

U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

A partnership for health

An editorial by Sir Richard Branson and Ambassador Mark Dybul

Sir Richard Branson is chairman of Virgin Group. Ambassador Mark Dybul is the U.S. Global Aids Coordinator of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. This editorial appeared in the Financial Times on December 1, 2006.

Aids has killed over 25m people in the world, about 8,000 people continue to die every single day, about 40m are currently infected with HIV and over 11,000 people are newly infected each day. Clearly, we are not winning this battle. Over the last several decades partnerships have emerged, but most organisations have worked in their own silos - bravely trying to single handedly fight this killer. While there have been some excellent results by some incredibly committed organisations, the world now has an opportunity to pull together to win this fight.

Historically, the public and private sector have been on opposing sides, often overlooking possibilities of pairings that could drive durable solutions. For example, can you imagine Virgin, the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), Anglo Coal and the South African Government as teammates? Yes, a pretty odd picture, but we have become just that to launch a new health centre in South Africa.

The Bhubezi Community Health Centre is a "one-stop health care centre" that is bringing effective diagnosis and treatment to a poor community in rural South Africa. The area has very limited health facilities, yet it is estimated that over 20 per cent of the population is HIV positive. Bhubezi will serve approximately 70,000 people from 12,000 households living in 21 villages. The centre will charge for basic health care services and provide free diagnosis and treatment for HIV and Aids, TB and malaria. The Health Centre will also drive an ambitious prevention programme to try and stop new infections within the community for all three diseases.

The centre has been built on a model developed by a remarkable social entrepreneur, Hugo Templeman, who created a successful autonomous treatment centre (ATC) in a rural area about 100k north east of Pretoria.

This centre provides high quality health care services and is sustained through international contributions and affordable payments for basic health services from the patients themselves. In addition to building the ATC, Hugo has also driven economic development through the creation of a number of local businesses that surround the clinic - everything from a bakery, to a diaper manufacturer, to a car wash. The new Bhubezi Community Health Centre will follow this same model and then be scaled up to launch a number of new health centres.

Each partner brings its own unique strengths to the party. Vir-

gin Unite (the charitable arm of the Virgin Group) and Anglo Coal (a division of Anglo American plc) provide the capital to get it started and the business expertise to ensure sustainability. PEPFAR provides funds and expertise for treatment and care, and the South African Government, the critical on the ground relationships. All of this has come together with Hugo's brilliant entrepreneurial spirit in a long term partnership that will have impact on thousands of people's lives.

This is but one example of thousands of unlikely but formidable partnerships that can be formed across the business and public sectors - taking a whole new entrepreneurial spin on fighting HIV/Aids. There is a significant amount of funds now going into the fight through PEPFAR, the World Bank, the Global Fund and other international partners. These organisations now need to open their arms to the benefits of teaming up with the private sector, while businesses now need to realise they have a responsibility to their employees and humanity as a whole to do their bit in this fight. Networks like the Global Business Coalition on HIV/Aids, TB and Malaria create essential stepping stones in this area. The key to these relationships is the identification of on the ground social entrepreneurs and partnerships with local governments to ensure that the solutions make sense for, and are owned by, the communities.

As a starting point, businesses around the world should have the right education and treatment programmes in place to ensure that none of their employees ever again gets sick or dies of Aids.

We have a real opportunity for a revolutionary shift in the way that the business, social and public sectors work together to drive sustainable solutions to global issues like HIV/Aids. The time is right for new partnerships that break the old donor/charity model. Business muscles, entrepreneurial skills and other core resources are now just as important as the golden cheque in order to drive large scale, sustainable change.

There will need to be flexibility and open minds on all sides to make these partnerships deliver on the scale needed. Yet certainly these odd couples can both benefit from the relationship - and more importantly, so will the thousands of people who are dying every single day. To win this fight, the world needs creativity, resources and energy - from all of us.

For more information, visit www.virginunite.com and www.PEPFAR.gov

U.S. President George W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief is the largest commitment ever by a single nation toward an international health initiative—a five year, \$15 billion, multifaceted approach to combating the disease around the world.