

Engineers Without Borders Birmingham Branch

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By David Streater, EWB Birmingham Branch Vice-President

It's been a busy start to the year with Engineers Without Borders, and we wouldn't want it any other way! With a new and substantial committee at the helm attendance to our weekly Monday meetings have greatly improved from previous years which is great to see. So far those meetings at 5pm in G26 Civil/Mech Eng Building have seen Jo Maguire talk about her placement over the summer with EWB-UK in Cameroon as well as run a workshop building a foot-operated water pump. Likewise, we've introduced our members to the idea of outreach and made our own wind turbine blades from straw and paper. We've also been busy outside of our normal Monday-based comfort zone with a talk and workshop from EWB-UK and Hydrogeologists Without Borders on Tuesday 5th November. The focus, however, this year is Cameroon Catalyst.



Cameroon Catalyst is an organisation set up in Southampton by two Masters Students looking to use their final year projects as an opportunity to help people. They formed a partnership with Cameroon-based charity Mosame Trust and have since provided yearly aid through design and financial support to the village of Bambouti. Each year, since 2009, they have developed and delivered designs for Bambouti and have so far delivered concepts for a new medical centre, school and hybrid power supply. These designs are then delivered and fundraised for so that the villagers of Bambouti can build the designs and maintain them themselves. Now, 4 years on, Cameroon Catalyst are looking to expand. That's where we come in!

EWB Birmingham have been approached to be the second Cameroon Catalyst Branch and we are, this year, undertaking a pilot project designing a rainwater harvesting system for the people of Bambouti. Over the last months we've received a design brief and support from Cameroon Catalyst themselves as well as launching the project here in Birmingham. We began the project on Monday 4th November and have set up an initial team of over 45 people interested in design, fundraising, publicity and delivering the project in French. It's a really exciting opportunity that anyone can get involved in and we're just getting started!

In the future we are hoping to adopt and work with another village similar to Bambouti after we've carried out this year's pilot project. The aim will then to deliver yearly design projects that can really make a difference in Cameroon from 2014 onwards.

Aside from Cameroon Catalyst, we have a lot of other plans for the future. This term we'll be having our termly PearJam band night raising money for Engineers Without Borders on Friday 9th December. Looking into next term we're then hoping to hold a series of trips to Wales and the Centre of Alternative Technology as well as to the Oxfam Logistics warehouse, not to mention the launch of EWB-UK's placements scheme! The future is certainly looking very bright and we look to see what happens over the coming year!

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