

## SUMMARY

*If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got! –Albert Einstein*

**The Social Innovation Academy (SINA) is a unique learning environment, which empowers marginalized youth to become job creators by nurturing innovative project ideas into social enterprises with positive impact on society and the environment.**

SINA is turning around individual live stories of suffering into positive catalysts of social change in Uganda. In its self-organized innovator and change-maker space, youth from marginalized backgrounds become social entrepreneurs. Within 18 months of existence, SINA has for example empowered former child soldiers to create rural solar startups or AIDS-orphans to design a sex-education app.



In open learning spaces, knowledge and practical skills are linked in such a way that projects constitute the curriculum. The academy is based upon “freesponsibility” to unleash individual potentials. Scholars leave SINA not with a certificate but with a fully established social business. SINA transcends Uganda’s current educational model that perpetuates a colonialist rigidity and provides ideal conditions for youth to develop their dreams into realities. Respect and intrinsic motivation are key values. SINA is inclusive for everyone, no formal entry requirements exist. Hierarchical structures are at a minimum and scholars run the academy themselves.

In a holistic entrepreneurial concept, innovative scholar ideas are incubated promoting social and environmental value instead of mere monetary profit. Scholars quickly need to prototype their products or services. If a project idea is based upon solving a social or environmental challenge, its monetary profit is doubled for project incubation. If it creates value for both, the society and the environment, the created monetary profit is tripled to accelerate project growth to become a social enterprise.

SINA is a sustainable ecosystem with a positive carbon footprint. Waste becomes a useful resource for innovative projects and social businesses. For example, briquettes are made from biomass; human and animal waste feed a biogas system, empty cement sacks are used for urban gardening or rain water is harvested. Furthermore, SINA’s learning spaces are built out of waste materials, protecting the environment and setting an example for seeing waste differently and stop producing it all together.

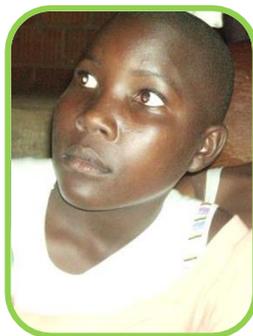


## SITUATION AND PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The output of schooling in Uganda for the society at large has become negative. This means, that the educational system does more harm than it does good for the country as a whole. The system certainly decreases illiteracy and helps students to understand basics concepts but an 83% youth unemployment rate (World Bank statistics) in the country with the world's youngest population (78% below the age of 30) indicates that Uganda is systemically conditioning the majority of its people to seek for jobs rather than to create them. The immense opportunities, such as creative capacities and the social capital are not being developed.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The German NGO “Jangu e.V.” has successfully sponsored orphans for their secondary education since 2007. Its founder, Etienne Salborn, lived and volunteered for one year in the Kankobe Orphanage in 2006 and has accompanied to date 100 of its orphans on their life journeys. In 2013, the first generation successfully finished their high school, but was unable to find employment. The sponsorship seemed to have failed because graduates were drowning in youth unemployment and university was unaffordable. A new project was needed in order to find ways to foster job creation and self-sustainability of the youth.



Ruth at Kankobe Orphanage, 2006



Ruth pitching her “KnowYou–Sex-Education-App” to investors, 2015

## SINA EMPOWERMENT

The goal of the Social Innovation Academy (SINA) is to bring Ugandan youth from marginalized backgrounds to the point where they can be self-sustainable by starting and leading their own projects in form of social businesses (with positive impact on the environment and positive impact on the society). Young adults, who otherwise would have never been able to start an enterprise, are becoming entrepreneurs through coaching, mentoring, training, taking responsibility, unlearning limiting beliefs and getting needed assistance and startup in a self-organized social entrepreneurship learning environment. It is transcending Uganda's rigidly colonialist educational model through a unique “freesponsible” educational approach and unleashing the full potential of youth through intrinsic motivation rather than punishments and rewards.

SINA is completely self-organized to empower its scholars. They run the academy together with facilitators without a boss giving orders. Different task-groups take on responsibilities like accounting, logistics, operations, maintenance or the sustainability of the entire project.

The goal is to prepare the scholars for entrepreneurial activities. Running a business requires expertise and skills which are not taught in schools but experienced every day in SINA. From the first day onwards, a scholar gets high level of responsibility to run SINA and its income generating activities. The scholar is growing through experience, learning from mistakes in a protected environment and fostered into starting an own/ team project to become a social enterprise.



Creativity, co-creation and self-organization are fostered through the creation of systemic social labs. The scholars are holistically enabled and mentored to the self-determined realization of innovative projects of any kind. Compared to high school class sizes of 100 students in each room, the focus lies on quality, not quantity. The academy is designed for a maximum of 45 scholars at a time with 15 facilitators eliciting their potentials.

The empowerment of the youth works through five key areas:

### INITIAL TRAINING AND UNLEARNING



When new scholars join SINA, they go through a six weeks initial training. It is comprised to 80% of experiential learning with activities, games and full engagement. In contrast to a school or university setting, no memorization, exams or punishment and reward exists. Unlearning, building a common culture of trust and empowerment, social entrepreneurship and upcycling are key aspects of the training:

#### Building culture and unlearning

Students come out of school or drop out of school while being afraid to ask questions because during their school life questions were not favored. Only memorization was rewarded. Secondly, students come out of school being afraid of doing anything different than what the standard told them to do. The attitude is generally rather not to do anything instead of making a mistake. This is because in schools mistakes have been punished by beatings or shaming. That is why it is inherently difficult for young Ugandans to create their own employment opportunities or start businesses by themselves. All their life, they have been conditioned to follow orders and do what someone else has told them to do. Different research indicates that one of the main reasons why Uganda is facing crises in youth unemployment, is because of the way the young generations are conditioned in school.

Through tools such, as Nonviolent Communication (NVC), Active Listening, Design Thinking, Ideation Workshops, Conflict Transformation and Team Building; a trustful working environment is created whereby questions are encouraged and mistakes celebrated as learning opportunities. Limiting beliefs are broken down. Only if fear is transformed into motivation, scholars will blossom. That is why the organizational culture of trust, harmony and happiness is at the core of SINA and of the initial training.



## Social Entrepreneurship



Problems can be seen as unmet needs and unmet needs always bear business opportunities. Solutions require a deep understanding of the problem and outside-the-box thinking. If a product or service is solving a rural challenge and people are willing to pay for what inherently improves their lives, then the people themselves are in charge of their own development. This creates a cycle where higher demand drives the business to grow and the social impact to expand. It is highly inclusive development through social entrepreneurship. Donor or government dependencies are abolished and customers drive social change and

further innovations. Social entrepreneurship is linked with the notion of the triple bottom line: instead of measuring only the financial success of a company, the equally accounts for the social and environmental aspects of any business activity. Scholars are trained in the basics and principles of social entrepreneurship.

## Upcycling

SINA embraced the concept of “upcycling”, which goes beyond recycling, and is the creative use of waste materials to create something of higher value. Following the slogan “Waste is only waste if you waste it”, the learning spaces for SINA have been constructed using thousands of old plastic bottles, which not only use a waste product as a resource but also replace environmentally unfriendly bricks, which are burnt for days and promote deforestation. Bottles are collected and compacted with soil, making the houses very cost effective and affordable. Mortar or mud is used in between the bottles. If a rural family has land with soil, trees for timber, and grass for the roof and is able to collect bottles, the house can be constructed with almost no costs involved.



In SINA, construction is done by the students themselves to spark their creativity and to break the dominant view that large sums of money are needed to start a business. Students understand that it is resources that are needed, not necessarily money, and some resources are all around us for free, such as garbage. That is why the students started experimenting with further upcycling ideas and the first social enterprise which emerged out of SINA in 2014 invented flooring solutions from plastic bags and egg shells ([www.sengonzi.com](http://www.sengonzi.com)).

## LIFE COACHING

*What you seek is seeking you.* – Rumi

Life-Coaching means to help in the development of another person without imposing. It unleashes potentials. A troublesome personal past is no indication for a similar future. Coaching helps to focus on what a scholar wants to achieve and increases awareness, choices, and trust in capabilities. The coaching process in SINA empowers scholars to have more fruitful relationships, belief in themselves, while discovering what obstacles or challenges might be in the way to reach personal goals. The scholar and coach create a step by step course of action to make life what the scholar wants it to be.

## FREESPONSIBLE SELF ORGANIZATION



The organizational structure of SINA mirrors its core values and is designed non-hierarchical for individual empowerment. SINA is a self-organized system, meaning that there is no boss to make decisions for other people but everyone is included in the decision making process. The scholars run the academy by themselves and take care of finances, operations, hiring new staff, connecting to the outside world etc. This is done in task-teams called the “Learning Groups”. The system is built upon “freesponsibility”,

giving scholars a lot of freedom and responsibilities. The groups run SINA while giving the scholars a lot of responsibilities and learn from mistakes. Facilitators are also part of the groups to guarantee the basic functionality and that important tasks get done. It is learning by doing. Scholars experience how to run a big organization and thus, get all the basics they need to be able to successfully in the future run their own enterprise. Visitors coming to SINA for the first time, are generally not able to distinguish between a facilitator and a scholar. The terms “teacher”, “student” and “school” have deliberately been replaced by facilitator, scholar and academy to reflect the idea that at SINA everyone is treating each other as equals.

## INCOME GENERATING PROJECTS

When scholars come to SINA they can get easily lost in the open structure of endless opportunities. Since all their life they have been used to receiving orders, typically a scholar in the beginning is looking for someone to tell him what project he or she should pursue. If own ideas are brought in, they usually are standard projects which the scholar has seen 1000 times before, such as starting a chicken farm.

Innovative ideas do not emerge on command but only in a free environment that gives exposure to different inspiration on a daily basis. That is why SINA runs ten income generating projects within itself. They contribute to the self-sustainability of the academy but foremost, train scholars in new skills, they learn through experience how to manage a small business and while working on something, new ideas always emerge. The projects include for example organic farming, upcycling plastic bottle construction or production of crafts. Scholars choose the projects they want to work in.



## SOCIAL BUSINESS INCUBATION AND MENTORING

Through the inputs of the Learning Groups, the Income Generating Projects and occasional sessions of external guests and speakers, scholars are constantly getting new and diverse inputs. If a scholar, or a group of scholars have their own project idea for a social business startup they can present it to the entire community. Feedback is given and if the idea is seen to have potential, two mentors are assigned to it. A small startup amount of 20 USD is given

to the team and the projects enters an incubation and gamification system, following lean principles. Within the process, a decisive mindset is developed and scholars pushed past their comfort zones until the business becomes viable and is registered and graduates from SINA with its founders having created their own employment. Scholars stay in SINA as long as they need to leave with their own employment established.



## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

In its initial stage SINA is a non-profit relying on donations but transitions into a social business itself. The income generating projects contribute towards expenses. Scholars pay only a small one-time contribution and after receive accommodation, food and the full empowerment until self-employment. However, an agreement is made, that when a business graduates, a negotiated percentage of the revenue will go back to SINA for the startup of further businesses. Because SINA is built on trust and ideas have been created and incubated together with SINA, graduating scholars are willing to pass on the opportunity they received to other youth in need through giving shares to SINA of their business. With current estimations, SINA will achieve financial self-sustainability in 2018 and will then expand into opening different Social Innovation Academies across Africa.



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