

Meet the Ecopreneurs



There is a natural synergy between sustainability and entrepreneurialism. Start-ups have the power to make bold, disruptive ideas a reality at unprecedented speed. To tackle the climate crisis in time, we need bold *and* disruptive....and we need them fast.

It's a connection Dr Camila Gaspar Quinonez feels acutely.

“I heard this quote at an event and ever since it stuck with me—‘Climate change has no time for your imposter syndrome’. It means, technically—just get up and do it.”

A scientist and Westminster PhD graduate, Camila won the University of Westminster’s 2024 Recent Graduate award for her incredible work as co-founder of The Atlantic Forest Association.

As diverse as the Amazon, the Atlantic Forest stretches along Brazil’s Atlantic coast and inland, as far as Paraguay and Argentina.

“People don’t even know that it exists,” Camila says.

Originally twice the size of Texas, only 12% of the Atlantic Forest now remains. Since its inception, less than three years ago, the Association has dedicated itself to keeping the area intact.

As well as protecting an area of the Forest it legally owns, the Association is addressing the causes of deforestation and supporting local communities.

“The neighbouring areas are very economically disadvantaged and they often source income through illegal logging and hunting,” Camila says. “So, we are trying to develop a ranger program where we can start providing them with a fixed income to protect nature, instead of degrading it.”

As a scientist, Camila also hopes to use the land to research biodiversity’s crucial function as a

carbon sink. In doing so, she hopes to “shift the conversation” towards solutions like biodiversity credits.

“It’s better to protect what we have left, instead of deforesting and then planting something new.”

For Westminster Software Engineering graduate, Bikke Chettri, sustainability applies to everything everywhere... including issues that often get overlooked.

“I think there is a whole thing about British people and their love affair with toilet paper.”

Chakow Limited, Bikke’s 9-month-old start-up, provides affordable bidet extensions for toilets to create a sustainable alternative to toilet paper.

Growing up in Nepal in the 1980s, there was no toilet paper (“We just showered”). Long after he moved to the UK, Bikke still favoured the bidet on hygiene grounds. It was the infamous

toilet paper shortages during the first 2020 lockdown that finally got him thinking about the product's true environmental cost.

“Millions of trees are cut down every day, just to meet the demand of toilet paper. We're talking about whole forests being destroyed in Indonesia and elsewhere. There is nothing sustainable about toilet paper. ”

Unlike bidet toilet extensions—which can last 10 years —toilet paper is the ultimate single use product. Plus, bidets use just a fraction of the water needed for toilet paper production—even eco toilet paper.

Although bidet talk may make some Brits a bit uncomfortable, other nations feel differently. Bidets are widely used across Asia and Europe, including our closest neighbour, France. They're also growing in popularity in Australia and the US.

“Chakow wants to be the company that makes this a movement in UK and also in Europe,” Bikke says. “We want to be the brand that makes it affordable.”

Whatever the product—as Chakow proves—there is always a more environmentally friendly approach to be found.

“Any business can be done in a sustainable way,” says Marc Fegarsky, Westminster graduate and co-founder of marketing studio, Schparkly Creative.

Originally from the US, Marc completed his Marketing MA at Westminster in 2020, before co-founding Schparkly Creative with Wren, his wife, in the same year. A full-service marketing agency with a difference, Schparkly (“You know—sparkly, but a bit drunk.”) puts sustainability at the heart of everything it does.

“Both my wife and I—she worked with green energy companies, I worked with animal welfare—so the sustainability thing's just kind of built into us,” he says. “When

we started our business, it had to be one of our core values.”

True sustainability, of course, stretches far beyond carbon emissions.

“For us, it's more than just the planet. It's people, it's everything.”

Nearly five years in, alongside their strong green energy client-base, Schparkly also works with a broad range of purpose-led business whose values align with their own.

“It's really diversified,” Marc says. “We've got veterinary clinics, therapists offices...One of our favourite projects we've done recently is a therapist who specialises in underrepresented cultures.”

There is, however, one kind of business they promise they will never, ever work with..



Marc and Wren Fegarsky, co-founders of Schparkly Creative

"We were offered a very large amount of money by an oil company to do some work and we didn't take it—even though we really needed the money," Marc says.

"We think—in the long run—that's going to pay off. This is our brand. This is what we do. We want people to understand that we're walking the walk and not just talking the talk."

The University of Westminster has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework to cement its commitment to sustainable development. A core tenet of Westminster's positive impact will always lie in its empowerment of present and former students—like Camila, Bikke and Marc—to take their own positive impacts out into the world.

The WeNetwork offers a range of programs and support to the burgeoning businesses of students and alumni. The advent of 29 Marylebone Road, Westminster's new centre of enterprise, scheduled to open

in late 2025, will expand this support even further.

Chakow received both funding and support from WeNetwork's Elevate Program, in 2023. Elevate's focus is on empowering established businesses—teaching core skills like marketing and financial sustainability.

"We found out the website we had was really bad and we had to redo it," says Bikke.

"We changed our whole marketing strategy. So, it was a lot to take for six months, but it was an incredible help."

After winning the WeNetwork's Big Idea Competition in 2022, Schparkly received tailored, strategic support, including up to £10,000 in funding.

"I think it probably jumped our business forward three or four years," Marc says. "Just because you're not having to learn by trial and error,"

Schparkly, in turn, gives back to the community by teaching a WeNetwork class

and recruiting interns from across Westminster's Marketing programmes.

"I think a lot of the interns have chosen us because of our sustainability stance—they were excited about it."

As well as the funding and mentoring they received, Marc also values the relationships he has built with fellow Westminster entrepreneurs, through the WeNetwork.

"I think the community is fantastic," he says. "I've had such a great experience with Westminster. They've done more post graduate aftercare than any school I could imagine."



Bikke Chettri, Chakow Ltd founder

Camila agrees. "I think they do a fantastic job of keeping the community alive," she says.

"I have always been involved with Westminster. Trying to inspire, speaking to students, sharing my career and giving recommendations and tips, or any way I can kind of keep giving back—because I got so much out of being a Westminster student."

She is currently engaged in discussion with Westminster's

Life Science Department about potentially allowing Westminster students to use land owned by The Atlantic Forest Association for their own personal ecological research.

"We can really create a mutual relationship where we can help the career development of young students and publish high impact research and conserve the Atlantic Forest," she says. "I mean, the options are endless, almost."

This kind of support is incredibly valuable, as more graduates than ever are now prioritising

sustainability, as they embark upon their careers.

But what is the most important thing budding ecopreneurs should remember, as they start out?

"I think perseverance is very important," Marc says.

"A lot of people are going to tell you 'no', and it's going to be hard. You have to take one small bite at a time and just keep moving."



Dr Camila Gaspar Quinonez , co-founder of the Atlantic Forest Association

<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/alumni>