

Finding Private-Sector Support for Primary Health Care in Bangladesh



"Before, if we were very sick, we had to go far (16 km.) into town to a traditional healer. He was a religious healer and would give us holy water—that is all. This is the first time in my life I have had real medical care." A beneficiary who receives health care paid for by BAT (Bangladesh).

NGOs which provide basic health care to the poor must become less dependent on donor support by diversifying their funding. The NGO Service Delivery Program (NSDP), a USAID-funded health care program in Bangladesh, is working with NGOs to find corporate sponsorship. NSDP partners with 35 NGOs that manage 318 "Smiling Sun" static clinics employing 4,259 staff, 8,278 satellite (mobile) clinics, and 6,408 community volunteers. This brief outlines efforts to find private-sector assistance.

Corporations have diverse reasons for undertaking corporate social responsibility initiatives. Some seek to boost their image with policy makers or in the communities where they work by supporting essential social services. Others seek to enhance their products'

brand recognition by developing partnerships with major donor-funded programs and NGOs serving the poor. Corporate foundations also exist in order to engage in philanthropy for its own sake, but the businesses with which NSDP partners are generally interested in sustainable assistance, rather than one-time philanthropic or charitable donations. In Bangladesh, many textile manufacturers face the need to comply with an international buyers' code of conduct which requires them to provide services meeting certain minimal standards for their workers.

Both Unocal-Chevron and British American Tobacco, Bangladesh --BAT (B) --have partnerships with NGOs to provide care. Unocal-Chevron donated funds to a partner NGO to finance construction and operation of a new "Smiling Sun" clinic. A second, larger donation from the Unocal Foundation will fund the construction of a new clinic and the purchase of an ambulance. Unocal-Chevron and the NGO have received guidance and technical assistance from NSDP throughout the process. By channeling the Unocal Foundation's donation through Pathfinder International, NSDP was able to ensure its tax deductibility.

Agriculture is a very important sector of the Bangladeshi economy, so assisting farmers and their families is important to Bangladesh's development. BAT (B) formed partnerships with three of NSDP's NGOs to provide health care coverage for farmers, purchasing 2,500 health cards for tobacco farmers and their families. The cards are purchased directly from NGOs, which then operate satellite clinics in the communities where farmers live. The cards function like an insurance policy, entitling all members of each farmer's family to low-cost health care for one year. In addition to purchasing health cards, BAT (B) has also allocated funds to buy medicine and for lab tests. The NGOs submit quarterly statements to BAT (B) detailing medicines distributed and fees for lab services. BAT (B) reimburses the NGOs.

NSDP's corporate partnerships are primarily with international, not domestic, corporations. But Bangladesh's biggest export is ready-made garments. NSDP now has 42 mobile clinics in garment factories, where the majority of the workers are young women -the people for whom "Smiling Sun" clinics' reproductive, maternal and child health care services are intended.

Some businesses provide products at wholesale prices to NSDP's NGO clinics which operate pharmacies. Clinics then "mark-up" the products and use their profits to subsidize services for the poor. The size of the "Smiling Sun" network is attractive to them. Some wealthy individuals seek to "give something back" to the communities they're located in or where they have family roots. Wealthy and successful Bangladeshis traditionally build a mosque or a school in their home village. Now, some executives are offering to provide health care in their home villages by supporting clinics or by offering to pay for health care for villagers.

Standard Chartered Bank was asked for a cash donation to sponsor a TV public service announcement on maternal health care starring the country's most popular sports personality --and the bank immediately agreed to make the donation, paying in full for the broadcasts.

NSDP continues to work to explore new mechanisms which may generate new private-sector partnerships for project NGOs.

