

## Greetings from Ghana #45 Thousands of Little Dots Make a Picture

Just like an impressionistic painting where the image is the results of thousands of little bits that make up the painting, so too (I believe) is how you understand a foreign culture. It has been my goal as I send these out to show you bits of life that I find that will help define your image of Ghana and Togo to a point. Here are some to help fill in a bit more of what life is like here.

Politicians here do not seem to be able to grab the concept of reality. Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia is a Ghanaian economist and former central banker. He is in charge of monetary policy and has even written a book on economic models for success. He is also the same guy (now running for election as the new president) who has said that the economy is in very good shape, that he has no direct influence on taxes, and that people should trust that if elected he will bring prosperity to the nation.

In the last month the government has added 35 new Value Added Taxes. That is where they slap a tax on whatever. Car insurance now carries and additional 30% VAT on the expense. Car repairs have an additional 15% VAT. You are now required to pay a \$100 annual road tax if you own a vehicle. Imported sanitary pads (96% of all sold) now have a luxury VAT – a move they say to promote local product consumption. The cedis (their unit of currency) is now 13 to the dollar. Three years ago it was at six. When he took office as vice-president in 2017 it was at three. They tried adding a VAT to electrical consumption but the businesses objected and they scrapped that one.

His opponent, former president John Mahamman has said that he will not consider his mission complete until all Ghanaians are equal under the law. He has also recently said that the blowback on the anti-LGBTQ bill is because Ghana is not completely independent from western meddling. His idea to lower the traffic congestion – the traffic increases by an estimated 9% a year and most roads have seen no improvement in 20 years – his idea is to move the government offices to outside the capital and then to set up trains to take people to the government offices when they need to contact an agency. (There currently are no rail systems in place). This might not be such a bad idea except that there are roads here that are primarily dirt when the pavement has been worn away. His idea to fix the financial woes is to develop a 24 hour economy without explaining why or how a business expands its operating hours successfully.

In an effort to increase art appreciation, the president hired his neice to paint overpasses in the city and its outskirts.

As the election gets closer the promises and programs proposed become even more outlandish. There are schools here with no walls. Children have no desks or books in communities that have no toilets,, no running water, roads



near impassable during the rains, no internet, and limited electricity. The current administration is trying to implement a program to address the lack of reference materials by promising to provide a laptop for every student.

Speaking of electricity, the Electrical Company of Ghana, after years of non-collection from government agencies has decided to start shutting down the greatest nonpayment offenders. They recently shut off a secondary school in the midst of final exams until the school officials reminded the agency that schools do not pay the electric bill and that they do not receive a bill. The finance department (see vice-president) is responsible for payments. The next day the power was back. The electrical agency have, since the start of this new policy, shut off power during the Africa Games where over 20 nations were competing, functioning hospitals, infant treatment centers, and even (for a moment) during a speech by the current president. And while that can be looked at as "oh well, that is them" the agency is doing load shedding and shutting off neighborhoods for up to four days with no warning.

But, believe it or not, life here is getting better in spite of the government. Freight trains do not make sharp right turns but turn they will. In the areas of environment, developing leadership, and empowering women to be entrepreneurs – businesses and organizations are working to fix the woes of society. There are groups and organizations working to provide independent resources to communities. And people are starting to mobilize for better opportunities and stronger services.

People here have always done what they can to accomplish their goals with the limited resources they have. Everyone is very accepting of what someone must do to achieve the goal. At the same time, when faced with an unobtainable result they often ignore the problem. This attitude is also prevalent in Togo.

In Ghana, there have been efforts by the government to improve mental healthcare services at all levels. However, significant gaps remain with only about 2% of Ghana's 2.3 million people living with mental health conditions receiving psychiatric treatment and support from health facilities according to the World Health Organization.



Families, unable to cope with the responsibilities of care and with no established mental health facilities or available programs, typically abandon the person and literally put them in the street to fend for themselves. These people start off with whatever they are wearing and after time their clothes and their complexions take on a hue of brown, green, and black. It is strange to say but you recognize them by the colour they have taken on. Propriety forbids me from



showing you images of men and women whose clothes have finally worn off. It is not frequent, nor uncommon, to see them nude. They sleep under pedestrian walkways, on sidewalks of secondary streets in the city, in places like up against a church in a rural neighborhood and, in the case of my recent trip to Togo, on the side of the highway and partly on the pavement. People, knowing they can have no effect, ignore them and literally turn a blind eye.

Norway, through the World Health Organization (WHO) established a five year initiative in 2022 for 12 select countries including Ghana to establish and develop mental health programs. Ghana promised to begin their process of establishing their programs in third quarter of 2022. "We need to create an environment that is conducive enough for people with mental disorders to come out and seek help at any level of the health system", said the Western North Regional Director of Health, Dr. Marion Okoh-Owusu "This special initiative is an opportunity for us to redefine mental healthcare in Ghana." Unfortunately, without familial assistance the odds of many of these people ever receiving care is doubtful. They have been abandoned.





I learned shortly after I got here that in Ghana "Dinning," as in "dining room," is the correct spelling. After a while you understand that many people spell English phonetically and their accents provide a bit of humour. I doubt that this trotro owner is trying to advertise a religious neurotic, "The Muslim Worrier."

And in an area where some people do not speak English, and others speak it sparsely, you gotta wonder how they understand some things.

For someone who knows "cum" stands for "along with being" or "part one thing, part another," the label is decipherable. However; I am still not sure why I would want a nasal inhaler/roll on. I cannot fathom how you'd use it. And would you want something in your nose after after having been used as a roll on?



Some of the Ghanaian society is greatly vocal and deeply involved in religion. From the president who has committed millions of government funding to a bloated-cost national cathedral he said God told him to build, to the religious schools where you can become a Pastor in six months, a Bishop in nine, or an Apostle in twelve. People are starting to raise voices of concern and appear to be re-evaluating the acceptance of all things religious. Revival attendance seems to be down. Evangelical events are now taking on subjects like "Prophetic Business Conference" instead the standard "Holy Revival." Civic leaders in remote areas are

wanting to know why the government is funding a church when schools have no desks. The foundations are beginning to show cracks.



There is some beautiful architecture in the Pre-Colonial area of Accra, massively beautiful buildings that are largely ignored and filthy. There is a distaste for that part of history. For architecture, the tourism bureau website recommends seeing the Jamestown Lighthouse. Only problem, the lighthouse was boarded up years ago.







I have more than a couple friends who about every couple weeks will spend a few hours washing their shoes before letting them dry in the sun. It is something I cannot recall doing or even thinking of doing. To the folks I know it is an important part of how they appear. Shoes should be polished if leather and washed clean otherwise. There is no machine and I have yet to meet anyone who considers the exercise an inconvenience. It, like washing bedsheets in a bucket, is just a part of day-to-day. The American in me wants to find a way to make the shoe task more convenient. It is an exercise in futility. If you want to appear properly in public you deal with the shoes.

When I was in Klobatem, Togo, viewing the Dignity Toilets and talking to the owner families, these four brothers saw my camera slung around my neck. "Look!" said the eldest picking up a piece of bark, "I have a camera, too!"



I laughed and said, "Too bad you don't have a cell phone too." A few minutes later as I walked past them again he called out, "White man, we have cell phones now!"



The projects in Togo are going well. We are starting to sell the fertilizer to the local farmers. Our responses from the community have been good and the women are promising to support us. Recent studies in the U.S. show Americans are willing to pay more for organic fertilizer. That bit makes our discount seem even more valuable.



We are blessed to have some excellent workers on our team in Togo. On my trip there I had to admire the craftsmanship these guys are exhibiting. They are proud of what they are creating and it shows.

Once we turn it over to the family, some find ways of adapting their structure,



like this one being used as a support for the satellite dish. (I have been told the dish is for the house. I didn't check).

When it comes to the Dignity Toilets, one thing is evident and should be noted. . . the number.

Over the course of eight years Nor'Wester and the Rotary Clubs of District 8 have taken a project from eight toilets to 174 with more being built every week. I looked at Taouvik, the director of the operation in Togo, and smiled. "Who'd have thought?" I asked. "Yeah," he smiled, "When we started with number one. Who'd have thought?"

Over 1000 people no longer use the fields and the bushes. And our work is making a difference that can already be seen and felt. It is with a great sense of pride that I see what we have done so far. And the exciting part is that it keeps growing.



