



5 Minutes with Mitesh Gala

CEO, SEED & Alumnus, Green Technology Entrepreneurship Academy '09

(Left) SEED CEO Mitesh Gala interviews farmers in Bangladesh in 2008 to understand their needs and requirements for an irrigation pump.

In a nutshell, what is SEED's mission?

SEED seeks to increase incomes of rural farmers around the globe by developing affordable, sustainable water management/conservation products and services. Our goal is to develop user-defined and user-designed products and services and deliver them through an affordable infrastructure, or network. SEED's products and services will create an ecosystem that will empower farmers to make decisions that facilitate and improve water conservation and management.

Describe your first product, the diesel irrigation pump. What sets it apart from competing models?

Our irrigation product is a pump set, an assembled set comprising both an engine and a pump. Competing products are either an engine or a pump, which local mechanics in villages assemble ineffectively. Additionally, our product is designed for high performance, given current water levels. SEED's pump set is at least 50 percent more fuel-efficient and delivers 10 percent more water. Finally, it is 50 percent lighter than competing products, and thus highly portable.

Last year you demonstrated a prototype of your pump in Bangladesh. What did you learn from the experience—and where has it led?

The demonstration last year did three things for us. First, we were able to verify that our prototype performed better than existing products. This was further attested by a local government expert group in Bangladesh. Second, we were able to showcase this successfully to our partner—BRAC, one of the world's largest NGOs—which led to a 20-unit pilot this year. And lastly, we were able to ascertain that this was a product that the farmers need and aspire for. Their approval provided encouragement for both us and our partner.

Tell us about your recent trip to China.

SEED traveled to China last year to identify suppliers for our pump set. Our goals were to gain insight into China's business culture, set up a working relationship with a few suppliers, and understand the Chinese engine and pump industries. I visited around 10 companies, placed an order with one and have an ongoing relationship with two others. These business relationships have helped us deliver 20 units to Bangladesh this year for the pilot study.

What's in store for SEED in the second half of 2011—and the coming years?

2011 is a very important year for SEED. This is the year we move from pilot to production stage, with a target to produce at least 250 units. Additionally, we're setting up operations in Mumbai, India. This will help us consolidate all aspects of the business—including staff, lab and market partnerships—in one location, and in the near future bring manufacturing closer to our markets.

We are seeking investment capital to help grow the company to this next stage; specifically, we are looking for angel/bridge investment to help take us through to 2013. Based on our business plan, we will break even next year, and by the end of 2013 will be cash flow positive with \$1 million, having sold 9,000+ units.

What was the most important lesson learned at the Green Technology Entrepreneurship Academy?

That if you have an idea, test it out immediately by asking the customer/user. Call them or talk to them in person. They will immediately tell you what is good and not so good about the idea—and this will help you narrow down your product development activity.

Anything else we should know about your company?

This year SEED is opening offices in India and Bangladesh, placing our operations in four countries. Next year, we plan to introduce a new product that will supplement the pump set, and also to conduct pilot studies in markets such as India and Nepal. We hope to match our progress with our plans, and welcome feedback.

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SEED is always looking for talent to help us grow as a company and develop products that are both meaningful in the lives of people and profitable for the business. If you are interested in becoming a part of our company and our mission, please contact us. We want SEED to be your platform for understanding rural markets across the globe, to developing your creative and innovative talents and to being an integral part of a dynamic start-up enterprise.

Contact SEED:

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