

LearnLink

Ghana

**Connecting
to the
Center of
the World**

Country Paper

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With the Prime Meridian and the Equator intersecting on its southern coast, Ghana is—geographically speaking—the centermost country in the world.

Ghana's warm, tropical climate is matched by its reputation as one of the friendliest countries in West Africa, and its pace of life is described laid back, easy-going and civilized. Despite five centuries of European colonization, when its mineral wealth was plundered and its people enslaved, Ghana's longstanding culture of kings, its social and artistic traditions, and even some of its gold, diamonds and cocoa survived. The Gold Coast, as the region was known during the colonial period, adopted the name Ghana in 1957, when it became the first black nation in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence.

Today Ghana is a West African country of approximately 20 million people, with a struggling economy and a tentative movement toward democracy, both bolstered by the appointment of Kofi Annan, a native son, as Secretary General of the United Nations. In its rainforests, savannas, and coastal waters, most Ghanaians still make their living from agriculture, fishing and mining. But unemployment is high, and the economy is burdened by an inflation rate of up to 20 percent. With half of Ghana's population under the age of 20 and literacy and urban migration increasing, young people are looking for new opportunities and outlets for their talents and ambitions.

CLCs Offer New Opportunities

My life has completely changed from an unknown to a known world.

Letter to Jonnie Akakpo from Comfort Awuah

Ms. Awuah, a volunteer at a Community Learning Center (CLC) in Kumasi, echoes the sentiments of many of the staff and patrons of the three CLCs that Jonnie Akakpo has established in Ghana through the LearnLink project.

Until recently, access to computers and the Internet in Ghana was sparse, with public access limited to Accra, the capital city, where a few ill-equipped computer labs supported by the international donor community were available. Thanks to Akakpo's tireless efforts, hundreds of people in three Ghanaian cities now have been introduced to electronic communication and have access to worlds beyond their immediate horizon.

According to Akakpo, "Interest in the Internet is growing at such an astronomical rate that one can hardly cope with it."

Located in three regions of Ghana—Kumasi in the Ashanti region, Accra in the Greater Accra region, and Cape Coast in the Central region—the CLCs are managed by local NGOs in each area, who approach the bridging of traditional and modern methods of communication with cultural sensitivity.

Those Standing Tall

According to Jonnie Akakpo, the main characters in Ghana's CLC story—"those standing tall"—are the NGO leaders managing the Centers, who have taken on a formidable challenge. Not only

Zoom in on Ghana

Geography

Location: Western Africa, bordered by the Gulf of Guinea (S), Côte d'Ivoire (W), Burkina Faso (N) and Togo (E).

Area: 238,540 sq km; slightly smaller than Oregon. The coastal region and the far north are savanna areas; in between is a forest zone. Lake Volta, in central Ghana, is one of the world's largest dammed lakes.

Land Use: arable land: 12%; permanent crops: 7%; permanent pastures: 22%; forests and woodland: 35%.

Environmental Issues: recent drought in north severely affecting agricultural activities; deforestation; overgrazing; soil erosion; poaching and habitat destruction threatens wildlife populations; water pollution; inadequate supplies of portable water.

People

Population: 18,497,206

Age structure: 0-14 years: 43%; 15-64 years: 54%; 65 years and over: 3%

Population growth rate: 2.13%

Infant mortality rate: 77.53 deaths/1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth: total population: 56.82 years; male: 54.77 years; female: 58.92 years

Total fertility rate: 4.27 children born/woman

Ethnic groups: black African 99.8% (major tribes-Akan 44%, Moshi-Dagomba 16%, Ewe 13%, Ga 8%), European and other 0.2%

Religions: indigenous beliefs 25%, Muslim 20%, Christian 50%, other 5%

Languages: English (official), African languages (including Akan, Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe, and Ga)

Literacy: definition: age 15 and over can read and write; total population: 64.5%; male: 75.9%; female: 53.5%

Economy

GDP per capita: \$2,000

Inflation rate: 27.7%

Unemployment rate: 20%

External debt: \$5.2 billion

Budget: revenues: \$20 billion; **expenditures:** \$20.8 billion

Communications

Telephones: 100,000

Telephone system: poor to fair system; domestic: primarily microwave radio relay; international: satellite earth station -1 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean)

Radio broadcast stations: AM 4, FM 23

Radios: 12.5 million

Televisions broadcast stations: 3

Televisions: 1.9 million

The World Factbook 1999

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/gh.html>

Library of Congress Country Studies Handbook

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ghtoc.html>

are they mastering information, education and communication technologies (IECTs) themselves, but they also are coordinating staff training, undertaking sophisticated outreach and orientation programs in their communities, and trying to catch the eye of the private sector by conducting seminars designed to appeal to business and professional needs. The NGOs are designing special events to address the needs of their constituents, hosting days devoted to women and women's groups, for example, to teachers and students, and to the private sector and professional associations. The goal is to accommodate the needs of all individuals, organizations and companies in the community.

The CLCs are permeating the communities slowly. The main challenge is education—capturing the imagination of the local people and groups and letting them know that the CLCs are not computer schools or just telecommunication centers for business. They are multifaceted centers

with the capacity to provide resources for varying interests and endeavors— from commerce to academics, entertainment, personal communication, and municipal information.

The NGOs managing the CLCs include Partners for the Internet in Education (PIE), an association of primary and secondary school teachers in the greater Accra region of Ghana. “As a means of widening the scope of both teachers and students to the rapidly advancing world of technology,” PIE’s mission is to “become a catalyst for the popularization of the use of computers and the Internet in education.” The group’s objectives include influencing educational policy and reforming curriculum goals to include computer literacy, as well as forging links between schools and organizations within Ghana and around the world who support the introduction of technology in education.

The Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), based in Kumasi, is engaged in building human capacities through training programs. One of the strongest NGOs working to promote sustainable development in Ghana, CEDEP has a long history of community-level development work and a long-standing tradition of community outreach and collaboration with USAID. CEDEP hosts a weekly development video cinema, inviting community members to watch films about health, environment, education and economic concerns, and houses a small public information center with a collection of texts, periodicals, and reference materials related to key development themes. Students of all levels, including those from the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, make frequent use of the library.

The Central Region Development Commission (CEDECOM) works to spearhead private-sector development, focusing on small-scale

Kumasi

With roots going back to the 17 th century, Kumasi is the ancient capital of the Ashanti kingdom, the largest ethnic group in Ghana and one of the few matrilineal societies left in Africa. Today, Kumasi is Ghana’s second largest city, with a population nearing 1.5 million people, located in the south-central part of the country. Known as the “biggest village in Africa,” Kumasi is a bustling city, a commercial, transportation and artistic center in a cocoa-producing region— Ghana’s principal crop. The city is home of one of the largest markets in Africa, noted for its work with gold and fabric, and the seat of the most powerful Ashanti King, the Asantehene.

Cape Coast

The region boasts more secondary schools and tourist attractions—beautiful hotels, excellent beaches and the Kakum game reserve—than any other in the country. Traditionally a petty trading, cottage industry and fishing community, its population is now approaching 800,000, and many are employed in the government offices, schools, and tourist organizations that have grown up with the city.

Accra

Accra is Ghana’s seaside capital, the seat of government, where the large organizations, institutions, factories and places of entertainment are located. Its population is 3.5 million, with another 500,000 to one million people trooping in and out of the city on business missions daily. The city’s increasingly cosmopolitan nature is moderated by its easy African atmosphere.

enterprise, rural housing, poverty alleviation, environmental management, and tourism development in Cape Coast in the Central Region.

All three NGOs share the goal of developing the capacities of less privileged people in their respective communities, and they view Community Learning Centers as a valuable means to that end.

Every CLC Launch is a Party

CLC launches are major events in Ghana. Accompanied by music, drama and dance, the first CLC opened its doors in Kumasi in October 1998. The celebration was attended by 150 people, including academics, students, business people, local dignitaries, USAID mission representatives and community leaders. Print and electronic media covered the event, and a group of children aged 8 to 11 demonstrated software packages and equipment such as networked multimedia computers with full Internet access. The launch was supported by the entire community, with a local oil company donating fuel to transport staff and equipment, an interior designer decorating the grounds, and radio stations giving free air time to host interviews and air announcements designed to introduce the public to the CLC. Special guests included a representative of the Asantehene of Ashanti King as Chair of the occasion and representatives of the Ministries of Education and Communication. The Queen mother of Mampong Kronko, Nana Aboagyewaa Kente, cut the ceremonial tape to the CLC facility. Stressing Ghana's entry into the computer age, the Ministry of Education representative urged students to make good use of the facilities to enhance their performance in school and to learn about computers and the Internet.

Traditional Communication

The means of transmitting knowledge in traditional, tribal Ghana ranges from songs, stories and proverbs that illustrate important social lessons to ritual rites of passage at various stages of life, in which adolescents, for example, receive critical cultural information from family members and elders. Historically, pre-colonial communication also used "talking drums" to convey messages. Different types of drums, each with a unique name and sound, were used on special occasions to broadcast announcements to people who were taught to interpret the meaning of the sounds. Another means of communication was through a "linguist," used by leaders who did not address their subjects directly but through an intermediary. Vocational skills were passed on from master craftsmen to apprentices.

Promises and Perspectives

While some Ghanaians are starting to realize the potential benefits of IECTs, they remain realistic about their expectations as well, especially given the challenges they face. They are struggling to ensure the sustainability of their public access CLCs while striving, at the same time, to overcome obstacles such as illiteracy, a sense of mystery and phobia about computers, low female participation, the absence of electricity and telecommunication facilities in parts of the country, and high prices and fees for IECT equipment and services.

“Early adapters” in Ghana—primarily the educated elite and the business community—are excited about entering the information age. That enthusiasm is spreading, and public access is becoming a priority. Once introduced to IECTs, teachers, students, NGO members and parents whose children live and work around the world find the prospect of immediate information and communication appealing for a variety of reasons, as feedback from Ghana’s CLC users suggests:

My first email to my son in Switzerland! On top of that, I got my own email address at hotmail. I’m reconnecting to my loved ones, so far away! Thank you.

...a noble idea..providing access to people who otherwise would not have [it]...My only hope is that...charges...should meet the pockets of those in the lower rungs of the community...

For the CLC concept and services to be embraced by the community, the technological structures must be demystified and practical benefits exposed.

The CLC is certainly a welcome angel.

This is a wide ocean of possibilities for education, business and news...I love the system.

It seems to be simpler than I thought.

Very impressive, and we hope it will not be a nine-day wonder.

Am impressed...It is my first time. I hope you will escort your services to the doorsteps of the community.

I have already learned a lot...and hope to be among the first batch of participants. Thank you CLC...More grease to your elbows, but make sure you don’t soil your beautiful shirts.

It is an innovative and strategic outfit which I think will go a long way to act as a catalyst to the development of various sections of the economy and engender in Ghanaians an awareness of the state of the art of technology, which is the best way to do things now. I appreciate your effort. God bless you.

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