

Maarɔŋ Initiative – National Peacebuilding with Education

Wisdom Boinde, Earlham College | May- July 2022, Ghana

Introduction: “Maarɔŋ” means “peace” in Dagaare, the language spoken in Northern Ghana. The Maarɔŋ Initiative is a peacebuilding project aiming to address the socioeconomic conflict between Northern and Southern Ghana. To do so, I am partnering with High Morale Academy (HMA), a nationally recognized sports academy in Northern Ghana. HMA trains young Northern women to compete in national and international track-and-field and cross-country races. Maarɔŋ will help these women use their athletic affiliation to secure sport quota scholarships at higher educational institutions in Ghana and abroad. This will open up economic opportunities for Northern Ghanaian women and reduce the number of women who are forced to migrate South to become *kayayeɪ*¹ (female laborers).

Addressing educational inequality, in both gender and regional dimensions, combats systematic exclusion. Enabling young women who migrate South to become *kayayeɪs* due to educational exclusion, to get access to education promotes peace at the communal and national level.

Background: Northern Ghana houses 15% of Ghanaians, but it accounts for 50% of those living in extreme poverty (living on less than ¼ of a dollar per day) ([GLSS 6 Report](#)). Consequently, Northern students struggle to transition from high school to higher educational institutions – 6% of high school graduates in the region are able to enroll in college ([GLSS 6 Report](#)). The lack of educational opportunities compels males to work as farmers, whereas females get trapped in child marriage, or migrate South to work as *kayayeɪ*. There are over 160,000 young Northern women working as *kayayeɪs* in Accra (capital city of Ghana) alone ([CSIS, 2017](#)).

Due to the animosity between North and South and vulnerability of *kayayeɪs*, they suffer both psychological and physical abuse: they live in informal urban settings and work for more than half a day in stove-hot weather, barely earning \$1 per day; they face constant sexual abuse. Each month 50% of all children born to *kayayeɪ* in Accra are abandoned by their mothers. *Kayayeɪs* are also treated as untouchables in the South: a *kayayeɪ* was beaten to death for mistakenly touching a Southern woman ([Study](#) and [CSIS, 2017](#)). This mistreatment does not allow *kayayeɪs* to live in peace. The ramifications are even more severe when combined with years of economic stagnation in the North. Growing up in North, my friends and I witnessed negative sentiments regarding educational and economic disparities between North and South. These sentiments combined with mistreatment of *kayayeɪs* deepens the preexisting conflict between North and South. This hinders the peaceful co-existence of North and South and risks national violence in Ghana.

Project Overview: Institute for Economics and Peace argues that increased levels of education help societies resolve conflicts and attain peace. In this light, Maarɔŋ promotes peace in two ways: First, Maarɔŋ keeps young women in school, reducing *kayayeɪ* migrations to the South due to the dropout. This spares women the abuse and mental turmoil that comes with working as *kayayeɪ*. Second, Maarɔŋ addresses educational disparities between the North and the South. Increased educational access leads to economic development ([World Bank](#)). Thereby, reducing the North/South socioeconomic divide. In these two ways, Maarɔŋ contributes to the alleviation of North/South tensions, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. In the light of this, the two project objectives are:

1. To increase Northern female student athletes’ participation in higher education by providing them with resources needed to secure scholarships and funding in Ghana and abroad.
2. By increasing the population of female students who further their education, we will mitigate female migration to the South to work as *kayayeɪs*.

Project Details: From background research and personal experience, increasing access to education for females in Northern Ghana will contribute to economic development and alleviate conditions that threaten communal and national peace. I will collaborate with HMA to increase female educational access. HMA is a sports organization founded by Boinde Boniface, an IAAF level 1 coach. He recruits 50 females annually from primary schools (grade 5) across Northern Ghana and trains them up to high school to compete in national and international races. These athletes stand an excellent chance of securing sports quota scholarships. However, due to HMA’s lack of financial resources, only a few athletes (20 in 50) secure higher education scholarships. This is where Maarɔŋ will intervene. I will create a database that will contain scholarships and funding opportunities available for Ghanaian athletes locally, nationally, and internationally. I, with the help of interns, will also train HMA athletes in crafting competitive applications and with scholarship search. Maarɔŋ will increase the educational participation for girls in Northern areas – reducing dropouts leading to *kayayeɪ* migration, gender-based violence, and poverty. This will help Ghana move towards communal and

¹ “Kayayeɪ” is the Ghanaian word for women porters who carry all kinds of goods on their heads through local markets. For now, I will focus on female students because of their vulnerability due to the patriarchal structure of Ghanaian society and their low literacy rate (44% in comparison to 83% for males). Boniface and I want Maarɔŋ to be a safe space for women where they take charge of their education. However, as Maarɔŋ expands, we will include men in our future programs, too.

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national peace. I am aware that this project is a minute intervention in a system that is plagued by corruption and regional politics. However, interventions, even at small scales, are needed to change the status quo.

I will implement Maaron from 29th May – 30th July in Nadowli, Nandom, the headquarters of HMA. The project will reach and educate 150 rising female high school seniors through workshops on scholarship search and student/faculty-led panel discussions on crafting a competitive application, standardized tests, etc. 100 of our participants will be rising high school seniors at HMA, Queen of Peace, and Kaleo Tech (HMA's partner institutions). The rest will be HMA athletes from the past who could not secure a scholarship due to financial constraints. The workshops will focus on familiarizing athletes with government, community service, corporate, and religious scholarships available to them. Additionally, we will hold information sessions on how to research for and apply to scholarships, so that the students will become self-sufficient. We will also create an online scholarship database that will contain 100+ sports scholarships available to Ghanaian athletes nationally and internationally. I will create this database using online resources such as *EducationUSA*, *Ghana Scholarship Directory*, and *We Make Scholars*. Once the database is completed, I will share it with HMA students, so they can explore and apply to the relevant scholarships.

Maaron Initiative will be conducted in four phases. The first phase (29th May – 15th June) will be **intern training and technology installation phase**. We will hire 10 scholarship research interns to help us with conducting workshops on scholarship research. We will also hire 10 writers to help our students with application writing process. They will teach students how to write competitive applications. Boniface has trained students to apply for scholarships in the past, so he will train the scholarship research interns. Similarly, Wisdom, who has secured international scholarships for higher education, will train the writers. Since Boniface is a professor at McCoy College of Education, we will hire McCoy students to intern with us. Boniface has agreed to help with the hiring process. Lastly, computers are necessary for Maaron to flourish. However, HMA has none. Lagrange Boinde, a Computer Science major student at the University of Cape Coast, will be responsible for installing 15 Wi-Fi accessible laptops at HMA headquarters in Nadowli, Nandom.

The second phase (17th June – 20th June) will be a **student/faculty-led panel discussion** on applying for scholarships. We will have past HMA students, Louis Akanpirige, Moro Salifu, and Elizabeth Azure as student panelists. Akanpirige, Salifu, and Azure have secured higher-education scholarships in Ghana. They will talk about their scholarship search process, what made their application stand out, and application tips. We will also have Bawa Fuseini, Ghana Athletics Association General Secretary, and Charles Yendoh, lecturer at McCoy as faculty panelists. Fuseini and Yendoh will provide administrative insights on the process. Since Northern Ghana is comparatively less developed, many students are pessimistic about applying for scholarships; they believe due to their geographical location, they will never secure a scholarship. The purpose of this session is to break that pessimistic view by showcasing success stories while familiarizing our students with administrative procedures of scholarship applications.

The third phase (25th June – 15th July) will be a **scholarship search seminar**. With the help of interns, we will train our students on how to search for the appropriate scholarships. This will also help students gather information on eligibility requirements, testing, deadlines, etc. We will train 150 students on all of the basics, so they could search for scholarships themselves.

The fourth phase (16th July – 30th July) will be a **scholarship application seminar**. In this, we will have our students get hands-on experience on applying to various scholarships in Ghana and abroad under the supervision of our interns. Our writers will provide real-time feedback on essays, resumes, and other application components. The mentorship will help our students learn to write a successful application.

Sustainability: Initial benefactors of Maaron will create a Scholarship Club at HMA to share their learnings with the generations following them. Additionally, we will share the scholarship database with HMA students. Wisdom will update the database once every two months to ensure it is up-to-date. With the impact of our programs and support from the National Sports Authority, Ghana Athletics Association, we will strive to secure additional monetary funding to hire permanent scholarship application mentors at HMA. However, if we do not, Boniface and I will work as mentors. Maaron believes that young women can play a significant role in promoting communal and national peace once they have attained their right to education. Therefore, Maaron is an important intervention because not only does it help alleviate gender-based educational inequalities, but by reducing the *kayayei* migration from North to South it works towards promoting peace on communal and national level.