

Press release

‘Technologies for a brighter world’: new models to enable progress to benefit everyone

A better world within our grasp?

Bern, October 5, 2018 – How can the benefits of technology be used to reduce global inequality? That was the question explored by CSEM in Bern on October 4 at the ‘Technologies for a brighter world’ conference. Along with experts from the Swiss R&D center, the participants heard contributions from Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Klaus Schönenberger, director of the EssentialTech programme at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), and Arturo Vittori, co-founder of Warka Water.

“The current rate of technological acceleration is such that nothing seems out of reach any more, with one notable exception: a fair and peaceful world,” said Mario El-Khoury, CEO of conference organizer CSEM, setting the tone at the opening of the event in the Bellevue Palace in Bern.

The goal of the conference was to explore new paths which could lead to technology benefiting everyone, drawing inspiration from existing projects.

Making progress accessible to the most disadvantaged

“I do not have good news for you,” Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC warned. In his speech, he explained to what extent conflicts are becoming more complex and entrenched, forcing a growing number of people into insecurity and destitution. The former diplomat also revealed a lesser-known side to the ICRC, that of an organization which actively works to support its activities using technological progress. With EPFL, for example, it is developing a new generation of prosthetic feet for the victims of anti-personnel mines. The goal is to supply those prosthetics at affordable prices.

From big data to water towers

The spectrum of “humanitarian” innovations is extremely broad: From a data platform improving the search for missing persons to bamboo water towers designed by the architect Arturo Vittori, cofounder of Warka Water. Christophe Ballif and Jens Krauss of CSEM presented more examples from the range of photovoltaic and medical solutions developed by the center. Using a solution developed at the Swiss R&D center, the Vaud-based start-up Biospectral will, for example, track high blood pressure among the population in Bangladesh, Tanzania and South Africa.

The project makes it possible to monitor this invisible scourge using a smartphone. The apparent simplicity of the idea masks a highly-advanced technology, the fruit of 10 years’ work at CSEM.

Switzerland destined to find new models

It is time to rethink development. This conviction gained a broad consensus at the conference in Bern. In related work, EPFL’s EssentialTech programme has made promising advances, creating a start-up to

provide x-ray devices suitable for Africa, for example. This company, which is also seeing its commercial prospects grow in Western countries, has attracted African and Swiss investors.

Switzerland has the right profile to play a key role in working out new models for true sustainable development. World champion of innovation and country of origin of the Geneva Conventions, “it is also a large financial center,” Peter Maurer noted. This strength is an essential factor in increasing the dissemination of technological progress, improving the daily life of those most in need, and moving in the direction of a more equal world to which so many people aspire.



Peter Maurer, President of ICRC



Mario El-Khoury, CSEM CEO, Peter Maurer, President of ICRC

About CSEM

CSEM—technologies that make the difference

CSEM, founded in 1984, is a Swiss research and development center (public-private partnership) specializing in microtechnology, nanotechnology, microelectronics, system engineering, photovoltaics and communications technologies. Around 450 highly qualified specialists from various scientific and technical disciplines work for CSEM in Neuchâtel, Zurich, MuttENZ, Alpnach, and Landquart.

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