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Grounds for Health was founded by a renowned coffee executive and an Ob/Gyn physician who were visiting coffee cooperatives in Mexico when they learned that the rates of cervical cancer in these communities were some of the highest in the world. Knowing full well that cervical cancer is entirely preventable through early screening and treatment, the friends took action and Grounds for Health was born.

Our international non-profit organization has a small administrative head office in Vermont and a team of seven in-country staff, currently in Africa, who are native to the regions we serve.

We train local doctors and nurses to screen and treat cervical pre-cancer and help them develop a sustainable, comprehensive program in their communities to keep women healthy and stop cervical cancer deaths.

The program model we teach has emerged from decades of practical application. Screening must be followed by treatment, ideally on the same day, in low-resource settings.

We have developed programs in Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Tanzania, and have provided short-term technical assistance through training and service provision in Guatemala and Kiribati. Our current program focuses in Ethiopia and Kenya.

## **Community engagement is essential.**

With support from the coffee industry, we have been working predominantly where coffee is grown, in some of the most remote communities of the world. We have learned over these years that program success is heavily influenced by wide community engagement. The community itself has the power to remove barriers that interfere with women getting the care they need.

- We create alliances with national and regional health authorities, NGOs, hospitals, as well as coffee cooperatives and farms, and village leaders.
- We pay attention to the nuances of each community, respecting the influence of all the people involved, not only the health care providers.
- We recruit and train local health promoters. These community mobilizers provide education, recruit women for services, track those in need of continuing care, and assist in reducing stigma and misinformation within their communities.
- Where applicable, local coffee cooperatives, who share our commitment to keeping women healthy, help us reach out to families and engage community leaders. When they can, they help transport women to support our work.

**Since 1996, Grounds for Health has brought cutting-edge cervical cancer prevention and treatment to women in remote Latin America and East Africa.**

*“Grounds for Health, while a small organization, punches far above its weight. It is an important player in the cancer community where it is considered to be effective, efficient and innovative.”*

**Sally Cowal**, Senior Vice President  
Global Cancer Control, American  
Cancer Society



#### MILESTONES SURPASSED

114,00 *women screened*

9,400 *women treated*

550 *health providers trained*



*With over 20 years of experience in lower-income countries, we look forward to the next great chapter in cervical cancer prevention, when no woman dies from this entirely preventable disease.*

Ellen Starr, Executive Director, Grounds for Health

### **Cervical cancer mortality is on the rise; yet it is entirely preventable.**

Most health conditions in the developing world have been improving. For example, since 1990, child and maternal mortality rates have fallen by almost half, while cervical cancer rates have increased. Worldwide, an estimated 311,000 women died from cervical cancer in 2018, and it is the leading cause of cancer death in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> The human papilloma virus (HPV) is responsible for close to 100% of all cervical cancer. While the vast majority of women will have the virus at some point in their lives, only the high-risk strains persist and develop into cervical pre-cancer, and then cancer. Timely screening and treatment at the pre-cancer stage will stop cancer from developing, and save a woman's life.

1. Bray, F., & Ferlay, J. e. (2018). Global Cancer Statistics 2018: GLOBOCAN Estimates of Incidence and Mortality Worldwide for 36 cancers in 185 Countries. CA CANCER J CLIN, 68:394-424.

### **We deliver cost-effective training.**

We concentrate on impactful, affordable methods to optimize resources. Currently, screening occurs through VIA, a low-cost screening method that uses white vinegar to detect early cellular changes that might develop into cancer. Treatment is achieved through cryotherapy, a device that freezes off pre-cancerous cells. These approaches are recognized by the World Health Organization as cost-effective and appropriate, although very few countries have managed to take them to scale.

### **Quality assurance is our hallmark.**

We have learned through many years of experience that trained providers in very rural communities need continuous support and learning opportunities. Grounds for Health field staff use digital cervicography as part of their supervision of the providers they have trained. The images are then synced and shared with our US-based clinical experts who give individual feedback on diagnosis and management decisions. This approach means that everyone benefits from the same level of oversight and support. It also provides the opportunity for all of our staff to learn from each other through remote meetings with a case study approach.

### **We are looking ahead, eager to bring new innovations to underserved areas.**

Grounds for Health has always been on the vanguard. We are excited and determined to use the next wave of innovations being developed right now to solve this health crisis. Currently we are introducing thermocoagulation to our programs as an alternative treatment modality. This approach is more efficient and cost effective and uses a device that is robust and ultimately less expensive than cryotherapy.

HPV testing, which has become a standard screening tool in higher income countries, will be used in low- and middle-income countries once it becomes financially feasible. It will be used as a self-administered triage test to identify and screen only the women at risk for cervical cancer. The screening innovation we hope to integrate into our programs will be AVE (automated visual evaluation) which will enable us to use an image-based algorithm that provides an objective diagnosis of cervical pathology. It's diagnostic accuracy and objectivity is destined to be a game changer, and bring cervical cancer prevention efforts to scale.

The WHO has called for global, coordinated action to eliminate cervical cancer. We are, as we have been for 20 years, committed to implementing this vision.

*"You accomplished more here in a few days than what we could have in a few years. Thank you."*

Mr. Asfaw Alemu, Zonal Health Department NCD Focal Person, Ethiopia

