

Where charity begins

National event allows businesses to effect changes worldwide



AZIZ LADHA

Municipal and provincial government leaders, along with volunteers and participants at the start line of the World Partnership Walk in Stanley Park

BY COREY VAN'T HAAFF

Some say that charity begins at home, but what if you feel you cannot turn your back on people in Asia and Africa who don't have access to clean drinking water? It's a sentiment that weighed heavily on Samir Manji, president and CEO of Amica Mature Lifestyles Inc.

"I think there's a moral obligation and responsibility we have to recognize the world we live in is one where we have those who are very fortunate and blessed with a standard of living and lifestyle and environment in which they are clearly the minority related to the global population," he said. "With that comes an ethical responsibility, in my opinion."

This doesn't take away from the many other worthwhile causes people contribute to locally and nationally, he said.

"They are very important, but in contrast with the reality of millions of people – one statistic says one billion people in the world – who don't have access to clean drinking water, it may be

extreme, but to me it's a far bigger issue than most others. How can we allow it, knowing the other five billion people do have access and within that five billion, a small portion have the ability to make a difference and change the plight of people?"

It's what led him to participate in the nine-city World Partnership Walk (WPW), Canada's largest event to increase awareness and raise funds to fight global poverty. Across Canada, 40,000 people take part in the walk, held the last Sunday in May.

Now in its 25th year, the Vancouver-arm of the Walk (www.worldpartnershipwalk.com) raised \$2 million in 2008, with more than 8,500 people attending. All monies raised go directly to international development initiatives. The WPW is an event of the Aga Khan Foundation of Canada. Not a single penny raised is used to fund administrative expenses, thanks to an endowment by the Aga Khan to pay for such expenses.

Funds raised then leverage additional support from large donors such as CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency), and together, they look for sustainable solutions to the challenges of global poverty. All programs focus on four core areas: health, education, rural development and building the capacity of non-governmental organizations. Gender equity and protecting the environment are integrated into every program.

"It's not a question of just giving," Manji said. "The Aga Khan Development Network eradicates poverty by enabling people and communities to achieve self-sustainability. Using the cliché, you don't give them fish, you teach them to fish."

He said giving to this particular charity has little correlation to his company's core business, and he doesn't give for any financial gain or benefit. So why not do it anonymously?

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ALAN KAPLANAS

Samir Manji: "this is a cause we understand and support"

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"In terms of participating and having our name as participants, it's important so people know that as a Canadian-based organization, this is a cause we understand and support. Within the business community, we're active participants in various non-business causes that improve human life and the quality of living," said Manji.

For the folks at Business Objects, an SAP Company, the corporate philanthropic philosophy is a little different. Whether supporting the 24-Hour Relay, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre or the WPW, it's all employee-driven.

"[Employees] select the charities," said Patricia Bjerrisgaard, senior director, worldwide community, for Business Objects. In the case of the WPW, the charity was invited to come speak to Business Objects staff at a coffee session and talk about the work done by the Aga Khan Foundation of Canada.

"We became familiar with them," said Bjerrisgaard. "There were no administration fees; it supported developing countries; it helped people take charge of their own lives; it was sustainable. There was a lot of appeal there. Our employees



Dave Macfarlane, chief sales officer for Hub International Insurance Brokers, (back row, third from right) with walk volunteers.

act locally but think globally."

The company matches funds raised by employees but also supports the charity by becoming a communication vehicle, offering staff the opportunity to learn about the charity and using an e-mail awareness strategy.

"One of our missions is to create citizens of philanthropy," she said. "Whether they volunteer or give, we consider it a win."

"If you have a great teacher, you get great results. At that point, I knew we were making a difference"

-Dave Macfarlane, chief sales officer, Hub International Insurance Brokers

Sometimes, people do both. Dave Macfarlane, chief sales officer for Hub International Insurance Brokers, Canada's largest property and casualty insurance broker, wanted to do more than just give money and participate in the World Partnership Walk. He wanted to see exactly what the money was doing abroad.

At his own expense, Macfarlane, along with eight other Canadians each

footing their own bills, went to East Africa to see how the money raised in Canada was being spent. Every day, they visited three or four projects in Nairobi, coastal Kenya and Tanzania. What he saw opened his eyes.

"There was a group of 27 women using micro-financing – they were a most powerful group," he said. Operating on their third loan (the first was for \$50, the second for \$75), the women were using

the \$125 to cut, boil, bag and sell cassava chips to generate revenue for the community, which then used the money to pay for a preschool and a primary school teacher.

In that community, Macfarlane said, the women were the only ones doing teacher training.

"If you have a great teacher, you get great results," he said. "At that point, I knew we were making a difference." ■