



## ANNUAL REPORT 2015



## Letter from the CEO

2015 was a year of rapid growth, as TEL expanded the scope of its programs through major new services, initiatives, and partnerships. After nearly doubling our database to currently over 600 technology solutions, we have built off last year's momentum to expand beyond our core role of information nexus and clearinghouse. TEL is now a force not only for discovery, but also for organizational collaboration and dissemination of solutions to problems of poverty and sustainability.

Along with 120,000+ annual visitors to our website, TEL's Kendall Square office has welcomed many new faces: visitors, volunteers, interns and research associates from Harvard, MIT Sloan and Lesley University, along with a new Operations Manager to guide our daily operations. Representing TEL at development conferences and events across the US, Asia and Latin America, the 'TEL team' is forging new and deepening partnerships with organizations like the United Nations, Siemens Stiftung, USAID and multiple programs at MIT.

Given these expanding opportunities to interact directly with organizations serving people at the bottom of the pyramid, along with urgent requests from the field, our team took action by developing the TEL Project Accelerator. The Accelerator is a needs-based service that helps developing-world NGOs and social entrepreneurs quickly and effectively leverage appropriate technology to maximize the impact of their development projects and social ventures. Having already employed this model with organizations in India, the Philippines and Sub Saharan Africa, we are pleased to officially launch the Project Accelerator on our new website this year.

Day by day we are amazed by how much TEL is able to accomplish, thanks to the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of our supporters, all of whom recognize that innovation, social enterprise and international collaboration are crucial factors in overcoming problems of poverty and sustainability in our interconnected world.

With your continued dedication and support, we will achieve even more in 2016 and beyond.

Karen von Bismarck  
Co-founder and CEO



## The Problem

Technology-based solutions are proven to be effective at combating myriad problems of poverty, but many NGOs, local entrepreneurs and developing-world communities lack the time and expertise to identify, assess and acquire appropriate solutions:



A grassroots organization in India has funding to power 30,000 off-grid homes with solar lights, but needs help identifying viable solutions.

A community-based organization in Sierra Leone wants to improve health outcomes through public hand washing programs, but lacks access to supply chains and funding.



An NGO in Northern India wants to pilot solar-energy solutions in last-mile communities, but it is inexperienced in conducting energy needs assessments.

## Our Solution

TEL, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, closes the gap between innovators of cost-effective technology solutions and NGOs, communities and end-users in developing regions. Supported by an annual \$120,000 grant from the Google Foundation, TEL's online database offers detailed, curated and unbiased information on over 600 solutions to problems of poverty and sustainability:



A ceramic water filter provides a family with 48 liters of clean drinking water per day.



An earthworm composting kit replaces costly and damaging chemical fertilizers with a sustainable organic alternative.

A solar-powered light replaces harmful kerosene lamps and lasts for over two years.



A clean burning stove provides a community with 600 meals a day, with cheap sustainable fuels.



Going beyond a catalogue of products and methods, TEL leverages the creativity of innovators, partners and TEL's own researchers and volunteers. The result: an up-to-date, curated and globally accessible center for proposing, discovering and sourcing practical technology solutions for the developing world.



## Our Mission

TEL is dedicated to bringing communities out of poverty by driving the adoption of innovative, cost-effective and sustainable solutions that improve the lives at the bottom of the pyramid. TEL was founded in 2009 by two alumni from the MIT Sloan School of Management, whose shared vision of 'bottom-up' poverty alleviation was inspired by their collective years of experience in introducing technology-based innovations to improve the lives of people around the world.

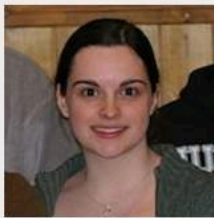
## TEL team



Karen von Bismarck  
Founder, CEO



Brennan Lake  
Programs Director



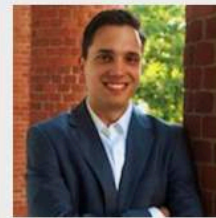
Éadaoin Ilten  
Operations Manager



Adrienne Perez  
Research &  
Communications Associate



Amrish Kapoor  
Chief Technology Officer



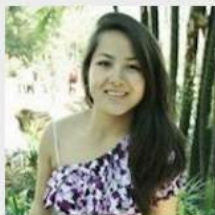
Dan Swann  
Communications Associate



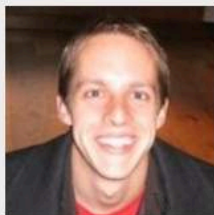
Donny Holaschutz  
Research Associate



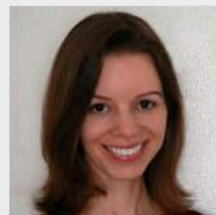
Elena Pascual  
Social Media Intern



Qingqing Wu  
Advisory Board Member



Tim Zeb Girouard  
Advisory Board Member



Miranda Grizio  
Contributing Writer



Lee Cusolito  
Volunteer Design Associate



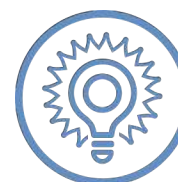
Balaji Mani  
Research Associate

## TEL platform

TEL's crowd-sourced database offers up-to-date, curated and globally accessible information on over 600 technology-based solutions in six key areas:

- Water & Sanitation
- Health & Medical Care
- Energy & Clean Cooking
- Agriculture & Tools
- Education & Connectivity
- Housing & Transport

**165** Countries Reached  
**+120k** Annual Visitors  
**1,174** Community Members







## New Service – TEL Project Accelerator

As more people discover innovative solutions every day thanks to TEL, we increasingly receive inquiries from NGOs and social entrepreneurs eager to maximize the impact of their development projects by leveraging TEL solutions. In order to orient them toward the resources and solutions that meet their unique needs, and to facilitate effective connections, TEL has launched the ‘Project Accelerator’ program.

A needs-based service, the Project Accelerator employs a bottom-up process of solution search and selection. The majority of technologies and superior methods within TEL’s database were developed and informed by a process of human-centered design in order to create solutions that respond to the needs, desires and behaviors of end users. Similarly, with an in-depth understanding of our clients and their stakeholders, TEL empowers projects to deliver appropriate solutions that meet key standards of desirability, feasibility and viability.

Throughout the process, and depending on the profile of the client at hand, the Project Accelerator service assists with:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Assessing needs       | by understanding the obstacles to defined goals with input from stakeholders.  |
| Identifying solutions | by matching on-the-ground needs with appropriate technology.                   |
| Acquiring solutions   | by liaising with solution providers and acquiring and piloting demo units.     |
| Finding funding       | by identifying prizes, grants and other funding opportunities.                 |
| Promoting projects    | by creating original content for publication in blogs, press and social media. |
| Recording impact      | by systematically tracking and documenting project progress and impact         |



## Clean Water for Sierra Leone

COMIN-SL is a small nonprofit organization currently working to improve water and sanitation conditions within communities ravaged by the Ebola crisis. With little expertise in water and sanitation solutions, COMIN-SL is further challenged by a lack of financial resources, and logistical obstacles that prevent them from importing pre-manufactured water and sanitation solutions into Sierra Leone.

### TEL's Approach

After working with COMIN-SL to identify the major issues faced by community members in relation to their water and sanitation needs, TEL introduced COMIN-SL to a variety of 'Do-It-Yourself' solutions that can be locally manufactured to provide clean drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities. Once COMIN-SL selected the solutions that best respond to their stakeholders' needs and desires, TEL provided the organization with detailed design specifications for the local manufacture of simple, robust water and sanitation technologies.



### The Results

COMIN-SL selected the Tippy-Tap hand washing system and the Biosand water filter as two locally-implementable solutions to pilot within local schools, markets and community centers. Six Tippy Taps were installed as part of the initial pilot, and COMIN-SL continues to conduct community engagement seminars to educate stakeholders in the importance of hand washing, along with Tippy Tap use and maintenance. Once COMIN-SL has conducted an impact assessment of the Tippy-Tap pilot project, TEL will pursue funding opportunities to scale up successful projects.



## Light up Karnataka

The Solar Program Karnataka is an initiative of Sumangali Seva Ashrama, a grassroots organization in South India. Their goal is to power 30,000 off-grid homes with point-of-use solar lanterns. By outfitting remote mom & pop shops with inventories of solar lanterns through a micro-consignment model, the program creates employment opportunities for local women entrepreneurs, while also providing a safe, cost-effective and sustainable alternative to kerosene lamps for thousands of families.

## TEL's Approach

After fully engaging the organization through a detailed process of needs assessment, TEL was able to assist the program in identifying and procuring solar lanterns from five different providers. TEL also applied to joint grant opportunities with Sumangali Seva Ashrama for funds to aid in the procurement of solar lights.



## The Results

After field testing the five demo units and conducting extensive interviews with stakeholders, the Solar Program Karnataka is in the process of drafting an MOU with one of the providers. The program has also received detailed applications from 30,000 qualified households eager to participate.



## Securing Water for Food - Technology Evaluation with MIT CITE

TEL partners with MIT's Comprehensive Initiative on Technology Evaluation (CITE) to disseminate quality, up-to-date information on rigorously tested technology solutions to challenges in the developing world.



Currently, TEL is participating as a full partner in CITE's evaluation of solar-powered water pumps, which are used for irrigating smallholder farms, and providing clean drinking water in refugee camps. The results of these evaluations will help development practitioners leverage appropriate technologies to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, and the health and wellbeing of refugees and internally displaced persons.



## Accelerating South-South Exchange Partnership with the UN

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) is partnering with TEL to accelerate the exchange of innovative solutions to problems of poverty between stakeholders in the Global South. Recognizing our expertise in solutions exchange, the United Nations has appointed TEL as its implementing partner to create knowledge sharing platforms in the fields of health, agriculture, energy and water & sanitation.

Through the partnership's first joint initiative, TEL will help create the South-South Global Health Exchange, an online platform for sharing sustainable and scalable health solutions between innovators and stakeholders in the Global South.



Additional TEL Partners



Clients Served







## Opportunities

Thanks to generous contributions from TEL supporters, our team is able to efficiently deliver innovative poverty solutions to developing regions worldwide. The rapidly growing number of innovators, organizations and last-mile communities that turn to TEL is a testament to our impact in supporting and shaping programs that satisfy basic human needs in the developing world, like access to clean water, education, adequate health care and more.

Unlike traditional models of ‘top-down’ aid adopted by many international development organizations, our programs succeed by empowering communities with actionable information and the freedom to choose and implement the solutions that best suit their needs.

While TEL’s crucial role in facilitating the implementation of proven solutions to problems of poverty is recognized as highly effective by our partners and peers, resources dedicated to international development are most often directed toward innovators and organizations on the ground, and direct purchases of products for least developed regions. However, in the absence of an effective means of disseminating impartial information and fostering end-user/innovator dialogue, lack of choice and market barriers prevent the optimal allocation of innovative solutions where they are needed most.

TEL closes that gap—with experience, intact ideals and fresh ideas. And with the leverage of your support, we can do much more to help the countless communities that turn to TEL for solutions to lift themselves out of poverty.

For more information on how to participate in this effort, please contact TEL’s Programs Director, Brennan Lake: [brennan@techxlab.org](mailto:brennan@techxlab.org)

Visit us online and join TEL as a member at [www.techxlab.org](http://www.techxlab.org).