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Ghana, 2003

## Everyday Life of a Poor Person in my Congregation (Ghana)

*source (printed German version): Interkulturelle Seelsorge und Beratung No 11, 2003; pp 40-42*

### *Introduction*

The following is an account of an individual person in my congregation at La, a suburb of Accra, regarding her economic situation. This factual account is true, however, for confidentiality, names are changed in the presentation. The background of the lady is given; migration to Accra to join the uncle is told; vocational training, employment, marriage and family life are shared here, church life and economic struggles are presented. Some Pastoral concerns are raised from her story and finally some Ghanaian and traditional practices are noted.

### *Background*

Dufie, aged 45 years, is an Ashanti. Her Village is about 300km from Accra and 30km from Kumasi the principal city of Ashanti. Dufie comes from a Polygamous family. Both parents are dead now but at a period the father lived with two wives at the same time together, he had 13 children. Dufie's mother had 4 children and she is the first child. The average educational level for all the children was the Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC). Both parents were Cocoa Farmers and the MSLC was the limit the father could give to his children. Therefore after Dufie's completion of the BECE the mother requested her brother who worked as a cook in a firm at Accra to help her. In 1972 Dufie joined the uncle in Accra.

### *Dufie with uncle*

Dufie joined the uncle when she was 16 years old. At that time the uncle had a wife and four children. The oldest child was 10 years and the youngest 3 years. In addition to his work as a cook the uncle had a Provision store. Before Dufie came the wife handled the store. She also sold other food items in front of the store. Dufie started a vocational training school in typing and secretarial duties in her first year in Accra. In addition she helped in the store and almost daily, early in the morning, go to the general market to buy foodstuff for the uncle's wife to sell. The uncle had a two-roomed living accommodation. Dufie therefore slept in the windowless wooden provision store. This arrangement served at least two pur-

poses: security for the items in the store and accommodation for her. The uncle and wife however had two major concerns with Dufie: Supposed pilfering and supposed interest in men. He would “patrol” around the wooden structure to check if any young men would go into the store at night. The arrangement to stay with Dufie was that Dufie’s mother could take care of the vocational training, and other related needs like clothing and monthly pocket money. Regular money was monthly sent to the uncle for her. Often misunderstanding will result regarding the money sent. Mistrust also existed between her and the uncle’s wife.

### *The first work*

The vocational training took three years. She got her first job, which she is still with it, with one of the Ministries. She was employed as a typist. Conventionally in Ghana, one’s first salary is given to the guardian or parents. It is a sign of respect and gratefulness. The money is usually given back to the young person. In the case of Dufie she feared that the uncle would not give the money back to her. She refused to present it to him. That was the beginning and end of their relationship. It brought a huge confrontation. In the heat of verbal exchanges the uncle slapped Dufie. She reasoned that she could handle her life and started to act independently. The uncle and wife were highly uncomfortable with this “grown” woman and therefore demanded that she found her own living accommodation. The intervention of the mother and others could not restore the relationship. She got a room nearby and almost immediately met the preset husband. They started living together without going through the normal marriage ritual.

### *Family life*

In 1981 they had their first child, Kwame. The husband worked with a Distillery but lost the job in 1982. After a year without work the husband left Accra for Kumasi in search of employment. The case of infant Kwame became a bit difficult for her. She therefore took the child to the mother at the village. She sent regular support to the mother for the upkeep of Kwame. Unfortunately after a year with the grandmother Dufie had to go back for Kwame after a heavy fall from a high table. He was hospitalised for some weeks but no serious damage was detected then.

After almost 2 years fruitless search for work in Kumasi the husband, after some persuasion joined the wife in Accra. For almost a year Dufie worked to support the family. Yaw, the second child came a year after the husband came back.

### *The husband*

Mr. Aboagye is 51 years old and he is currently working as a security personnel of a company. He has been with this company for about 15 years. His present salary is 290,000 (a little over US\$ 40.00). He contributes 100,000 (US\$ 15) a month to support the family. He is reserved and leaves the running of the home to Dufie. She takes major decisions about the children and the family welfare. He is not interested in religion. He reasons that the work does not give him the freedom to worship since he works 7 days a week and seldom gets a leave. Much of his money goes into alcohol. He contributes virtually nothing to the children’s educa-

tion.

### *The children*

*Kwame* is 19 years old and he is in the second year at the Senior Secondary School. The fall at age two seems to have affected him a bit. He has frequent headache. He visits the doctor often. Though he is in a boarding institution he comes home to see the doctor at least 2 times during each term. He is a bit slow in learning and has a poor reading comprehension. He is however a keen football fan.

*Yaw* has just finished the Junior Secondary School (JSS) and he is 4 years younger than *Kwame*. He is the very opposite of *Kwame*. He is very outgoing and hardly stays at home. The mother sees him to be very stubborn boy. His Sunday school teachers confirm that assertion. About two months ago he contracted typhoid fever and a lot of money was spent on the cure.

### *Living arrangement*

*Dufie*, the husband and two children live in a one-room accommodation in a compound house with other six families. They share the following with the other families; bathroom, piped water on compound and pit toilet on compound. They have all their property in that single room. They cook in front of the room.

### *Dufie's religious involvement*

She got interested in Christianity in 1981 and joined the Methodist Church at La. She had a conversion experience in 1982 and got confirmed. Currently she's a lay reader, a Singing Band member and also a member of the Women's Fellowship. She helps at the vestry every Sunday to count the collection money and also serve refreshments to visiting preachers. She confesses that her trust in the Lord has greatly sustained her.

### *Dufie's surviving strategies*

*Dufie's* current salary is 350,000 (about US\$ 50). She usually uses the whole amount to buy provisions to sell. They feed on the profit. The husband and children often help in the selling. They close sales by mid-night everyday. The monthly rent is 35,000 and they spend 40,000 on utilities. The JSS fees per term is about 300,000 but she spends about 700,000 on him each term (medical bills, visits, pocket money and others). The JSS boy spends about 3,000 a day on lunch and transportation. Her lunch and transport amount to 80,000. Average expenditure on other things like funeral donations, tithe, gifts, clothes and others is about 80,000 a month. The total monthly expenditure is about 510,000 (US\$ 73). She does some borrowing to keep the head up. Currently she is owing a total of over 750,000 (a little over hundred dollars)

### *Some memories*

She feels that if she had got an earlier better education it could have helped in her present condition. She has been very grateful to the mother but feels some bitterness towards the uncle and the wife. Her marriage and family life have not been what she anticipated but she believes that things could be better. She hopes that the husband will turn to God. Her prayer is that the children turn out to be useful in the future. She prays that they could study outside Ghana. Her major concern is to care for the children. She wished that she could have enough capital to expand her trading and pay off the debt. The husband often dreams about farming and she prays that they get enough money to settle in the village to raise animals (sheep, goats) and other crops.

### *Areas of pastoral concern*

- The need for the husband's involvement in the daily life of the family and some of his moral issues
- The eldest son's health situation and the need to be more assertive
- The need for self-discipline for the younger child
- How to service her debt and how to improve herself at work
- The uncle is dead – but the wife is alive. How does she deal with the bitterness?