

FT SPECIAL REPORTS RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

Humanitarian crisis spurs innovation

Development Awards shortlist highlights examples from reactions to Ebola to supporting struggling smallholders, writes Sarah Murray

When Ebola broke out in west Africa, ArcelorMittal, with mines in Liberia, moved swiftly to protect its operations. However, the company soon decided that it needed to do more. "We realised protecting ourselves wouldn't be enough," says Alan Knight, the company's general manager for corporate responsibility. ArcelorMittal had to join forces with others to help stop Ebola.

So Mr Knight gathered a group of companies in London for a "coffee morning" that turned into several intense hours. "We recognised there was lots we could learn from each other," he says.

The meeting sparked the creation of the Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group (EPSMG), through which companies took part in regular conference calls to share information about the spread of the disease and ways of avoiding infections in corporate facilities.

"We also developed an informal advocacy role," says Mr Knight. For example, the group wrote to the World Health Organisation when it was criticised for a slow response. While it was not the only group to apply pressure, this was a rare example of the private sector approaching the WHO in an organised way.

At its peak, EPSMG had more than 100 companies and almost 50 public sector groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is an example of how companies are engaging in development, whether responding to pandemics or supporting smallholders. This is increasingly regarded not only as a responsibility to communities in which they operate but also as a means of shoring up business operations.

The role of companies investing in



Companies with a conscience

The Responsible Business Awards recognise companies' work to improve their social and environmental impact.

This year there were 297 eligible entries to the awards run by Business in the Community, with 103 shortlisted.

"These firms aren't simply considering how to spend their money on good causes," says Stephen Howard, BITC chief executive. "They are thinking about how they make their money and how their core business operations can both improve society and drive commercial advantage."

Areas covered include environmental sustainability, education, skills building, supporting rural communities, global development, wellbeing at work and diversity.

This week is BITC's Responsible Business Week, aimed at highlighting such issues and sharing best practice.

The awards shortlist is at ft.com/responsible-business

communities has long been a focus of the Responsible Business Awards, run by Business in the Community (BITC), the UK charity that today announces its shortlist (see box, left). Among those named are companies working to address subjects ranging from resource scarcity to climate change and workforce diversity.

However, the largest group of entries in 2015 was from those focused on global development and disaster relief. In these categories, collaboration is a strong theme, reflecting a growing recognition that there are areas in which companies do not always need to compete.

"As we understand the complexity of these sustainability challenges, we're realising the need to collaborate because we share these supply lines," says Sally Uren, chief executive of Forum for the Future, a sustainable development nonprofit organisation.

Recovery: pupils play by a school in Monrovia, now reopened after serving as an Ebola centre

Getty

'We realised protecting ourselves wouldn't be enough'

Often such collaboration is across sectors. GSK, the pharmaceuticals group, and Save the Children, the NGO, are combining efforts to tackle some causes of child mortality.

For other companies, the focus is on developing long-term sustainability of markets. This is the case for Cargill, the agricultural trader, which relies on smallholders for its cocoa. Ageing populations and young people moving to cities pose a threat to supply stability. The company's response in Ivory Coast is the Cargill Coop Academy, which increases access to business training for more than 300 cocoa co-operative leaders.

"If we can ensure farmers make a decent income from growing cocoa, that will not only support communities, it will also sustain our supply and our business," says Taco Terheijden, Cargill's director of cocoa sustainability.

Marks and Spencer, the retailer, also believes education can strengthen supply chains. In countries including Kenya and South Africa, its three-day Emerging Leaders training course uses everything from team projects to physical exercises to show participants how to think as leaders and recognise that they have the power to change things, explains Louise Nicholls, head of responsible sourcing for food.

Workers feel more confident and able to make change, which she says has led to productivity gains of up to 11 per cent in M&S's supplier companies and increased staff retention, resulting in up to 50 per cent savings on recruitment costs. "This is about us having a really resilient supply chain that sets us up for the future," says Ms Nicholls.

In fact, many of the companies on the awards shortlist have found that supporting communities also helps strengthen their business, particularly in developing countries.

"There's definitely a breed of pioneering businesses beginning to look way beyond the boundaries of their [companies] and understanding these more complex sustainability challenges," says Ms Uren. "And they are finding ways of tackling those challenges in a way that drives value to the business."

We need to talk about mental health

OPINION

Michael Skapinker



The most striking result that emerges from surveys of mental health at work is the awkwardness. For all the progress made in taking the stigma out of mental health problems, a large number of people just do not want to talk about it.

A survey last year for Time to Change, a programme run by the charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, found that 28 per cent of people in England would feel uncomfortable asking someone close to them about their mental health problems. Why? Because it would make the other person feel uncomfortable, they would not know what to say or because they would not feel able to help.

The same embarrassment surrounds mental health at work, one focus of the "wellbeing" category of the Responsible Business Awards. In another survey conducted for Mind by YouGov in 2014, 31 per cent said they would not feel able to talk to their manager if diagnosed with a mental health problem. Some 33 per cent said that if they told their boss that they were stressed at work, they felt their ability to do the job would be questioned.

This awkwardness is a serious difficulty. The most important task for any manager is to ensure that staff can do their jobs. While some people with mental health problems say that work keeps them going, carrying on working is not a long-term solution. People suffering in silence are not helping themselves and are not, over time, going

31% would not feel able to talk to their manager if they had a mental health problem

33% believe their boss would question their ability if they admitted feeling stressed

Eco-café that makes your coffee greener

Environment

An energy-efficient Costa 'pod' and smart guest rooms are among the contenders, reports **Brian Groom**

Whitbread, the hospitality company, is to reduce its energy consumption with two building projects: a Costa Coffee "Eco-Pod" concept and a new type of high-tech city hotel, the Hub brand from Premier Inn.

The ventures have led to Whitbread being shortlisted in the Asda Environmental Leadership category of the Responsible Business Awards. Other shortlisted companies include the banking group HSBC, waste company Veolia, WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff, EDF Energy and Affinity Water.

The Eco-Pod, a coffee shop that opened last year at Wrekin Retail Park in Telford, Shropshire, features solar panels that help to power the building, passive ventilation that naturally manages



Fresh approach: Whitbread's Eco-Pod coffee shop in Telford, Shropshire

the internal temperature and a rainwater harvesting system.

Energy use at the Eco-Pod is 52 per cent below similar-sized Costa coffee shops elsewhere. It is claimed to be the UK's first "zero energy" coffee shop in the sense that it produces more energy than it needs for its lighting, heating and ventilation. Further energy is required, though, by the coffee machines and dishwashers.

The key to the project was an "open book" collaboration between Costa and landlord Hammerson on the costs and benefits of a constructing a high-performance building. Hammerson was able to recoup the extra building costs because Costa agreed to a higher rent based on expected energy cost savings.

Costa is now planning four similar coffee shops in retail parks and at drive-through units.

The launch of the Hub brand gave Premier Inn the opportunity to incorporate environmental technologies such as LED lighting, grey water recycling

(from sources excluding toilets) and air-source heat pumps all under one roof.

Customers can use an app on smart phones to book, check in to the hotel and control lighting and temperature. "Presence detection" in guests' rooms is used to switch systems on when they enter. The buildings have a biodiverse green roof, with wildflowers, and renewable-certified energy supplied from the grid.

Hub hotels have opened in three London locations and one in Edinburgh, with plans for 10 more across the two cities. Hub claims 25 per cent lower build and operating costs compared with other central London Premier Inn hotels. It has achieved 40 per cent less water usage and 30 per cent less energy usage than building regulations require.

Alison Brittain, Whitbread chief executive, says: "Whitbread's challenge is to ensure that, as we grow, we manage our carbon footprint, minimising our energy usage, water consumption and production of waste."

Remodelling roles helps maintain traditional skills

Older employees

Adjusting job descriptions has helped a pottery company to retain valued workers, says **Brian Groom**

For some industries with ageing workforces, such as ceramics, it is vital to hold on to those with traditional skills. Nowhere does this matter more than in Stoke-on-Trent's pottery industry, where Steelite International is in the forefront of the sector's recent revival.

Steelite, which makes tableware for the hospitality industry, is shortlisted in the Championing an Ageing Workforce category of the Responsible Business Awards. Other shortlisted companies include Barclays Bank, which has revamped its apprenticeship schemes to appeal to older workers.

At Steelite, policies include flexible working and phased retirement, continuous training, removal of upper age limits from apprenticeships and graduate programmes and sometimes redeployment to less physically arduous roles.

"These are the demographics that a lot of companies are dealing with today,"

says Louise Griffin, group head of human resources. "We haven't got the same number of young people coming up. There are going to be more people working for longer and it's recognising what skills you need and then matching that, rather than thinking about the age of the person."

Of Steelite's 876 UK employees, 360 are aged 50 or over. Its eldest worker is 69 years and its youngest 17. Its managers believe that the mix of ages enables older workers to train apprentices and pass on knowledge that is needed for the company's future. Steelite says older workers are less likely to change jobs than younger colleagues and often have a stronger commitment to the company.

Most jobs are manual, including shovelling clay, sponging, pot-throwing or operating kilns. In some cases, help is at hand to allow people to do their jobs for longer, such as use of electric trucks. One former shop floor worker is now a health and safety auditor while another is team leader of the cleaners.



Responsible Business Awards See the full list of 103 companies shortlisted this year, plus further coverage of the awards at ft.com/responsible-business

to be able to deliver their best work.

Managers who have not thought about mental health are not doing their jobs either. Usually, their failure to deal with employees' mental health problems is not because they are uncaring. It is because no one has trained them how to deal with the issue and they too can feel uncomfortable.

The responsibility for ensuring a proper approach to mental health starts at the top, but senior executives often also need help in knowing what to do. An alert human resources department can be a great help. So can outside agencies that can explain what mental health is, how illnesses present themselves and how best to help employees find the best treatment.

For managers going about their everyday work, there are some helpful approaches. It is important to make time to talk to team members individually. After talking about their work, it is worth asking open questions such as "How are things otherwise with you?" And then just waiting.

If people talk about stress, anxiety or mental health issues, remember that you are not expected to have the answers. You can listen and ask open questions. If the problems exposed are difficult or unfamiliar, there is nothing wrong with saying, "Look, I don't know much about this, but I am going to find out what we can do to help" and then asking outside for advice.

You are not alone. Other organisations deal with similar problems and you can draw on their experiences to help tackle yours.

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