

Buzz Origins - how it all started

"Everybody deserves a dream"

It must have been around 2006. Dave was facilitating a leadership program in a small, dusty village in The Gambia. Better Future, the social enterprise he co-founded, was hosting a leadership journey that brought together a local NGO team and a group of professionals from the Netherlands.

A vision takes shape

During a break in the program, villagers walked into the compound where the session was being held. Curious and eager, they began asking questions about what was happening. Soon, under the mango tree and around the flipchart, a lively discussion emerged, as if a new training had spontaneously begun.

Ousman Cham (then director of the local NGO) and Dave watched the scene unfold. Impressed by the villagers' eagerness to learn, a fundamental question arose: How could we reach all these people who were so motivated, yet had no access to learning opportunities? Ousman explained that starting a school would not solve the problem. Schools were often too far away, with no transport available, too expensive, and required time women simply did not have. Leaving their families for long periods was not an option. In addition, the psychological barrier of entering a school building could be too high. Listening to this, an idea sparked in Dave's mind: If they cannot go to school, let's take the school to them. That day, the idea of a school on wheels was born.

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Fast forward to 2011. Another leadership program, this time in India. Better Future was working with the senior leadership team of Grameen Koota, a leading microfinance institution. During a break, Dave shared the idea of a school on wheels with Suresh Krishna, then Managing Director of Grameen Koota. Suresh did not need time to think. 'This is a great idea,' he said. 'This could be the missing link.'

After the program, during a four-hour bus ride back to Bangalore, Dave found himself sitting next to Arun, then IT Director of Grameen Koota. He shared the idea once more. Arun listened quietly. When Dave asked him what he thought, Arun simply replied, 'I am thinking about when and where to start.' A few days later, Arun called back. 'I know someone who could run this new initiative,' he said. 'She wants to apply for the job. Her name is Uthara, my wife.'

The start of Buzz Women

In 2012, Buzz India Trust was launched, with Uthara as founder, director, and only employee. She was supported by Suresh as a board member. At the same time, the Buzz Women Foundation was established in the Netherlands.

When we started, we had only two real assets: a dream and an idea. The dream was fueled by a deep sense of injustice: the lack of opportunity faced by so many women simply because of where they were born. More than anything, we wanted women to dream again. Our guiding question was simple yet bold: How could we enable women to break free from generations of poverty and patriarchy, using their own talents and their own voice? In those early days, this ambition lived in a single sentence: 'Everybody deserves a dream.'

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The idea gave the dream its first shape. A school on wheels, bringing education and transformation directly to women, instead of asking women to cross physical, financial, and psychological barriers to reach education.

Idea meets reality

Then came the hard part. Armed with a big dream and a practical idea, Uthara took on the challenge of grounding the vision and making it work. While Dave - the dreamer - still spoke about a 'Harvard on Wheels,' Uthara - the changemaker - went into the villages of Karnataka to listen, observe, and understand the everyday reality of women. It quickly became clear that women were not waiting for high-level education on talent and leadership. They were in urgent need of money. 'If you can help us solve this challenge,' they said, 'you are very welcome.'

With funds raised in the Netherlands, through friends, family, colleagues, and clients of Dave, the first bus was purchased. It was too big, clumsy, and regularly got stuck in the village mud. Yet it brought the idea to life. More importantly, it proved that what we envisioned was possible: bringing life-changing education directly to women's doorsteps. Uthara developed a curriculum that addressed both immediate needs - gaining control over money and reducing daily stress - and deeper, underlying needs such as self-confidence and entrepreneurial skills.

Looking back, those early days were as exhilarating as they were daunting. Exhilarating because a dream was becoming reality, opening doors for women who had never had such opportunities before. Daunting because each day brought a new challenge. In the first months, the phone rang constantly. One day Uthara would call, frustrated: 'The women are not coming.' The next week it was: 'They came, but they didn't come back.'

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We are on the move

Somehow, we found our way. We navigated the challenges, listened carefully, and kept adapting. What started as a dream and an idea slowly became a project that worked. Then it grew into a program, and eventually into a real organization, with more and more people committed to the dream. What began small naturally wanted to expand: first across Karnataka in India, then to Africa with Buzz Gambia launching in 2018. Europe followed, with Georgia and later Ukraine joining the Buzz Women family. In recent years, more countries across Africa have followed.

Today, with one million educated women leading transformation in their own communities, the original dream and idea have grown into a movement. A movement from the ground up, led from the heart by women with their feet firmly planted on the ground. Still, we feel this movement is only just beginning. We are convinced that, when women are given the space to dream again, the world will transform in ways beyond our imagination.