

A *leap* in the dark



The desire to make a difference, the study of Environmental Economics and Climate Change and an eventful plane ride all combined to give **Kat Kimmorley** her “light bulb moment”. **Candy Gibson** finds out what led LSE’s Student Entrepreneur of the Year to focus her energy on lighting India’s urban slums.

As every entrepreneur knows, the spark for a successful business idea is often lit in unusual circumstances. For Kat Kimmorley, the location was an aeroplane, 30,000 feet above northern India, looking down on a landscape of complete darkness.

The world’s largest blackout ironically provided the “light bulb moment” for the LSE master’s student, who was returning to London after spending two months in the slums of Bangalore as part of her research. On that night, in July 2012, 700 million people in India (10 per cent of the world’s population) suffered a power cut, plunged into darkness for hours on end. As Kat discovered during her time in the urban slums, another 400 million people in India experience that every day once the sun goes down.

Lack of access to electricity is a reality for 25 per cent of the country’s population. Kerosene lamps are a poor substitute in more ways than one: not only do they provide inadequate light, but the toxic fumes released in burning kerosene are the second largest cause of premature death in women and young children in India. The smoke emissions are the equivalent of two packets of cigarettes each day. That’s not to mention the millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases and black carbon released into the

atmosphere by kerosene lamps, contributing to global warming. The committed environmentalist could not let the opportunity pass, using the knowledge as a springboard for her PhD at LSE, researching the impact of sustainable-energy products in India’s slums. “I realised I was in my defining decade – a decade when I could connect with something that really made me tick,” Kat said.

The interconnection between poverty and climate change and the slums of Bangalore has not only formed the basis of her thesis but shaped her destiny in ways she never imagined.

Pollinate Energy is the result. The organisation, co-founded by Kat with a group of fellow young Australians, is a social enterprise that provides sustainable energy to urban slum dwellers across India. It ticks a number of boxes: environmental, health, entrepreneurial and economic missions are all rolled into an ambitious project which provides solar lighting to India’s poor through a micro-franchise model.

Pollinate Energy HQ finds the best and most affordable sustainable energy projects and supplies them to Bangalore’s urban slum communities via young, local Indian entrepreneurs. As of October 2014, 6,786 solar-powered systems had been installed in Bangalore’s poorest 500 communities, servicing

31,000 people. Approximately 17 million rupees have been saved by not having to purchase kerosene. The environment has also emerged a clear winner with the gradual removal of the fossil fuel, saving an additional 865,000 kilograms of CO2 emissions.

The long-term plan is to eradicate the use of kerosene in India within the next six years by rolling out the scheme to more than one million people in all 53 cities by 2020.

Kat’s brainchild earned her the 2014 title of LSE Student Entrepreneur of the Year. The award follows Pollinate Energy’s 2013 UN Seed and UN Momentum for Change awards and her recognition in the same year as one of Australia’s 100 Women of Influence, determined by that country’s leading business publication, the *Financial Review*. ■



Candy Gibson is senior press officer at LSE.



Katerina Kimmorley (MSc Geography 2012) is a PhD candidate in Environmental Economics at LSE.

Q&A with **Kat Kimmorley**, LSE Student Entrepreneur of the Year 2014

Q: What are the main challenges that would-be entrepreneurs face?

A: The main challenge is not about skills, ideas or expertise but about the fear of taking on a non-traditional career path. The first few years after you leave university, you are full of ideas and passion and you don't have much to lose by establishing a career as an entrepreneur in a field you are passionate about. You just need to let go – for a couple of years at least – of the notion of a traditional corporate or institutional career path.

Q: You have talked about entering a "new dawn for social entrepreneurship". What do you mean by this?

A: In the last few years I have seen enterprises pop up all over the world started by people who want to make an impact first and a profit second, although it still has to be financially sustainable. This model suits impact investors and also young donors. It also means we are getting some really innovative projects off the ground.

Q: How has LSE facilitated your journey?

A: I came to LSE because I wanted to learn about how to effect change at the nexus

of poverty and climate change. Pollinate Energy in part was born from my master's research and continued in my PhD. I have had tremendous mentoring and academic support from LSE and becoming Student Entrepreneur of the Year is the icing on the cake. It has given me financial support to expand Pollinate Energy into our second city.

Q: Is there anything more that LSE could do to inspire budding entrepreneurs?

A: I am greatly inspired by stories of people who have had great ideas and put them into action. We need more inspiring "doers" featured as part of the LSE public lecture series and promoted within the LSE community.



Kat Kimmorley (pictured above) plans to roll out solar-powered energy to more than 1m people in India by 2020

Supporting the next generation of LSE entrepreneurs

Since 2012, the entrepreneurial offerings at LSE have grown substantially, buoyed by a number of success stories among the School's young entrepreneurs.

Environmental Economics PhD student Kat Kimmorley is the standout, co-founding the social enterprise Pollinate Energy in India in 2013, which stands to benefit millions of people (see main article), but she is far from alone in seeking to turn her ambitions to help others into reality.

Another project to capture the public's imagination this year has been Kirsty Kenney and Harold Craston's brainchild to turn London's disused iconic red phone boxes into solar-powered public charging points for mobile phones. And thanks to the entrepreneurial zeal shown by LSE law student Maya Linstrum-Newman, prison inmates in south-east Africa now have basic sustainable farming skills to grow their own food.

These are just a handful of examples demonstrating the initiative, vision and perseverance of LSE's entrepreneurial-minded students. Their dreams have been nurtured by the newly named Generate at

LSE programme via practical and technical support, as well as by mentoring programs, networking opportunities and funding.

The Generate programme includes:

- Start-up Boot Camp at the beginning of Lent term each year, including one-on-one meetings with successful entrepreneurs, the opportunity to pitch ideas, a Q&A event and a speed networking evening
- Master Classes for students in the Michaelmas term looking at the "nuts and bolts" of building a business, covering business plans, finance options (ie, crowd-funding, bootstrapping, Angel investment and loans), legal contracts, marketing, establishing a domain name and online development, building the right team and planning for growth
- Networking events throughout the year, including a flagship launch in October, a speed networking event matching LSE entrepreneurs with app and web developers from partnering institutions, and meet-the-mentor events

- Funding competitions, with individual financial prizes of £10,000 on offer for the best entrepreneurial concepts

LSE Careers Consultant Laura-Jane Silverman said there had been a "massive increase" in the number of students accessing entrepreneurial resources from the School in the past year.

"The growth has been extraordinary," Laura-Jane said. "The number of social enterprises being launched in particular reflects the subject choices at LSE. We have also seen strong interest from Management students, many of whom have a natural talent for business."

LSE is gradually building a pool of alumni mentors who are successful entrepreneurs in their own right. This year the School is also collaborating with incubators such as Rainmaking Loft and the Bakery in Tech City to allow students to network and develop their technical expertise.

More on Generate at LSE Careers can be found at: lse.ac.uk/intranet/CareersAndVacancies/careersService/generate/Home.aspx