

Greetings From Ghana #14 Not THAT Different

As I write this we have not had water flowing from the utility for about a month now. I have a friend in another area who has been without tap water for over six weeks. The utility has said they need a rate increase of 334% this year. The electrical utility (we have had two rolling black outs a week for the past few weeks) says they need 148% in order to function. And the opposition party is saying the current government is selling off the utilities to cronies.

When I meet someone it does not take too many conversations before the Ghanaian will say something about how America is so much better than Ghana and ask me my opinion. I tell them that my country is about four times as old as Ghana and there are many things that are the same. They just look different.

They have people here accused of trying to sell off public lands. That happens almost every single term in the U.S. Here it makes big headlines. There it just makes the news. In the U.S., no one sells off the public utilities, we shut off fresh water to a city because contaminated water is cheaper. We give our postal system over to someone who owns a competing service and watch a vital link of society getting gutted while we stand by mired in bureaucracy..

Ghanaians complain that the government is out of touch with the public. Here they were complaining about inflation. The latest was 26% in one month. The government's answer was to initiate a 1.6% fee on any and all electronic transfers of money over 100 cedis. (That is around \$14). And is added on to all bank or mobile money transactions to generate money to offset the economic shortfalls. To offset what the government called the "financial inconvenience" of the new E-Levy that no one voted on, it stopped collecting tolls on the motorways.

To offset gas prices increasing by 60% in six months the government minister for that sector recently offered to lower the cost of gas by $\frac{1}{6}$ of 1%. The public had a different idea. Public transportation stopped for a day. Gas prices went down. . . a little.

Ghana's history of independence since 1957 has been rocky at best. Since its independence it has had three military coups. After each one, the next government is called "The () Republic." We are now in the Fourth Republic which started in 1993. The president serves for four years and can be re-elected for an additional term. Each party accuses the other of corruption and being ineffective.

Back in 2005 (or 2006, depending on who you talk to) the government started six housing projects for middle to low-income families. The project in Kumasi - Ghana's second largest city - of 1,026 or 1,053 units (again depending on who you read it from), was stopped in 2008 when the political party in office changed. It was restarted in 2015 when it was given to the Social Security- National Insurance Trust as an investment to be finished. In 2020, the president inaugurated the 312 finished units and heralded the project as a major step forward for social housing. The current SS-NIT Facebook page says it is 50% sold. It also touts the project as having luxurious one and two bedroom apartments and 26 shops in a gated community with a police station and communal parks.

As of about two weeks ago. . .



there are about 92 units occupied. There are three entry gates. One has a security guard, one is locked and one is locked except for a man gate that is wide open. There is no police station and no shops. Most of the buildings have no air conditioning units installed. The “luxurious” two bedroom units have a kitchen with a cement countertop, metal sink, and no cabinets in a room that is about 8 x 11 with no exterior venting except for a window (or two, depending on the model). But what do you really expect for apartments that were started about 15 years ago and then left unfinished?

The Osei Tutu II housing project is not an isolated incident. Schools, administration buildings, public projects of all kinds (doesn't really matter what). . . virtually every project started by one government is abandoned when the new one takes over. After all, who wants to be saddled by the projects of a corrupt, ineffective government?

About 5 km from the house is an overpass that was started a couple years ago. Since I have been here I have gone through a restriction area with large metal walls and signs proclaiming “Work in Progress.” A couple weeks ago the walls came down and the pillars that had stood like silent sentinels were capped by the superstructure of the overpass. They are now in the process of pouring the cement for the road surface of the overpass. All this is very exciting . . . seeing a governmental project accomplished.



Now all it needs is a road on either side to connect to. Well, maybe the next time this group comes back into power.