

# GIVING SOMETHING BACK

Speech by Dr Christine AMA AMAKYE DELIVERED IN LONDON ON THE  
OCCASION OF HOLY CHILD PAST STUDENTS ASSOCIATION 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
27<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2008.

Deputy High Commissioner Mr Quartey, Distinguished  
Guests, Fellow Hopsans, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I extend my gratitude to the Executive of HOPSA UK for  
asking me to speak on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding  
on the topic 'Giving Something Back'.

As kindly introduced, I was educated in Ghana up to  
University level. But after my house job, like a lot of other  
professionals I left for the UK to fulfil my professional  
aspirations. This was 23 years ago and since then many  
more Ghanaians have done the same. Ghana has lost a  
lot of highly skilled and educated people to other  
countries. Now after many years of living abroad a lot of  
us have decided that the many professions, skills and  
experiences we have acquired can be used to benefit  
Ghana. The national brain drain is making a U-turn and is  
becoming a national brain gain.

This is where the voluntary work gives something back.

Voluntary work was something I had been thinking of for  
some years especially after the disaster of the tsunami but  
I was busy with a full time job and a family. When my  
children became young adults, I decided the time had

come to do my bit and give something back to the country that I grew up in.

I was lucky in that I heard of a consultant orthopaedic surgeon who was also educated in the University of Ghana Medical School. Mr Paul Ofori-Atta had the same vision of offering skills and services back to a country that needed us.

The beauty of it was that he had already set up a medical charity called Motec Life -UK which comprised of volunteer health professionals from the UK and other European countries. They provide education, training and health care services to under-privileged people of Sub-Saharan Africa but concentrating on Ghana. There are a lot of Ghanaians in the group and also members from Wales Canada Holland and Germany.

I visited Ghana twice this year with Motec Life -UK:

On the first visit we went to four hospitals in Accra, Akosombo, Koforidua and Nkawkaw. We did some private work in Accra to generate funds for the non-UK members of the group and our projects in Ghana. The rest of the time was spent working with surgeons, anaesthetic nurses, theatre nurses and other staff in the hospitals in Akosombo and the Eastern region. We gave lectures on certain aspects of practice that we felt needed to be changed. We also gave updates on medical and nursing practice on topics that were requested by the hospital staff. We held clinics and I anaesthetised for some orthopaedic operations like knee and hip replacements and correction of limb deformities.

On the second visit we went to the same hospitals as before but also to St Michael's at Pramso near Kumasi and St John's at Sefwi Asafo in the Western Region. We offered the same type of services but more discussions and lectures this time.

At Asafo we did a reconnaissance tour to look at the state of the hospital and its equipment, so as to offer help where needed in the form of theatre equipment and practical and educational advice.

This hospital also had two buildings of interest. One of them in the past was used to manufacture intravenous fluids but had been shut down. The second structure was built as an infectious diseases unit but was being grossly underutilised. A benefactor from Dublin is interested in donating money and time to revive the IV fluid factory. He also hopes to convert the other building into a state of the art surgical centre that will attract skilled foreign medical teams to come and operate several times a year. It will also attract and train Ghanaian medical and nursing staff who hopefully will remain and work in this hospital.

We have obtained an anaesthetic machine for them to use in theatre to replace the very inadequate one they are using at the moment.

Mr Ofori-Atta went back to Ghana last week with the benefactor to make a financial assessment of the project. Plans are in progress and completion is expected in the first quarter of 2009. I was delighted to hear that Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital have given their commitment

to support training and surgical work at the surgical centre in Asafo. The second building is being converted into a basic drug and water manufacturing plant.

On both visits we gave lectures at the Nkawkaw Nurses Training College which were very well received.

The charity is also involved with the Ghanaian authorities in trying to set up formal national trauma and orthopaedic services with the input of the government. With the number of accidents on the roads and the aging population these services are in very high demand but very thin on the ground. Motec Life – UK is collaborating with Orthopaedic Concern UK in arranging specialist trauma training to man what is intended to be the largest trauma centre in Africa. This is currently to be completed in November this year at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in Kumasi

This October two ambulance personnel who are also Motec Life UK members are going to run a para-medical workshop at Koforidua which will be attended by professional drivers, nurses and doctors. Some Ghanaian companies are part sponsoring the workshop.

A new Orthopaedic Hospital in Koforidua funded by a Dutch couple is due for completion in May 2009. More money has to be generated to furnish and buy equipment for the hospital. We spent time in discussion with doctors there to arrange doing surgery there on later visits.

## **There are other groups doing volunteer work in Ghana:**

The Japanese Volunteers Organisation project has been sending professionals to Ghana since 1977 to teach science, computing, engineering, veterinary medicine and nursing in highly deprived areas.

Medical teams from other European countries such as Italy and Holland work in the hospitals in the eastern region.

Mercy ships along the West African Coast do complex ear, nose and throat surgery.

Medical teams from the US that include some of our own home grown doctors visit annually to operate, run clinics and distribute drugs.

Ghana Doctors and Dentists Association of the UK do their bit.

The Bright and Needy Scheme set up and funded by HOPSA UK to help educate bright but impoverished girls at Holy Child. They have produced their first University entrant.

This list is nowhere near exhaustive

## **Skills and Professions that can be of use in Ghana:**

Medical/Nursing;

Accounting/Legal;

Teaching/Education at all levels;

Computing/Information Technology;

Construction/Artisan skills; and

Education on HIV/Nutrition/Obesity/Family Planning.

If you cannot travel to do voluntary work, there are other ways of contributing.

Organising fundraising activities here to support visiting groups.

Getting Ghanaian Hopsans to host visiting groups.

Collecting and helping to pack/crate useful items donated by sympathetic organisations.

### **Benefits to Ghana**

Improves educational standards at all levels.

In already existing institutions it promotes continuing professional education.

Depending on the charity, help goes to the less fortunate i.e.: street girls, orphanages, understaffed and needy hospitals, institutions for mental and physical disabilities and schools in poor and rural areas.

The Government and Ghanaian professional bodies acquire skilled and experienced individuals and groups that can help improve standards in already existing institutions. They can also assist/advise on new national projects.

As it becomes more difficult for people to come abroad to acquire further education we can with the help of already existing Ghanaian institutions take some of the education back to them.

## **Benefits to you as individuals are:**

Boosts your own self-esteem and confidence;

You realise once you start that you underestimate just how much you have to offer;

You can easily impart your professional standards and knowledge to others who have not had the privileges of the education and experience you have had over the years;

You meet up and bond with new and old acquaintances

You work as a team and compliment each other;

You network here and in Ghana;

You create links at home which will be useful to you when you decide to go back to Ghana to live; and

You have the satisfaction of giving something back to Ghana;

And above all you continue to do God's work

Thank you!