

The Narration of the Travel Experiences of Joshua Suttah to the Community of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI), Japan

My name is Joshua Ofori Suttah I am from Ghana in the Greater Accra Region and the Ga-East Municipal Assembly and from a small community called Adenkrebi, with population of about 600 people.

Am 28 years old and I come from a family of four and am the only child of my father.

I have a 2 year old daughter. Am a Christian and worship with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana-Adenkrebi Gligal congregation. My father was an evangelist and he was the caretaker of the Adenkrebi /Ayim Methodist Church until his death. I was born in Adenkrebi and raised there.

After my basic education, I attended a Technical school called Danfa Voc/Tech Training Institute to study Electricals in the year 2007-2013. One may ask why 6 years in school? My father passed away when I was about to write my first examination which is NVTI certificate 2. I had no money to do my registration so I had to stay at home and raised money for the next year. Unfortunately for me when back to school the curriculum had changed so I have to wait and write another examination before the NVTI certificate 2 which was NVTI foundation skills in 2010. After writing that examination, I had to stay home for another year before writing the NVTI Certificate 1. During my technical school days I joined a football team in the Eastern region of Ghana; the Brekusu third division side called Unity Football Club for only six months and I had to quit because my father asked me to choose between football and education. What kept me moving in life is that I have a natural instinct and motivation to make others feel happy so I always create excitement and turn even bad circumstances into a period of joy and fun. So when I face challenges myself, I am reminded about my own disposition when others are in similar situation so this often gets me back on track. I am always reminded by Jeremiah 29.11:

SMALL SCALE FARMING AND HOW I GOT KNOW ABOUT ARI

A year later without job I decided to go into small scale farming so I started cultivating crops like cassava, maize, and vegetables eg. pepper, tomatoes and green beans.

In December 2014 an NGO called Heifer International came to train young people on how to rear animals so after the training program I started rearing grasscutters which they taught us. I started with 40 grasscutters later they started dying because of the weather so I quit. In the following year another group came to train the people of the Methodist Church, Adenkrebi so they invited other churches in the community and from outside. At this time, I was keeping sheep, goats and chickens. The group name is; The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) which was led by Mr Mozart Adevu. They taught us moringa and soy cultivation and processing and emphasized on the nutrition benefits of these plants. They also taught Beekeeping. After the training program and on next day I was at home and I had a text message from Mr Adevu congratulating me for my active participation and that even though I am not from the Methodist church but I did well during the program. After a few weeks he called me and asked about my intentions of staying permanently in the community. My response was that am searching for work so if any comes on my way I have to leave the community, he told me he would call me later the following day. He later called me and said "Josh I want to recommend you to an organization in Japan, the Asian Rural Institute because I know you have the quality to teach your community on your return". My reply was yes and I was full of joy the whole day. He briefed me on how I will acquire skills and improve my small scale farming and learn organic farming. My first email from ARI was around March last year, I had long emails from Kathy Froede and Manosi both staff of ARI. During the process I asked myself where am traveling to with all this kind of email messages. I got about 20 messages before eventually got accepted to ARI. When I got to ARI, I asked Kathy (she is Ecumenical Relations Director at ARI) why all those emails and she tried to explain it to me. What makes me more frustrated is sometimes I had to

go to the Sending Body's Head office in Abokobi three or four times before approval or to get a letter or document signed, because my community is far from the Head office of the Sending Body: I often had to walk to the road side for about one and half hour before boarding a vehicle

. THE JOURNEY TO ARI

After completion of all documents to travel to ARI, I started counting my days then pandemic of COVID-19 broke out. Mozart visited my community about three weeks to my departure to ARI to announce my departure so most of my community members knew I was leaving to ARI. After they begun to ask me "do you really want to travel to Japan in this time"? On 20th March when the coronavirus case was getting worse the President of the Republic of Ghana gave a press statement for all borders to be shut down from midnight of 21st March 2020. So after the press statement I knew my trip to Japan was impossible but after few minutes I saw I had missed a call which I did not want to receive anyway because I was confused that moment. Later I decided to call back and surprising that was the Travel Agent. Before the announcement I had a message that my flight had been changed from 23rd to 24th March 2020 so the time she called I knew she was going to tell me that I won't be able to travel to ARI but she rather told me about the first cancellation and that she had not heard of the announcement so I tried to explain to her and she expressed surprise and said she will check and call me back. On next morning she called and asked if I was ready to travel same day so she could book a new ticket for me. My immediate response was okay because some of my friends had started mocking me. So I called Mozart and told him the situation at hand and his reply was "you have to leave today because you don't know what will happen in the next two weeks". I had to hurry to my Sending Body for my signed agreement letter but when I got there it was not signed and the document couldn't be found. I had to get a new copy but all internet cafe shops were closed because it was Sunday. One of our administrators called Felix told me to return to the office on my way to the airport and that he will meet with me the document. I got home around 2:00 pm and I had to get to the airport at 6:00 pm because the flight will take off 9:30pm. I had to leave the community at 4:00pm to get to the airport on time. I took off from the community with a friend, Daniel who owns a taxi but after 10 minutes' drive the car broke down. I had to call a cousin with motorbike to pick me to the road side to get a car. When I got to Oyarifa, which was on the major highway to the airport, I had to alight and wait for Felix to take my letter. I spent one hour waiting for him until he finally came. I took off around 5:20pm. On this note coronavirus played a role to get me to the airport early because there was absolutely no traffic, I got to the airport a few minutes to 6 pm.

CHECKING IN AT KOTOKA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

At the Accra International Airport at the check-in point I had to wait because the lady who attended to me was so inquisitive. She asked me the purpose why am travelling to Japan. I gave her couple of documents sent to me from ARI and a letter I wrote to the Japanese embassy in Ghana. Later she started using frustrating words on me like "you young guy, have you not heard of what is going on when Ghanaians are coming back to the country and citizens of other countries are going to their land you are travelling this hour, don't you know what is happening?". "How much money do you have on you" After answering all questions she asked me to wait. I had to call Mozart and the Travel Agent to tell them what was happening. They both told me to take it easy. During period of waiting I was asking myself if unable to travel, what was I going tell others who knew I was travelling to Japan and that I had already left home. At about 7:15pm the airline official gave me the green light and so I knew I was through to the second check point to be issued boarding pass. Once again they told me to wait and that she was going to call

Nairobi to check if they would allow other citizens into their country. She also further said very frustrating words to me. At that moment all I knew was I was travelling to ARI and their word of discouragement will not stop me until all avenues have been explored. As was all evening, I had to call Mr. Adevu and the Travel Agent. The Agent told me to relax and that she had to call the manager on duty that night and call me back. When she called, I realized the lady who told me to wait was the manager on duty. At 8:45 pm a confirmation came that they should allow only people in transit so she called me and asked me again and said "young man do you really want to travel at this hour?" At that moment I had no reply. After issuing the boarding pass to me she told me to run otherwise in the next fifteen minute' I will not be able to travel. When I got to the immigration I had to complete a form. I asked one of the staff to assist me but he requested for money and I just had to oblige so I gave him 10 cedis (1.8 dollars). At the last point which they had to check my hand baggage, the young man told me that he had closed and was just packing out when and I got there so I had to put something on the table so I gave out 10 cedis as well. In the meantime, there was announcement that the flight was waiting for passenger Joshua Ofori. One can just imagine what was going on in my mind that time. I began to run and a lady met me and asked "are you Joshua and why are you late?" I tried to explain to her but she told me not to worry the flight is taking off in the next 15 minutes relax don't run.



Joshua arrives in Narita International Airport in Japan

I got to Nairobi the next morning but the connecting flight was not until 6:30 pm so I had to hang around till that evening when they started checking for boarding pass. Once again my name was mentioned to step aside. They said the Government of Thailand are requesting health certificate. I told myself I should have listened to the ladies in the Ghana airport. However about a few minutes later someone called me "are you Joshua?" I said yes and they mentioned their names as Martin Mwulimu and introduced themselves as participants also to ARI. I called Mozart immediately and the Agent as well. The latter told me if that is the instruction from the Government of Thailand then the only thing she could do was to change the flight for us. Some minutes later Mozart gave me an address and that if all hope was lost I should tell my new friends to take me there. On our way out one security advised us not go out from the airport otherwise we will be quarantined for two weeks; the only option he gave us was that we had to pass the night at the airport. We went back and slept on the floor and anyone who passed asked us questions. On the following day the Travel Agent booked us a new ticket with the Ethiopian airline number as 319 but around 12;00pm when I went to check the flight display board there was no 319 on the screen. I had to call Martin and Mwulimu to tell them when we went to check we were told to come back at 3;00pm. At this time my hope was lost because I didn't know what else to do. But finally we took off with a different flight 372 much to my relief. Am someone who always likes to question God "why me at the end" I always found out why it happened that way- faith is important. We eventually left Nairobi, transited through Addis Ababa and arrived safely in Japan landing at Narita International airport. I was expecting three days journey but it turned out to be five days. Oftentimes God's delay is not His denial. A delay does not mean God is denying you; it just means God is preparing you for the future.

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Joshua makes presentation at 48th Opening ceremony at ARI

The following is a speech presented by Joshua on behalf of his colleagues in ARI
Dear ARI Family,

It is a great honour to be selected to represent the 2020 participants to address the 48th opening ceremony of the training program in Rural Leadership and Sustainable Agriculture. On behalf my colleagues I wish to express our profound gratitude to the staff of ARI for the great welcoming they accorded us and to make us feel at home even in these uncertain times.

Regrettably, some 2020 participants were unable to make the trip to Japan due to the unprecedented events of this year- COVID-19. I together with my colleagues from Kenya almost missed getting here and we have the story to tell for the rest of our lives on the experiences we went through to get here. It was just by God's grace. We however are grateful to the ARI Team for an exceptionally great work done while we were in transit to get us the flight connections to Japan. We remain indebted to you all for your dedicated service.

We will keep praying for all others who were unable to make the trip. We hope those who have already left their homes and got locked up in other countries (Sierra Leoneans in Ghana) will eventually make it

here to join us when the borders get reopened after the virus gets defeated. This is like a war with invincible enemies. We pray the pandemic gets contained sooner than later. We the very fortunate ones who made it here pledge to commit ourselves to a full participation in the program. We will serve as Servant Leaders and hope to make the best out of the program. We know we will forever be tagged as the Coronavirus graduates of ARI. This will be an unforgettable experience and we will be better for it. We will have stories to tell back home as we educate and train our communities for transformation.

Thank you all for everything you've done so far to make us comfortable and in settling. We will soon overcome the cultural shock and adapt to the weather conditions here.

God Richly Bless You all.

Joshua Ofori Suttah



Joshua is multi-talented and a good organist-an asset for his class at ARI