

Greetings from Ghana #41 Advancing to Zero

After my last newsletter before the holidays went out I received comments from people concerned about my safety. I am safe. And while I may show you the entanglements of politics here I should also show you the responses. Yes, the government is corrupt and trying to find more ways to take money from the populous. At the same time, the Office of the Special Prosecutor took to the news channels three days ago to say the the country is on a road to being doomed because of corruption and cited a specific case where the judges are impeding his progress by giving the defendant immunity from investigation. It caused a big ruckus and is still. Apparently no prosecutor has ever alerted the public about major cases or developments and some of the talking heads were furious. Others found great reason for what had been done. You can watch democracy at work as the different factions come forward to deal with things. The seeds of change are being planted. The ruling is now under great scrutiny and review.

The advantage Ghana has is that it is a much smaller country Things can be dealt with faster. People are waking up to common sense and to how corruption is limiting and changing their habits. Well, promising to anyway.

What price democracy? The New Patriot Party (NPP) (current folks) put out a statement that all the political parties need to de-monetise the election process. This came about after some of their delegates refused to cast ballots unless they saw compensation that other delegates had received. Some had received two to three thousand. Others had gotten 750. The unrewarded delegates were demanding the upper level. The NPP is going in for major reforms and demanding others do as well..

In any country one will be able to find a plethora of stories. I have tried to bring you along on stories I have found to be interesting. It occurred to me that while not necessarily negative, most of the stories would not necessarily cause you to think highly of Ghanaians or West Africans. In an effort to balance things a bit I would like to introduce you someone I may be collaborating with in the near future. Where my goal is to start an effort that will change Mother Africa, Samuel wants to change the world.

As you know, I am here to marry two projects and create a way to bring toilets to rural villages, give farmers a way to have greater harvests on the family plots, and rebuild the soil. It is low key and low tech. Samuel is Samuel Kwaku Worwui, an engineer who is creating a special hydraulic machine that will turn Bamboo, Lime, and Bio-Char into building bricks and blocks that will replace up to 80% of cement and steel in buildings..

Engineer Worwui is licensed to give expert advice, design, and audit green building projects in over 150 countries on behalf of the International Finance Cooperation (a member of the World Bank Group) and Green Business Certification, Inc. in the U.S. His passion is finding a way to thwart global warming His interest is in developing affordable, high-quality, innovative, local

construction materials and technologies. He also works in designing, constructing, and auditing green/sustainable infrastructure projects. His company has won awards in green building design competitions in countries such as Netherlands, Kenya, and Turkey.

He is working with a global team of experts and foreign direct investment groups to develop a 200 acre multi-purpose self-sustaining, Carbon Negative City. This is a model of the next generation cities designed to improve living standards at affordable cost while also generating revenue/income for the city dwellers through rooftop greenhouses and vertical gardening indoor, animal and fish farming; waste recycling, renewable power generation, eco-tourism, high-tech industries, modern logistics, commercial and recreational centers, all in an area about 2 hours west of Accra.

I had the opportunity to meet with a different developer earlier this year. In his office in the high rise tower next to the airport he described a community where you could buy a home that would allow you to have all the luxuries you were used to having in an upscale residence, but if you decided to throw the switch, you could live that lifestyle off the grid. Using the latest in technology and green building techniques it would allow luxury buyers to have the best of both worlds. It sounded incredible and too good to be true. And apparently it was.

Over the next few meetings that we had and a visit to the construction site it became apparent that the designs were changing. The green aspects kept getting, I guess you could say, lighter and the luxury aspects were becoming fewer. When it got to the point that the solar power aspect was optional and some of the green aspects had been eliminated we respectfully excused ourselves.

Engineer Worwui's GM Bamboo Eco-City is not designed to provide a lower carbon footprint lifestyle. It is not that shallow. This city has a better than zero carbon footprint. He wants to build a model city that can be duplicated and he wants it carbon negative, not carbon zero. . . and he just might do it.

Samuel is also a member of a professional association of engineers who have decided that the woes of Ghana's infrastructure will never be fixed unless engineers are in control to make sure things are built right. They are starting to make their presence known.

Many of the Ghanaian problems are infrastructural and some from improper methods being used by government contractors. These professional men and women of the engineer group are now attracting major corporations and business leaders and impressing on them that unless the corruption can be dealt with the true possible profits will never be seen. Their message is fairly simple. Limit society by denying the opportunity for affordable housing and services and you lower your ROI.

One can hope enough people are listening.

It is kind of fun to see the citizenry wake up. The president and finance ministers have proclaimed that the country has turned the corner and prosperity has been restored. A media critic then charged, "If we are back to being prosperous, how about you pay your bills?" That was followed two days later by a clergyman with national attention proclaiming that God wants the NPP (current government) to be kicked out of office.

The government has announced a major highway project to take a dilapidated four lane highway with huge pot holes and to make it into a ten lane highway. As one woman said, "They have been in office close to eight years and NOW are just starting this? It is just to get votes. And what, they will have it done in less than 11 months? After the election everything will stop. We've seen it before."

And while one side of the government is saying that good times have returned, the finance department just floated the idea of adding a tax of 30% to auto insurance premiums. And lawyers started to immediately challenge the bill that has now been drawn back for reconsideration.

The president has said he will not sign any bill that adds to the fiscal responsibility of the government. For that reason he will not get rid of the death penalty. Getting rid of it would add years of financial expenditure to keep those prisoners alive. Regardless of what you think of him, President Akufo-Addo is a seasoned politician who know how to use the system.

There is a contingent of conservative evangelical ministers here who get guidance from a group of clergy in the U.S. They have a fairly strong contingent. And there is a member of Parliament who grabs the spotlight whenever he can as he points out the dangers of whatever he thinks will get attention. And like in the U.S., there are politicians who fall in line with him to garner support. His name is Sam George and his latest is a bill to allow police to arrest anyone caught crossdressing with the intent to have sex. The act itself does not have to be in reality if intent can be proved. The president has refused to sign the bill because it would add financial burden to the budget. No one can accuse him of doing anything against religion or morality if the decision is strictly financial.

So when I hear that the Finance Minister (his cousin) has already given a multi-year contract to a proven under-qualified contractor with no competition in the selection process, the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt in describing President Somoza of Nicaragua come to mind. There are times when even I find myself thinking, "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."

Speaking of Roosevelt, some of his advice seems relevant today for both America and Ghana. In his second inaugural address he said, "We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we now know that it is bad economics." On education, "Books can not be killed by fire. People die, but books never die. No man and no force can abolish memory...In this war, we know, books are weapons. And it is a part of your dedication always to make them weapons for man's freedom." Here's to hoping these realizations come to more of society before the ballot boxes open..