

THERE IS LIFE AND HAPPINESS AFTER HIV

It was refreshing to have a successful and well executed programme for the Inauguration of the Brong Ahafo Technical Support Unit Offices and Dissemination of the National HIV&AIDS, STI Policy at Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region. Participation was good. There were participants from the District and Municipal Assemblies, Representatives of Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Representatives of the Regional House of Chiefs, Regional AIDS Committee (RAC) Members, Executives of the Regional NAP+, the Brong Ahafo Network of NGOs (BANGO), Civil Society Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), and the Media. The programme was well facilitated by the consultant, Mrs. Estelle Matilda Asante, Mr. Cosmos Ohene-Adjei (Project Manager at GAC), Md. Mary Asante (Policy & Planning at GAC) under the distinguished chairmanship of the Regional Coordinating Director, Mr. Felix Chaahaah, with the able support of the Director General of GAC, Dr. Angela El-Adas and the former HIV&AIDS Coordinator for BA, Mr. William Sopiimeh. Participants responded positively with good questions and contributions. All these were to augment the work of providing care and support for Persons Living with HIV.

After the hard day's work, the team needed a time to relax and rejuvenate the mind, the body and the soul. The question was "are there any places around we can go site seeing?". So we decided to go on a visit to the "Kristo Buase" Monastery in Techiman the next day. At 11:00am the next day we had an hour tour of the Sunyani Township and then set off on an hour's journey to the Monastery in Techiman.

The entrance to the site welcomed us with a beautiful natural view of a long stretch of cashew plantation. One could smell nature as we drove through the trees into the main tourist area. How refreshing! On arrival the team was given a tour guide who took us around the site. The environment with many trees and shades looked neat like a well managed village somewhere in the Eastern Region of Ghana where I once lived with my grandmother. With some guest houses built in between the rocks and amidst the trees you could sense that living in such an environment would be amazing. The appearance of the buildings and positioning of the trees gives them the perfect qualification as "Guest Houses under trees".

Sign Post to the Krito Buase Monastery

You could appreciate the real handiwork of God on the site of the natural designs of the huge rocks. As if a modern 21st century architect was purposely hired to carefully design and carve these stones. The spaces under the stones were large and formed shapes like an overhead interchange with a dual carriage underpass. The cool ambience beneath these fascinating natural elements was enough to soothe our weary bodies. The long tunnel well carved in the heart of the rocks with well tarred roads was intriguing. One would be tempted to think that these were manmade, but no they are really natural. The shade provided by these huge rocks were used by the ancient settlers for homes. You could see marks of domestic activities such as cooking and pounding by these ancient settlers. Today these places are used as prayer grounds where various Christian religious groups gather for prayer retreats. In fact we met a group in fervent prayer beneath these rocks while their children engaged in vigorous hide and seek.

A portion of the huge rocks with an underpass

The other side of this long chain of mountain was a reservoir built on the rocks to collect and store water from underneath the rocks. The team decided to climb these relatively steep rocks to its top to have a better view of what was up there. This was a hilarious moment – the females among us had to go through some difficult motions with the support of the equally afraid men to get up there. It was interesting to be up the rocks. The scene from above was splendid. Climbing down was equally challenging once again especially with our female counterparts. But with all this I learnt a great lesson. As I watched Mrs. Estelle Appiah, at her age and in slippers, putting in all the efforts to ascend and descend the steep rocks I told myself “there is nothing you cannot do if you set your heart and mind to do it”. This woman continued to fascinate me as we took the tour. She looked and sounded enthused at every step she took – life indeed is meant to be enjoyed!

Mrs. Estelle Appiah being supported to climb the rock

After the tour, we inquired about the abundance of cashew around. We were told that the cashew plants surrounding the Monastery cover an area of more than 200 acres of land. The cashew fruit is used in producing cashew wine while the nuts are roasted and packaged. The nuts are also used in making marmalade of different types and flavours. At the mention of “wine”, everyone started smiling for obvious reasons. We did not just smile we inquired of it and we bought some. Just when we were about leaving the question came “can we have some of the cashew fruits?” And the answer was “yes but please leave the nuts on the ground for us”. On our way out of the monastery we kept looking out for those cashew trees with the bright red fruits hanging from their branches. Immediately we spotted them, we stopped and jumped into the farm and helped ourselves with as many as our hands could carry. There again I was so fascinated with the vigor and enthusiasm with which my Auntie took a bite of one of the juicy fruits. I asked “is it nice” and with joy she answered “mmmm, it’s sweet”. After having enough we embarked on the journey back to Sunyani fulfilled. After all, there is life and happiness after HIV.

The tour team and their guide on top of the huge rocks