Introduction

Pfizer and Mothers2Mothers (m2m) are pleased to submit a brief article and case study describing our unique partnership for your consideration for publication.

The article describes Pfizer’s pioneering skills-based corporate volunteering program and how its employee participants worked alongside Mothers2Mothers, a grassroots non-profit in South Africa, to scale up services to combat the spread of HIV from mothers to their children.

The case highlights how a steady stream of technical assistance is vital towards helping non-profits focus on their own critical organizational development needs so that they can do what they do best – provide critical services to improve health in communities.
Short-form Case Study for Media

Reducing Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV through Corporate Volunteering

“Each Pfizer Fellow who has worked with us has been an innovator, ready to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to make us the best we could be. Each one brought a unique talent, and each one became a member of our family.” -- Robin Smalley, Cofounder and International Director, mothers2mothers International

In 2003, Pfizer, Inc. pioneered a new brand of corporate philanthropy when its Social Responsibility Division launched the Global Health Fellows (GHF) Program. The Program seeks to address the operational capacity needs of organizations working to improve health systems across the globe. Through the GHF Program, Pfizer’s reach is extended to populations in need, not through cash or drug donations, but rather another valuable company resource: its employees. Fellows work with public and private partners around the globe to assist in building health systems capacity in a variety of areas. In 2005, one of those partners was a small, newly registered, grassroots organization in South Africa called mothers2mothers (m2m).

When the partnership commenced, m2m had only a handful of employees, directors who had just moved into their first office space from the back of a car, and the ambitious mission to assist in the eradication of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Without any intervention, about 40% of children born to an HIV-infected mother will contract the infection, either during pregnancy, during labor, or through breastfeeding. This translates to over 400,000 new HIV infections passed from mother to child worldwide each year. With appropriate medical intervention, that figure can be reduced to less than 5%. These figures illustrate the crucial need to prevent mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV and the importance of m2m’s mission in the fight against the devastating epidemic.

With the help of a steady stream of technical assistance provided by GHF Program Fellows, m2m was able to expand its reach of life-saving programs by addressing the operational infrastructure behind them. Since those early days of the partnership, m2m has grown into an international organization working in nine Sub-Saharan African Countries. In 2010, m2m employed nearly 1800 HIV-positive women, and reached one out of every five HIV-positive pregnant women in the world with services designed to prevent MTCT, keep mothers and their babies healthy, and empower local women to combat stigma and lead positive and fruitful lives.

Pfizer’s Unique Program

Over the six years of Pfizer’s partnership with m2m, 11 Fellows have worked with the organization in the areas of financial management, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, human resources, and communication. The GHF Program’s core strengths include:

- **Building up the essential components of a financial management system**: The GHF Program works to institute quality, transparent, and accountable financial systems, a necessity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to build and receive continued donor funding.

- **Preparing organizations to handle greater volume by minimizing risk and helping establish a strong foundation**: Often, donors choose to avoid the risk by not investing with potential business partners because they are fledgling or start-up operations.

- **Maintaining accountability and transparency**: This allows partner organizations to continue attracting donor funding and expand into foreign countries and currencies.

- **Improving human resource management and communication**: As organizations go through periods of growth and development, improvement in these areas is crucial to attracting and maintaining personnel and assuring that departments are working collectively towards a single mission.
Positive Impact Felt On Both Sides

m2m staff readily credit the Pfizer Fellows as being critical to the organization’s ability to thrive through a period of turbulent, high-profile growth and change. David Torres, m2m’s Director of External Affairs, notes the business value of the Fellow’s work: “the value of the Pfizer program is actually a big multiple of the cash cost. The Fellows help carry us through tough stretches. We don’t necessarily need someone in that position for the long term. A multiple of the value of their contribution in cash would not necessarily be worth as much to us as the actual person.”

As for Pfizer, there is no shortage of benefits there. A 2009 study conducted by Public Relations Review on corporate philanthropy and the relationship between the corporate and non-profit partners and the benefits for the partners found that corporations benefited from the partnership with “an increase in sales, publicity and exposure, and business opportunities.” Additionally, Fellows gained an improved understanding of the complexities driving global health and program implementation in resource constrained environments; in doing so, they gained skills they bring back to Pfizer. Nyasha Manyonda, a 2011 Fellow, reflects on the time she spent with m2m in the following way: “I have improved my management and technical accounting skills, and learned a great deal about the non-profit world, US Government funding, and the impact of a recession in the US on a non-profit in Africa amongst many, many other things. Personally, I feel I achieved all my goals.”

The Pfizer-m2m partnership demonstrates that, when corporations engage beyond funding and direct program support and commit to building the capacity and internal operations of NGOs, positive impact is felt by all stakeholders. Pfizer continues to work with 12 partners, forging mutually beneficial relationships across a variety of areas and providing innovative leadership to international organizations all over the world.
Full Case Study


Authors: Kristen Giambusso and Jennifer Beard

In 2005, mothers2mothers (m2m) was a small, newly registered, grassroots organization in South Africa with only a handful of employees and directors who had just moved into their first office space from the back of a car, and the ambitious mission to assist in the eradication of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Since then, m2m has grown into an international organization working in nine sub-Saharan African Countries. In 2010, m2m employed nearly 1800 HIV-positive women, and reached one out of every five HIV-positive pregnant women in the world with services designed to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT), to keep mothers and their babies healthy, and to empower local women to combat stigma and lead positive and fruitful lives.

In 2003, Pfizer Inc.’s Social Responsibility Division created its signature Global Health Fellows (GHF) Program to address the operational capacity needs of organizations working to improve health systems across the globe. Through the GHF Program, Pfizer began sending employees to work with public and private partners in order to build health systems capacity in a variety of areas.

This case study recounts m2m’s rapid growth concurrent with a steady stream of technical assistance from Pfizer Global Health Fellows over a six-year period and analyzes the relevance and value of corporate skills-based volunteering programs born from collaboration between government, non-profit and private-sector organizations working toward the common goal of expanding the reach of life-saving programs by improving the operational capacity.

Actors and Context

mothers2mothers

Without any intervention, 25-40% of children born to an HIV-infected mother will contract the infection, either during pregnancy, during labor, or through breastfeeding (1). This translates to over 400,000 new HIV infections passed from mother-to-child worldwide each year and illustrates the crucial need to prevent mother to child transmission (MTCT) in the fight against HIV/AIDS. As of 2009, women accounted for almost 48% of people living with HIV (15.9 million), and children accounted for 7% (2.5 million) (2). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) suggests that integrating PMTCT into maternal, newborn, and child health services can increase efficiencies in addressing maternal HIV and can improve women’s access to care (3). With appropriate medical intervention, the proportion of infants who contract HIV from MTCT can be reduced to 5% (1).

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for roughly 90% of all annual cases of MTCT (4). Approximately 5 - 20% of children who do not contract HIV from their mother during pregnancy or labor will contract the infection while breastfeeding (1), so PMTCT utilizes antiretroviral drugs for mother and infant, and recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months followed by mixed feeding for another six months or replacing breast milk with formula (5). m2m aims to utilize effective interventions such as these to reduce the number of babies born with HIV and help women access medical care for themselves and their families by educating, empowering, and providing psychosocial support to HIV-positive pregnant women and new mothers. Through a training cascade model, a National Trainer coaches HIV-positive mothers, who themselves have utilized PMTCT methods, and then deploys these women as Mentor Mothers in antenatal clinics, maternity wards, post-delivery clinics and hospitals (referred to below as “sites”) that offer medical treatment to women living with HIV. Mentor Mothers are paid members of the health care team and work alongside doctors and nurses to support and educate women about taking medicines and caring for themselves and their babies. At all its sites, m2m seeks to improve the uptake and outcomes of established PMTCT treatment programs.
m2m services include: regular support groups; formal and informal individual counseling; couples counseling; counseling about stigma and disclosure to family and friends; comprehensive education sessions about HIV/AIDS, PMTCT, support for personal and newborn well-being; and daily gatherings for nutritious lunches and nutrition education. The objective of this education and training is to empower women and reduce stigma associated with HIV.

In February 2005, m2m’s partnership with the Pfizer GHF Program began when a US-based Pfizer Inc. employee was deployed to Cape Town, South Africa to help the organization build a financial management system. At that time, m2m had just moved into their first Cape Town office and had 12 office-based employees, 75 peer counselors working in 24 sites, and revenue of about USD 500,000. But m2m was in urgent need of temporary technical expertise because none of its staff were equipped to upgrade the organization’s relatively basic financial management system, which comprised management of financial records and payroll. Co-founder and current International Director, Robin Smalley, who had taken on the financial responsibilities while trying to find a Finance Director, admits that at the time she was ill-equipped for the mounting finance challenges she was facing. When she received a call from USAID to see if m2m would be interested in applying for a Pfizer Fellow, she jumped at the opportunity.

Although m2m’s reach was relatively small in the early days of the Pfizer GHF partnership, word of their promising, facility-based PMTCT support program was spreading among international donors. The organization was on the verge of a substantial increase in funding, which would mean a rapid scale-up of service provision. In order to prepare for this prospective growth, m2m needed to build a significantly stronger financial management and accounting system.

Pfizer Global Health Fellows Program

Since 2003 Pfizer’s GHF Program, which is focused on global health and development, has been at the forefront of corporate volunteerism. The goal of the program is to promote public health in developing countries by strengthening service delivery and growing local capacity. The GHF Program matches Pfizer employees with global health not-for-profit organizations for assignments that last three to six months. Since its inception eight years ago, the GHF Program has placed over 270 Fellows with 40 partner organizations in 40 countries around the world (6).

In the early days of the GHF Program, Pfizer worked closely with USAID to create field placements for fellows. When USAID introduced Pfizer and its GHF Program to m2m in 2005, the first thing Pfizer asked the burgeoning organization was, “What do you need?” Pfizer’s willingness to explore possibilities with their partner organizations and to bridge the gaps identified by them is the key to successful technical assistance partnerships. A few months after the link was made, the first Pfizer Fellow arrived in Cape Town.

Capacity Strengthening: The Pfizer/m2m Partnership

Over the years, 11 Pfizer Fellows have worked with m2m in the areas of financial management, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, human resources, and communication. Seven Fellows have contributed to the financial evolution of m2m since 2005.

First Steps: Establishing the Essential Components of a Financial Management System

Instituting quality, transparent, and accountable financial systems is a necessity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to build and receive continued donor funding, but it can be one of the biggest challenges due to lack of resources, including capable personnel. As David Torres, Director of External Affairs, notes, “Organizations fall over when data capture needs a complete revamp or when your finance and accounting team gets overwhelmed.”
A financial management system is one that “routinely tracks and monitors an organization’s use of financial resources” and “supports the use of data on financial performance, which is linked to overall organizational performance.” The critical components of a financial management system are organization and personnel, budgeting, accounting and record-keeping, payroll, audit, and cash control, banking, and cash flow (7).

Torres states, “When we were at the edge, Pfizer Fellows came in and helped us to scale up...We have found that one of the biggest bottlenecks to our growth has been finding affordable, experienced, highly professional people who can get here and hit the ground running.”

The primary focus for the first four Global Health Fellows was on building capacity for financial systems and controls and assisting in establishing the basic components of the organization’s financial management system. The first Fellow was with m2m for only three months, but it was a productive period of time. The Fellow guided the organization through its first audit; helped it transition from cash to electronic payment systems; created time tracking, payroll, and petty cash systems; helped establish its first strategic financial plan; and hired and trained the Finance Director who is still with the organization. Robin Smalley describes the first Fellow’s impact after only a few weeks as, “...he had completely changed our lives. He set all those first systems in place that allowed us to pay staff, survive our first audit, and ultimately continue to access donor funding.”

Handling Greater Volume

Donors aim to support organizations that, like m2m, have developed innovative strategies for delivering essential services to disadvantaged populations. However, if an organization’s financial management system lacks a solid foundation, donors are hesitant to invest funds with said organization. Donors, much like corporations, must assess potential risks when planning to invest resources in another business. Often, donors choose to avoid the risk by not investing with potential business partners because they are fledgling or start-up operations. The Pfizer’s in-kind donation of skilled labor and high-level technical assistance through the GHF program assists organizations to minimize risk by helping establish a strong foundation for the partner organization, thereby making them more attractive to other donors.

In the face of rapid growth, it is important for NGOs to continuously evolve their financial management systems to handle the influx in funding. Financial management has been described as the “Achilles heel for rapidly scaling up civil society’s role, especially when the donor community is caught between the ‘rock’ of getting the money out there and the ‘hard place’ of timely and accurate financial reporting to keep the funds flowing.” As increasing funds are directed at civil society organizations such as NGOs, an increasing number of such organizations lack the capacity to handle the increased funding (7).

Throughout 2005, m2m began to diversify their funding sources and were becoming increasingly recognized internationally. Over the course of that year, the organization received its first U.S. government funding through the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) and Johnson & Johnson Inc. became the organization’s first significant corporate sponsor. The Wall Street Journal wrote an article on fashion designer Kenneth Cole selling Mothers Creations lanyards, a product of the m2m income generation project, in all his stores. m2m hosted a visit from First Lady Laura Bush, and later that year was invited to attend the 2005 World AIDS Day celebration at the White House. Laura Bush then invited a group of m2m mothers and the executive team back to the White House to be honored with a press conference and reception, an event that was instrumental in generating international attention for the project.

To support m2m’s increased visibility, the second Fellow continued strengthening the organization’s financial foundation in close collaboration with the new finance team. She helped m2m redesign their accounting structure to facilitate in-depth analysis and reporting of income and expenditure by donor and site as well as to fine-tune expenditure compliance and donor reporting mechanisms, which were particularly important for USAID and EGPAF. She also helped m2m complete their first EGPAF audit.
By the end of 2005, m2m had scaled-up to 53 sites across South Africa. The organization had an annual revenue of just over USD 1.5 million and 129 staff (110 field staff and 19 in the Cape Town Head Office) and were providing services to 10,000 women per month. m2m was also planning to expand its services to seven additional African countries in 2006 and to be operating in 10 countries by the end of 2007.

**Transparency and Accountability in a Global Market**

For an NGO in the midst of rapid expansion, achieving results, using funds efficiently, and demonstrating accountability and transparency become increasingly important, especially as the organization’s reach begins to traverse national borders. In most developed countries such as the U.S., the steps to achieving these standards are systematic, as organizations are regulated and accredited by both public and private entities. An international NGO’s integrity can be vulnerable due to a lack of built-in systems that exist in countries like the U.S., which enforce state and federal regulations and obligations set by the Internal Revenue Service. The lack of such regulatory requirements may make it more difficult for international NGOs to track funding and attract further donor support (8).

The third Global Health Fellow arrived at m2m in 2006 with the primary objective of making the financial functions of the organization more transparent. She further refined the system for monitoring and reporting on USAID expenditures and helped the financial team by developing a new budget model for national and international use, allowing m2m to expand to countries outside of South Africa and to operate with foreign currencies. When the fourth Pfizer Fellow arrived she found the Finance Department to be much more efficient than it had reportedly been in 2005 and early 2006, but there was still a great deal of work to be done. Policies and procedures needed to be created, refined, and documented in several areas, leading her to begin writing the organization’s first Financial Policy and Procedure Manual. By the end of that year, m2m had 71 sites and 326 staff members (including 301 field and 25 home office staff). Their revenue stream had increased by 60% to USD 2.6 million.

**Growth and Organizational Needs**

**Human Resources, Communication, and Continued Financial Management**

Between 2007 and 2008, mothers2mothers experienced an extraordinary period of growth. In 2007, the organization was awarded USD 7.2 million over three years through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the New Partnership Initiative. This support, combined with other sources of revenue, allowed m2m to expand from 322 employees to more than 1600 to 462 sites across Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zambia over an 18-month period. In January 2008, sites were opened in Kenya and Zambia and in Malawi, Rwanda, and Swaziland by the middle of the year.

By the end of 2008, m2m revenues had grown by 143% to USD 9.3 million. This large influx of revenue and the addition of several new countries and currencies further drove the need for continuous improvement of the m2m financial management system. The organization hired an experienced Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and the fifth Fellow was instrumental in facilitating this leadership transition in m2m’s finance group. The Fellow helped redesign the internal and external reporting system and developed new financial forecasting models building on 2008 actual figures. The ability to conduct financial scenario analysis enabled m2m to build safeguards in its program planning to limit the risk of having to close sites if the global financial situation were to deteriorate further.

According to David Torres, this Fellow’s work with m2m’s accounting and finance systems ensured that m2m’s new CFO could rapidly build the organization’s capacity to budget and report in detail across multiple countries and currencies: “for us to have hired someone with [his] experience would have cost us more than we could afford.”
Interdependent Philanthropy: Impact on Both Sides of the Partnership

According to a 2007 evaluation of the GHF Program and its impact on both Pfizer and its partner organizations, corporate volunteer programs have contributed to a paradigm shift from unidirectional corporate philanthropy to “interdependent philanthropy.” Interdependent philanthropy has the twofold objective of “addressing social problems while also furthering the company’s strategic interests and expanding core business” (9), making a positive difference for all stakeholders. Although evaluation of corporate philanthropy and public-private partnerships has room for development, findings from the GHF evaluations indicate that for-profit companies can improve healthcare services in poor countries while benefiting their own businesses simultaneously.

In the past decade, another term, “global corporate citizenship”, has become an increasing corporate priority. According to the World Economic Forum, corporate citizenship “expresses the conviction that companies not only must be engaged with their stakeholders but are themselves stakeholders alongside governments and civil society (10).”

Impact on m2m

m2m staff readily credit the Pfizer Fellows as being critical to the organization’s ability to thrive through a period of turbulent, high-profile growth and change. David Torres explains the strategy m2m has employed over the years of their GHF partnership as one of bringing in Fellows who could bridge temporary gaps while also helping the organization manage its growth and build long-term systems and staff capacity:

- Help us to put systems and processes in place;
- Bring a dose of real world corporate reality into our environment;
- Help identify and address roadblocks and organizational deficiencies—because there are times when, without outside help, you ‘don’t necessarily know what you don’t know.

Empowering HIV-positive mothers to help them prevent transmitting the virus to their babies remains the central focus of m2m’s growth. As Robin Smalley explains, “the bottom line is that m2m has a great program and it works, but there are a lot of other great programs out there that fizzle or implode” for lack of the right systems and human resources. From her point of view, the technical assistance provided by Pfizer Fellows is directly linked to the organization’s growth. She believes that, “each Pfizer Fellow who has worked with us has been an innovator, ready to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to make us the best we could be. Each one brought a unique talent, and each one became a member of our family.”

In terms of Pfizer’s actual investment in m2m over the last seven years, the in-kind technical assistance their employees have provided is approximately $1.5 million. (Pfizer estimates the investment per Fellow for a 6 month assignment at between $150,000 and $175,000.) However, as David Torres explains, “the value of the Pfizer program is actually a big multiple of the cash cost. The Fellows help carry us through tough stretches. We don’t necessarily need someone in that position for the long term. A multiple of the value of their contribution in cash would not necessarily be worth as much to us as the actual person.” In effect, the work the Fellows have contributed has functioned as a revenue multiplier, bolstering and enhancing m2m’s systems, making them increasingly able to turn donor funding into public health outcomes that then attract more donor funding.

Impact on Pfizer

Corporate philanthropy has existed for decades, but the concept of “interdependent philanthropy” is new. A 2009 study conducted by Public Relations Review on corporate philanthropy and the relationship between the corporate and non-profit partners and the benefits for the partners found that corporations benefited from the partnership with “an increase in sales, publicity and exposure, and business opportunities (12).” Aside from the
literature, current Fellows in the field can also provide their insider perspective on how Pfizer’s model of corporate “interdependent philanthropy” is working to benefit Pfizer as well as their partner organizations.

A Fellow currently working with m2m in Cape Town described benefits for Pfizer when she said “this program shows the human side of Pfizer and should never be cancelled. . . both parties benefit because sometimes we need to walk in the shoes of the other side before we can help them.”

From Pfizer’s perspective, the value of the partnership with m2m and other GHF partner organizations goes beyond the monetary investment, and the company has measured this value. Evaluation data reveal that Fellows gained an improved understanding of the complexities driving global health and program implementation in resource constrained environments, and in doing so they gain skills that they can bring back to Pfizer (11).

Fellows feel that their work in the GHF Program gives them enhanced skills that they then bring back to their work at Pfizer. A 2010 Fellow with m2m reflected on her experience, stating that she has “developed solid business acumen, not only surrounding finances, but around global health issues, program management, and leadership.”

The ability to tackle a large problem in a small organization over a short period of time and to see the outcomes sends Fellows back to Pfizer with a renewed sense of purpose and energy. As one Fellow reflects, “in a massive organization like Pfizer, it is often difficult to see the effects of your hard work. It was powerful to see how I was able to contribute so much in such a short period of time.”

The Fellows frequently discuss how their m2m work experience has enriched them both professionally and personally. One Fellow who works as an auditor at Pfizer believes that the Fellowship stretched her skills in new and unexpected ways:

“In this role, I did not work as an auditor but as a “financial consultant”. I was able to leverage my audit skills to benefit the organization. I have improved my management and technical accounting skills, and learned a great deal about the non-profit world, US Government funding, and the impact of a recession in the US on a non-profit in Africa amongst many, many other things. Personally, I feel I achieved all my goals.”

Conclusion

Rooted in collaboration among government, non-profit and private-sector organizations, public-private partnerships work to expand the reach of life-saving programs by addressing the operational infrastructure behind them. Through the partnership with Pfizer, m2m was able to transform itself into an NGO that deployed an innovative approach to filling a critical need and that had the capacity to safeguard and use funds effectively to achieve results.

Today, m2m continues to grow. The organization has a finance department of roughly 45 individuals and is strongly positioned to sustain its operations for the long term. Like any international NGO that is still growing, challenges continue to emerge.

The Pfizer-m2m partnership demonstrates that when corporations engage beyond funding and direct program support and commit to building the capacity and internal operations of NGOs positive impact is felt by all stakeholders. Pfizer continues to work with 13 partners, forging mutually beneficial relationships across a variety of areas and providing innovative leadership to international organizations all over the world.
Works Cited


