Social enterprise founded by Earlham Davis UWC Scholars wins international award

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Bean Voyage, a nonprofit social enterprise founded by recent graduates of Earlham College — including two who were Davis UWC Scholars — has won the Grand Prize in the Facebook Social Entrepreneurship Awards competition. 

Co-sponsored by the charity One Young World, the international competition is for companies dedicated to the social good. Bean Voyage was represented in it by Abhinav Khanal (Nepal, Pearson UWC, Earlham ’16), who co-founded Bean Voyage on the Indiana college campus in 2014 with fellow Davis UWC Scholar Sunghee Tark (Republic of Korea, Mahindra UWC, Earlham ’16) and three other Earlham students.

The award carries with it $55,000 worth of Facebook ad credits and executive mentoring from Carolyn Everson, vice president for global marketing solutions at Facebook.

Based in Los Santos, Costa Rica, Bean Voyage provides training and market access to women coffee producers so they can skip the middlemen, earn more income, and lead sustainable lives. In announcing the award, One Young World said this about Bean Voyage:

“The enterprise was inspired by the intersectionality of two key issues within traditional coffee trade: inequitable distribution of revenue and gender inequality. The high price of specialty coffee in the market is not reflected in the income earned by smallholder farmers, as they earn less than 10 percent of final retail price even though they do 80% of the work in producing the coffee cherries.

“In addition, women farmers do 70-80 percent of the work in coffee production but earn 39 percent less income than their male counterparts, which then restricts them from further expanding their farms or spending towards the educational, healthcare and sanitary needs of their families. Even the alternative, fair trade, has proven to be unreliable, as research has confirmed that farmers earn only 15 percent more revenue than their previous earnings. The problem is not about creating fair payment systems but addressing the larger issue of agency.”

“We’re humbled by the support and confidence of Facebook and One Young World in our mission and efforts,” Khanal says. “We’re at a crucial junction as a social enterprise to maintain the balance between our efforts in the community, including the enrollment and training of farmers, and ensuring sustainable demand for their coffee in the market.

“This award will provide us with the opportunity to build our capacity on the market side of things,” he adds. “Not only will the credits help us to further expand our audience and reach, but we will also have an opportunity to learn from Facebook’s VP of Global Marketing Solutions, which will be highly valuable in building our capacity as co-founders of this venture.”

Bean Voyage provides women producers a yearlong training in the production, processing, roasting and cupping of organic coffee. After the training is complete, Bean Voyage shares the coffee that the women produce with consumers, currently in the U.S. and Germany, through an e-commerce platform. The program’s success allows the company to promise participating farmers a 300 percent increase in revenue.

In announcing the award, Everson, the Facebook marketing executive, expressed great excitement at Bean Voyage’s potential to change lives for the better, and praised the company’s “proof of concept,” which is currently playing out on small farms in Costa Rica.

Bean Voyage was started on Earlham’s campus by a team that included Khanal, Tark, and Sohrab Amiri ’16, Bryan Tipton ’16 and Victor Zuniga ’17. Khanal and Tark are currently leading the venture, along with a team of five part-time staff members based in the U.S., Costa Rica and Germany.

In winning the international competition, Bean Voyage (which represented Central and South America) bested entries from Africa, Asia and North America.