

Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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Young entrepreneurs are taking the baton of sustainable development from community-level solutions to globally replicable innovations. UN Habitat's biennial Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Award recognises the need to foster such initiatives, and presents a valuable opportunity for creative young minds to garner support for their enterprises.

Young entrepreneurs are taking the baton of sustainable development from community-level solutions to globally replicable innovations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a renewed opportunity for entrepreneurship to be viewed as an inclusive undertaking, given its multi-dimensional impact.

A young entrepreneur, Augustin Ekka from Assam presents an example of one such success story. In the absence of both capital and resources, Ekka, daughter of a tea-plucker, started a handloom weaving centre which employed several women from the community as teachers. The weaving centre ended up being a profitable venture from its very first year. She continues to train women from Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and beyond; and the venture has expanded to produce ethnic outfits for large-scale buyers.

In yet another blend of innovation and passion, two friends, Prateek Aggarwal and Raj Desai created the 'WIFI Trash Bin'. Their model incentivises people to properly dispose of waste by giving out a free WIFI access code when garbage was dumped into the bin. The duo travelled across a number of countries to research the best mechanism, before bringing the idea home. At its core the idea incentivises a behavioural shift in people, and creates environmentally viable result.

Ranjan shifted to his hometown in Himachal after a five year stint in Delhi as a taxi driver. It was difficult at first for his family to come to terms with the sudden reduction in family income. Ranjan went around the town looking for opportunities other than small-hold farming, but there were none for this father of a three-year old, who had failed to clear the eighth standard. His situation was critical; he bought two jersey cows from his savings and made a shed for them, all by himself. He was rearing strange cows when everyone around him laughed at all the care the cows demanded. Ranjan was determined; he didn't know a way out or a way back. After a wait of two long months, the two cows produced a total of 30 litres milk every single day. He sold it across a 10 km radius but this wasn't it. He went on to produce organic cottage cheese to the tune of 20 kg every day for local shops with, an additional 50 litres of milk from his more recent acquisition of a few more cows. Ranjan created a dairy farming model that tripled his family income, and an environment-friendly waste disposal system. Many village boys later replicated the model with success and Ranjan guided them through the process.

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Born and brought up in the gorgeous valleys of Ladakh, Thinlas Chorol is the only Ladakhi woman to be professionally trained in the field of mountaineering. Thinlas studied in SEMCOL, The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, and later worked as a guide with Around Ladakh with Students (ALS). Thinlas has been on several mountaineering and expedition trips in groups and otherwise. Powered by her intuitive connection with mountains and a passion for breaking stereotypes, she founded the Ladakhi Women's Travel Company. The idea behind her company was to encourage women to take up mountaineering and allied studies to earn a living as well as creating an experiential platform for beginners in the field of mountaineering.

Rustam Sen Gupta graduated from INSEAD with a burning desire to do something different and work for the development of those less fortunate than himself. After quitting his finance job in September 2009, Russ started working with NGOs, manufacturers and villagers to design and develop BOOND Engineering & Development Pvt. Ltd. BOOND is a Social Enterprise founded in 2010, promoting alternative energy in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi NCR and other northern states of India. Rustam is trying to reach the remotest and most difficult areas, to not just provide energy access, but also explore embedded solutions to various inter-connected social issues. His major focus is to provide appropriate and customized solar solutions across the spectrum of various communities, sectors and geographies.

The world is brimming with stories of such young entrepreneurs leading tremendous social impact, with innovation as the nucleus of their initiatives. Innovation and entrepreneurship form a close-knitted mesh which accelerates sustainable development, social inclusion, gender equality, poverty alleviation, the end of violence, and more.

In view of the manifold impact of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, UN Habitat has launched a Biennial Award to recognize such stories at a global level. The award intended to recognize, honour and promote the young generation of leaders who are in a unique position to leverage the power of invention to establish businesses which would contribute to solving social and environmental problems.

Culturally innovative proposals and projects which promote local culture in their concept, design and operation of the project will also be considered for the Award.

Encouraging young talent

The aim of the Award is to acknowledge and recognize initiatives which will create a positive impact: socially, economically and environmentally. The initiative should act as catalyst towards the promotion of sustainable cities and towns and encourage talent needed for future urban development measured by the creation of youth employment, poverty alleviation and ensuring ecological safety. This Award will be granted to outstanding inventors, innovators, and entrepreneurs from all corners of the globe—particularly those from developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

These five categories span the breadth of the Award and are judged by the steering Committee and panel of expert judges in their field. Awards will be given in the following categories:

1. Youth Leadership
2. Green Inventions and Innovations
3. Urban Ecological Safety
4. Youth Entrepreneurship
5. Social and Cultural Innovations

The total amount of the prize pool is USD 200,000 and the individual cash grant will be USD 20,000, to be given to two winners in each category.

Bottom-up transformation

Citation will also be given to institutions and mentors who have been instrumental in innovators' achievements. The scheme is a comprehensive mechanism which touches all walks of life and is geared to bringing serious and meaningful changes to society. It is geared to transforming society: bottom-up. The deadline for receipt of entries is **31 August 2015**.

<http://unhabitat.org/young-innovators-and-entrepreneurs/>