



FINAL REPORT FOLLOWING CLOSURE

By former trustees of Friends of Wechiau (written by Ann Bannister, in consultation with Janet Kirk, John Flynn, Martin Upson and Lisa Porter)

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Former Friends of Wechiau Group

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Introduction

This is the final report from the Friends of Wechiau Group (FoW), which was formerly registered as a charity with the Charity Commission of England and Wales from February 2006 to June 2021. As former trustees we are proud of our achievements in partnership with the local area to provide educational support for the people of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary Community Resource Management Area (WCHS CREMA) in the Upper West Area of Ghana. Many young people faced difficulties in continuing their education without this support and their education achievements have brought further benefits for the local community.



(R.Y. Abudulai Issahaku, WCHS)

Some of the highlights of the partnership work over 16 years are documented in this final report. However, this is not the end of the educational programme. We are pleased that the Calgary Zoo Foundation (CZF), now overseen by the Wilder Institute, have taken over from FoW with the provision of educational support from September 2021. All remaining funds held by FoW before its closure were transferred to CZF to use for the purposes as defined by the FoW original charity.

History



It all started in 2002 when we worked at the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary as Earthwatch volunteers. Some of us were also supported by the UK Millennium Fund volunteer programme for over 50s. Many of the Earthwatch volunteers got together a year later and agreed they would like to continue their support to the community. We also involved a volunteer from a different group visiting Wechiau who had been sending funds separately. We were impressed the way the sanctuary was managed in Wechiau by a board of traditional leaders and chiefs and representatives from the 17 local communities, which allowed the local people to manage their natural resources, protect the hippo population, retain ownership of their land, while at the same time benefiting from ecotourism. The Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) later became recognised as a Community Natural Resource Management Area (CREMA), combining

the dual goal of biodiversity protection and poverty alleviation.¹

FoW was set up and over the next 2 years we worked in partnership with the Wechiau Sanctuary Management Board (SMB) and the other NGOs working at Wechiau, Calgary Zoo and Nature Conservation Research Centre, to develop an educational scholarship programme to support the local community. The SMB identified that education of the young people would be the most important factor to promote conservation.

The main aim of the education programme was to provide scholarships to the more able students who experienced hardship (termed '*brilliant and needy*' by the local community leaders) who would not be able to continue their education or training without support. These students agreed as part of the scholarship to contribute to their local sanctuary community on completion of their studies, by undertaking 12 months community voluntary work. This combined the need for conservation of the local area with benefiting individuals who live there. We funded the first student to go to senior high school in 2005 and gradually increased the numbers of scholarships and further educational support over the next few years.

We are indebted to Donna Sheppard, from Calgary Zoo/Wilder Institute, for supporting the set up and ongoing management of the education programme during the initial years. Donna was at the time living at Wechiau and working as the Sanctuary Advisor. We also had initial support from the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC), based in Ghana, which provided an additional external monitoring role and received and disbursed the funds we provided each year.



In 2013, when Donna left Wechiau, the WCHS took on more responsibility for the management of the education programme. The sanctuary manager, R.Y. Abudulai Issahaku, took on the pivotal role of the local administrator and has been essential to the continuance of the education programme. The picture on the left shows Donna passing on the keys of the motorbike (purchased by FoW) to Issahaku so that he could undertake the work of the education programme (visiting schools). Also in the picture is the late chief, Meteu Naa.

There were also new developments for the WCHS in the trade of organic shea butter from shea nuts collected by local women supported by the Savannah Fruits Company (SFC). We took a decision to change the organisation responsible for receiving the annual funding and monitoring its dispersal from NCRC to SFC. We thank the SFC staff for their assistance over the years.

In 2018 the Trustees of FoW discussed a succession strategy recognising, due to the age of most of the trustees, that if the charity were to continue then new trustees were needed. If none were recruited by 2021 the charity would need to be wound up. Unfortunately, no candidates came

¹ [Ten years of adaptive community-governed conservation: evaluating biodiversity protection and poverty alleviation in a West African hippopotamus reserve](#); Donna J. Sheppard, Axel Moehrensclager, Jana M. McPherson, and John J. Mason, *Environmental Conservation* 37(3):270–282 © Foundation for Environmental Conservation 2010
[Perceived Benefits and Sacrifices of a Community Resource Management Area in Ghana](#); Brianne Labute, Ashley Coulter, Llanavis Davies, Devon Clark, Cody Harman, Shannon West, Research report Department of Recreation and Tourism Management at Vancouver Island University

forward to take over the running of the charity and in 2020 the trustees decided that closure was the most appropriate option.

At the same time discussions took place with Calgary Zoo which offered to commence funding and support of the education scholarship programme in addition to their other programmes of support with the WCHS CREMA. In April 2021 all remaining funds from FoW (£5685.09) were transferred to CZF to continue the education programme.

Governance

FoW was an unincorporated membership organisation registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales from February 2006 to June 2021.

The FoW objects were:

“The advancement of education of people resident within the boundaries of the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary, Ghana, or surrounding areas by the provision of educational materials, funding of teachers and supplies and at the discretion of the trustees the provision of scholarships for individuals to extend their education and training.”

FoW initially had a Memorandum of Understanding with NCRC and the WCHS SMB, followed later by a partnership agreement with the WCHS SMB and SFC for the management, administration and monitoring of the education programme. NCRC and then SFC disbursed the FoW funds locally and provided an independent monitoring role. A local administrator of the scholarship programme had agreed terms of reference reviewed annually.

All young people within the WCHS area who were eligible (*‘brilliant but needy’*) could apply for a scholarship by completing an application form which was submitted to the Education Committee in Wechiau. Scholarship students were selected by the Education Committee in Wechiau which comprised representatives of members of the Sanctuary Management Board, SFC, schools, former scholarship students and representatives of the local community. The Education Committee also selected the schools which were to benefit from school supplies based on the funding agreed annually with FoW.

An agreement was signed in March 2021 between CZF and FoW to commit CZF to use the FoW remaining funds only for the purposes as outlined in the FoW charitable objects detailed above.

Achievements

Scholarships

The scholarship programme exceeded all our expectations in the numbers of scholarships provided, the educational achievement of the students, the employment opportunities that were opened up to the young people and the overall impact on the WCHS community.



By the end of FoW a total of 64 students received scholarships to go to Senior High School. 54 were funded directly by FoW and 10 funded by the WCHS Sanctuary Management Board Education Fund via other sponsors. Three of these students received further scholarships to go onto university. In addition, one student received a scholarship for further education. Only 1 student did not complete their senior high school education and dropped out of the scholarship programme.

The financial amounts provided for each scholarship has varied over the years due to inflation and variations in currency exchange. It started at £100 per student per year. Over time it was fixed in the local currency rather than sterling. At its highest point it was 700GHS, then reduced to 500 GHS when the Ghanaian government started contributing towards a proportion of the schooling costs in the form of the school fees. In the final year FoW awarded scholarships of 600 GHS (equivalent to £74). The tertiary scholarships started at 750 GHS and increased to 3000 GHS.





From the start FoW were committed to equality of opportunity for all young people to access the scholarship programme. To help promote equality data was gathered on the applicants' gender, religion, tribe and village. Young people were limited by the lack of primary schools in their local villages and historically young women were achieving lower grades which did not give them the qualifications to enter senior high school. This was reflected in the lack of applications from young women.

16 young women were awarded scholarships compared to 49 young men, and all four of the scholarships awarded for further education

were to men. There were improvements in the number of scholarships awarded to women from 2007 onwards, with three out of the 4 scholarships awarded in 2013 being to women, although there was a decline more recently. However, of the 16 young women that received scholarships there have been great achievements: one is now a teacher, one a nurse, and 8 are continuing their education after completion of Senior High School.

There has been a good spread of young people receiving scholarships from the different villages of the sanctuary area with 35 coming from the centre at Wechiau, and 30 from surrounding villages. Of those receiving scholarships for further education 3 were from surrounding villages and one from Wechiau. This diversity of scholarship students across the locality was also reflected in religion and tribe. Of those who provided information on their religion, 29 were Muslim, 19 Christian and one traditional. Tribal origin was 22 Brifor, 27 Waala, 1 Kawa-nayiri, 1 Dagaati, 1 Dagaaba.

The scholarship programme has proved to be extremely successful. We know of 20 scholarship students that achieved professional employment as teachers, nurses, an engineer and a businessman who is a chemist. Of these, 6 are employed directly in the sanctuary area (3 as teachers), and a further 5 are teaching in the Upper West region. Our hopes that the scholarships would lead to benefits in the local area have been realised with the young people choosing to return to their own communities after completing their education. It is still early days to see the longer-term impact as most of the previous scholarship students are continuing their education: 15 are currently in further education, with one having just completed a Master's Degree; 10 are still studying at Senior High School and 5 have just completed Senior High School possibly waiting to go onto further education. Of the scholarship students that have graduated from Senior High School 92 percent (44 out of 48) have gone onto further education or beyond.

In addition to the students' educational achievements, they have all fulfilled their scholarship commitment and contributed to the local community acting as tour guides or volunteer teachers after completing their studies.

Primary school supplies

In addition to the scholarships, FoW provided funds for primary school supplies. Each year the local education committee chose a different school to receive support. Sums between £100 and £300 were provided each year depending on resources available to FoW.



Wechiau E/A JHS receiving school supplies in 2021

As a final legacy to the education programme 2,500 GHS (£300) in supplies were awarded to the Community Senior High School at Wechiau.



Wechiau Senior High School at Wechiau receiving school supplies in November 2021

Monitoring and Evaluation



In 2009 some of the trustees (Ann Bannister, Lisa Porter and Lee Greatbatch) visited the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary. They met all the scholarship students and presented them with school bags and dictionaries. They also participated in the distribution of school supplies to a local primary school. The first scholarship student, Yussif, acted as their guide during their stay. A clear demonstration of how the scholarship students were contributing

back to their local community.

The Wechiau CREMA Executive Committee (previously known as Sanctuary Management Board) ensured openness and transparency in disbursing funds, with parents and guardians and fellow students all present when scholarships and school supplies were given out.

We have further evidence that the scholarship programme has been effective from external evaluation undertaken thanks to Dr Aggie Weighill from Vancouver Island University, Canada. Dr

Weighill visited the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary in 2018 with Recreation and Management students. One of the students, Kristina Vaudry, undertook an evaluation of the Friends of Wechiau scholarship programme using semi-structured interviews between May to July 2018. The results were extremely impressive from this evaluation. Quoting Kristina from her [blog](#) on the VIU Education Abroad website, when asked “How has the scholarship impacted you, your family, and the community?”



Student meeting in 2021 during scholarship disbursement

“Many of the respondents spoke about the hope and motivation that came from a relative being awarded the scholarship; if an older sibling had won the scholarship, their brothers and sisters would often aspire to do the same. This impact wasn’t just localised in families though, it was experienced throughout the community. Some schools in the Sanctuary have hosted returning scholarship recipients, providing motivational talks for younger students promoting the opportunities that have come from education and winning the scholarship. There were additional benefits that flowed to family groups from a young person receiving the scholarship. Families could redirect their income sources to better support the younger children. Scholarship recipients who later attended university and went on to well-paid careers could provide financial support to their families in Wechiau, and in turn subsidise the education of their younger brothers and sisters. Perhaps the most substantial benefit arising from the scholarship has been the development of a pool of professionals who return and contribute to the health and wellbeing of their community and family”.

Finance and Fundraising

Over the years we raised £32,710. Nearly all these funds have been transferred directly to the work at the WCHS CREMA and the education programme. Any administration costs have been minimal.

Most of our funding over the years came from regular donations from a small number of members backed up by sponsored walks, appeals to friends and family, car boot sales etc. In addition, a big thank you to the Quantock Deanery of Churches and the Taunton Branch of Royal Over-Seas League who both adopted FoW for 12-month periods for all their fund-raising initiatives. We also appreciate the donations from the Bristol Commonwealth Society and the Bristol Breakfast Rotary Club following talks about the work of FoW given by trustees.

What next

Whilst Friends of Wechiau may have ended its days it is still possible for people to donate to support the continuing educational scholarships that are now managed by the CZF/Wilder Institute. Click this [link](#) which takes you to the webpage at the Wilder Institute for the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary and scroll to the donate button at the bottom of the webpage (NOT at the top right). It should show the donation goes to Wechiau and you can write in a private message to say it is for the education scholarships. Ann Bannister (the former chairperson of Friends of Wechiau) can keep you updated on progress upon request, as she will receive annual reports from the CZF on how the remaining funds from FoW are being used.

Tributes

John Baryiri Minle

One of the early scholarship students John Baryiri Minle told us about the impact of the support Friends of Wechiau had on his life

"I am highly honoured to have been a sponsored student. I must say that I had the most support from this family. I was given the scholarship from Senior High school (2006-2009) and was extended to tertiary education from 2011-2015. The encouragement alone I had from all of you made me to study hard and now am teaching in St. Francis of Assisi Girls Senior High school, Jirapa. One of the best schools in the Upper West. As a teacher, I sometimes use my personal life experiences to encourage my students to put forward their best in all endeavours. Most of my students too have taken me as a role model due to the kind of advice I give to them.

Friends of Wechiau group made who I am today. It is really heart breaking to hear you are going. I know there are numerous students in the zone who still need this support. I am still trying to make it bigger and better to be able to help the young ones to also see the light of the world. God bless you all, guide and protect you from all calamities of life. Love you all."

Hasehni Vampere (Hassan)



Hasehni Vampere
(known as Hassan)
graduating with a
Masters Degree

One of the highest achieving students to date is Hasehni Vampere (known as Hassan) who initially received a 3-year Senior High School Scholarship from Friends of Wechiau, followed by a one-year scholarship towards his university study. Hassan obtained a first-class honours B.Sc in Disability and Rehabilitation Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, continuing his study of disability at the same university to obtain a Master's Degree. Hassan is now employed as an Assistant Lecturer at the Center for Disability and Rehabilitation Studies at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and will be able to continue his study to obtain a Ph.D. Hassan was supported financially by the Business Council for Africa to enable him to study for his Master's degree. Hassan is now *"trying to draw the attention of the power-holders and the world to the challenges of the most vulnerable (especially children with disabilities) through his research"*. His independently conducted research

focused on the Wa West district (Wechiau). First on the education of children with disabilities and second on the healthcare of children with disabilities (specifically, can children with impairments be identified early enough by nurses and midwives for early medical intervention). Hassan is hoping that the findings from the second study, which are yet to be published, can be used as the basis to implement intervention programs or conduct further studies. Hassan also says *"I support the younger ones by way of teaching when I visit home. But it is rare as I spend most of my life in Kumasi for school. I also supported the Wa school for the Deaf with veronica buckets with tabs for hand hygiene through funding from the Business Council for Africa. I helped the school developed a proposal for funding to fix their lighting challenge but unfortunately we did not get the support"*. Hassan undertook his duty to the WCHS as a tour guide which helped in raising funds that benefitted the communities by way of borehole drilling and provision of school materials to the kids.

"If I am a tree, now fully grown and ready to bear fruits for mankind, then the water, heat, and light that nurtured my growth is the Friends of Wechiau (FoW) group." Hassan Vampere 2021.

R.Y. Abudulai Issahaku

Issahaku, the sanctuary manager had this to say about FoW

"I am thankful and much grateful for all the wonderful support you and the FOW Trustees have given to the youth at the Sanctuary area. You will continue to be in our minds forever."

Donna Sheppard

"Through the Calgary Zoo / NCRC partnership, I was the Sanctuary Advisor at WCHS from 2004 through to the end of 2014. During that time, I got to know this small but extremely dedicated group called the Friends of Wechiau. These energetic people fundraised for educational scholarships, school supplies, and other education programmes throughout my tenure in Northern Ghana and well beyond it, making a difference in the lives of so many rural youth. FOW stayed

with their efforts for such a long time, that they really understood how to maximize their contribution from afar. Their friendly faces, flexible agendas, humble collaboration, and sincere approach made it such a joy for myself and for RY Abudulai Issahaku, the Wechiau Manager, to work with them on behalf of Ghana's rural sons and daughters. More than that, the positive impact of the FOW has been amplified, with the model being replicated in other conservation sites across Ghana. They will be dearly missed, but their legacy lives on in the next generation!"

The Rt Hon the Lord Boateng of Akyem and Wembley formerly Chief Secretary of Her Majesty's Treasury and High Commissioner to South Africa

Lord Boateng said this about FoW before the decision to close.

"Small locally based charities with a focus on community support have a continuing and important role to play in delivering Sustainable Development Goals. Significantly they also build global solidarity from the grass roots. Governments come and go but peoples and their relationships remain. Friends of Wechiau is a small charity that punches above its weight with a welcome focus on outcomes and impact. The needs it meets are real and ongoing and its work deserves to flourish."

Acknowledgements

Thank you to R.Y. Abululai Issahaku (Wechiau CREMA) and Donna Sheppard (Calgary Zoo, Wilder Institute) for many of the photographs in this report and over the years. Thank you to the scholarship students for your hard work and dedication to your studies and personal development. Thank you WCHS CREMA for working in partnership with FOW to facilitate the educational scholarships.

In the words of former Divisional chief and educator Meteu-Naa, Bandana Chielinah:

"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go

Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later.

One head does not contain all the wisdom"