

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/putting-a-face-on-consumer-products>

Social entrepreneur Leila Janah talks about how her luxury skincare brand LXMI (pronounced "luxe-me") also gives dignified work, instead of charity, to women and families in need. She says the business addresses growing consumer demand for supply-chain ethics, as well as for a more personal connection to retail products.



Transcript

- A couple of years ago in Northern Uganda, I started thinking, is there a way I can apply the Samasource model, which is really B2B, to a different industry? And I came across this amazing ingredient called Nilotica.. It's a rare type of shea butter, and it only grows wild at the source of the Nile River.. And I started looking at this product and thinking, God, it's amazing.. It comes out into this beautiful butter that if you apply it to your face, absorbs really readily, and women in the region use it to massage onto their infant babies.. And I thought, wow, this is such an amazing product.. Why has nobody done anything with it? Why are we spending \$200 on luxury skin creams at duty-free that are not only not good for the world, but actually toxic for our bodies as women, don't benefit any women in the supply chain or any women as owners of these companies? Why are we doing that when we could buy something that's natural and good for the world with a sustainable fair trade supply chain that elevates women in the same position as someone like Ken, but in a place like rural Northern Uganda? Many of these agricultural inputs actually, almost all of them and certainly all Nilotica is farmed or collected by rural women.. So, I came up with this idea.. I went and pitched my board and they said, "Okay, we give you permission "to start (laughs) this other company." And I set it up so that Samasource actually owns 1/3 of the founding equity in the business.. So, we have a really unusual setup where this nonprofit has a big equity stake in what became a for-profit social enterprise called LXMI.. We launched last year as the first fair trade and organic skincare brand at Sephora nationwide..

And I think it's a real revolution that's coming in beauty, the same revolution that happened in food.. Consumers are looking for ethics in the supply chains of what they buy, and they're looking for products that don't poison them.. So we're building something really similar to what we've built with Samasource, but for consumers in luxury beauty.. And we've really tried to reflect the ethos of our brand in the packaging, so a lot of our packaging and materials are inspired by the region in which we operate.. The other cool thing, I think, about the brand is how often do you get to meet the people in the supply chain of what you buy? We actually show you videos of the people who harvest these nuts, and you can meet them on our website.. Every product has a number on it.. If you type that number into our website, you can actually meet these women.. And I think more and more brands are starting to come along and realize that this is what consumers want.. They don't want a product made by a nameless, faceless person that they have no connection to...