

Kedge Conservation: Supporting Entrepreneurship, Saving Ecosystems

The Maasai Communities of the Western Mara Ecosystem, KenyaDurham, United States



Alexandra Sutton



Kedge

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Year Founded:

2014

Organization type:

hybrid

Project Stage:

Growth

Budget:

\$1,000 - \$10,000

Website:

<http://www.kedgeconservation.com>

Twitter:

<http://www.twitter.com/KedgeConserve>

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/KedgeConservation>



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Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Kedge provides a combination of business education and conservation training to rural communities in East and Southern Africa. Our curriculum helps bridge critical skill gaps for rural entrepreneurs, providing alternative economic opportunities to poaching and environmental exploitation.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

a compact, high-quality business education was all that stood between rural African entrepreneurs and success in the global marketplace?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Over the last 50 years, the unparalleled biodiversity of East and Southern Africa has been decimated by poaching, resource abuse, and environmental exploitation. This natural wealth could also be the key to better lives for rural people; small-scale sustainable businesses would help rebuild local economies. But simple barriers slow local entrepreneurial growth: a lack of basic business skills, and a lack of opportunities to learn them.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

Kedge vaults these obstacles by providing 3 to 6 week courses in conservation literacy and business education to rural communities in East and Southern Africa. We work with local NGOs, corporations, and community leaders in high-impact biodiversity regions to bring our "miniature MBA" to groups of entrepreneurs who live beyond the reach of traditional schooling. And crucially, we teach in an experiential, activity-based style that's tailored to the needs of rural adult students. We help students grow from ad hoc entrepreneurs to stable economic anchors for their communities -- and hope for the future of rural development.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Lemayan is a young man living in a small town in rural Tanzania. Here and there, he sells his services as a car mechanic along the main road in the nearest town. Eventually, he finds some spare wood and builds a kiosk to advertise, but he doesn't keep a written account of his tools or money, and he's often surprised by the expense of running a shop. He also doesn't have a business plan or consistent customer base, and when the rainy season washes out the road, he goes without revenue for months. Lemayan joins our Kedge class and gets a quick introduction to what it really means to build a business from the ground up -- how to come up with a business plan, invest in useful advertising, retain customers, and plan for growth.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

We've trained 12 rural entrepreneurs in our first 3-week training, which took place in June 2014 in the small town of Kawai, Narok County, Kenya -- where residents live adjacent to the Maasai Mara National Reserve, one of the most valuable biodiversity regions in the world. High demand for participation in our Kedge pilot led us to admit two additional students to our Kedge class, exceeding our original goal of 10 students. Of our 12 students, 4 were female (30%), 4 were already involved in conservation (30%), and 4 were owners of small local businesses (30%). All students completed the full 12 hrs of intensive training, and 3 students approached us, asking permission to self-organize a post-Kedge 'business support circle' to help keep skills sharp and accountability high.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

Our goal is to reach 100 entrepreneurs in 3 countries by 2017 (500 in 5+ countries by 2020), and we're well on our way. We've already planned our next training event to take place with 25 entrepreneurs over 4 weeks in Malawi in Spring 2015, and we hope for another 25 in Tanzania in the fall of

2015. If we can reach revenue sustainability and expand our teaching team, we'll be able to work even faster and better - and meet our goal of reaching at least one rural community in every country in Africa by 2030. Kedge could help stabilize small-scale businesses in rural communities all over Africa.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

Kedge identifies and approaches rural entrepreneurs through the help of large economic entities (i.e. corporations & NGOs) who operate in our target regions. In exchange, we help these partners build better relationships with their communities. This social responsibility consulting forms the basis of our primary revenue model, and we expect it to grow as we expand, our client base grows, and we receive more invitations to share our work.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

As more corporations shift from in-house social responsibility programs to contracted services, we expect demand for our work to continue to grow. To date, we haven't encountered any other companies engaged in social responsibility consulting in the rural areas that we target. And although there are many rural development programs operating throughout East and Southern Africa, none of them have a hybrid approach and our unique focus on sustainability+business. The nearest comparable effort is the African Capacity Building Foundation, a World-Bank sponsored, Zimbabwe-based non-profit.

Team

Founding Story

At a dinner party in Durham, NC in early 2012, I was lamenting to a local investor in rural development that the most distressing problem I'd witnessed in the Mara Region (where I conduct my dissertation research) was the lack of local entrepreneurial economy. Rural communities ran small, unstable (essentially *ad hoc*) businesses, but utterly lacked the stability or longevity to aid in regional growth. I wondered out loud why no one did anything about such an evident and easy-to-solve problem -- what was everyone waiting for? And as I was walking out of the dinner later that night, I had the sudden thought: What are *you* waiting for? Why don't *you* do something about it? I launched Kedge the next day.

Team

Kedge is a 4-person team (all part-time, unsalaried), with two members on the field team and two on the base team. Our base team members, Emily and Courtney, help us research and write our curriculum, as well as manage Kedge partnerships and communication from our home "base" in the United States. Our field team members, Alexandra and Joe, travel to Kedge sites to conduct our training, liaise with local partners, and mentor entrepreneurs.

About You

About You

First Name

Alexandra

Last Name

Sutton

Email

info@kedgeconservation.com

Twitter URL**Facebook URL**

About Your Project

Organization Name

How long has your organization been operating?

Project

Organization Country

, NC, Durham

Country where this project is creating social impact

, The Maasai Communities of the Western Mara Ecosystem

What awards or honors has the project received?**Funding: How is your project financial supported?**

Friends and family, Individuals, Foundations, Other.

Supplemental

Sector

Inclusive Business.

Audience: Who have you identified as your customer/recipient groups and do these groups value your solution for different reasons? How do you engage different customer/recipient groups to deliver your solution?

Our recipient groups are small-scale entrepreneurs (annual revenue <\$10,000USD) in rural communities of East and Southern Africa -- people who are innovative, curious, and hungry for a little help with their businesses.

Our clients are local NGOs, corporations, or community groups, through whom we identify and engage target communities and recipients. For these clients, our value comes through the relationship-building work that we do to support their existing social responsibility goals.

Scaling the solution: How would the prize money and publicity help you to achieve your objectives over the next two years?

We've set a goal to reach 100 entrepreneurs in 3 countries by 2017, and finding the next stage of funding to support our growth will be the key to hitting that target.

The prize money would ensure we could cover our barrier expenses (airfare, classroom materials) and expand our teaching team (from 2 part-time to 5 full-time Kedge leaders) to meet the rapidly-growing demand for our help.

And publicity would help us to expand our network of sponsors, mentors, and supporters -- meaning more support resources (like guest lectures from national business leaders) for our Kedge participants.

Fundamentally, the prize/publicity would help us grow Kedge beautifully, rapidly scaling to more communities and more entrepreneurs in need.

Experience: Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered

Developing leadership at the interface of business and conservation has been an interest of mine since I was an undergraduate, spearheading the student-led institutional appeal for a Howard University Recycling Program.

After graduating, I built LushGreen Consulting, a sustainable design company, and as a graduate student, I've helped lead the growth of GoMarket, a sustainable agriculture startup in North Carolina.

Are you eligible to attend the Accelerator event in Cambridge and subsequent events in London, UK in January, 2015?

yes

Will you require a visa to enter the UK?**Are you a current Unilever employee?**

Source URL: <https://www.changemakers.com/sustliving2014/entries/kedge-conservation>