

TECHNOLOGY,
INNOVATION AND
PARTNERSHIPS
**TO BUILD A
SUSTAINABLE
WORLD**



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the world we live in and challenged us in ways we could not have imagined. However, innovations and technologies have helped in a number of different circumstances, serving as an opportunity to change for the better. Increasingly, digital tools have assisted organizations in overcoming challenges within access and training across the board. As a result, public and private partnerships have emerged as an essential instrument driving technology and innovation to help society recover from the pandemic.



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In May 2021, Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week gathered experts from business and industry to explore how the post-pandemic world can drive a more sustainable recovery through technology,

innovation, and international aid, as well as vital collaborations between the public and private sectors to have a long-lasting impact on the most vulnerable of communities.

ADSW Web Series, May 2021

In the seventh episode of the **#ADSW Web Series, “International Aid and Technology Driving Sustainable Recovery”**, Clare Dalton, Head of the UAE Mission at the International Red Cross (IRC), spoke of specific challenges facing humanitarian organizations in light of the pandemic. With around 60 million people around the world still living under the control of an armed group – with no access to government or health services – access to people, the services they need, and the places humanitarian

organizations operate in, has proven challenging. Capacity reduction has also impacted many of the IRC’s responses, while mental health issues are on the rise. “Six percent of our operations are strained, and 73 percent of our operations have been moderately impacted, which means that 80 percent of the places we work in are the hardest-to-reach places,” said Dalton, who moderated the session. “We are not necessarily able to do our jobs as we should.”



Clare Dalton

Head of the UAE Mission at the International Red Cross (IRC)



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However, technology and innovation are viewed as an opportunity for improvement – for the people, for organizations and for partners. For Dalton, this means taking risks, learning, sharing, and driving improvements, all of which the pandemic has helped towards. As a result, the IRC has had to develop digital solutions to overcome these access challenges, such as capacity training, which was previously done face-to-face. Today, Virtual Reality

(VR) has brought with it the necessary sensory experience to help people learn and exchange expertise. “It might even be better than face-to-face,” she added. “We have also developed tools to help us in the work we do in restoring family links – we should have done this a long time ago, but this pandemic has helped push us to scale this up quicker, moving from paper-based tools to digital.”

She called on the need to share expertise and develop applications to help with partners working on the ground, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and remote sensing to find water points or assess damage to infrastructure. In each of these sectors,

partnership between public and private entities has proven vital, which is where technology and innovation can help the world in recovering from the pandemic.



Increasingly, organizations are focusing on sustainability and building the post pandemic world in a sustainable way. Yet the issue of access is far-reaching. Although an abundance of capital is available, it does not reach the places it needs to. And with all the technology solutions needed to solve most of the world's problems at hand, there is still a gap in terms of market leakages. "Whilst we have the technologies, they are not going where

they need to," said Sudheer Perla, Vice President of Business Development at Tabreed. "And whilst we have the capital, it is not going where it needs to. We have been trying to solve this market access problem by enabling the technologies and the capital that is available out there to meet an essential need, which is cooling in a more cost-effective and sustainable way."



Sudheer Perla

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However, technology was not the main concern for Pia Yasoku Rask, Senior Director of Safe Water at Grundfos. In a supply squeeze that she experienced in the pandemic's aftermath a year ago, she found the need for adaptation in the capabilities, the relationships, and the support towards partners. The company's owners also took it on themselves to rapidly shift their philanthropic activities towards COVID-19, including protective gear that Grundfos 3D printed in its factories, and in research and development by supporting the sequencing of the virus. Perla echoed similar thoughts on the importance of partnerships in solving difficulties. As such, Tabreed has been looking at different sets of partners, including on the urban front, where the company provides cooling services in developing

markets in Asia. "A big part of what we are doing is to ensure it is done in a more holistic way," Perla added.

He mentioned the lack of access to reliable cold chains in India, causing up to 40 percent of the total agri-produce to be wasted, and only four percent of the country to benefit from cooling. In response, Tabreed is attempting to apply a more systems-thinking approach to solving cold chains. But with not much investment capacity for farmers and no reliable access to energy in most parts of rural India, a sophisticated cold chain would prove useless. Perla spoke of a multitude of interconnected issues that must be tackled holistically to avoid worsening the status quo.



Pia Yasoku Rask

Senior Director of Safe Water at Grundfos

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Rask agreed, explaining that the issues extend beyond technology, as she mentioned business models, technology, and people. "The most vulnerable are those who do not have proper water access yet in the first place," she noted. "It is not a question of new technology; it is more about getting it there." She highlighted the importance of water and technologies in remote monitoring, operation and maintenance of systems, and

keeping track of how sustainably they are run over time. Although connectivity and digitalisation had already taken place prior to the pandemic, the most remote vulnerable communities still lack access. "This only exacerbates the path we are already on," she said. "That ties into the business models because that can also help bring down the costs of maintaining some of these water systems."

The pandemic has also propelled capability building and training on electricity and installing pumps online, in an aim to democratise access to

good quality training and lift competency levels everywhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Perla: It is more than technology, it is innovation related to access first, to business model, capital, know-how, capacity, people and mindsets. We have most of what we need already to address problems.

While it is easy to say we need to think more macro, there is an accelerated shift, because of the pandemic, towards a more holistic, equitable mindset that is coming about right now to do something different.

The more the voice becomes collective, the more independent the dialogue that gets across to make sure partnerships can be forged in a more holistic way. The rest of the ecosystem needs to then follow suit to make things happen.



Rask: It is important to prioritise the ecosystem. And people want to do that – and they can, but the biggest challenge is we have to do it together, to really transform and embrace change. It is a really big systemic mind change that has to happen, which is why it takes time. This is the biggest barrier; it has to happen globally and across sectors. The barrier is partnerships, collaboration, and trust and that just takes time.

The role of the private sector with NGOs and local authorities when we talk about vulnerable populations is an area that may still be in need of more development and recognition of each partner's role and responsibility. Then, it is about securing the traction that private-public partnerships have received these past years and keeping that momentum. There is still a gap from the pilot to scaling and getting to that type of impact.



For more information

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