



B R E A K I N G G R O U N D
Grassroots, Sustainability, Community

Strategic Plan 2010 - 2012

Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary.....	3
II.	Organizational Principles.....	4
	Mission Statement	
	Vision Statement	
	Core Values	
	Underlying Beliefs	
III.	Organizational Profile and History.....	5
	Summary of Achievements	6
IV.	Critical Issues and Strategies	7
	Environmental Scan (SWOT)	9
V.	Program Goals and Objectives.....	10
VI.	Management Goals and Objectives	11

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I. Executive Summary

This is the first multi-annual strategic plan of Breaking Ground. It was prepared by Executive Director Lindsay Clarke and Secretary of the Board of Directors Alexandra Moore, with assistance from the Board and our Cameroonian advisors.

The Cameroonian landscape is brimming with communities who are mobilized to address the basic needs of their populations (e.g. clean water, education, and healthcare), but whose solutions are hindered by a lack of financial capital. Breaking Ground enables Cameroonians to address the self-identified needs of their communities by providing locally initiated projects with funding and resources.

We believe that a 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, and that this investment cannot be fostered through the work of a foreign entity like ourselves, but must develop organically through a collective recognition of the identified problem and a commitment to solve it.

Breaking Ground identifies communities who have independently identified a need among their population, devised a solution to that need, and made measurable progress towards achieving that solution, but whose efforts have been hindered by a lack of financial resources. We generate support for these projects in the United States and abroad, making it possible for our donors to engage directly with Cameroonians by donating to specific projects. In doing so, Cameroonian communities are provided with the financial resources they need to launch effective and sustainable solutions to their basic needs.

This strategic plan highlights the values that have driven Breaking Ground since its inception in 2006 and lays out the direction for program expansion and evolution over the next ten years. It includes a frank discussion of the challenges the organization faces and our strategies for facing these challenges.

II. Organizational Principles

Mission Statement:

Breaking Ground enables Cameroonians to address the self-identified needs of their communities by providing locally-initiated projects with funding and strategic resources.

Vision Statement:

Our goal is to provide Cameroonian communities with the resources they need to employ sustainable solutions to satisfy their basic needs. We will achieve this through the funding of community planned and initiated projects and through capacity building programs. Over the course of the next ten years we aim to have expanded upon our current partnership with the Peace Corps and utilize their entire national network for finding worthy projects in all twelve regions of Cameroon. In addition we will have built a network of partner organizations throughout the twelve regions who will assist Breaking Ground with community evaluation and capacity building. By 2020 we plan to have a Small Enterprise Development Program (SED) and a Women's Entrepreneurial Program (WEP) in each region of Cameroon. These programs will provide income generation as well as culturally specific health education. To oversee all these projects, Breaking Ground will expand our in-country staff to include Regional Directors in addition to our National Director and Directors of Small Enterprise Development. Breaking Ground ultimately envisions a Cameroon in which communities possess the capacity to address their own self-identified needs.

Core Values:

Respect: In our work in Cameroon, we will always honor the indigenous knowledge and innovation of the Cameroonian communities with whom we work.

Transparency: Breaking Ground will require clear, transparent and timely financial records from the communities in which it works and accurately report progress to our donor base.

Partnerships: The work of Breaking Ground is complemented by that of our strategic partnerships in Cameroon. We seek to leverage our influence and increase the scope of our work by utilizing the expertise and reach of our partners.

Underlying Beliefs:

- Breaking Ground sees the role for outsiders in development as providers of funding and strategic resources to assist grassroots, sustainable projects.
- Breaking Ground believes that a prerequisite to strong, growing and sustainable societies is the satisfaction of basic needs—access to clean water, adequate sanitation, educational opportunities, and health care.
- At the core of sustainability are deeply committed communities with long-term goals.

III. Organizational Profile and History

Breaking Ground was founded in 2006 by current Executive Director, Lindsay Clarke. In 2004, as a university student, Ms. Clarke participated in the School for International Training's Cameroon program. She returned to Dschang in 2006 with a grant from Wesleyan University, which she received upon her graduation. While teaching English at a primary school in the village of Doumbouo, 12 kilometers from Dschang in the West Region, Ms. Clarke 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, Ms. Clarke contacted her community in the United States to raise funds to assist the community in their endeavors. Over the course of seven months, Ms. Clarke raised \$12,000 (approximately 6,000,000 f CFA), 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, vision, and mobilization of the community in Doumbouo, Breaking Ground was founded to help similarly motivated and organized 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 Associate Director Sarah Oxford to Ngaoundéré where she established Breaking Ground Football, a program which empowers young girls through soccer (football), and the Women's Entrepreneurial Program (WEP), a business class and grant program designed specifically for women. Following this, Breaking Ground representative Nathan Spence founded the West Cameroon Coffee Project, 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.

In just three years, Breaking Ground has made measurable progress in tackling the inadequacies of social services and the barriers to grassroots efforts in more than six Cameroonian communities. Projects have included the improvement of a primary school in Doumbouo and the construction of a bilingual nursery and primary school in Ngaoundal, a bridge between Litieu and Melah, and a nursery school in Keuleng, the latter two both near Dschang. In Doumbouo, we funded the construction of a library that loaned more than 7,000 volumes to villagers in two years. Our Women's Entrepreneurial Program has provided business skills training to more than 150 women and financed 21 new enterprises. Breaking Ground Football has empowered more than 120 young women since 2007.

Summary of Achievements 2006-2009

January-April 2006

Improvement of Doumbouo Primary School (West Region)

- Classroom and office floors and walls cemented
- Potable water source installed
- Staircase and flagpole constructed
- Blackboards expanded & cabinets installed
- Classrooms painted
- Educational murals painted in classrooms and around school grounds

June-July 2006

Construction of Public Library of Bafou-Sud (West Region)

- Building constructed from the ground up
- Books shipments received from African Library Project & ICA Canada
- Library Staff trained

August 2006-August 2007

Registration of Breaking Ground as 501(c)(3) public charity in the United States

September 2007-Present

Women's Entrepreneurial Program (Ngaoundéré, Adamaoua Region)

- More than 150 women provided with business skills training
- Approximately \$25000 in grants provided to 21 program participants to start their new businesses

September 2007-Present

Breaking Ground Football Program (Ngaoundéré, Adamaoua Region)

- 120 young women engaged in empowerment program
- 6 teams formed
- 12 volunteer coaches

January-March 2008

Construction of Glory Bilingual Nursery & Primary School (Ngaoundal, Adamaoua Region)

July 2008-July 2009

West Cameroon Coffee Project (Batoufam, West Region)

- 60 farmers trained in improved processing and organic practices
- International buyers introduced to Cameroonian coffee

February 2008-May 2009

Construction of the Menouet River Bridge (Les Villages F4, West Region)

- 34,000 villagers provided with improved access to the markets and services of Dschang

November 2009-Present

Construction of Keuleng Preschool and Community Center (Keuleng, West Province)

IV. Critical Issues and Strategies

The ability of community members to meet their basic needs is a prerequisite for building a healthy society. In Cameroon, however, whole communities are deprived of necessities such as clean water, education, and health care because of the inadequacy of public services: only 41% of rural populations have access to “improved water sources” (WHO), only 63% of births are attended by a skilled medical professional, and only 64% of primary school entrants succeed in reaching 5th grade (UNICEF).

Breaking Ground addresses these needs by providing access to funding that otherwise would be inaccessible to Cameroonian communities. The citizens of Cameroon face often-insurmountable obstacles to addressing the needs of their communities. Because more than 50% of Cameroonians live on less than \$2 per day (UNDP), funding projects to address local needs can take years – even decades. When communities turn to lending organizations or other sources of funding for assistance, they are thwarted by corruption: 52% of small enterprises report paying bribes to conduct business, and 19% report paying bribes to obtain a bank loan (Transparency International). Major lenders and donors are reluctant to engage with communities in a country as corrupt as Cameroon, which was rated by Transparency International in 2007 as the most corrupt country in the world.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW:

Population: 18,879,301
Life expectancy at birth: 53.69
School life expectancy: 9 years
Infant Mortality Rate: 63.34/1000
HIV/AIDS Adult Prevalence Rate: 5.1% (2007)
Population living below the Poverty Line: 48%
Unemployment: 30%
Labor force - by occupation:
Agriculture: 70%
Industry: 13%
Services: 17% (2001 est.)

CIA World Factbook, 2009

As prevailing trends in development theory have evolved to all but mandate a participatory approach, many NGOs have adopted methods that rely heavily on community involvement and capacity-building, believing – rightly – that effective and sustainable solutions require local input. In *Reversed Realities*, Naila Kabeer states that alternative views to development, inspired by grassroots approaches, “are based on close, face-to-face interaction between organizations and their constituencies so that ideas and policies are shaped in the crucible of everyday practice rather than in the upper echelons of remote and rule-bound bureaucracies.” However, “despite [their] rhetoric of participatory development, the power to define priorities remains where it has always been, in the hands of a minority at the top” (1994, p. 223). It has been established that the failure of many projects implemented by foreign NGOs results from these organizations’ “inadequate understanding of local socioeconomic context” (Campbell and Vainio-Mattila, 2003; Wells and Brandon, 1993).

Breaking Ground achieves this “close, face-to-face interaction” with our constituency via several strategic partnerships, including those with the United States Peace Corps, the Bafoussam-based Research Institute for Development (RIDEV), and the Buea-based Center for International Cooperation (CIC). Breaking Ground's partnership with the Peace Corps utilizes the vast network of American volunteers as a means of connecting Breaking Ground with communities in need of assistance throughout the country. The partnership with RIDEV, a local NGO that focuses on community development, helps to effectively identify and evaluate motivated communities with projects in need of Breaking Ground's funding, and also provides capacity building programs and technical assistance in addition to those programs provided by Breaking Ground. Following this model with RIDEV, Breaking Ground is in the

process of establishing a relationship with the Community Research and Development Center (COREDEC), based in Ngaoundéré. Building upon the existing models of women's education and small enterprise development, Breaking Ground's partnership with CIC will establish an agricultural enterprise development program in the Southwest Region, aimed at enhancing communities' abilities to generate revenue through improved practices in palm oil production and the support of cocoa farmers' as they pursue better market access for their product.

It is self-evident that Cameroonians know better than anyone else what their own communities need. Thus, Breaking Ground has designed an approach that is innovative because we seek out and reward indigenous solutions to communities' self-identified problems by funding only those projects initiated independently of foreign influence.

Our methods necessitate a patient, flexible, and deliberate approach. In accepting that each community's needs are unique and require a culturally appropriate solution, we must also accept that what works in one village may not work in the next – a particularly daunting reality in a country as ethnically diverse as Cameroon.

Through education and outreach, Breaking Ground aims to empower Cameroonian communities with the financial capital to move beyond the basic needs in their own communities and assert themselves in the global playing field. In bringing attention to the plight of Cameroonian communities, we begin the process of shifting the negative and demoralizing foreign influence to one of mutual respect, cross-cultural understanding, and international cooperation.

As our Internal/External assessment demonstrates, our primary strengths are our committed volunteers (our Executive Director currently works fulltime without a salary) and our knowledge of Cameroonian culture and communities. Our primary challenge is the need to secure the funding necessary to hire a fulltime staff and cover our modest administrative expenses. We do not generate any income and thus rely on donations and grants.

Internal and External Assessment
(SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Internal	External
<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of potential community-initiated projects in Cameroon - Well-established system for evaluating community mobilization and project success - Positive history of collaboration with partner communities and like-minded domestic and international organizations - Successful realization of funded projects and programs - Maximizing impact of donor contributions - Strong, respectful, and trust-based relationships with Cameroonian communities - Engagement in work with culturally and ethnically diverse communities - Experience with and understanding of Cameroon’s diversity of cultures - Well respected both in Cameroon and the United States - Committed and passionate volunteers - Small group of committed donors - Expansion of web-based and social-media presence 	<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enthusiasm of Cameroonian communities for programs - Increasing demand for expansion of programs to new regions of Cameroon - Partnerships with locally-acting NGOs - Partnership with the US Peace Corps - Increasing eligibility for funding via foundation and government grants - Expansion of donor-base via collaborative relationships with existing donors - Numerous partner communities awaiting funding - Increased community recognition of activities - Contacts and ideas from future board members - Increasing attractiveness to potential donors and board members
<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of full-time staff - Lack of sufficient reporting in early years of operation - Lack of documentation of operating procedures - Difficulty in obtaining “general support” grants - Inability to capture profitable donor opportunities for lack of sufficient staff and collateral - Small donor base - Insufficient exploitation of web-based marketing tools - Board and staff crossover - Lack of board member expertise 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of funding - Potential for political instability - Continued struggle against systematic corruption in the field - Insufficient mobilization of current and future board members - Insufficient staff - Other agencies competing for the same grant money - Unavailability of “general support” grants - Delay of project funding due to reliance on slow-paced project-specific grantmakers - Impact of current economic crisis on donor generosity

V. Program Goals and Objectives

Breaking Ground provides Cameroonian communities with access to the funding, resources, and capacity-building programs they need to implement sustainable solutions to their basic needs. We achieve these goals through funding community initiated and planned projects and through capacity building programs. In collaboration with our partner organization RIDEV, Breaking Ground has designed a process for careful selection of eligible projects. The evaluation and selection of potential projects is conducted by a combination of Peace Corps volunteers, independent experts and Breaking Ground staff. Once a project has been selected, the project is carefully overseen by the national director, and evaluations are conducted during actualization and after project realization.

Our capacity building programs are designed to fit the specific needs of the community in which they are based.

- Breaking Ground Football is a program that empowers young girls through soccer (football).
- The Women's Entrepreneurial Program (WEP) is a business class designed specifically for women, which accomodates both literate and illiterate participants. We plan to partner with local microfinance institutions, giving WEP participants the opportunity to apply for start-up loans for their businesses, with Breaking Ground acting as their guarantor.
- The West Cameroon Coffee Project, a branch of our small Enterprise Development Progam works 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.
- Beginning in November 2010 a branch of the Small Enterprise Development program will be working with women in Lewoh in the South West of Cameroon to provide training in Palm Oil processing.

By 2020, we aim to facilitate seventy community projects in seventy different communities in Cameroon, involve more than 2,000 new individual donors in the United States, and maintain 50% retention of our existing donor base. In the same period, by diversifying and expanding the reach of the Women's Entrepreneurial Program (WEP) and the Small Enterprise Development (SED) program, we aim to provide educational opportunities to more than 8,000 Cameroonians, enabling them to increase their earning capacity and invest in the well being of both their immediate families and the greater communities.

Breaking Ground relies on the ingenuity of each community with whom we engage, and because each community's needs are unique, the nature of our projects varies and no single baseline figure can quantify the problems we strive to solve. Based on the observed needs and priorities of communities thus far, however, we predict that a majority of our projects will focus on the improvement of education, sanitation, and health services. In providing Cameroonian communities with the resources they need to employ sustainable solutions to their basic needs, our work empowers a population that has been repeatedly disenfranchised by their position within the global economy.

VI. Management Goals and Objectives

Breaking Ground is a relatively young organization which is continuing to evolve as we expand to service more communities. By the end of 2010, we aim to have at least two paid, full-time positions in Cameroon, and one in our Portland, Maine headquarters, to ensure that Breaking Ground has fully committed leadership. The staff structure presented here is therefore a planned structure, which we are in the process of actualizing.

