**Breaking Ground**

**Press Kit**

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**Mission**

Breaking Ground partners with Cameroonians to achieve lasting solutions to their self-identified needs by investing in local knowledge, empowering women, and promoting economic development.

**Our Approach**

In Cameroon, whole communities are deprived of necessities such as clean water, education, and health care, keeping them locked in a cycle of poverty. We believe that a community project can only effectively address the needs of a population if it is conceived, planned, and implemented by the community for whom it is intended.

Furthermore, we believe that a project’s long-term sustainability is reliant on the deep-seated investment of the local population. Breaking Ground sees the role for outsiders in development as providers of funding and strategic resources to assist locally initiated projects. By empowering Cameroonian communities to implement their own grassroots projects, we enable sustainable, bottom-up development.

**Three focus areas**

1. [Community Partnership Program](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/community-partnerships/): We provide seed funding for development projects of mobilized communities.
2. [Investing in Agriculture:](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/investing-in-agriculture/) We provide training and resources to increase the ability of farmers to earn income growing coffee or cocoa or processing palm oil.
3. [Women's Empowerment:](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/womens-empowerment/) Our Women’s Entrepreneurial Program provides women with business skills and the confidence to put them to use. [Breaking Ground Football](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/girls-and-young-womens-soccer/) helps girls and young women build confidence and independence.

**Breaking Ground Statistics**[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. In our first 6 years, over 39,000 individual lives have been directly benefited from our projects and programs. This includes 1,650 students in primary and high school.
2. We have worked with 10 distinct communities in 3 different regions of Cameroon.
3. 243 women have graduated from our business programs and 64 women run businesses have received start up or expansion funding.

**Fact Sheet**

1. Only [51%](http://apps.who.int/whosis/database/core/core_select_process.cfm?countries=cmr&indicators=PopAccessImprovedWaterUrban&indicators=PopAccessImprovedWaterRural&indicators=PopAccessImprovedSanitationUrban&indicators=PopAccessImprovedSanitationRural) of rural populations in Cameroon have access to "improved water sources."[[2]](#footnote-2) Further, [7.7%](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/diarrhoea/en/) of deaths in Africa as a whole are caused by diarrhea, a condition easily prevented with adequate sanitation.[[3]](#footnote-3)
2. In Cameroon as a whole, only [63%](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon_statistics.html) of births are attended by a skilled attendant, leaving many women and children at risk from avoidable complications.[[4]](#footnote-4)
3. Only [64%](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon_statistics.html) of primary school entrants succeed in reaching 5th grade, inhibiting them from achieving their full potential and limiting their contribution to their families' wellbeing.[[5]](#footnote-5)
4. [55%](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx) of Cameroonians in rural populations live below the national poverty line.[[6]](#footnote-6)
5. The infant mortality rate is [86](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx) deaths for every 1,000 live births.[[7]](#footnote-7) The mortality rate for children under 5 years old is 154 deaths for every 1,000 live births, making it the 13th highest child mortality rate in the world.[[8]](#footnote-8)
6. [16.6%](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx) of children under 5 years old are underweight.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**History**

Breaking Ground was founded in 2006 by Lindsay Clarke. In 2004, as a university student, Lindsay participated in the [School for International Training’s Cameroon program](http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/program_content/contents.cfm?include=cmr_index.html&progCode=ssa.cmr). She returned to Dschang in 2006 with a [grant from Wesleyan University](http://africa.blogs.wesleyan.edu/christopher-brodigan-award/). While teaching English at a primary school in the village of Doumbouo, Lindsay saw that the greatest barrier to her students’ success was the state of their classrooms, which had dirt floors and unplastered walls.

On learning that the students’ parents had raised the funds themselves to build the school and that construction had been halted when funds ran out, Lindsay contacted her community in the United States to raise the money. Over the course of seven months, she raised more than $12,000, which the village of Doumbouo used to finish the school and build a community library.

Acknowledging that the success of this project was due to the enthusiasm and mobilization of the community in Doumbouo, Breaking Ground was founded to help similarly motivated communities to achieve their goals.

As Breaking Ground evolved, it became clear that in addition to facilitating pre-existing projects through funding, there was also a need for capacity building programs that would give communities the tools to begin addressing their needs. In 2007, Breaking Ground sent Sarah Oxford to Ngaoundéré where she established [Breaking Ground Football](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/girls-and-young-womens-soccer/), a program which empowers young girls through soccer (football), and the [Women's Entrepreneurial Program](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/womens-entrepreneurial-program/), a business class and grant program designed specifically for women.

Following this, Breaking Ground representative Nathan Spence founded the [West Cameroon Coffee Project](http://breaking-ground.squarespace.com/coffee/), working with coffee farmers in the village of Bayangam in the West to provide training to improve product processing and assist the farmers in negotiating a fair price for their product in the international market.

Over time, the number of ongoing programs and the number of community requests for partnership became too much for a volunteer-run organization, and in 2010 we hired Paul François Zangue as our first Program Director. Shortly thereafter, we opened our office in Dschang. Since hiring Paul we have expanded our programs to include [the Lebialem Valley](http://www.breaking-ground.org/cocoa-palm-oil/) local partnerships, launched a Women’s Entrepreneurial Program in Dschang and completed the construction of a preschool in the village of Keuleng.

**Ongoing Programs**

* **Women’s Entrepreneurial Program**: Founded in 2007, WEP provides women with critical business skills and the confidence to put them to use. Currently the class is taking place in Dschang, in partnership with the locally based organization Groupement d’Appui pour le Developpement Durable (GADD). Together with GADD, we offer a seven-week business course that incorporates topics such as feasibility studies, basic marketing, cost analysis, and leadership, among others.
* **Breaking Ground Football:** The program helps young women overcome social and cultural obstacles through the medium of football (soccer). The program targets teenage girls who come from a variety of backgrounds. Together, they learn to work as a team, develop respect for their peers across religious and ethnic lines, and strengthen their own sense of confidence and independence.
* **Cocoa and Palm Oil Program**: The goal of the project is to bolster production of cocoa and palm oil by providing nurseries of specialized crops, training and access to improved processing techniques. The increased income empowers families to invest in education and healthcare. We hope to enable more girls to attend school by mechanizing the palm oil production. When done by hand, this process requires many workers, many of whom are girls who might otherwise attend school.

**Completed Projects**

* Continued Construction of Doumbouo Primary School (January-April 2006; West Region)

Independent of any government funding, the community of Doumbouo made tremendous progress in constructing the Doumbouo Primary School. Because of limited funding, the work had been halted with just a basic, six-room cinderblock structure in place, leaving dirt floors, walls bare of any instructional materials, and windows open to the elements.

Breaking Ground helped finish construction of classrooms and office floors, installed a potable water source, built a staircase and flag pole, installed cabinets, expanded blackboards, painted classrooms, and painted educational murals.

* Construction of Public Library of Bafou-Sud (May-July 2006; West Region)

The Lycée de Bafou-Sud is the premier educational facility in the subdivision of Doumbouo. It serves as a secondary school for all the primary schools of the eleven surrounding villages. In 2006, the school’s teachers and parents petitioned the [African Library Project](http://www.africanlibraryproject.org/) and [International Children’s Awareness](http://www.icacanada.org/) to arrange the shipment of English and French books for a new, bilingual community library. With the book shipments secured, the community constructed a library to support the educational needs of their youth. In the first two years of its operation, La Bibliothèque Publique de Bafou-Sud lent more than 7,000 library volumes to students, teachers, and community members of Doumbouo.

* Construction of Glory Bilingual Nursery & Primary School (January-March 2008; Ngaoundal, Adamaoua Region)

Madame Becham, a participant in the 2007 session of the Women’s Entrepreneurial Program, is a certified teacher and single mother of four. In 2004, Becham used her own savings to start Glory Bilingual Elementary School in Ngaoundal, a district where government studies estimate that only 35% of children attend school. With funds from Breaking Ground, work began in March 2008 to build a three-classroom facility. The school was inaugurated on June 28, 2008. Since 2008, Becham has expanded the school to over 60 students.

* West-Cameroon Coffee Project (2008)

In 2008, Breaking Ground worked with an organized group of coffee farmers. By making the few operational improvements necessary for a consistently high quality coffee that will attract buyers in the U.S. specialty coffee market – where higher quality means higher prices – this group worked to create a sustainable source of income to energize the community and boost the rural economy.

In a single year, the West Cameroon Coffee Project produced high quality beans, exposed them to western markets and increased their value for the farmers by 30%. Along the way we provided them with the knowledge and technique to sustain that quality and consistency and to eliminate chemical products and fertilizers from their operations.

* Construction of the Menouet River Bridge (February 2008-May 2009; Les Villages F4, West Region)

Construction of the Menouet Bridge Project was completed in early 2009, connecting tens of thousands of villagers to a nearby city and increasing their access to markets. From the beginning, the community tackled this project alone, without government funds or support, and without a major contracting company involved. We were alerted to this project by a Peace Corps volunteer and were immediately inspired by the energy and commitment of the community.

Once we joined the effort, the U.S. Embassy and British High Commission followed. The project management committee, composed of community and traditional leaders from the villages, worked to maintain communication and coordinate effective collaboration between the different parties. Many members of the community waded deep into the waters of the river to build this bridge, working through rain and many nights, over the course of months.

* Completion of the Keuleng Preschool and Community Center (November 2009-August 2011; Keuleng, West Region)

The village of Keuleng collectively decided that the construction of a two-room preschool building, which would serve as a community center also, would greatly benefit not only the children but the village and surrounding area. The villagers raised more than $1,000 towards the project. After more than 18 years of savings, they succeeded in constructing the building's foundation and vertical beams.

Thanks to a generous grant from the [Obakki Foundation](http://obakkifoundation.org/), Breaking Ground worked side-by-side with the village leadership of Keuleng to launch construction in November 2009. While the grant from Obakki and additional Breaking Ground funds served to purchase materials, the community contributed the manual labor for the construction. Classes began in September 2011.

1. Updated January 3rd 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.who.int/gho/countries/cmr/country\_profiles/en/index.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.who.int/water\_sanitation\_health/diseases/diarrhoea/en/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon\_statistics.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon\_statistics.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cameroon_statistics.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)