Ghana: A Look at the Developing World
Report on Fieldwork Experience in Ghana
Description of Trip

On May 26th, 2009 fifteen Eastern Connecticut State University and two Delaware State University students travelled approximately 5,000 miles to the coast of West Africa. This experience took them out of their comfort zone in order to learn about the pertinent development issues facing Ghana first-hand. The ECSU students were fortunate enough to have taken a sociology seminar entitled Change and Development in Africa. During this course the students openly debated raw development issues from articles written by esteemed professors in Ghana. The lectures were led by their fellow classmates and further enhanced with current relevant literature from their professor.

In Southern Ghana, the students lived with Cape Coast University faculty and their family in order to experience genuine Ghanaian family culture. As a result, they were able to experience traditional African dancing, chores, jobs, food, television and music. In addition, they attended lectures from professors from the university including those that had written articles they read in the previous course. In between lectures the students visited historical locations in southern Ghana including two slave castles and a national park. After the lectures in the south concluded they had the unique opportunity to journey twelve hours to Northern Ghana. Along the way they were able to see the striking differences in infrastructure and vegetation between the two regions.

In Northern Ghana, the students lived in hotels and hostels and experienced mostly Ghanaian Muslim culture. Therefore, they were able to compare and contrast Muslim culture in the north with primarily Christian culture in the south. Once again they attended lectures, but from professors at the Institute for Development Studies. The trips
in the north consisted of visiting the first Muslim mosque created in Ghana, sitting on the back of a crocodile and driving down a dangerous dirt road to see animals including being 50 meters from wild elephants! The trip concluded with a visit to the United States Embassy to learn what the U.S. was doing currently to help Ghana. I was lucky to be one of those fifteen students and here is a reflection on my experience in Ghana focusing on what I thought was the most important development issues.

**Actual Report**

Though Ghana's development is more than fifty years behind the U.S.'s the people of this beautiful country seem to have something most Americans lack, a sense of pure happiness, national pride, and determination. However, these intangible qualities that Ghanaians possess are not as effective as a means towards sustainable development as money and power which America has. As a result, they are facing serious development issues which are getting increasingly worse over time. The purpose of this paper is to reveal some of the issues I encountered during my visit.

The first problem that I came across was the mass amount of trash that lined the European style drainage systems. The trenches were covered in black plastic bags and other garbage including food scraps. The small black plastic bags are what the Ghanaians and tourists use to carry anything they purchase. I could not understand why after they were done using the bags they just threw them in a ditch until I saw the local news. A local Ghanaian television program said that they have no public waste management program. This means that they don’t have garbage trucks that go around and pick up their trash bins like more developed countries such as America. Therefore, there
is no need for street vendors and small villages to have trash cans since there would be no close place for them to dispose of them. The news anchor continued admitting that there are several reasons why there is no program, but that the main reason is the unsafe road conditions. Most of the roads are dirt roads and have lots of holes in them; not to mention that some roads are so small that a garbage truck would not fit.

The large amount of litter due to the recent urbanization due to globalization in Ghana can create several issues for the locals. Unfortunately there also seemed to be a large amount of rodents gathered in the trenches in search for food. This means that if an infection were to break out that needed a vector it would be that much easier for the virus to spread. Not only can the uncontained trash cause obvious medical problems and be aesthetically displeasing but it can also cause environmental degradation. The damage to the surrounding lands could decrease the crop yield which could decrease the amount of herbivores which could reduce the amount of omnivores and carnivores. The decrease in plants and animals could eventually affect the Ghanaians food source which could ultimately increase starvation and malnutrition (Boadi and Kuitunen 2002).

In order to solve this problem, the Ghanaians need to fix the roads or come up with some solution to manage the trash instead of simply littering. There needs to be large containers for trash located closer to the large markets and busy streets. Perhaps a smaller trash vehicle can be used to transport garbage on the narrow dirt streets. However, in order to really asses the severity of littering more data needs to be collected so that a sustainable trash management plan that involves the citizens can be erected. On a positive note, the people do recycle glass soda bottles and the few landfills that the Ghanaians have are currently being upgraded to higher sanitation levels (Achakeng
Another displeasing sight that I saw along with the trash, were lots of young children and youth participating in what is known as hustling. Further observation of this behavior reveals two problems. Not only is hustling an extremely difficult way to live life, but kids under the age of fifteen hustling violates child labor laws. This meant that Ghana either does not enforce child labor laws or perhaps these laws haven’t been able to be put in place yet. It seems as though if your family has little money, the entire family works together to support their lifestyle. Also, perhaps if you have some money you have to balance attending school and hustling to buy books or other school expenses. What was apparent was that these venders were willing to sell almost anything to tourists and were very efficient and persistent at their work.

I experienced hustling from the moment I stepped out of the airport and my bags were attempted to be seized to help me carry them in exchange for magazines also known as cash. This type of hustling is expected in foreign countries, but it didn’t stop there. Next as we drove away from the airport, there were young men and women with baskets on their heads walking up and down in the road through traffic frantically trying to make a profit. The items ranged from African souvenirs, to food and fruit, to water and travelling needs. The venders looked exhausted from the heat and vigorous physical labor, but this did not seem to affect their performance. However, the hustling did not stop in the bustling cities it continued to tourist attractions.

In fact, when we arrived at our first tourist spot the W.E.B. Dubois museum we experienced first hand the determination behind hustling. When we left the museum to eat lunch in the outside patio, we were immediately bombarded by a young group of boys
selling bracelets. We weren’t able to exchange our money yet, but that didn’t stop them, they said they would take dollars or if we gave them our name they would bring bracelets to the hotel. Well most of us conceded and gave our names to have them make bracelets for us; thinking that they would not really find our hotel. Well after the long three hour drive from Accra to Cape Coast we were speechless when the same group of boys was outside the restaurant we were eating at holding our bracelets.

This example demonstrates the importance of a sale to a hustler and also the potential of these boys. While I admit that some of their tactics were extremely invasive and irritating, I cannot complain because if I were in their situation I would probably hustle too. But I am not in their situation so I can’t say for certain that I would be as tough, but I do know that the will power these boys have for hustling shouldn’t be just thrown away. Imagine if this potential were used for education purposes and after their education it were used in the work force. This is why it is important to examine both the severity and possible causes of child labor, so that we can try and prevent it from at least getting worse.

There is a group of people that attempt to define, determine the cause, collect data and stop child labor laws. They are known as the International Labor Organization (ILO). They have found that child labor is a widespread problem affecting 26% of children between the age of ten and fourteen in Africa and 13% of children the same age in the world. They define child as anybody who is under the age of fifteen and laborer as someone who does work on a regular basis that is not compensated for or ultimately the product is intended for the market. In addition these children usually have a work day consisting of a grueling amount of hours (Basu 1998).
The main cause of child labor is quite simply poverty. Through increasing globalization and as the gap between the third world and the first world widens living conditions continue to decline. As a result, the cost of living increases in third world countries and subsequently privileges such as attending school become more like luxuries. The cost to attend school becomes more expensive, but so does clothing and food which precedes the importance of education. After all these are basic needs because an unhealthy tragic human being cannot possibly benefit from education. Although, perhaps the school is fortunate enough to not raise the attendance of school, but they still will have to make cuts elsewhere possibly leading to an inadequate education (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005).

Specifically as the ability to support your family becomes increasingly more difficult parents look for alternative means of support. This seems to be what I mentioned informally before; the problem that adults who lack adequate money to support their children encourage them to work to support their family. Formally this is known as the parent trap and it occurs prevalently in poor underdeveloped countries. This is not to say that the parents are to blame. It is apparent that when one looks at the parents of child laborers they do not seem happy. Parents might not know the extant of the problems caused from child labor (Pallage and Zimmerman 2007).

In fact, yet another indirect fault of some cultures is the disparity between the sexes. Most African culture predominantly sees the boy as responsible for taking care of their family when he grows up while the woman may ultimately leave. The family may invest more in the boy’s education while the girl struggles with laborious work. Therefore, one proposition is to educate the family about this bias and the severity of
child labor. Sometimes all it takes to decrease on a destructive behavior is education. Another cause for child labor is the lack of modern technology. Scientists believe that if means of producing such products were improved and production became easier and more efficient than the need for child labor would decrease.

In fact, Pallage and Zimmerman claim that there are two possible solutions to ending child labor. They emphasize that while the topic is a hot topic in the world, the richer countries are not doing enough to stop it. They claim that if the wealthier countries put aside money to help developing countries raise their standard of living then child labor will end sooner than later. While this proposition would be the most effective they propose a second idea and more realistic idea. That is to place a partial ban on child labor laws.

A partial ban instead of a full ban will make the transition smoother. They argue that child labor is too loosely defined and not always harmful to the growth of children. For example, not all children work in dangerous factories, but instead may help their parents on the farm. Regardless of which option we choose we must remember to involve the locals in on the decision making. That way we can ensure good governance and we have to remember to make our policies sustainable so after child labor disappears it does not arise again in the future (Pallage and Zimmerman 2007).

In one of our lectures another serious issue that Ghana faced was brought forth. The problem was with the insufficient operation of the fishing industry. A crucial part of Cape Coast is the large fishing villages. At first when I saw the boats I didn’t realize that using primitive boats was very dangerous and inefficient. These boats that I saw resembled the wooden canoes that you might think of that inhabitant the tranquil rivers of
Italy. I didn’t know that these same boats that may be adequate for calm waters were being used in rough sea water. Not to mention the poor storage made available from the lack of space.

Wooden boats could easily be tossed about the ocean and destroyed or simply even sink. But the problem did not stop with the poor fishing vessels it continued to the lack of refrigerators. Not only was it difficult to catch fish with the small boats, but if you were lucky enough to catch a fish you had to sell them that day. This is because the fishermen have no means to refrigerate the fish. All of these discoveries were from the locals, but when I examined the issue further I found even more serious problems with the fishing market industry in Ghana.

Once again one of the main issues was globalization which caused all of the other problems. Fishing in Ghana used to be a major source of the governments income. In fact, Fishing used to contribute 380 million dollars to the nation’s economy. It was also a major export of the country and was a main source of jobs for the locals. However, over time foreign fishing industries have exploited new potential fishing areas. The Ghanaians were left with their old fishing exports and equipment. The technique behind fishing has also changed the foreign industries have replaced subsistence fishing with industrial fishing which has severely decreased the population of fish. If the destructive and invasive techniques of the modern fishermen continue this could become a global problem (Atta-Mills et al. 2004).

There are several issues that need to be fixed with the current Ghanaian fishing industry. Fishing needs to be sustainable and foreign industries need to drastically cut down on their overexploitation of the water. There is modern technology now that can be
used to estimate the current population of target fish and determine the optimal catching rate so as to maintain the population. Although it is apparent that overfishing was not caused by the Ghanaians. The foreign fishermen in Western Africa are the ones that need to cut down enough so that Ghanaians can increase a sustainable export of their fish since this used to be a major profit for them. In turn they should be given modern fishing equipment such as proper boats and refrigerators. A boost in the fishing community could increase their budget and provide more jobs for the people. Once again the local fishermen should be part of the decision making since ultimately they know what is best as long as sustainability is kept in mind.

The inequality does not stop at the fishing industry. While I was in Ghana I was fortunate enough to view a village school. The school was only one floor with very primitive classrooms. Everything that was at the school had been funded governmentally but it was far from adequate. I remember walking around the school and we walked by a blank room and I asked the head teacher what the room was and she said the library. How can it be possible to have a blank room be a library? Not one book! I was appalled she said that they had been promised used books but never got any. Other differences that I noticed in the school system were that the teachers taught more than one subject. One guy taught math and computers and he had to teach his students about word using his own personal laptop. I realized then how much I and all of America take for granted.

As I continued my tour through the school every time the head teacher took us into a new classroom she would give an introduction to the class. She would tell them that I and my roommate were from America and that we had a list of all the names of the kids in the class. She would then say that if they misbehaved they would not go to
America, but if they studied hard we would come back for them. I want to come back for them because when she asked the class how many people want to go to America, I have never seen kids that excited. However, they do not just have village schools; they have schools that are funded by the university. Those schools have used computers that they can use in class. I can’t understand how the village had no books if we give to all these non profits. Where do all the books go to? Do we have to organize our own book drive?

The dissimilarity goes beyond village and university schools and in corporate two regions as well. A major part of this course was to learn about develop and thus far I have discussed develop for the most part in terms of the nation state. However, we were lucky enough to travel a long journey to Northern Ghana and see first hand the striking differences between the two regions. As we drove further north, there were no longer lots of shacks placed closely together but instead there were mud housed placed in groups situated at far distances away from each other. The mostly modern buildings that consisted of southern Ghana became smaller and smaller and more and more farmers were seen.

We were told that most people who go to Ghana do not bother to drive to the North and I knew why. It was a long journey into a more rural area. At one point I believe that there was only one road that you could take to get further north. The attitude of people changed in the north too. Although it seemed in general the Ghanaians were nice; the Ghanaians in the north were even more polite. In fact the majority of Ghanaians in the north are Muslim whereas in the south they are Christian. As Muslims they believe that not acknowledging by a simple wave as you pass a complete stranger is rude. It was very odd at first but really interesting.
The weather in the north was also remarkably different instead of hot and humid it was hot and dry. Also the animals were smaller, bonier and even appeared to be anorexic. There were small cities in the north that were somewhat similar to the south in that there were hustlers, but they were not nearly as crowded. The university that we visited was also different. Instead of a modern lecture room, the classes still had blackboards and wooden desks. In addition the classroom building was only one story instead of two like in the south. The drastic differences between northern and southern Ghana development leads one to wonder what exactly caused the differences.

One political economist challenges the typical assumption that the reason for the underdevelopment in the North is due to the lack of natural resources. His article examines primary documents that tell the real story. I was told from the Ghanaians that Ghana was organized before it was colonized. But this man goes further proving the organization of Northern Ghana pre-colonization. Northern Ghana used to be a trading post and took place in subsistence agriculture. It was a good trading place too because it was so close to the bordering African countries that openly participated in trade with Ghana. The majority of the farming occurred during the rainy season in April consisting of planting and weeding. After this time anthropologist talk about a large migration due to migration (Plange 2009).

They neglect to mention the new laws set forth by the colonizers such as building headquarters for the English and borders that forced the citizens to migrate south. He also negates the explanation for the move south due to mining. In fact, he finds evidence that mining was actually traded through the north up to North Africa and into Southern Europe. Not only was Northern Ghana trading agriculture products and mining, but they
were also trading livestock. Pogucki says that first cows were used for food, then they were used for religious reason and lastly they were sold. Apparently the colonials were the ones that shut down livestock trade and as a result the farmers emphasized the religious value of the cows or sold them. The colonials also closed down the selling of cotton, shea butter and cocoa and had it relocated to the south. The author is able to show you the inherent danger of colonization and how much power they can wield (Plange 2009).

Lastly, I will mention the importance of Malaria because I feel differently now than I did when I was in Ghana. When were in Ghana we were fortunate enough to meet with the U.S. Ambassador and we asked him the tough questions. He responded that the U.S was doing the most it can with the small budget they are given. However, he has said that Malaria has come along way. At first, I was not impressed since I have seen Malaria prevention in most foreign countries.

However, after listening to personal testimonies of Ghanaians that have had it multiple times I realized the severity of the situation. How is any one supposed to fight for what right if they feel ill? Malaria is a very serious disease and we have come along way with treatment and prevention. In fact, I’ve heard that most Ghanaians have had malaria at least once in their life. Therefore, I am very proud that there is actually a vaccine for Malaria users and that it was discovered in my lifetime!

In conclusion, I hope that I have introduced you to some of the main problems that I think Ghana is facing currently. They are a work in progress, but we must at least be aware of them so that we can collect data and analyze to come up with methods to solve them. Ghana has only been a nation state for fifty years, but it has come along way
for such little time. They have survived colonialism and have a decent democratic system. I am pleased to say that most of the problems I have discussed in this paper are on their way to being solved. We must just always remember to consult with the local people and to try and preserve the culture as much as possible. I have seen what great things develop can cause and some bad development and development that was good, but takes away from the culture. Development should be a dynamic field and should be molded around the area of concentration.

I will never forget the faces of those children when they thought they would eventually go to America. This trip has opened my eyes and I think it would be an amazing experience if students from Ghana could see the U.S. Although I would recommend that they live on campus because I think that they would have a better experience. I loved being able to live with an authentic Ghanaian family, but I am afraid that is probably not possible here.

Finally I would like to say thank you to all of those who organized this trip. I know that we were the guinea pigs, but I think that it was still a successful enlightening trip. I am especially gracious to those that donated to make this possible. I wish Dr. Canterbury, Dr. Oseis and Dr. Bryant good luck on the next trip and only wish I was not graduating so that I could go back to Ghana again!
Literature Cited


