

# Youth**Action**Net™



2007

*Global Fellows*

## 2007 YOUTH ACTION NET™ FELLOWS

### *africa*

Sphamandla Mzobe, South Africa

Rachel Nampinga, Uganda

Ainos Ngadya, Zimbabwe

Zablon Wagalla, Kenya

### *asia / pacific*

Bernise Ang, Singapore

Abhishek Bharadwaj, India

Audrey Codera, Philippines

Tom Dawkins, Australia

Anna Rose, Australia

Li Shen, China

Rama Shyam, India

### *europe*

Vanja Hamzić, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Talía Delgado, Romania

### *latin america / caribbean*

John Miller Beauvoir, Haiti

Ana Moraga, Guatemala

Maritza Morales, Mexico

### *north america*

Tal Dehtiar, Canada

Antoine Eloj, United States

Neilesh Patel, United States

Cheryl Perera, Canada

## FOREWORD

Profiled in the following pages are twenty extraordinary young leaders—social entrepreneurs—who saw a problem in their community, or halfway around the world, and took action to develop a solution.

The term “social entrepreneur” has come into our vocabulary in recent years to describe singular individuals who combine accentuated leadership, a drive for social justice, and astonishing managerial ability to create social enterprises that benefit human and community development.

The young people described here are distinguished as YouthActionNet™ Global Fellows. Established by Nokia and the International Youth Foundation (IYF) in 2001, YouthActionNet™ is a program that recognizes and supports the role of young people in leading positive change. Each year, YouthActionNet™ selects twenty Global Fellows from an applicant pool of hundreds. Awarded Fellows attend a specially designed program of peer-to-peer learning, training, mentoring, and networking. The 2007 Global Fellows now join one hundred young leaders in over fifty countries who have participated in this program over the past six years.

What are the leadership qualities that these young visionaries share in common?

First is their ability to think and act with optimism, to believe that change is possible no matter how big the challenge. Consider, for example, the efforts of Ainos Ngadya, 25, of Zimbabwe, who led a team of business students in boosting the incomes of small farmers while combating hunger and malnutrition.

Second is their entrepreneurial spirit and gift for developing innovative solutions and pattern-changing ideas. Technology has enabled many of this year’s Fellows to dramatically extend their reach and impact. Neilesh Patel, 25, of the United States, developed an interactive website that connects health professionals to volunteer opportunities around the world.

Third is their skill at mobilizing people and enrolling others in their cause. These are creative collaborators, who know how to work in partnership with others to achieve win-win solutions. Abhishek Bharadwaj, 29, of India, has addressed the needs of the homeless through building effective partnerships among diverse sectors.

And fourth is their ability to serve as transformative agents of change—to influence how people think and act. Anna Rose, 23, of Australia, is engaging hundreds of youth throughout the nation in efforts to combat climate change and influence the policies and priorities of business and government leaders.

These young social entrepreneurs and others like them around the globe are redefining leadership at a time when the world needs more leaders like them.

### **William S. Reese**

*President and CEO*

International Youth Foundation

### **Martin Sandelin**

*Vice-President, CSR and Community Involvement*

Nokia

*What are the leadership qualities that these young visionaries share in common?*



## SPHAMANDLA TREVOR MZOBE

Ntuzuma-KwaMashu, South Africa

Age: 27

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Use the power of theatre to empower young people with the knowledge and skills to transform their communities.

“We see ourselves as people who are removing the clouds of fear and racism and letting the sun shine.”

Sphamandla Trevor Mzobe lives in Ntuzuma Township, located 25 kilometers from Durban, with his mother, grandmother, and two sisters. “It’s survival of the fittest here,” says Sphamandla, whose name means “one who gives power.” Sphamandla is no stranger to the violence in his community. His brother was recently shot and killed.

An actor, theatre creator, and artistic director, Sphamandla founded Wala-Wala Productions, a not-for-profit organization that engages young people in Ntuzuma, and other parts of South Africa, in activities that build their knowledge, skills, and self-esteem. Wala-Wala is a Zulu term meaning “mother of the rain.” Says Sphamandla, “We see ourselves as people who are removing the clouds of fear and racism and letting the sun shine.” Wala-Wala develops plays that celebrate South African culture and explore critical social issues such as crime, HIV/AIDS, and poverty.

One Wala-Wala play, *Flame*, tells the story of a young girl who finds herself alone on one of the most dangerous streets in Durban. “The play looks at how she survives,” says Sphamandla, “because no matter what you are facing there is always a light inside you, a flame.”

Another production, *Tastes Like Strawberries*, explores the theme of violence against women.

“It’s really a love story,” says Sphamandla, “about a man who kills his wife and becomes tormented.” After the man is found not guilty and is released from jail, he struggles to live with his conscience. “It’s a story about morality and faith,” Sphamandla says, “and gets at the idea that we all have a higher set of values we need to live by.”

A key focus of Sphamandla’s work is honoring the cultural heritage and traditions of South Africa’s diverse citizenry. “We recognize the culture that we have within the townships,” he says. “There are heroes from the past—since the days of slavery—that need to be remembered, that young people need to know about.”

Through celebrating the nation’s rich cultural diversity, Wala-Wala promotes the inherent value of South Africa’s multi-racial, multi-ethnic society.



## RACHEL NAMPINGA

Kampala, Uganda

Age: 29

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Mobilize and empower African youth to take steps to combat climate change and live in environmentally sustainable ways.

“Change starts with individuals stepping out and deciding to play a role.”

For Rachel Nampinga, climate change isn’t something to guard against in the future; rather its impact is being strongly felt in African communities today. “Climate change is already a reality in Africa,” she says. “The evidence is here—floods, drought, famine, crop failure. We as young people cannot sit back and wait for others to act. Our future is at stake!”

Rachel was a driving force behind the establishment of the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change (AYICC), and serves as its President. During the first AYICC conference in Nairobi in 2006, more than one hundred youth from ten African countries met to put forth an action plan for mobilizing African youth to take urgent steps to combat climate change and contribute to international goals as articulated in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At home in Uganda, Rachel is the founder of Ecowatch Africa, a nongovernmental organization that raises awareness of the threat of climate change and empowers people to live in environmentally sustainable ways. Among its activities, Ecowatch conducts advocacy campaigns via radio and mobilizes Ugandan students to plant trees. It also teaches communities about sustainable agriculture and ways of limiting climate change activities. To date, Ecowatch Africa has

conducted educational outreach in more than 200 schools.

Rachel’s motivation stems from the harsh realities facing rural Ugandan communities. “In the Nakasongola district where we worked, during the dry season hundreds of animals die due to lack of water,” she says, “and children eat one meal a day because that’s all the food they have.”

Rachel recognizes that while Africa produces only four percent of the world’s CO2 emissions, it is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change. Sadly, she explains, Africa’s high sensitivity to climate is exacerbated by factors such as widespread poverty, recurrent droughts and floods, a heavy disease burden, and the conflicts that have engulfed the continent.

Empowering individuals and engaging young people as part of the solution is critical to Ecowatch Africa’s approach. “Change starts with individuals stepping out and deciding to play a role,” Rachel says.



## AINOS NGADYA

Harare, Zimbabwe

Age: 25

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Train small farmers in finance, business, and entrepreneurship skills and provide them with access to micro-credit.

*“Our research pointed to a profound absence of entrepreneurship, finance, and business skills in the area.”*

A student studying finance and banking at the University of Zimbabwe, Ainos Ngadya is putting his knowledge and skills to work in the service of poor rural communities.

As Executive President of the University’s Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) chapter, Ainos has mobilized his peers to fight poverty. SIFE is a global organization that establishes student teams on university campuses that develop community outreach projects.

In 2006, Ainos led a team of thirty of his peers in creating Soyabiz, a project that boosts the incomes of small farmers, while combating hunger and malnutrition. Soyabiz was initially launched in the Mount Darwin area, fifty kilometers from Harare, where hunger, unemployment, and hopelessness are endemic. “Our research pointed to a profound absence of entrepreneurship, finance, and business skills in the area,” says Ainos, adding that the nation’s dire economic situation has exacerbated already difficult living conditions in rural communities.

To address local needs, Ainos and his peers offered workshops in management, finance, and marketing. They taught local farmers how to maximize income from soybean production and leverage their collective resources through forming cooperatives.

A key to Soyabiz’s approach is providing small farmers with access to credit. To do so, the team adapted the Village Bank model developed by Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus. Through accessing micro-loans, farmers can now afford to process soybeans into soy-related products (e.g., soy milk), thereby increasing their revenues. “Agriculture is the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy,” says Ainos, “yet much of the country’s exports consist of raw products.” By developing farmers’ abilities to process what they grow, Ainos hopes to contribute to the nation’s economic growth.

To date, Soyabiz has directly benefited 4,000 farmers and indirectly impacted the lives of thousands of farm families. In the future, Ainos hopes to connect farmers to larger markets, including corporations, hotels, and institutions of higher learning. Soyabiz also plans to replicate its model in other communities, starting with Nyanga, a town where 200 rural women will be trained to form sustainable cooperatives.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.uz.ac.zw/commerce/sife](http://www.uz.ac.zw/commerce/sife)



## ZABLON WAGALLA

Nairobi, Kenya

Age: 27

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Boost rural farm incomes through producing a clean energy, biofuel.

Zablon Wagalla was a university student studying agricultural science when he first learned about *Jatropha curcas*, a plant that can grow in marginal soil and produces seeds that can be processed into a clean energy, biofuel. Zablon and several of his peers started thinking about how they could introduce *Jatropha* to increase farm incomes in poor, rural communities in Kenya.

Their efforts focused on farmers in Nyakach, a rural area 450 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, where Zablon grew up. Most of the families in Nyakach struggle to survive on less than US\$1 a day—selling scarce firewood and producing what food they can given the region’s semi-arid climate. Through encouraging *Jatropha* cultivation, Zablon hoped to address poverty in the region, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of wood and charcoal. *Jatropha* oil can be used in stoves, lamps, and small engines and is carbon free. The plant has the added benefit of replenishing degraded soil.

Over the past two years, Trees for Clean Energy, the project Zablon launched, has engaged more than 950 area farmers in *Jatropha* production. “My community has never had a cash crop,” says Zablon. “Now people are busy working toward the development of their soci-

ety and are investing their energy in conserving the environment.”

Particular emphasis is placed on engaging local youth who have few livelihood opportunities and little hope for the future. To date, more than forty young people have received training in how to conduct local outreach—distributing seeds and providing technical assistance to farmers. Youth are encouraged to farm *Jatropha* themselves, interspersing Vanilla plants to maximize profits. Young people also generate income through crushing and processing *Jatropha* nuts.

In its current phase, Trees for Clean Energy is encouraging farmers to form cooperatives so they can pool their resources, apply for micro-finance loans, and purchase processing equipment. Over the next five years, Zablon, who has his eye on the European Union as a potential market, seeks to engage up to 6,000 farmers in *Jatropha* production.

*“Now people are busy working toward the development of their society and are investing their energy in conserving the environment.”*



## BERNISE ANG

Singapore, Republic of Singapore

Age: 26

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Connect Singaporean youth engaged in social change and provide a capacity-building platform to enable them to increase their effectiveness and impact.

*“An important goal of our work is to change people’s attitudes about youth and social change.”*

Over the past decade, more and more Singaporean youth have become actively involved in social change activities—from advocating for migrant workers’ rights to educating their peers about urgent environmental issues. While there is excellent support for social services (e.g., programs assisting the elderly and disabled children), there is an emerging need to strengthen organizations focused on social change issues such as HIV/AIDS and fair trade, explains Bernise Ang, founder of SYINC.

Bernise created SYINC in 2006 to build momentum and networking opportunities among Singapore’s young social change pioneers. Among its activities, SYINC hosts events (e.g., a film screening to coincide with Youth AIDS Day), organizes meetings, facilitates collaboration, and explores opportunities to engage the country’s youth in national and global platforms, such as UN forums and meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

“We’re trying to increase the opportunities for young people to be involved in social change, and enhance collaboration among them,” says Bernise. Among its successes, SYINC coordinated the country’s first Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) youth initiative and helped spark the nation’s first fair trade movement.

Young people have a strong role to play in reaching the MDGs, affirms Bernise, pointing to youth-led efforts to address such issues as environmental sustainability and HIV/AIDS.

In 2008, Bernise plans to launch SYINCubate, a project mentoring initiative that will support the development of promising new initiatives and young leaders in the country. A project proposal competition will be held in conjunction with SYINC’s Annual Summit in July 2008. Projects will be selected based on their level of innovation, accountability, and potential for sustainability. Awardees will receive seed funding and technical support to transform their social change visions into reality.

“An important goal of our work is to change people’s attitudes about youth and social change,” says Bernise. “It’s not just something to leave to our community champions and then forget about it, it’s something we can all own. We can all contribute in our own way. It’s about creating an engaged citizenry that’s actively involved in creating the future they want.”

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.shoutsingapore.org](http://www.shoutsingapore.org)



## ABHISHEK BHARADWAJ

Mumbai, India

Age: 29

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Address the needs of the homeless through a comprehensive, multi-sector approach, including coalition building, awareness-raising, and creative advocacy campaigns.

*“As a result of our efforts, people are starting to see homeless individuals as human beings.”*

After completing his Masters degree in Social Studies, Abhishek Bharadwaj didn’t look for a job; rather he spent time with homeless people living on the streets, under bridges, and in makeshift shelters in Mumbai, India. Not long afterward, he created Alternative Realities, an organization that works to raise awareness and address the needs of the city’s more than 100,000 homeless people.

In pursuing its mission, Alternative Realities collects data, mobilizes volunteers, and educates the public through media outreach and street theatre. It also improves health care access for the homeless and connects them to livelihood opportunities. A key to Alternative Realities approach is building coalitions among diverse sectors—NGOs, municipal authorities, law enforcement, hospitals, churches, and academic institutions—to address the issue of homelessness.

As part of its advocacy efforts, Alternative Realities has formed groups of homeless youth who write and enact street plays on issues related to their lives. More than 300 street plays have been performed to date. It has also collaborated with other organizations in redrafting legislation related to the homeless. As a result of these and other efforts, “the issue of homelessness has become visible in society,” says Abhishek, “and has been acknowledged by the state administration.”

Also critical is giving a human face to the issue of homelessness, an issue that makes people uncomfortable, prompting them to look the other way, says Abhishek. As part of its public education efforts, Alternative Realities organizes weekly “nights out” with the homeless to break down barriers and stimulate social interaction. “As a result of our efforts, people are starting to see homeless individuals as human beings,” says Abhishek.

Since its founding in 2003, Alternative Realities estimates that it has reached more than 50,000 homeless citizens. Among its achievements, it has successfully advocated on behalf of incarcerated homeless individuals to receive identity and ration cards. Each year, thousands of homeless people are arrested and jailed simply because they lack proper identification. Alternative Realities has also sensitized doctors toward the proper treatment of the homeless, and worked with the media to put forth a more positive image of the homeless.

Abhishek has ambitious plans for the future, including an education and vocational-training initiative for homeless children and youth and the construction of a shelter which will house up to 50,000 homeless citizens over the next five years.



## AUDREY CODERA

Pasig City, Philippines  
Age: 28

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Provide youth with loans and technical support to create sustainable micro-enterprises.

*“My vision is to have youth becoming economically sustainable so they can create social change.”*

Audrey Codera was nine when a young girl knocked on the window of her family’s car begging for money. “My family had a car, a nice home, and I didn’t have to beg,” says Audrey, now 28. “This girl was exactly my age yet faced a completely different reality.” The experience instilled in Audrey a profound desire to help others less fortunate.

As her education progressed, Audrey’s interest turned to helping young people access jobs and create business opportunities. In 2003, she created the Philippine Youth Employment Network to stimulate youth employment and employability in grassroots communities. Recognizing the enormous potential of young people to start and maintain their own enterprises, in 2006, Audrey founded YouthWorks, Inc., the first micro-finance institution for youth in the Philippines.

When she first conceived of YouthWorks, Audrey borrowed US\$200 from friends and relatives and distributed three micro-loans. Each of the youth-led enterprises was successful, with the loans paid back within three months.

To date, YouthWorks, which is based in Manila, has supported more than twenty young people, ages 13 to 30. Loans range from US\$100 to \$400, with a three percent interest rate. Now working on her third master’s degree in Political

Economy and Development, Audrey provides loan recipients with assistance in enterprise development and business planning.

In just over a year, YouthWorks boasts a successful track record. One loan of US\$100 was made to a group of seven youth, ages 13 to 16, in Baras Rizal, located southeast of Metro Manila. The youth set out to produce and market organic fertilizer. They convinced the municipal authorities to provide them with land and collected compost from local residents. Now—six months later—the group is diversifying and has received orders from Japan. Nearly 1,000 people have benefited from short-term jobs.

With another YouthWorks loan, young people recycle material from political ads into fashionable bags and wallets that are now being exported to Europe, and soon to the U.S. The project has employed nearly 300 out-of-work men.

Both projects reflect Audrey’s passion for building sustainable enterprises that produce multiple benefits. “My vision is to have youth becoming economically sustainable so they can create social change,” she says. “Already, we’re seeing young people address climate change and create employment.”

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.youthmicrofinance.com](http://www.youthmicrofinance.com)



## TOM DAWKINS

Ultimo, Australia  
Age: 28

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Create youth-controlled media outlets and creative opportunities where thousands of young people express their views, while connecting to each other and their communities.

Tom Dawkins was a university student in 2000 when he created Vibewire.net, a youth self-expression portal. “Democracy only works if we have open and accessible platforms to discuss the issues we care about,” says Tom. Today’s new media offers young people bold opportunities to connect and collaborate, he adds.

Today, Vibewire.net boasts more than 7,500 members from throughout Australia. Its website receives up to 2,000 unique visitors a day. Over the years, young people, ages 15 to 30, have contributed more than 5,000 articles through the site, ranging from political coverage to music reviews to creative writing.

Fueled by the creativity of its members, Vibewire continually expands and refreshes its approach. During the 2004 Australian election, Vibewire launched its ‘electionTracker’ project. Four Vibewire correspondents went on the campaign trail with the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader, reporting on the election from a youth perspective. Not only were they the only youth reporters on the trail, but they were the only independent media present. The project has expanded for the 2007 election, with a greater emphasis on film and audio content.

“Australia suffers from the most concentrated media ownership in the world,” says Tom. “We

also have a crisis of disengagement among young people and deepening cynicism about the political process.” Vibewire addresses both issues by actively engaging youth in an open dialogue about issues in their lives and communities.

Another Vibewire project encourages young filmmakers, ages 15 to 25, to express their creativity and perspectives. In 2007, the Reelife Short Film Festival traveled to four cities and included youth-made films from other countries.

Vibewire’s most recent initiative, the sQuareOne space, offers young people the resources, advice, and training they need to transform their media, arts, or community project ideas into reality. sQuareOne provides young innovators with workstations, computers, internet access, scanners, printers, and multimedia equipment so they can realize their visions.

“Ultimately,” says Tom, “Vibewire seeks to foster a more participatory and responsive democratic culture in Australia, where young people’s contributions are sought and valued.”

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.vibewire.org](http://www.vibewire.org), [www.vibewire.net](http://www.vibewire.net),  
and [www.s1.org.au](http://www.s1.org.au)

*“Vibewire seeks to foster a more participatory and responsive democratic culture in Australia.”*

**ANNA ROSE**

Hamilton South, Australia

Age: 23

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Mobilize youth politically, economically, and socially to take an active role in combating climate change and ensuring a clean energy future.

*“Climate change is the biggest issue facing us as a generation and as a planet.”*

“Climate change is the biggest issue facing us as a generation and as a planet,” says Anna Rose, who founded the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) in late 2006 to mobilize the nation’s youth to take action to create a clean energy future. The Coalition is made up of 25 of the country’s top youth organizations, representing over 200,000 young people.

Currently studying environmental law, Anna is well versed in climate science. Scientists estimate that we have around ten years to make serious emission cuts, she explains. Evidence of climate change can be found throughout Australia, Anna adds, from the coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef to the nation’s ongoing drought.

While Australia’s youth are active on social change issues, not enough are yet engaged in climate change activism, says Anna. AYCC educates youth about climate change through its high school program, while providing opportunities for young people to take action. In October 2007, AYCC hosted its first “Switched On” conference in which 100 youth met for four days outside Sydney to learn about the root causes of climate change and how to be part of the solution.

Believing that Australia’s elected officials and business leaders are not doing enough to combat climate change, AYCC recently launched an

Adopt-a-Politician campaign. Young people who sign up to the campaign receive regular e-mail alerts, urging them to contact their local representative and demand action on climate-related issues. Among the campaign’s platforms are urging legislators to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, implement greenhouse gas reduction targets, and pass laws to ensure all new electricity come from renewable sources.

AYCC is also working to make sure youth voices are heard at international climate change platforms. Anna recently served as a youth delegate at the UN high-level session on climate change convened by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. AYCC also plans to send a youth delegation to the next round of Kyoto Protocol negotiations in Bali this December.

**For further information, see:**  
[www.youthclimatecoalition.org](http://www.youthclimatecoalition.org),  
[www.switchedon2007.com](http://www.switchedon2007.com),  
 and [www.adoptapolitician.org](http://www.adoptapolitician.org)

**LI SHEN**

Shenyang, China

Age: 27

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and combat discrimination against homosexual men through public education and creative community outreach.

*“I think I’m doing some good things, but it’s not just me, it’s our team.”*

Li Shen’s interest in combating HIV/AIDS in China was sparked through a psychology course he enrolled in while a student at the Shenyang University of Technology. Shen volunteered to help his professor conduct research into the behaviors of gay men and prostitutes. The experience sensitized him to the enormous threat posed by HIV/AIDS to these men and the need for greater public awareness.

A large industrial city in northeastern China, Shenyang attracts many rural peasants who come in search of jobs, explains Shen. At least some of those who cannot find work turn to prostitution. Lack of awareness of the threat of HIV/AIDS among gay men and prostitutes is a growing problem, he says, with UNAIDS estimating that half of all new HIV infections in China occur during unprotected sex.

To address the issue, Shen founded the Psycho-Behavioral Intervention Group (PBIG) in Shenyang in 2003. Among its activities, PBIG distributes materials (e.g., posters, pamphlets), conducts HIV/AIDS awareness training, hosts weekly educational seminars, trains peer educators to conduct outreach among college students, and offers free testing for sexually-transmitted diseases. A critical component of PBIG’s activities is increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS and

the importance of prevention measures, such as condom use.

PBIG also helps gay men deal with the discrimination they face in their community. “Discrimination against gays is fairly widespread here,” says Shen. “People emphasize the family more than ever. Parents want their children to get married and fit in.” To facilitate a safe, supportive environment for men to discuss sensitive issues, PBIG organizes monthly leisure activities.

Currently working as an associate marketing specialist at a leading software company in Shenyang, Shen is as committed as ever to his volunteer work through PBIG. He attributes his understanding and commitment to gay rights to an ongoing dialogue with friends in Europe and the United States and to being an avid reader of news media via the Internet.

In the future, Shen seeks to expand PBIG’s efforts to include seminars on gay rights and legal issues. “I think I’m doing some good things,” he says, “but it’s not just me, it’s our team.”



## RAMA SHYAM

Mumbai, India

Age: 27

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Combat alienation, polarization, and violence among Muslim and Hindu youth through deepening their self-awareness, understanding, and respect for differences.

*“We seek to foster peace and co-existence so that differences contribute to the creation of a beautiful mosaic, rather than a fractured society.”*

In 1993, more than 900 people were killed and 2,000 injured in riots that swept through Jogeshwari, a mixed Hindu-Muslim community in Mumbai, India. While the initial violence was attributed to the demolition of a mosque, the area had long been plagued by religious and ethnic tensions.

Nearly a decade later, Rama Shyam began volunteering in Jogeshwari in hopes of addressing the root causes of the violence and hatred that continued to polarize the community. In 2004, she and Masood Aktar co-founded the Society for Awareness, Harmony, and Equal Rights (SAHER). Its goal: to promote peace, equality, and harmony through engaging Jogeshwari’s youth in efforts to engender mutual respect and understanding.

Rama realized that young people absorb beliefs at an early age and often lack the self-awareness to accommodate diverse perspectives. “One needs to expose young people to multiple realities and develop their sense of responsibility,” she says.

A key to SAHER’s approach is creating safe spaces for young people from different backgrounds to interact with and learn from one another. Toward that end, SAHER engages youth in the production of street plays that explore social issues such as substance abuse and

discrimination. It also organized a Sports Meet attended by students from twenty local schools.

In seeking to increase awareness of the impact of entrenched beliefs among the community at large, SAHER recently collaborated with university students in producing a documentary film looking at how communal beliefs influence children’s development.

SAHER’s latest project, Parwaaz, which means “to take off,” addresses youth alienation within the community. The project builds self-awareness and mutual respect among youth and is delivered through a curriculum taught in local schools.

Rama sees the issues facing Jogeshwari as symbolic of challenges confronting India as a whole. “The entire country is grappling with the growing alienation of certain segments of society, resulting in unprecedented violence,” she says. “We seek to foster peace and co-existence so that differences contribute to the creation of a beautiful mosaic, rather than a fractured society.”



## VANJA HAMZIĆ

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Age: 28

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Promote inter-faith dialogue and understanding aimed at combating discrimination based on one’s sexual orientation and gender identity.

During the Bosnian War that resulted in more than 100,000 deaths from 1992 to 1995, world attention focused on the violent divisions in the region. The war had a different effect on Vanja Hamzić, who started searching for the fundamental values that people share in common.

His search for answers took Vanja from Western Europe to the Middle East to Central and South-eastern Asia. He began exploring basic human rights, including freedom of thought, expression, and belief. “When you look at all of us together, our differences start to blend into harmony,” he says. “There’s something that connects us regardless of our faith, our class, our worldviews.”

This connection, explains Vanja, can be understood through the concept of *Logos*, a Greek term, that refers to human rationality and the universal wisdom that underlies it. In 2006, Vanja created an organization called Logos. Based in Sarajevo, Logos is distinguished as the only non-patriarchal, inter-faith organization in the Balkans working to put an end to discrimination based on one’s sexual orientation and gender identity.

Logos’ primary constituency is LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer) individuals, who struggle with oppression and violence.

Logos reaches people from across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans, providing them with a forum, free from prejudice, where they are able to dialogue and learn about inclusive interpretations of their faith.

In 2006, Logos co-created the Muslim Advocacy Initiative, a network of scholars and activists around the world who work on issues related to sexuality, gender, and human rights in Muslim communities. It also participated in the preparation of a report for the United Nations exposing acts of violence against LGBTIQ persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Logos is currently participating in the process of drafting the legislation designed to prevent discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“People fight for identity,” says Vanja, a visual artist whose works have been exhibited in countries across Europe and beyond. “It’s more important to fight for what we have in common.”

For further information, visit:  
[www.logos.org.ba/index\\_en.html](http://www.logos.org.ba/index_en.html)

*“There’s something that connects us regardless of our faith, our class, our worldviews.”*



## TALÍA DELGADO

Bucharest, Romania

Age: 29

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Harness the power of the Internet and new media tools to connect young people through communicating issues they share in common.

Believing that today's media and new technologies are powerful tools for empowering young people, Talía Delgado launched *Brainstorming: An Investigative International View*, a youth-driven, multi-media magazine.

Talía got the idea for the magazine while studying to be a journalist in Spain. She came to Romania as a volunteer in order to realize her dream. *Brainstorming* started out as a forty-page print publication and was expanded to an electronic magazine to better meet the needs of youth and extend its reach globally. "The publication encourages creativity, constructive opinions, citizenship, democratic values, and freedom of speech," says Talía.

*Brainstorming's* approach is particularly relevant in countries of the European Union, where immigration issues have fueled racism and xenophobia, explains Talía. The site encourages young people to explore and reflect on social and political issues in—and outside—their communities. Researching and writing stories offers youth a productive way to spend their free time, she adds, pointing to the allure of alcohol and drug use among youth who have few leisure or employment opportunities.

Approximately thirty young people, ages 18 to 30, from 17 countries contribute to the site's

content. *Brainstorming* is divided into ten issues areas, including human rights, politics, the environment, and minorities and social exclusion. Past articles have explored malnutrition in Indonesia, racism in Russia, and alcohol and drug addiction in Kenya.

The site also features photojournalism, including a pictorial essay Talía produced documenting the plight of North African migrant workers seeking to gain legal status in Spain.

"Our approach centers on the use of media and new technologies to engage those who are affected by development problems and encourage them to be active in promoting solutions," says Talía. *Brainstorming* offers young people of all backgrounds a means to express their views and network with their peers in Europe and elsewhere around the world.

**For more information, visit:**  
[www.brain-storming.info](http://www.brain-storming.info)



## JOHN MILLER BEAUVOIR

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Age: 25

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Train youth as active citizens and leaders who educate and empower children.

John Miller Beauvoir was born on the Haitian island of Gonave, where the vast majority of children can only dream of obtaining an education. Most work from a young age on family farms; their parents unable to afford their school fees. John was one of the lucky ones. His father, a preacher, received support from overseas missionaries to send John to school.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in international relations, John decided he wanted to give back to the children in his community. He launched *Pathway Toward the Future*, a program that trains local youth in leadership skills and educates them about environmental and health issues. These young people, in turn, offer educational support to the island's children. Currently, *Pathway Toward the Future* offers weekend classes to 35 children, ages 10 to 12. Says John, "We don't just teach them how to read, we show them how to be citizens of the community."

"The only way you can have hope for a better future is through children," he adds, emphasizing that Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, is failing to support its youngest citizens. Just over half of the country's primary-age children are enrolled in school, with less than two percent of young people finishing secondary school.

Believing it's up to the current generation of youth to lead the country toward a more positive future, John recently published *Pathway Toward the Future*, a book that serves as a call to action for the nation's youth. "Youth not only need to be involved in service to their communities, but they have to organize themselves," he says. "Only then will their voices be heard on local and national policies." John's book was distributed—not only to young people—but to political party leaders, government ministries, and the nation's President in hopes of raising awareness of the need to integrate youth views into the policy-making process.

For John, true leadership begins with setting an example for others. In addition to his volunteer activities, he is paying the tuition costs of five disadvantaged young people. "Those who succeed in life aren't just those who do big things," he says, "but those who do small things with a big heart."

"Those who succeed in life aren't just those who do big things but those who do small things with a big heart."

"Our approach centers on the use of media and new technologies to engage those who are affected by development problems."



**ANA MORAGA**

Guatemala City, Guatemala  
Age: 24

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Build the self-esteem and life options of sex workers through education, vocational training, and emotional development.

Ana Moraga was 13 when her parents moved from Guatemala to the United States. Eight years later she returned to Guatemala City, where she and Tania Torres, a friend, founded *Mujeres por la Justicia, Educación y el Reconocimiento (MuJER)*, or Women for Justice, Education, and Awareness. Its mission: to empower women sex workers to become socially and politically active through education and awareness-raising activities.

Ana’s interest in the plight of the nation’s sex workers was sparked by a documentary film—*The Railroad All-Stars*—about the women of La Linea, a red light district in Guatemala City located beside a railroad track. When she first visited La Linea, Ana was nervous that she wouldn’t be accepted. It didn’t take long before she developed a special rapport with the women who work there. Maintaining that level of trust remains a hallmark of MuJER’s approach.

“With time, persistence, and consistency, we become close friends with the women and they begin to realize that they are mothers, women, and human beings before being sex workers,” says Ana.

MuJER currently serves 45 women, providing them with literacy training, English language instruction, computer skills, exercise and relaxation techniques, and beautician courses. Says

Ana, “Our goal is to give the women tools so that they can make choices about what’s best for them and their families.”

MuJER’s literacy program, *Leer es Poder* (Reading is Power), began with one student, Vilma, who is now a community leader, encouraging other women to attend classes. Another woman, Noemi, received a MuJER scholarship to study beauty training. She now shares her knowledge by training other women sex workers.

Ana recognizes the important role that advocacy plays in ensuring the protection of women’s rights. In response to the violent murders of women in La Linea and elsewhere in Guatemala, MuJER co-hosted the Guatemalan Femicide Conference in Los Angeles in March 2007—the first international conference in the U.S. to address the issue. More than 350 people attended.

In the future, Ana hopes to establish a community center where women sex workers can gather, share their ideas, and organize around issues related to health, violence, and women’s rights.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.mujeer.cfsites.org](http://www.mujeer.cfsites.org)



**MARITZA MORALES**

Mérida, Mexico  
Age: 23

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Create an interactive theme park where young people educate their peers and adults about environmental sustainability.

Young people learn about environmental issues through books, films, TV, and the news media, but how often do they get to learn—and have fun—through experiencing the wonder of nature and the difference they can make?

In 2003, Maritza Morales began constructing the Hunab Theme Park to educate young people—and adults—about urgent environmental issues and steps they can take to be part of the solution. The park, located in X’matkuil on Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula, covers an area nearly the size of a football field. More than 13,000 people visit the park each year during an annual fair held in X’matkuil.

“The park promotes the concept of taking care of nature through games,” says Maritza, who began working on environmental issues at the age of ten.

Visitors travel through 12 zones, where they develop an appreciation for water, forests, biodiversity, and other natural phenomena. In the water exhibit, for example, participants experience what it is like to become a drop of water. They learn how water is made and the increasing threat posed by water shortages. Other exhibits explore themes ranging from recycling to preserving fisheries, from protecting endangered species to producing sustainable handicrafts.

The park is entirely staffed by children and young people, ages 7 to 23. The young volunteers show visitors how to make crafts out of natural products and teach them how to grow the ingredients in popular foods. For example, visitors plant tomato, onion, and parsley seeds in soil that they mold into the shape of a *tamale*, a popular Mexican dish. Young people take their soil creation home with them and watch as the seeds grow into plants.

In 2006, Maritza was honored with the *Premio UVM por el Desarrollo Social Award* through the national YouthActionNet™ program in Mexico, created with support from the Sylvan Laureate Foundation. In 2007, she received funding from the World Bank to create a mobile exhibit that illustrates environmental challenges in the coastal zone of Mérida. Through the exhibit, young people in towns across the Yucatán learn about the biodiversity of coastal ecosystems.

“The park promotes the concept of taking care of nature through games.”



## TAL DEHTIAR

Toronto, Canada

Age: 27

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Young business professionals contribute their knowledge and skills in developing countries.

At 17, Tal Dehtiar spent a month in Belize helping a woman farmer build up her business. The experience, coupled with a year spent traveling in Latin America in his early 20s, left Tal wondering how he could continue using his knowledge and skills to contribute to others. When he graduated from business school, Tal says: “I wasn’t craving a power suit or to climb the corporate ladder.”

It turns out, he wasn’t alone.

In 2004, Tal and fellow business school graduate, Michael Brown, launched MBAs Without Borders (MWB). Its goal: to link business professionals with for-profit and nonprofit organizations in developing countries.

Since its founding, MWB has sent over 30 MBAs to 15 countries to develop projects related to health, agriculture, finance, income generation, and the environment. Volunteers receive a stipend of US\$1,000 per month, a laptop, medications and vaccinations, a round trip plane ticket, and health insurance. The NGO or business requesting assistance provides partial financial support, which MWB supplements through the grants and donations it receives. “We don’t provide anything for free,” says Tal. “What’s great is that our partners don’t want handouts. Our cost-sharing model ensures their involvement.”

Interest in the program is strong and growing. More than 30,000 people visit MWB’s website and online social networks each month. For each position it posts, MWB receives 50 to 100 applications. MWB participants are drawn from nearly 400 communities and schools worldwide.

One MWB placement applied his marketing savvy to increase mosquito net use in malaria-prone areas of Nigeria. His strategy—producing the nets in attractive colors and promoting them through the Nigerian film industry—paid off, resulting in the sale of a million low cost nets. Other MWB projects have enabled HIV-positive women and children in Rwanda to access health insurance and a remote hospital in Haiti to develop professional accounting practices.

Through such successes, MWB seeks to transform public perceptions of the role of business in society. Says Tal, “We’re raising awareness that business can be done well and can develop local economies.” He sees MWB as part of a larger trend away from a philanthropic model of development to one based on partnership and self-reliance.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.mbaswithoutborders.org](http://www.mbaswithoutborders.org)



## ANTOINE ELOI

Washington, D.C., United States

Age: 25

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Transform the energy and ideas of university students into locally sustainable development projects.

While studying abroad in South Africa, Antoine Eloi kept meeting local university students with great ideas for how to contribute to their communities, but no support to realize their dreams. In many cultures, youth have to reach a certain age before their ideas will be taken seriously, says Antoine.

Not long afterward, he and two friends founded Leadership Initiatives (LI). Its goal: To train and support young people in realizing their social change visions. Since 2003, LI has carried out leadership programs in Namibia, Nigeria, and the Philippines benefiting more than 120 university students and dozens of community members.

“We don’t tell students how to solve problems,” says Antoine. “We simply help them to make their ideas a reality.”

In each community where it works, LI partners with a local university. After an initial interview, 15 to 20 students are selected to participate in the program. At the core of LI’s approach is asking students what problems they see, how they would like to address them, and what resources are available. During a two to three week training course, LI staff teach participants how to conduct a needs assessment, develop a budget, fundraise, network, and measure results.

Following, students form smaller groups based on the issue they seek to address and develop an action plan.

One LI project in Maiduguri, in northern Nigeria, was launched by IT students looking to improve computer literacy at local secondary schools. The team developed a curriculum and introduced it during a three-month pilot phase. Now, the curriculum is being taught in ten schools, where the project has provided employment for five university students.

LI’s mission is critical in countries like Nigeria, explains Antoine, where poor leadership, mismanagement, and corruption have left people distrustful of government. Within such an environment, “young people are ignored and marginalized—their ingenuity and innovation wasted,” he says. In the future, LI hopes to expand its approach to additional West African countries, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte D’Ivoire. “These countries need youth who are going to take the task of rebuilding their nation to heart and empower others,” says Antoine.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.leadershipinitiatives.org](http://www.leadershipinitiatives.org)

*“We don’t tell students how to solve problems. We simply help them to make their ideas a reality.”*

*“We’re raising awareness that business can be done well and can develop local economies.”*



**NEILESH PATEL**

Los Angeles, United States  
Age: 25

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Link health professionals to health-related volunteer opportunities around the world.

Two years ago, Neilesh Patel, a dental student, and a friend studying medicine were hoping to do some volunteer work while on a trip to Brazil. Internet searches yielded little in the way of volunteer opportunities, leaving the two with no option but to give up their search.

Their experience, however, planted a seed that continued to grow. Neilesh’s research pointed to an estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide who lack access to basic health care, often because there is no health worker. Some months after their trip, the two took steps to create a website to link health professionals to nongovernmental organizations, health clinics, and hospitals in need of volunteer assistance.

Today, the result of their efforts—www.healthcarevolunteer.com—lists nearly 2,000 organizations globally where health professionals can volunteer their time and expertise. The site also features the equivalent of a health “MySpace” where physicians, nurses, dentists, medical students, and others can post information about their qualifications, raise funds, and create volunteer teams. HealthCare Volunteer’s subsidiary website, www.dentalvolunteer.com, lists comparable opportunities for dental professionals. Both sites provide information on volunteer laws by country, as well as licensure

and visa requirements. Neilesh estimates that more than 12,000 volunteer connections have been made through the sites since late 2005.

In 2007, HealthCare Volunteer started placing individuals directly in volunteer positions in 12 countries, forging ties with government health ministries to facilitate placements. In Tanzania, for example, the Ministry of Health offers housing, food, and transportation to volunteers who work at certain government-run hospitals.

Both websites offer their services free of charge, with Neilesh volunteering 20 to 30 hours per week to the project. “People now realize that they can positively impact the health of others anywhere in the world,” says Neilesh, who sees HealthCare Volunteer as addressing a growing need, with more and more people wanting to exercise their roles as contributing global citizens.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.healthcarevolunteer.com](http://www.healthcarevolunteer.com)



**CHERYL PERERA**

Richmond Hill, Canada  
Age: 21

**INNOVATIVE IDEA:** Engage young people in a global movement to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children through advocacy, awareness-raising, prevention, and rehabilitation efforts.

At the age of 16, Cheryl Perera read about the commercial sexual exploitation of children for a high school project. Learning about the experiences of young people her age and younger changed her life. “What I read filled me with anger, determination, and resolve,” says Cheryl, who dedicated herself to researching the issue and mobilizing her peers to take action.

A year later, Cheryl traveled to Sri Lanka—her family’s country of origin—to learn first-hand about the child sex industry. Working with a national child protection NGO, Cheryl volunteered to disguise herself as a child prostitute. Her efforts resulted in the arrest of a 40-year-old pedophile, a senior executive of a multi-national corporation.

In 2005, Cheryl founded OneChild, a youth-led nonprofit organization that empowers young people to take action against the global sex trade in children. Among its activities, OneChild conducts advocacy, raises awareness, develops youth programs and educational materials, provides support to victims, and investigates the root causes of child sexual exploitation.

A cornerstone of OneChild’s approach is public education aimed at prevention. Research conducted by OneChild revealed that Canadians comprise a significant portion of child sex tour-

ists from North America and that Canada had a weak record for taking action. To spotlight the issue, OneChild convinced Air Canada to broadcast a video on all its international flights warning travelers of laws against child abuse. An estimated 400,000 passengers view the video each month.

OneChild is also collaborating with the PREDA Foundation in the Philippines to construct a rehabilitation center for girls rescued from the child sex trade. To date, OneChild members have raised over US\$40,000 for the project, which will offer girls counseling, formal and non-formal education, and vocational skills training.

Cheryl spends a significant amount of her time speaking about the issue at schools and national and international forums. Her age, says Cheryl, is both an asset and an obstacle as she sets out to convince policymakers and business leaders of the importance of taking action. “We work to change popular perceptions of youth as simply adults in-waiting, who lack the intellect and experience to make a meaningful contribution to society,” she says.

**For further information, visit:**  
[www.one-child.ca](http://www.one-child.ca)

*“We work to change popular perceptions of youth as simply adults in-waiting.”*

*“People now realize that they can positively impact the health of others anywhere in the world.”*

# Youth**Action**Net™ *Fellows...*



*...in action*

### **YouthActionNet™**

Launched in 2001 by the International Youth Foundation and Nokia, YouthActionNet™ invests in the power and promise of young people to create positive change. Through its Global and National Fellowship Programs, customized trainings, dynamic website, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, YouthActionNet™ offers young change makers ideas, resources, and connections to like minds around the world. In 2006, YouthActionNet™ launched its first national institute in Mexico with support from the Sylvan/Laureate Foundation, with additional institutes planned for Brazil, Chile, Turkey, and Spain.

For more information, please visit: [www.youthactionnet.org](http://www.youthactionnet.org)

### **Nokia**

Nokia is committed to having a positive impact on society that extends beyond the advanced technology, products, and services it creates. It has invested in community projects supporting young people and education in 30 countries, benefiting more than one million young people. The company has an active employee volunteering program which last year saw its employees give more than 18,000 hours to local community projects. Nokia is also supporting innovative technology projects designed to bridge the digital divide and bring the benefits of mobile technology to communities around the world.

More information about Nokia is available at: [www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)

### **International Youth Foundation**

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) is a global nonprofit organization uniquely dedicated to preparing young people to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. Founded in 1990, IYF's worldwide network of partner organizations has grown to 70 countries, helping young people to shape their futures through proven programs that tie education to work, improve employability, and enable them to play a positive role in their communities. IYF collaborates with businesses, governments, and civil society organizations to build effective and sustainable programs that positively impact the lives of young people worldwide.

For more information, please visit: [www.iyfnet.org](http://www.iyfnet.org)

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