

Ugandans win Johnson & Johnson Africa award

OUR REPORTER

Grace Nakibaala and her team of Makerere University innovators, Isah Ssevume, and Molly Mbaziira Nannyonjo, are an excited bunch after the news arrived last week that their PedalTap innovation had been chosen as one of three winners of the Johnson & Johnson Africa Innovation Challenge at the Global Entrepreneurship Congress in Johannesburg.

Nakibaala's team devised the PedalTap to prevent the spread of infections at communal hand washing facilities in Uganda. The PedalTap is a free-standing,

universally-fitting connection that can be attached to any water tap. Rather than turning the tap on and off using their hands, users can control water flow by stepping on a foot pedal that is made from a bicycle brake handle and a spring-loaded water cut-off mechanism.

The initiative, which received nearly 500 submissions from innovators and entrepreneurs across the continent, sought the best ideas for new, sustainable health solutions that will benefit African communities.

Transforming the PedalTap from an idea into a usable

product has been a challenging process for the team. Indeed, Nakibaala admits that the team has been, "stretched in ways we never imagined, way beyond our comfort zones". She adds: "one of the challenges we faced quite early on, as a multidisciplinary team of students, was in making time for our project.

Our schedules never seemed to align, but we quickly learned that if this was important to us, which it was, we had to make time for it".

The other winners include Project Agateka (Burundi) - a sustainable solution to support

girls who are unable to afford menstrual pads and underwear.

Project Agateka is designed to provide a direct health solution as well as the opportunity for women and girls to generate income in Burundi. With the inclusion of health information, the initiative also provides health education to support improved sexual and reproductive health.

Project Kernel Fresh (Liberia) sources natural palm kernels from smallholder women farmers, increasing their income. The entrepreneur cold presses the palm kernel oil to be used in organic cosmetics.

The project will also create jobs for young women by training them to sell the products throughout Liberia.

The Africa Innovation Challenge is part of the company's comprehensive approach to collaborate with and support Africa's vibrant innovation, education and health systems institutions. The Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies comprises the world's largest healthcare business and its presence in Africa dates back to 1930, including business operations, public health programmes and corporate citizenship.

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