

Yvonne Choi, FCM Internship at Asante Akim North District Assembly, Ghana



Photographs from different communities in Asante Akim North District (clockwise from top left): Town of Agogo; Market Day in Konongo; Drying of cocoa; Children in Wioso.

In mid-September 2005, I arrived in Ghana to begin a six-month FCM internship with the Development Planning Office of the Asante Akim North District Assembly, a local government authority in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. After an orientation at the FCM office in Ottawa, I had come to Ghana with a clear idea of what I would be doing over the next six months. Following the work of last year's FCM intern at Asante Akim North, my role was to further work on the framework of the district's medium-term development plan and then begin writing a draft of the development plan. However, shortly after my arrival here, it became apparent that there was an absence of reliable, current data required to write the plan. The District is made up of over 100 communities, with incomplete and inconsistent information on them. As a result, the focus of my internship became a district-wide data collection program. The data collection would not only address the lack of data for the development plan, but also broaden the District's capacity to plan and implement programmes and projects. The data collected would furthermore aid in widening the revenue base and ensure efficiency in revenue collection required for sustained development.

My responsibilities included developing household, community, market and traffic questionnaires; training data collectors in the questionnaires and data collection

techniques; co-ordinating logistics of data collection fieldwork, including field supervision at the first few communities; designing an electronic database in MS Access; training staff on MS Access; identifying how the data can be used and analyzed for the new district development plan; and writing a report to document activities undertaken to date on the data collection project and provide framework for further data collection and future analysis.



Training session for data collection agents, January 2006

During my six months with Asante Akim North, the project experienced a number of setbacks and delays due to political, financial, and administrative reasons. However, in the end, we were able to begin implementing a program, which will should serve the District in a number of ways: The District now has a database that will assist it in all future planning activities/programs. Staff at the district also have the capacity to continue with the data collection project and update/maintain the database. More specifically, the data from the data collection project will be used by the District Planning Team in formulating policies, making projections/ prioritizations, and setting out an implementation plan for the District.

As someone who has just started a career in planning, the internship program has allowed me to see how much development and planning are subject to the political environment, as well as public scrutiny. It is important to engage the public in all aspects of planning, and to ensure that the political support is there for the work being undertaken. Given Canada's multicultural environment, the ability to work among different cultures and with a diverse public is an important aspect to professional planning.

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