

HITA Working Trip to Ho, Volta Region, Ghana
27 December, 2019 – 12 January, 2020

Report

This year's HITA delegation is travelling in two waves: Thomas (HITA chairman) and Daniel (the youngest member of the HITA board) arrive on 28 December already, together with Petra and Rachida, the two teachers of the Frankfurt Carlo-Mierendorff-School. Karsten (also a member of the HITA board) and the two IT-technicians Leonhard and Johannes follow on 2 January.

The main objective of the trip is to check and – where necessary – repair the eLearning infrastructure that HITA has been operating since 2018 together with its local partners at the School of Nursing and Midwifery (SONAM), part of the University of Health and Applied Sciences (UHAS), in Ho (Volta Region). In addition, the number of computer workstations in the eLearning labs of this training facility for nurses and midwives is to be further expanded. In discussions with the teaching staff and the project management, it is also necessary to determine what experience has been gained with the integration of eLearning and mLearning in everyday training. On the basis of the results Thomas, Daniel and Karsten want to plan the further procedure with the partner institutions in Ho in order to ensure a sustainable improvement of nursing and midwifery training in this part of Ghana.

Petra and Rachida, who travelled to Ghana in Easter 2019 for the first time, want to use their stay to officially conclude the partnership between the Carlo Mierendorff School and one of the local general education schools, the Mawuko Girls Senior High School, and to inaugurate a modern computer lab as a first step of the cooperation. In addition, the other schools that were visited last spring are not to be left empty-handed either – they too will each receive a larger number of computers, which will be installed and networked by HITA in cooperation with the local IT specialists.



The third project is to hand over donated school material, computers and hospital equipment to the population of the Adaklu district. HITA Chairman Thomas was appointed "Development Chief" of Adaklu in 2018; now we have joined forces with the traditional head of the area, Togbe Lablulu, and a group of local development workers to tackle some of the district's main challenges.

Arrival

After 12 hours flight and a 3-hour drive – not to mention the midnight wait in Addis Ababa – the first of us arrive at the Chances Hotel in Ho on December 28th, exhausted but happy. There we immediately take a look at the warehouse where the contents of the container shipped in Germany a few weeks ago had been stored. Our host Emmanuel Chance, at the same time one of the most important HITA partners in Ghana, tells us about the problems that had to be overcome at customs and when unloading the container. We also had our first meeting with Robert Kaba from the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) that evening.

Already during the drive from the airport to Ho we notice how inhospitable the climatic conditions in Ghana are at this time of year. No rain has fallen for months, while a multitude of small bush fires

ensure that there is a smell of smoke in the air at any time of day. In addition, there is the Harmattan, a wind system that covers the whole of western Africa in winter and transports large quantities of desert dust and sand from the Sahara to neighbouring countries. For the farming population, these months represent a time of privation, even though only a few people in Ghana suffer permanent hunger. The situation will only improve in April, when the first rains of the year will bring refreshment and urgently needed drinking water supplies.



The first days: Start of the cooperation with the new partner school

In the morning of the next day Rachida and Petra prepare the first meeting with the Mawuko Girls Senior High School, while Daniel and Thomas are busy with the formulation of the cooperation agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, or MoU); tomorrow the MoU will be signed ceremonially. At lunchtime the group will travel together to Mawuko School, where we were already expected by the school management team (Ernestina, Erik, Bridget, Delight) and the school chaplain Divine. The welcome is characterized by great joy and hospitality. Now we have the opportunity to make concrete plans for the coming days and the further procedure. For this purpose, we will be led into the room intended for the Computer Lab; the computers donated by HITA will be installed here in the course of the next few days.



On the one hand, the areas of activity and responsibilities of the individual cooperation partners are discussed: HITA, Chances Foundation, Mawuko Girls Senior High School and the Carlo Mierendorff School. On the other hand, we discuss concrete contents of the cooperation, which will be mentioned later in the MoU. We unanimously agree on three first joint projects:

- A common homepage with a link to a platform that will serve the intercultural/pedagogical/teaching methodological exchange between teachers in Ghana and Germany;
- A first teacher exchange from Ghana to Germany;
- Planning and conducting joint English lessons with the help of Skype.

We also decided to create two WhatsApp groups to simplify the difficult communication. HITA will accompany and support these steps and the necessary processes with technical and know-how and the necessary project management.



Afterwards we will drive to Mawuli Senior High School. There we are surprised to find that nobody was expecting us, although the visit was announced long in advance by e-mail. Together with the responsible teachers, who were summoned in a hurry, the further procedure for setting up the computer lab and the necessary appointments are also determined here.

From the discussions on site it is clear to us that communication with the schools by e-mail does not work very well. Most

e-mails are not read or at least not answered. This makes it impossible to stay in communication with each other in this way. It is obvious: In Ghana, the spoken word counts most of all; written material is hardly noticed and is therefore often not considered binding. If at all, written communication works via messenger services like WhatsApp and Facebook.

On the morning of 30 December, Rachida and Petra again visit the Mawuko School to concretise the contents of the cooperation with parts of the school management team. The first teacher exchange, for example, which is already being planned, is scheduled to take four teachers from Mawuko School to Germany for two weeks in autumn 2020, so that they can get to know their new partner school there.

Then the ceremonial signing of the MoU begins. More and more guests arrive – among them representatives of the school board, a representative of the Episcopal Church of Ghana, Mr. Emmanuel Chance, Prof. Prudence of SONAM, plus representatives of the media. Despite the holiday season, many teachers and students are also present. Besides greetings and speeches there will be singing and prayers. After the symbolic handing over of some computers and the guest gifts of the Carlo-Mierendorff-School (chalk, sponges, laminated bags, colored clay paper and a calendar), the cooperation agreement was signed. Afterwards a pupil spoke and thanked in the name of the student body. Everyone agreed: This was a great start for the partnership between the two schools!

No work was originally planned for 31 December and 1 January, but due to problems with the transport of the container contents we have to check the donated equipment for completeness and integrity, re-sort and put it together again. To do this we spend many hours in the Chances Hotel warehouse. The planned festivities on New Year's Eve are also being cancelled sparingly, because Thomas has to stay in bed because of a flu-like infection - on the nightly outward flight he was unlucky to have to sit next to a fellow traveller who had a severe cold, so that an infection could hardly be avoided.

The rest of the HITA TEAM arrives

In the early morning of January 2, Rachida leaves the hotel, as she already has to travel back to Germany. The university driver will take her to the airport in Accra in three hours. On the return trip, he takes the rest of this year's HITA team to Ho – Karsten, Leonhard and Johannes, who have just arrived from Frankfurt.

Leonhard and Johannes will set up and get the computer labs running at the general education schools



(Mawuko Girls Senior High School; Mawuli Senior High School; Ola High School; Springs Preparatory School; Basic School Hasu; Adaklu Senior High School) in the next few days. At each of these locations, handover ceremonies are planned with invited guests and partly also the press.

Over dinner and a subsequent, obligatory "Club" beer we discuss the work plan for the next few days.

The next morning Leonhard and Johannes inspect the warehouse together with Daniel and discuss the further procedure. In the next few days, all

donated equipment will be loaded onto pickups and transported to their place of use. We have to pay close attention that the goods are carefully packed and secured on the vehicles, because the streets in Ho and the surrounding area are mostly in such a bad condition that they can only be described as bumpy roads. The HITA IT team then visits the respective institution and installs the various computers, printers, switches and other equipment in cooperation with the IT experts present. Our schedule is ambitious –a maximum of one working day is planned for the installation of each computer lab. Fortunately, Leonhard and Johannes prove to be a well coordinated team, so that all work can be completed within the planned time frame.



On Friday the two of them drive to the SONAM campus for the first time and inspect the condition of the computer lab and the network infrastructure they installed there a year ago. The

Computer Lab has been used a lot and has done its job very well. The local technicians decided at an early stage to expand the memory of some of the computers because the installed equipment proved to be a bit weak when using the current version of Moodle. We had left some spare parts here a year ago, so repairs of this kind were easy to carry out.



The importance of HITA's support for the modernisation of nurse and midwife training at SONAM has already become clear: this is demonstrated by the use of the HITA computer lab and the eLearning infrastructure we have set up for conducting both regular online and the final licensing examinations for a selected range of programmes. The latter took place for the first time at SONAM in 2019. This makes the school the only one in the entire Volta Region that already participates in online licensing examinations (see also below).

The inspection of the SONAM campus shows that the mobile network installed by HITA is currently not operational. After a closer examination, Johannes and Leonhard find that configuration work has not been carried out completely correctly by the SONAM IT

team. With the know-how of the two, this problem can be solved quickly. But we would have liked the SONAM team to have contacted us to report the problem and find a solution together. Here, too, it is clear that without frequent on-site visits and discussions, cooperation is more difficult than one would expect in view of today's technical possibilities in the fields of remote maintenance and limitless social networking. In the evening, we discuss in the team how we have to adapt the HITA processes in order to learn from such experiences in the best possible way.

A big day for Adaklu-Waya

Karsten, Daniel and Thomas have an appointment with the DreamsAlive team on Friday evening. DreamsAlive is a group of committed development workers, who support girls and women in the region through a variety of activities in order to fight grievances and acute need. DreamsAlive aims to overcome outdated role stereotypes, according to which women and men are in charge for strictly separated areas of responsibility – usually to the disadvantage of the female population, who are almost always worse off in terms of education and health outcomes. DreamsAlive's area of activity is the Adaklu District – the part of the Volta Region where HITA Chairman Thomas was appointed "Development Chief" two years ago.



A joint activity is already planned for next Sunday: The ceremonial handing over of 80 school backpacks, a computer lab for the local high school and equipment for a newly built hospital to the Togbe of Adaklu. Togbe Lablulu is the traditional chief of the Adaklu district, a rural and very poor area in the Volta region near the border to Togo. Here, almost everything is lacking: many of the local families have to walk vast distances to get drinking water, and large parts of the population are insufficiently or not at all connected to the road network. Of course, health stations and schools are also very poorly equipped.



In early 2019, the DreamsAlive team proposed to specifically support the most disadvantaged people in Adaklu: school-age girls in the poorest communities of the region. Although there is compulsory schooling in the country, learning materials of all kinds are in short supply. In case of doubt, it is the boys who are most likely to be provided with the most necessary things by their families. Against this background, donations were collected to provide school backpacks for disadvantaged girls of school age. Thanks

to the active help of a large number of HITA supporters, 80 high-quality school backpacks together with writing utensils, pencil cases and colouring books could be procured and transported to Ghana.

In preparation for the event on 5 January, banners have already been made in Germany and printed T-shirts have been procured. But there is still a lot to organize on site: the list of the guests to be

invited including the tribal chiefs and mothers from the surrounding area; the schedule for the celebration; the transport of the selected girls and their parents to the place of the ceremonial handing over; the supply of water and small meals for those present; as well as the recruitment of media representatives to report about the event on the radio and online.

On Sunday the time has finally come. Thanks to the energetic support of Togbe Lablulu, everything is running almost like clockwork. Besides Togbe Lablulu, the speakers at the event will include: Richard Atiemo, Health Coordinator of the EP Church, Adaklu; Samuel K. Taylor, Headmaster of Adaklu Senior High School (and at the same time member of the DreamsAlive core team); Jacob Ahiave from the DreamsAlive Foundation; Thomas Erkert and Karsten Gareis, Director and Board Member of HITA respectively. Mr. Nananyaw Bediako leads through the program as Master of Ceremony. Special thanks are expressed to Emmanuel Chance, the director of the Chances Foundation, who cannot be present today for health reasons, but without whose active support none of the donations would have been possible.



The student ensemble of the Adaklu Senior High School, which is supervised by a local, highly talented young musician on a voluntary basis, provides for great music performances.

After the speeches, the girls present on site will be called individually by name and asked to come to the front where they will receive their rucksack. Daniel takes a photo of each of them, holding a sheet of paper with their name and the rucksack in the camera - later on we will make a poster from this on which each recipient is shown with her name and photo. We have agreed with the DreamsAlive team to make sure that the backpacks are really used for the intended purpose and are not used or even sold by other family members.

Because they live further away, not all of the girls, for whom a backpack is intended, could be brought to Waya today – the remaining 25 school bags will be delivered by DreamsAlive to more empty villages in the coming days. The selection of the most needy girls was only possible because the DreamsAlive team has a profound knowledge of the situation in all parts of the Adaklu district due to their daily work.



The other donations - the two new computer rooms at the Adaklu Senior High School in Waya and the primary school in Adaklu-Hasu, as well as the equipment for the EPC Clinic in Waya - will be handed over today only symbolically.

Johannes and Leonhard will use their free time before and after the ceremony to finish installing the equipment at the nearby high school. As always during this trip, we have to use every spare minute to get all the planned work done!

In selecting the donations, special care was taken to ensure that the equipment provided is tailored to the needs and constraints of the target community, is fully functional and can be easily maintained over many years. In this way, HITA wants to distinguish itself from many other initiatives led by international donors, which were well-intentioned but did not make a noticeable contribution to the development of the region in the long run due to too little consideration of conservation and sustainability. One example can be found directly at the Senior High School in Waya: In one room there are brand-new, but dusty and apparently never used computers and monitors on the desks. We ask what this is all about. The surprising answer: It is a terminal server network, i.e. the computer workstations are only usable when the host computer is in operation. The latter has never been the case, however, because the computer used as a server is completely unsuitable for the local conditions (power supply susceptible to faults; dust; temperature). The system was installed a few years ago by one of the world's development aid agencies, but has not yet brought any benefit whatsoever to the community. What a waste!!



After saying goodbye to the guests and briefly discussing the next steps with Togbe Lablulu, we set off home exhausted. A part of us uses a taxi driver for the trip, whose driver we got to know during the last days as reliable and conscientious. But unfortunately his vehicle is already getting on in years - and promptly fails the service on open road, far away from the next village.



Fascinating: Here, on a gravel road in the middle of an uninhabited area in one of the poorest parts of Ghana, we have internet reception via the mobile phone network! So we can send photos of our tricky situation to friends in Germany. This once again confirms our assumption that the mobile phone coverage in Ghana is by no means worse than in Germany – the geographical coverage may even be better!

After about an hour our taxi driver and his colleagues have repaired the damage and the trip back to Ho can continue – just in time before nightfall...

The second week

Our work schedule for the second week of our stay is full to bursting with the transport of the equipment to their respective locations, installation work at the general education schools, the preparation and execution of the respective ceremonies for handing over the computer labs, surveys on the use of the infrastructure donated by HITA at SONAM, as well as discussions on the further development of the cooperation with our most important local partners.



The discussions with the new management level at the university show that UHAS wants to take care of the procurement of the ICT infrastructure itself in the future. The main focus of the cooperation with HITA would therefore shift to the transfer of knowledge and know-how in the sense of empowerment, particularly through training measures based on the train-the-trainer principle. In addition, HITA and UHAS intend to increasingly design and implement pilot projects in the field of ICT-based innovations in the health and education sectors jointly.

On the other hand, we learn from our discussions with the other local HITA partners, especially Prof. Prudence Portia Mwini-Nyaledzigbor, the former dean of SONAM, that the smaller nurse and midwifery schools in the Volta Region need more support in their modernisation. One reason for this: The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the professional association of nurses and midwives in Ghana, which is responsible for the design of curricula and certification, recently decided that all licensing examinations at Ghana's nursing and midwifery schools should be conducted online with more or less immediate effect. However, as most of the educational institutions do not yet have computer labs and the necessary powerful Internet connection, students at nursing and midwifery schools in more remote parts of the country are in danger of being left behind. For them, the new directive not only means that they have to travel long distances to a suitably equipped school for their licensing examinations; it also deprives them of the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills in the use of computers and e-learning systems during their education. Indeed, the introduction of online licensing examinations at a time when most students only have rudimentary computer skills has been strongly criticised in the public debate.

In the coming months and years, HITA wants to make a sustainable contribution to filling this gap by enabling nursing and midwifery schools in the more remote parts of the country to comprehensively familiarize their students with the use of computers, Internet and mLearning applications as part of their training.



Last day and departure

On the last day handover ceremonies in three schools are scheduled. The public and the teaching staff are given the opportunity to visit and try out the newly established computer labs. The response is great, and the school representatives express many warm words of thanks to the HITA team and all individuals and organizations who have donated the equipment.



Since the schools all have IT teaching staff and there are also technicians responsible for maintenance, the infrastructure is guaranteed to operate permanently. We have instructed the staff as well as possible and also offered them the possibility to contact us via Whatsapp Group in case of major technical problems.

We spend the evening before departure on Mr. Chance's estate, where some of his hotel chefs – all of them from Togo – provide us with marvellous grilled food. There are close ties between the Volta Region and neighbouring Togo, as both traditionally speak the same language, Ewe, and the border is completely open for any kind of economic exchange. The official language in Togo, however, is French – and not English, as in Ghana. Our host obtains all his kitchen staff from Togo, because the kitchen there is considered of a higher standard due to the influence of the former colonial power France. In fact, the food tonight is once again super delicious! But we cannot stay long, as our driver is already waiting for us at 5 am the next morning; due to the heavy traffic in the Accra area, we have to plan a good four hours for the way to the airport, even if it is often faster. Approximately in the middle of the route we again see a group of monkeys at the roadside, who are at home in the adjacent nature reserve. The return flight takes us again over the capital of Ethiopia before we reach Frankfurt on 12 January.

