



STARTUP WEEKEND: INSPIRING YOUTH INTEREST IN MONGOLIAN FIBRE

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized

Introduction

Though Mongolia is ranked as the second largest cashmere producer in the world, after China, the fibre sector is facing challenges in growth — one of the key constraints being the dramatic decrease of newcomers to the workforce in recent years.

Youth in international fibre

In 2015, 65 percent of the fibre sector workforce was youth under the age of 35 — some even working as executive directors of leading companies. However, fewer graduates enter the industry each year as they get drawn to higher-paying jobs in construction and mining.

Interest is not the only concern: training in schools are not preparing youth adequately for new technologies used by Mongolian fibre processors and major producers, and few companies offer internships to develop students' practical skills.

Program:

Volunteer Cooperation Program 2015-2020

Date: March 2016

Implementing partner: Startup Mongolia, Nomadd, American Culture and Information Center, Mongolian University of Life Sciences, Mongolian & Korean Polytechnic College, the Shima Seiki Training Center and the Uniterra Program

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Key themes of the story: Textile fibre, startups, youth employment



There was a perception that the fibre sector is old and youth hadn't much interest in it.

P. Byanbasceren
Startup Mongolia



Solution: An inspired weekend

From March 29 to 31, 2016, fifty young engineers, students, and entrepreneurial youth gathered in Ulaanbaatar to develop and pitch to top local processing companies their ideas of new, Made-in-Mongolia fiber products.

The weekend of innovation was initiated and funded by the Uniterra Program, and was organized with Startup Mongolia, local accessories brand Nomadd, and the American Culture and Information Center.

In preparation for the competition, participating youth learned about turning an idea into a business, the current status of and development opportunities in the fiber sector, and insights on the latest fully automated knitting technology. They also received step-by-step mentoring on international approaches for innovation with the support of MUST, Mongolian University of Life Sciences, Mongolian and Korean Polytechnic College, and the Shima Seiki Training Center.

Results

- 50 direct beneficiaries (students)
- 9,200 indirect beneficiaries (200 family members of more than 4,000 students from 3 TVET schools and a community reach of 5,000)
- 3 volunteers involved
- 7 tools (2 training PPT, 3 posts published, 1 newsletter/Flickr, 1 video produced)

New opportunities for youth in traditional industry

The Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST)'s project on wool-knitted office accessories was the final winner out of nine teams, and the team was given the opportunity to market their product through local chain store Evseg Cashmere. Silver and bronze teams "Organic Chameleon" and "Bubble Think" were also recognized by the judges for their creativity in using nanotechnology-based smart fiber in garments and recycled fibers in modern furniture.

As a result of the weekend-long boot camp, two to three new businesses have started in the fibre sector within half a year.

What we learned: multi-disciplinary

While Uniterra focused on involving youth of all backgrounds, from high school students to trained youth in post-graduate institutions, the participation and advice of specialists from relevant disciplines, including chemists, physicists, nanotechnologists, and legal experts provided interdisciplinary inspiration for the fibre prototypes proposed by young entrepreneurs.

The results of this project contribute to SDG: 4 - Quality Education, 8 - Decent work and economic growth, 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

Volunteers:

Dzuy Tran, Policy Support Volunteer for Research and Development, and Waqas Youafzaid, Policy Analyst Advisor, supported the partners and youth in preparatory meetings, the vision and needs for a start-up and the enabling partners to have supports in place for ideas and entrepreneurs that were motivated by the event.

Jessica Finders — Research Officer — assisted with youth inclusion and tying the Startup weekend with the partners' project, allowing rural youth to diversify their income streams.

Baiglamaa Gankhuu — National Partnership Advisor — helped build linkages between the business, the academic institution and Chamber of commerce, as well as facilitated links between actors

Vivian Chiu — Communications Advisor — worked with the local media students to help film, edit and disseminate the start-up weekend video.