

Accra 2003

By Etienne Von Bertrab



Strategic Intervention in Accra

In Accra, one of the fastest-growing cities in West Africa, DAP, ESD, UDP and UED students, accompanied by Michael Mattingly and Julio Dávila, set out to elaborate a diagnosis and propose a set of strategic interventions aimed at improving the living conditions and livelihoods of two communities:

- 1) James Town in the now called Old Accra. This community -once formed by the original settlers, 'the Ga'- was at the heart of the city and had a relatively prosperous economy (predominantly fishing-based), but was importantly affected by the transfer in the 1960s of the harbour activities to another location, and is nowadays confronted by general poverty, high population density, deteriorated housing, and poor urban and social services; and
- 2) The indigenous village of Gbawe located in the area experiencing the most rapid land-use change in Greater Accra -which is creating a shortage of land for farming services- and, as a peri-urban area faces both positive and negative impacts of the urban sprawl.

Most of the time was dedicated to meetings with local authorities (Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the Ga District Assembly), representatives of central government, NGOs, academics and researchers from local and international organisations. These sessions helped us to achieve a more comprehensive understanding, and in many instances the different viewpoints resulted in interesting discussions.

The group's interest and motivation didn't end in the formal visits to the communities: a number of initiatives were set up. We gathered precious information from informal conversations with men and women of the communities. Not only did we visit an almost-vanishing ancient fishing community, but we also participated in the chieftaincy meetings, where traditional chiefs discuss their collective affairs. All this wouldn't have been possible without the valuable support of George Opata, Emanuel Lashon-Cudsiw and the ex-DPU students Farida Shaikh and Veronica Ayi-Bonte , and without the warmth and openness of the James Town and Gbawe's communities.

We had the opportunity to present our findings and recommendations to representatives of local government and other institutions, and a set of recommendations are contained in our report. We had the marvellous opportunity to look at these places as development planners with an enriched view built at the DPU, to make relevant connections of interlinked issues affecting many countries (such as the impact of SAPs at the local level and the focus on macro-economic policies). We hope that this

experience and the work accomplished during our field work will develop DPU's involvement and connections with vibrant Ghana even further.