

Amaranth for Africa wins student business competition

Creating cosmetics out of a weed for Kenyan villages plan has been judged the winner of the 2010 Global Enterprise Experience, a business-concept competition uniting 550 students from 30 countries.

Their winning business concept – Amaranth for Africa – proposed to train and franchise women in Kenya to grow amaranth. The company will buy the seeds to convert into valuable oils that retails for \$32 per ounce for use in cosmetics. The women will be able to keep the leaves, roots and stems which provide healthy nutrition. Amaranth grows rapidly like a weed in arid climates, but requires manual labour to harvest.

New Zealand students led all of the 68 global virtual teams in a three week effort to meet on line, choose a project, then research, design and jointly write a business proposal. This year students were asked to develop a profitable proposal for a product or service to foster women's social and/or economic development.

Judge and Victoria University's Pro Chancellor, Helen Sutch, said "This has been a most interesting and at times moving task. I am impressed at the thoughtfulness and concern of these teams, and the way the project has stimulated and enabled young people in poor countries, alone and facing formidable obstacles in the most difficult environments, to participate. It also appears to have been a life-changing experience for some of them."

Some participants go to extraordinary lengths to contribute to their teams. This year there were 12 Iranian Baha'i, who are banned from attending public universities because of their faith. One has already spent two months imprisoned for his faith, and accused of communicating with foreigners. It is with great personal risk that these Baha'is participated in the Global Enterprise Experience working on line in global teams.

Nigerian, Sowemimo Olubukola James, was called up for national service in a remote village with no electricity. He walked long distances to find a functioning internet to contribute to his team, fasted to afford the internet cost, and then contracted malaria. Nepali, Shishir Rajbhandari, managed to work, study, and compete with electricity cuts of up to 12 hours per day by borrowing his cousin's laptop.

Victoria University Global Leader Award winner, Cara O'Shell described how this contest had given her the "entrepreneurial bug" to make a web based venture happen to help women. As a team leader she said, "We New Zealanders had to do the early hours of the morning shift to pull together our team members in time zones around the world. It was intense, but very rewarding."

This is the seventh time the Te Kaihau Education Trust has run the contest with the support of Victoria University. Competition director, Deb Gilbertson, said, "I am keen to see young people grow into global leaders who can work across differences in cultures, world views levels of wealth, and geography. Many of our impressive New Zealanders are already leading world organisations and making a difference – this contest should inspire more to follow in their footsteps.

The 68 teams were judged by the Hon. Maryan Street (Spokesperson on Foreign Affairs and Trade), Helen Sutch (Pro Chancellor at Victoria University), Her Excellency Caroline Chrétien

(Canadian High Commissioner) and Anu Mukherjee (National Bank NZ and a successful Indian social entrepreneur).

Best journal award went to Adeniyi Sheriff Adebawale from Nigeria. He grew up in extreme poverty in remote Nigeria but pursued education to get himself out. He sold his cellphone to afford the internet cost to communicate with his global team.

Members of the winning team are: Jas Giri (New Zealand), Andrea Serna Restrepo (Colombia), Jason Kirby and Alyssa Silver (USA), Oyehan Tajudeen Adeyinka (Nigeria) and Miha Sebenik (Sweden)