



ANNUAL REPORT 2017



*Working together to improve
learning, teaching
and **boarding** facilities at NISEC*

Nisec Alumni Abroad
Annual Report 2017
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Cover photo: NAA President Nick Opoku joins the school community to turn the first sod for construction of the new toilet to start.

Contents

President's review	2
Organizational overview	4
Governance and regulatory arrangements	5
Regional Coordinators	6
The NAA Constitution	6
Membership and registration	7
Summary	7
Membership	7
The registry	9
Challenges	10
Projects	11
Summary	11
Sports complex: a rethink	11
To start or not to start	12
Contract for work to begin	12
Progress	13
Financial statement	14
Conclusion	16

President's review



It is my pleasure to present the 2017 Annual Report of Nisec Alumni Abroad Inc. (NAA).

Our second year of operation, 2017 was a time of consolidation of our position as an up-and-coming alumni organisation dedicated to helping our alma mater. It was a period in which we applied the lessons learnt in our inaugural year to strengthen NAA and firmly pursue our goals.

The year was marked by three major achievements: streamlining of our membership; project selection and fundraising; and election of a new executive. Following a low-key celebration of NAA's first anniversary in early January, the executive embarked on an exercise to disbar members who were not of good standing. These members had made little or no contribution to NAA, including failing to pay their one-off registration fee and declining to offer any explanation for the failure. The exercise resulted

2017 was a time of consolidation of our position as an up-and-coming alumni organisation dedicated to helping our alma mater.

in nearly halving our membership numbers. It was a good outcome because we were left with a cohort that was committed to the NAA cause and shared the NAA vision. We believe the quality of our membership is more important than quantity.

With the membership streamlined, we turned our attention to our number one goal: helping Nifa Senior High School. A review of a decision made in 2016 to build a multipurpose sports complex for Nifa led to a change of course. The majority of our members favoured a new toilet facility for the school and voted to start construction with the available funds. The headmaster of the school, Dr Phillip Akoto, agreed to our change of project plan.

We promptly redirected the fundraising we had begun the previous year towards the newly selected project.

In October, I flew to Ghana to sign a contract for the construction of a \$20,000 biofil toilet facility for female students at Nifa and cut the first sod for work to begin on the project. It was an opportunity for me to meet face to face with the headmaster and other members of the school's administration for the first time since NAA was established. This meeting provided

a boost to the relationship between the NAA executive and the school authorities.

On another positive note, 2017 saw an improvement in our relationship with the Nifa Old Student Association (NOSA), one of our key stakeholders. The NOSA executive demonstrated its support for the NAA toilet project in many ways and invited me and the Secretary to join their executive platform, which we accepted.

Our main challenge in 2017 remained getting all of our members to contribute to the cost of our maiden project. Many appeals were made for members to honour their obligation to NAA with mixed success. We also embarked on regional fundraising activities with some good results. By the end of the year, we were confident we would be able to raise enough funds to complete the project.

Another challenge was making sure as many members as possible participated in NAA activities and discussions pertinent to the organisation. There is still room for improving the responsiveness of members to issues placed on the NAA platforms to inform decision making. Also, we had little success in our efforts to develop our own website, a task we expect to take up again in 2018.

We believe the quality of our membership is more important than quantity.

We concluded the year with the election of a new executive. All but three members of the inaugural executive were returned to the management committee. Having lost nearly all our members in Europe after the membership streamlining exercise, we decided to merge the Regional Coordinator (RC) jurisdictions of the United Kingdom and the Rest of Europe into one Europe RC jurisdiction, headed by the incumbent RC for Europe. I am pleased to be able to continue to work with a renewed and re-invigorated leadership team to move NAA forward over the next two years.

The year ahead promises to be an exciting one. With construction well under way at the time of writing, we look forward to completing and commissioning our very first project for our beloved former school in early 2018. Above all, I will continue to count on the cooperation and goodwill of our members, who are the lifeblood of Nisec Alumni Abroad, to build on our achievements over the past two years.

NICK OPOKU APPIAH
President

Organizational overview



Nisec Alumni Abroad Inc. (NAA) is a non-political and non-religious public charity group founded on January 7, 2016 to improve educational facilities at Nifa Senior High School in Ghana, West Africa.

NAA members are all former students of Nifa Senior High and its precursor, Nifa Secondary School—affectionately known as Nisec—who are resident outside Ghana. They were brought together by the power of social media.

Many older members, who had once enjoyed modern facilities at the school, were stunned by photographs of crumbling facilities and revolting sanitary conditions circulated on social media in late 2015. It appeared their beloved Nisec was moving backwards, rather than forward, in the digital age.

Moved by those gloomy photographs, the former students now residing overseas were galvanised into action. By early 2016, a new group known as Nisec Alumni Abroad had been formed.

NAA has a one-pointed focus: to raise funds to assist in providing and improving learning, teaching and boarding facilities at Nisec.

At December 31, 2017, the group had more than 60 members across Europe, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Canada and the United States.

NAA is led by an elected executive, a ten-member management committee chaired by its president. Supporting the work of the management committee, especially in the important task of fundraising, is a team of three regional coordinators (RCs) representing the key regions from which the group's membership is drawn: Europe (including the UK), Canada and the US.

The group's principal mode of communication is electronic, based on Whatsapp group platforms, where most discussions, announcements and voting take place, with meetings held via telephone conferencing where possible.

NAA is registered as a public charity group in the U.S. State of Virginia and is guided by a constitution adopted by members on April 1, 2016.

Governance and regulatory arrangements

Summary

The ten-member management committee (the executive) elected in 2016 continued to lead Nisec Alumni Abroad in 2017. They were supported by three regional coordinators in Europe, Canada and the United States. The NAA constitution adopted in 2016 remained unchanged and continued to govern NAA's operations during the year.

The executive

The executive held eight meetings throughout the year. The agenda of these meetings varied, but the key focus was on streamlining the NAA membership, deciding on an appropriate first project for NAA and fundraising.

In the course of the year, the Assistant Secretary, Pearl Quist, resigned from her position on personal grounds. A decision was made not to replace her until the next election given her duties were adequately covered by the Secretary, Kofi Ansah.

The election of a new executive was held during December 15–31.

All but three members of the inaugural executive were returned to the management committee. The incoming executive will become operational effective January 15, 2018.

In a sign of improving relationship with NOSA, the NOSA executive invited two NAA executive members to join the NOSA executive platform. As of December 31, President Nicholas Opoku and Secretary Kofi Ansah were two of eleven people on that platform. This is a positive first step towards a stronger working relationship with NOSA. It also gives NAA access to firsthand and timely information on matters pertaining to Nifa, complementing NAA's direct engagement with the headmaster of Nifa.

During the year, the NAA executive set up a four-member internal committee to investigate the cost and feasibility of building and maintaining a NAA website. Some cost estimates were obtained, with the executive concluding that having a website built *pro bono* would be the best way forward.

An appeal was subsequently made to members who might have the skills or knew someone with the skills to develop a website for NAA at little or no cost. Some initial work on the design of a logo was started. The Assistant Registrar, Yaw Obiri, got a commitment from a friend to help build the website. By the end of the year, very little progress had been made on NAA's efforts to have its own website.

Regional Coordinators

NAA's three Regional Coordinators (RCs) play an important leadership role within the organisation. They support members in their respective regions to meet their membership obligations by encouraging them to participate in discussions about issues placed on NAA's main platform and to pay their contributions towards projects. The RCs also help solve region-specific problems and occasionally arrange social activities.

The RC for the Rest of Europe, Kwaku Adjei Brown, requested to be relieved of his post because he was leaving Europe. This, along with the low membership numbers in the region, led to a decision by the executive to amalgamate the UK and the Rest of Europe into a single RC jurisdiction, headed by Adelaide Yirenkyi, the UK RC.

In Canada, Ruby Adwere continued to act as the interim RC, in addition to fulfilling her substantive role as NAA's Registrar, following Kwaku Barima Boateng's vacation of his RC post.

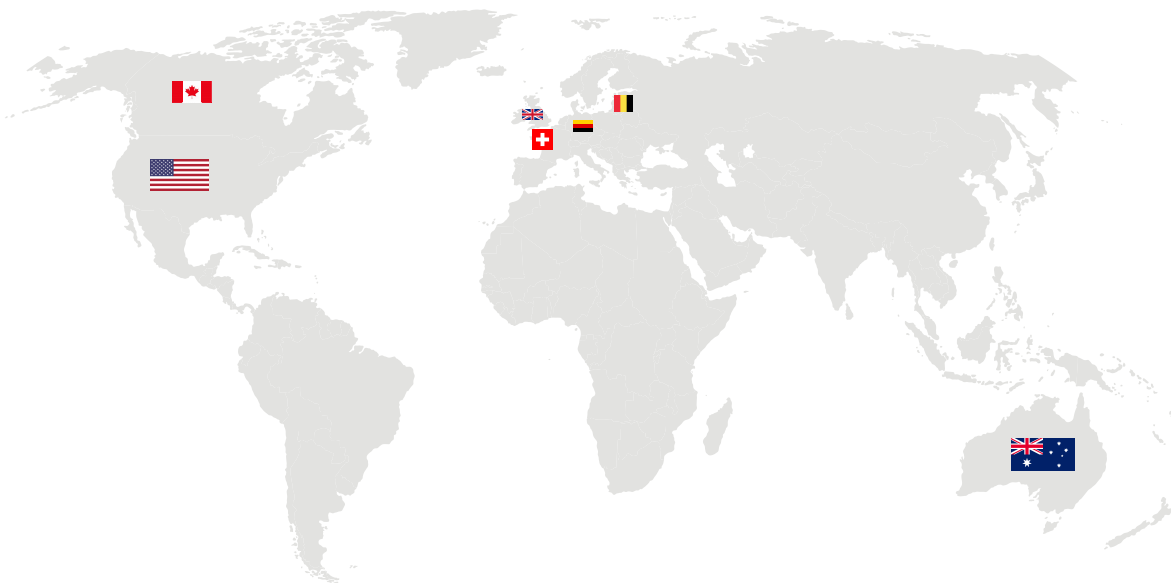
The RCs for Canada and the US were particularly active, with fundraising activities among their key achievements during the year.

The NAA Constitution

A few members advocated a change to the constitution to allow for the exclusion of members who failed to contribute funds towards projects, even if they had paid their one-off registration fee. This idea did not get much support and was, therefore, not taken up by the executive.

The NAA constitution adopted in 2016 remained unchanged and continued to govern NAA's operations during the year. The RC Guidelines developed under the constitution also remained unchanged and continued to guide the work of the Regional Coordinators.

Membership and registration



Summary

In early January, approximately 42 per cent of members were removed or exited voluntarily following an exercise by the executive to ensure only committed members remained in the organisation. By the end of the year, NAA had a total of 63 members.

Membership

Membership of NAA remained open to all old students of Nisec resident outside Ghana irrespective of their year group. The total number of members remaining in NAA at December 31 was 63, down 42 per cent on 2016.

A much-needed member-pruning exercise was conducted in early January to make sure only those who were committed to the NAA cause remained members of the organization

by January 7, NAA's first anniversary. Uncommitted members were given the opportunity to voluntarily exit themselves over a one-week period or be removed from NAA's registry and platforms.

Uncommitted members included those who had not:

- paid their \$50 registration fee
- paid any amount towards their \$250 project contribution
- asked the executive or the RCs for additional time to honour their financial obligations, or
- informed the executive or the RCs about exceptional circumstances preventing them from making any payments.

The executive had made it clear to members that NAA was formed to help improve facilities at Nifa Senior High

School through member contributions. If a member didn't share in this goal, it was important that they seized to be part of the organization.

The decision to streamline NAA's membership was not related to money alone. The executive had observed that since joining the group, some members had never participated in any NAA activity, including voting to adopt the constitution, choose a project or decide how much each member should contribute. Besides, many of them had not expressed their views about organisational matters; in fact, these members were effectively ghost members.

The executive left the door open for exited members to return if they chose to. They were welcome to return if they were ready to commit to the NAA cause, but they were required to pay their registration fee before being admitted back into the organization. It was also decreed that new applicants for membership would have to pay their registration fee before attaining full membership.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that some members joined NAA to socialise; others were wary of

entrusting their money with anyone for projects in Ghana; and some wanted to "wait and see" (i.e., whether NAA will fail or succeed).

In the end, the executive took the view that it would be better to have fewer members who were committed to the NAA cause and shared in the executive's vision to build a strong organization than to have a large number of uncommitted members.

The executive was also acutely aware that committed members were increasingly unhappy, frustrated and disillusioned about the uncommitted ones and the incessant pleas to them to fulfil their membership obligations. The result was that the continued membership of the uncommitted members had become a distraction from the core business of the organization.

NAA membership by country

Country	N° of members
Australia	2
Belgium	1
Canada	8
Germany	1
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom	9
United States of America	41

The registry

Joining NAA entitles members to a place on its communication platforms. At December 31, NAA had five official Whatsapp-based communication platforms:

- The global platform, also called the 'main platform'
- RC Europe platform
- RC Canada platform
- RC USA platform
- The Executive platform

The main platform remained the official registry. One became a member of NAA only after being placed on the main platform, which then entitled their presence on their respective RC platforms.

At 31 December, there were 12 registered members in Europe (UK and mainland Europe); two in Australia; eight in Canada and 41 in the United States.

Socialising on platforms

While social activity by NAA members and on NAA platforms remained incidental to NAA's core business, it was among the most patronised activities during the year.

As in 2016, the platforms became popular venues for celebrating:

- birthdays
- Mother's Day
- Father's Day
- Canada Day
- Independence Day (USA)
- Valentine's Day

Expression of condolences to bereaved members was also prominent. A lot more members were responsive to social occasions than they were to the day-to-day discussion of NAA matters.

Away from the platforms, the Canadian members organised a get-together in July. By all accounts, it was a fun-filled day. They enjoyed drinks, Ghanaian food, and music. They also used the occasion to raise funds to support NAA's maiden project.



NAA members in Canada get together

Attracting and retaining more of the younger generation of alumni will be necessary to secure the future of Nisec Alumni Abroad.

Challenges

Achieving broad-based membership within NAA continued to be elusive. NAA's membership is drawn predominantly from former students who studied at Nisec in the 1980s. Activity participation patterns during the year reflected this imbalance, with the few members from other year groups engaging less actively in discussions of NAA issues compared with a rather vocal cohort from the 1980s.

Attracting and retaining more of the younger generation of alumni will be necessary to secure the future of Nisec Alumni Abroad.

The small size of NAA's membership within the UK and Europe is also a concern given these two regions are known to be home to a large number of Nisec alumni. This will be one of the key issues to be addressed in 2018.

Projects

Summary

A review of the 2016 decision to build a multipurpose sports complex for Nifa resulted in a change of course. Members voted for the construction of a new toilet facility for female students at the school. Work to start construction of a \$20,000 biofil toilet system began after the President signed a contract with a contractor in Ghana.

Sports complex: a rethink

Before 2017, NAA had been raising funds from members towards the construction of a multipurpose sports complex, which was a proposal from the headmaster of Nifa Senior High. However, new graphic photos of crumbling facilities at Nifa shared by the US RC, Lady Queen Gyasi Danso, following a visit to the school in February, changed everything. Many members expressed strong views against proceeding with the sports complex. They believed the sports complex should be a low priority at a time when Nifa clearly lacked basic infrastructure like toilets and a kitchen, with the walls of the dormitories, dining hall and classrooms showing large cracks and the paint on them peeling off. It will be recalled that what had led to the formation of NAA in the first place was the alarming state of the school's infrastructure, particularly the near-primitive toilet facilities that were being used by students, as seen in photos shared on social media.

When NAA was ready to start a project in 2016, the headmaster informed the executive that other organisations had committed to building toilet facilities for the school, along with other priority projects relating to dormitories, classrooms, water supply and street lighting. At the same time, NOSA had published a list that showed year groups had picked up almost all the remaining projects, including painting of buildings and window repairs. Considering this, the sports complex became the next-best option for NAA to take up.

The new grim photos that emerged suggested to members that, one year on, none of the organisations or groups that had ostensibly committed to build, repair or renovate facilities at the school had fulfilled their commitments. Subsequent enquiries by the executive from the headmaster confirmed this. It also turned out that the sports complex was a more ambitious project than we were first made to understand. It was going to be a covered assembly area plus several sports facilities, with costs running into more than a million dollars.

A vote was conducted to decide whether to go ahead with the sports complex or take up another project. Members overwhelmingly voted in favour of a new project. A subsequent vote confirmed, from among five projects—construction of a new toilet facility, dining hall repairs, classroom repairs, dormitory repairs and construction of a multipurpose sports complex—that the toilet facility was the preferred project for members.

“We have done a tremendous job pulling this money together. I know of alumni groups that started before us but have not come close to what we’ve achieved so far.”

Confirmation from Kwabena Bekoe—a member from Canada who visited the school and met with the authorities—that the toilet was the highest priority reinforced the merit of the new project direction.

The headmaster agreed to a request by the executive to take up the toilet project, instead of the sports complex.

To start or not to start

The difficulty of raising enough money to build a toilet facility estimated at about \$20,000 remained to be addressed. Halfway through the year, NAA had raised \$12,000, some \$8000 short of the target. It was still a significant achievement by a group that had been in existence for only a little over a year. As the President commented, “We have done a tremendous job pulling this money together. I know of alumni groups that started before us but have not come close to what we’ve achieved so far.”

Some members agitated for NAA to start the project with the money that was available given the risk of inflation. Others believed it was not prudent to start the project when there was no guarantee of finding the rest of the money to complete it. A vote for or against these two options was conducted. By the deadline of July 8, the majority had voted in favour of starting the project.

Contract for work to begin

Things moved quickly afterwards. In August, the Project Leader, Michael Adu, on a private visit to Ghana, took the opportunity to work with the school authorities to initiate arrangements about contractor hiring, project commencement, supervision, and payment timelines. In October, the President, also on a private visit, signed a contract with Biological Filters and Composters Ltd to construct a



Workers erect walls for NAA's 10-seater biofil toilet system for Nifa Senior High School



NAA President Nick Opoku joins the school community to turn the first sod for construction of the new toilet to start.

10-seater biofil toilet system for the girls at Nifa Senior High School. On the same day, the President cut the sod for works to begin on the project. In November, the first instalment of US\$9,000 was transferred to the headmaster. This represented 40 per cent of the total cost of the contract. Throughout this period, the executive and RCs embarked on further fundraising to ensure NAA had enough funds to cover the entire cost of the project and meet its contractual obligations.

Progress

By the end of the year, the foundation of the toilet facility had been laid and the walls had started going up. NAA arranged for a member of NOSA resident in Adukrom to monitor and report on progress of the works.

The contractors expected construction to be completed by the end of February 2018.

Financial statement

Summary

In 2017, a total of \$3,000 in registration fee and \$19,029.34 in payment towards the ten-seater toilet project was received. Over the same period, NAA's expenses totalled \$9,040.

Registration fee collection

Through the membership-pruning exercise, every member remaining in the organisation after January will have paid their \$50 one-off registration fee, unless a member was facing financial hardship and had informed the executive about it.

At December 31, all NAA members had paid their \$50 registration fee.

Fundraising

The fundraising that began in 2016 continued throughout 2017. The same minimum amount (US\$250) that had been set for each member to pay towards the multipurpose sports complex in the previous year now applied to the toilet project.

On 1 January, a total of 29 members or 27 per cent (of the 107 members) had paid amounts ranging from \$200 to \$1000 each. By the end of June, 38 members or 60 per cent (of the 63 members remaining after the membership streamlining) had paid between \$100 and \$1300 each, and by the end of December, 44 members, or 70 per cent (also of 63), had made contributions in the same range as June.

Summary of Accounts Receivables and Expenses

Explanation	Item	Total
Total amount received from members towards the 10-seater biofil toilet facility	Contribution towards biofil toilet facility	\$ 16,547.85
Total expenses	Amount transferred for 1st instalment	\$ 9,040.00
Balance as of 01/25/2018	Total balance after 1st transfer	\$ 7,507.85

Challenges and opportunities

Before 2017, the executive had counted on the majority of members making the minimum contribution, which would have been more than enough to pay for the multipurpose sports complex, at the time estimated at \$25,000. Later events proved otherwise. With membership nearly halved in early 2017, the task of fundraising to meet the funding target had become more difficult.

It was expected, however, that contributions from the remaining members would cover the cost of the less expensive toilet project. Again, getting every one of the 63 members to pay was a challenge. The executive made numerous appeals for outstanding contributions to be made, but progress was slow.

Some members suggested approaching other philanthropic organisations and NGOs for funds. The general sentiment, however, was that it was not going to be easy because there were thousands of Third World

schools in a worse situation than Nifa Senior High.

The issue of having a website also came to the fore during these discussions. Some members believed a dedicated NAA website could boost the organization's chances of raising additional funds. Members urged the executive to speed up the work under way to build a website for NAA.

There were also suggestions for those who had already paid to make additional contributions. The President took this up and appealed to the paid members, a few of whom responded positively.

The US RC held a two-day fundraising event on the US platform and raised \$675 from seven paid members. In Canada, a fundraising event organised by the RC in July raised about US\$285.

Conclusion

Nisec Alumni Abroad has achieved much in the past two years, but like any organisation that is in its infancy, significant challenges remain. NAA is still working to find its feet. It will take a few more years before it comes of age.

The signs are, however, positive. There is every indication that NAA is on a firmer footing than it was a year ago and the year before that. The outlook is also promising, with a great sense of optimism among members that the organisation will continue to grow more strongly over the coming years.

The year 2017 was a year in which NAA strived to consolidate its position as a rising alumni organisation dedicated to helping its alma mater, Nifa Senior High School. The organization's structures put in place in 2016 are working well. The leadership remains strong and committed. The membership base has been streamlined to achieve a highly committed group of people that take pride in sharing a common vision to help their former school.

Through its robust democratic processes, and after a few necessary adjustments, a suitable project has been chosen to help meet a high-priority need for Nifa. A fundraising drive has yielded a significant amount of project money from members many of whom are working hard to make ends meet in faraway foreign lands.

With its maiden project due to be completed and commissioned in the first part of 2018, NAA is set to reach

an important milestone in its relatively short life. Completion of the biofil toilet facility will serve as a beacon for sustained efforts by NAA to help Nifa Senior High hold its head high among Ghana's schools.

Much work remains to be done.

The organisation needs to harness more effectively the power of new information and communication technology to support its cause.

This includes having a website and a Facebook account that can increase NAA's profile around the world and facilitate external fundraising. A younger generation of alumni will have to be attracted to the organisation to diversify the membership base and ensure continuity in the decades ahead, as will more members from Europe and the UK.

Internally, innovative ways need to be found to keep the NAA platforms lively and encourage greater responsiveness and participation by members.

Last, but not least, NAA will have to capitalise on its improved relationship with key stakeholders, particularly the school authorities and NOSA, to influence decision-making by the school's administration, especially where such decision-making impacts on infrastructure facilities at the school.

These are among the key issues that will inform NAA's program of work in the year ahead.

In members' own words

Together we will make Nisec great again.

– BELINDA DARKO

The school is in a very bad shape.

– LADY QUEEN DANSO

We've gone through a lot to come up with this money which I'm hoping that not a penny is wasted in the end. I think everyone shares a similar sentiment. I know we will all be proud of being part of this effort. – HELENA ADU

I do not see the need for a sport complex. Take a look at the NIFA pictures and you will see crumbling infrastructure, due to lack of maintenance. Let's go back to the drawing board, given the dire state of the school's infrastructure. – KWABENA BEKOE

The pictures that Lady has graciously shared with us, it's obvious that the school infrastructure is in dire straits. We ought to reconsider changing course. – ENOCH ASANTE BEDIAKO

The cracks in some of the buildings' foundation are really disturbing; not to mention the deplorable state of the classrooms. We need to reconsider going ahead with the tennis court. – AMA OPPON

Our initial goal to help was due to the deplorable pictures of our alma mater. – OLIVIA OTU MANTEAW

Don't forget that any project in Nifa is big money but we should not be deterred by that. A journey of 1000 miles start with a step. Let's rise and build. – HAYFORD ASARE-TABIRI

What shall profit NAA to build a nice sport complex while the main school building looks like the school has not been functioning for the past 75 years? Folks, we've got to wake up from our sleep. – DORIS YIRENKYI

We need a second thought about this sports complex. This is like asking a weak and dehydrated patient to run, meanwhile you have not given him IV fluids. – JULIE OWUSU

Until essential and pertinent priorities (like bathroom projects) are taken care of, everything else can wait. Ye nea ehia ansa na ya ye na efata. So the complex is a good idea but the Atonko is a death trap. – DOUGLAS BEKOE

We should take a project we can handle and be in control from start to finish. We can then realise what our efforts have achieved. – KINGSLEY AKOWUAH ADDO

Nothing beats a decent toilet facility; the importance of the dining hall can't supersede the urgency of a TOILET! Food can be eaten anywhere, but easing yourself can't. – VERA LARBI

It's a bit frustrating when you're waiting for members to chip in their contributions towards a major decision and they're budinnnn. It's a tortoise walk, but we'll get there. – RUBY ADWERE

Please remember the idea of creating this platform is to help the deplorable state of our dear Great Nisec and nothing more or less, so I think it is time for us to do our job. – ERNEST LARTEY

Digging a little deeper to come up with what is left to help the school that helped or moulded us while we were young and silly, it's also time to help her when she is old and frail. – MARY QUAO

When it comes to wishing happy birthdays or expressing sympathies, the enthusiasm is high. In the same way, we need to rally, encourage and motivate members so they have their say [about project issues]. – ERIC AFRIFA

I think we have done a tremendous job pulling this money together. I know of alumni groups that started before us but have not come close to what we achieved so far. – NICK OPOKU

