



Kopeyia Bloomfield L.A. Basic Schools

Kopeyia Bloomfield L.A. Basic Schools are the brainchild of composer and musician Robert Levin, who visited the village of **Kopeyia** in 1988 to study with drumming master **Godwin Agbeli**, an elder of the village. In the course of raising and administering some \$300,000 in **contributions** from individual Americans and a small handful of businesses and corporations, an attractively designed and well-furnished school compound has been gradually and painstakingly assembled by local artisans with the support and organization of the fund. The school, where some 750 students are enrolled, offers a standard Ghanaian curriculum taught by 28 government accredited Ghanaian teachers.

Since 1991 Cathy Levin has visited the village of Kopeyia four times to document the progress of the school and its effect on the village of Kopeyia. Volunteers will be part of the many daily routines which have been enlivened by the school, as well as the traditional social and cultural activities which are an integral part of life in the village of Kopeyia, a farming community of approximately 2,000 inhabitants.



The Kopeyia Ghana School Fund

The Kopeyia Ghana School Fund is helping to educate a generation of children in the rural farming village of Kopeyia, where there is no electricity or running water. Prior to the project, villagers had no access to the outside world, spoke no English - the official language of Ghana - and were illiterate.

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Then in 1988, The Fund began a grass-roots effort to build a school to bring development to the village.

Now, eight years later, children eagerly learn all subjects in K-9th grade classes taught by government accredited Ghanaian teachers in a beautiful model school built by The Fund; they read in a library fully stocked by books donated by Americans; they take special classes and are tutored by visiting American teachers; and volunteers like you. Students also proudly participate in the school marching band and sports teams.

The students also actively share the richness of their culture and learn about ours through pen-pal writing, cultural and educational exchanges with a series of sister schools in America.

The children's dream and The Fund's mission, is to continue their education through college and then return to Kopeyia with the skills necessary to maintain the school and foster development in their community.

Today , 28 Kopeyia students have completed their first year of senior secondary and are ready to proceed to the next grade. More students are ready to graduate from the Kopeyia school and are starting to apply to senior secondary schools, which are private in Ghana.

The Kopeyia Ghana School Fund has brought hope to this remote African village, that through education, Kopeyians will be able to break the vicious cycle of third-world poverty. Volunteer with us to provide the nourishment to see them through.

Background to Kopeyia

Kopeyia, a small village of approximately one thousand inhabitants in the extreme southeastern part of the lower Volta region of Ghana, West Africa, and less than seven kilometers from the Ghana-Togo border. The language and people of the region are known as *Ewé*, although there are many regional variations in custom and dialect. The village is largely a traditional agrarian society, maize and cassava being the staple crops with a variety of vegetables also grown independently in commercial garden plots, set in a paleo-fluvial geomorphology; archaic lake remnants of the Volta river's shifted deltic plume system.

The area is one of many in rural Ghana suffering from continuing currency inflation and economic downturn. Locally grown crops are sold at local markets after transport by local growers, usually women who, when they can afford to do so, take their loads on *trotros*, although headloading is a very common means of such goods conveyance

Produce is usually conveyed with a metal head pan or basket resting on a cloth cushion on the top of the skull. Both physical and cultural problems have long been associated with this:

This is a form of goods conveyance almost exclusively the domain of women. The low level of agricultural surplus reflects the correspondingly low average wage rate in this largely subsistence economy. The relatively high level of coastal population density and diffused pattern of economic activity (usually with low returns) in Kopeyia is characteristic of much of Sub-Saharan Africa (I.T Transport Ltd. 1996:17; Agarwal *et al* 1994:14).

There is some light industry in the form of motor repair, metal fabrication and welding and carpentry in the nearest center, the conurbated border town of Aflao-Denu (pop. 90 000). However the area's rural population could be described as a largely pre-industrial, agrarian one with limited amounts of technological and industrial development when compared to industrialized OECD countries.

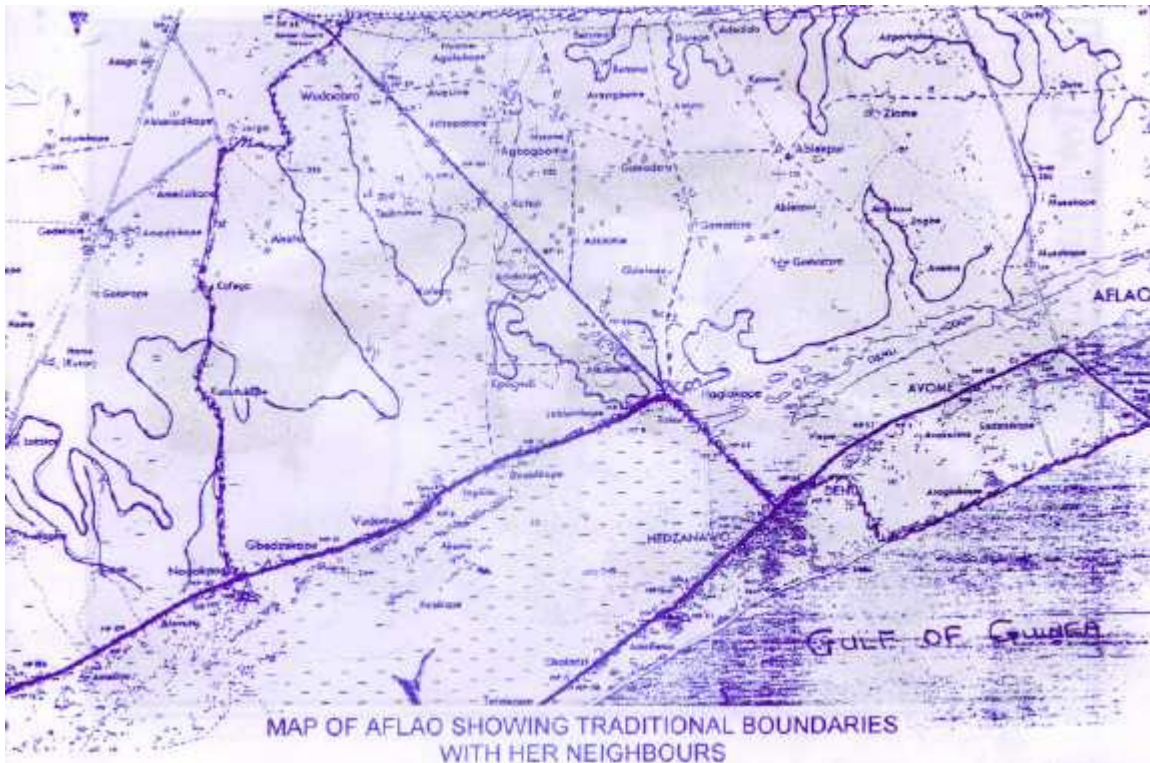


Figure 1.3: In the extreme Southeast section of Ghana, Aflao (far right), is the largest population center with greater than 50,000 people nearest to Kopeyia. Aflao is conurbated across the border into Lomé, the capital city of Togo, only four kilometers to the east.

Testimonial Statements

"The school is clearly a labor of love for them, for you, and most impressively for the community."

Robert H. Arbuckle
 Cultural Affairs Officer
 U.S. Embassy
 Accra, Ghana

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January 29, 2003

Dear Mr. Levin,

First of all, thank you for your generosity by visiting us, the Seventh Grade Community. We learned so much more about the value of African music in the Ewe tribe. We clap for you! And we truly appreciate the teaching you brought to the classes as well as to the Kopeyia village. Without your help, students wouldn't even have a chance for the opportunity of an education.

Yesterday, everyone watched the video taped during 1988-1994 and observed the improvement in the newly built school over time. All because of your efforts and the villagers' hard work, we are now more eager than ever as a 7th grade, to push ourselves in raising materials to benefit Kopeyia. Thank you again for everything, and wish you good luck on your future excursions to Ghana and with hopes for success in this program.

Sincerely,

The Dwight-Englewood Seventh Grade, Class of 2008

Erica Zendell, Class Senator

PS - Thanks, Robert, the students really enjoyed your visit!

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April 17, 2000

Dear Robert:

Just a quick note on a hectic afternoon to let you know that U.S. Consul Michael Schimmel and I spent the day on Friday out at Kopeyia, seeing both the Kopeyia-Bloomfield school and the Dagbe center, and meeting as well with the District Chief Executive and the area's Paramount Chief. It was an impressive visit.

Anthony Douglass (KGSF emissary volunteer) stopped in this morning, unfortunately while I was out of the office; it was really a pleasure to meet both him and Avram (KGSF emissary volunteer) out at the school. The school is clearly a labor of love for them, for you, and most impressively for the community.

Robert H. Arbuckle
Cultural Affairs Officer
U.S. Embassy
Accra, Ghana

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April 11, 2000

I was the one who introduced Robert Levin to Godwin Agbeli; the Kopeyia-Bloomfield School grew from the relationship between Levin and Agbeli...

In my view, the villagers of Kopeyia exemplify grassroots, bootstrap development. With encouragement from Americans, persons in this village have created a cultural tourism infrastructure (Dagbe Center) and an admirable public school.

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David Locke, Chairman of the Department of Music,
Tufts University
Faculty Advisor to the Tufts-in-Ghana Program

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April 5, 2000

During my service as United States Ambassador to Ghana from 1989 to 1992, my wife and I had occasion to visit Kopeyia at the invitation of Robert Levin. During a 1991 visit, I laid the cornerstone for one of the school buildings. We were greatly impressed with the spirit of Kopeyia village and the commitment of both the adults and children to what was then a quite new school.

We were especially struck by the success of Mr. Levin and others at a grassroots, non-governmental level of linking the Kopeyia school to American school children, adults, and organizations especially in the New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut area. Since our departure from Ghana almost eight years ago, the school has continued to prosper with strong support from the Kopeyia Ghana School Fund in the United States and from the village of Kopeyia.

Raymond C. Ewing
former United States Ambassador to Ghana

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April 6, 2000

My name is Steven Finkelstein and I am a teacher at the Wheatley School, a high school consistently rated as one of the top high schools in the country.

Presently our students, staff, administration, Board of Education, and Parent Teacher Association are involved in a project with the Kopeyia Ghana School Fund in which 200 old bicycles collected from the community will be shipped to Kopeyia with the help of K-Mart and the collaboration of Newsday, the region's most widely distributed newspaper. In conjunction with the Institute for Transportation Development Policy's "Afri-Bike" program (funded in part by the World Bank), I will volunteer for two weeks this July and go to Kopeyia with other volunteers to deliver the bicycles and to assist in a highly organized training session which will be attended by many, including recent graduates of the Kopeyia School.

The goal of my trip will be to train these individuals in running a bicycle repair business in Kopeyia. Bicycles represent an environmentally and economically appropriate form of transportation technology for our friends in Kopeyia, most of whom will never have the luxury of owning an automobile. Bicycles can be used to get to and from school, as a means for mothers to get to the market or collect fuel wood, for health workers to be more effective, and so on. In addition, peripheral businesses, ranging from the weaving of bicycle baskets to the construction of heavy duty human powered

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work vehicles and machines, can ultimately be developed and will be encouraged through the middle school's vocational education program. This project promises Kopeyia increased mobility and growth. Only in a place like Kopeyia is there a chance of success for such a program in Ghana. This is because of the momentum and motivation created by the Kopeyia School. Clearly this is no ordinary school.

Yours in education,
Steven Finkelstein
The Wheatley School
Old Westbury, NY

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April 6, 2000

As someone who has contributed financial support for the Kopeyia Ghana School Fund, I am honored to see these students do so well and be offered the opportunity for further improvement at a U.S. university.

Edgar Romney Secretary Treasurer of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE!) and Manager-Secretary of Local 23-25, the largest affiliate of UNITE

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April 10, 2000

Kofie Agbeli has gained a rare opportunity against enormous odds by his own incredible diligence and hard work as a student. The program that provided his education to this point has been supported by grassroots efforts in his community and in the U.S. for over a decade. As a development professional who has worked in the field for almost two decades, I know the ability for a student to return and provide that rare commodity of leadership in a rural area is one of the most important success stories we have.

Dr. Seth Berkley, President
The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

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3 Apr 2000

I have supported the Kopeyia Ghana School Fund precisely because of its unerring commitment to Kopeyia itself. They are not in the business of helping people escape the poverty of Ghana, they are in the business of helping Ghanaians help other Ghanaians.

Doug Berman
Producer of National Public Radio's "Car Talk"

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04 Apr 2000

Hi Bob,

Thank you so much for your message and the care you have demonstrated towards the school and its people. You are really a wonderful man, a man who understands what love really means. The people of Ghana will ever be grateful to you.



Charles Baah, of the Ghana Foreign Ministry
Former Consul General of the Ghana Mission to the United Nations
New York, NY

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While I have never visited the Kopeyia school, I do know about it's excellent reputation by fame. I lived in that area of Ghana and taught at a nearby school, St. Paul's, just before the Kopeyia school was inaugurated. From the contacts with people which I have maintained over the years I hear nothing but good things about Kopeyia.

The success it has had with its graduation rates is truly remarkable. I know that it could not have achieved this success without very strong local support. The truth is that the opportunity to create successful businesses that will employ the local population and compensate these employees very well is there, and I believe the Kopeyia school is on the right track towards making this a reality.

Jonathan Nash
African Crafts Online

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I have been actively following the extraordinary development of the KOPEYIA SCHOOL project. This project truly represents the best way in which people in third world settings can be helped to help themselves, through education and the inculcation of high standards of thought and behavior. As a program director at a major American medical center, I have also been impressed with the way in which public health issues can effectively be addressed in the setting that has been created in Kopeyia (which is now a model for the local region, country, and other third world environments).

This success could not have been achieved without the tireless and selfless work and expertise of Robert Levin, President of the Kopeyia Ghana School Fund.

David A. Silbersweig, M.D.
Director, Neuropsychiatry Program, and Functional Neuroimaging Research Laboratory
Cornell University Medical College
New York Hospital, New York, NY

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Robert:

Congratulations! Your tenacity and perseverance have been rewarded with success. We look forward to hosting your students at UNI and applaud you for your devotion to them. Thank you for your attention.

Tim O'Connor
International Program, Assistant Vice President
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, IA



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