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ZAYED SUSTAINABILITY PRIZE



Social climbing: tech for social impact

“You can build a school for sick kids or you can get to them in the first thousand days of their lives, and then build a school full of healthy kids,” says Felix Brooks-church, Founder of Sanku, a non-profit social enterprise that provides nutritiously fortified food to the developing world.

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‘Hidden hunger’ has negative long-term consequences from anaemia to respiratory issues.

In East Africa, the Sanku dosifier machine is enabling millers to “dose” flour with the precise ratio of nutrients to ensure a healthy diet. So far, the company has outfitted more than 400 flour mills in East Africa, feeding close to two million people daily, and has plans to reach 25 million people in the next five years. The journey started more than 10 years ago when Brooks-church and his co-founder realised there was no mechanism to fortify flour mills on a smaller scale – “Nothing existed that could automatically and safely add nutrients at the village level.” Sanku works in countries with high levels of micronutrient deficiency. “They have enough food to survive but they’re starving from lack of nutrients,” Brooks-church explains, “and this ‘hidden hunger’ has negative long-term consequences from anaemia to respiratory issues.”



Tanzanian millers fortifying their maize flour with the Sanku Dosifier.

Like many humanitarian efforts, the focus here is on prevention. “We want to get to children before the problem starts,” Brooks-church says, “We’re putting back the key

building blocks.”

This critical, life-transforming solution offered by Sanku’s technology led to the company winning the 2019 Zayed Sustainability Prize in the food category; a prestigious award granted by the United Arab Emirates in honour of the late founder and President of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.



Sanku technician training a miller on the use of the dosifier machine.

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I watched health workers struggle to conduct care using candles and kerosene lanterns

Fellow 2019 Zayed Sustainability Prize winner Dr Laura Stachel, Co-Founder of non-profit We Care Solar is using technology to tackle another kind of poverty. Her first encounter

with energy poverty in healthcare was in Nigeria while on a research programme from UC Berkeley School of Public Health. “While observing care at a state hospital conducting 150 deliveries a month, I watched health workers struggle to conduct care using candles and kerosene lanterns,” says Stachel. “The hospital had sporadic electricity due to rolling blackouts each day. I saw that doctors had to postpone caesarean sections, diagnostic equipment lay dormant, and lives were lost.”



Midwives in thousands of health centers are being equipped with clean, reliable energy, thanks to the We Care Solar Suitcase, pictured behind this midwife and baby in Ghana.

Dr Stachel learned that energy poverty was widespread in frontline health centres. Her organisation’s solution is the Solar Suitcase – a complete standalone 12V DC solar electric system with medical lighting and devices, and the only off-grid system developed specifically for medical staff in remote, underserved parts of the world. Designed to be

safe, easy-to-install, and easy-to-use, the system is designed to be used 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Solar Suitcases have also been used in earthquake and hurricane situations, providing critical medical lighting and essential power. To date, the suitcases have reached more than 6,200 health centres serving 7.5 million mothers and newborns.

“No woman should die giving life,” Dr Stachel says, simply, “We envision a world where all families have access to safe, reliable healthcare. We will have achieved success when all health workers have the power to save lives, and mothers and babies no longer die of preventable causes during childbirth.”

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