

# Building Schools for Africa

(UK Reg. Charity 1127661)

Our website is [www.schoolsforafrica.co.uk](http://www.schoolsforafrica.co.uk)

Supporters' Newsletter—October 2013



**Building Schools for Africa** is about – well it's about doing just that – building schools, so that children like this little chap can have a real role to play in a modern world! However, a brief look at our projects shows that we have a slightly broader remit. In this issue we would like to show what other things we do to complement the school building programme and why we do it.

## ***So, what schools have we been building this year?***

So far during 2013 we have completed the construction of 4 primary schools and one secondary school and, at the time of writing, there are seven more schools under construction – one of them a technical school offering vocational training. Four more school-building projects are at the planning stage as is the upgrading of an existing secondary school building.

Old classroom blocks at Bangourain

### **Completed Schools in 2013:**

- E.P. Bangourain Chefferie - 3 classroom primary
- E.P. Njintout - 3 classroom primary
- C.E.S. Koumaga - 3 classroom secondary
- G.B.P.S. Koupamenke - 3 classroom primary
- G.S Mfe Mback-Mabok – 3 classroom primary

### **Schools currently under construction:**

- C.S.S. Ngouetou - 3 classroom secondary
- C.B.C. Kishey - 3 classroom primary
- C.S. Rifem - 3 classroom primary
- G.S.S Kiyam - 3 classroom secondary
- G.S.S Nkar - 3 classroom secondary
- G.T.C Kitiwum - 3 classroom technical secondary
- G.B.P.S Ntui - 3 classroom primary

All these projects include the provision of toilets and hand-washing facilities, and school farm for income generation ... and there's more ...



New School on opening day



Every penny donated to Building Schools for Africa goes directly towards the construction of a new school. We make **no deductions** for administration and pay all our own expenses.

# ... AND WHAT ELSE HAVE WE BEEN DOING??

In addition to the schools, we are also funding several allied projects including

- building one medical centre and upgrading another,
- providing water for a village,
- equipping a school workshop and
- building a bridge over a river.

Finally we are funding the education of a small number of individual children, each of whom has their own story to tell...

## Why build a bridge?

The 7 metre-long Roh Kimbo Bridge spans a narrow gorge which separates a farming community from the main road into Kumbo and has to be crossed daily both by farmers taking produce to market and by over 400 children walking to school. The current bridge is made of wood with no handrail and no walkway to separate the children from trucks and motorbikes. In the rainy season (which lasts for several months) the river becomes a raging torrent and over the years many children and elderly people have been swept to their deaths. When SHUMAS undertook a needs assessment exercise in this community, a replacement bridge was given highest priority. Made of reinforced concrete, the new bridge will have both a handrail and walkway and will provide a safe crossing for the schoolchildren for years to come. In addition, families will no longer lose income from spoiled crops due to their inability to get to market - and this means that school fees can be paid. Everybody wins!



Old broken bridge



Foundation set



200 villagers help lay the platform

## Why provide water?

Cameroon has a high rainfall and there is no lack of water. The problem is to make it accessible. In some communities such access is easy but in others, children have to make long treks to carry their daily water supply in buckets, bowls and cans. Without clean water, children are at constant risk of intestinal infections and from all the other illnesses associated with poor hygiene. The topography of the areas in which we work is very variable and thus supplying water to a school or to a village can mean anything from laying a short pipe from a holding tank to a tap (costing a few hundred pounds), to sinking a bore hole, or building a water catchment in the hills and laying several kilometres of pipe (costing several thousand pounds). Clean water improves every aspect of village life. It enables children to keep themselves and their uniforms clean, and attend school unhindered by ill-health. Time spent learning increases as the water is literally on tap rather than half a mile away so morale and self esteem all improve.

This is the UN's International Decade for Action on water provision. We want to help the UN achieve its goal in Cameroon.



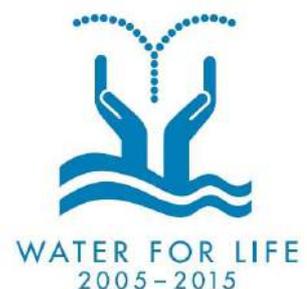
A typical village water hole



New supply of clean potable water



Children carrying unsafe, contaminated drinking water to school





Children demonstrate their electric wiring skills at GTC Mbah

## Why provide a school workshop?

Some of the schools that we are asked to help actually have reasonably sound classrooms but lack the very basic equipment necessary to educate their pupils. School books are rarely available and in rural areas, even the most primitive computer would be an unheard of luxury. In the village of Ndikimeniki there is a Lycee Technique (technical secondary school) which offers vocational courses in such subjects as brick laying, mechanics, electrics and plumbing. These skills are the passport to self-sufficiency but how can they be taught without the facilities of the two workshops and equipment which this year are being funded by BSFA? Our aim is not just to enable literacy and numeracy but to provide skills for life and avoid any kind of future dependency.

## Why provide Health Centres?

Indeed at first sight, these have little to do with education but how can children attend school if they are sick? Likewise if another family member is ill, fields still have to be tended and education inevitably takes a lower priority. In some areas there is little or no access to health care: women die in childbirth at the side of the road, treatable diseases are not diagnosed and wounds become dangerously infected. The small number of health centres which we have refurbished respond to this need and are part of an integrated package of village development aimed at promoting good health, increased literacy, independence and self-reliance. This then offers real hope of prosperity to those who have formerly been denied such opportunity. We work closely with our Bournemouth-based sister charity 'Spreading Health' who fund the training of nurses to work in these rural villages.



Spreading Health nurses unveil new equipment at the opening of the health centre at Njitapong



Ali Jafaru tells Marianne his story outside his school in Kumbo.

## Why have a Scholarship scheme?

Child sponsorship schemes have been somewhat frowned upon in recent years. They raise all sorts of issues about fairness and appropriateness with accompanying risks of introducing jealousy and division in communities. However, our partner NGO in Cameroon (SHUMAS) has intimate knowledge about individual children who would benefit most from help and support. Almost always these are either orphans or children from particularly poor families who show particular abilities, talents and determination. Wherever possible we offer educational scholarships to these children rather than more general 'sponsorship' which is so frowned upon. This scheme is implemented and monitored by a dedicated SHUMAS team to ensure not only proper use of funds but also to provide personal support and mentorship to the children.

Ali Jafaru is one such child. Aged 11, he comes from a very poor Fulani community. Although he had completed primary education, he was unable to go to secondary school because of the family's poverty and, as he put it, his job now was to 'run behind the cows'. On a visit to Ali's village, the head of SHUMAS, Stephen Ndzerem, was approached by Ali who offered him a friendly greeting, a firm handshake and an unsolicited explanation about his situation in life. When asked whether he would be prepared to go to secondary school if a place could be found for him, Ali immediately ran into the house to pack his few belongings! With his parents blessing he left the village that same day and Stephen managed to place him in a boarding school some miles away. He is now doing exceptionally well and is achieving high marks in all subjects. His ambition is to be a doctor. He is being supported by two BSFA trustees who consider it a privilege to enable a child to swap a life of poverty for a professional career which will benefit so many others.

In our last Newsletter, we mentioned the twins Valerie and Vera Kernyuy (then aged 10) who made their way from their remote village to Bamenda to offer themselves as child labour so that they could save money to pay for themselves to go to secondary school. The girls had been given temporary accommodation at the Bishop's House although the nuns were not keen to



Twins Vera and Valerie, at home in the Bishops house in Bamenda. They would like to be nurses.

keep them there. SHUMAS was told that the girls would have to go to a residential school as soon as a place could be found for them. How things have changed for them in just one year! Marianne met them during her trip this year and learned that everyone at the Bishops House had taken the girls to their hearts and now want them to stay on for as long as they need. The nuns actually compete with one another for the privilege of taking the girls into town to go shopping! Both Very and Valerie are very happy in Bamenda and are doing well at school. They would eventually like to become nurses.



Sandra was just 14 when her mother, Jane, died in her arms. Jane had been a single parent and was a very popular member of the staff at SHUMAS. During Jane's illness, Sandra had dropped out of school to look after her and had fallen far behind in her school work. SHUMAS found her a place in a residential school where Stephen is a PTA member and, despite considerable resistance from some teachers who felt Sandra was not making sufficient effort, Stephen insisted she be given a chance both to recover from her bereavement and to catch up with her school work. Sandra is now doing well. Her exam grades are improving every term, she has regained her self-confidence and, when Marianne met up with her

in April, she declared that her dream is to become a lawyer.

There are many children like Ali, Sandra, Vera and Valerie and, with help from a few exceptionally generous BSFA supporters. there are now more than 100 children in secondary education thanks to the scholarship scheme.

### Children in the UK raising money to help children in Cameroon



Amelie (aged 7) and her little brother Fraser (aged 4) set out this summer to undertake a sponsored walk to raise money for extra facilities at a tiny primary school called CBC Kishiy. Why would they do that? Well, the grown-ups in their family had sent BSFA the funds to rebuild this dilapidated

school, in memory of the children's grandparents, and Amelie and Fraser wanted to get involved in the project too. They were supposed to walk 6 miles but ended up walking more like 10 ... and they raised an astonishing £700!!!

The money will be spent on extra benches so that all the children will have somewhere to sit in class. A couple of school footballs and a set of football jerseys will also be purchased (both boys and girls are mad about football) as will a collection of African drums which the children will use to form a school band, because singing and dancing is a very important part of school life. Finally, some of the money will be used to buy essential text books. We are quite certain that the children at Kishiy will be overwhelmed by the generosity of Amelie and Fraser and their sponsors.

#### Only a small space left and so much to say ....

Please visit our **website** ([www.schoolsforafrica.co.uk](http://www.schoolsforafrica.co.uk)) to get more info and see more pictures of our schools. We have a **Facebook** page which we hope will be even more active in future (Building Schools for Africa) and we also have a **Twitter** account (BSFA), which will get tweeting asap. We are also very excited about having **three more trustees** to help us in the near future. Full details on our website when everything has been finalised.

Whilst Olly Gompels (aged 11) was a pupil at Warminster Prep School, he helped to raise almost £350 for the primary school in Koumenke village in the West Region of Cameroon. Olly's



parents had funded the rebuilding of this primary school (below) and he, too, wanted to be involved.



With his parents' help, he organised the sale of specially printed T shirts at his school's sports day. It was a brilliant effort and the money he raised will be spent on the purchase

of extra text books and teaching aids for the school, footballs and handballs, a set of football jerseys and a First Aid Box.

#### A special message from SHUMAS to these children.

"On behalf of the children at EP Koumenke and CBC Kishiy, I wish to thank you immensely for your contribution to help our children study in a conducive learning environment for the first time. The children of these villages will now be able to study properly, unlike in the old buildings with the holes in the roofs where the rains came in freely and mercilessly during the raining seasons. Thanks to your support, the situation will never be the same again. They told me to inform you that you have now put smiles on their faces and they hope to study hard and, in future, they will develop their country as well.

Thank you a million thanks!"

Stephen (Ndzerem) - Director of SHUMAS.

## Trustee visit

Earlier this year, our Chair of Trustees, Marianne, traveled to Cameroon to monitor recent projects, attend school openings and to help set priorities for the coming year. Her schedule was, to say the least, frantic and over the course of her three week trip she traveled to all corners of the country.

One of the aims of BSFA is to help our partners in SHUMAS to achieve a high profile in the country so as to be able to have some influence over policy relating to development issues in general and education in particular. Part of this process is to help build schools in all parts of the country according to need rather than in the 'easier' areas close to roads and amongst English-speaking communities. We have been very successful in this aim, and following our previous visits, during which we lobbied several members of parliament, SHUMAS has been recognised as a leader in its field and has been asked to advise government on many issues relating to education, rural development and women's empowerment. Marianne takes up the story...

It is now just over four months since I got back from Cameroon, and I am still trying to decipher pages of hastily scribbled notes, organise hundreds of photos and put together all the clips of video. Not a minute was wasted during my trip. It really was full on, and SHUMAS staff made an enormous effort to help me to see all the places on my 'shopping list' ... and more!

For the first eight days or so, I was accompanied by Paul Smith from Market Makers - a business in Portsmouth that has been supporting our work for the past three years. Paul's feet didn't touch the ground the whole time he was with us and, never having visited anywhere like Cameroon before, I think I can safely say that he was bowled over by the whole experience. He was given the best seat in the truck and his eyes were out on stalks the whole time, taking in every aspect of this beautiful country.

We traveled through five regions of Cameroon together, visiting schools that have requested our help, schools that we have recently funded and are in process of being built and others that were finished and being opened in grand style. It was great to see the schools and the health centre in the village of Nseh, which Market Makers funded in 2011. Both the Nursery school and the primary school were thriving and the children greeted us with plenty of vigorous singing and dancing. The health centre was totally transformed, and with its new beds and equipment, is providing a simply wonderful service in the community. During our visit there, we had the privilege of meeting the newborn babies at the centre: two girls, named Righteous and Victory and a boy named Christian. We then went on to see projects that Market Makers might fund in the coming months, taking in 11 projects in one day - 8 schools, 2 health centres and a water supply deep in the forest. At the end of it all, it was a great relief to accept an invitation from the Mayor of NdiKinimeki, to have a drink with him at his house! The highlight of that first week was when we attended the official openings of the projects funded by Market Makers in 2012: two primary schools, a secondary school and a health centre in the area around Bangourain. As the representative of the funders, Paul was showered with gifts and honours by the community leaders. The events were attended by Government officials from the education ministries and SHUMAS received due acclaim for what it has managed to achieve in this very poor part of Cameroon. It was an uplifting, if exhausting, day full of speeches, feasting, dancing, singing, deafening celebratory gunfire and racing in trucks from one event to the next, as the sun started to set and the timetable gradually became an irrelevance. I doubt Paul will forget this trip in a hurry.



Paul and staff at Nseh Health Centre



Victory and her mother



Paul with the Fon of Nseh



Traditional dances are central to any celebration in Cameroon and the Ju-jus in the NW Region made the occasion at Nseh spectacular.

EP Ndokohok New Bell will be one of the schools to benefit from Market Makers' funding this year.





The roads have been particularly bad during the rains this year. This is a main highway!

One of my aims for this trip was to see the progress of the biggest project which we have undertaken to date. It encompasses at least eight villages around Kumbo Central Sub-Division in the NW Region and comprises five school-building projects, a health centre, a large water project which will benefit more than 3,000 villagers and the Roh-Kimbo School River Bridge. The cost of this project, which had been planned to take two years, is £150,000 and BSFA was fortunate to secure two-thirds of the funding required by the end of 2012. I really wanted to visit all the villages involved so that I would have a good understanding of how the work was progressing, how each individual community would benefit and what the overall impact would be for Kumbo Central. I hoped that, armed with this information, I might be able to find the rest of the funds required. I wasn't disappointed! The project in its entirety is absolutely amazing, the positive impact on the communities once the work is complete, will be huge - and the funds have now been found!!



CS Rifem - the first of the schools to get its roof in place

The reputation that SHUMAS enjoys in this region has ensured that all the communities have been turning out in their droves to make sure that their commitment to each aspect of this project is met. An informal competition was set up between each of the five schools to see which one would be the first to get its roof in place, and it was my pleasure to let the Head Teacher at the primary school in Rifem know that they had won. He was delighted! In addition, the Fon of Nso (the paramount chief in this region, who has worked closely with SHUMAS for many years) was very keen to support this fantastic development project. His active encouragement of the workforce was such that, despite the very heavy rains this year, the project as a whole is far ahead of schedule and the Grand Opening is now due to take place in April 2014.

It is astonishing how SHUMAS helps such remote communities to achieve so much year on year and I am always bowled over by what I get to see during my visits to Cameroon, but the highlight for me this year was my trip to the Extreme North Region. It was like an entirely different country. It has the largest population of any of Cameroon's regions and yet it seems very like a desert: vast and empty, with hardly any trees and very little water. Village houses are generally made from grass and mud and with thatched roofs. The population as a whole is very poor and, generally speaking, people are more reserved than the ebullient villagers in the NW region, but the welcome we received everywhere we went was wonderful and generous in the extreme.



Village houses in the Extreme North

We undertook impact assessments at two schools (CETIC Goulfey and EP Ndegvaya) which we had funded in 2011. Both were doing exceptionally well, with increased enrolment and additional teachers, and the buildings were sparkingly clean and in good repair. I enjoyed the most magical evening meeting, quietly talking under the desert moonlight with members of the Goulfey Village Development Committee about the school and what differences they had noticed in the community since its construction. CETIC Goulfey is a Technical School and, in addition to the usual academic subjects, the children learn trade skills such as electric wiring, construction and accounting. One of the women, who had never finished primary school, was welling up with tears when she described how overwhelmed she had been to be invited to the school to see what her children had learned and were now able to do. Some of the children were working in the village on construction projects during the school holidays and it was felt that, eventually, they would be able to get meaningful work that would provide a regular income for their future. It really is humbling to see what an enormous difference our relatively small injections of capital make to these communities.



Meeting the women from Goulfey

Back on the road, and we visited another five schools - all in desperate need of help. Up near the border with Chad, the primary school at Djafga had 700 pupils, 305 of whom shared one classroom, one teacher and one blackboard! Similarly, the school at Dobogo had 540 pupils and only one classroom with a roof! And when we visited the two of the primary schools around Boukoula, near the Nigerian border, goats were roaming through the classrooms, urinating on the rocks which the children used as seats. We also made an un-scheduled stop at a tiny mud and thatch school at Ouro Boubi, to give them information about SHUMAS' school-building programme and BSFA was delighted to learn recently that this, along with the school at Djafga, will be amongst the schools we help with new classroom blocks and latrines this year.



Kids in class at Ouro Boubi

Over the past few years, SHUMAS has been harassed to pay taxes on monies donated by many of its overseas supporters for the construction of school buildings and, despite many attempts to find a local resolution to this problem, it has proved impossible. On our way back from the Extreme North, Stephen and I stopped in Yaounde, the capital, to meet with senior civil servants in the Ministry for Education, for advise on how to resolve the issue once and for all and, with help from the BSFA trustees back in the UK, we were able to provide the required documentation to satisfy the Tax Department before the end of the working day! And, whilst waiting for the all-important email to arrive from the UK, I was whisked off to see another needy school about 10 Km from Yaounde ... never a moment was wasted! So I was not surprised when I finally arrived in Kribi the next day for a few hours rest before flying home, to find a motorbike waiting to take me to one last school .....

It was a fabulous, action-packed three-week trip. I can't wait to go again!



Some of the schools we visited in the Extreme North Region

## Fund Raising - One Million Pounds!!

When we funded our first school project in 2007, we set ourselves a target of £7000. This sum would enable the refurbishment of a dilapidated primary school in the village of Ntseimbang. Six years later ... and our income from donors has just tipped £1 million! We are speechless ... well, almost!! At the time of writing this has funded the building of **176 classrooms at 51 schools** (each with new latrines and many also with Head Teachers' offices and drinking water supplies), **four large water projects, four health centres, a dormitory** for disabled students at SHUMAS' skills training centre and a **road bridge**, as well as many smaller items. We could **NEVER** have achieved so much without you - so thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Few of our corporate donors seek public recognition and some actually request anonymity but they know who they are and we hope that they will accept these words of thanks on behalf of the children of Cameroon. They know that every penny they donate is sent directly to the project for which it is intended and that absolutely no deductions are made by us.

A few of our donors frequently give unsolicited large amounts and quite a few supporters have been to Cameroon and seen their project come to fruition. Some have kept in touch with staff and pupils (although this is by no means easy) and others have made personal contact with individual children whom they support through our scholarship scheme.

Other donations have been made to mark a particular event, such as the passing of a loved one. This was the case recently when we were contacted by the Hindle family who wished to build a school in memory of Andrew's parents who had such an affinity for Africa. Andrew is planning to attend the opening ceremony for the school which the family has funded and the story of his children's fundraising efforts is told elsewhere in this newsletter.

Sometimes money comes from the most surprising initiatives. One such was a huge donation arising from an on-line game-playing community who raised almost enough money to build a whole school, during the course of just one night following an on-line appeal from the 'Syndicate Project's' leader Tom Cassell - thanks Tom!

As always we must thank our individual supporters who give regular monthly donations, large and small. Again, you know who you are and we really appreciate your generosity. Thank you to our small army of unsung heroes!

### Would you like to feel the warmth of Africa this winter??

A small team of quilters on the Isle of Wight spent two years creating a magnificent double 'African' patchwork quilt (central section shown here) which they have given to us to raise funds for our schools. This is a REALLY generous gift, and we would like to raise as much money as possible to show our appreciation for their hard work, so we have organised a Grand African Quilt Draw. Tickets cost £1 each and are in books of 10. The draw will be made on the Isle of Wight on Dec 14th 2013. **Please help us to sell lots of tickets.** Contact Marianne at [marianne.bsfa@gmail.com](mailto:marianne.bsfa@gmail.com) to make arrangements to get some tickets and sell them to your family, friends and colleagues. Thank you.... in anticipation!



## What impact do our projects have ?

During the past twelve months, SHUMAS staff have been travelling out as much as possible, given the weather conditions and the state of the roads, to conduct impact assessments at schools they have constructed with funds raised by Building Schools for Africa. This is not an easy task. It usually means many hours of travelling on the back of a motorbike, at least one overnight stay in a remote village and then more hours spent producing comprehensive reports. These are very valuable documents for us. They enable us to give the best feedback we can to all our funders, in particular those who have not visited SHUMAS and seen at first hand their splendid achievements. So far this year we have received 22 impact assessment reports on schools, and whilst Marianne was visiting in April, she conducted very brief impact assessments at two more schools in the Extreme North, one in the West Region and a Medical Centre in the NW Region. We are pleased to say that the news is very good!

21 of the schools now have significantly more children (between 15% and 2,400%!!!) attending regularly. The 4 schools that have seen a slight drop in numbers (between -2% and -38%) are in very remote areas where attendance is always erratic. Children still drop out of school to help their families in the fields during the farming season: the culture of sending children to school is not yet well established. Yet all of these schools have reported an increase in the number of girls attending school, which is very encouraging.

23 of the schools now have an increased number of teachers and many more of the teachers are now employed by the Government and are fully trained.

All of the schools have seen a marked improvement in their success in exams. At primary level, the number of children taking the Common Entrance and the First School Leaving Certificates is gradually increasing and the pass rates are extremely good. Unfortunately many children from poor families do not have birth certificates and, as these are needed, as well as registration fees, to enter exams, new ones must be bought from the authorities. This can be financially crippling for many subsistence farmers and the increase in entries indicates that, now that the schools have good buildings, families are starting to recognise that education is important.

Many other positive impacts are included in the reports: schools are buying textbooks with monies raised from the school farms, the children's health and cleanliness has improved significantly, jigger flea infestations have been almost eradicated, schools have benefited from even more classrooms being built and four of the secondary schools have been upgraded to High Schools by the Government. It has been SO ENCOURAGING to receive these reports, and there is plenty more information that we could include here ... but we wanted to leave space for some extracts from a report we recently received from SHUMAS about our most astonishingly successful school - GBHS Kimbo.

"One could never talk about the achievements of SHUMAS without GBHS Kimbo topping the list. It has been one of SHUMAS' projects whose impact could never be estimated. GBSS Kimbo was created in August 2008 ... with 38 students and a head teacher ... and, as the enrolment gradually increased, the school was later transferred to two unused rooms (in the town). At this time, the Fon of Nso offered a 146443.75 sq m piece of land to the PTA to enable them start off with some classrooms structures while paying for the land gradually.... The administration of the school approached SHUMAS who intervened timely (with funding from BSFA) and helped construct 6 classrooms, Principal's office, a toilet block, provided water and equipped classrooms with benches, chairs and tables.... The school population drastically increased from 38 to 300 students that same school year. One could never imagine the number of children who were staying back at home desperately looking for such an opportunity.

On 6th September 2012, GBSS Kimbo was transformed to a High School by Ministerial Order. Today the school has an enrolment of 1300 active and serious students. The school has a total of 51 staff (30 PTA paid and 21 Government paid) who are very devoted to their job. Statistics of the General Certificate Exam O-level proved that the pioneer batch of the school had the best results in Bui Division.... and the PTA, so far, has helped by constructing five more classrooms, an administrative block and offices.

The presence of the school has also created an impact on the Kimbo community as a whole. Prior to SHUMAS' intervention the rate of criminality and promiscuity among youths in the community was alarming (with many exposed to risks of contracting HIV and AIDS). The nearest secondary schools were far off and they had to trek long distances to get to school. They became discouraged and the majority of children gave up studies and resorted to bad means of getting money. Now, 95% of these youths attend school and consequently there has



GBSS Kimbo in 2008 ...



... and in 2009 - it's now too big to fit in one photo !!

been a reduction in criminality and promiscuity. More provision stores have been built (in Kimbo) to provide basic needs of children and some additional student hostels have also been built. Looking at the achievements of GBHS Kimbo in the last 5 years, it is without doubt that its impact in the next 10 years will be felt not only within the community but also in the NW Region and Cameroon as a whole."