

Success Stories

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CCREAD: Inspiring sustainability education project improves lives in Cameroon

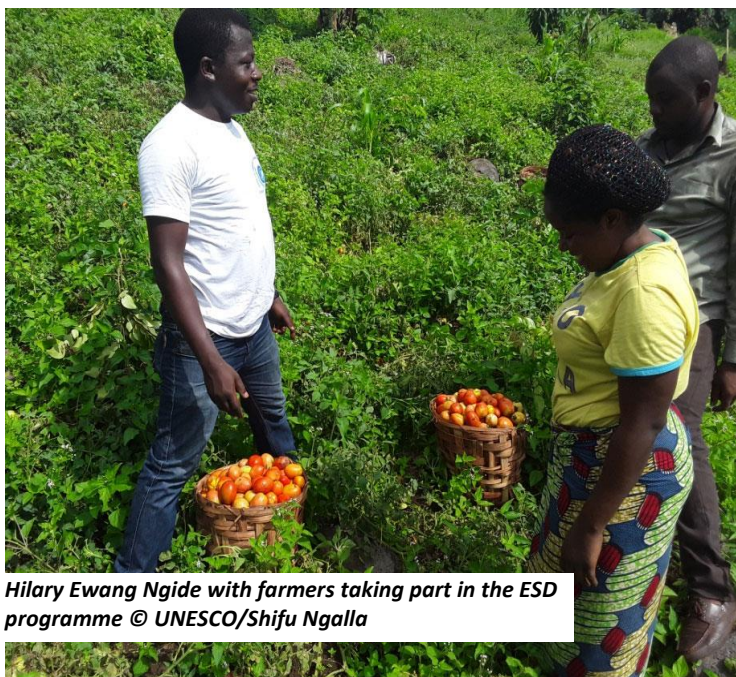
By Shifu Ngalla

In Cameroon, 36% of young women and men who graduate from the eight state universities and from over 50 private institutions every year find themselves unemployed. Some describe themselves as the “lost generation”. But one young graduate, who experienced hardship as a child, is using Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to provide capacity, sense of focus and hope to the socially and economically challenged.



Assistance to disadvantaged school children to fight cholera and poor hygiene © CCREAD-Cameroon

Meet Hilary Ewang Ngide, a 31-year-old PhD research student at the University of Buea, and head of the [Center for Community Regeneration and Development](#), (CCREAD) in Cameroon, one of the winners of the 2016 UNESCO-Japan Prize on Education for Sustainable Development.



Hilary Ewang Ngide with farmers taking part in the ESD programme © UNESCO/Shifu Ngalla

He was born in 1986 in Ekanjoh-Bajoh, a small village lost under the sprawling tropical forest of South West Cameroon.

Hilary's parents were poor, "very poor" he specifies. He worked on the farm with them. At harvest, he carried head loads of plantains or cocoyam and trekked 20 kilometers on his fragile limbs to the nearest town market at Bangem. "I did all the trekking on the bush forest path to Bangem barefooted," he says. "It was a painful experience, but I had to endure. That was the only means to have some money for my parents to buy basic school needs and pay my fees." Hilary worked equally very hard in school and was admitted into secondary school. "You see, I got my first pair of leather shoes in life when I was about to get into secondary school," he recounts. Today, the hardships he experienced as a child help draw him closer to young people who are undergoing similar distress in their lives.

Helping improve lives in his community

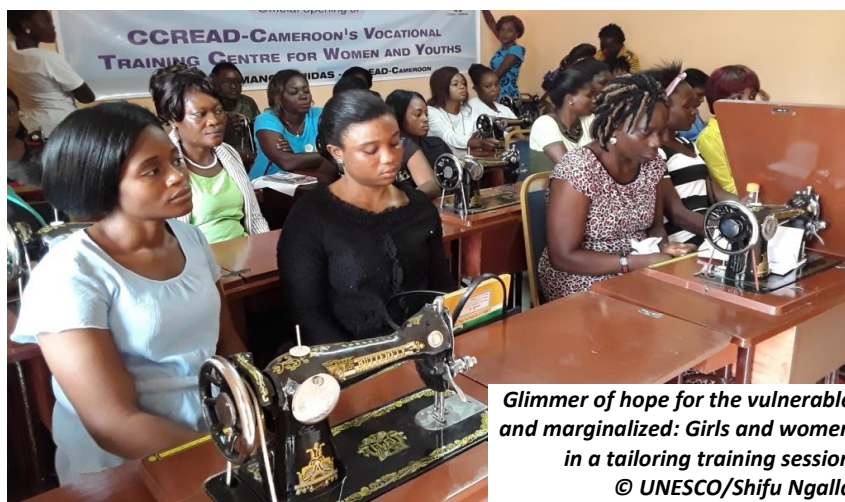
Hilary started his drive as change agent and helper by volunteering in his community during holidays in the area of hygiene and sanitation. At university, he still volunteered for NGOs. Galvanized by these experiences, Hilary decided in 2004, to create his own platform – CCREAD – through which he could help improve the lives of the underprivileged, "marginalized" and vulnerable. Buoyed by this ambition, he carved an all-embracing content for the ESD programme in Cameroon.

"Through this all-embracing programme, we want to reach out to as many people in as many sectors as possible; kind of giving every youth in any sphere of life a chance."

Hilary Ewang Ngide, Head of CCREAD-Cameroon

It includes ESD in school and communities; sexuality education and family planning; environmental education; climate change adaptation and resilience; entrepreneurship; leadership and good governance, and sustainable agricultural trainings. "Through this all-embracing programme, we want to reach out to as many people in as many sectors as possible; kind of giving every youth in any sphere of life a chance," Hilary explain.

The record of the programme's reach-out so far is phenomenal: 39,000 students in 147 schools, 260 teachers and administrators, and 3,640 households. On the magic behind achieving so much with so little resources, Hilary giggles and explains: "As an organization, the implementation of projects is not totally dependent on funding. We prioritize the energy from the beneficiary



Glimmer of hope for the vulnerable and marginalized: Girls and women in a tailoring training session © UNESCO/Shifu Ngalla

groups to make a change with or without external support. The organization is more of a facilitator of the process of youth empowerment. Our main actors are therefore the local youth groups, municipal administration, traditional village rulers, local partner organizations and international partners who provide the basic support needed to expand and consolidate our interventions.” This approach of positioning young people as main actors in the process of their own change has “regenerated” and transformed the lives of many in a deep and long-lasting manner.

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Hilary Ewang Ngide, Head of CCREAD-Cameroon

A life changing training for beneficiaries

The story of a beneficiary couple testifies to the transformative power of ESD programme in Cameroon. Keka Grace, 28, holds a master’s degree in international relations from the University of Seoul in

South Korea, and her husband, Njoh Njih, 31, has a master’s in public administration from the University of Buea in Cameroon. For local standards, the couple is considered academic achievers who could be working for a government office in the capital Yaoundé. However, today, they have “stooped low” as farmers, market gardeners precisely to conquer the challenge of unemployment which stands at

about 36% among university graduates in the country. Keka Grace was first to be redeemed by the ESD programme. She shares her story: “After graduation from university, I returned home to join thousands and thousands of other young Cameroonians without jobs. I lost my sense of purpose, self-esteem and dignity. My husband was also jobless. The whole thing was hopeless. Then, I learned about CCREAD and its activities. I came closer and learned about it in detail. I then decided to attend a series of ESD trainings on sustainable agricultural practices. At that point, my husband did not catch the fever yet, but I knew he had always loved farming. After the trainings and conferences, I explained the whole concept to him, and ‘paaf’, he was immediately interested. Straightaway, we opted for



From frowns to smiles: Young beneficiary couple of the ESD programme displaying tomato harvest in basket © UNESCO/Shifu Ngalla

organic agriculture because we were told during our training that, chemical fertilizer is harmful to the environment and to our health.”

“CCREAD gave us the know-how through training. We want to expand and develop a sustainable agricultural enterprise to employ others and help develop our society.”

Njoh Njih, farmer

When Njoh “picked” interest in organic farming for commercial purposes, he started thinking big and dreaming big: “CCREAD gave us the know-how through training. They also gave us farming tools and seeds. We have started by growing essentially tomatoes. For now, we are not rich, but we are not beggars either. Revenue from the sales gives us the basics to live on. We want to expand and engage in large-scale green production of soya beans, corn and pepper, that is, develop a sustainable green

agricultural enterprise to employ others and help develop our society. We just need to have the land,” says Njoh beaming with hope. They will eventually have the land they long for, and realize the new cherished dream of their life as a couple, for “where there is the will, there is the way.”

Through this experience, Keka Grace who at one point toyed with the idea of going out of the country has learned an enduring lesson. “Thank God, the ESD programme has made us realize that the answer to joblessness is not in “bush-falling,” that is, moving out to Europe and North America in search of greener economic pastures like many African youths do today and sometimes perish on the way. The couple is now settled under the firm shelter of their farm at Ekona, a small locality at the foot of the eastern flank of Mount Cameroon.

Hilary is all smiles as he watches Njoh and Keka Grace, happily harvesting tomatoes for the market. He philosophizes on an eternal truth: “When you are part of somebody’s success, it is what gives you joy, real deep joy”.



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UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.



The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

