

Kuvaka: The Bolgatanga Library Project

Location: Bolgatanga, Ghana

Sponsoring College: Lake Forest College

Project Leader: Sadiq W. Dabire (Ghana, Lake Forest College, UWC Maastricht)

Student team member names: Trevor Marimbire (Zimbabwe, Earlham College, UWC Maastricht)

Developing the local community of Bolgatanga has been one of the main goals of Kuvaka since we founded the organization in 2018. The mission of the Bolgatanga Library Project has been to improve academic and research resources in Bolgatanga, Ghana by restocking the regional library; hence improving the learning conditions. In addition to restocking the library with learning resources such as books and furniture, we had additional goals of installing a solar system at the library to combat the interruptions caused by frequent Electricity cuts.

Firstly, we had a team that comprised the Library Director, Mr. Lesley Kasanga; Matthew Addah, a Kuvaka representative, and Trevor Marimbire, the co-founder of Kuvaka. We kept in constant communication throughout the project and every single individual worked diligently to make the project a success. Kuvaka aims to provide the younger generation with the chance to become successful changemakers in their community. This project focused on this library because we believe that it is one of the most essential resources available to the Bolgatanga community. The success of the project can be grouped under three umbrella categories namely, (i) Furniture replacement (ii) Solar system installation (iii) Book Donations.

It was observed that people increasingly refused to use the library because the conditions there were very poor and unsuitable for effective research or studies. Therefore, we worked collectively to replace the broken tables, chairs, and shelves with new and more durable ones. With the aid of Lex-one carpentry works and Rukjon's Enterprise, two carpentry businesses in Bolgatanga, we repaired some of the broken furniture in the library. A lot of the furniture was in terrible condition and uncondusive for a good studying environment. We managed to repair 10 study tables and 50 chairs. The process of the furniture replacement included meeting with the carpenters to receive an initial cost structure and plan and executing the repairs which took about 32 days in total to complete. Most of the repairs involved replacing nails poking out of the furniture, discarding worn out portions of the furniture and replacing the surfaces of the furniture with fresh plywood. This rejuvenated the study space, and we hope it will help any student who uses the space in the future. In addition to these benefits, we used local Bolgatanga carpenters to ensure that we leave a positive economic footprint not just at the library, but in the whole community.

Our second major goal for the project was to install a solar system at the library. The Bolgatanga library is subject to power cuts on a regular basis, which is not beneficial for the students in any way, shape or form. Also, due to limited funding from the government the Library Director, Mr. Lesley Kasanga is forced to pay the electricity bill from his own pocket. Thus, it was essential we installed the solar in place to keep the library running smoothly. Thus, in collaboration with Best Solar Ghana, we managed to install 8 solar panels that were able to power the library throughout the day. The panels provide electricity to every section of the library except the children's section due to problems with wiring and proximity to the site of installation. This was one of the toughest parts of the project to execute for several reasons. Firstly, we had little knowledge of the solar market in Ghana, so we had to get several quotations from local companies to find the one that matched our budget and needs. Secondly, we had to work a lot with the Library Director at this specific stage because we needed approval at every single stage of the installation. The Library Director and

Matthew Addah were very influential in ensuring that the Solar is installed safely, and with little interruptions. Just like the furniture, we used local solar companies to leave a positive economic footprint in Bolgatanga.

Our third goal for the project was to increase the current library inventory with relevant textbooks for the main library users, who are students. The initial plan was to have a combination of novels and textbooks for school use. We managed to receive a generous donation of a series of *World Book* Encyclopedias from June A. Mayor and her husband Dr. Ronald Kaplan. This gesture allowed students, with limited access to the internet, to find a physical encyclopedia for free in the library. Moreover, we purchased more books from local bookshops such as Fonky Publications and Woldin Enterprise based on a list given to us by Mr. Kasanga. These books mostly comprised novels, and most of them were in very good condition for library use. We also purchased textbooks for Nursing schools, High schools, and primary school students. The books included but were not limited to A+ Series Mathematics, Simplified Economics, Aki-Ola Integrated Science, Phipps' Medical-Surgical Nursing Textbooks among others.

Our fourth and final goal was to purchase new computers for the library, but they had received a donation of new computers prior to the commencement of the project. So, Mr. Lesley advised us to redirect the funds into purchasing solar batteries to save the energy absorbed by the solar panels. We reached out to Azesco Enterprise, an electrical installation company based in Bolgatanga to install the new batteries. With the power stored in the batteries, solar panels can be used both day and night and this allows the library to switch between the solar electricity and the regional electrical grid. The library staff have been trained by the electricians how to make these changes in case of a power outage on the regional grid. We are most proud of this initiative because of its alignment with the UWC mission of sustainability.

There were many challenges that the team faced throughout the project. The Covid-19 pandemic, and the restrictions that came as a result, was one of the problems faced. Due to the nature of our project, we had to travel and interact with individuals daily. The projected members were vaccinated, and we made sure to wear a mask in enclosed spaces. Thus, I was able to travel to and from Ghana without facing any major issues and we were happy about this. Another challenge that we faced was constantly changing exchange rates. This provided fiscal difficulties and made budgeting difficult. However, to combat this, we made sure that we would keep track of every single purchase from as small as transport costs within Bolgatanga to as large as the solar panels purchases. The team was composed of many different individuals in different locations throughout different times in the project and we made sure to keep communication with every single member of the team to allow the project to run smoothly.

I define peace as tranquility and the absence of disturbances. In a peaceful society, people are interconnected yet, they can achieve their maximum individual potentials without interfering or suppressing the potentials of others. Education is vital in the global fight to combat all forms of violence and promote peace. In this way, this project will contribute to peace by providing a resource that is essential to the education of local Bolgatanga residents. In the short term, the refurbished library will allow current high school and college students to work more efficiently with less disruptions. In the long term, we plan on using the Regional Library as a hub for community development and advancement. We anticipate that this project will increase foot traffic even more, and students will use this as a space to work. The project has changed the way we think about the world. We learnt some of the challenging aspects of community development and the barriers that stand in the way of sustainable and effective community development. Furthermore, we realized that for progress and community development, a combination of both financial and human resources is essential. The project changed us and took us out of our comfort zone. For me especially, working on the ground in my hometown and interacting with different members of the community on the project's success was a moment of personal growth for me.

