

Greetings from Ghana #36

Bits and Pieces

Sometimes, most times, I focus on a single thing or related topics for these newsletters, but there are a lot of things that get my attention that are not big enough for a single issue. That is what has brought about this one.

Ever seen one of those "Grab the Cash" booths they have as promotion, where you stand in a small booth and try to grab cash as dollar bills are blowing around you? There is so much going on that the contestants are somewhat disoriented in their efforts. Same can be said of Ghanaian society under this ruling party.

The corruption level in Ghana jumped radically in 2016 (current government came in in 2017) and has maintained or grown even larger since. The organization that rates countries on their corruption level has said after the third near-identical annual report that, perhaps, things would be better if the president was not the one in charge of correcting the situation.

The government just released a report that said (despite it being common knowledge that one of the illegal mining operations in the national forest is run by a government minister) there was no one from the government involved with the illegal gold mining.

There are protests taking place throughout the country and a couple weeks ago the president said he was aware of the problems but that he could not fix everything.

In 2021 the Bank of Ghana had a profit of over \$21 billion USD. Then, according to some reports, the bank printed money without parliament's permission in order to bolster the programs of the government. Last year the bank went into the red by over \$60 billion. The country currently has an inflation rate of 40 percent. Two months ago it was at 54 percent. The president has said before he leaves office it will be down to single digits.

The Minister of Sanitation recently had a break-in at her house. When the police arrived they found over \$1,000,000 in CASH in her bedroom closet. There were other stashes as well. My thought is that maybe the president is going to ask the ministers to return the money they have and maybe that will be how he lowers the debt.

People are protesting lack of infrastructure repair and advancement. The current administration touts a new rural highway project getting started while trucks fall sideways from the uneven roads in other areas. In the Accra area alone it is estimated that traffic volume increases at a rate of nine percent a year. There has been no major road improvement or addition in the past 20 years.

There are bridges – or the parts for them – sitting on one of the culvert sides in various places where the current government said they would provide new bridges. They never promised to assemble them.

There is a critical housing shortage. Apartment complexes that are 80% - 90 % finished sit abandoned because the current government does not want to finish what the previous administration started for fear the previous political party will get the credit.

The government keeps adding new fees to things like e-commerce and transportation. It is easier to tax the public than the commercial friends of the government.

There is a dam on the Volta River that provides water and electricity to the area. It was so far past capacity that the dam was said to be vibrating. The engineers, without alerting landowners near the river, opened the flood gates and wiped-out hundreds of homes and farms in communities down river.

The government responded immediately by forming a subcommittee to study the situation with their report coming out a week after the tragedy. Predictions are that the cost of food, which has gone up so far 51% this year will grow dramatically by March of next year because of food shortages created by the flood..

The chicken industry is having tough times trying to create more sales. The Agricultural Minister recently signed an agreement for the import of chickens from China.

Gasoline costs about the same here as it does in the U.S. and there is a refinery about 15 miles from my house. Right now, it is running about \$4.75 a gallon. Milk is running about \$8.50 a gallon to \$24 a gallon depending on the brand. Butter is about \$18 a pound. Fruit juice drink is around \$14 a gallon. Coffee is still about \$40 a pound unless you buy Folgers in the American Grocery for about \$15 a pound. Beer ranges from about \$1.50 to over \$7 a bottle in the grocery stores. Candy runs around \$2 for a Snickers bar. (Interesting note, Ghana exports cocoa and then imports the candy – and some of the cocoa farmers cannot afford to buy chocolate). As for cigarettes, I have no idea on the price. There are only a few brands that I have ever seen and there are no advertisements. I know of one store that sells them and they are not on display for all. They are stuck in a small cabinet on a side wall.

Farmer's markets are in different areas, some covering acreage, serving thousands daily. We end up hitting the market for fruit and vegetables as well as things like smoked fish or welleh (beef hide) about every ten days or so. We get pineapples, green skinned oranges, lumpy green lemons, plantains, bananas, mangoes, melons, potatoes, onions, peppers, and the list goes on. We stock up there and then go to grocery stores for things like mayonaise and flour. Our diet is

primarily a starch with vegetables and fruit followed by inclusion of meat for about 60% of the meals. Desserts are not uncommon but far from a daily occurrence.

Sometimes I wonder about the coincidence – things in the U.S. that we have ample access to are difficult to have here –and people here are, in general, healthier than in America. At the same time, I am reminded that here it is not uncommon for someone to miss a day, rather than just one meal.

The president has now said that he is very aware of the problems that the country is facing, but that he is confident that the people are wise enough to be able to choose a leader who can solve the country's problems.

There are companies that say they can get you into a lottery for a visa to the United States. While many do not subscribe to the service, I know a lot of people who tell me their dreams of America. I show them a couple truths. They have a corrupt government. So do we. They have poverty. So do we. They have almost no racial discrimination among dark-skinned people and police. Um. . . that is one that is hard for them to fathom. I get discriminated against. They can understand that, but having it as a personal experience is beyond comprehension of many.

The sinks here typically have one tap. Just water. Not hot. Not cold. Just water. No reason for hot water. Who would want hot water when the average temperature is about 85 at any given time? As for "cold," I know people who eschew cold. "Not natural. Don't like it." And as a result of the lack of hot water availability, most household kitchen plumbing drains I have seen are white plastic pipes made in China. Guess what? If you are making a lot of pasta for dinner and you pour off the pot of boiling noodles into an available colander and sink. . . .moments later you are mopping the kitchen floor because someone melted the plumbing.

If you thought this was my only experience here, I am sure you'd wonder why I stay. But Ghana does have incredible beauty. And the culture, while baffling to me at times, is rich with heritage and things to make you wonder. I have changed a lot on what I buy for food. I have far fewer possessions. I do miss the seasons changing. It is a surprise when I get a call from the National Identification Bureau that I am a week behind on getting my ID renewed for the start of year three. It does not seem that long, but here weeks seem to happen every three days. You start on Monday and notice the day on Thursday which becomes Saturday and here ya are in another week, almost like a pattern you follow without paying attention.

That also explains the "regularity " of the newsletters.

Speaking of which, this one is late, but done.