

## 5 powerful ideas for global impact from social entrepreneurs



18 Dec 2015

### **Katherine Milligan**

Director and Head, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship

All of us wish to feel a sense of purpose in our careers and make a meaningful contribution to society, but where to start. Social entrepreneurs offer a fascinating model. They combine compassion and business ac solutions that are needed now more than ever.

More than a year in the making, this video series featuring leading Schwab Foundation Social Entrepreneur journeys is packed full of surprising insights, powerful ideas, and lessons learned the hard way.

Whether you are an established social entrepreneur, a corporate executive considering your next career m graduate launching a start-up, these videos constitute essential viewing.

# 5 powerful ideas for global impact from Social Entrepreneurs

1. Partner for scale

2. Combine focus with flexibility

3. Design is important, but distribution is

4. Use technology everywhere you can

5. Scale your solution, not your organization

#SocEntInspire

## Lesson 1. Leverage partnerships for scale

[Martin Burt](#) draws on decades of experience to explain why the era of the lone social entrepreneur is over. He is the widely celebrated founder of Fundacion Paraguaya, Teach a Man to Fish, and most recently, the I diagnostic tool that allows families to diagnose their level of poverty and create an action plan to overcome dozens of companies are using the tool to eliminate poverty among their labor force. “We are seeing business government about the housing needs in the slums near their factories,” he says, “and they are finding they nobody else has: the power of leverage.”

Martin Burt also draws on his experience in the public sector as the Mayor of Asunción and later as the Ch previous administration. The keys to success? Start by recognizing that government officials face structural then strive to identify and empower elected officials who genuinely want to create change.

## Lesson 2. Combine Focus with Flexibility

[Mark Ruiz](#) was an executive at Unilever in the Philippines when he had an insight that led him to create the Hapinoy with his co-founder, Bam Aquino. Why can Coke products find their way to every rural village, but financial services do not? Rather than create a new distribution network from scratch, Mark and Bam decid

existing infrastructure – tiny “hole in the wall” stores called sari-sari shops – by formalizing them into a network, creating a channel to get much-needed services such as mobile banking into rural communities.

His advice to other social entrepreneurs? Never lose sight of your social mission. Make sure your investors value it as you. Find ways to create economies of scale to attract large companies as partners. And most of all, follow your passion. “You cannot be the best at everything,” he says. “Ultimately, you have to decide what you’re going to do, and that entails a certain focus.”

### **Lesson 3. Design is important, distribution is key**

D-Rev is a non-profit social enterprise that designs and develops medical devices for poor people such as prosthetic limbs and phototherapy units to treat jaundiced babies. d.light is a for-profit social enterprise that has created over 50 million solar lights and power solutions to off-grid households. Both organizations are widely respected for their human-centered design, and both [Krista Donaldson](#), a mechanical engineer and CEO of D-Rev, and [Ned Tozun](#) of d.light, offer surprising insights about the design process.

Given both social enterprises are so famous for their product design, it is telling both Ned Tozun and Krista Donaldson emphasize distribution as the toughest nut to crack. “We thought if you have a great product at a great value, it was going to sell,” said Ned Tozun. “But distribution, marketing, and branding required even more innovation than

design.” “We realized early on we can’t do everything, so we work with partners – NGOs, faith-based groups, and governments to fulfill our mission, which means getting our products to our target users,” says Krista Donaldson. “Once the product is designed, it needs to be entirely economically self-sustaining with profit margins built-in so that if D-Rev disappears tomorrow, the products can continue to be sold.”

### **Lesson 4. Use technology everywhere you can**

Dr. Shannon May, an anthropologist, and Jay Kimmelman, a tech entrepreneur, founded Bridge International in Kenya in 2008 with the goal of providing affordable world-class education to families living on \$2 a day. In 2015, Bridge International Academies has opened 400 schools serving 120,000 students and aims to reach 10 million more in the near future. They have achieved such staggering scale by using technology at every step, from how they prepare and assess student performance on a weekly basis to how they distribute daily lesson plans to every one of their 10,000 teachers and even monitor teacher arrival and departure times.

[Shannon May’s advice to social entrepreneurs](#) is simple, though executing it is anything but. “Leverage technology everywhere you can to make the radical disruption you are seeking,” she advises, and she would know. Mark Zuckerberg was so impressed with Bridge’s use of technology he invested \$10 million in them after a meeting in Davos.

### **Lesson 5. Scale your solution, not your organization**

All social entrepreneurs, even those who by any objective measure have reached significant scale, are frustrated by the staggering gap between the people they can reach through their direct service model and the size of the global population. [Naidoo movingly described](#) this phenomenon as “being responsible for an island of success in a sea of despair.”

social problem you are passionate about at massive scale is the dream of every social entrepreneur. The c  
get there? The insights of Sébastien Marot and Elizabeth Hausler start to offer some answers.

[Sébastien Marot founded Friends-International in Cambodia](#) to rebuild the futures of homeless and margin;  
working with such a deeply challenging population, Sébastien found a way to improve the sustainability and  
intervention by turning all of their vocational programs into social businesses that now generate 40% of the  
operating budget. Even so, the numbers of marginalized youth Friends-International can reach directly – 50  
countries – pale in comparison to the half a billion marginalized children and youth worldwide. Rather than  
organization, Sébastien is spreading his market-based approach through the CYTI Alliance, a network of 5  
working with homeless and marginalized children in 11 countries.

A skilled mason with a doctorate in civil engineering, Elizabeth Hausler founded Build Change in 2004 to cl  
disaster reconstruction is done. “We started small and on the ground,” she says. “We got our hands dirty fi  
actually build an earthquake-resistant house.”

Recognizing she would never been able to hire enough engineers and builders to respond to disasters, [Eli](#)  
[sourced the Build Change methodology](#). Build Change’s design and safe construction guidelines are now u  
other NGOs and have been adopted by seven major relief agencies. “We’ve expanded our model from a d  
to a system change approach,” Elizabeth Hausler explained.

Ned Tozun of d.light offers one final piece of advice to social entrepreneurs. “To all of the social entreprene  
persevere and keep at it,” he said. “If you’re thinking about taking the plunge, I really encourage you to do i  
thing I could imagine doing.”

---

## Social Entrepreneurs: Innovators for Impact

This post is part of a major series of interviews with leading social entrepreneurs as  
[Schwab Foundation](#). For further insights from the world of social enterprise see the 1

[Explainer: What is a social entrepreneur](#)

[10 lessons from leaders — social entrepreneurs tell all](#)

[How to make everyone a microentrepreneur](#)

[Driving up school standards in Kenya with smart data](#)

[The full set of interviews](#)

---

**Author: Katherine Milligan is the head of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepre  
World Economic Forum.**

**Image: Survivors of Typhoon Haiyan learn how to sew eco-friendly waterproof backp  
factory set up by Taclob, a social enterprise in Tacloban, October 17, 2014. REUTERS**

**Share**

Written by

[Katherine Milligan](#), Director and Head, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship

The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and not the World Economic Forum.

---

---

**Featured: Agenda in Focus: Social Entrepreneurs**

[View all](#)

---

**How China's social enterprises can prosper alongside the country's state-run businesses**

**Li Ding** 27 Jun 2017

---

**3 reasons why social enterprises fail – and what we can learn from them**

**Leticia Gasca** 08 Jun 2017

---

**Our food system is bust. This innovative three-step plan could fix it**

**World Economic Forum** 29 Mar 2017

---

**Meet the Social Entrepreneurs of the year 2017**

**Hilde Schwab** 29 Mar 2017

---

**Social entrepreneurs are building the society we want to live in**

**Hilde Schwab** 14 Jan 2017

---

**In one industry, the glass ceiling has already been shattered**

**Monique Villa** 15 Sep 2016

---

**12 social entrepreneurs who are changing the world**

Hilde Schwab 31 Mar 2016

---

## Follow Us

---

### About

[Our Mission](#)[Leadership and Governance](#)[Our Members and Partners](#)[The Fourth Industrial Revolution](#)[Communities](#)[History](#)[Klaus Schwab](#)[Media](#)[Mapping Global Transformations](#)[Careers](#)[Open Forum](#)[Contact Us](#)[World Economic Forum LLC](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Privacy and Terms of Use](#)[Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution](#)[Sustainability](#)[日本事務所](#)

---

### Media

[News](#)[Accreditation](#)[Subscribe to our news](#)

---

### Global sites

[Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution](#)[Open Forum](#)[Global Shapers](#)[Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship](#)[EN](#) | [ES](#) | [FR](#) | [中文](#) | [日本語](#)

---

### Members & Partners

[Member login to TopLink](#)[Strategic Partners' area](#)[Partner Institutes' area](#)

---

© 2017 World Economic Forum [Privacy Policy](#) & [Terms of Service](#)







