

ENTERPRISE 101

A young social entrepreneur with big dreams

Evans Muriu's passion for community service has seen him bring together over 6,000 young people for engaging programmes. Free and easily accessible, facebook is his best tool.

Search the word 'young innovator' and you end up with the name Evans Muriu. That is an expression of course, but, only in his twenties, Mr. Muriu is setting a pace for Kenya's young people with his passion and drive.

Kuna Vijana, a goodwill organisation he established three years ago and big dreams for success in entrepreneurship inspire many observers. Being CEO of the dynamic organisation requires skill, hard work and determination, and this writer had a chat with Mr. Muriu to understand what the initiative really means to him.



Evans Muriu the founder, Kuna Vijana

A short young man of light complexion, who likes dressing in smart casuals, Mr. Muriu cuts an appearance of a school boy at first sight. Kuna Vijana runs a fast growing group on the social network site Facebook, where it coordinates most of its activities. Chatting with him, you discover a deep love for community service. He effectively juggles between school and work to achieve that goal.

Kuna Vijana, Swahili for "there are youth" is a non-governmental organisation whose aim is to change the mentality that 'the youth are known for all the wrong reasons,' Mr Muriu explains. He says the initiative helps the youth become positive, responsible and resourceful citizens. This was especially so in 2008, when Kenya experienced one of the worst political violence in decades and where countless people lost their lives. The youth were majority of rioters and property destroyers. Now, Kuna Vijana actively seeks to eradicate this kind of behavior by fully tapping and utilising young talent, and killing idleness.

Mr. Muriu started working on the concept in mid 2007, after realizing the society tended to have a negative perception of the youth. "I don't blame them though, because the youth do at times engage in activities that have given them a negative image," he says adding that lack of jobs is the biggest contributing factor. Peer pressure and lack of proper information on responsible behavior, are other reasons. Mr. Muriu embarked on the initiative full time in October, 2008. He says a documentary he watched, showing young people in prison after participating in the riots, stirred him up.

The organization's facebook page has over 6,000 young members. They use the tool in mobilizing members. Some of their successful projects over the past year include Communication for Conflict (C4C) where members underwent training and were equipped with knowledge and skill to solve issues pertaining to conflicts resolution. M.A.D.I.S (Making a difference in Society) is another, which involves charity, especially in orphanages and even visiting resettled Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to offer encouragement. Another aim of such visits, Mr. Muriu explains is also to discourage idleness, and

resultant vices like drug use or early pregnancies.

What makes Mr. Muriu tick? Knowing that he has influenced a person's life positively, he says. Helping the youth exploit their talents, to better themselves and the environment in general, makes him look forward to his job every day.

For now, the organisation does not have a formal office, coordinating most of their activities online. "We decided to use facebook because it is a social medium that has caught the attention of many youths in Kenya," he said. Statistics show that nearly half of Kenya's youth population frequently uses facebook. The social networking site he says is also flexible enough to manage the large numbers – mass mailing and even creating events easily.

The greatest limitation for the group is funds, which mostly comes from well wishers and sponsors. "I have several businesses which I run on the side, and which also help me in financing the group," said Mr Muriu. "Since we have not been fortunate enough to get sponsors for most of the projects, we have come up with several income generating schemes that will facilitate our running." To register, members pay KShs200 on off fee. Their website receives 1,000 hits a day and they are also working on publishing a monthly magazine to boost revenue, as well as branded t-shirts for sale.

"I have great ideas for the youth, if only I had good funding," says Mr. Muriu. "But that does not stop me in any way." The determined expression on his face is convincing enough. "Many organisations have come up in the name of exposing talent but they end up exploiting young people. This has made it hard for youths to put their trust in us, but we have managed," he says.

His favorite quote is "treat people as if they were what they ought to be and help them to become what they are capable of being." Truly fitting words to what Kuna Vijana stands for. He plans to launch the organisation nationwide so as to reach more youth, as well as take part in more peace initiatives. "We want to develop community radio stations in remote areas in Kenya, not forgetting there's the planting of 500,000 trees in the Mau in a span of six months that we want to undertake," he says. "We are to hold monthly exhibitions in conjunction with one of our dedicated partners, and have several seminars and conferences addressing different issues affecting the youth in the society." These events are posted on their website and facebook page where members stay up to date.

His advice to the youth? "For one to be successful and encounter minimal challenges, they should never forget to put God first," he says. "Always strive to be long term oriented and do every job the right way regardless of the income generated." As young entrepreneurs keep in mind that determination and hard work always comes before success, Mr. Muriu also advises "love what you do and have fun with it!"

Comments:

- **Okeleky** - Evans Muriu is an inspiration. BRAVO...EVANS!
- **Wakala** - This is so encouraging. Keep going ahead. I am with you.
- **Magret Cherono** - I can see you are a man of a vision. Please keep the fire burning. I like it and remember that am with you in every step you make. God bless you abundantly
- **Hilda** - Evans is a true inspiration. . . .gnet, nice interview my gal

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- **Grace** - That's great boy@!!! Keep moving dude!
- **Ndirash** - Evans as young as you are you inspire many so keep it up role model and thanks 4 all.
- **Denis okoyo** - If a young man can do such wonderful things to make the society a better place, then that's a true leader. HONGERA!
- **MAULINE OGAO** - Evans you are an icon that can change society for better. Your efforts are timely and relevant. I am excited to know that the LITTLE vision you had in school has translated into real life changing programmes. You have my support.
- **Jummah** - Bravo Man... Keep on believe in yourself n have faith in your abilities! The Youth got your back....
- **George** - You are a big inspiration to the youth of this our country. Keep going young man. We are all behind you.
- **Caroline** - Man that's so good. keep it up
- **Rapper TN** - Great inspiration, am proud of you Evans big up.
- **Olilo jnr** - Bro, I see the sky inside the tunnel!! Kudos!
- **Amondi** - congrats. Keep it up!! You are an inspiration!!
- **william williams Williamson** - Evans you are a man of change i believe....big up bro
- **Robert** - It amazing how much you have done with your age. I am sure your parents, friends and family are proud of you coz i am
- **Godiy** - This is deadly I love this idea if any support am in
- **Douglas Njiru** - Evans, your efforts are just remarkable. I sincerely salute you boss for being such an inspiration. Keep it up.
- **iszo platform** - good stuff lil-bro..Keep up the good work; Evans for counselor 2012.
- **Nina** - ..I have got no words except that you really are an entrepreneur!!!! Big ups
- **Oj_Liberty** - Two thumbs up 4 yah! Am ready to support u, We need mentors like you
- **Patrick Wameyo** - Visionary and persistent. A great way to enhance the financial well being of young Kenyans. Tuko pamoja
- **DENIS BOSIRE** - Well done Evans. We are proud of you. Kuna wazee pia
- **Jeff Dimitri** - Great ideas...Let me search for your group on Facebook. Make your organisation known and trust me sponsors will come running.

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