

Eawag Event: Serving base-of-the-pyramid markets & customers: From pilot to scale-up

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Around 60 visitors participated in the “Serving-the-base-of-the-pyramid markets & customers: from pilot to scale-up” event that took place on the 2nd of July, 2015 at the Eawag in Dübendorf. In the morning, participants were given the opportunity to learn from insights presented by practitioners and experts working in low-income sanitation and water markets around the world. Heiko Gebauer, in his speech, illustrated the need for companies to protect BoP ideas from their research and development routines and how firms should consider tapping into higher income segments instead of exclusively focusing on low-income markets.

The keynote was held by Paul Polak, serial social entrepreneur and co-author of The Business Solution to Poverty. He highlighted the need to enter into a direct dialogue with poor customers before designing BoP products and services. Polak identified the outlook of breaking even within the first year of implementation and achieving economies of scale as determining characteristics of successful BoP ventures.

In her presentation, Naomi Rosenthal from the South Pole Group showed how carbon credit markets can help to attract investments to set up decentralized water decontamination systems in poor rural areas. Renauld de Watteville explained how rural water kiosks evolved into veritable shopping malls over time with the engagement of his company Swiss Fresh Water in Senegal. Jessica Altenburger from x-runner Venture GmbH illustrated how social mechanisms within poor Peruvian communities influence consumption patterns of residents and affect their ability to invest into safe sanitation solutions. Urs Heierli from msd consulting/Antenna Technologies Foundation argued for strong partnerships between companies, governments and NGOs but warned from potential downsides of subsidizing water purification systems.

In the afternoon, participants got a chance to discuss and deepen their knowledge in workshops which covered diverse topics such as customer needs and preferences, marketing and sales approaches, supply chain management, scaling-up strategies, tools for assessing applicability of technologies, capacity building for business planning and development, or financing. Feedbacks on the event have been very positive overall and participants described the day as very instructive and as a good opportunity to network with potential partners.

The event was co-organized by Swiss Water Partnership, Swiss Bluetech Bridge, and the Eawag (Heiko Gebauer, Caroline Saul, Simon Joncourt).

<https://www.eawag.ch/en/info/portal/news/news-archive/archive-detail/eawag-event-serving-base-of-the-pyramid-markets-customers-from-pilot-to-scale-up>