

Green Entrepreneurship

Successful business cases of Green Entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean



Boutique Sociale: Social shops for refurbished basic products in Lebanon

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Project Name:	Boutique Sociale, Arcenciel
City, country:	Damour (Southern Chouf), Jisr el Bacha (Beirut North Suburb) , Taanail (Bekaa), – Halba (North of Lebanon) Lebanon.
Name of entrepreneur:	Arcenciel

Description: Four shops run by teams of repairers, refurbishers and receptionists from vulnerable and marginalized groups (people with disabilities, young unemployed groups etc.) where donated clothes, accessories and sundries are refurbished and sold at low cost (or no cost) to socially excluded groups; “*people in difficulty serving people in difficulty*”. The concept is now being launched in Syria.

Donated items are first sorted by type, then according to age and gender, cleaned and shelved. Each item is valued and all non reparable items are discarded. When clients approach the store a file is opened in their name, they are allocated a number of free points per month and able to choose items according to their needs.

Investment: Suitable premises equipment and furniture as shelving, washing machines, desks, etc +salaries and trainings all depending on space available.

Stakeholders: Arcenciel, donors: (stocks from shops, wholesalers, and individuals, underprivileged groups).

Employment generation: 12 in total (with an average of 3 per shop)

Timeline: 1995 initiative began.
3 month period for setting up each shop

Feasibility study: Needs of the beneficiaries of Arcenciel's services were identified mainly through health and rehabilitation programs. Community workers, who visit people in their homes observed the reluctance of families in poverty of so many families to ask for in kind contributions or money. An enquiry among friends of Arcenciel revealed their willingness to collect items and donate them.

Geo-social-economic setting: The Social Stores are located in Arcenciel's centers all over Lebanon which regularly receive people in need and provide them with various services. These centers are located in needy and popular areas with an easy access.

Key features: The project is of public utility aiming at all persons in difficulty with no discrimination whatsoever. It is a free service with a large impact on social and environmental life. It can also be considered as a community based project for it encourages the community to be involved in the process.

Overall rationale and motivation:	Provide people in disadvantaged groups with basic needs, such as clothing in a dignified and orderly way as well as generate employment opportunities which allow peer to peer exchange. Help disadvantaged groups' access basic needs. Reduce waste and revalue resources through refurbishment and recycling. Help people in economic difficulty manage their budgets through voucher payment system.
Strengths:	Established working system and organized categorization of items so people in need can easily select their items of choice in a fair and respectful matter, limiting abuse in order to serve the largest number possible by allowing each person a certain amount of items per month. Also an employment/volunteering opportunity for people with difficulties and a place for exchange between communities and individuals.
Challenges and constraints:	The reception of "unwanted" or "unsuited for distribution" items which creates an unwanted load on the stocks which creates a strain on space, as well as a problem of disposing items. The unavailability and in balance between supply and demand, certain items are constantly demanded and not always available. Collection and transportation, when the donors is not able to deliver himself (large quantities, remote area /..)
Direct activities and impacts:	<i>Social:</i> The provision of the free in-kind help results in the fulfilment of basic needs <i>Environmental:</i> The collection of unwanted goods which reduces waste <i>Economic:</i> The creation of 3 jobs per shop.
Evidence of a holistic approach/world view:	The concept is simple, easy to duplicate, economically viable and respectful to human dignity and environmental sustainability.
Scale of benefits:	2845 beneficiaries, 200,000 items supplied, it is important to note that this is a 100% non for profit activity.
Policies, incentives and regulations needed:	Social shops in Lebanon are attractive because of the national ban of importing used clothes and similar items.
Lessons and recommendations:	Never assume that poverty is visible : people in need are not always those you think they are, Lebanese are generous but they need to trust that what they donate is properly disposed of, Lebanese are unaware of environmental issues, and awareness raising has become a new objective within Arcenciel. Replicate the project with all its features and key elements: proper recruitment and training / peer to peer approach / best quality offered / dignity and respect of persons served / best presentation and good space management / non discrimination / trust / good organization and management.

Key references:
www.arcenciel.org