

Three for Africa

Nan Guslander, Paul Lamontagne and Dennis Overton share two common bonds: YPO-WPO and Africa. They are among the social entrepreneurs advancing economic development in countries where even the smallest business can transform the lives of families and entire communities.



Nan Guslander (WPO Northern California), right, with a Senegalese entrepreneur.

NAN GUSLANDER: SUCCESS IN SENEGAL

Nan Guslander (WPO Northern California) is a savvy entrepreneur who has sold two successful businesses. These days, however, she's spending as much as 50 percent of her time translating documents, networking and raising money for other people – for free.

"It's added such passion and meaning to my life to do this," says Guslander about her work with the Senegal Eco-village Microfinance Fund (SEM), a nonprofit she cofounded in 2006 after learning about microfinancing through the YPO-WPO Peace Action Network.

"Before becoming a business owner, I was a social worker and had seen certain shortcomings in the United States welfare system," says Guslander, who continues to run a real estate investment company. "I view microcredit as very empowering because it focuses on a person's achievement and provides a means for motivated individuals to create real change in their lives."

SEM works with an association of 38 rural villages to create sustainable, eco-friendly businesses. While SEM's directors facilitate loans, village representatives meet quarterly to review all loan proposals. "They decide who gets the money. It's very bottom-up," she says.

Guslander's Forum has sponsored a number of loans, and she updates her peers with quarterly progress reports. From peanut farmers to pottery makers, entrepreneurs assisted through SEM are working toward economic stability.

"For some people, it helps to even out their income, leveling out the ups and downs," says Guslander. "Then there are others, like the women operating a millet factory. The loans have allowed them to rent a larger structure outside of town and really grow the business. They just received an award from the government for entrepreneurship!"

To learn more, visit www.sem-fund.org.



Paul Lamontagne (WPO Quebec)

PAUL LAMONTAGNE: FROM CANADA TO SOUTH AFRICA

"I'm living proof that YPO and WPO can move mountains," says **Paul Lamontagne** (WPO Quebec).

As CEO of Enablis SA, a South African not-for-profit that provides small and mid-sized businesses with loans, networking events, business coaching

and technical support, Lamontagne credits the chapters in the region with vital startup support.

Now members are continuing to support Enablis through a mentoring program for participating entrepreneurs launched last year by the YPO Johannesburg Chapter.

"It's life changing for entrepreneurs to be able to link to YPO members because it opens access to a network of knowledge and experience," says Lamontagne. "One year into it, there are more than 20 YPOers mentoring 20 Enablis entrepreneurs."

Enablis started in 2003 when Canadian businessman Charles Sirois sold the cable TV company Lamontagne was running and asked him to help start an entrepreneurship organization. "It launched a new, socially minded career for me, which has been the most pleasant surprise," says Lamontagne, who moved his family from Montreal to Cape Town in 2005.

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Enablis operates in Mozambique, South Africa and Kenya, with plans to expand into Tanzania and Senegal by the end of 2008 and Nigeria in 2009.

Lamontagne and **Dennis Overton** (YPO Scotland) recently co-chaired a YPO-WPO Economic Development Network trip to social enterprise sites in Kenya and Rwanda. In addition to Enablis, the group visited the International Medical Corps led by **Nancy Aosse** (YPO Bel Air), YPO-WPO partner Ashoka and Ikirezi (story follows).

"When friends ask what I'm doing in Africa, I tell them we're making history by empowering these entrepreneurs to end the cycle of poverty," says Lamontagne. "I truly feel lucky to be where I am today."

To learn more, visit www.enablis.org.



Dennis Overton (YPO Scotland)

DENNIS OVERTON: A GERANIUM REVOLUTION IN RWANDA

When **Dennis Overton** (YPO Scotland) participated in the Economic Development Network's trip to South Africa in 2007, he had no idea he'd be co-chairing the next one.

"Last year's trip to Johannesburg was memorable because it proved to us that social enterprise has a role to play in Africa," says Overton, founder and managing director of Aquascot, a sustainable seafood business based in Scotland. "The trip confirmed our belief in the power of applying entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to some of the most challenging situations on the planet."

Overton uses his expertise in business and farming/processing to help Rwandans farm geraniums for their essential oils and sell them in Europe and the United States under the business name Ikirezi.

An introduction to Rwandan exile Nicholas Hitimana in 1999 led Overton to Africa. "We are both agriculturalists and from that common interest grew a friendship," he says. "When Nicholas decided to return to Rwanda, he discussed a number of business ideas with me. Ultimately, the Ikirezi business model emerged."

Many YPO and WPO members have shared their knowledge and resources with Overton, and some have inquired about the investment opportunities.

"My hopes for Ikirezi are that we see a successful, ecologically sound business emerge, run to the highest standards, capable of transforming life outcomes for thousands of rural Rwandans," says Overton.

Ikirezi will complete its second round of financing by the middle of 2009 and anticipates expanding the number of growers from 800 to 2,000.

To learn more, visit www.ikirezi.com.