



Stanford eCorner

Inspired by Simple Innovations

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Tina Wells, founder and CEO of Buzz Marketing Group, talks about how her service on the United Nations Global Entrepreneurship Council has deepened her appreciation for simple innovations that truly improve and save lives in the developing world.



Transcript

When I was in Uganda and met entrepreneurs there I realized that we truly do not understand what it means to run businesses with challenges. I walk into a room, I know that if I flip the switch the lights will work, I know where the nearest bathroom is, I know how to get out of the room in an emergency, I know that if I send an email my internet is going to work, and to go to a place where none of those things are certain and to see people still work so hard and come up with unbelievable solutions. I was on a remote island called Bussi Island and met an entrepreneur who had developed a solar backpack that basically lit this clinic where women would have to go if they could get there to give birth. And when - if they happened to give birth at night, there was no light. So babies were born and the first thing this baby is doing is inhaling smoke. And so, we don't think about those things, about the impact of those things and to see an entrepreneur - they came up with a solar backpack, now there is lighting, simple solutions. And so I think so many of us spend so much time thinking about very complex things and to see entrepreneurs focus on things that might seem so simple, but were so life changing for so many people. We also met a group of Stanford students, recent graduates who were living in Uganda, and had come to open a company focused on clean cook stoves. And it was amazing, because no one understands the importance of a clean cook stove. That if you cook up over an open fire, it is the equivalent of smoking five packs of cigarettes a day.

And think about the fact that most of these women are doing this with a child on their back and so the child is also inhaling smoke. They came up with a solution that's less than \$10 that heats food in this kind of clay pot for five hours and so to see how the developed world was working with the developing world, I think, was really interesting. And I have spent so much time, I think, trying to think of these really grand ideas and to see that something so simple meant so much to so many people, I think, has been interesting. And the last one was - actually this was a day, Global Accelerator, it was an entrepreneurship day at the UN and entrepreneurs were pitching us ideas and one guy had created a bicycle ambulance, which really made sense for parts of Africa, where he was using it. And again, we think of such big technology and this was really the safest best solution at \$1,500 and the statistics and research he had done on how many lives he has saved, it was unbelievable. And so I think that I walked away from that trip realizing that it's the small innovations that sometimes can really have the biggest impact. And if you take away the comfort that we're used to and we just had to - there are so many entrepreneurs. People who created clean filtration systems that changed the lives of children at boarding schools. So the idea that I think for me at this stage is thinking how simple can we be to come up with solutions; that's been the most interesting.