

## **Angie Cook, Cambridge Education Foundation, Mott MacDonald: The Ojekoo Kpone Saduase community partnership**

Cambridge Education Foundation, the not-for-profit arm of Cambridge Education, provides opportunities for its employees not only to talk about cultural and religious diversity, but also to experience it. We are developing a long-term mutually beneficial partnership with Kpone Saduase, a community 25 miles north-east of Accra, Ghana. This partnership began in 2007 and is providing opportunities for colleagues across the Group to become involved with the community. The culture of the Mott MacDonald Group is one of PRIDE in our achievements and a strong belief that we want to be involved in projects which are of worth to communities around the world. Many, but not all, of our employees are able to work in different locations. For those colleagues whose jobs do not take them overseas, we want to be able to offer a new experience; one, we believe, that may be life changing. Teams of younger and retired Mott MacDonald staff work together with the community in developing ideas and their implementation. In this way inter-generational relationships are created from which all parties benefit. Skill sets and wisdom are shared, which develop understanding and build social capital; a new environment such as this one provides outstanding learning opportunities and creates new networks and interactions.

We visited a number of villages in Ghana in the hope that one would like to partner us. One Chief told us that white visitors to his village had pointed out that a new toilet block or some other facility was required, but no white person had ever said to him before that they wanted his help in meeting **their** needs!

The Chief of Kpone Saduase presented Mott MacDonald with a plot of land. Mott MacDonald, with the Chief's blessing, gave the land to the community and asked them what they would like to do with it. The people discussed this at length and decided that they wanted a training school for young women who had left school without qualifications.

The partnership activities currently include:

- a) supporting the development of a seamstress training school
- b) supporting the construction of a building for the training school
- c) supporting the development of a women's group gari factory. Gari is a highly prized product made from cassava. Micro-finance has been offered to purchase cassava from the fields locally. The repayment will become a community fund that can be loaned to other entrepreneurs. The women's group is so successful with their gari production that they won the prize for the best gari in the region in 2010. This has led to an export contract, with some funding being advanced to provide improved machinery.



*The gari factory team with their winning product and the certificate for the prestigious award, 2010*

Two UK employees visited the community in October 2010 to discuss the building plans for the training school with the community. This provided practical professional development for the UK visitors, who came back saying how much they had learned about cultural differences and about contextualising designs to meet local circumstances.



*Our Ghanaian project manager, Solomon Appiah, meeting Director Richard Birch, wearing a chief's shirt, in Cambridge, 2010*

The community is offering the building as a place to stay for Mott MacDonald' families, so long as the visitors understand that the basis of the partnership is mutual learning. Mott MacDonald supports its employees in undertaking tangible projects. This is a first pilot and its outcomes will be widely shared.