RESTORING LOST HABITATS: MEG WAH

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A blooming tree sits on top of the hillside; its leaves are flourishing; branches stretch towards the sun. swaying side, to side, to side.

A small boy walks atop the hill, eventually meeting the tree. And in its glorious wake, the boy sits down. On the trunk of the tree. Hums a song with the wind blowing against his face.

He sighs a note of peace.

Day by day, night by night, he plops himself next to this tree.

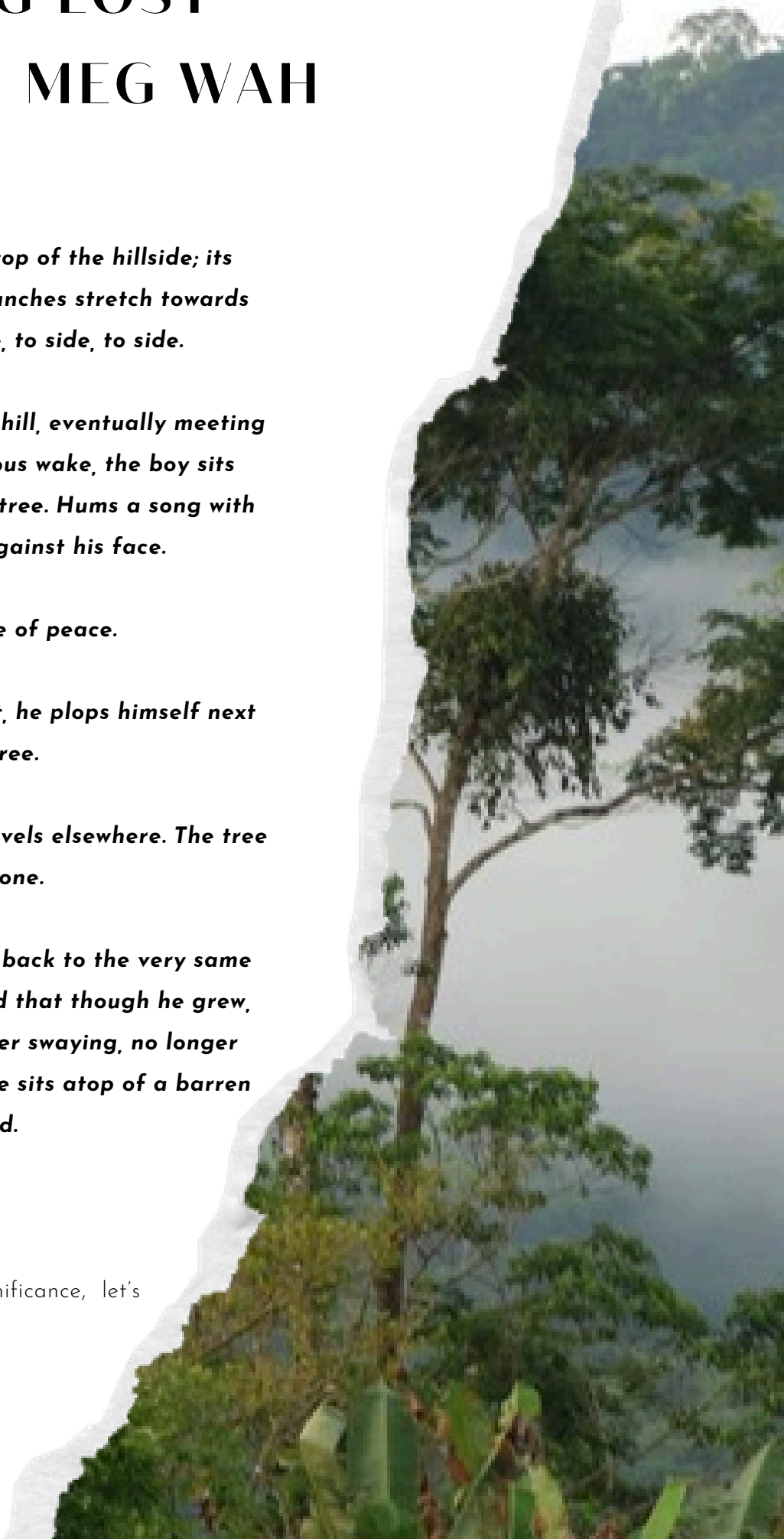
Years pass, and the boy travels elsewhere. The tree is left alone.

The boy eventually comes back to the very same tree, but is shocked to find that though he grew, the tree did not. No longer swaying, no longer glorious, the withering tree sits atop of a barren mound.

Not make believe, reality.

But to fully understand the significance, let's boil it down to 3 points.

The focus is Cameroon.



First, let's identify problems that led to the withering of the environment. Second, analyze those problems and figure out the reason why such process is occurring. And last, identify a promising solution with its target being restoration: that comes in the shape of MegWah.

The Withering Hill: What and Why

According to a 2019 article by Junaid S Mohammed, an exploration geologist, environmental issues are plaguing the Cameroon landscape. And while these issues include things such as overhunting and water pollution, the most "threatening is deforestation."

The negative implications of such actions have played out in multiple ways. "Soil erosion, desertification, and low-quality farmland," as well as losses in biodiversity, increases in CO2 pollution, the list goes on and on.

This issue is so pivotal in fact that Mr. Mohammed exclaims, "Cameroon's deforestation issue is imperative to solve for the country and for the world."

And in the context of the tree, what was once prospering is now being uprooted. Each year, deforestation proliferates and on a holistic level, "deforestation rates have increased by ~10% since the end of the 1990s."

Mike Mwenda in 2019 adds that deforestation is uprooting native tribes as well. The forests of Cameroon, taking a big part of the Congo Basin, provide basic necessities such as shelter, food, water, and protection against floods for "more than 75 million people."

To quote, "The world's second largest rainforest, in Central Africa's Congo Basin, is disappearing…"

But why is this occurring? The UN in 2024 identifies that decades worth of unsustainable agricultural practices, coupled with deforestation, have threatened the lifelines of these forests. History hasn't been so kind. Customary laws, designed to protect these, have clearly shown to be weak in terms of strength, failing to preserve these forests.

But it goes beyond just forests. As Raissa Kinkoh, a Community Specialist for Sub Saharan Africa, finds rapid urbanization did not come with equal access to water. Local communities still rely on untreated

water, and in Cameroon, "1.5 million child deaths [are] recorded annually as a result of waterborne illnesses." Moreover, unsustainable fishing practices have left local fish stocks depleted, threatening a vital part of "food security" for said communities.

Overall, the message seems to be clear. The environment is changing through unsustainable fashion, resulting in its degradation. Cameroon's "profits" are part and parcel with its expenses.

Restorative Programs

Peter Agbor has always had an intimate relationship with nature. Before he left his community to further his studies, as well as after he returned. Within those 10 years, "a lot has changed."

Exploitation of natural resources by major companies has stopped him from doing the same activities he had done as a child. "It was not possible for me to do my fishing because a lot of the streams around the house were getting dry."

Habitats were destroyed, animals were displaced, and it's because of that and so much more that Peter made up his mind to start Meg Wah in 2017.

Meg Wah translates to "My Earth." "It's a kind of exclamation that this earth needs someone to stand for it."

But what part does Meg Wah play in the solution?

Peter identifies a major factor in these regional problems within Cameroon: implementation of policy. Because while they "usually have really good policies regarding these problems", the level of implementation falls flat. And as a nonprofit organization, Megwah seeks to bridge this deficit.

The first link it tries to solve is education. Eco Kids, for example, is an initiative

they started where they "expose young people between the ages of 12 to 18" to "areas affected by climate change." Not only are the children exposed to these dire conditions, but they're also taught on how to better them. Meg Wah "educates them" on how "they can be responsible, and how they can be ambassadors."

Another example is an initiative called "climate tech innovators." This derived from the prominent flooding issue in Cameroon. The project gathers young people and teaches them how to understand basic technology, such as those related to data sets. They then visit these flooded areas, gather data, and upload them so that anyone can "readily get information" on areas of risk. These programs have been performed to enormous success, with them pulling "at least" a hundred people, all from Cameroon, each year.

The second part of solvency lies in environmental conservation and restoration.

Interestingly, Cameroon has "limited or no research" that has been done regarding the endangerment of animal species. But because Peter lives in that community, he has first-hand accounts of what's truly happening.

Farmers have intruded on the habitats of vulnerable species, deforesting the region for the purpose of cocoa cultivation. But just like how it was said before, these practices aren't sustainable. The destruction of these habitats has driven animals such as the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee out of their homes; surrounding communities explain that they can be seen along roads. The fear is that people are afraid of such species, and thus attempt to drive them away too, resulting in a "serious crisis."

The Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee isn't unique to this predicament, however; species such as giant pangolins, diverse types of birds, cross-river gorillas, and African Elephants all suffer from the same risk. MegWah forms alliances with other conservation organizations to:

1) teach farmers sustainable cacao farming measures,
2) restore harmed environments through methods such as planting thousands of seeds, and
3) strengthen "community governance and build local capacity."

To tie this all up, the thesis of Meg Wah was never to be perfect. But rather, that perfection shouldn't be the enemy of progress. Peter's final message highlights this sentiment: "We should not neglect our little efforts."

Truly, I could not be more happy that Peter is running this restorative process.

The boy doesn't mourn. He understands that now the tree is dead, but maybe he can help the ones that are still alive. Maybe, he can grow another forest. Maybe he can stop this destruction.

He takes his first step, with the branches of the tree following his every step.



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Meg Wah is the newest member of the BBS Causes Network. The current focus is raising US$20,000 to support their work protecting the Nigerian-Cameroon chimpanzee, one of the world's rarest and most endangered chimpanzee subspecies.

Found only in the forests of Nigeria and Cameroon, this remarkable chimpanzee is estimated to number fewer than 6,000 individuals in the wild. Its survival is increasingly threatened by deforestation, habitat loss and hunting. Unlike more widely distributed chimpanzee populations, these animals have a very limited range, making the protection of their remaining habitat and the communities working to conserve it particularly important.

The project will be highlighted on Giving Tuesday as part of a GlobalGiving campaign. Donations made through our community of supporters on Giving Tuesday will be eligible for a matching contribution through GlobalGiving, helping to maximise the impact of every donation.