

# Maaron Initiative – National Peacebuilding with Education

Ghana

Earlham College

Wisdom Boinde

Website: <https://athleticshour.com/category/maaron-initiative/>

The Maaron Initiative is a peace-building initiative, aiming to address the socioeconomic conflict between Northern and Southern Ghana. This summer, I partnered with High Morale Academy (HMA), a nationally recognized sports academy in Northern Ghana to help females use their athletic affiliation to secure sports quota scholarships at higher educational institutions in Ghana and abroad.

I hail from the Upper West Region of Ghana. Growing up, I heard, read, and witnessed firsthand the consequences of the crippling economic situation of Northern Ghana. I witnessed families not being able to afford the educational expenses of their children, compelling young and abled-minded youth to drop out of school and work menial jobs. This lack of financial opportunities still hinders young people from realizing their potential. Due to the patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society, this issue is further exacerbated for females as, traditionally, more focus is given to male children. As a Northerner who, through financial assistance, made it out to fulfill his dreams, I recognize the struggle Northerners, especially females, face in their journey. In this regard and that of the general struggles of minorities, I decided to take a commitment to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion starting in Northern Ghana.

I chose northern Ghana as my site because as a Northerner, I have related to and understand the economic, social, and political landscape of Northern Ghana. I am also accustomed to the language, norms, and culture. Lastly, I have connections to people in the North to help me see my project to fruition.

My initial plan was to implement the Maaron Initiative from the 29th of May 2022 - the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2022; and for the project to be conducted in four phases (the intern training and technology installation phase, a student/faculty-led panel discussion, a scholarship search seminar, and the scholarship application seminar). However, the trajectory of the project changed due to the successive teachers' strikes in Ghana. As most strikes were indefinite, there was no way of reaching our target audience, i.e. high school females. Therefore, the Maaron initiative officially kick-started on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 and was brought to a conclusion on the 8th of October 2022, with changes to the project phases, as noted below.

Realizing the absence of the youth in schools and the general interest they have in sports, coach Boniface Boinde and I decided to organize a race to recruit students for scholarship workshops. We also focused on reaching potential participants through social media. Consequently, the first stage of the project shifted from intern training and technology installation to organizing a race and hiring staff to help with marketing. Starting in mid-July 2022, we worked on recruiting and training thirteen qualified personnel on the mission of the Maaron Initiative. We had in the team a sports journalist, Mr. Richard Sekyere, as our head of promotions and advertisements. We also hired five college physical education tutors to help with building the scholarship database.

The second phase of the project was to start training new hires on how to teach students about searching for relevant scholarships and gathering resources (which involved getting in touch with the Ministry of Education and other authorities) to craft a scholarship database. We spent approximately ten days on these two tasks. Currently, we have a database for sports scholarships available in Ghana. We are in communication with educational institutions in the United States to explore opportunities for our athletes. During this time, we also acquired a location to be served as the office of the Maaron initiative. Currently, we have the place for two years with six computers on the site. Lastly, with the help of our marketing

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team, we have made three appearances and more than ten announcements on Nandom FM and Athletic Hour, Ghana's most widely used athletic news platform.

The third phase was the Maaron Initiative Championship, which I referred to as the race earlier. The Maaron Championship was successfully organized on Saturday, 27th August 2022 at Nandom, Upper West Region. One hundred and eighty-seven athletes registered from different regions across Ghana. Of these, sixty demonstrated interest in attending our scholarship workshops and applying for the scholarships next academic year. The launch had in attendance the members of Parliament of the Nandom Constituency, members of the Nandom Municipal Assembly, Directors of the Ghana Education Service, and heads of academic institutions of Ghana. Therefore, the Maaron Initiative started off on a strong footing with support from the authorities.

The fourth phase was the workshop on scholarship search and application seminar as well as a discussion on how to browse the internet and use computers. This workshop was planned to last for two days and the venue was the Nandom Municipal Assembly Conference Hall in the Upper West Region. To facilitate the fluidity of the workshop and the learning process of the students, more purchases of relevant electronics such as 2 projectors and 3 more computers were made. Due to miscommunication between the involved parties, the workshop ended up being rescheduled and held on the 7th and the 8th of October 2022. We had in attendance all the athletes selected at the end of the third phase as well as the sports teachers in their various schools. The workshop and the entire phases of the Maaron Initiative were a success as they attracted the attention of dignitaries and financial institutions such as the Nandom Rural Bank to the need to support the Maaron Initiative in our long-term goal of addressing the socioeconomic conflict in Ghana.

It is the intention of Coach Boniface and me to continue to make the Maaron Initiative an ongoing project centered on unearthing talents amongst the youth and children in the field of sports, especially in athletics. To do so, I am currently applying for a \$5, 000 grant called Catalyst Project and also looking for other potential donors. Since the race, there has been an uptick in the number of students and supports interested in attending and aiding in future projects and workshops. This means installing more human infrastructural, and technological capital. I am confident that this is just the beginning of a life-long project, aimed to serve the women and minorities of Northern Ghana. To further strengthen our footing, I am scheduled to visit the project site in the summer of next year.

Through this project, I learned that the economic divide between Northern and Southern Ghana is much deeper than I thought. For instance, most purchases had to be made in the south and then transported to the north. Furthermore, the spread of the news of the Maaron Initiative attracted unexpected interest from the people in the south looking to benefit from the project. This incurred additional expenses and work for us while making me realize that we find ourselves in a world that is unfair to certain groups of people, regions, and sexualities. Lowering those boundaries and unfairness is what constitutes peace for me.