family and colleagues,

After a 6,5 hour flight we arrived yesterday around 21.30 safely in Accra, the capital of Accra. After waiting for our Swiss colleagues, we left for the hotel with a lot of fuss about the tips for the porters. Although it was evening it was still very hot: 27 degrees and very humid. That is a big promise for the daytime when we have to work (but always better than freezing nights ;-).

While enjoying a African beer we got to know each other a little bit better and looking forward to the adventure we will have together.

After a good but short sleep (specially for some of us who forgot that we have a time difference of one hour...) we got to know the African 'way of life'.

The bus came an hour late, the local restaurant took an hour and a half to prepare our order and the driver was completely lost. After a travelling day of 8 hours we arrived in Kumasi.

On the way we experienced a lot of Ghanaian culture. The roads are partly tarred, the rest are dusty red coloured dirt roads. All ladies wear heavy load on their heads and were wearing pretty colourful dresses.

Along the roads we saw a lot of corrugated roofs and collapsed houses and there is a lot of garbage at the side of the road. The youngsters sell (homemade) snacks and drinks around the traffic lights. A lot of us had a culture show and we realise how luxury our lives in Europe are.

In Kumasi we've met Sister Olivia and Martha of the Daughters of Charity. Also we met Hanneke, our Dutch contact person and initiator of the project. We were impressed by their stories. A lot of children (mainly girls between 6-18 years) are sent from the rural area to the family in the city because they think they will have a better life there. A lot of families don't welcome them because it is another mouth to feed. Next step is that they survive on the street and sometimes even become prostitutes.

The 14 sisters of Daughters of Charity are daily on the street to help the street children and send them to the day care centre. This centre doesn't offer them a bed for the night or education. That's why this project is set up a vocational training centre called: the Saint Louise training centre.

A couple of builders have collected money together with their friends, family and colleagues. This fantastic amount of money was EUR 2090,- which we handed over to the sisters. They were very happy with it, and we want to thank everybody who contributed to this gift!

After this impressive story we have even more energy to start our First building day tomorrow.

Greetings, big hug, on behalf of the group,

Angela and Karlijn.

### **Our first night in Kumasi**



Today's report starts a little earlier because the 4B's (Boy, Bart, and Ben Bass) have been to Kumasi city. After a thrill ride of 20 minutes we arrived at a roadhouse go for a game of pool and then look at the roulette table. At one moment we had 70 cedis profit, which is about 35 euro but in the end lost it all. The rest of the group spent the evening at the poolside with a beer or a glass of wine.

After a good night everyone was on time for breakfast. And for those who think we were a very Burgundian breakfast, breakfast was an omelet with toast and of course jus d'orange.

The bus was on time and had a good air-conditioning, even though there were three street girls on the bus came along to pick us up. In a bus with more passengers than seats, we went towards the construction site. Along the way we are well shaken up the road is really not! hardened.

On the site we got an opening prayer by Sister Olivia and then an instruction SCC (but on its Afrikaans) Francis of the local builder. SCC toolbox here means the observation, nothing special today because we did not work at heights. Am curious if tomorrow we have a supplemental instruction given.

We were divided into four teams of four colleagues. One team had to carry bricks, crew 2 had to carry bricks, crew 3 had to carry bricks and crew 4 to our amusement also had to carry bricks. This eventually took all morning, until lunch which consisted of egg and tuna sandwiches. These were prepared by Angela, Marion, Asha and Ben and Charlotte under the inspiring leadership of Sister Oliva. The HACCP standard was very severely handled by Sister Olivia which meant a lot of hand washing for diarrhea you here just to pick.

After lunch the street girls told their story how they ended up in this situation and now must survive on the streets. Impressive stories, imagine, you're a girl of 14 in a strange city 200 km from home, without family or friends and you have no property except the clothes you have on. Aisha, one of the street girls, we made happy by telling her what her name means. We have an Asha in our team, what means hope. Aisha from Kumasi also brings hope and makes all the difference. Already she is picking up other girls from the street and brings them to the sisters. There also more than 20,000 children living on the streets of Kumasi, but every child who can learn a trade in our training centre will soon have a better future.

Then we went back to work, carry bricks. In total, we had 1000 in our hands just handmade bricks of clay minimum 15 kilo each weighing. Because we made a human chain, we have all had these 15,000 kilo's in our hands! After this "relaxing" day we were let go, by Kevin at 15:30 to the hotel. The boiler for the shower could not handle our demand for water, so we had to shower with a small trickle of water.

Tonight we were guests at Sheryl Busk to her home for dinner. She is an American professor who investigates the cause of the fact that there are so many street girls are in Kumasi. It is now 22.00 and we have just done the evaluation of the day and the presents are distributed for our "family visit" tomorrow afternoon. We then visited the family of staff of the project. But first we will build again!  
Wim and Ben

### **Ein erlebnisreicher Tag im Westen von Afrika geht zu Ende!**

In der Letzten für nicht alle so ruhigen Nacht haben alle sicher Ihre Eindrücke des gestrigen Tages verarbeitet. Sei es mit wilden Träumen, nachdenklich nicht einschlafen können oder einfach überwältigt die Augen schliessend.

Der heutige Morgen begann wieder ganz im Zeichen der Kultur Afrikas. Mal funktioniert das Morgenessen, mal kommt der Bus pünktlich, mal nicht, wie eben heute!

Mit Verspätung aber nicht weniger motiviert, starten wir unsere Arbeit im Rohbau des St. Louis Trainingcenters.

Oder besser gesagt, das wollen wir.

Aber zuerst muss organisiert werden. Das tun wir am Besten selbst,sonst machen wir vieles zweimal. Aber es herrscht eine gute Stimmung.

Heute gilt es aus grossen Bambusrohren, Deckenstützen zu machen. Zum sägen haben wir nur zwei gute Sägen. Bart B. und Bart vd E. machen sich einen grossen Spass ihre Sägen in den Pausen zu klauen.

Ein wiederum herrliches traditionelles Essen wurde von der Crew mit Boy und Asha gekocht. Am späteren Nachmittag besuchten wir in Kumsai ein kulturelles Zentrum. Die interessante und lebendige, etwas zulange Führung zeigte viel von der königlichen

Geschichte. Das anschliessende kurze aber heftige Gewitter brachte dann blitzartig ein wenig Abkühlung.

Nach einer langen mühsamer und chaotischen Busfahrt treffen wir bei den Schwestern ein. Schwester Olivia und ihre Schwestern haben uns zum Dinner eingeladen.

Ein warmer herzlicher Empfang! Viel Dankbarkeit und Liebe erleben wir gemeinsam mit dem langsam wieder genesenen Kevin.

Pater Francis von der katholischen Ortsgemeinde begrüsst uns im Namen Gottes.

Ein wunderbares Mahl mit Eis und Fruchtsalat!!!

Der Höhepunkt des Abends waren sicher die gemeinsam gesungenen und von Schwester Caroline schwungvoll dirigierten Liedern.

Und wieder geht ein unglaublich intensiver, erlebnisreicher und emotionaler Tag in dieser von einem wahnsinnigen Spirit sprühende Woche vorbei.

Die beiden letzte Tage hier waren "Africa Hardcore"

Africa we love you!

Und zum Schluss noch dies....

Fast alle Menschen in Ghana, egal wo und in welcher Situation, sind meistens sehr schön, farbig und sauber angezogen.

Unser (Georg und Sigi) persönliches Fazit bis heute: Lache, lache soviel Du kannst! Gib den Leuten ein Lächeln, lache aber wenn immer möglich über Dich selbst!

Grüsse von Jurg und Sigi..

### **Working like Ghanaians!**

Started with a quiet morning and breakfast and a easy drive to the building place. Marion could not go along, since she lies ill in bed. Likely to suffer from heat, strange food and hard work.

The first task today is making a lot of cement for the floor in the dining room. Large mounds of sand, gravel and cement are mixed up with water. Ghana builders are hours to create this mixture. Compliments for their efforts.

As true Ghanaians, many of us carried a hat made of cement bags to bring the mortar in large metal bowls to bring to the diningroom. After a lot of practicing, it looks quite

professional. The rest is busy with wheelbarrows. It's a dirty job, but very satisfying, because you see the results grow.

Between all the hard work, there is also time for fooling around: 3 girls in the wheelbarrow of Bart, wheelbarrow contest run by the Barts and transporting cement with the supervisors motorbike.

We can continue to make mortar, because there is additional sand and gravel supplied. These supplies we expected some days earlier, but delivery on time is not easy.

The catering was done great. Ben and Henny bought fresh fruit and we had apple pie! Two students from the music program (Dutch Sarah and German Marijke) of street children project had baked it for us. Very nice of them!

Lunch consisted of delicious peanut soup with a ball of sticky rice and chicken. Delicious!

After lunch we had a CSR workshop. We worked together and presented the results to each other. Salome was particularly good in form and asked critical questions. After that there was time for a recurring discussion. Last night on the way to dinner with the sisters, we dropped the street children on a corner of the street. This was rather rude according to some of us, but it appears that it is better that these girls are back in time in the city to find a place to sleep. Otherwise they will get in trouble, finding a proper and safe place to sleep. We were touched by this event. It showed again, how important it is, that they are taking care of and that they have the opportunity to get education and give them a future. This leads to daily discussion among us.

Shortly after, we gave the last energy shot and finished the floor of the dining room. Another part of the building is completed!

Meanwhile, Sister Olivia arrived to discuss what to do with the money that was raised by some of the group members going. The generous donors choose to build a well and finance a part of a new creche. However for the creche much more money is needed, so we hope the group that will come in January, shall raise the missing funds.

Just before leaving, there was a heavy rain. The terrain became so bad that the bus got stuck. It took quite some effort to resolve that problem. We made it a team effort, hooray!

We arrived at the hotel much later than planned, after a quick shower the evening could start. A local dance group performed dances from various African countries. Finally, we were invited to join the dancing group. Of course it was not that easy, with our stiff hips and legs.

However the evening is not over yet, we will now go swinging and singing in a karaoke-bar. How this will end, will be written tomorrow!

African kisses from Henny and Nicole[gallery]

### **End of the journey, and now what...?**

Today we all experienced the best moment of the week... we had Belgian Fries with mayonnaise. Another proof of the incredible hospitality of the Ghanaian people. Which was a great ending of a fantastic day.

Before this delicious dinner we had shared our emotions and experiences of this building camp:

'It doesn't matter at all which educational background, nationality or the position one holds within a company to share a common goal; creating a better world around us.. Even without a formal leader. The only things that really matters is that there is a passion, a drive to achieve a common goal..'

'Being grateful and being satisfied with what you DO have is the only thing that really counts. . A friendly, warm smile like the Ghanaian people gave us every single day proved to be the best medicine against stress or any other discomfort. It seems at least like sport and almost like art to not join "our street girls" when they show us their beautiful smiles.'

'AA or Amazing Africa became the translation of the incredible perseverance to keep on going.'

Before we went back to the hotel a closing ceremony was scheduled which was hosted by our orchestra leader Kevin. All stakeholders were present: First of all our "girls"; Aisha, Bintou, Rofia, Zenabo, Bilau en Fatima, secondly the Head Sister Olivia and a few of her assistants, followed by the full building crew supervised by Francis, the kitchen crew lead by Sister Martha and Sister Charlotte, the families whom had welcomed us in their homes with all their hospitality, Samson our bus driver for the week, the project leaders Street Children Project accompanied by Hanneke and last but not least the amazing driven and cosy bunch of the Vebego foundation. (The 'V'-team) mixed and tamed by the experienced Annet. After some words of gratitude presented by Karlijn and Wim and the presentation of the memorial sign by Bart B en Juerg, Sister Caroline was able to silence the whole crowd, by receiving the kisses from Bart B and Jurg and she clearly enjoyed it. ;-).

Then she overwhelmed us with sincere and emotional compliments. Afterwards the girls amused us with a typical African dance to say thank you. Finally sister Carolina lead us in

a song with 'Hiep, Hiep Hoera' from the west and 'Hiep, Hiep, Bouha' from the east. During saying farewell there were many tears.

Oh right...also today we came here to build, we nearly forgot to tell. Early in the morning we got a visit from the management board of SDP (the organisation which supervise the build). They were so kind to teach us some wisdoms:

'Mistakes don't bring us back to the past, they help us for a better future

'If you keep distance you can see things better and you are able to improve them. One of the core competences of the building supervisor Francis

These people were willing to borrow us their car to transport the cement. Great that this management board in Africa also drives an SUV ;-).

Belgium greetings from Bart en Bart (B en VDE)