



## **Introduction to working with GHEI**

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with the Ghana Health and Education Initiative! The Ghana Health and Education Initiative (GHEI) is a grassroots nongovernmental organization located in the rural village of 4,000 people in western Ghana called Humjibre. It is approximately 3 hours from the nearest city of Kumasi.

GHEI was founded by professional students at the University of Maryland in 2001, with project work beginning in 2003. It focuses on maintaining sustainable health and education programs for youth in Humjibre and the entire district it is located in. The organization is managed in Ghana by a Ghanaian team headed by Mr. Clement Donkor, GHEI's Country Director, with help from three long-term coordinators from the west.

GHEI offers short-term volunteer programs to enable those interested in international development and social justice the opportunity to experience grassroots community work. We see this as an opportunity for volunteers to explore development work and get a sense of how you can be the force of change in the future, no matter what career path you take. We also hope that by participating, you will develop an interest in GHEI and social justice

We believe that GHEI offers volunteers a unique experience to discover how much a small group of people can do to strengthen a community by following the community's lead. If you become a volunteer with GHEI, you will be challenged each day and your perspective will undoubtedly change. If you are ready for what will likely be the greatest challenge of your life thus far, please join us!

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **GENERAL**

#### ***I am interested in volunteering. How do I know if GHEI is a good fit?***

You need to learn about GHEI, our programs, our goals, and our members. The following steps may be useful in deciding whether or not GHEI is right for you:

Read through these FAQs and the volunteer information document and read the comments from past volunteers. Contact us if you have specific questions ([volunteer@ghei.org](mailto:volunteer@ghei.org)).

#### ***What is the application process like?***

Applications for summer sessions will be reviewed on a rolling basis beginning on **January 15, 2012**. This means that GHEI's leadership will review applications in the order they are received. Applicants are encouraged to apply early as spaces may fill quickly.

After February 1, applications are reviewed within ten days of receipt and selected applicants are contacted for interviews. Offers are extended to successful applicants within one week of



the interview and applicants are given one week to accept or decline GHEI's offer. This is done to allow ample time for fundraising, travel reservations, and general preparations for the trip.

If you are offered a position, you will be required to send in a **non-refundable deposit of \$600** (which goes toward your fundraising requirement) as well as a waiver form that you will receive after acceptance. We ask that you send in the remainder of the funds that you raise (or choose to donate) as soon as possible or no later than **May 15, 2012**.

***What are you looking for in applicants?***

- Maturity and respect for other cultures.
- An understanding that the primary purpose for volunteering with GHEI should be to *learn* about the community and the work one grassroots NGO is doing local community.
- Ability to work as part of a team (alongside fellow foreign volunteers and Ghanaians).
- An open mind, flexibility, adventurous spirit.
- Potential for helping GHEI through long-term volunteering or other involvement.
- Ready to laugh, ready to work

***What preparations will I have to make prior to travel?***

You will need to arrange logistics:

- Purchase a plane ticket
- Purchase travel insurance
- Obtain a passport and Ghanaian VISA
- Go to a travel physician and get all required immunizations and malaria prophylaxis
- Send in the remainder of your fundraising requirement

***Can I apply for more than one summer session?***

Yes. Applying for more than one summer session will likely increase your odds of being selected for one or both. You may indicate a preference and you are welcome to participate in more than one session. We ask volunteers who participate in more than one session to fundraise accordingly (two sessions- \$3,600, three sessions \$4,800).

***Do I need to have any qualifications and/or training to participate in any of the programs?***

Training is not required, though we ask that volunteers be aged 18 years or older when applying. GHEI volunteers vary in age, nationality, interests, and experience, but are all joined by a common passion for supporting locally-based development work in rural Africa. [Click here](#) to read about previous volunteers.

*I have learned how important it is to not only have cooperation with the community, but also to have the majority of staff actually comes directly from the community in order to ensure an organization's success.*

*-Lexi Greenwald, Read and Play 2011*

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### ***Who will I work with in Ghana?***

Volunteers will be working with foreign volunteers for the duration of their stay, but volunteers will also be working local staff members, such as Health Program Assistant Mensah Gyapong and Education Program Manager Enock (Happy) Nkrumah, to plan and implement daily activities. The local and foreign staff members will coordinate all logistics including travel, meals and project planning, but you will get to meet all members of GHEI and experience the broad collaborative nature of the way we work.

### ***Is it possible to communicate with people in English?***

Most people in the village will speak some level of English, since English is Ghana's national language. Many people are fluent in English, but all will feel more comfortable in Twi and Sefwi, the primary spoken languages in the area. If the language barrier is ever a problem, anyone else in the village will step in and help. The people here are incredibly friendly!

### ***What is an approximate timeline for each session?***

- Day 1: Arrive in Accra, Ghana
- Day 2: Travel to Humjibre. Begin to settle into village life.
- Day 3: Village tour and GHEI orientation
- Day 4-15: Plan and implement Serve and Learn project in Humjibre.
- Day 16: Travel to Kumasi to spend the day and night
- Day 17: Travel to Cape Coast, visit the Cape Coast Castle, continue on to Accra.
- Day 18: Depart Accra for home or travel.

### ***Who will help me organize a game plan prior to my arrival in Ghana?***

You will be helped by your specific session volunteer coordinator, who will also be on-site with volunteers. You will also have assistance from former volunteers and coordinators who are in charge of the application review process for 2012. These staff members communicate as frequently as possible with the team in Ghana, although this is sometimes limited by power and internet outages, to assist volunteers with any questions they have and to plan for the summer projects.

### ***What is a typical day like?***

- Wake up between 6-8am
- Shower
- Have breakfast (bread, ground nut paste (similar to peanut butter), eggs, oatmeal, pineapple when in season)
- Prepare your program plans and start outreach classes (varies depending on program)
- Eat lunch at the house (meals prepared for volunteers)
- Continue your volunteer program activities (varies depending on program)
- Hang out, relax, chat with others, write in journal, run, go to the market, read with local children at GHEI library, etc.
- Eat dinner around 6-7pm (meals prepared for volunteers)

- Group Reflections/ Evaluations

The day's events will vary. There are times when you may have half days off and you can choose what you want to do with your free time. Options include going to farm, batik making, going to church, etc. GHEI works hard to connect volunteers to local community events and culture. Take advantage of your free time and get to know the village!

***Will I enjoy every day in Ghana?***

Probably not. There will inevitably be days when you will ask yourself "Why did I do this?" Living in a rural African village will be nothing like you have ever experienced before and will present you with difficult situations. You will see poverty as you have never seen it. There may be local customs that you encounter that you strongly disagree with. However, on completion of your project you will likely look back and realize it was a positive life-changing experience.

***How much of an impact will I have on the village?***

Over several years with more than twelve long term coordinators and more than eighty short term volunteers, GHEI has had a positive impact on several aspects of people's lives in Humjibre. Each day, GHEI contributes in a small way to the health and education of many people. Each volunteer contributes to our overall mission and makes a small but distinct impact on the lives of several people in Humjibre during his or her stay. The fundraising that each volunteer participates in prior to arrival is absolutely crucial to GHEI's continued work in Humjibre.

Perhaps the greater impact is on many of our volunteers, who feel that they have had a life-changing experience; their new perspective fuels their drive to make larger contributions to GHEI, other organizations or to assist impoverished communities in general. The inspiration to start a partnership with Humjibre and form GHEI came from one person's relatively brief volunteer experience in Ghana. For many people, volunteering in the developing world changes their life and career paths dramatically.

***Does GHEI have any rules that volunteers are expected to follow?***

Yes. Volunteers represent GHEI and the Western world. If a volunteer is not respectful of the community, GHEI's efforts are severely compromised.

GHEI has a **NO GIFT POLICY** that is absolutely crucial to GHEI's success.

**Please consider our reasoning for this policy:**

If volunteers give gifts, those who work closely with GHEI will naturally receive more gifts than other people in the village. This can cause conflict among community members and volunteers. GHEI interns and staff will be left in the future to explain why only certain people are given gifts.

Gifts create an unhealthy expectation from local people. Individuals come to expect material help instead of our skills that help the entire community. If you give a gift to one person, it is virtually impossible to keep others from knowing. Other people will be offended.

**Instead, please help us help the community:**



This does not mean that you cannot help the community with materials or money. Please feel free to leave items with GHEI and we will ensure it benefits the community. The greatest gifts you can give are your skills and your commitment to helping the community long-term.

When you return home, you can ask your friends to volunteer their skills to help Humjibre. You may make material donations through GHEI. Please do not send money for school fees etc. or send any items to anyone on your own. Please believe us that it will cause more harm than good.

GHEI also has a **NO SMOKING/DRUGS** policy as these actions may lead the youth in the village to participate in these activities.

*I did not expect to feel as well-taken care of as I did, and maybe because I come from an American dog-eat-dog society, I thought everyone pretty much had to fend for him/herself here. It is a pleasant surprise to see how much everyone cooperates in this village. I could not have imagined my time in Humjibre to be any better than it was.*

*– Helen MacDonald, Read and Play 2011*

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## **FUNDRAISING INFORMATION**

### ***Why does GHEI have a fundraising requirement?***

We ask volunteers who believe in our mission to raise funds for GHEI so that we can continue our high quality programs. We spend a great deal of time both in the US and in Ghana coordinating volunteer activities. Since we have limited time for fundraising, we would prefer to focus a portion of our efforts on sharing our approach to development work with volunteers; we, in turn, ask volunteers to help with fundraising.

We are proud that we are able to coordinate programs with volunteer involvement, and we are proud of all of our volunteers for their demonstrated commitment to our mission.

### ***How much is the Fundraising Requirement?***

The fundraising requirement per person is a minimum of \$1,800 USD. Many volunteers choose to raise more than the minimum, which helps GHEI as an organization tremendously. For example, if a volunteer raises an additional \$2,400, we are able to provide an additional three scholarships for students to go to high school. Volunteers have raised as much as \$18,000 in the past.

### ***Is the fundraising requirement tax deductible? Are my travel expenses tax deductible?***



All donations are tax deductible. According to <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p526.pdf>, your travel expenses while volunteering are tax deductible “only if there is no significant element of personal pleasure, recreation, or vacation in the travel.”

***Will GHEI provide housing and meals?***

We are happy to be able to provide accommodations in Humjibre, Accra, and Kumasi as well as two meals a day, transportation, and program planning and support.

***How are the funds raised by volunteers allocated?***

Funds go to general operation costs including local staff salaries, community center maintenance, training local staff, scholarships, all health and education programming and a multitude of other basic costs that are standard when operating an NGO. Volunteer fundraising has also helped us build our community center and library in the past.

Many volunteers are able to fundraise above the minimum requirements; this enables GHEI to strengthen programs even more.

***Is there any financial support provided for the volunteer’s plane ticket or other costs of volunteering?***

No. Unfortunately, we have no external funding to provide this service.

***What has worked for other volunteers for fundraising?***

After you have accepted our offer of a position, GHEI will supply you with a fundraising guide. In the past, volunteers have held fundraisers at their schools, homes, workplaces, local bars/restaurants, etc. Many volunteers have had successful fundraisers at their local churches. Some have held larger events such as silent auctions. Many have fundraised successfully by writing to family and friends (there is a template letter in the fundraising guide).

*I would like to say thank you for the opportunity that GHEI gave me. My overall experience was amazing and I have gained from it, which is all I asked for. I appreciate everything that GHEI has done for us to make sure we were satisfied with our experience here in Humjibre. I hope to see more success out of GHEI and will try to help out as much as I can.*

*-Poranee Arthayukti, Build Ghana 2011*

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**TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

***Will I make my own flight reservations?***

Yes. Summer session volunteers should all arrive in Accra on the start date listed on the website. If you want to leave with the group and be accompanied to the airport, you should book

your departure for the end date listed on the website as well. You will be given more specific instructions after you are accepted into a program.

***Who will pick me up at the airport? Where do we go from the airport?***

One of GHEI's staff members will meet you at the airport in the arrivals area after you clear customs. The GHEI staff will take you to hotel in Accra where you will stay that evening. You and the group will leave for Humjibre early the next morning.

***Do you have any information about travel insurance?***

GHEI requires that you purchase travel and evacuation insurance that covers you during your entire stay in Ghana. Travel agents have information on travel insurance providers or you can buy it on the internet. Some providers are Atlas, Medjet, SOS (sosinternational.com), Mondiale Assistance (France), Travel Guard International, and The Student Travel Association (sta.com).

***I am interested in doing some traveling. What do you recommend?***

GHEI Serve and Learn Volunteers will be travelling to two of the most amazing points on the travelers itinerary in Ghana: the haunting Cape Coast Castle, where millions of slaves were held and shipped to the Americas during the slave trade, and to the sprawling Kejetia Market in Kumasi, by many reports the largest market in West Africa, and a dizzying amount of beautiful fabrics and so much more.

Many enjoy visiting Kakum Park near Cape Coast and the other slave castles along the coast such as in Elmina and Axim. These can be easily seen in two or three days after your stay in Humjibre and accessed by public transport. A bit further away, there are beautiful isolated beaches west of Cape Coast, various eco-tourism sites and the north offers the opportunity to see elephants and other animals (Mole Park) and a very different culture. The Bradt guide to Ghana is an excellent resource. Your GHEI coordinator and contact can help you with trip ideas if this is something you are interested in pursuing.

***What type of visa do I need?***

You will need a Tourist Visa. For information about the VISA and to obtain an application form, visit the [Ghanaian Embassy](#) in Washington DC website or [www.zvs.com](http://www.zvs.com) (private VISA company). There are a number of options for how to go about getting your visa and the sooner you look into it, the better off you are as they have different turn around times.

If you are planning on traveling to any other countries while in Africa with the intent of returning to Ghana, you should consider getting a multiple entry visa.

*My most memorable experience was the talent show. I didn't realize how attached I was to the girls until that night. It just made me feel good to see them up on stage singing about everything we were trying to teach them. And then when we all were dancing on stage that was the most, I had smiled and laughed the entire time. I felt like I was with my friends at home*

*and it just felt good to have a good time with the girls and the volunteers as well as the people in Humjibre.*

*-Omolayo Adebayo, Girls' Empowerment 2011*

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## **HOUSING IN GHANA**

### ***Will I live with community members or in separate housing?***

You will be living in the GHEI volunteer house. The house is built in the style of a Habitat for Humanity house, and consists of two large bedrooms, a smaller room serving as the hallway/dining room, and an outside patio. The house has electricity and each room is equipped with power sockets and ceiling fans.

### ***Will the house have running water and electricity?***

There is no running water in the village, however, on the GHEI compound we have a running water system. We have our own well, and a pump to fill our 500 gallon polytank that's raised several meters high so we have good pressure in our showers. We do not recommend drinking water from the tank or from the well or pump. Drinking water can be bought in small, purified 500ml bags in the village market and will be provided for you. They get recycled in the community.

The house is wired for electricity, however, there are circumstances beyond our control that effect whether or not you will have electricity during your stay. In cases where the electricity is out, there are lamps available for use. It is recommended that volunteers bring flashlights (LED headlamps are a good idea as well) with them as a precautionary measure and to use when walking at night and reading in bed.

### ***What are the washrooms like? Are there showers or toilets? Is there a kitchen?***

A separate utility block to one side of the house contains the kitchen. The kitchen contains a fridge and a propane gas stove for cooking.

The toilet and shower room is a little further down from the kitchen block and contains three flush toilets, and three showers. These kind of luxuries are pretty rare in Ghana! In fact, we have some of the best water pressure for our showers that you are likely to encounter anywhere in Ghana!

When you are in a nearby town or traveling in Ghana, be prepared for some less-than-ideal washroom set-ups. Many will be very dirty. But, each experience with one will be a fantastic story when you go home!

*I think I came to Africa with the thought that we would make this big impact and be unforgettable. My expectations were overturned when I realized how much more I was gaining from the experience of international travel and two weeks of life in sub-Saharan Africa. Working on the ground definitely changed my preconceptions on what it is like to live within the community you work in. Living with limited resources for even two weeks was a reality check. Now, my original expectations seem silly. However, these upturned ideas and my experience here have fed my new expectations of what I can do, and my intentions to keep helping.*

*-Erin Rosen, Malaria Prevention 2011*

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## **DRINKING WATER AND FOOD**

### ***Is the water safe to drink?***

Purified water will be provided for all volunteers. Local water is NOT safe to drink, although you will notice that most of the locals drink the water without treatment of any kind. In order to avoid diarrheal illness, we recommend that volunteers do not eat fruit without a peel, or vegetables unless they are peeled or cooked.

### ***Should I bring a water filter with me? Are there other options for water safety?***

Most volunteers drink the purified water that is sold all over Ghana in bag form, and this will be provided for you. Bottled water can be found in cities and occasionally in the village where you will be staying. It is generally not necessary to bring a water purifier with you to Ghana. Instead, just make sure you have enough water with you at all times and plan ahead to make sure you have enough water for the day.

### ***What will I eat when I'm in Ghana?***

Serve and learn volunteers will have two meals a day (lunch and dinner) cooked for them. Meals usually consist of Ghanaian sauces and vegetables with rice, starches (yam, plantain, etc), pasta, and beans. The meals will be vegetarian, and many will be supplemented with eggs. The diet is low in fresh fruits and vegetables, so please plan accordingly and bring any supplemental foods you require such as protein bars, or dried fruit. If you have any food allergies, please alert your team coordinator prior to departure for Ghana.

*I had actually learned a lot about development work prior to coming here, but GHEI gave me an example of what one actually looks like. GHEI has local staff and is also run locally by a person from the community. It even pays its respects to the village's chief. Many NGO's don't.*

*-Tola Emiola, Build Ghana 2011*

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## DRESS

### ***Are there cultural restrictions as to what I can wear while in Ghana?***

While in Humjibre, we strongly encourage volunteers to respect local tradition and dress conservatively. Females should wear skirts, dresses, shorts or pants that end at or below the knee. Tank tops are acceptable as long as bra straps are covered. Volunteers wear flip-flops most of the time, but we highly recommend bringing close-toed shoes that can get dirty for hiking and working at farm. The climate in Ghana is extremely humid, so clothing will often mildew. Please be aware of this and bring clothing that can get dirty. Volunteers will need to bring a few nice and conservative outfits (collared shirts for males, and bottoms past the knee, and shoulders covered for females) for church and meetings with the elders.

### ***Will I be able to do laundry while in Humjibre?***

There are no washers and dryers available, but you are welcome to do laundry the local way—using buckets. You can bring detergent with you or buy individual packets in the local markets. There are clothes lines next to the volunteer house that you can use to dry your clothing. Local staff can help show you how to best wash your clothing using buckets, it may be different than what you are use to, but it works well and is often a fun experience.

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## SAFETY

### ***What is the political situation in Ghana right now and do you think it will affect any potential trips?***

Visit [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1124.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1124.html) for more information about safety and the current political situation in Ghana. But Ghana is regularly cited as one of the most safe and friendly countries for foreigners in Africa.

Please keep in mind that you will be living out in a rural village where people are very friendly. GHEI has been in existence in Humjibre since 2001 and none of our past volunteers have experienced hostility or violence during their stays.

### ***I am a young female and very concerned about safety, especially since I have never traveled to Africa before. Will I be safe?***

When you are out in the community working on the program you have applied to, you will always be with someone from GHEI. After some time in Ghana, you might feel more comfortable and go out and about on your own. As always, use common sense when alone or with others. We cannot guarantee safety, especially outside of the village, but if you use common sense while traveling you should have no problems. Also, the people of Humjibre will step in very quickly if you are being troubled by someone, no one is a stranger here.

In fact, the majority of foreign volunteers at GHEI, and in the rest of Ghana, are women. There is good reason many guidebooks call Ghana “Africa for Beginners”. Ghana is a safe, stable country, with a culture of deep respect.

*My most memorable experiences here have been when I was being immersed in the community, so going to the Anglican church and dancing in the aisles with everyone was pretty memorable, and so was learning to play children’s games with the kids in Kojina while we waited for the interviewers to come back from the surveys.*

*-Kari Fish, Malaria Prevention 2011*

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## **MONEY**

### ***How should I take my money to Ghana?***

The closest ATM is in Kumasi, 3 hours from Humjibre. On arrival, we suggest you change \$100-\$200 cash in the airport as it is convenient and has comparable rates to ATMs (across from baggage collection). It is also possible to visit an ATM in Accra before traveling to the village, as well as get your money changed at the forex bureau in town. It is recommended that you have a VISA ATM card (Mastercard is often NOT accepted). It is also a good idea to carry with you \$200 USD in cash to use in case of an emergency. Some volunteers prefer traveler’s checks to cash or ATMs, but those can only be exchanged in Kumasi or Accra.

Keep in mind, you will spend very little money in Humjibre, but it is a good idea to have enough for spontaneous purchases and an extra few Yam Chips.

## **COMMUNICATION/CONTACTS**

### **How often will I be able to contact home via phone or email?**

The team coordinator will have a cell phone that can be used for contact in case of an emergency. You are welcome to purchase calling cards and use them on that cell phone to make calls. There is an internet café about 45 minutes away that volunteers are welcome to go to for email service, but the connection here is negligible. You will also have opportunities to use internet in the larger cities (Accra on your first and last day and Kumasi on your return to Accra).

### **Do you recommend buying a cell phone once in Ghana?**

It is up to you and depends on how long you will be staying. You can purchase cell phones in Accra for close to \$60 USD. You will then need to buy a sim card for the phone for ~\$1, and register it with your passport, you are often able to do this right where you buy the card. You do not have to sign a service agreement. You buy “Scratch Cards” which give you service. Once

your minutes are exhausted, you can buy more cards or you can just receive calls but not place any. You only use your minutes when you initiate the call. Hence, you can still receive incoming calls when your minutes run out.

If your phone is quad band and has a SIM card in it, it will work in Ghana, and you just need to buy a new SIM card.

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## **FREE TIME**

### **Will there be any free time?**

Yes, there will be a significant amount of unscheduled time. There are many things to do in the village, such as hiking, running, going to farm, and helping out with GHEI odd jobs. The amount of free time depends on the specific session and day, as the schedule varies considerably. GHEI staff is extremely busy, so you will be expected to entertain yourself much of the time.

### **What can I do with my free time?**

You can travel around to other communities nearby. Bekwai has a market day on Wednesday and there are other villages nearby with markets scheduled on other days during the week. Reading is always an option, as is chatting with other volunteers and locals. Taking walks in Humjibre is a great way to learn more about the culture, as well as practice your Twi/Sefwi. Each group will have Twi/Sefwi language classes with one of the local teachers or GHEI staff a few times during your stay when you are not working on your project.

Going for a run is always a great release. The main road passing through Humjibre is winding, however, and you will need to watch for traffic in both directions. GHEI staff can help you determine the best routes and times for you to run if you ask them.

For those that enjoy a drink now and then, there are many great “spots” located around the village. Because you are a guest in the village and representing foreigners as a whole, we ask that you drink responsibly.

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## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **Will I be able to buy some of the essentials in Humjibre or do I have to bring enough for my entire trip?**

There are a few stores in Humjibre and Bekwai (3 miles from Humjibre) where you can purchase laundry detergent and a few other basic items. If you are brand-loyal, then you will want to bring enough supplies for your entire trip. Essentials like shampoo, soap, cotton buds, feminine hygiene products, razors, shaving foam, etc are available in Accra if you forget them. Items such as insect repellent, anti-itch ointments (such as Benadryl or Calamine) and medications (such as for allergies) would be better to bring from home.

### **Should I take a sleeping bag?**

Sleeping bags are not necessary for your trip. Bedding is available at the volunteer house. At the same time, if you know you need certain types of bedding or pillows to sleep you may want to consider bringing some items.

*My time here greatly changed my understanding of development work. As a matter of fact, I learned a lot more than I was anticipating. I am convinced that my time spent in Humjibre has helped shaped the beginning of my path in life.*

*- Oluwaseun Ososami, Build Ghana 2011*

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