

Rural Access to Clean Water Through Cross-sector Partnership

Country: India



Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Duration: Initial project: March 2007 to September 2009

Beneficiaries: 17,986 households in 35 rural communities in 12 Area Development Programs (ADPs) and 5,165 households in four urban communities in four ADPs

Partners: World Vision India, Eureka Forbes Limited, local government, community women's self-help groups

Total project funding: US\$230,000

Funding source: Private donations

Project goal: To establish strategic partnerships in order to increase access to clean drinking water for rural communities while creating income-generating activities for women and youth

What we have tried to accomplish:

1. Improve access to clean drinking water for a number of rural and urban communities in targeted ADPs.
2. Strengthen the ability to filter impurities from water in disaster contexts by engineering technologies appropriate to relief and by empowering aid workers with skills to operate and maintain technologies.
3. Work with private sector and government partners to accomplish the project goal and develop a model for ongoing cross-sector partnership

Project Overview

A cross-sector partnership is an innovative process where organizations from different sectors come together and offer an opportunity to leverage skills, knowledge and resources to accomplish things that each partner, on its own, would not be able to achieve. The quest to find a way to filter the dangerous amounts of fluoride in the water in the village of Manikyapuram, India, exemplifies how building sustainable solutions requires the collaboration of the community, local government, non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as World Vision and corporations such as Eureka Forbes Limited.

How the partnership began

Interaction between different sectors is not a new concept. In fact, after the tsunami in December 2004, the Canadian company, Zenon Environmental Inc.,—now owned by General Electric (GE),

a global technology leader in water treatment systems,—approached World Vision Canada with an offer to donate water filters for people whose homes and clean water supplies had been destroyed. It was from this gift in kind that World Vision was introduced to Zenon's Indian partner, Eureka Forbes Limited—a renowned water filtration company with more than 25 years of experience in delivering safe drinking water to Indians.

Ultimately, more than 44,000 people affected by the tsunami benefited from the supply of safe water. The successful collaboration led to a strategic partnership in 2006 between World Vision Canada, World Vision India and Eureka Forbes, with a focus on clean water for all, improved service delivery in disaster response and making the markets work for the poor.

Meanwhile, World Vision India staff had been struggling to find a solution to

the high fluoride content in the water in Manikyapuram, a village in the Banjara Area Development Program (ADP), about 85 km from Hyderabad. Many of the 1,300 villagers had suffered for years from anemia, weak teeth, sore joints and even birth defects in their children because their drinking water had a high level of total dissolved solids (TDS), including fluoride. World Vision staff had been unable to find



Community people collect water at the plant in Manikypuram



a suitable water purification system in the market. Because people couldn't afford water transported by carriers from a nearby town, they had no choice but to drink the local water.

Taking it to the next level

World Vision approached Eureka Forbes to see if a solution could be found and a year after the initial dialogue, the two signed a formal partnering agreement. In a continued collaborative process with the community, including the local government and women's self-help groups, Eureka Forbes was able to design and build an effective water treatment plant that included using GE's membrane technology.

Although technical solutions were found, the communities had poor awareness about clean water, sanitation and hygiene. This had to be addressed through education and training before the project could proceed. Once community members saw the need for clean water, they and members of the self-help group contributed their own funds toward the cost of the building that housed the unit. In villages where funds were not readily available, communities donated their labour to contribute to establishing the water treatment plant. The panchayat (village council) donated the land and where necessary, paid the balance of the building costs.

The pilot in Manikypuram has provided the first example of an innovative new business model—not only for Eureka Forbes, but also for the women of the village. The filtration unit is now owned by the self-help group, which also supervises its operation. They generate revenue by charging the potable water to the community. One 20-litre container sells

for three rupees, compared to 10 rupees for water transported in from 'safe' areas. The partnership is now aiming to provide the purification units to another 20 villages.

Community ownership—the foundation of sustainability

Including community members in the process of finding a solution to the contaminated water in their villages has helped build ownership of the water treatment plants. Their continued involvement and valuable input in co-creating the filtration units not only helped shape the Eureka Forbes model, but also empowers them with the assurance that their opinions matter.

There is also a sense of pride in having used their own money and labour to contribute to the installation of the water treatment plants in their respective villages; the communities literally "buy-in" to the initiative.

Moreover, with the self-help groups overseeing the operation and maintenance of the plants, the potential to gain more income which can go towards funding other development activities also increases, leading the way for more groups to form.

Where the partnership is now—beyond Manikypuram

The successful establishment of the community water plant in Manikypuram spread to neighbouring villages. With it came the stories of improved health and safe drinking water that tastes good. Hence, it was no surprise that surrounding communities came forward requesting

that similar plants be established in their own villages. Through the partnership and continued involvement of community members and the local government, four more water plants were installed.

Today, there are more than 25 Eureka Forbes reverse osmosis plants and 40 ultraviolet water treatment plants in 35 rural and four urban communities.

The communities have enthusiastically embraced the water plants. At the official opening in Singarajupalli, one woman exclaimed, "I've waited 30 years for this!"

Since the partnership began, World Vision has also relied on Eureka Forbes to provide water filter units for emergencies. To date, over 10,860 units have been distributed to flood-affected areas in Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Pondicherry and Kerala. Eureka Forbes has recently developed a manually-operated filtration unit specifically for emergency use, which produces 500 litres of clean water per hour.



Machinery of water treatment plant.



Girls now have access to clean water in their own village.

Partnering challenges: developing mutual understanding and trust

The partnering journey has not always been smooth. In the early days, the ad hoc partnership between World Vision Canada and Zenon almost dissolved and was only maintained because of the perseverance of key individuals in each organization who were willing to see beyond the short term. The partners have since realized that cross-sector collaboration requires a significant investment in time and resources. “Communications,—both internal and external—requires careful attention. In the process of initiating the partnership,

the potential for mistrust is high because of the language barriers and different mindsets that dominate each sector. It takes time to understand, value and ultimately, know how to leverage each other’s capabilities towards shared goals”. The potential for mistrust is high, particularly as the partnership is initiated, because of the different language and mindset that dominates each sector. It takes time to understand, to value and ultimately to know how to leverage each other’s capabilities toward shared goals.

The benefits of cross-sector partnership

The partnership forged between Eureka Forbes and World Vision India has turned out to be successful because each partner continues to bring added value that could not have been attained on their own. The rural water initiative is also special in that all parties involved are passionate about reaching their common goal of providing clean and safe drinking water to rural communities.

Since the partnership began, World Vision India has developed a deeper understanding of how to address challenges in rural water, including the business acumen needed to provide sustainable solutions. Eureka Forbes has broadened its perspective to include the rural market. In fact, it has dedicated a whole unit and staff to work with World Vision and continue in the collaborative efforts to develop cost-efficient, innovative technology.

As a result of the partnership, World Vision Canada is building a broader cross-sector partnership strategy that includes strengthening the relationship with local governments and partnering with other NGOs, companies and financial institutions to address environmental, sanitation and hygiene issues.

World Vision’s collaboration with Zenon Environmental and Eureka Forbes shows how an ad hoc collaboration during a disaster response was transformed into a strategic partnership for sustainable development through social and technological innovation.

Results to date:

1. As a result of the project, 23,151 households in 39 communities gained access to safe water at an affordable price, thereby protecting them from waterborne diseases and safeguarding their health.
2. Thirty-nine community water plants were established and staff were trained on installation and maintenance of water purification units. The water plants are now operated, managed and maintained by water user committees, village development committees and women’s self-help groups.
3. Communities increased their understanding of the risks of using unsafe water, and learned how to implement good sanitation and hygiene practices.
4. As a result of the cross-sector partnership and community consultation, Eureka Forbes developed effective and affordable water purification units targeted at the rural poor, an entirely new market for the organization.
5. Eureka Forbes and World Vision India joined forces to develop a cause-related marketing campaign targeted at 200,000 wealthy households in two of India’s largest cities—Mumbai and Chennai. Funds raised will be used to address water-related issues in India.

Policy influence:

The government has developed a plan based on the Rural Water Initiative to increase access to clean drinking water for rural communities throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh.

What we learned from this project:

- While technical solutions are readily available, communities are not always ready to accept those solutions. Agreed processes and timelines with the local communities and government could have mitigated delays in establishing community water treatment plants.
- Building strong, strategic partnerships takes time. Effective communication is vital in maintaining successful partnerships. Broad dissemination of partnership objectives to all internal stakeholders is key to ensuring goals are being met.