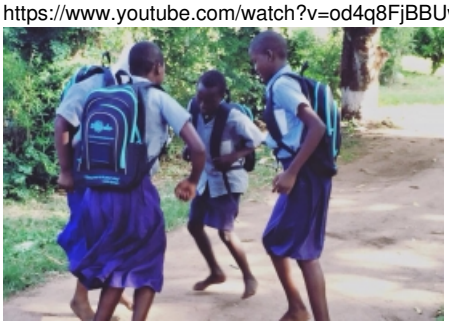
The Soular Backpack: Leveraging the power of the sun into creating a brighter future for every child!

Vancouver, CanadaMombasa, Kenya
Salima Visram
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od4q8FjBBUw



Year Founded:
2014
Organization type:
hybrid
Project Stage:
Growth
Budget:
$100,000 - $250,000
Website:
http://www.thesoularbackpack.com
Twitter:
@SoularBackpack
Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/thesoularbackpack/

- Education
- Poverty alleviation
- Sustainable development
- Technology

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

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

The Soular Backpack is exactly what it sounds like - a backpack with a solar panel on it that enables every child to study every night without the use, cost and health effects of the carcinogenic kerosene lamp! When they come home, it connects to the LED lamp that comes with the bag.

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

What if every child in this world had access to light?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Currently, families living under $1 a day spend 25% of income on kerosene every month. When children use kerosene, there are numerous health consequences that they face and when their parents can't afford kerosene, they can't do their homework. In addition to it being carcinogenic, entire villages and communities burn down every year as a result of kerosene lamps being knocked over.

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

A backpack with a solar panel on it that enables children who don't have access to electricity to study every night without the use of kerosene. The lack of electricity significantly affects their performance in school, and they don't get the grades to make it into secondary school, hence perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty. The backpack gets charged on their walks to school, usually an average of an hour and a half each day and when they get home at night, they connect it to the LED lamp. An hour in the sun gives them at least five hours of light.

Awards

Gifted Citizen Distinction & Honorable Mention - named as one of the top 30 global social enterprises: October 2015. Gretta Chambers Award - May 2015. McGill Dobson Cup Startup Competition - May 2015. Innovation of the Year, McGill University - March 2015

Impact: How does it Work

Impact: How does it work

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

The Soular Backpack has reduced the amount of money that parents spend on kerosene every month, and is improving performance at school. In addition, early childhood education and reading are being fostered as they are essential parts of child development. One father said that his kids used to only be able to study 3 times a week because he could only afford kerosene 3 times a week and this heavily affected their performance in school. This isn't the case any more. Social Impact Assessment is currently being carried out with the first 50 backpacks that were deployed in Kenya, and employment is being generated for members of the Kikambala Village, including community health workers and electricians.

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

To date, a crowdfunding campaign was held earlier this year to get the first 2,000 backpacks on the ground. The campaign managed to exceed its goal by 25%, raising a total of $50,051. The pilot phase is now being completed, and the next 700 pieces are being deployed next month, in the Kibera slums, the Dadaab Refugee Camp, and various schools across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We are working with SHOFCO, PLAN International and the UNHCR as distribution partners. By February, the rest of the backpacks will be on the ground and orders have started coming in of thousands of backpacks from various NGOs and donors.

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

The main spread strategies are to create a business model which involves creating a product such as a solar powered backpack, inspired and made by Kenyan women that would charge iPhones and other handheld devices. There is already a demand for this product and a waiting list of potential buyers. Every purchase would subsidize or cover the cost of one Soular backpack for a child prone to energy poverty. Partnerships with the UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as governments will ensure that this product reaches the people who need it most, with the next area of focus being Central Africa and India.

Sustainability

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

The development of a business model will ensure financial sustainability, through the implementation of a one-for-one model as highlighted above.

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

There are plenty of solar products on the market today, however through my research it was evident that the child is indeed the last person who would get access to the light to study, and most times the parents use it either to run their own businesses or to charge their phone most importantly. The Soular Backpack therefore is a child centric approach to this problem, and doesn't charge phones. It has been specifically designed to just charge the lamp.

Team

Founding Story

From the age of 4, I was exposed to poverty and thought it was unacceptable that there were billions of people living without basic human rights. I initiated and led various projects close to where I grew up, in the Kikambala Village in healthcare, education and economic development but always felt that I couldn't find something at the intersection of all these problems. When I realized that electricity was a huge scarcity, I started looking for options within that realm. One day, I was sitting at a cafe, studying for an exam and I was using a pen with a soccer ball on top and thought, why can't this be solar powered? I moved from that to shoes to a hat to 4 other things, & then the backpack

Team

Founder - Salima Visram (Full-time) Community Health Rep & Social Impact Assessor - Rose Atieno (Full-time) Ground logistics - Caroly Dzameh (Full-time) Volunteers: Social Impact Assessment Consultant - Nadia Hasham Business Development & Finance Consultant - Tarek Bouaadbdali (KPMG) Web Developer - Khallil Mangalji (BitPesa, Facebook, Apple) Legal Representative - Tara Mandjee (Stikeman Elliot LLP) Intellectual Property Expert - Erika Bergeron-Drolet (Norton Rose Fulbright LLP) Board of Advisors: Judson Althoff - Microsoft Sapna Dayal - Imagine One Day Grace Carter - Hootsuite Anita Nowak - Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship - McGill University As the project grows, there will be an engineer, a designer and a fabricator on board within the next 6 months.

File attachments:

unilever_pitch_deck_soular.pptx

Background

Please confirm how you heard about the Unilever Awards:

Email

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

Founder & Chief Imagination Officer

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]

No Poverty, Affordable and Clean Energy.

Leadership and the Unilever Awards

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

I started my first social business when I was 12, which was based around employing local women from the Kikambala Village to create jewelry as designing jewelry is one of my passions. The whole purpose was to empower women and also to enable young girls to stay in school and pursue

their passions. The jewelry was sold at a local tourist boutique. This enabled a group of 40 girls stay in school, as well as start a choir and compete in the national competition which is very prestigious in Kenya. The following year, they stood first nationally and ended up getting media exposure. During my time at McGill, I was selected to consult for a local not-for-profit with McKinsey & Co. and that greatly expanded my skill base and knowledge of business and not-for-profits. Additionally, I have done work and led projects with Microsoft, UNICEF, and represented Canada/Kenya at the UNAOC event hosted by the Government of Austria in Vienna. Additionally, being invited to the Forbes 30 Under 30 Summit allowed me to create connections, as well as attending the United World College of the Atlantic and being involved with the Grameen Foundation.

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

SHOFCO
UNHCR
PLAN International
The Next Big Thing/Hootsuite
Ryan Holmes/Meredith Powell
