

**As psychologist in Ghana - Report of my Hospitation in the National
Assessment and Resource Centre for Children with Disabilities and Special
Educational Needs (NARC) in Accra, Ghana - July until September 2009.**

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„Akwaaba - as I (...) went to Ghana and got development assistance“¹- unfortunately Stefanie Waibel forestalled me with her exactly fitting book-title. So I may use this sentence only as a quotation although it would be quite an suitable title for my report. I write this report now with some months distance and with long breaks in between - that way it precedes only slowly. Despite the short duration of our stay in Ghana, Stefan Hackl (EMC), Dinah Kwadade (Africa Action), and Patric Tackie (NARC) had asked me to write a report. But since our return back to Germany, the weeks and months hurry one after the other and being back in our well known universe is difficult catching the fitting words for our experience. Unfortunately in Ghana a serious "tropical illness" had paralyzed my laptop. Trying to write down my notes in an Internetcafé in Accra desperately soon I had given up. Being back home again I had to cope with the consequences of my hard disc breakdown for quite some time. But this is not the only cause of my slow progress. My reluctance goes far beyond. We (this is me, 46 years, Dipl. Psychologist, my daughter, 13 years and my stepdaughter Frauke, 25 years) smoothly melted again with our everyday life. Yet we brought along something, which is as precious as possibly also „fragile“. Perhaps it is the fear to flog this total force of impressions to teeth or also the knowledge that the out picking of some individual milestones in no way generate an approximately suitable picture that causes our difficulties in transmitting our impressions into words. Anyway, to my astonishment me and my daughters, feel no urge to talk about Ghana and our impressions for several months; sometimes even nearly felt an aversion, because telling always also includes to clear up, to put away, to file and to close. But we do not want to complete, not discharge us, but to keep alive what we bring along. We went with the readiness to give something and now are those, which return being presented, presented with humanity, hospitality, humor, courage, sincerity and full of pictures, odors and sounds; enriched with memories of overwhelming coloredness and aliveness, with also includes extreme impressions. Meda wase! (Thanks!) - I wanted to say already right at the beginning, so in no case this goes to short!

Preparation time

Everything had begun with vague thoughts and many questions. Might it be possible to go to Africa as psychologist and after all to find a duty within my profession - a task or duty that proves useful for the people over there? What could this possibly be? And how could this be organized, travelling with two daughters, but no other fully responsible adult person? These are only a few of the questions in 2008 I was in the happy situation to ask myself. In order to get ideas, I investigated in the Internet. This proved as conceivably laborious, because in our constellation - all without experience in developing countries; only substantial knowledge in English, and beyond that a limited length of time of 2 - 4 months available - we didn't comply with requirements of the well known organizations that place volunteers. However, we would have been ready for most different activities in various African countries, yet particularly favoured to contribute something where I could apply my special competence. My professional experience covers a wide range of psychological work with children, adolescent and adult people with mental handicaps or impairments in connection with psychological or emotional disturbances - so-called „provocative behavior“ - and also provide various kinds of psychological support to family members and professionals working in organisations for people with impairments. Would this sphere of activity keep something on hand or prove my demand as impossible? Over several months my search not really preceded.

Friends and neighbours from Ghana caused a first breakthrough. They set me on the trace of committed projects in Ghana. I was astonished about the number of projects and NGO's², which could be found in the Internet. My astonishing certainly reveals more about me and my prejudices than about the situation. Therefore a common tread of our journey therefore should also become catching myself at needing to revise prejudices, by which I didn't think at all that I would have them. So what had I expected? Why thus astonishing? I had to the fact that my conceptions were rather fears, which originated from from some articles that portrayed the situation of people with a serious mental illness and those with impairments in Westafrica, which I had read some time ago and which suggested dreadful things to expect. But actually I wasn't nearly well informed about how the conditions of life humans with handicaps in developing countries look like. I felt unmasked as uninformed by my surprise about the fact that in a continent, where people fight against so many difficulties resources are used for handicapped humans at all - and this in a very committed way. The topic really began to fascinate me. And dont we travel, in order to learn?

The Internet certainly provided more information about development cooperation - above all

theoretical issues - and also about the situation of people with handicaps, usually focussing problems and requirements. To me, however, information about the projects in Ghana and particularly projects for and together with humans with special educational needs and mental impairments were amazing and inspiring. Likewise in the Internet I obtained an interesting and informative thesis (diploma) investigating the situation of mentally impaired women in Ghana³. All this and the possibility of being able to get first hand information about Ghana and also support during the preparation time finally was decisive, and so the search particularly concentrated on Ghana. My questions specified themselves: Aren't in Ghana problem situation to be found, which are comparable to those in Germany and could be my contribution to thread in somewhere in the supporting network? Could I for example offer Workshops for local personnel as my contribution? Might this be the answer to my initial question? I was enthusiastic and convinced that it would surely be a beautiful chance experiencing Ghana together with the girls, primed with openness and curiosity on the one hand, and on the other hand, being able to bring in our time and our abilities - so far desired - , where it could be useful. More easily meant than to be done.

For several months I wrote letters and mails to various organizations, projects and individuals. Answers I only received three and two of them rejecting. A gentle and fanitly positive answer came from Stefan Hackl of the EMC⁴. This association is to be found on the website of Africa action⁵ They support several projects in Ghana and mediate volunteers supported by Bezev⁶ to schools in Ghana, and provide local support. The interest and the readiness from Stefan Hackl and Dinah Kwadade to take care and to look out for a placement for me/for us was tremendously encouraging for me in during the following weeks. It was obvious, however, that I couldn't wait for a definite commitment of the EMC on a support but had to start our travel preparations independently, go ahead with flight booking, organize vaccinations etc. also I had to develop an alternative plan, what we would do, if we wouldn't spend our time being busy with a task or in a project. And that proved to be a good call.

Over months then the takeoff date was the only firm size. Since nothing required anything different, I agreed with the head master of my younger daughters school that she was to be released four weeks before end of the running term. and to return in time for the new term. An earlier start of the travel wasn't possible, since the older of the both still had to pass an exam at the end of June. The months beforehand apart things like vaccination dates, visa procurement etc. were filled with the preparations how to live and travel as a family in Ghana.

In this period extensive converstions with friends and acquaintances from Ghana were

extraordinary helpful also an excellent travel guide of Ghana⁷. We also were invited to a 3-day-EMC meeting over. This meeting in Kassel in May 2009 joined pre- and post volunteers in order to exchange experiences and information. Between all the young people at the beginning of their vocational training or their studies we, as a family, felt somewhat out of line, but nevertheless welcome. Some information also was new for us. Above all, however, these days proved to be a most intensive common joining for the tree of us. In addition we were equipped with telephone numbers, and left with the impression to be surrounded with threads of a network around us in case, we needed it. During these days our journey, which was supposed to start 5 weeks later, for the first time really seemed to come within the reach to all of us three.

In the meantime Stefan Hackl had established a contact between Dinah Kwadade and me. Mrs. Kwadade works for Africa Action and coordinates the affairs of EMC in Ghana. In May, Dinah Kwadade had a good news for me. She had found a placement for me and acted as an intermediary between the NARC centre in Accra and me. She sent me information and answered my questions and concerns. In the meantime I had developed several doubts whether our whole enterprise was responsible and feasible at all. Against my doubts and concerns stood Dinah Kwadade's imperturbability. To confront me with her confidence, was very helpful. On my email inquiry to the NARC centre concerning some preparing questions I received no answer. Therefore I only had a faint imagination, what I should do there or if I would meet any specific expectations. Thus I decided only to pack up some books and to take things as they come.

With the placement in the NARC no accommodation possibility or the like was connected. Also there was no possibility to assist for two girls. Yet both also wanted to do something. So there had to be found something for them to do, fitting to my schedule in the NARC-centre. The preparation of the last months now turned out to be decidedly useful, and our native network proved as extraordinarily helpful. At the end of June we knew: the brother of a friend will pick us from the airport and bring us into a house of friends of friends, who do not know us (as we also don't know them) but with whom we could stay for now or longer. For the girls I had (vaguely) a possibility to assist in an orphanage in Accra. In addition we had some telephone numbers of people we could get in touch with. On Saturday we would leave for Accra, on Sunday I had an appointment with Dinah Kwadade, and on Monday I was supposed to be welcomed in the centre. That was all I knew. Dinah Kwadade promised support, if difficulties arose. All serene - so what should go wrong? I got weak in my knees!

Accra

Akwaaba („welcome“)

Stout, fully, dustily, loud and unbelievably: The power, with which Accras roads came down on us right at the beginning vanished after approximately 3-4 weeks and gave way the feelings of having arrived and finally, towards the end the time, fascination and enthusiasm. To my joy and surprise, our arriving actually passed smoothly. In our accommodation in Accra we received a warm welcome and very soon were accepted in an natural and friendly way. The people we met ther shaped our stay in Ghana and also impressed us as humans deeply with cordialness, helpfulness, humor and their natural readiness to share their life with us. This was to be a place we felt well and for the short time of our stay even like home. Due to this support in many ways necessities of everyday life and our life as a family, such as a buying, a cooking, a washing our clothes we mastered very soon. The rather persistent „negotiations“ needed getting used to, that were necessary for us, until we could take part in the everyday performing and to what extend we were allowed. Quite unfamiliar and sometimes awkward for me to handle was the readiness of our hosts to service for us in most varied way. Only to step in and sit down at a covered table sometimes feels pleasant, but does not correspond to our conception, of how we want to live together with one another and with our hosts. Step by step mutual negotiations lead to a good balance in giving and taking, which satisfied both, our hosts and us - this was an ongoing learning field; an enriching learning field.

Support and attendance by Dinah Kwadade

“Our second day in Accra. I am a little excited. Accras roads still overwhel me - overexert me. Meeting place: Goil Filling station Achimota/Dome, Atomic Junction“. Aha?! A task, which in Europe easily would be solvable also for non-residents with a city plan. A city plan illustrates, what is actually is firm and not dynamical. They presuppose that, over reasonable periods of time, the city won´t change too much. In addition it requires the presence of street names. Both barely apply on Accra. Therefore there are no real city plans. Nevertheless: No problem, our driver calls Dinah Kwadade and thus guided, we actually arrive, receive a a warm and cordially welcome by her and her husband and follow her car for the remaining distance. We continue, passing over roads with deep gutters partly resembling mountain torrent beds, passing incomplete carcasses, climbing up the hill to their house. A beautiful house and the view over Accra simpy is impressing. Is there water supply in this area? Electricity? I do not ask. Toilsomenesses does not seem to be that

important for Dinah Kwadade that, one should spend them all too much attention. More important for her than focussing on handicaps seems to direct ones attention to possibilities and toward the scope of action. Dinah Kwadade is a woman, who impressed me in various regards, through the way she is and by what she does."

I gratefully cherish that only by her personal commitment she enabled the possibility for me to volunteer in the NARC-centre. Her support surely contributed substantially to a good and safe feeling during our stay.

We agreed to meet in the NARC the day after tomorrow. There she introduced me to Patric Tackie, the director of the centre, and to the members of the staff and in so doing officially delivered me to them. During the following weeks we repeatedly had telephone contact, from time to time she called and inquired if we were in good condition and at the end of our time she saw us off with a delicious meal. As we were not officially sent by Bezev, she did not have to do all this. But she kept in touch at the beginning, in between and at the end. Thank you!

NARC

Arrival in the NARC-Centre

As turned out, we had passed the centre already at our first day in Accra. An inconspicuous flat and old one-storey-building on the wide campus of Achimota School. We actually lived not too far away from the centre. Probably no more than approx. 800 metres bee-line. But since an inaccessible populated area full of rocks and crannies, a river and a golf course lay in between there was no direct connection. The daily way then along the road was substantially longer. Taking account of this and also the usual daily traffic-jam, my way to the centre took then approx. 30 minutes. This was nevertheless a nearly fantastically short time compared the time other people need to go to and come from work, reported from other people working in Accra. Therefore it was easy for me to be in time on my first day in the centre: „European time “. To become acquainted with „African time“ to find a calm handling with this also should turn out as a learning task for me. Relieving!

„Everything is new - however feels somehow also completely natural. Nobody gave rise to doubts that the girls also are being invited and are welcome in that situation. On the contrary!

Handshake with the staff members in the centre. Also our driver, Peter, is welcomed. Peter is the brother of a friend, cab driver and - important to emphasize for him - also our self proclaimed „Safety-man“. He drives us around during our first days in Accra, until we are familiar using the public means of transport. And it proved to be good to be mobile like that, because likewise an official welcome in the premises („Headoffice“) of the department of Special Education („Special Education division“) is to take place. This is somewhere else in Accra, and me and the girls are supposed to go there. Only the large and important roads in Accra have names. If you want to find a place, you haven't been before, you look out or ask for a distinctive or well known place nearby and get a description of way from there or are being fetched there. Thanks to Peter, we have no problem getting there. Still we feel well supported by his company, because he knows the ropes, takes us there and cares for us.“

But already after a few days we were ready to find our way rather without „safety-man“, because we realized that moving around in Accra is quite easy. We never felt uneasy or threatened and actually everyone, which we asked for advice proved to be utterly ready to help.

“The headoffice of the Special Education division is situated in a storey-building above a business line alongside a road, as it is typical: pedestrians, street vendors, some goats and cars all mingled. The whole place is loud and cramped. We park the car, go back door, climb the stairs. We enter an office floor with older sitting opportunities, some elderly office cabinets, within and besides batch materials, pictures taken from pupil parades on celebration days - a braille press, people bustling to and fro and apologizing several times that the „Head of Ministry isn't in and its representative unfortunately still is in a meeting“. But after some time of waiting we are asked in and are welcomed officially. I receive an impression of appreciation, joy and astonishment about, what made me come to Ghana. I also mean also to hear faint amazement about my motives and in addition - this becomes like a central theme during my entire stay - the exposition of the limited possibilities of the Ministry as well as the minimal financial margin of the Special Education division. It's a brief meeting, and we are released.“

Later in the NARC centre followed a closer introduction of every staff member; I got a short tour through the rooms and brief description of the work of the centre. Charles was selected to be my Mentor for all emerging questions and problems. In his office I also got a place to sit and work. A conception or mental image of what was expected from me or what I could work there, I didn't get, but I didn't mind for the moment, because I simply was curious and pleased to be here. Right for the next day an outreach activity of the counsellors was scheduled and I also was invited

to be part of it. I was excited! Right from the outset all the colleagues from the centre approached me in a friendly way and also withstood with friendliness my asking so many questions during the following weeks.

The Centre - Focal points and tasks

The advisory centre was founded in 1975. Accra centre's professional focus is devoted to all issues, that emerge from developmental problems during childhood and adolescence, school problems of all kinds and behaviour disturbances that possibly cause the problems or might be a consequence, like development delays, sensory disorders such as hearing and vision problems, speaking or speech disturbances, learning handicaps, mental disabilities, physical disabilities, emotional disturbances and behavior problems. In addition to them, the self-manifestation of the centre also mentions for special emphasis for example autism, hyperactivity, down syndrome, epilepsy, cerebrale palsy and multiple handicaps.

Likewise in other some other provinces of Ghana national advisory centres can be found, according to my information in 5 of 10 provinces. Yet the centre in the capital is the largest of all, that with the most comprehensive task spectrum and that with the most employees (6 counsellors and 2 administrative coworkers). The centre is a subunit of the department of the Special Education division of the Ghana Education service. That again is subordinate to the Ministry of Education. The close linkage to the Special Education division becomes apparent in the everyday life by intensive and frequently personal contacts and the monthly reports which are to be written. The centre is open to the public on 5 days per week during daytime to anybody who is looking for consultation and support.

The specialists in the centre are government employees, designated Officer and, depending upon which field of activity they are specialized in, bear titles like „Hearing Impairment Officer “or „Intellectual Disabilities Officer“. I particularly was looking forward to the cooperation with the „Educational Psychologist“. A psychologist? All counsellors are trained teachers with an additional study in special education, differing in their main focus and the special emphasis of their further qualification. I did not meet a psychologist during my time. A pity. A prominent position in the work of the centre occupied Grace, a blind woman counsellor who, as a trained teacher and qualified specialist, successfully personified a central goal of the centre of promoting solid education to all children with impairments.

The centre's field of activity is extraordinarily widespread and not quite comparable to advisory centres in Germany. The range of tasks partly aligns with the tasks of an early intervention centre regarding development diagnostics and consultation of small children but reaches far beyond. Further purposes are screenings (comprehensive and diagnostic assessment) of children, adolescents and young adults, being a source of consultation for family members and all kinds of specialists in all questions, sensory and/or cognitive impairments have a substantial part. Children and young people with remaining vision or remaining hearing capacity so far as possible are supplied with suitable aids. Referrals to physicians or hospitals are made, if a specialized diagnosis, a psychiatric treatment or medical intervention appears helpful. An admission to one of the few special schools or vocational training centres of the country as a rule presupposes a recommendation of the centre.

The Screenings in the centre cover the sectors of hearing, vision, cognitive development and behaviour and an extensive inquiry concerning history, developmental milestones, level of self-help capacity in the family and - if the case - school achievement. Since 1975 the NARC was established all data and cases are being documented. In the summer 2009 a comprehensive data evaluation, by one of the counsellors was to submit as theses for her masters of in special education, was nearing completion.

Self-conception and task of the centre also was to work as a kind of pacesetter for the interests of the children with impairments and special educational needs. Therefore one of the duties of the centre is also to notice the needs of the children with handicaps and to gain attention for them in the public opinion. „Public awareness“ was a winged word and an expression, which was to be found on many posters in the area supplied centre, and also found an expression, when staff members reported of their appearances in radio or television, where they tried to solicit to people - especially parents - that all children are able and supposed to learn something and to encourage them to make use of any possibility of supporting children with impairments, to enable them to participate at instructions and trainings and to bestow them the best support⁸ - including also the work of the centre.

In order to promote this goal, one day per week was designated for so-called outreach activities in an around Accra these were among others in different kinds of institutions for the disabled or, other pre- or postnatal counselling centres such as maternity clinics. At these places, where people were advised, the work of the centre was to be introduced and contacts should be established.

Visits in public schools could serve a closer linking with these schools, a better awareness of the children's situation with special educational needs, and an improvement of support for teacher working with these children. The latter was particularly possible if a resources teacher was located at a school - which not nearly is the case in all schools. Occasionally visits in special schools also were supposed to take place and beyond networking and consultation, were supposed to include a renewed performance of children.

Main tools of the centre are assessments, consultations and placements. The assessment contains and covers a Screening with observations, how the child deals with certain play offers or how the young person deals with a certain setting of tasks. Close examination of hearing and vision abilities followed a reasonable suspicion. A very extensive questionnaire, that serves as anamnesis sheet is being filled in together with parents question for question. This is the second step, when clients come to the centre for the first time after registration and untangling conditions. The asking of questions partly is interrupted by offering of tasks to the child or the adolescent. This process may last up to two hours. If this process - and if necessary - further vision or hearing test is completed all counsellors and the clients assemble to the case conference. In the course of the meeting the questionnaire is discussed point by point and the observations is communicated. Questions of the present counsellors and open questions likewise. In this round recommendations are stated and if necessary figured on further diagnostic measures and agreed upon the further procedure. All the steps are recorded.

Concerning diagnostics there were no possibilities for standardised measurements for screenings and assessments available at the time of my stay⁹. There are no opportunities for individual support apart from consultation in the centre. Therapies or special assistance measures are not offered and are unknown - with one exception (sometimes clients are referred to a speech therapists praxis).

My impressions of the work of the centre

Right from the onset I was included in ascertaining case histories, screenings and case conferences. The language mainly spoken while the clients contacts was Twi¹⁰. However for my sake in those cases, if the clients could do and wanted to do that the counsellors strove to hold the conversations on English, - or however occasionally to translate. To accomplish diagnostics or consultation independently for me was not possible due to the language barrier, missing suitable

instruments and furthermore possibly would also not have been desirable.

A characteristic feature during the consulting process results from the meaning of relations and linkages of relationship in Ghana and reflects those. The process began with the clarifying of the exact name at the registration (which not always was simple) and carried on in untangling, with whom naturally the collection of data and the consulting process should or could be accomplished. In the first place it had to be sorted out thus who was that person who came with the child or youth, which relationship he or she had with it. Quite often a parent came alone, or with new partner or another family member. Ever so often also came uncles, aunts, grannies or somebody else, with whom the child/the adolescent lives. In these cases it had to be untangled as a first step, who can give the necessary data about the child or the adolescent. The counsellors in the centre consistently required, that both parents should appear. If both parents were alive, lived in attainable proximity and able to come both were expected to turn up for the case history - at least to come along - even if the child does not live with them any more.

To find out which persons actually has substantial knowledge over periods and areas of life of the child/the young person and made these to appear, occasionally needed several approaches, until actually a case history would take place. In singular cases this process could drag on over several days. For me as German a very interesting experience.

Because I was integrated in every day's work I could participate in some case histories, screenings and case conferences. Also different outreach activities took place during the time of my presence, with which I could likewise be part of. The first date, already on my second day in the centre, took place in a governmental primary school outside Accra. There approx. 30 children were screened, who had been selected of the resources teacher located at the school. Following that, we visited two families, whose children with serious mental impairments were not attending any school and spent their time exclusively at home. These parents should be induced to a visit of the centre and to be convinced to let their children attend a school.

A further outreach date took place in a Maternity Clinic in Jamestown. Jamestown is a part of Accra, which essentially is inhabited by fishermen and, mainly members of the Ga-population live in contrary to the rest of Accra. The population mainly is poor. Pregnant women and women, who had come to the hospital with their babies and infants for further investigations and training courses, should be informed about the work of the centre, informed about early signs for developmental disorders and be encouraged to look out for also utilize early support and assistance.

One of the counsellors had made an appointment at this place. She wanted to meet the mother of a blind adolescent and induce her to send their boy into a special school for the blind with boarding house, which is in a distance to Accra. She already had organized a foundation that would sponsor the boy, since the family could not afford the costs. In order to get this out of the ground she had used all their private connections. This mother, however, neither emerged this day nor at a further date in the course of the time I spent in the centre. A repeating experience in the centre: Concern for the boy, probably also a frustrated desire of putting something forward, maybe feelings of disappointment, anger and helplessness about humans, who are responsible, don't do anything; anger on parents and other family members, who do not care for their handicapped children wasting precious time of the children without stimulation or training or even give up. Some counsellors actually became somewhat passionate in their anger about cases, when family members of disabled children, instead of sending the children in schools, use time and money for prayer camps - and waste valuable time. A „prayer camp“ can be a spiritual meeting of most diverse traditional or modern charismatic groups of faith. Some families go there with their handicapped members, because they expect healing of the handicap through prayers or rituals. The anger of the counsellors even more becomes understandable, when they refer to experiences, where children are sent into the homeland village of the family, where some of them died within a few days. Nobody complains, nobody knows exactly. One can only assume and continue with the daily work - with a little more despair, resignation or rage - depending upon one's personal style.

A third outreach activity led into the department for special education at the University of Winneba. There teaching materials and assistance aids for children with handicaps are developed and created by students of the special education in the context of their studies or training in classes as instruction assistance and being stocked. The counsellors once a while go and pick them up and store them in the centre. If teachers should look for support in the centre - if necessary - these materials could be placed at their disposal. This is creating and supporting of networks in regard of scarce resources.

Particularly touching were the contacts with quite a few clients, children, young people, specialists, parents or other family members, who came to the consultation into the centre. Not all children and adults, who were presented in the centre in the time of my presence live in a caring and affectionate environment. But some of the clients, had taken on large distances and got to considerable length, in order to come to the centre. Some clients connected high hopes with these consultations, which could not be fulfilled always: In Germany too, we know understandable and

partly disparate hopes from parents. Hopes, that the problems of their descendent will disappear with time, hopes that a medicine or something would cause the problems to disappear. Feelings of mourning and despair in Africa surely don't differ from those in Germany. More difficult to interpret, however is a frequent appearing indifference - yet rather less perceptible in clients, who finally came into the centre. Many of them impressed me thereby, how they meet the adversities of their life - even intensified by the handicap of the child - with serenity and high spirits. Impressing, how they try to make, the best out of their situation, support each other and in a natural way give support to each other. Everyday life heroes!

What do I leave behind?

To answer the question, what I had left behind, it would be useful to ask which were the expectations on me in the centre what and I was supposed to do? Superficially nothing. No expectations were formulated, at a later date allusively was expressed an expectation that I had taken along tests or diagnostic material. An reasonable wish. And apart from the fact that it was too late, I think it disputable what what use lays in bringing along a german test or questionnaire based on standards and a context of meaning to Ghana, which is neither translated nor transferred to local conditions? Is there anything to be gained? During the Screenings in a public school I asked a teacher, what it would do, if as result of the screenings for example would be dyslexia as a cause of a childs problem. Thus she she had no idea neither what it was nor what to begin with. Who gains from more and precise diagnostics, if the result does not have a meaning, which is embedded in a system of knowledge, of support and assistance measures in the relevant everyday life?

Perhaps there were rather worries before my visit than expectations? Worries not to be able to pass before European eyes? Toward the end of my stay, one of the staff members actually noted that they actually had expected that I wouldn't remain for a long time, since they wouldn't have to offer enough of interest für me. If I only would have come under the aspect of maximum use of all local possibilities, volunteering in one of the psychiatric hospitals might have been more effective concerning experience and impact in my profession. But a journey under the guideline of being part and thus share the life in such a way as it is, contains however also to share and bear idle times and frustration; experiencing, how it feels like, when things precede tormenting stringy or even not at all. Also I was not by any means as fit for use, as I would have favoured, All together no good conditions to organize things optimally. Sometimes I time I faintly regretted

there that I didn't fill the nevertheless quite frequently occurring idle times with visits in other facilities such as schools, psychiatry etc. Yet in retrospect I am glad, that it was exactly the way it was, because all these experiences all along were important to seize the awareness of life in important - safe not all - facets. Bearing that things progress slowly or not at all was a learning process. On the one hand a recovery for me, also appropriate and in the period of arriving and becoming acquainted with the new situation offering much time for conversations and questions. Gradually was added as point of view, how different humans deal with these empty times and other difficulties, as they fill the time or rather sink into their own thoughts, as these times dampen the mood and gives way to strain the atmosphere among one another. Yet to have the time to listen and realize, how people experience their life, their work and their assignment, as they cope with loads in the everyday life and what provides people with strength, courage and confidence, I received grateful and was enlightening to me. To me these conversations emanating idle times made accessible to me much of that what I experienced. And I would be pleased, if I had left behind a good memory.

After some time I personally however I increasingly became impatient about the doing nothing and looked out for activities,. Therefore I was glad, when the office assistant asked me to show her different things at the computer. If no clients were in and also no power failure, we, for example, drew up tables, text modules for letters, revised the layout for the writing paper, made an input form and a search mask for the digital data collection of the clients files and finally a PowerPoint presentation aot of the centre's info-leaflet.

Another area, I possibly left something was the use of the Internet as a source or information. Due to my searches in the internet in the months of preparation I knew some projects in Ghana, which particularly address to humans with mental disabilities. This possibly also a a small contribution might be having drawn the attention of some of the professionals on the possibilities of the Internet as a means of looking out for more possibilities in Ghana for children and youth with handicaps and disabilities other than the well-known schools for the disabled. The many initiatives, the large and small projects (NGO's) hardly seem to be linked-up. The knowledge of projects and NGO initiatives, where children with handicaps can find a place to live and of being and getting an overview and interlace promoted might extend the range of possibilities for some particular children or adolescents. Whether these impulses have an effect in everyday work, I may not estimate, since the use of computers usually is restrict by limited computer capacities and recurring power failures and therefore makes its use time-consuming or even annoying.

Beyond these inheritances however I would be pleased very much, if my contributions during the consulting process and in the mutual exchange with other councillors in the centre left a little of that behind, what enriched me so much. Whereas visible was the terrific parting celebration for me at the end of our common time. Me, also my daughters and friends of us were invited to Fufu with Groundnut soup - our favourite dish - Not only that, in addition also everyone of my daughters and me were presented with a beautiful traditional dress. Thank you (in alphabetical order) Charles, Edusei, Grace, Mr. Patric Tackie, Ramatu, Salome, Sister Kate, Vero!

What remains?

I am very grateful having had the chance to volunteer in the NARC centre. That was an incomparable possibility to get a close look on many different ways of life in Accra, a chance to see perhaps some of and being part of what constitutes living in Ghana - so far as this can be disclosed to someone from a completely different culture area evenly. And I sure that I could never have made such experiences as a tourist. This journey inprinted all three of us sustainably. I myself notice, that since then, my perception of fortune completely new and effectively is filled with living. In addition we bring along intensive memories, many pictures, some friendships and a preference for Highlife music. If I think to this time, some hardships occur to before my eyes. But against all odds the feelings however, which overlay everything, are intense joy, gratitude and the certainty that the time changed us a little in good way.

- 1 Waibl, Stefanie: Akwaaba - wie ich als Ärztin nach Ghana ging und Entwicklungshilfe bekam, SUV Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2009
- 2 NGO: non-governmental-organisation
- 3 Saxer, Barbara: Zur Situation von Frauen und Mädchen mit geistiger Behinderung in Ghana. Drei Fallstudien am Beispiel der Kultur der Akan“, AutorIn: [Barbara Saxer](http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/saxer-ghana.html) <http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/saxer-ghana.html>
- 4 EMC-Ghana Project – africa action / Deutschland e.V. - registered association - <http://www.ghanaproject.de/>
- 5 africa action / Deutschland e.V. (aa/D) - registered association - <http://www.africa-action.de/>
- 6 BEZEV - Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit e.V.
- 7 Jojo Cobbinah: [Ghana](#), Meyer Reiseführer, 2004
- 8 There is no compulsory education in Ghana
- 9 In the meantime there is an approach:
Adrian und Christiane Kniel: „GHANA ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR SCALES (GABS)“ und „Draw a Person Test for Ghana“ beides im Internet zu finden http://www.africa-action.de/cont_116.news.php?news_id=210
- 10 Asante-Twi belongs to the Akan-languages and one of the approx. 50 local languages and dialects, that are spoken besides English as the official language. Many people in Ghana speak Twi – or at least understand it.