SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES AND PRACTICE

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Introduction

KIWANJA.NET – KEN BANKS

" *I shall pass this way but once. Any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.*

ETIENNE DE GRELLET, QUAKER MISSIONARY

While the term 'social entrepreneurship' is relatively new, social entrepreneurs are not. Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing in the 1800s, was a social entrepreneur. Dr Maria Montessori, who developed the Montessori approach to early childhood education in the early 1900s, was also a social entrepreneur. Social entrepreneurship, as a specific term to describe those driven, persistent, ambitious individuals working on innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems – people such as Florence and Maria – only began to appear in social change literature as recently as the 1960s and 1970s.

The discipline found one of its early champions in Bill Drayton, who founded the Ashoka network in 1980 (Bill, who wrote one of the forewords to this book, is often described as the 'grandfather of social entrepreneurship'). Ashoka became one of the first organizations dedicated to specifically supporting and promoting social entrepreneurship, and today it is one of the largest global networks of what it refers to as 'innovators for the public'. Seminal publications such as Charles Leadbeater's *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur* in 1997 went on to help the practice gain further traction and attention.

Whilst the term has become mainstream over recent years, particularly in academic circles, there remains confusion and concern around both definition and the struggle for sustainability in many social entrepreneurship activities. Indeed, in my work over the past two decades – the last five as an Ashoka Fellow – I find some of the most heated debates centre on the question of definition, with the only thing everyone agreeing on being that it's problematic. While it is sometimes useful to have clear definitions – academia is a fan, in particular – given the wide reach and influence of social entrepreneurship it is perhaps more helpful to allow the term to be used more loosely. I, for one, didn't identify myself as a social entrepreneur until I was first approached by Ashoka in 2009, and millions of other innovators and social change agents around the world today would no doubt feel the same. I'm still not sure if I am one, to be honest, but don't think it matters. Actions speak louder than words, and the label attached to a particular activity is unlikely to have much impact on how that activity develops although, admittedly, being labelled a social

entrepreneur does seem to open doors to funding and support not available to people not officially labelled or recognized as one. This, in my view, is one thing the sector needs to work on.

If I'm honest, I'm drawn more towards the term 'social innovation' than 'social entrepreneurship'. I prefer the term because, while it also focuses on the social aspect of the work, it doesn't imply the application of business skills or practices to the initiative. Whilst 'innovation' may also be a contentious word – again, definitions are wide and varied – in my view many of the social innovators I meet and work with, including those showcased in this book, have genuinely developed new approaches to often-old problems, and for that alone I see their work as innovative. Business practices – activities you may define as 'entrepreneurship' – are not always present. It is one component of the complex, wider debate if they really need to be or not.

A journey into meaning and empathy

The seeds for what was to become my later life's work were planted at a very young age. Our mother, who brought my brother, two sisters and I up on her own after the death of our father when I was six, encouraged us to be inquisitive, enquiring and curious. My love of nature and the outdoors, which would later lead me to conservation work in Africa, started from spending long days and evenings outside, mixed with country walks collecting insects and flowers, and looking and listening for birds. I was fortunate to spend my childhood and much of my early adulthood in Jersey, where I was born – an island blessed with natural beauty – and my mother drew every last drop of value from it not only while we were growing up but also for herself, right up until her death.

FIGURE 0.1   Early family photo: Ken, second right, with brother and sisters

PHOTO: Joan Banks

My love of writing stemmed from my mother's encouragement to read, and the very tangible support she gave by buying me my first typewriter – a second-hand cast iron Olympus – when I was 10 years old. I would spend hours typing away, making up imaginary exam and quiz papers, writing poetry, and doing homework. The *Amoco Cadiz* oil tanker disaster in March 1978, which threatened the island's beaches, inspired me to write a small book on oil which I still have to this day. My mother encouraged me to reach far and wide for information, and I still treasure the written response I got from the BBC. Later, the poetry I wrote would lead me to win two island-wide competitions, and cement my love of creative writing.

Hacking the code

Thanks to Mr Cooper, who ran a social club on the estate where I grew up, I was exposed to technology early. The large, heavy Commodore PET computers he owned did not fail to spark my curiosity and interest and, while other children used them to play games, I figured out how to hack into the code and break them, kick-starting a career in information technology. I soon began writing teaching programs for children with learning difficulties (the social club doubled up as an education centre), and I was earning pocket money developing software for Mr Cooper, who was also a teacher. Looking back, this was perhaps the early sign of an entrepreneurial flair which would develop and grow as I got older. Earning an income, albeit a small one, at a young age certainly taught me to value money, and it gave me a degree of independence that many friends didn't have. The same applies today, decades later, as I find comfort and success in the freedom of self-employment.

My early flair for computing didn't go unnoticed by the IT teacher at college, who shared the software I was writing there – including a simple word-processing application – with a local technology company. I was offered the opportunity to quit college and start a career in software development, but – unlike Bill Gates – decided to see my education out. To the surprise of many people, to this day I have had no formal training in technology, despite it being a cornerstone of almost all of my efforts to help make the world a better place.

Beating the education system

Sadly, too many of the world's education systems seem to curb many of the early instincts of childhood, and mine was no exception. As results-driven education dominates, creativity often takes a backseat, and our curious, always-questioning young minds slowly become more critical and closed. I fought against this, and as a result was always something of an outsider through much of my childhood. I was described by teachers as 'too thoughtful and sensitive', as if these were negative traits. I left school unhappy, having failed six out of eight exams despite being described as 'intelligent with great potential'. After a spell at college studying business, where I did a little better, I left school and entered the world of work, taking up a position at a merchant bank. Despite my struggles, I was lucky that the finance industry in Jersey was sufficiently buoyant at the time to need as many people as it could get, regardless of qualifications.

Needing new direction

As I settled into work, a cosy career in offshore banking beckoned. Despite this, I even drifted between banks, moving from the bullion delivery team in one, to become the operator of the mainframe computer in another. While banking promised to deliver materially, spiritually it felt far removed from the kinds of things I felt I should be doing. I'd already started taking an interest in global development, something kick-started after watching Live Aid in 1985, a global music event organized in response to the Ethiopian famine.

I struggled to understand how, with all of the money and resources that the international development sector had at its disposal, such inequality could not just exist but appeared to grow across vast swathes of the planet. I also felt a sense of guilt, something I'm not ashamed to admit today, that I was one of the fortunate ones to be born on a side of the world where many of these injustices did not exist. As I read more and took more of an interest, these questions increasingly challenged my 'thoughtful and sensitive' mind.

Africa calling

A chance trip to Zambia in 1993 to help build a school as part of a Jersey government project changed everything for me. For the first time I came face to face with some of the realities of life for people much less fortunate than myself. It was an uncomfortable, but hugely informative few weeks. Whilst there, I sought out a local artist and bought one of his paintings. It turned out he was holding multiple jobs to keep his five sons at school after his wife had died of an HIV/AIDS-related illness a couple of years earlier. I admired him and his determination, and supported him financially on my return home up until his own death, two years later, of a similar illness. Worried that his sons would be forced out of school and, even worse, split up, I made copies of his painting and sold them at a local art market in Jersey. The proceeds, along with those from a barbeque event I organized, helped keep the brothers together and through school. To this day we are still in touch – although it's now through Facebook, of course – and the family are thriving. What happened with Justice Kabango and his family set the tone for everything that followed – a strong, built-in desire to provide people with whatever opportunity I could to help them better themselves and meet their potential.

I followed up the Zambia trip with another Jersey government project in 1995, this time to help build a hospital in northern Uganda. My thirst for knowledge and understanding continued unabated, and I wanted to spend as much time in the field as possible in my quest to understand what life was like for the people I felt a drive to help. On my return I applied to Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) for a two-year overseas placement, but was turned down. I was devastated, but this turned out to be just the first of a number of major setbacks. My response was to quit my job, sell everything I owned up to that point, and to move to England with just two suitcases to study social anthropology with development studies at Sussex University. Fortunately somebody there believed in me, and the introduction to anthropology

turned out to be pivotal to the work I was to do in later years. During my studies I was also introduced to the concept of appropriate technologies, another pivotal moment, and I thrived studying subjects that genuinely interested and inspired me. I graduated in 1999, missing out on a 'First Class' degree by less than 1 per cent.

One step forward, two steps back

The more I read, the more I wrote and the more I studied, the more I realized that life sucked for the vast majority of people on the planet. This continued to trouble me deeply. Despite the enormous scale of the challenges these people faced, figuring out how I could contribute to any kind of solution, however small, became my call to action. But for longer than I remember I struggled to figure out precisely what that action should be. How could I – *me* – contribute to fixing these huge, global injustices? It would have been so much easier not to care, to turn my back, but I did not seem to be wired for such a response.

After graduating, my search continued and I ended up returning to the world of technology. I became a team leader at Cable & Wireless as they accelerated the rollout of digital cable television across the United Kingdom. Fate later took me to Finland where I taught English to senior business executives. I applied to study for a Masters in Development Geography at the University of Helsinki, but was turned down. I still remember burning their refusal letter on my balcony in frustration. I was drifting, and becoming increasingly disillusioned. Jobs in international development were hard to come by, and that seemed the only way to fulfil my ambition and dream. How wrong I turned out to be.

I turned my attention back to voluntary work, and online found a primate sanctuary in Calabar, southern Nigeria in need of a project manager. I met a trustee for coffee in Brighton train station and within a few weeks, after selling all of my belongings once again, I was on my way back to Africa. It was a tough year, spent in suffocating heat and humidity, mixed with the odd bout of malaria. But it was worth it as I continued to learn a huge amount, at first hand, of the problems being faced by communities there. I still didn't know what I could genuinely and meaning-fully do to help, though, and I'd often sit in my room at night with a candle, trying to capture my thoughts in a diary, continually probing while drinking cheap Nigerian beer. As with much of the previous 10 years, I didn't find anything.

From motorbikes to mobile

It took a late night motorcycle accident on a busy road in Calabar for my life to turn. After eight days my leg was finally put back together in a hospital in Jersey. I lay there in pain with no money, no mobility, no job, nowhere to live and still no idea where my life was headed. This was the lowest I was to get. Soon after I received a random phone call from an ex-colleague at Jersey Zoo where I'd previously worked writing their membership system. He offered me the chance to work on a very early mobile-for-development project. I jumped at the chance and upped sticks once more

and moved over to England to live. It was January 2003, 10 years after my Zambia trip and the beginning of my search. Figuring out how mobile phones, still rare in number but spreading quickly across the developing world, could help solve some of the more pressing conservation and development problems of our time was a perfect fit for me, blending my passion for technology with a passion for international development and a desire to help people solve their own problems.

My one-year contract turned into two as the work we were doing gained traction. Most of that first year was spent building a conservation portal called wildlive!, where people could download conservation-themed mobile games, animal ringtones and wallpaper images, and get live news from the field, all through their mobile phones. It was groundbreaking, and an exciting time to be working in information and communication technology for development, or ICT4D as it was beginning to be known. 2003 also marked the birth of kiwanja.net, my own organization through which I began openly sharing my work. During the second year I co-authored one of the earliest reports on the potential of mobile technology to help in conservation and development work, and it was during this time that the seeds of an idea for a project of my own were sown.

Disruptive grassroots messaging

During one of our many field trips to Bushbuckridge, an area straddling the eastern border of Kruger National Park in South Africa, I was approached by the park authorities. They were trying to determine whether they could use text messaging to better communicate with the communities living around the park. Phones were far from everywhere, but they were appearing, and mobile coverage in the area was spreading. After some research I was able to find a few messaging tools, but these required internet access and credit cards to work, and neither of these were available to the Kruger staff. I shared the bad news and returned to my regular work.

F I G U R E   0.2   Bushbuckridge: The inspiration behind FrontlineSMS

PHOTO: Ken Banks

It wasn't until January of the following year, 2005, that a solution came to me, and it came quite randomly during a Saturday night football show. I wondered whether you could connect a mobile phone with a cable to a laptop computer, and use software to send and receive group messages through the phone, not the internet. I jotted down a few notes, drew a diagram and the following morning jumped online. No 'offline' messaging platforms seemed to exist, and certainly nothing aimed at the kinds of grassroots user I had in mind. A further search revealed the Hayes modem commands needed to instruct a phone to send a message, and further commands showed me how to read messages back. eBay was my last stop, where I found a Nokia 6100 mobile phone for sale from one supplier, and a cable from another. Safely ordered, I got back to what was left of my weekend.

A few days later the packages arrived, as had my moment of truth. Fortunately, I'd previously worked with communications devices so configuring everything was second nature. Once complete, I opened up 'Terminal', a communications program which came with all Windows computers, and asked the phone to respond if it was there. 'OK' appeared boldly on the laptop screen. Good. Next I sent down the three commands needed to tell it to send a text message to my own phone, which sat next to me, and waited. A few seconds later my mobile beeped. It had worked. I replied to the text message, and asked the laptop to request the phone to send up any messages in the inbox through the cable. Up came my reply on the laptop screen. It was a true eureka moment, even though technically it was not difficult at all to do. I began to imagine the possibilities of grassroots NGOs being able to send large numbers of text messages to groups of people, and then handle and sort replies, all through a piece of software I would need to write.

That week I hastily put together a two-page proposal. I didn't need much money, but did need a development laptop and a couple more phones, modems and cables, plus the VisualBasic.NET programming environment in which to write it (and a couple of books to help me figure out what to do). Karen Hayes and Simon Hicks, the friends from Jersey Zoo, helped me secure a little start-up capital from two former Vodafone directors – enough to buy the kit I needed – and by the summer I was ready to start coding. I needed somewhere quiet to focus, so followed my now-wife over to Finland (where she was born) and wrote ProjectSMS while she did a summer job there. Through much trial and error, and plenty of learning on my feet – I'd never written a Windows application before, never mind one which needed to communicate with a mobile phone – I eventually got something not only to work, but to work quite well. I kept refining the software over the following weeks, adding an 'auto-reply' feature after the realization that it might be helpful came to me during a bus journey across London. By the time October 2005 had come, the name had changed to FrontlineSMS, the software was about as good to go as I felt it needed to be, and the website (which I also wrote) was up. I pushed it out to the world and returned to my day job.

FrontlineSMS is unleashed on the world

FrontlineSMS was still a side hobby, as it had been since conception, and my paid work at the time involved testing the operating systems of mobile phones. I was

particularly good at finding bugs and crashing the devices, and because of that regularly found myself with time on my hands as the programmers and engineers tried to figure out what I'd done. While I waited, I made good use of the time to search for, and e-mail, anyone I could find online who was interested in, working on or writing about the use of technology – and mobile phones in particular – in conservation and development around the world.

I pitched FrontlineSMS to every single one of them. Some downloaded it and tried it out. Others shared news with potential users they knew. Others blogged and wrote about it. I was relentless in my outreach, something which continued throughout the history of the project. Word travelled quickly, and far and wide. People seemed very quickly to 'get' what FrontlineSMS was all about, and why I had written it. Within two weeks I'd got my first user, a civil society organization in Zimbabwe called Kubatana. They immediately deployed FrontlineSMS to help get news and information to and from communities suffering under the Mugabe regime. For an idea seeded in a national park, I was pleasantly surprised to see it being deployed in activism. That early trend continued, with various forms of activism representing the majority of the more significant uses over the first couple of years.

All manner of interesting uses continued to come in, everything from coffee prices to farmers in Aceh to security alerts for fieldworkers in Afghanistan. I knew what was happening because I'd written the software in a way that meant potential users had to contact me for activation codes before it would fully function. (The activation codes, incidentally, were local names of the places David Livingstone, the famous missionary explorer, had visited on his travels across Africa.) Requiring registration was very unpopular among the dedicated, hardcore software development and activist community, but I realized I had to know who was using it, what for and where if I was to be able to share their stories (assuming they wanted them to be shared), and continue to add useful functionality based on the use cases, and fix bugs. Despite doing it for all the right reasons I was challenged on my approach during those early years, but stood my ground. The project wasn't being funded by anyone, so I didn't have donors or partners to answer to. Remaining 'independent' was key to its eventual success and, as it turned out, my decision on activation codes was vindicated when evidence-hungry donors came on the scene a couple of years later.

And then came the Nigerian elections

In 2007 things stepped up a gear. The year before I had been accepted as a Visiting Fellow at Stanford University, mentoring and supporting other social entrepreneurs working on technology-driven social change. Ironically, they didn't think much of FrontlineSMS when I applied, so I had to continue that work in my own time. That said, the Fellowship itself was somewhat fortunate. A Fellow from the 2005 class, Erik Sundelof, contacted me about my messaging software and, although he didn't end up using it in his work he did think the Reuters Digital Vision Fellows Program he was on was a great fit for me. I agreed, and applied, but was rejected. Not for the first time I was hugely disappointed. I waited a few days, and responded with a carefully crafted e-mail describing how useful I could be to the other Fellows. Stanford changed its mind, and I was on my way. To save money, I lived in a VW camper van

on the edge of campus, which became something of a joke as donors came on board. Not only did it allow me to stretch my limited finances – the Fellowship was unpaid – but living in a van somehow kept me focused and 'real'.

By April 2007, FrontlineSMS had a growing number of interesting use cases, but downloads were less than 100 as it approached its two-year anniversary. Suffice to say, it wasn't setting the world on fire. I considered pulling the plug, and started diverting my attention to other projects. But then a phone call in the middle of the night, followed by an e-mail the following day, diverted my attention back. It was from a group calling themselves the Nigerian Mobile Election Monitors (NMEM). The 2007 Nigerian presidential elections were a couple of weeks away, and they were going to use FrontlineSMS to carry out citizen monitoring. A press release followed. My initial reaction, after the excitement had worn off, was that they must be mad. But they were serious. Regardless, if they were going to do this, I thought, the least I could do was help them promote it. After all, the more citizens who got to hear about it, the more would text in their observations (and, in addition, I had something of a soft spot for all things Nigerian after my time there). I pushed the press release out to a few people, including my good friend Bill Thompson who had contacts at the BBC, and he replied. Shortly before the polls opened, FrontlineSMS appeared in an article on the elections on the BBC website. Things would never be the same again.

F I G U R E 0.3   The breakthrough moment: FrontlineSMS on the BBC website (via news.bbc.co.uk)

Knock knock

I've always believed that if you do good things, money will follow. And it did. The MacArthur Foundation contacted me as the Nigerian election use gained ground among the mobile and activism communities. They offered me a $200,000 grant to do a major rewrite and build a new, better website, but they first needed evidence that it was finding use beyond Nigeria, and luckily my insistence of collecting information about users meant I could share a number of great case studies with them. It was enough, and the funding came through. I was still at Stanford, though, and MacArthur insisted the funds would have to go through them. I was offered 'Visiting Scholar' status and stayed on another year after the end of my original Fellowship, and ran the FrontlineSMS project from my desk and my van. Stanford took 35 per cent of the money for the privilege of handling the grant, but there was still enough to build a solid new version of FrontlineSMS, and Wieden+Kennedy, the global advertising agency, had already offered to work with me on the project, so at very reduced rates they built and designed a new website, and gave us a fantastic new logo and brand.

The relaunch went well and the user base continued to grow, with a huge variety in deployments. FrontlineSMS was being used in the Azerbaijani elections to help mobilize the youth vote. It was used in Kenya to report breakages in fences caused by elephants, and ran the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW-SOS) emergency help line, allowing workers to receive immediate assistance in case of personal emergency. It was deployed in the DRC as part of the Ushahidi mapping platform (more in this book later) to collect violence reports via SMS, and was deployed by Grameen Technology Centre in Uganda to communicate with their Village Phone network. Projects in Cambodia and El Salvador used it to help create transparency in agricultural

FIGURE 0.4   The relaunched FrontlineSMS, complete with new logo

PHOTO: Ken Banks

markets, and Survivors Connect made use of it in a number of countries to run anti-trafficking reporting systems among vulnerable communities. The list went on.

The ups and downs of growth

As this growth took hold I found myself with users who were becoming increasingly dependent on me for support, and speaking and writing commitments subsequently rose. For the first time the challenges of financial sustainability came into play. Whereas I had previously handled FrontlineSMS as a side project, it was gradually demanding more and more of my time. Something had to give.

As MacArthur's money ran out, putting any future growth in doubt, Larry Diamond – Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Stanford University, and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute – wrote to the Hewlett Foundation, who were based just up the road from campus. Larry had become a huge supporter and friend, and he saw FrontlineSMS as a significant innovation in his field. Hewlett later responded and granted the project $400,000. Things were really beginning to move. Hewlett were also happy to give the funds to me directly. Fortunately, a few months earlier I had founded my own 501c3 tax-exempt US foundation in hope, and anticipation, of further funding. I sold my VW van and returned to the United Kingdom in the late summer of 2008 with two years' funding secured.

Over the next few years funding came in as often as the awards and recognition. The Open Society Institute, Rockefeller Foundation and Omidyar Network all contributed support in the region of $1 million dollars. Fellowships and awards came in from PopTech, the Tech Awards, National Geographic, Ashoka, Curry Stone, the Pizzigati Prize, the World Technology Network, Cambridge Business Magazine, the Royal Society of Arts and the University of Sussex. FrontlineSMS was coming of

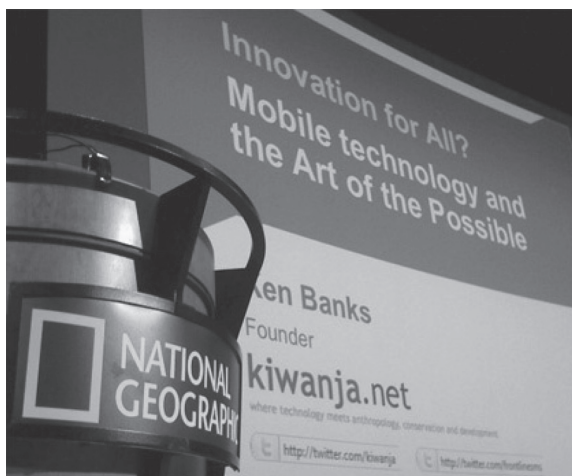**FIGURE 0.5** Speaking at National Geographic HQ: A career highlight

PHOTO: Ken Banks

age, and was beginning to grow. We had staff, and offices, and were turning into a fully-fledged organization.

Users, users everywhere

As well as the things we'd planned, elsewhere things began happening organically. A student at Stanford, Josh Nesbit, who I met during my time there, had made waves in the mobile health sector after using FrontlineSMS to great effect in a hospital in Malawi. His project grew, becoming FrontlineSMS:Medic and, later, Medic Mobile. Ben Lyon developed a similar adaptation for the mobile money sector, giving rise to FrontlineSMS:Credit. Other variants followed, including FrontlineSMS:Radio, FrontlineSMS:Learn and FrontlineSMS:Legal. It was fascinating to see others building new, sector-specific functionality on top of the core FrontlineSMS platform I had built, and for a while FrontlineSMS seemed to be everywhere.

FIGURE 0.6 FrontlineSMS at St Gabriel's Hospital, Malawi
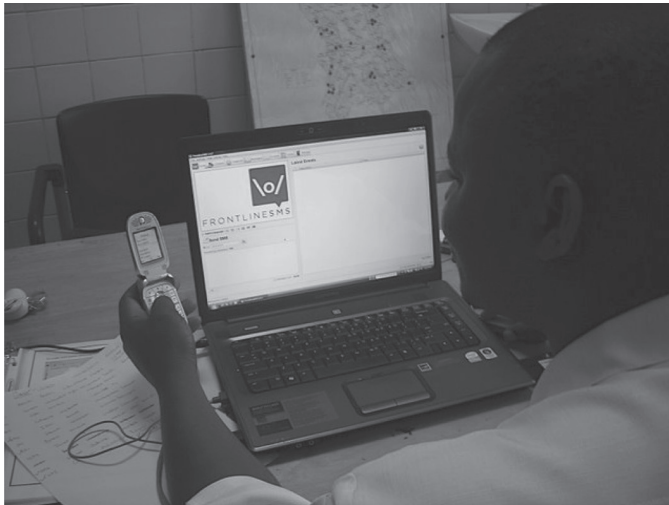
PHOTO: Josh Nesbit

This popularity began to be reflected in the numbers. The number of downloads would soon hit the hundreds of thousands, the number of countries where it was active pass 170, and the number of people benefiting from its use hit upwards of 20 million. Users were beginning to win awards, and funding, for their own use of the platform. What was happening was living proof of something I'd said a couple of years earlier about why I thought FrontlineSMS was special:

> FrontlineSMS provides the tools necessary for people to create their own projects that make a difference. It empowers innovators and organizers in the developing world to achieve their full potential through their own ingenuity.

Growing pains and a time to step back

With success came different kinds of pressure, and by 2011 it was all beginning to change for me. What started out as a desire to innovatively apply technology to grassroots development challenges had become more about running an organization, and this wasn't something I really wanted to do. I didn't think I'd be particularly good at it, either. After an extended handover, where my senior management team effectively ran FrontlineSMS for me, I announced that I'd be stepping back in May 2012. It wasn't a difficult decision.

I've always maintained that it's important to be aware of your limitations just as much as your strengths, and as FrontlineSMS grew its way out of my one-bedroom flat in Cambridge and my VW camper at Stanford University, it became clear that the project needed a whole new set of skills to take it to the next level. In one of my favourite blog posts – 'The Rolling Stones School of Innovation Management' – I wrote about how the Rolling Stones needed three different managers over the course of their careers, each of whom had entirely different skills needed at very different stages of their growth. Funnily enough, FrontlineSMS followed a similar trajectory with different needs at the technological, business and organizational levels. As I wrote back then:

> As The Stones example demonstrates, each phase requires a very different skill set, and it would take an extraordinary individual to be able to manage and deliver successfully on each. While I may have been the right person – in the right place at the right time at the very least – to successfully deliver on Phase One, that doesn't mean I'm the right person for Phase Two, or Three. A large part of building a successful organisation is assembling a talented, diverse team with complementary skill sets. Identifying gaps and being honest about our own strengths and weaknesses is a large part of the process.

The handover was met with a mixture of surprise and enthusiasm. Founders rarely step away from their creations, in some cases dragging them back down in the process, and many people saw what we did at FrontlineSMS as a model for others to follow. As I closed the door behind me, I found myself with a new lease of life. Within months of my departure I had started a new project, Means of Exchange, had ramped up my consultancy services and was planning a new book. I continued to speak and write widely, and advise and mentor a range of organizations. I was invited to be Ambassador for International Development at Sussex University, and was appointed a founding member of the UK Government's Department for International Development's (DFID) 'Digital Advisory Board'. I travelled with the UK Prime Minister during an official visit to Africa, and was nominated for the TED Prize. Those early struggles for meaning and purpose seemed like a long way off.

A few words on empathy

Anyone connected with or interested in social entrepreneurship could not have failed to notice the growing debate around empathy (ie the ability to understand and share the feelings of another). For me and my work, empathy was critical. I only

felt remotely qualified to help grassroots non-profits in Africa with their communication problems because I'd spent the best part of 20 years living and working with them. It gave me an understanding and insight – and yes, empathy – which was not only crucial to my solution working for them, but it also gave me credibility among the people I was trying to help.

According to Ashoka's Empathy Initiative:

> Applied empathy encompasses the abilities to feel and understand another's perspective, and then act with a concern for the welfare of others. Consequently, empathy requires a number of different skills and aptitudes: emotional literacy, perspective-taking, self-regulation, communication, problem-solving, and more. For individuals, such skills are correlated with greater success in reasoning, collaboration, and academic and professional performance. For communities, a greater empathetic capacity facilitates a greater likelihood of conflict resolution and cooperation.

Social innovators looking to develop solutions to problems faced by communities in the developing world – and there are plenty of them – have little alternative than to actually get out there and spend time with them. Empathy is critical if any solution is to have a chance of success, and there really are no short cuts. It takes time, and effort.

That said, while we should certainly be encouraging people to take an interest in helping others, we also need to make sure it is done respectfully. I frequently argue that we shouldn't develop solutions to problems we don't understand, that we shouldn't take ownership of a problem that isn't ours, and we certainly shouldn't build solutions from thousands of miles away and then jump on a plane in search of a home for them. This, in the ICT4D world where I spent most of my time, is generally what tends to happen. Good intentions, often poorly executed.

In a recent guest article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, I argued this very point. My argument was well received, but one commenter asked what I suggest all the people who lived far away from the problems of the developing world should do with their passion and time. My response was that there are problems everywhere, including where they lived, and it might be better to try to solve some of those instead. If people really do want to contribute to solving the problems of 'others' then they really need to go and live under the same conditions as them for a while. Each of the social innovators in this book had direct exposure to the problems they decided to solve, and with the people those problems affected.

Problems with the teaching of social entrepreneurship

During my time at Stanford University I became increasingly exposed to social entrepreneurship, social innovation and design thinking as academic disciplines. I found myself meeting increasing numbers of smart young people looking to colleges and universities to equip them with the skills they felt they needed to 'go out and change the world'. I was a bit taken aback. You didn't need qualifications to change the world, did you? Often I'd dig deeper and ask what they wanted to do when they graduated. Answers such as 'I want to be a social entrepreneur' perplexed

me. Few people I know in the messy, often frustrating world of social entrepreneurship ever set out with the explicit aim of becoming one. Rather, they stumbled across a problem, a wrong or a market inefficiency which bothered them to such an extent that they decided to dedicate much – if not all – of their lives to putting it right. It was rarely, if ever, part of a wider plan.

Many of the students I met were unlikely to experience that problem, injustice or market inefficiency within the walls of their college or university. Teaching the mechanics of social innovation may be helpful, yes, but only if matched with passion, and a cause, to which people can apply it. Desperately seeking that one thing that switches you on can be a lonely, difficult journey. It took me long enough.

What I was witnessing was the increasing institutionalization of social entrepreneurship. I thought it unhelpful on many fronts, not to mention that it could easily be seen as a barrier by many motivated young people unable to afford further education. Not only that, it implied that social change was a well-thought out process, when in reality it is far messier and more random than that, as many of the case studies in this book testify. You don't *learn* how to be a social entrepreneur in the classroom. You learn by being out *doing* in the world.

Passion and purpose are critical, although it is far easier to learn the mechanics of social entrepreneurship – business plans and elevator pitches among them – than to manufacture a passion or calling in life. You may be the person best-qualified to solve a particular problem, but that's of little use if you don't find it. Finding purpose is often the toughest part of the process, and there are few short cuts other than to leave your comfort zone and get yourself out there. You won't, after all, get to experience 'Third World' maternal care in London, Paris or New York, but you will if you follow Laura Stachel's lead and spend hard time on the ground in maternity wards in West Africa. You can read more about Laura's work later in this book.

While the mechanics of social entrepreneurship dominate, most of the aspiring social innovators I meet want stories. Sure, they want to know some of the theory, maybe a little about the technology. But what resonates with them more than anything is the background to the solutions, the journey, and where the innovators behind them got their drive and motivation. They want to resonate, to feel closer to the possibilities and potential, to see themselves in the innovator's shoes. They want to walk away with 'Well, they did it. Why can't I?'

The difference in approach boils down to one of 'mechanics vs. motivation'. The 'mechanics' world centres on business models, the quest for data, for metrics and an obsession with scale and measuring impact. Lots of tables, numbers, graphs and theories – the very things which score low on most people's motivational scale. The 'motivation' approach is built on real-world examples, inspiration and a belief that anything is possible because others have done it. That is the very reason why we chose to publish a book of case studies and not a deep functional analysis of what makes 'social entrepreneurship work'. After all, the 'a-ha' moment innovators-to-be hear about is rarely the discovery of a new metric, or a new business model, or a new way of presenting or collecting data. It's the realization that a problem can be solved, and solved in a new way. These answers often come by doing and experiencing, being out in the field, and there are almost always stories behind why the person was there, sometimes how they got there, and what they suddenly saw which gave them their big idea. You'll find those stories in this book.

FIGURE 0.7   Sharing inspiring stories of change with students, with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Tori Hogan

PHOTO: Evan Swinehart/Unreasonable at Sea

The power of passion

Innovation and entrepreneurship start with passion, so we ought to focus more on that. We can help by speaking about our own interests, passions and stories – which most of us have – and less on the mechanical stuff (some of which, incidentally, includes the actual technology we've invented). This is why, I think, people tend to resonate more with individuals who succeed, rather than bigger organizations. The year I became a Tech Award Laureate a dozen people – not companies – were rewarded for their efforts to make the world a better place. The celebration of their achievements would have been less remarkable if they'd all been housed in resource-rich corporate environments. Innovation by everyday people, often out of scarcity, against the odds, is what seems to really excite people. Perhaps the fact they can relate to them helps a little, too.

Al Gore spoke at that Tech Awards gala. After a 30-minute speech not a single person could doubt his passion and commitment to the climate change cause, whether or not they agreed with him. There was hardly any mention of the intricacies of the science. This was a motivational speech if ever there was one. Somehow, if he'd focused on the mechanics I doubt he'd have had half the impact. Al Gore has taken a complex subject and made it accessible, and that has to be one of his major achievements.

We need to do the same with entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, technology and innovation. These subjects need to be demystified, and this series of case studies is our contribution towards making the discipline more relevant and approachable to students and concerned citizens alike.

About this book

Of course, there is no shortage of books on social entrepreneurship. Authors regularly place social entrepreneurs under their expert spotlight – sometimes, but not always, even interviewing them – before attempting to unpick and dissect their work. Analysis is offered on what experts consider worked, and failed, and the various theories applied give their commentary a sense of academic credibility. Surprisingly, most often missing are the voices of the innovators themselves, with the occasional quote considered reasonable exposure to the person doing the actual work. While expert analysis can be helpful, so too can the voice and story of the social entrepreneur, in their own words. This book represents an attempt to address that balance.

TABLE 0.1   Matrix of case studies

Case study	Country of origin	Region of operation	Sector	Solution
We Care Solar	USA	Africa/Global	Health	Technology
Centre for Digital Inclusion	Brazil	South America/Global	Connectivity	Technology/ human networks
I-MAK	India	India	Law/patents	Legal
Visualizing Impact	Palestine	Middle East	Advocacy	Data visualization
Magpi	USA	Global	Health	Technology
FoodCycle	UK	United Kingdom	Food poverty	Human networks
Ushahidi	Kenya	Global	Activism	Technology
Qigong Massage for Autism	USA	United States	Health	Massage
Refugees United	Denmark	Global	Humanitarian	Technology/ human networks
PlanetRead	India	India	Education	Film subtitling
Dream in Tunisia	Tunisia	Middle East	Environment	Human networks
Genetic Alliance	USA	United States	Health	Genetics
GovRight	Morocco	Global	Activism	Technology/ human networks

The 13 case studies you'll find here cover a wide range of problem areas with a wide geographical spread. The founders of each social innovation share their own stories – their background, how and where they grew up, and how they believe it helped qualify them to do their later work. They share the facts – and own analysis – of the problem they encountered, and why their solution works and why it matters. You'll get to read about their response to finding the problem – or the problem finding them – and how they went about developing a solution and then an organization to support it. You'll hear their thoughts on key decisions they had to make – funding, sustainability and organizational structure among them – and how they determine the impact of what they do. They share the highs, and the lows, of life as a social entrepreneur – what worked for them, and what failed. Theirs is no glossy account of instant success and fame, rather the often untold messy and frustrating side of social entrepreneurship. They end with reflections on lessons learnt throughout their journey, and questions you might want to consider asking yourself as you unpick their work, and offer your own expert analysis.

You may notice that these case studies are not grouped together by topic or geography, something many other books might have done. Rather, the stories are presented in a way which provides better opportunity for discovery. Too much of the social innovation sector works in silos, with health innovators hanging out with other health innovators, and political activists hanging out with other political activists. As a result, opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas and solutions are often limited, despite it being quite possible that health professionals might learn from activists, and vice versa, if they ever found themselves in the same room. Tim Smit, founder of the Eden Project, once told me that you should attend at least one conference every year which is totally outside of your usual areas of work and interest.

It is our hope that you will discover case studies in this book that you might otherwise not have naturally gravitated towards. Regardless of your own particular focus or interest area, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to learn something from case studies in a totally different field – in data visualization in Palestine, for example, or the development of solar technologies for maternity wards in Nigeria, or massage for autism in the United States. Remain open to solutions, wherever they come from.

Some advice for innovators-to-be

Despite the considerable amount of focus, funding and bets placed on social entrepreneurs and their ideas, many mistakes tend to be repeated over and over again, often reflecting negatively on any potential impact. Interestingly, the same problems apply in international development, where I've focused much of my time over the past 20 years. Unlocking the potential of what many people believe to be an underperforming sector is something I am often asked about, and it has become something of a mission for me of late.

Those efforts recently culminated in the launch of a Donors Charter. I decided to focus on donors because, in my view, most of the more common mistakes made by social innovators are made before they've even started their project. Raising

awareness of this among donors, I felt, might mean that funding could be held back until projects had been properly thought through and planned.

Why is something like a Donors Charter needed? Well, with few checks and balances in place, what we've ended up with today is a social sector full of replication, small-scale failed pilots, secrecy and near-zero levels of collaboration. This negatively impacts not only on other poorly planned initiatives, but it also complicates things for the better ones. On top of that, it confuses the end user who is expected, for example, to make sense of all 100 or so mobile data collection tools that end up on offer. The policy of funding many in the hope that the odd one shines through – the so-called 'let a thousand flowers bloom' scenario – belongs to an earlier era. Today, we know enough about what works and what doesn't to be far more targeted in what is funded and supported.

If you have an idea for a project or initiative, I'd encourage you to ask yourself the following 12 questions (which form the basis of my Donors Charter) before going any further. These are the questions you should expect to be asked and, if your idea is properly thought out, you should be able to answer them.

Preliminary questions

1. Do you understand the problem you are trying to solve? Have you seen, experienced or witnessed the problem? Why are *you* the one fixing it?
2. Does anything else exist that might solve the problem? Have you searched for existing solutions?
3. Could anything that you found be adapted to solve the problem?
4. Have you spoken to anyone working on the same problem? Is collaboration possible? If not, why not?
5. Is your solution economically, technically and culturally appropriate?

Implementation questions

6. Have you carried out base research to understand the scale of the problem before you start? Do you have 'before' numbers so you are able to measure how well your project has done?
7. Will you be working with locally-based people and organizations to carry out your implementation? If not, why not?
8. Are you making full use of the skills and experience of these local partners? How?

Evaluation and post-implementation questions

9. How do you plan to measure your impact? How will you know if your project was a success or not?
10. Do you plan to scale up or scale out that impact? If not, why not? If yes, how?
11. What is your business/sustainability model?

Transparency questions

12 Are you willing to have your summary project proposal, and any future summary progress reports, posted online for the benefit of transparency and more open sharing?

It is my belief that if you plan to go out and make an impact on people's lives – and use up valuable funds in the process – then it's not unreasonable to expect you to have properly thought through what you're going to do first. Not only could you save a community somewhere a lot of pain and disappointment, but you might end up helping donors target their money better, and save yourself a huge amount of failed time and effort – time and effort you could instead use on something that becomes ultimately more impactful.

More broadly, I usually offer the following additional advice to people wanting to help make the world a better place:

1 *Don't be competitive.* There's plenty of poverty to go round.

2 *Don't be in a hurry.* Grow your idea or project on your own terms.

3 *Don't assume you need money to grow.* Do what you can before you reach out to funders. Prove your idea first.

4 *Volunteers and interns may not be the silver bullet to your human resource issues.* Finding people with your passion and commitment willing to work for free can be time consuming and challenging.

5 *Be relentless.* Pursue and maximize every opportunity to promote your work.

6 *Suppress your ego.* Stay humble. Remain curious.

7 *Remember that your website, for most people, is the primary window to you and your idea.*

8 *Learn when to say 'no'.* Manage expectations. Don't overstretch.

9 *Avoid being dragged down by the politics of the industry you're in.* Save your energy for more important things.

10 *Learn to do what you can't afford to pay other people to do.*

11 *Be open about the values that drive you.* People will respect you for it.

12 *Collaborate* if it's in the best interests of solving your problem, even if it's not in *your* best interests.

13 *Make full use of your networks*, and remember that the benefits of being in them may not always be immediate.

14 *Remember the bigger picture*, and that whatever you're trying to solve is bigger than any one person or organization.

15 *Don't beat yourself up searching for your passion.* You'll find it in the most unlikely of places, and if you don't it could very well find you.

16 *Write down your values, and a quote that inspires you, on a large sheet of paper and stick it on your wall.* Look at it every morning. Remind yourself why you're doing what you're doing.

17 *Finally, strive to be a good person, a role model for others.* And if you do succeed, remember the importance of giving back. We all started at the beginning once.

Discussion questions

1 How important is passion in social entrepreneurship?

2 What is your definition of a social entrepreneur? Does it matter that there's not universal agreement?

3 What do you think of the questions in Donors Charter? Do they make you think more about any projects you're thinking of starting? Are any questions missing?

4 What do you think is the role of empathy in social entrepreneurship? Is it an absolute necessity, or a nice-to-have?

5 What do you think of Ken's decision to stand down? Can you think of any other examples of founders of social enterprises stepping away? Was it the right thing for them to do?

6 Do you agree that many social innovators operate in silos? If so, in what ways might we encourage them to reach out and learn from other disciplines?

7 What do you think is the role of business in social entrepreneurship?

Further reading

You can find more material to do with this chapter at www.koganpage.com/socialentrepreneurship

Websites and articles

Ashoka Empathy – empathy.ashoka.org [accessed 10 December 2015]
Donors Charter – donorscharter.org [accessed 10 December 2015]
Ken Banks' website – kiwanja.net [accessed 10 December 2015]
Ken Banks' National Geographic profile – nationalgeographic.com/explorers/bios/ken-banks/ [accessed 10 December 2015]
Article on Ken's stepping back – clearlyso.com/a-lesson-from-rock-aristocracy/ [accessed 10 December 2015]
General anthropology resource – discoveranthropology.org.uk/ [accessed 10 December 2015]
Social innovation incubator – scu-social-entrepreneurship.org/gsbi [accessed 10 December 2015]
The Unreasonable Institute – unreasonable.is [accessed 10 December 2015]

Videos

video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/ken-banks-es
currystonedesignprize.com/winners/frontline-sms/
Tech Awards – youtube.com/watch?v=XrtN7rtJrfM

Founders Forum for Good – youtube.com/watch?v=aLM5tHouOcg
poptech.org/popcasts/josh_nesbit_mobile_healthcare
ted.com/talks/jessica_jackley_poverty_money_and_love

Books

Doing Good Better: Effective Altruism and How You Can Make a Difference
    – William MacAskill
The Top Five Regrets of the Dying – Bronnie Ware
More Human: Designing a World Where People Come First – Steve Hilton
The Myths of Innovation – Scott Berkun
Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty –
    Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo

"I believe this collection will inspire more than a few readers to explore their passions and translate them into incremental stories of meaningful change."
Alex Moen, Vice President of Explorer Programs, *National Geographic*

"This important, timely book gives the reader an invaluable insight into the workings of the world of social entrepreneurship. It is a must-read for students, practitioners, policy-makers and anyone with a passing interest in how to work for the greater good."
Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder of the World Economic Forum and Co-Founder of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship

"The world's most challenging problems are being taken on by people motivated by their personal passions, informed by their deep understanding of local realities and shaped by their frustration with inadequate solutions. Ken Banks and the other remarkable innovators here offer inspiration and insight into building practical solutions while calling into question established wisdom about social innovation."
Ethan Zuckerman, Director of the Centre for Civic Media, MIT

This inspiring collection of case studies presents the journeys of pioneering social entrepreneurs who used their courage, creative thinking and tenacity to tackle pressing social issues. *Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation* showcases the innovative business models and strategies used by entrepreneurs around the world to tackle a broad range of issues in the fields of politics, the environment, healthcare, education, waste and representation.

Told in their own words, these vivid stories give the reader the opportunity to learn from the individuals themselves, providing honest insights into their challenges, setbacks and hard-won successes. From a life-saving project to bring solar-powered lighting to midwives in Nigeria to a technology platform reuniting displaced refugees, each case study draws out the lessons learnt, providing guidance for those wanting to follow in their footsteps.

Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation is an invaluable resource for social entrepreneurs and innovators looking for new ideas and insight into what really works – and what doesn't. This book is an inspirational read for anyone with a social conscience and a desire to change the world for the better.

Ken Banks, founder of global non-profit organization kiwanja.net, devotes himself to the application of mobile technology for positive social and environmental change in the developing world. He is a PopTech Fellow, a Tech Awards Laureate, an Ashoka Fellow and a National Geographic Emerging Explorer. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2012, nominated for the prestigious TED Prize in 2013, and appointed Entrepreneur in Residence at CARE International in 2015.