

School Partnerships between Ghana and Slovenia



A case study report on the Slovenian experiences in the North-South Connection Project





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www.globaleskolepartnerskaber.dk

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Project Introduction

One of the main challenges of our current educational systems is to create a common feeling of interconnectedness and shared responsibility for the world and for its inhabitants. Even when teachers are ready to integrate global issues in their teaching, they often lack the knowledge, skills or tools to motivate their students by demonstrating the immediate relevance of these issues to them.

This is the reasoning behind the project North-South Connection: Partnership for a more just world between European and African schools which has been running for the past 2 years with the support of the European Union. The main beneficiary of the project is a network of 16 European schools from Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovenia. Each of these schools is linked to an African counterpart, allowing direct collaboration with peers in the global South.

The main aim of the project has been to improve the sensitivity and critical understanding of global problems among European high school students and promote their active engagement in addressing these issues with a specific focus on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as to integrate global issues into the formal education system by developing global school partnerships between European and African schools.

In Slovenia the schools have been collaborating with Ghanaian schools from the Accra area. All partnerships have been established with the help from the Ghanaian based NGO Embracing Hidden Talents Network, which has followed the project throughout the project period.

The participating Slovenian schools are as follows:

- ✿ Ngleshie Amanfro Senior High School, Accra
- ✿ Odorgonno Senior High School, Accra
- ✿ Christian Methodist Senior High School, Accra
- ✿ Saint Thomas Aquinas Senior High School, Accra

The participating Ghanaian schools are as follows:

- ✿ Šolski center Ravne, Srednja šola, Ravne na Koroškem: www.srednjasolaravne.si/
- ✿ Ekonomska šola Celje, Celje: <http://www.escelje.si>
- ✿ Šolski center za pošto, ekonomijo in telekomunikacije, Ljubljana: www.scpet.net/
- ✿ Srednja šola za gostinstvo in turizem Maribor, Maribor: www.ssgt-mb.si/

During the project period, the partnership program has involved more than 110 Slovenian students and 100 Ghanaian students who have had the chance to exchange thoughts and ideas through classroom activities.

In this report we have gathered the experiences of the students and teachers involved in the school partnership program.



Project activities

During the project period, a variety of activities have been carried out. This report will focus mainly on the lessons learned from the activities concerning the partnership between the Ghanaian and Slovenian schools.

Establishing of school partnerships

In Slovenia, the four participating schools were selected from the network of Global School Partnerships. They were initially shortly briefed on the framework, aims and activities of the project and later at a teacher workshop introduced more in depth to the project and the methodology of developing joint teaching projects and school partnerships.

The Ghanaian schools were selected and introduced to the project by Embracing Hidden Talents Network and once key teachers had been appointed at both the Slovenian and the Ghanaian schools, they were matched and started communicating with their partner in order to initiate the planning of the joint projects and the Slovenian teachers' visits to Ghana.

Some key factors to establishing good partnerships:

- ✿ Early contacts amongst teachers
- ✿ Teacher motivation and support from school management
- ✿ Local coordinators: The Ghanaian NGO played an important role in connecting the schools
- ✿ Thorough introduction to the project and the method
- ✿ Communication – internet access and ability to use thereof

Joint curricular projects

When planning the joint teaching projects the teachers were encouraged to follow a four step model:

1. LEARN: Students receive theoretical inputs from their teachers
2. RESEARCH: Students explore how global issues are reflected in their personal lives and local context
3. SHARE: They exchange their findings with the students in their partner school
4. ACT: They implement an action based on their own idea and initiative

Among the joint projects developed between the Ghanaian and Slovenian schools were the following:

Ghana and West Africa & Slovenia, importance of education value, habits, personal behaviours

Ngleshie Amanfro and Šolski center Ravne

Focus: Making it possible for the students to understand the importance of education. The students from both schools independently read different documents about two countries from wikipedia, google, encyclopedia texts. They researched on pollution; water supply and quality of air and recycling of waste and published findings in school bulletins

Health and environmental sustainability: a view from two sides

Saint Thomas Aquinas and Srednja šola za gostinstvo in turizem



Focus: students linked up via email and facebook and researched on health and environmental issues affected the partner country. The students showed an interest in other topics as well and ended up also discussing and exchanging views on educational systems on both countries.

Partnership for Development via Social media

Christian Methodist and Ekonomska Šola Celje

Focus: Partnership for Development via Social media - The schools deemed that a key element if we are to bridge the socio economic gap between different countries is to bridge the technology gap. They set to focus on enhancing their skills in the use of social media (facebook and skype) and successfully employed them to exchange information on topics they covered: economy, geography and cultures of the partner countries

Poverty and the environment

Odorgonno and Šolski center PET

Focus: what is the link between poverty and environmental degradation? Students used school books, wikipedia and information from peers to try and understand how the threats to Ghana's environment contribute to the creation of poverty. They came to the conclusion that poverty was not a monopoly of African countries. Students found out that the key problems facing the environment in Ghana were the loss of biodiversity through the wood carving industry, illegal logging, destruction of natural habitats,

Visit to Ghana

Four Slovenian teachers and 2 members of the project team visited Ghana for one week in order to plan the joint projects face-to-face, to gather first-hand experience of the formal education system in Ghana and knowledge on how MDG issues are reflected in a local African context.

These visits proved to be of utmost importance as the joint projects were planned during this visit. For some of the Slovenian teachers it was their first time in the African continent and many of them describe it as an eye-opener as well as a once in a lifetime experience.

Some of the Slovenian teachers had the opportunity to guest teach a group of Ghanaian students as well as doing Q&A sessions with the students. The teachers found this part very useful and would recommend this for future partnerships.

Advice from the Slovenian teachers:

- ✿ Remember to have a plan for the visit
- ✿ Arrange Q&A sessions with students
- ✿ Arrange co-/guest teaching
- ✿ Reserve time (at least one full day) to make teaching plans and future arrangements
- ✿ If possible, travel with another teacher
- ✿ Make sure you come at a time where it fits in the plans of the hosting school

Visits to Slovenia



After having finalized the joint teaching projects, five Ghanaian teachers and the Ghanaian national coordinator visited their Slovenian partner schools for one week. The visit was an occasion to evaluate the collaboration so far, to get an impression of the Slovenian educational system and to meet with the Slovenian students. For the teachers involved, meeting again with their partner teacher was also seen as an important opportunity to look forward and plan activities for the coming year as they hope to be able to continue the partnerships and the collaboration.

Meeting of participating teachers in Celje:



For some of the Ghanaian teachers it was the first time they travelled abroad so early planning was essential in order to obtain not only visa but also passports. We had planned that the visit takes place in March, between the first and second semesters. But we failed to obtain visas then and hence postponed the visits to the September timeframe



Supporting activities

The Ghanaian and Slovenian students have also been participating in other activities preparing and bracing them to participate in the project. All Ghanaian students participated in a one-day summer event hosted by Embracing Hidden Talents Network and 12 Slovenian students participated in the summer camp 'Eurolinks' in Slovenia where they met students from the other European schools involved in the project.

Summer camp in Slovenia

The Eurolinks Summer Camp, which took place in Zgornje Jezersko, Slovenia, proved to be a great success in terms of intercultural communication. Forty eight students from four European countries got to learn about each other's culture as well as about the traditions of the African countries they have been working with during the project.

Opinion of a Slovenian student on partnership lessons:

I feel quite lucky to be chosen for this camp. Not only for the good time, for the adventures, but also because it gave me a lot of insight on things I had no clue about before. The lessons themselves were very dynamic, fun, interactive, and most of all, educational. Far better than regular ones

During the camp students came together to generate ideas on how to further promote a global dimension in schools.



Student generated ideas for future projects:



- ✿ “We should make YouTube videos of how to use different social media platforms for our Ghanaian partner schools”
- ✿ “We could do a Ghana Café at our school teaching our peers on what we now know on Ghana”
- ✿ “I would like to visit Ghana as well and meet more Ghanaian students! Even though we come from different worlds, we still share many of the same interests”

Summer activity in Ghana

The four Ghanaian schools participated in a one-day summer event on November 1st Accra organized by Embracing Hidden Talents Network. The day included presentations by coordinating teachers and student representatives from each of the schools of activities, partnerships, benefits, lessons learnt and future prospects for the partnerships.

A clear message from the presenters was that in spite of some shortcomings of the project, they would like to see the partnership continue. The head teachers from each of the participating schools also gave closing remarks.

During the activities, the students and teachers were entertained by local artists and also talented students from the different schools showcased their musical and dancing talents.

Lessons learnt

As the project was carried out, a number of challenges as well as opportunities were revealed, some of which were expected whereas others were unforeseen. These are some of the lessons learned expressed by the students, teachers and NGOs involved.

From a student perspective

Many of the Ghanaian students had not heard about the MDGs before entering the project but found it to be an interesting discovery that helped them broaden their minds. In some of the Ghanaian schools, the project also gave the students the opportunity to apply other talents than they usually do in school and many hidden artistic talents were uncovered, such as musicians, dancers and poets.

For students in both Ghana and Slovenia, the fact that they could interact with students from a different part of the world without travelling was an amazing idea and some of them have made good friends and are now communicating actively, especially through their Facebook page, and share ideas and experiences not only related to the partnership activities.

Opinion of a Slovenian student on lessons learnt:

“We learned that Africa is not only what the media perpetually conveys it to be. It’s not all poverty, sickness and underdevelopment. They are just like us; they get good education, live in nice cities, and their life



doesn't differ much from ours. But the difference between the rich and poor is bigger there... we heard that students there tend to appreciate the ability to go to school a bit more than students in Slovenia.."

From a teacher perspective

The teachers were faced with a number of challenges of planning joint teaching activities, such as differences in school schedules, in equipment and Internet access. The Ghanaian teachers experienced difficulties due to lack of modern equipment and computer skills and therefore recommend more support to the Ghanaian schools in terms of equipment and time.

The Slovenian teachers stressed the need to make more simple and strict plans and find that now by the end of the project they are much better prepared for planning joint activities because they are aware of the differences of the school systems and know what can be done.

In the words of the President of EHTN:

At local front teachers and students have embraced the concept and we are looking forward to start a local project that aims to locally support TALENTED YOUTH in our partner schools. Already funds have been secure to start a pilot project in one of the schools in Ghana. Beneficiary teachers in Ghana understanding of Global situations have change positively and most of them are now involving in orienting their fellow teachers through decision making in their schools.

The Ghanaian teachers were impressed by the interest of their students in discovering the MDGs and reported that they themselves also learned more about the MDGs during the project and about different teaching methodologies from their partner schools.

From an NGO perspective

According to Embracing Hidden Talents Network (EHTN), a positive effect of the project is that it has helped the Ghanaian teachers and students understand that the problems they face in their day to day life are global problems and not just their own local problems. They have also discovered that there is a need for global collaboration to resolve the problems being addressed by the MDGs.

In the words of the President of EHTN:

"Opportunity should be given to more schools in both North and South to benefit from such a project. Involving students in the travel process would help to depend the understanding of global issues among students in both parts of the world. Teachers from both part of the world should have the same training at one venue before the commencement of the project either in Europe or Africa to give them a clear meaning and understanding of the project."

As a recommendation for future projects Embracing Hidden Talents Network suggests to have the African NGOs involved at an earlier stage, preferably already at the beginning of the proposal development, so as to be able to give input about the challenges that the African schools are likely to face. A more equal distribution of activities between the European and the African schools is also recommended by Embracing Hidden Talents Network. This is supported by Zavod Voluntariat, which would liked to see an equitable distribution of funds and responsibilities between the partnerships. The current division between funds for activities in Europe and funds for activities in Africa makes it very difficult to secure equal terms for all participants in collaboration projects such as The North-South Connection Project.



References and presentation of organizations

This report is based on interviews with teachers and students as well as evaluation schemes from all schools, Ghanaian and Slovenian. The Slovenian students have been contributing with their input writing student essays as well. Furthermore, Embracing Hidden Talents Network has contributed with a more comprehensive evaluation report on the Ghanaian part.

The organizations involved in the Slovenian part of the project

Zavod Voluntariat (Slovenia)

www.zavod-voluntariat.si/

Contact: Katja Celin Yere, globalno@zavod-voluntariat.si

Zavod Voluntariat is an organization for international volunteering. Voluntariat aims to promote social justice, sustainable development, global education, international understanding and solidarity, through non-formal education programs targeting mainly youth in voluntary programs, secondary schools, universities, youth centres, and also teachers in schools and youth workers, project managers from other NGOs. It is in charge of coordination of the working group on global volunteering with an aim to advocacy for systematic treatment of global volunteering on national level.

Embracing Hidden Talents Network (Ghana)

Contact: Ebenezer Parditey, ebenezerparditey@gmail.com

The Embracing Hidden Talents Network (EHTN) works in 3 regions in Ghana namely Greater Accra Region, Central Region and Western Region. People in the regions live mostly from fishing, farming, stone quarrying and tourism. Educational levels among the villagers are generally low; EHTN's main activity is to provide educational support to needy children in the 3 regions. EHTN also raises awareness on issues such as HIV, environmental pollution, other diseases etc.

