



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Converting plastic bags into solar panel school bags

'African Start-Up' on CNN tells story of a South African start-up improving children's lives

'African Start-Up' Wednesday 10 December at 1800

Johannesburg, 9th December 2014 – This week CNN 'African Start-Up' profiles two South Africans - Thato Kgathanye and Rea Ngwane, co-founders of Rethaka, a company that converts plastic bags into solar panel school bags.

For this South African start-up, upcycled plastic bags are the main component in their solar panel school bags. The company's take on sustainability also goes one step further, the solar panels charge while children walk to school and act as a light source when they need to study at night.

Ngwane tells 'African Start-Up': "The repurposed school bag is an innovation that's basically an upcycled solar panel backpack. It's actually made from 20 plastic bags that are upcycled into a textile, and then we have also integrated a solar panel because the kids that we are trying to serve actually go home and they don't have any electricity to study. So while these kids are walking to school we actually give them something that can help them later on. All the kids need to do when they get back home is just slip the solar panel off the bag and put it onto a jar that is supplied, connect the switch to the solar panel and then they have a light source to use at night."

'African Start-Up' discovers that this resourceful duo entered the SAB Foundation Social Innovation Awards in 2013 and won third place, receiving US\$30 000 to start their business.

Rethaka source their plastics from different places such as schools, households and landfills. The plastics go through a washing and sorting process to remove dirt, from there they go through a brand removal process, and they are hung to dry afterwards. They are then taken to a station where they are cut, ironed and sewn into bags.

Rethaka was launched in January 2014. Kgathanye tells 'African Start-Up': "Business is amazing, we've managed to do our prototyping phase, piloted our first school and did 128 bags, we've had great clients that have come on board to support us by placing orders."

With a successful start, Rethaka now employs eight people and the co-founders say they've had to learn a lot, quickly, telling 'African Start-Up': "We are young, and yet we have to manage a team of

CNN EMEA, Turner House, 16 Great Marlborough Street, London W1F 7HS
Tel: +44 20 7693 0939

people that are essentially a lot older than we are...being able to keep your cool while talking to a client while production is crazy and falling behind schedule for instance. We've managed to really deal quite a lot with stress."

"I see our bags definitely going beyond the borders of South Africa and reaching other African countries and other developing continents such as Asia, countries such as India, and making that much of an impact," Ngwane concludes.

Note to the Editors

To watch this interview tune in to CNN on DStv Channel 401 this Wednesday, 10 December at 18:00.

'African Start-Up' airs each Wednesday in 'Connect the World' at 18:00 on CNN International.

Website www.cnn.com/africanstartup

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For more information, please contact:

Penny Biram

Tel: +27 11 480 8512

Penny.biram@bm-africa.com

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