

The view from the middle: How cooperation makes successful development programmes

Posted by [Howard Sharman](#) [1] on Dec 12, 2011

There are some big challenges in development and emergency relief, but effective partnerships can help find some long-term solutions

Coming towards the end of the first year writing these columns, it's time to look on the positive side and see what has been achieved as a result of public private partnerships in the field of emergency relief and development assistance.

Because, for all that these partnerships are hard to specify and harder still to deliver, there have been successes.

Success number one: Huruma, Nairobi

Let's start in Nairobi with the Huruma village clean water project that I wrote about [earlier in 2011](#) [2]. At the time of writing that piece, the joint venture between three commercial businesses, two community-based organisations (CBOs), two public sector organisations, one NGO and UN Habitat had been ready to roll for some months, but everyone was waiting for the water extraction permit to come through from the relevant Kenyan ministry.

In the meantime, the pumps, pipe work, storage tanks and water purification devices were just sitting there. But in September the permit finally came through and the water purification project went live.

The villagers now have a constant and reliable source of clean water – they pay for their own water, but they can also sell any surplus on to people from outside the village, thus raising money for maintenance, repair and other village improvement projects.

And the key thing about this project is that the involvement of organisations like UN Habitat means (or should mean) that the benefits are not restricted to just the village of Huruma.

The approach that delivered (finally) in Huruma is one that should be spread far and wide across Africa and the promise from UN Habitat is that this is what will happen. Let us hope that they deliver and that the bureaucracy that kept Huruma village waiting for more than six months for its water will be reduced in future installations.

Success number two: Project Laser Beam

Dutch company Royal DSM has been working with the World Food Programme (WFP) and a number of other companies, NGOs and governments to develop a range of micro nutrients that can improve both the food supplied to emergency victims by WFP and the staples that the developing world relies on for its everyday nourishment.

[Project Laser Beam](#) [3] is a five-year, multi-million dollar public private partnership that seeks to eradicate child malnutrition. It brings together the expertise of UN agencies with that of Fortune 500 companies, and others in the private sector, to work with local governments and companies to find, as they say, new solutions to old problems.

So far it has been running for just over two years and its founding partners are WFP, Unilever, Kraft Foods, DSM and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). The work involves fortification of food with micronutrients; developing products to nutritionally supplement a child's diet; developing ready-to-use foods requiring no water or cooking; improving sanitation and hand-washing; providing access to clean water; therapeutic feeding for the severely malnourished; and nutrition education.

Initially this is a pilot phase that is being tested in Bangladesh and Indonesia. But the aim is to create a model that can be replicated and then rolled out in other regions.

So far, DSM reports that, working with the other Laser Beam partners, it has been able to improve the nutritional value of at least 80% of the food basket and about nine million beneficiaries receive better nutrition from the results of the joint work.

The products developed include micronutrient powders that can be scattered on prepared food, high-energy biscuits and rice-based ready-to-eat supplementary foods.

DSM has been working with Indonesian food manufacturers in order to produce these products locally, thus aiding development by providing employment and additional turnover to these companies.

Success number three: Ajinomoto's Koko Plus

Also in the nutrition sector, Japanese company Ajinomoto spoke in November about its micronutrient work at a conference in Brussels – Combatting Malnutrition through Sustainable Interventions – organised by PA International Foundation in Brussels.

Ajinomoto is working in Ghana with the University of Ghana and the Nevin Scrimshaw International Nutrition Foundation to develop, test market and then produce locally a supplement, known as Koko Plus, that can easily be added to the traditional corn-based local dish, Koko.

By adding the supplement, the resulting dish meets the World Health Organisation's nutritional recommendations.

This project is at an earlier stage than either of the two outlined above, but it is now in a test marketing phase with mass production, the roll-out of the product and, critically, the preparation for launch into other west African countries due next year.

Success number four: Advance Aid

At the risk of being seen to blow my own trumpet (but if I don't blow it, who is going to?), I'd like to include [Advance Aid](#) [4] in this list.

In our first full year of operation in Nairobi, Advance Aid will put more than \$1.5m into the local economy that would otherwise have been spent on imports from China, India or even Europe and the US. This has been done through local procurement of non-food items for emergencies (NFIs).

These NFIs are relatively low-tech products – mosquito nets, kitchen sets, blankets, tarpaulins, hygiene kits – that can almost entirely be made in and around Nairobi. Advance Aid has partnered with forward-thinking aid agencies like World Vision (WV) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), with the local division of logistics company Agility – and with a range of local manufacturers – to make all of this possible.

A lot of the goods that we have sourced for WV and CRS are now being used in the massive refugee camp at Dadaab – so this is very much a case of emergency response from Africa, for Africa.

Conclusions

There are a lot of complex issues that have to be resolved before any public private partnership in emergency relief or development can even begin to get off the ground.

Many of the "View from the middle" columns that I have written this year have focused on these problems – and they should not be underestimated.

But it would be wrong to leave everyone with the idea that the problems are insuperable. It just

takes clarity of purpose, clarity of roles and a whole lot of determination.

The most heart-warming aspect of all of the short case histories outlined above is that they are all only the beginning.

- Huruma village's water should be the model for similar operations all over Africa.
- Project Laser Beam would appear to have got off to a good start and the chances are high that it will be extended into other countries once the pilot scheme is completed.
- Ajimoto's Koko Plus is also set to be rolled out across West Africa in the next year or two.
- As far as Advance Aid is concerned, we are only just beginning. Our business plan foresees three hubs around Africa, of which Nairobi is the first. Watch this space.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.ethicalcorp.com/users/howard-sharman>

[2] <http://www.ethicalcorp.com/communications-reporting/view-middle-agencies-pool-efforts-kenyan-village>

[3] <http://www.wfp.org/how-to-help/companies/laserbeam>

[4] <http://www.advanceaid.org>

[5] <mailto:howard.sharman@advanceaid.org>