

2011 National Conference Transformational Business Network

This report was written by Harrison Brown, Operations Manager of the Transformational Business Network

For many Christians the workplace seems merely a venue for evangelism and a source of funds, and the concept of ministry is often restricted to what you can do for the church. But we know business can be so much more than that. Businesses have enormous potential to bring social reform, to transform communities and to reduce poverty. Many professional people are now using their business skills to fulfil the biblical mandate to fight poverty.

Transformational Business Network (TBN) and its members do this in several ways. We use our skills to: support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through mentoring and training; start businesses with local entrepreneurs; market goods from the developing world; and invest in transformational projects or businesses. In short, we support projects in developing countries that create jobs, empower the poor and transform communities. We believe that building SMEs fosters improvements in living standards, health, education, innovation and, above all, restores human dignity.

The annual TBN conference is the highlight of the year and this year we focused particularly on impact investment: proactively seeking to invest in, support and encourage something that has an intentional social and environmental impact beyond financial return.

Nick O'Donohoe, JP Morgan's former head of global research, presented findings from their significant report on impact investing, which he called an emerging asset class. Gavin McGillivray, Head of Private Sector Development at the Department for International Development, talked about how DFID is allocating funds to support new businesses, and encouraging the private sector by assuming some of the risk of commercial ventures. Investment in the area of infrastructure is particularly strategic.

The case studies of people on the ground, directly involved in TBN projects, were especially inspiring. Greg Spencer presented the Paradigm project, a for-profit business providing healthy, efficient stoves to Africa that drastically reduce a family's consumption of wood and improves their economic stability. Livingston Mukasa, whose background is extreme poverty in Kampala, spoke about his growing laundry business which employs 35 people and regularly delivers business training to potential entrepreneurs.

Courtney Rountree talked about the work of The Sinapis Group in finding and investing in the top entrepreneurs in Kenya. Many investors say that entrepreneurs in the developing world are too risky, there are too few exits, and there are questions of professionalism and integrity. Sinapis seeks to solve this "start-up gap" by widening the bottleneck of seed capital through providing a seven-month training programme and seeking backing for the most promising entrepreneurs. Business Partners International has a sustainable business model enabling them to make 400-600 investments a year. They focus on the lower end of the SME market and particularly in small, family-run businesses.

Full recordings of the conference presentations at the conference can be found at <http://www.tbnetwork.org/uknc11/med a>.

Why not get involved in TBN? At the conference we saw just how much impact individuals and small teams can make by using their workplace skills with the power of the network behind them. As a member of TBN you will be able to access expertise you don't have yourself, you'll get help and connections to get started, you will connect with other members and local groups and you can receive resources and support for your projects. Help us reach our goal of creating 1,000,000 sustainable jobs by 2015 and play your part in eradicating extreme poverty.

Find out more about Transformational Business Network at <http://www.tbnetwork.org/>