

## Artist Intervention Asutsuare Rebound

After Ghana won its independence in 1957, the village of Asutsuare became the focus of state-led, socialist-inspired agricultural and industrial development. A sugar factory was built, along with a residential area, a sugarcane plantation, and the required irrigation system. Twenty years after its closure in the 1980s, the plant was bought by Chinese investors. Today, it manufactures paper and plastic products, while the sugarcane plantation was repurposed for the farming of rice, bananas, and fish.

*Asutsuare Rebound*, first presented at the Rotterdam Biennale of Architecture (2022), studies the reuse, reappropriation, and revalorization of modernist planning in Asutsuare. We have interviewed retired employees of the sugar factory and younger inhabitants who explained to us how the material infrastructure and memories of the plant are a resource for imagining and producing a collective future. By juxtaposing their voices with images by photographer Eric Don-Arthur, this project revisits concepts of long-term planning beyond dominant narratives of postcolonial melancholy and postsocialist nostalgia.

*Asutsuare Rebound* begins to reassess the ambiguous impact of long-term planning on the landscapes of Asutsuare. While the irrigation system has become a crucial resource for the villagers, it has also been undermined by conflicts around land taken over by the state sixty years ago. While the repurposed buildings are not always adequate to new programs, they have often become nodes of new activities for which there was no funding available. While many inhabitants in Asutsuare appreciate the state-led development from the Kwame Nkrumah period, they appropriate it for individual entrepreneurship. We understand these ambiguities not as evidence of failure, but as an invitation to rethink the future in a way that moves beyond both modernist techno-utopias and neoliberal short-termism.



Figure 1. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. A view of rice fields and an irrigation system from the Kpong Irrigation Scheme at the foothill of the Osudoku mountain. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur.

*I think it was considered very seriously before [the factory] was sited here because of the river and the water. . . . In the laboratory we had our own water works and we supplied water to every part of this community.*

—Mr. Anthony Ramzey, retired lab technician, 2022



Figure 2. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. Mr. John Awuku Dziwornu, a farmer and business consultant, shows the process of manufacturing egg crates at the paper processing plant of Shinefeel Ghana Ltd. In the late 2000s, Chinese investors purchased the old GHASEL factory buildings and began producing paper and plastic products. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur.

*The collapse of the company [GHASEL] was a blessing in disguise. The infrastructure was there and [people] became owners of their own enterprises: whether that's farm enterprises, or they set up a place to provide vulcanisation services, mechanisation services, the repair of motorbikes, bicycles, shops of spare parts, and the rest. The place has become very vibrant. Each and everybody has something to do. But all this could be attributed to the initial investment in the construction of the sugar factory and the irrigation infrastructure that was put up.*

—Mr. John Awuku Dziwornu, 2022



Figure 3. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana.  
Paper recycling depot at Shinefeel  
Ghana Ltd. Photo © 2022 Eric  
Don-Arthur.

*At first, GHASEL was employing people from the community, they were also contributing to the economy of Ghana. And Shinefeel has come and is doing the same thing.*

—Mr. Prince Selasie Tong Kurug, environmental and safety officer at Shinefeel, 2022



Figure 4. Asutsuare Township, Ghana. Ms. Paulina Addison, pioneer and heavy vehicle operator at the sugarcane plantation, shows grandson her family photographs. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur.

*I remember that when we started the job, it was fine. . . . Because the sugar cane was there. . . . The outgrowers would come and report at the end of the day. At that time people from the North would collect them and harvest the sugarcane. They would load the trailers, they had six trailers or eight trailers. At that time, we used the machines. They called it Ulysses. That machine we used. And another one was MF.*

—Ms. Paulina Addison, 2022



Figure 5. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. A view of the former GHASEL laboratory currently serving as the boys' dormitory of the Osudoku Senior High Technical School (OSUTECH). Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur.

*This school was initially housed because of the [GHASEL] structures available. [They include] the boys' dormitory, the main structure that houses the boys, and then, part of the accommodation has also been leased to teachers to live in. And then I can also say that other people, even the primary school here, they all have places that they squat, so to speak.*

—Ms. Christina Adjei, headmistress of the Osudoku Senior High School, 2022



Figure 6. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. Ruins of the GHASEL hospital reclaimed by nature. The hospital served the staff of GHASEL and the wider community. The structure briefly served as classrooms for pupils of the Asutsuare Estate D/A Basic School. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur.

*We have the banana farm, fishpond factories, and a Chinese company that recycles waste materials into re-usable products. But we need many things here. What we need most are a hospital and a doctor. Also, the roads are in a poor state.*

—Ms. Paulina Addison, 2022



Figure 7. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. Repurposed sugarcane fields of the erstwhile GHASEL for the cultivation of rice and bananas. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur

*In the late '60s, there was this irrigation project which was undertaken by FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] about some six miles from Asutsuare. They called the place Padlock Area A. They experimented with rice production and irrigation. People became used to the rudiments of rice cultivation.*

—Mr. John Awuku Dziwornu, 2022





Figure 8. Asutsuare Estate, Ghana. Mr. Seth Akligo, pioneer and engineer at the water works shows a swimming pool used by both foreign and Ghanaian staff of GHASEL. Photo © 2022 Eric Don-Arthur

*The place was very lively, we had a swimming pool over there, and you could see white men and there were blacks together, enjoying themselves. There was also a canteen and a workers' canteen. It was Kwame Nkrumah's time. We enjoyed a lot.*

—Mr. Seth Akligo, 2022

#### Biographies

Michael Gameli Dziwornu is a research scientist with the CSIR-Institute for Scientific and Technological Information (CSIR-INSTI), a public research organization in Ghana. Michael joined CSIR-INSTI in June 2021 after completing his PhD in Urban Studies from the University of Milan-Bicocca in Italy. He is particularly interested in crime geography, geographic information systems (GIS), urban studies, migration studies, and the postcolonial geographies of Africa.

Lukasz Stanek is Professor of Architectural History at A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA. Stanek authored *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minnesota, 2011) and *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, 2020). Stanek taught at the ETH Zurich, the University of Manchester, and held guest professorships at Harvard University and the University of Ghana. He co-curated the exhibition *The Gift: Stories of Generosity and Violence in Architecture* at the Architekturmuseum der TUM (2024).

Eric Don-Arthur is a photographer based in Winneba, Ghana, whose artistic practice, as he describes it, “visually investigates the physical and psychological intersections of love, light, and logic.” His work has been widely published and exhibited both in Ghana and internationally, most recently at the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (Netherlands), the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (UK), and the Architekturmuseum der TUM in Munich, Germany. Eric Don-Arthur's current research interest is in photography as liberation pedagogy.