

**Authors**  
Ryan Knight

## The House on Mango Lane

One of the hardest things about doing research on poverty can be finding people for follow-up visits, especially in urban areas like Accra, Ghana, where I work. As a rule Accra has no helpful signs, street names, or addresses. Directions are based on landmarks, whose defining feature is usually that it's something old -- the types of things that are obvious if you've lived there forever, but make no sense when you're new to the city. The resulting irony is that the most expensive thing about our research can be the time spent finding people to research.

As one sweltering afternoon slipped away searching for respondents in Accra, I decided it was time to take charge and ask for help in interpreting our directions. The directions were about as good as any: "On Mango Lane, blue kiosk on the left". The street name and kiosk color were valuable clues, but where is Mango Lane? It didn't help that Vodaphone had just finished painting all the kiosks in the neighborhood Vodaphone-red, either. 'Which left?' was the least of my worries.

Approaching desperation, I retreated to the shelter of a nearby tree to ask a man sweating in the shade, "Where is Mango Lane?" His look was one of utter disbelief, even indignation -- 'you *Obrunis* will never get it, will you?' -- as he pointed straight up to the tree stretching out above us and said, "The one with the mango tree!"

Add another thing to the list of things I didn't expect to learn working for IPA: The ability to identify mango trees. Next time, I'll trust my survey team to interpret the directions.

August 31, 2009