

Continuation of Annual General Meeting Friends of Wechiau Group 18th December 2006

Attendance: Ann Bannister, John Flynn, Lisa Porter, Ian Brown, Martin Upson, Donna Sheppard.

Apologies: Janet Kirk

Recap of summer AGM: Minutes of last AGM accepted as accurate record. Resignation of David Warren accepted. Janet Kirk accepted as trustee (not heard otherwise that she is not happy to continue).

Election of Trustees: Janice Kirk, Ann Bannister, John Flynn, Lisa Porter, Ian Brown all elected as new trustees (Ann Bannister proposed, seconded by John Flynn)

Election of Officers: Ann Bannister (Chair), John Flynn (financial officer), Lisa Porter (secretary). Proposed by Ian Brown, Seconded by Martin Upson.

Accounts (John): Accounts accepted (proposed by Ian Brown, Seconded by Martin Upson). Accounts will be made available on the website. Still more money coming in than going out. Suggestion to look for other ways of using the monies.

Fundraising suggested: John suggested the need to have a business plan/proposal to give to bodies who may consider supporting us. Lisa offered to do this.

Martin is pursuing the idea of having his village support Friends of Wechiau Group (FWG)

Donna Sheppard Introduction

Ann thanked Donna for all her time and support.

Donna introduced herself. Works in conservation outreach for Calgary Zoo. Donna has several bosses (Brian Keating, Head of Conservation Outreach, Calgary Zoo; John Mason of Nature Conservation Research Centre through international secondment; the Sanctuary Management Board at WCHS). Within the Conservation Outreach Department at the Calgary Zoo, there is just the two of them: her and her boss, Brian Keating. Transferred from previous international partnership in Guyana, South America to Wechiau, Ghana for 2 years (Jan 2004 – Nov 2005). Has just been moved to Accra (1 full year now) so she could develop and replicate the 'Wechiau' model elsewhere in Ghana. Long term the model could be used elsewhere in Africa. Situngu model is doing very well. Visitors at Wechiau have increased to approx 1,000-2,000 per year for the past three years. Reason for increase believed to be increased publicity – is now in Brant guide and Lonely Planet guide, Philip Briggs promotes also through his writing. Usual stay is sleep over, river safari, then leave. Hippo numbers – hard to say if they have differed. Earthwatch have a special relationship with NCRC and are working on other projects in Ghana such as a Cocoa farming project with Cadbury Schweppes.

Baseline of data: Agba is doing an insect survey at present. Wechiau became self-sustaining and the original baseline data was completed. Therefore Earthwatch withdrew. Gate sales are quite high. Some issues of transparency have to be addressed. The Sanctuary Management Board have been handling the financial management of the Sanctuary for over three years now, however, they have not been able to establish reliable financial systems in order for Wechiau to become truly self-sustaining. NCRC uses a hands-off approach in the support of the WCHS. The community is learning about resource management through trial by fire.

Donna Sheppard Presentation

The other population of hippos is at Bui National Park but this is political because of the hydro electric river dam proposals; the future of this protected area is uncertain, as is the survival of the hippo population. Hippo population at Wechiau is thought to be approx 15-20 (Numbers from last census in December 06 was 18 animals). The population is stable in 2 pods. The dead hippo died from natural causes, as far as we can tell. Was pregnant. Her skull is on display in visitor centre. The baby is preserved.

Equality in the representation of the 17 communities is always an issue. Finding ways to ensure all communities have a voice is always an issue and is constantly being looked at to find ways to find a balance.

Donna in 2004 did a complete census of the area including, adults, children, schools, bore-holes etc. 3 new bore-holes currently being drilled. Now each community has at least 1 bore-hole.

The road has been improved and the bumpy track is now half as long as it used to be.

SMB will make mistakes as they learn. Case of trial and error. Management of natural resources combined with social issues is not easy to learn. Funders supporting the area often have their own western values attached to providing the funding such as achieving targets, exit strategy. Need to appreciate the values within Wechiau and that things work differently in Ghana. SMB makes overall decisions on whether to accept proposed investments – only accepted if it is felt that it is good for the community.

Example of mistake: Streetlights for community. No one owns them. Therefore when the battery runs out it no longer works. No one has responsibility for replacing parts as it is seen as a communal resource. In the new lighting scheme supported by the WCHS, the Wechiau Lighting Initiative, each family “purchases” their lighting system. The community contributions ensure care is taken in the maintenance of the solar lighting systems. Canadian Hydro spearheaded the fund raising campaign to purchase the lighting stock and ship it to Ghana from Canada. Will eventually be 550 lights installed. Wechiau is now considered to be a district capital. There are new buildings, clinic becoming a hospital, various projects now happening because of this (ie feed a child etc). Francis (the volunteer teacher) has a light at his house so his students can do their homework and continue to learn after daylight hours. Most families want a light for this reason. Most people cannot afford kerosene for lanterns all year round. When they start

to starve (usually rainy season) they no longer can afford then to have the light on. There is no food to harvest in rainy season even though the rains mean all the plant life starts to grow.

If conservation is kept separate from community development and not developed in harmony then issues arise. For example at Mole National Park the community is not involved. Those who live on the outskirts get guns and go in and shoot elephants. The new model (Wechiau) marries up conservation with development of community and the community benefits from conservation: they are motivated to protect the environmental resources as they receive a direct benefit from doing so.

Bike rental business for tourists developed by Donna and Isaku manages it. Business is now 3 years old and is doing well.

Community labour is a standard event in Ghana. Expert labourers from NCRC came to oversee the project. 6 communities can use the new school. It is already full. 2 teachers + volunteer teacher (Francis) has just been appointed. Francis has done so much for the community. Francis and the school children made 4281 (finished by Friday July 8th 2006) cement blocks to build their new school. The kids love their new school. They have a soccer pitch and a volley ball area. Calgary Zoo has just given money for a teachers bungalow to accommodate 2 teachers. Heather Graham (patron of the school) is coming to open the school soon (September 2007).

Community Education: Any donated items are used as awards at the local schools for the top three students as an incentive to do well. Talks are given at the schools to keep the local communities aware of hippo sanctuary A book has been developed (What is the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary) to enhance the presentation. The book is written in English with lots of pictures. The local languages are not written languages so it made sense to write it in English. The children can then translate and read it to their parents. This will be the only book in most households and would be a treasured item.

A 'rangers training program' and 'womens English' course has been run to develop the rangers conversational English. The guides were progressing better than the rangers with their English.

Education Scholarship: FWG, Sanctuaries own Education Fund Scholarships, school twinning programme.

SMB Scholarship supports 2 children to go to school.

School twinning program: 2 schools in Calgary twinned with 2 in Wechiau: Tokali primary School and Wechiau JSS. Group letters written between classes. The Calgary schools hold a sale and raised money. Used for 3 solar lighting systems last year, teacher materials and school support this year.

FWG: Sorting out the forms for FWG was a really good learning exercise. Took a long time to sort out (most of 2004) but the SMB were learning about the importance of

paperwork and process. The same FWG is used for all scholarship applications whether funded by FWG or SMB. Process is now established.

2005: Pictures of Yussif receiving his scholarship award. Pictures of Talawona School and the ceremony when the educational supplies were handed over (£100 funding from FWG). Used to share 2 text books in a class. Now have 3 or 4 to share. Has helped so much.

Young people important to the future development of Wechiau

Agba won best tour-guide in Ghana award and won a cell-phone and is very honest. Agba is part of the team doing research at Bochiye, the leopard area, and also runs a bicycle rental business.

Issahaku runs visitor centre and is very honest. He is always accused of things. The elders don't like his brazen and proud attitude. Because of the social status and structure of the society you cannot be like this. Have found leopards near Mole – Isaku also involved with this.

Francis – volunteer school teacher. His students are doing really well under him and he has loads of energy and enthusiasm. He is being supported to go to a community college to improve his education. He received funding to re-write his SSS finals to improve the scores so that he can qualify for polytechnic or community college.

John suggested whether FWG could help support his education as he is committed to the area. Donna will look into the costs when she gets back.

The fees for the schools all differ. The PTA fees could range from 300 cedis upwards depending upon their facilities. Different schools have different procedures. Such as some provide books and costs covered in PTA fees, others have a book store that student must buy their own books from. Computer selects which school the kids go to depending upon their scores and where they live.

Andy Murphy did first survey for FWG for fees. He costed it at a fancy private girls school in Bolgatanga. This it is why it was so high then we were given much lower costs for the SSS options around the hippo sanctuary.

Feeder schools: Wechiau JSS and Donrye JSS. In the future the 3rd feeder school will be Tokali (currently running a JSS1 pgm)

The higher the score the poorer the national result; best score you can earn is a '6' – or a '1' in each of the '6' subjects. The scores of the students are improving. Still no girls going for scholarships. Very few girls at school. By the time they get to JSS the numbers reduce (? 2 at Wechiau JSS and non at Donye). The girls get pregnant and then do not continue at school. Had an exercise where students debated on topics. One girl got up and debated for girls education. The women were so supportive of her and were clapping and cheering her on. Every year a girl or two gets pregnant by a teacher. A fuss is made but the chiefs settle things down and tell families not to make a fuss. The teacher is made to promise to support the girl until the child can stand. Lobi women are

considered a property of a man. Donna has seen a girl run away from husband to her father pleading to be able to come home in the market place. Father tricks her into a truck and she is whisked back to her abusive husband.

Wechiau Scholarship Candidates

7 students short-listed for 4 places (2 for SMB and 2 for FWG scholarships)

Schooling is for 3 years that they need support for.

Students selected by scholarship committee in Wechiau are:

Solomon Nuurizie

Solomon is a 20 year old Lobi (Birifor) young man from the community of Kowachiyiri (Kachiau). He tied for third place with the young man above – Laahi A. Abdul Aziz – with a final results score of 20. Solomon’s father is a farmer and his mother a housewife. Kowachiyiri is approximately 4 kilometres from Wechiau, and Solomon has been travelling back and forth to school each day on his bicycle. He has been admitted to Lassia Tuolu Senior Secondary School in the course of Home Economics.

(Introductory Paragraphs - Donna Shephard)

Mohammed (Mama) Toyali Osuman

Mohammed is a 22 year old young man from the community of Wechiau. He tied for second place with Mantani Y. Sanao (below) in the national exams this year with an aggregate score of 18. He has been admitted to Wa Senior Secondary School in the Home Economics course. Mohammed is a Waala has been working as a respected carpenter in Wechiau when he is not attending classes. His father is no longer alive, and thus Mohammed is supporting his mother and siblings while putting himself through school. Mohammed – who is known to all as ‘Mama’ – qualified for Senior Secondary School previously during 1998, however, due to lack of financial resources, he did not take advantage of this success and rather interrupted his studies to work.

(Introductory Paragraphs – Donna Shephard)

Wa Islamic Senior Secondary School – listed as in top 20 schools in Ghana

Also this year school supplies given to hippo sanctuary Wechiau primary school. SMB suggested this school got supplies this year and Donna agreed. The school created a wish list. SMB analysed the list and then supplies were bought at best price. During the ceremony for handing over supplies it is a good opportunity to talk to parents. Donna was last to talk during the meeting, which was great as by the time Donna spoke people had all arrived. People in Bukino Faso also send their children across the river to the new school.

The future growth of Scholarship Scheme

- Sustainable growth of scheme (FWG to work on this)
- Encourage educational achievement for girls (Donna working on this)

Women have little status in Ghana. The only reason Donna is listened to within the community is because she is white. It is mainly the mothers who educate their children therefore the women need education. Donna realised that the fathers of the children she was seeing were the same men that she worked with.

Long term goals for Wechiau:

Cashew crops, irrigation and long term sustainability schemes

Short term:

Continue the schemes to help area develop

Action Points:

Look into supporting Francis through his education

Will find a bank who doesn't charge £60 for transfers if possible

Need other sources of income. Dangerous to rely on one source only.

- Martin will pursue his village supporting scholarships (Donna happy for her presentation to be used as long as Calgary Zoo is accredited. Also Calgary Zoo website has lots about Wechiau)

Suggestion from Donna – that FWG concentrate on the niche area of supporting education. Ways of expansion would be to look at extending the educational scholarship support to post secondary educational support.

Next meeting to be arranged for May – will be discussing how to use the money