

ENVenture - creating sustainable enterprises: The world's first incubator for last mile entrepreneurs

United States Uganda

Aneri Patel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew1vg3TBFW8>



Year Founded:

2012

Organization type:

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Project Stage:

Growth

Budget:

\$10,000 - \$50,000

Website:

<http://www.enventureenterprises.org>

Twitter:

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

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Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

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

ENVenture works with respected community based organizations (CBOs) already based in the last mile to set up clean energy stores that sell life improving technologies. We provide a revolving seed loan and business coaching to CBOs in our incubator program.

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

What if local communities used entrepreneurship to solve their own energy and fuel problems?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

1.3 billion people lack access to modern forms of energy and 4 million people die from traditional forms of cooking. Low-cost and affordable technologies are available, but are not reaching the people that need them. Many grassroots community based organizations (CBOs) have a real desire to distribute essential clean energy technologies. However, in setting up enterprises they face three hurdles: sufficient labor, knowledge, and financing.

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

ENVenture has developed an incubator that coaches CBOs on how to build and maintain a storefront selling clean energy technologies. ENVenture provides a seed loan to every CBO in the incubator to purchase product inventory. The CBO is obligated to pay the loan forward to the next batch of CBOs in the incubator. Furthermore, ENVenture recruits volunteer fellows that coaches CBOs on-site and project manages the launch of the business. We have currently incubated four CBOs, which have cumulatively sold over 600 products in two years, adding another revenue stream to their community relief work. In addition, one loan dispersed from ENVenture has successfully revolved three times, benefiting three of the CBOs.

Awards

Tufts Ideas Competition, Tufts Energy Competition, Pollination Impact Grant, Huffington Post Millennial Impact Challenge Competition Finalist

Impact: How does it Work

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

Once a CBO decides they want to have a sustainable enterprise, ENventure checks to see if they fit our predefined criteria for inclusion in the incubator. Once accepted, a clearly defined MoU is signed between the CBO and ENventure. Once signed, we advertise for a Business Development Fellow for a placement with the CBO. Once a Fellow is selected and the project date is set, either ENventure or a previous CBO in our incubator sends the partner the loan (in the amount of \$2000 USD). The Fellow on-site performs market research with the CBO, determines the timeline, store launch date, and orders the initial inventory. The CBO partner in the meantime scouts for a retail space, salespeople, and creates marketing material. Thus a store is born.

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

Over the past couple years, ENventure secured funding to support the launch of four sustainable enterprises with four CBOs. The impact is that all of these CBOs had previously been donating life-improving technologies, but have not distributed these same technologies in a market-led manner. Cumulatively, the CBOs have sold over 600 products and serve as a supply-chain for solar lanterns, improved cookstoves, water filters, and fuel briquettes. Customers can save money on fuel for lighting, cooking, and drinking water as a result. For 2016, we plan to scale this approach to incubate ten more enterprises, which would then revolve into 12 new enterprises in 2017 (in addition to another 25) and in 2018 we aim to onboard 50 new CBOs (with 37 enterprises revolved) with plans for expansion all across Uganda. In 2018, we will begin operations beyond Uganda as this model is not country-specific.

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

The full impact is to change the aid-mindset of rural non-profit organizations. CBOs are usually faith-based and exist to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. Because they exist in the last mile, they are perfectly primed as distributors, but business concepts can be difficult to grasp. Donation-based models are extremely disruptive as potential customers won't use, value, or replace products that are given to them for free. ENventure is actively changing the aid-mindset of these CBOs and they are learning how to create impact by selling, not donating these same affordable technologies.

Sustainability

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

ENventure collects interest on every loan dispersed and revolved through the incubator. As loans are paid forward, which supports the sharing of best practices within the last mile network of CBOs running enterprises. Future costs will be shared with like-minded partners; volunteer fellows from top Universities are recruited as Fellows and ensure project success. Grant funding is sought for administrative operations and loan expansion only.

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

ENventure is the only organization dedicated to teaching business distribution to local CBOs. Though many distributors for these same technologies already exist, none are putting resources into building the capacity of rural organizations to tackle these efforts. In order to an enterprise to be truly sustainable, the entire management team, shareholders, and business should be comprised 100% by locals. Once the CBOs determine that they can raise additional revenue for their activities through enterprise, they invest more into their business.

Team

Founding Story

In 2009, Aneri Patel traveled to the village of Irumbai, Tamil Nadu to set up an enterprise called the EcoLife Store with the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG). This store services about 90,000 households and is a focal energy access hub in the community. In less than three years, over 3000 low carbon technologies were sold. Sales have brought extra revenue for the CBO, which allows them to continue working on empowering women, eliminating the caste system, and combating alcoholism and domestic violence. Aneri learned of similar organizations to AVAG when living and working in Uganda. She decided to replicate her experience in India by setting up a similar program in Uganda.

Team

Aneri Patel is the Founder and Executive Director of ENventure. The team, comprised of four women (Aneri Patel, Emily Chessin, Xiaoyue Hou, and Bettina Bergoo), has strengths in business development, engineering, program management, and communications. All have a background in energy access, including renewables, mini-grids, and improved cookstoves. ENventure's board is also comprised of the COO of Solar Sister (a successful scaled energy social enterprise in Africa), the co-founder of Energia (a prestigious civil society network of women in energy), and the head of energy access programs at the World Wide Fund for Nature, who is also a native Ugandan.

Background

Please confirm how you heard about the Unilever Awards:

Ashoka Changemakers email

Please confirm your role in the initiative (eg Founder/co-Founder) and your organisational title:

Founder & Executive Director

Which of the 8 UN Global Goals (Sustainable Development Goals) pre-selected for this competition does your solution relate most closely to? [select all that apply]

Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy.

Leadership and the Unilever Awards

Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered.

I'm a serial social entrepreneur with prior experience living and working in 6 different countries. My expertise is on market-led development and innovation for sustainable technologies and marketing the same technologies for last-mile communities. I started EcoLife as a distributor for clean energy products in rural India in 2009, before a real sector was even developed around life-improving technologies. I was brought on to Impact Carbon to grow their country operations in Uganda and improved cookstove distribution and sales for the organization by 200%. Currently, I am pioneering a new program dedicated to energy access at Facebook, which is seeking a way to catalyze rural electrification for households for connectivity. As this is the first time the company is looking at this sector, the program development is completely entrepreneurial.

Beyond your existing team, who else are you working with to achieve your objectives, eg partners, advisors, mentors?

ENventure's board is also comprised of Neha Misra, COO of Solar Sister (a successful scaled energy social enterprise in Africa), Elizabeth Cecelski, the co-founder of Energia (a prestigious civil society network of women in energy), and Robert Ddamulira, the head of energy access programs at the World Wide Fund for Nature, who is also a native Ugandan. I've been fortunate to have advisors from product manufacturers such as Fosera and Nokero as well as support from Tufts University and the Pollination Project Foundation.

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