

Geared for change - women bicycle mechanics in Namibia

NamibiaNamibia

Clarisse Cunha Linke

Organization type:

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Budget:

\$250,000 - \$500,000

Website:

<http://benbikes.org.za/namibia/>

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Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

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

Training and equipping women to run community-based bicycle workshops has proven to be an entry level for women's empowerment, positioning them as local transport technology experts in traditional male roles. Currently the employment of 45 women bicycle mechanics across Namibia leverages empowerment through access to income, affordable transport, and new skills.

About You

Organization:

Bicycling Empowerment Network Namibia

[Visit website](#)

Section 1: About You

First Name

Clarisse Cunha

Last Name

Linke

Website

<http://benbikes.org.za/namibia/>

Country

Section 2: About Your Organization

Is your initiative connected to an established organization?

Yes

Organization Name

Bicycling Empowerment Network Namibia

Organization Phone

+264 61 250 200

Organization Address

Organization Country

How long has this organization been operating?

1 5 years

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen..

Your idea

Country your work focuses on

Innovation

What makes your idea unique?

BEN Namibia's approach has focused on building a national network of bicycle workshops connected to existing health-care grassroots organizations. Transport technologies are an important lever for communities' empowerment, especially considering its potential for a multidimensional impact on improved health, education, income, participation and reduced vulnerability. Most community volunteers delivering health care at community level (i.e. home-base and OVC caregivers) are women. However women are usually marginalized in access to transport solutions, and almost always excluded from attaining technical mastery over the technology itself. Namibian bicycle mechanics part of BEN's programme are not only trained and equipped to run bicycle workshops, but networked with women in other regions, sharing experience and reinforcing their position as pioneers in what for Namibia is a new industry.

Do you have a patent for this idea?

Impact

Tell us about the social impact of your innovation. Please include both numbers and stories as evidence of this impact

In 2006, BEN Namibia and a Canadian volunteer network, Bicycles for Humanity (B4H), developed a new bicycle distribution model, the BEC. A BEC is a 12m modified shipping container with about 350 second-hand bicycles, tools, spare parts, paint, roofing materials, and workbenches, delivered to a grassroots organisation and run as a community-based bicycle shop. With each project BEN Namibia provides extensive training in bicycle mechanics and financial and project management.

Through each BEC, at least 10 per cent of the bicycles are allocated for use by volunteers and beneficiaries of the local partner. Income is generated through sales and servicing of bicycles to the community. This income generation component not only provides paid employment for volunteers, but generates income for community projects and provides ongoing availability of maintenance services to bicycles used by volunteers.

As more than 90 per cent of Namibian healthcare volunteers are women, the majority of our project participants are women. Training women in bicycle mechanics addresses the practical need of teaching them how to maintain their bicycles, and is an entry point for changing existing gender division of labour. BEN Namibia considers it an opportunity to promote more fundamental changes in gender roles and relations, and the planning process of BEC projects with local communities consider strategies to make best use of this opportunity. Training women in bicycle mechanics can be a powerful tool for empowerment.

Fifty six percent of the population of Namibia lives on less than US\$2 per day, and typically healthcare volunteers and their clients live on very low incomes. The BECs provide these people with an employment opportunity, and a reward for their commitment to healthcare volunteering. BEN Namibia has already established 22 BECs, providing employment for 90 people, 50% of which are women.

Problem: Describe the primary problem(s) that your innovation is addressing

The Namibian health system has struggled to cope with the number of people being admitted with HIV related illness, but the shortage of healthcare professionals remains a hindrance. Problems are exacerbated within the rural setting where the lack of transport systems isolates communities from access to social services.

To address these problems, dozens of grassroots organisations have implemented projects in partnership with the Ministry of Health, providing support to the health care system. One of the main responses from communities is the programmes for home-based care (HBC) of people living with HIV/AIDS and for supporting of orphans and vulnerable children. HBC programmes work with health care volunteers that visit clients in their houses. They assist clients and their families with household chores; provide counselling and information on adequate nutrition, hygiene and health; deliver medication and sanitary supplies; and provide basic solutions to common needs. The volunteers also assist clients to visit clinics and hospitals and to adhere to their anti-retroviral treatments. These programmes, however, face major challenges such as lack of appropriate transport and limited income generation activities to enable sustainability for their activities.

The need to support healthcare volunteers with improved access to reliable and sustainable transport is urgent. Many of these volunteers walk long distances to visit people infected with and affected by the disease and often take responsibility for taking sick clients to hospitals and clinics with limited resources. For many infected people, stigmatisation among family and friends combines with geographic isolation and makes coping extremely difficult. Volunteers reduce stigmatisation; provide emotional and psychological support through counselling; distribute prevention information; and give advice on living positively—many volunteers are HIV positive themselves.

Actions: Describe the steps that you are taking to make your innovation a success. What might prevent that success?

Skills transfer to project participants occurs through initial training and ongoing support. Each project provides significant economic benefits to the local community in which it is located. Up to five people are employed directly, in most cases these people have never previously held formal employment, relying on sporadic informal work and subsistence agriculture. Each individual is in turn likely to support a number of extended family members, broadening the impact of their employment. At least 50 per cent of people employed are women.

Project participants, together with their supporting CBO, take decisions on how surplus project income is spent. Existing BEC projects have allocated income for different community projects.

Each project generates its own income from the outset, and after implementation is responsible for meeting ongoing costs such as purchase of spare parts and bicycles for resale. By the end of BEN Namibia's period of support, the project has a clear picture of its financial performance. Eighteen months after implementation there are no costs associated with handing over the project for fully independent management by participants.

The greatest constraint to project implementation and hand-over stems from Namibia's poor standard of basic education. Historically, apartheid-era spending on non-white education allocated far fewer resources per-capita compared with white education. Policies limiting the level to which non-white students could study were a further limiting factor. Today this legacy is perpetuated as the products of this education system are now teaching, and at the same time government has been unable to improve its service delivery. To address this, BEN Namibia provides 18 months of support to ensure that key components for project success are embedded.

Results: Describe the expected results of these actions over the next three years. Please address each year separately, if possible

- Improved income for participating CBOs within 18 months from project inception.
- 1) Improved quality of life for five participants involved directly in each BEC project.
- 2) Improved community volunteer service delivery to people living with HIV/AIDS in communities where BECs are located.
- 3) Replication in other sub-Saharan African countries

From 2010 to 2012, 16 new BECs will be established in Namibia.

BEN Namibia has been in dialogue with different grassroots organisations and is starting to explore replication of the model in Zambia, Uganda, Malawi, South Africa and Ghana.

How many people will your project serve annually?

101 1000

What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?

\$50 - 100

Does your innovation seek to have an impact on public policy?

No

If your innovation seeks to impact public policy, how?

Sustainability

What stage is your project in?

Operating for 1 5 years

Does your organization have a board of directors or an advisory board?

Yes

Does your organization have a non monetary partnerships with NGOs?

Yes

Does your organization have a non monetary partnerships with businesses?

No

Does your organization have a non monetary partnerships with government?

No

Please tell us more about how partnerships could be critical to the success of your innovation

BEN Namibia's main partners are grassroots organisations in Namibia, which are focusing on address HIV/AIDS impact at community level. As a principle, BEN Namibia decided not to act independently, but on the contrary to work strengthening the work of grassroots initiatives that have broad legitimacy, credibility and knowledge at community level.

We would like to learn more about how your initiative is financially supported. Please explain your business plan/revenue model

BEN Namibia is an organisation funded by network of individuals, business sector and bilateral agencies both in Namibia and overseas. We receive funds in kind (bicycles) and in cash (grants and donations).

Our fundraising strategy has is two-fold: we raise funds per project and for overhead. Because we have very low overhead, most of our personnel and administrative costs are directly related to specific projects.

The Story

What was the defining moment that led you to this innovation?

When BEN Namibia was established in 2005, we had a workshop in Windhoek and distributed bicycles to home-based care volunteers--mostly of them women--in small batches. It became evident that there was no service provision at local level, so the bicycles would break and there were no skills or parts available to put them back on the road. That was when we trained one women connected to one of our projects (Hilya Ekandjo, now manager of the first BEC in the country). In turn, she trained women in her village on basic maintenance skills. Initially there was a total discomfort in the training - how would a woman be capable of handling all those tools and do such a male job? She was however very confident and knowledgeable, which turned the general discomfort into surprise and pride.

Tell us about the person—the social innovator—behind this idea.

We would like to describe the social innovator as a couple - Michael and Clarisse Linke. Michael founded Namibia in 2005 and Clarisse joined him in 2006. We have been working closely with all our project participants, finding solutions for challenges they face, and sharing ideas on how to improve their quality of life.

How did you first hear about Changemakers?

Email from Changemakers

If through another source, please provide the information

ICRW

Does your project address any of the following barriers to women's technology access and use?

If you checked any of the boxes above, please explain how.

Does your project involve women in one or more of the following stages of the technology lifecycle? Identification of the problem the technology will solve:

If you checked any of the boxes above, please explain how you will ensure women's involvement in each relevant phase of the technology lifecycle.

If women are a focus of your project, how did this focus evolve?

Which type of women will your project reach directly?

In what ways does your project team/leadership involve women?

Has your organization formed any new partnerships in response to this challenge? If so, with what type/s of organization/s?

Has your project leadership had prior experience with the following?

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