

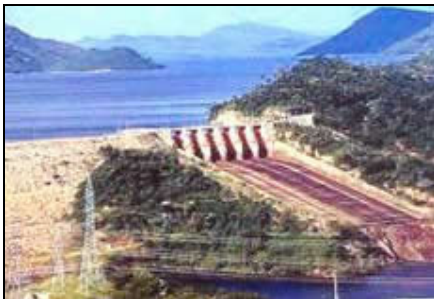
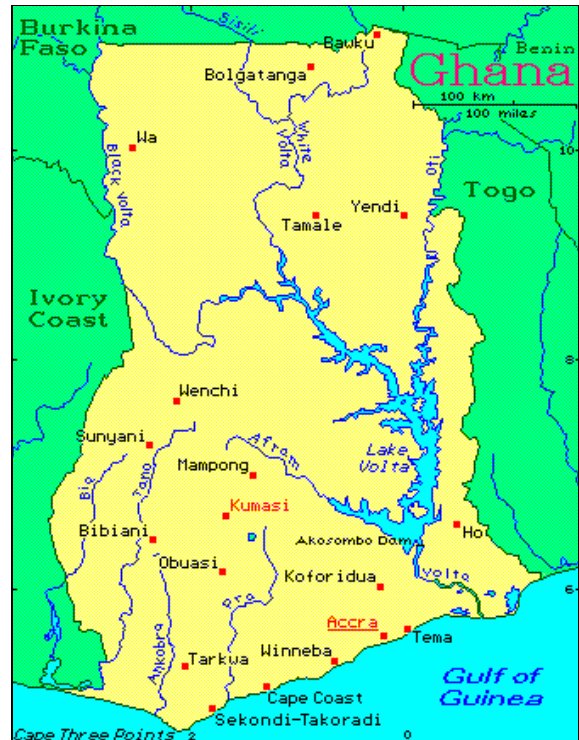
The Volta Dam in Ghana

Ghana was the first country in Africa to gain independence from Britain in 1957. The new government decided to invest in hydro electric power to meet the country's power needs. To do this, Ghana built the Volta Dam at Akosombo on the Volta River - the fifth largest river in Africa. 80,000 people were moved from their homes to make way for the dam which is now the world's fourth largest artificial lake with a length of around 250 miles.

The Volta Dam project aimed, among other things, to open up Ghana to rapid development. A few years after the construction of the Volta Dam, rapid industrialisation took place, particularly in major cities such as the Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Tekoradi and Akosombo. But this development in turn brought about demand for more electric power.

By 1981, the increased demand for power meant that another dam was needed and a small dam at Kpong downstream from Akosombo was built.

The combined power of the two dams has meant that Ghana has been able to meet its domestic and industrial power needs. The dams have also provided irrigation for agriculture, a new supply of fish, an increased use of water transport in the lakes and the growth of tourism.



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These developments have not come without cost however. The Volta dam has led to a reduction in the shrimp population – an important source of protein for people living in the area. This reduction is because less food is being brought down the river for the shrimps. A fall in protein affects the health and nutrition standards of a population.

There has also been a decline in crop yields due to less silt being deposited downstream. The Volta dam has prevented natural flooding so the silt – which is rich in nutrients for plants – is no longer deposited. This has resulted in a fall in food production and also a drop in income for local farmers. The

result is greater poverty within the community which has led to problems such as crime, prostitution, an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, migration away from the area into towns and the cutting down of mangrove trees – to sell as fuel wood. This is causing serious deforestation in the area.

The dam has also caused a reduction in the flow of water in the main river which has resulted in a large increase of aquatic weeds. These have in turn led to an increase in the number of snails, particularly those that carry the bilharzia disease. Diseases like sleeping sickness and malaria have also increased in the areas near the lake.

The water levels of the lakes have also declined due to a fall in the rainfall. Global warming is blamed for this. With less rain to fill the lakes, there is of course less electricity generated...

Web links for further information:

BBC Country Profiles: Ghana

A brief history and key statistics: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1023355.stm

Oxfam Country Profiles: Ghana

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/kidsweb/world/ghana/index.htm>

BBC report: an 'eyewitness' report on water which focuses on the Volta Dam and its impacts in Ghana: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2947420.stm>

BBC News World Edition

Top news stories from across Africa <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm>

All Africa

A site offering news from over one hundred newspapers and news agencies across Africa.

Ghana pages:

<http://allafrica.com/ghana/>

One World Africa

The African arm of the One World independent media network; a network of people and groups working for human rights and sustainable development.

<http://africa.oneworld.net/article/frontpage/151/509>

UNDP Human Development Reports

Human development indicators, searchable by country or indicators.

<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>