



In January 2011 Member of Parliament Peter Goldring traveled to Ghana, West Africa, on a fact-finding mission with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Canada to provide insight into the opportunities for Canada in Ghana, our largest bilateral partner in Africa. This is his report.

As Member of Parliament for Edmonton East and a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Mr. Goldring went to Ghana to examine a wide variety of aid and development projects and learn some best practices which could then be utilized in the projected study and visit by the Committee to Haiti that he had called for by way of a motion accepted by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

In 2006 Mr. Goldring led a Parliamentary delegation to Haiti and reported on the situation there, in a 20-page report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs,

calling for a study of conditions in Haiti. Following that study the Committee report on Haiti was presented in Parliament in December 2006.

With that in mind Mr. Goldring traveled to Ghana to observe Canadian aid projects, in order to learn if there were successful projects and practices that could also be applied to Haiti.

Their group had the opportunity to visit a remote village well outside Tamale, which in



Mr. Goldring opens discussion with village elders, asking for their help to assist others in developing other societies such as theirs. They were very grateful—they had never been asked for help before.

many ways is unchanged from the rural life of centuries past. Mr. Goldring was struck by the pride and community respect that the villagers and elders exhibited. The village compound area was spotless and they had ample storage of crops. The villagers admirably exhibited what he believed to be a wholesome social society benefiting and existing on broad

range of rural farm activities.

When given the opportunity to address the



village elders, he told them that he wanted their help, to learn from them, from their agricultural successes and their obvious societal success, to determine how they could in turn help Canada in helping the people of Haiti to re-build their society and communities.

The headman and the elders had never before been asked for such help and were extremely appreciative of the gesture. They told Mr. Goldring that of course they would help in any way possible to help Canada help the people of Haiti. The villagers then, over the next three hours, showed their visitors into every corner and faction of the village and crop areas with great pride of their accomplishments.

Mr. Goldring asked about a small crop that he did not immediately recognize and was told it was tobacco. He was shown by the owner/farmer his crop and processing facilities, including a smaller nursery area for starting plants and a processing area where leaves were beaten into a heavy paste and formed into bricks approximately 30 cm by 15 cm by 15 cm, which were then left to finish curing in the shade for months.

Absolutely nowhere was this activity mentioned in background research information as an important, valuable, farming commu-

nity enterprise, perhaps because of our culture's negative connotation of all things tobacco. Mr. Goldring noted that no-one in the village smoked tobacco and he did not even have the impression that the village people chewed tobacco. While to some tobacco may be considered a questionable product, there remains a market for it.

This small farmer had on hand 16 bricks of tobacco, with a market value of approximately \$1600 sitting in a corner of a small village. Given that in Ghana the minimum wage is equivalent to \$2 per day, this \$1,600 processed crop is an amazingly profitable effort from a plot of land less than 1/20th of an acre.

While visiting villages and travelling back highways Mr. Goldring noticed that

each village had a large black poly 500 gallon plus water tank with the name of the charitable donor organization printed in white, most, mounted on cement foundations, costing some \$5,000 each to provide. The intention obviously was to save women and children the drudgery of carrying 5-gallon containers on their heads or on their bicycles for some distances to bring potable water to the village, their school or their home, but all the large water tanks were empty!



A graphic example of misguided aid - an empty water tank in every village. Meant to release villagers from the drudgery of carrying water to the area for others, the village can't afford a water truck to fill it.



As with many well-meaning aid efforts an important aspect was missed. The villages could not afford to pay for a water truck to fill the tanks. If the tanks were located to collect building rain run-off from nearby metal roofs then at least the villages would have water for part of the dry season, but they were not. These tanks are an example of costly, wasteful planning (or lack of planning) and simply are a blight on the community.

Connecting Canadian businesses to opportunities in foreign countries can have great benefit. Some businesses in Canada are struggling and have shut down or are on the verge of shutting down simply because they cannot compete with the low-cost labour of China.

But that is not the only option. Gildan, a Quebec-based company, decided differently. They kept their high-tech knitting mills, design technology and management in Quebec, but located factories in Honduras and Haiti for the all-important manufacturing salaries of \$2-4 per day (\$100-120 monthly) in order to compete with China's manufacturing rate of \$120 per month.

The wages paid by Gildan for the 5,000 jobs in Haiti are comparable and competitive with labour costs in China for similar work and are highly valued by the Haitian employees

for the family-sustaining wages, comparable to double a Canadian minimum wage, or the equivalent of approximately \$20 an hour!

In discussions in Tamale, the capital of the northern regions of Ghana, the city's development officer and the Mayor expressed great interest in Canadian manufacturers that work internationally, such as Gildan.

They told Mr. Goldring they particularly are seeking a textile manufacturer willing to locate in Tamale for the jobs it will create.

It would be useful if CIDA, when speaking to governments, attempted to determine these commercial needs and make that information available to Canadian corporations. One of the most elementary aspects of foreign aid

should be to develop business, to encourage family-sustaining jobs capacity, as well as governance capacity. Without jobs for the majority of citizens there will be a continuing dependence on foreign aid, and without good governance society will also not develop to self-sufficiency. There needs to be a better balance of aid involving both the non-profit sector and the private sector.

To provide real help for the people is possible, as demonstrated by some successful



Mr. Goldring with the mayor and councillors of Tamala with MP Dave Van Kesteren (right) following a meeting to discuss a variety of issues for aid and economic development in the region.

projects visited in Ghana, but to do so it must engage the development efforts of non-profit organizations, the private sector, community and governments to truly be successful.

Most farmers have very small plots – one or two acres of land. Collectivizing into larger parcels allows more efficient production. When previously a bare subsistence farmer had trouble feeding his family for the year on the crop yield of less than 1 metric ton (MT) per hectare, the yield, through coordinated efforts, jumps to 2.5-3 MT per hectare and can further rise to 4-5 MT per hectare by use of high yield seed, fertilization and mechanization. Furthermore, with mechanization of

farming, an in-country manufacturing sector for machinery has been developed.

Partnering with Canadian businesses, and businesses of the countries of concern, as the South Koreans have partnered with South Korean businesses and in-country businesses in their aid efforts for example, could be beneficial to all concerned.

Aid efforts should be balanced between the many hard-working and committed non-profit NGOs and the engagement of the interested private sector organizations.

Update: A full 23-page report (with pictures) with recommendations for improving Canadian aid efforts was bound and presented to the Minister of International Cooperation, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister. The report can be read at www.petergoldring.ca.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Question 1 Should Canadian companies be proactively pursuing internationally business opportunities as part of an overall aid strategy?

Yes No

Question 2 Should Canadian aid efforts engage more private sector organizations in addition to non-profit and non-governmental organizations?

Yes No

Comments: _____

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