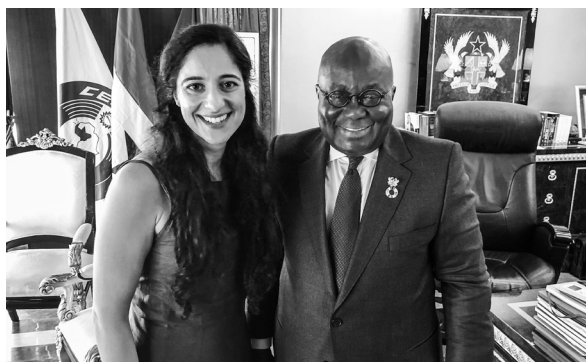


Ghana

Hope



President Nana Akufo-Addo, Accra, Ghana.

To understand why Ghana is a nation defined by hope, you have to understand its president, Nana Akufo-Addo. His election in 2016 was not just a new beginning, but also the culmination of a near-two-decade campaign for the presidency. He first tried in 1998, losing in his party's primary. Ten years later, in 2008, he finally became the candidate, receiving the most votes in the first round, before losing the runoff by less than half of one percent. It was the closest election in Ghana's history. Four years later, another close election was lost again. Most politicians would give up after one failed bid at high office, let alone two. But Akufo-Addo did not. He never let his hope for success—for his country and himself—subside, and at his third attempt in 2016 was finally successful.

“Our best days lie ahead,” he said at his inauguration. “Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. Ghanaians have ever been a restless, questing, hopeful people.”

Since his election, Akufo-Addo has not let up on promoting his hope for Ghana to fulfill its potential as a nation. When I interviewed him, he spoke most passionately about his desire to help young people seize the future, “to create the conditions to allow them to see that yes, there’s every reason to think out of the box, there’s every reason to try new things, there’s every reason to dream. Because there can be a result from your dreams, there can be a result from your creativity. That’s the society that I’m hoping to try and build.”

In many ways, the current president echoes Ghana’s first, Kwame Nkrumah. The founding leader of modern Ghana, the first British colony in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence, Nkrumah launched his presidency in 1957 with a powerful vision of hope. “I am depending upon the millions of the country, and the chiefs and people, to help me to reshape the destiny of this country,” he said when the Gold Coast became Ghana.

Hope is integral in the culture—and it is not just preached from the political mountaintop. It is also something embraced by every Ghanaian, particularly in a song you hear all over Ghana: *Dabi dabi ebeye yie* (One day, one day it will be all right). More than a song lyric, this is almost a national motto: that the future will be better than the past.

Hope is not just something verbally expressed, but brought to life by visual symbols like traditional Ghanaian beads. In a practice that has been revived by bead artists like Kati Torda, Ghanaian women wear them around their waists, wrists, and necks, in strings that symbolize the hope for marriage, fertility, and good fortune.

It is also seen in the return of a once huge diaspora to Ghana. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 10 to 20 percent of the Ghanaian population lived abroad, but now many are coming back, a wave of “reverse migration” that is investing its talent and belief in helping the country to fulfill its vast potential.

Amy Frimpong, who worked in the U.S. for years before returning as executive director of the National Theatre of Ghana, told me that she

often gets asked why she gave up a stable job that earned in a month what a job in Ghana would pay in a year. “I tell people it’s because I want to give back,” she said. “Whether you’re here or outside, a lot of people have a love for the country; and when they come back, they’re coming to assist, not to compete.” I heard a very similar story from others I interviewed, ranging from musicians to lawyers. Korieh Duodu, a top media and anticorruption lawyer, decided to return to Ghana and qualify there to add to his UK practice, hoping that by spending time in both countries he could make a bigger impact on the world. Amy and Korieh, and many others like them I met across entertainment, education, and professional services, are all buying into the hope of what Ghana could still become: “an independent nation that will be respected by every nation in the world,” as Nkrumah defined it in 1957.

In doing so, Ghanaians offer an example to the rest of the world. Because what life, what career, what organization does not depend on hope to succeed? Nothing good ever came without the essential optimism of hope: that tomorrow will be better, that obstacles can be overcome, and that the impossible can be achieved. Hope is what gives us life and keeps us going. And Ghana shows us what it really means to live with hope in your heart.