

Accelerating Private Sector Engagement

CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT



● ● ● A series on private sector approaches in family planning



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Cover photo: MTV Staying Alive Foundation's Nishedh launch, September 2019

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Summary



Since 2015, the USAID–funded Sustaining Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) Plus project has sought to harness the full potential of the private sector to improve health outcomes, including by working with corporate actors on family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programming. The project has engaged corporates in the health industry and in other industries. This learning brief will share lessons learned and practical tips from SHOPS Plus’s experience engaging non–health corporates in particular. Although there are ample opportunities to engage corporates of all sizes, the brief will focus on the project’s partnerships with multinational corporations (MNCs), with the aim of helping implementers leverage MNCs’ brand recognition and geographic reach to strengthen the reach and impact of FP/RH programming.

Practical tips

Initiation, partner selection, and understanding partners

- 1 Be clear about the problem you want to solve.** There are many MNCs in a wide range of industries that USAID and implementers could engage. To strategically invest time and resources, it can be useful to identify gaps in programming.
- 2 Corporate engagement is a process, and local context and timing are everything.** Corporate engagement takes time and patience. This is particularly true when partners operate in different sectors, industries, and even geographies—it takes time to learn about and understand each other’s interests, build trust, align on shared objectives, design an activity to do together, and secure necessary buy–in and approval from internal stakeholders on all sides.
- 3 Cast a wide net in the corporate landscape, and be willing to walk away.** USAID staff and implementers may find it daunting or overwhelming to consider the thousands of non–health MNCs there are internationally. It is important to assess this landscape

strategically in order to invest time and energy wisely, but do not do so much analysis that the effort is wasted if initial conversations with some corporates do not lead to collaboration on specific activities.

- 4 Do research to understand the corporate stakeholders involved and develop a business case that attracts the main contacts and helps them gain stakeholder buy-in.** A detailed understanding of the potential corporate partner and its stakeholders is essential to developing an effective business case that will help build corporate buy-in. Developing a business case is not just important to help align with the main corporate contact; it also helps that contact, whether an individual or team, share the partnership opportunity with their key stakeholders, get buy-in from their corporate leaders, and find additional resources if needed.
- 5 Anticipate and address corporate hesitance related to FP/RH.** Social and cultural norms may affect corporate engagement on FP/RH, just as they do a development organization's FP/RH programming. Some companies may be wary of making FP/RH the primary or explicit focus of their engagement with a development organization because of social and cultural sensitivities among customers and other stakeholders.

Design and implementation

- 6 Build trust and replicate success by leveraging existing partnerships and employing test-and-learn approaches.** Corporate engagement and partnership development depends on building trust between partners, and leveraging or generating evidence of success can help in that process.
- 7 Ensure adequate resources to manage partnerships: planning, inclusive outreach, processes for decision making, consistent communications.** Corporate engagement works best when there is a designated point of contact at both the development organization and MNC, and the ability to clearly communicate and manage expectations. Similar to other types of partnerships, development professionals should be prepared to invest resources in corporate engagement and in partnership development in order for these to succeed.
- 8 Identify and nurture internal champions within all partners.** Document progress and lessons learned and anticipate turnover. Engagements start through personal relationships, which are essential to success and scale. Changes in personnel can significantly disrupt engagements, particularly during the early phases.
- 9 Consider roles as a third-party convener, broker, connector, and technical expert.** USAID missions and implementers are well-positioned to play these roles—facilitating new relationships across multiple private (and sometimes public) sector stakeholders, verifying the credibility of partners and ideas, and providing technical expertise in FP and other health priorities.

Corporate Engagement



Per the USAID Private Sector Engagement Policy, PSE is a strategic approach to planning and programming through which a development organization or program consults, strategizes, collaborates, and/or implements with private sector actors for greater scale, sustainability, or effectiveness of development outcomes.¹ The private sector is large and diverse—it includes for-profit businesses of all sizes and industries, corporate foundations, industry associations, as well as for-profit approaches such as investment funds and social enterprises. Corporate engagement is a subset of PSE that specifically focuses on engaging “corporate actors,” which include for-profit commercial entities and their affiliated foundations (see Figure 1).

Mutually beneficial engagement can leverage all parties’ respective competencies and resources to achieve an agreed-upon goal that supports development or humanitarian outcomes. Although such partnerships focus on advancing social and/or environmental goals, they tend to be most successful when all partners, including the private sector actors, see how they directly benefit from the partnership. Because PSE can include a broad range of types of relationships and private sector organizations, it is important to tailor PSE approaches to specific contexts and actors. Thus, it is important to understand MNCs’ specific interests, and the barriers they face, to successfully engage with them.

Figure 1. Key definitions related to corporate engagement



Corporate actors include:

- For-profit commercial entities (i.e., “corporations”) of all sizes, operating in any geography or industry
- Foundations created by and affiliated with corporations, often operating as separate legal entities with registered nonprofit status and explicit social and/or environmental goals



Multinational corporation:

- A type of corporation that is registered and operates in more than one country



Corporate engagement:

- A strategic approach to planning and programming through which a development organization or program consults, strategizes, collaborates, and/or implements with corporate actors for greater scale, sustainability, or effectiveness of development outcomes

¹ Adapted from USAID PSE Policy (USAID 2018).

The SHOPS Plus project's corporate engagement took many shapes and forms depending on country context, local needs, and the size and focus of the corporate actors involved. The project engaged a wide range of both health and non-health companies, including those focused on digital technology, telecommunications, media, and consumer goods. Examples of the project's partnerships with non-health MNCs include piloting a community health facility model with a global tea brand and its local supplier in Kenya, partnering with a media company's foundation to run an information campaign targeting youth in India, and working with mobile operators in Nigeria and Haiti to disseminate FP information to mobile phone users. SHOPS Plus also conducted workplace interventions (WPIs) with national and multinational firms to improve worker awareness and knowledge of FP.

There are three common threads that led to the project's successful engagement with MNCs, threads that are also common in PSE more broadly:

- It is important for development professionals initiating engagement with MNCs to be clear about their development objectives while simultaneously building a strong understanding of the corporate actor's priorities. This enables development professionals to better identify shared interests that can form the basis of mutually beneficial collaboration.
- Partnerships require frequent and purposeful dialogue that brings stakeholders together to converse, share needs and interests, break down barriers, and resolve bottlenecks.
- Engagement is a process and can be valuable even if it does not result in a formal partnership with implemented activities—not all engagement will turn into a formal agreement that results in corporate action or resource allocation, and not all activities or development objectives require a corporate partner.

Why engage MNCs?

Although there are opportunities and potential benefits to engaging corporates of all sizes to improve health outcomes, MNCs offer both opportunities to leverage their brand recognition as well as geographic reach to expand or strengthen health programming. Potential high-level benefits that corporates—particularly MNCs—can bring to development efforts in FP/RH include both financial and non-financial contributions:

- Complementary expertise in specific technical areas such as supply chain, demand creation, and/or product design
- Ability to reach national, regional, and even global scale
- Access to new technologies and commercial best practices
- Resource mobilization
- Access to networks
- Access to information and data

Why would MNCs engage?

MNCs have increasingly recognized that environmental, social, and governance issues affect their businesses—and many have sought to engage donors, NGOs, and other development organizations to help address these issues. Development challenges can increase companies' costs, reduce their profits, and affect the productivity of their supply chain and workers. Social and environmental issues can also represent large market opportunities, such as by attracting consumers with a product that was ethically and sustainably made or selling a product that addresses the unmet needs of a particular customer segment.

To attract employees, customers, investors, and other stakeholders, MNCs are increasingly expected to have a positive societal and environmental impact. Many MNCs frame this impact around the UN Sustainable Development Goals and/or the UN Global Compact, so referencing these frameworks as well as each MNC's purpose and objectives can be helpful when engaging them.

To compete successfully, MNCs must build and maintain strong supply chains and distribution channels across multiple countries. Social and environmental problems can affect their access to reliable, good-quality, and/or low-cost inputs as well as their ability to distribute products or deliver services to their customers. Given MNCs' geographic coverage, the problems they face are especially diverse and complex. In addition, MNCs seek to expand their reach among customers around the world. This includes targeting customers living in countries where USAID operates, as well as global customers who increasingly make purchasing decisions influenced by a brand's social and environmental impact.

Figure 2 outlines examples of specific interests or incentives for MNCs to engage development organizations.

Figure 2. Examples of key interests or incentives for MNCs to engage development organizations:



- Strengthen market penetration
- Develop or enter new market or customer segment
- Develop or test a new product
- Strengthen relationships with customers or suppliers
- Access inputs that are higher in quality, lower in cost, or more consistently supplied
- Improve workforce productivity and health
- Improve supply chain productivity and/or inclusivity
- Attract and retain employees
- Reduce risk and/or foster a stable business environment
- Strengthen “brand equity” or “corporate goodwill”
- Meet corporate commitments to social and/or environmental goals

When it comes to FP/RH specifically, it can be challenging for donors and implementing partners to understand why MNCs outside the health industry would be interested in engaging and how to initiate engagement. There are several trends that FP/RH champions can leverage as opportunities to initiate and inform initial conversations. For example:

- MNCs increasingly care about the health and well-being of their employees, recognizing that doing so can improve productivity, increase worker retention, and attract talent.
- MNCs are increasingly focused on demonstrating that they help improve the health and well-being of the people in or affected by their supply chains, be they farmers, artisans, workers, or community members.
- MNCs recognize that emerging and developing countries have significant potential for customer growth and that many of these countries have large and growing populations of youth.
- The empowerment of women and girls has attracted increasing levels of corporate attention, with many companies expressing alignment with or commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 5, which focuses on gender equality.
- Digital and social media channels are critical for companies to engage with consumers and other stakeholders, and companies are eager to share their positive social and environmental impact online. However, many MNCs are also wary of communicating impact that is not verified or credible, as today’s information-savvy consumers increasingly research corporate claims— getting caught making false or misleading statements is a reputational risk.

It can also be challenging for donors and implementers to identify which non-health MNCs might be interested in engaging on FP/RH. To start, consideration should focus on corporations whose target customers or employees are also key population segments for FP and/or RH, as well as corporations whose supply chains include many such population segments (e.g., supply chains with many women workers). There may be MNCs already focused on addressing FP/RH but that have framed the topic in a way that aligns with their general interest in health or well-being, or with a related topic (e.g., women’s empowerment, youth development).

Corporate interest in people as customers, in their workforce, and in their supply chains are all opportunities for possible engagement. Examples of broad categories of companies that could be interested in engaging on FP/RH include:

- Companies that want to improve customer satisfaction by providing trustworthy and relevant information, particularly when those customers are key segments such as youth, who are often eager to learn about FP/RH topics but may lack access to information tailored to them
- Companies that want to improve the health of the workers in their supply chain in order to improve productivity, strengthen relationships with suppliers, meet global commitments around worker well-being, or position a product or brand as being more socially conscious
- Companies committed to empowering or otherwise supporting the well-being of their own workforce

Examples: SHOPS Plus FP/RH partnerships with non-health MNCs

Category of corporate interests	Partnership example from SHOPS Plus
Expand and strengthen the relationship with customers, especially youth	SHOPS Plus partnered with the MTV Staying Alive Foundation (SAF) on a radio campaign to promote sexual and reproductive health (SRH) among youth in India. The campaign reached 2 million youth across six cities and generated cost share of approximately US\$1 million.
Improve the health of workers in the supply chain to meet global commitments around worker well-being and strengthen the brand’s socially conscious positioning	SHOPS Plus facilitated a partnership between Twinings, a global tea brand; Eastern Produce Kenya (EPK), one of Twinings’s tea suppliers in Kenya; the Nandi County government; and a local community group. In this pilot initiative, partners collaborated to expand access to health products and services, including voluntary FP/RH for women and their families in a tea-growing community, with 6,155 total patient interactions from October 2020 through August 2021.
Support the health and well-being of the company’s workforce	SHOPS Plus partnered with national and multinational firms on WPIs in India to improve young workers’ knowledge of FP/RH and access to modern contraceptives. From April 2019 to September 2020, WPIs reached 5,818 workers in face-to-face sessions and generated over 8,000 registrations on a digital application providing easy access to information and products.

There are companies—both within and outside the health industry—that have made public commitments to FP specifically and are particularly open to partnerships. Around the FP2020 Summit, 18 corporations and affiliated corporate foundations made public commitments, including five non-health corporations, a corporate foundation whose affiliated corporation is not in the health industry, and two corporate foundations that are affiliated with major multi-industry conglomerates. (See table below.) Corporate actors will likely make public commitments around the FP2030 Summit as well—summit organizers have published a brief highlighting opportunities to engage different types of private sector actors around [FP2030](#).

FP2020 Summit: MNC commitment makers from outside the health industry

Lindex	Swedish MNC in fashion retail
NST	Portuguese MNC in apparel manufacturing
Spark Minda	Indian MNC in automotive component manufacturing
Twinings	British MNC in the beverage industry, particularly tea
Vodafone	British MNC in telecommunications
MTV SAF	Foundation affiliated with MTV, an American international media entertainment firm owned by the American MNC ViacomCBS
Chaudhary Foundation	Foundation affiliated with the Chaudhary Group, a Nepalese MNC operating in financial services, consumer goods, hospitality, electronics, and more
Tata Trusts	Philanthropic trust affiliated with the Tata group, an Indian MNC operating in information technology, telecommunications, manufacturing, retail, tourism, and more

Source: www.familyplanning2020.org

Four peer health educators, most of them smallholder tea farmers, with the HERhealth program that Twinings funded in Gacharage, Kenya. SHOPS Plus interviewed them to learn what they valued in terms of health care services.

Photo: Lauren Rosapep

PROVINCE ON 14TH NOVEMBER 1972.



Getting from the why to the how

Even if a development organization identifies potential areas that could benefit from MNC partnerships, it may be challenging to determine how to engage MNCs that do not have FP/RH products or services in their core business offering. What topics are such corporates interested in? How to engage them? What might they bring to the table? What might they contribute to FP outcomes?

At a high level, the process of answering these questions and exploring potential partnership opportunities looks a lot like a general approach to corporate engagement and partnerships. (See Figure 3, which applies to corporates of all sizes, including MNCs.) However, in FP/RH, it may be especially important to cast a wide net and spend time learning about a corporate actor’s interests and goals—it may not be as clear where their interests align with development objectives. Given the sensitive nature of FP/RH in many contexts, there may even be hesitancy or resistance. This exploratory learning process is iterative and takes time. It does not always lead to a partnership, but what you learn from exploring potential opportunities with one company can inform conversations with other potential partners. The “Practical Tips” section further below discusses these and other lessons from SHOPS Plus’s experience developing partnerships focused on FP/RH with MNCs outside the health industry.

Figure 3. High-level steps to corporate engagement

The specifics that emerge from the high-level steps below will differ depending on the development objectives, the interests of the corporates involved, and other context-specific conditions.



Determine the programming objectives and identify which ones could benefit from corporate engagement



Analyze the corporate landscape to identify industries, types of corporations, and potential corporate actors who could have relevant interests and incentives



Explore possible shared interests and goals (this will be an iterative process)



Identify what each stakeholder (the corporation as well as your own organization) would gain from engagement, as well as the positive social impacts



Identify what each stakeholder would contribute to engagement, which may include financial or non-financial resources



Align on mutually beneficial objectives



If the stakeholders decide to establish a formal partnership:

- Develop a shared theory of change and vision
- Co-design activities
- Develop clear roles and responsibilities
- Implement activities
- Measure and communicate results
- Scale or expand activities, if appropriate

Practical Tips



SHOPS Plus’s experience with corporate engagement highlights the importance of context-specific approaches that are tailored to local needs and the specific corporate actors involved. However, common themes across countries and corporate partners can help inform successful approaches elsewhere. USAID staff and implementers may consider the following practical tips as they develop their corporate engagement strategies for FP/RH programs, particularly when it comes to engaging MNCs. While some of these tips particularly apply to MNCs, many of the lessons also apply to PSE more broadly.

- 1. Be clear about the problem that you want to solve.** There are many MNCs in a wide range of industries that USAID and implementers could engage. To strategically invest time and resources, it can be useful to identify gaps in programming. When developing its corporate engagement strategy in 2016, SHOPS Plus identified key gaps that were not being fully addressed by FP partnerships at the time (see Figure 4). Additional areas development professionals could consider include FP/RH awareness and behavior change, as well as access to primary health care and other health products and services.

Figure 4. FP/RH gaps to explore for corporate engagement



The project used the list of identified gaps to target potential corporate partners by conducting research on which types of corporates might be interested in and well positioned to engage on these topics. SHOPS Plus then analyzed country-level needs and opportunities to further prioritize who and how to engage.

As described further below, timing and windows of opportunity can be critical. For example, SHOPS Plus connected with corporates that had made commitments around the FP2020 Summit and helped several of them work toward their commitments through specific partnerships. To make initial exploratory conversations with corporates more productive, it is important for development professionals to have a good understanding of their priorities—while being open to exploring new ideas.

- 2. Recognize that corporate engagement is a process, and local context and timing are everything.** Corporate engagement takes time and patience. This is particularly true when partners operate in different sectors, industries, and even geographies—it takes time to learn about and understand each other’s interests, build trust, align on shared objectives, design an activity to do together, and secure necessary buy-in and approval from internal stakeholders on all sides. It is therefore important that development professionals focus on corporate engagement as an opportunity to learn about the private sector, build relationships and networks, and explore the potential for collaboration and partnership. Sometimes, engaging a particular company will lead to a formal partnership in the near term. Sometimes it will not, but it could open communications channels that could lead to a partnership later on or that open introductions to other potential partners. At the very least, exploratory conversations, even ones that “go nowhere,” can help inform how you engage other corporate actors in the future.

In this process, local context and timing make an enormous difference. If the timing is not right, even a model that has worked well in several places may not take off in a new one, even when everything else seems like an appropriate fit. Moreover, conditions may change over time and make the model well suited to the new context. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to quickly determine that local context is not a good fit or that timing is not right, so resources and time may be invested exploring an option that does not work out in the end. However, there are flags to look out for and lessons you can take into future engagements. SHOPS Plus’s experience engaging Digicel in Haiti is a good example.

Learning from experience

SHOPS Plus leveraged its ongoing relationship with Viamo, an international social enterprise specialized in mobile engagement and information, to approach a telecommunications MNC in Haiti together, but in the end the parties did not reach an agreement on how to collaborate.

The project had successfully collaborated several times with Viamo in other countries. Viamo partners with mobile network operators (MNOs) to offer toll-free audio and SMS information to mobile phone subscribers. In one model, Viamo offers MNOs exclusive arrangements to provide their subscribers with access to health and other information, which is a customer benefit that could give an MNO an edge over its competitors. Viamo also uses the service to gather customer insights that MNOs find valuable, such as usage data.

SHOPS Plus and Viamo approached Digicel, a multinational MNO operating in Haiti, with an offer to uniquely communicate information to subscribers and gather client insights at the same time. Viamo's model had been successful in mobile markets in which MNOs are competing for clients. In contrast, Haiti's market is dominated by Digicel, which captures about 90 percent of the market. Given the company's existing dominance, the local market landscape did not give Digicel a sense of urgency or clear return on investment. Also, the firm was going through a major transition at the time, with an interim Chief Executive Officer likely leaving the company. After about one year of attempts at engagement, there was no agreement between SHOPS Plus, Viamo, and Digicel on a way to collaborate, though SHOPS Plus did contract Digicel as a vendor to deliver a mobile SMS campaign and paid phone lines.

3. **Cast a wide net in the corporate landscape, and be willing to walk away.**

USAID staff and implementers may find it daunting or overwhelming to consider the thousands of non-health MNCs there are internationally. It is important to assess this landscape strategically in order to invest time and energy wisely, but do not do so much analysis that the effort is wasted if initial conversations with some corporates do not lead to collaboration on specific activities. Be informed and strategic in your outreach, but be prepared to cast a wide net, walk away if needed, and learn from the experience—do not get overly vested in sunk costs. Walking away from an initially promising relationship that turns out to be not a good fit enables you to pursue more fruitful relationships and give them the time and effort they need. Walking away does not mean failure—the effort could have been the wrong activity or at the wrong time. Again, initial exploration may inform future conversations or open doors to other potential partners.

SHOPS Plus invested in a strategic landscape assessment when developing its corporate engagement strategy in 2016. The project identified gaps in FP programming that could benefit from the additional support that new partnerships could offer, and then identified industries and types of corporate actors that appeared to have interests and incentives that would align with the project's objectives.

SHOPS Plus considered:

- Which industries and types of companies are operating in our priority geographies, whether through their supply chain or by targeting customers there?
- What roles do they play in the market?
- What interests and incentives does each type of company have?
- How might those interests change over time or in different geographies?
- How and where might they align with what USAID is trying to achieve?
- Are there any types of partnerships or joint activities that we think could leverage the potential shared interests we have identified?

The findings and strategic recommendations from this analysis helped inform SHOPS Plus's corporate engagement strategy, identified several partnership models that were later adopted, and identified a preliminary list of specific companies with which to begin initial conversations.

Learning from experience

SHOPS Plus’s work in India is an example of being prepared to engage many corporates, while also having the confidence and conviction to walk away from relationships in order to focus resources on those with the greatest alignment and potential for impact. The project approached dozens of corporates in health and non-health industries to explore the potential for collaboration, then spent several months following up with those that had expressed a strong interest in collaborating and aligned with project goals. Realizing that what mattered most was having partnerships with the greatest potential for significant and sustained impact—not necessarily developing a large number of partnerships—the project narrowed the pool further by prioritizing partnerships with this potential. SHOPS Plus established criteria (summarized in Figure 5) to analyze whether corporates were aligned with SHOPS Plus requirements, such as being focused on low-income urban youth, interested in category promotion, and willing to invest in demand-generation activities. This helped the project decide to stop pursuing engagement with certain corporates. The project also prioritized corporates that might be able to continue activities and contribution after the period of formation and testing (see the project’s experience with WPIs in Annex B).

Figure 5. SHOPS Plus India’s criteria for choosing potential partners



- **Potential impact**—corporates’ interests must align with project goals.
- **Potential financial or in-kind contribution**—the value of corporates’ potential contribution must justify the resources the project must invest in partnership development.
- **Complementary skills**—partners’ expertise should add to and not duplicate or counter the project’s skills.
- **Time and management effort**—the benefits that corporates bring must be balanced with the time/effort involved in managing the partners and ensuring high-quality outcomes.
- **Good for business**—corporates need to see a value or benefit they will gain from the partnership in order to be interested and committed.

- 4. Do research to understand the corporate stakeholders involved and develop a business case that attracts the main contacts and helps them gain stakeholder buy-in.** A detailed understanding of the potential corporate partner and its stakeholders is essential to developing an effective business case that will help build corporate buy-in. Developing a business case is not just important to help align with the main corporate contact; it also helps that contact, whether an individual or team, share the partnership opportunity with their key stakeholders, get buy-in from their corporate leaders, and find additional resources if needed. (See “Building the Business Case” below for tips specifically on the business case.)

During this learning phase, focus on understanding the corporate actor’s priorities, challenges, and opportunities as well as its internal financial and operational processes (Figure 6). The research will help inform the business case for the company to engage, one that speaks to the company’s business objectives and frames FP/RH activities in a way that aligns with those objectives. Corporate contacts will ultimately be the one to refine the business case and sell it internally, but having a business case perspective and framing can be helpful for development professionals when communicating with their contacts. Research on a potential corporate partner also helps implementers better understand the likelihood that engaging the company will lead to a partnership activity, and thus invest resources accordingly.

It is ideal to do as much of this “homework” before starting to engage the corporate actor directly, as this will maximize the productivity of conversations with them. Desk research and interviews with relevant stakeholders will help develop as detailed an understanding as possible, including potential shared interests and engagement opportunities. It can be especially helpful to learn from other development organizations that have partnered with the corporate in the past. Development professionals sometimes do not have much time for this background research and may need to prioritize what to look into and how. Come prepared with whatever background research was possible when meeting the corporate itself. However, be careful to focus on listening without being tied to assumptions you may have developed during pre-engagement research.

Figure 6. Illustrative research questions about a potential corporate partner



Understanding market priorities, challenges, and opportunities

- What products and services make up the company's core business?
- Who are the company's primary customers?
- What are the company's current priorities?
- Who are the company's competitors in the market?
- What risks is the company trying to mitigate?

Understanding the company's internal processes

- When, how, and by whom are decisions made?
- What is the company's budget cycle and how does this affect its ability to commit to new activities?

When learning about a potential corporate actor, consider its industry and size, as well as the geographic reach of its supply chain and sales. Large MNCs can be more difficult to engage, as they can have more and larger internal teams that need to buy into or sign off on a partnership. Some of these teams may be potential entry points to first engage (and sources of eventual internal champions), while others will be stakeholders that the champions will need to get on board. Potential entry points may include the corporate foundation (if there is one) or the corporate social responsibility (CSR) or sustainability teams; operational teams like sourcing and supply chain management; and marketing and communications. Other stakeholders to keep in mind include the legal, finance, and human resource departments (the latter especially if employee volunteers or workplace activities are involved). However, each company is structured differently, and even when structures seem similar, the relationships between business units may differ significantly from one company to the next.

In addition, when engaging MNCs, if primarily speaking with contacts in global headquarters, it is important to make sure that country-level teams are engaged as well—their local input can strengthen design and their buy-in may be critical for effective implementation, especially if you need to leverage their relationships with other local stakeholders such as government officials, suppliers, or local NGOs.

- 5. Anticipate and address corporate hesitance related to FP/RH.** Social and cultural norms may affect corporate engagement on FP/RH, just as they do a development organization's FP/RH programming. Some companies may be wary of making FP/RH the primary or explicit focus of their engagement with a development organization because of social and cultural sensitivities among customers and other stakeholders. This is true for local firms as well as MNCs trying to be sensitive to local contexts or public perception, particularly about the involvement of non-health corporates in FP/RH issues. Even companies with public commitments to improve health and well-being in their workforce or supply chain typically focus on broader health issues instead of on FP/RH. It is helpful to understand and anticipate a company's potential concerns and identify strategies to frame activities in ways that align with the company's broader CSR or sustainable development goals.

For example, although Twinings had announced a public commitment at the FP2020 Summit, the company emphasized to SHOPS Plus that it was important to frame the partnership activity broadly as promoting access to health services for women and children. This was in part due to concerns that exclusively promoting FP/RH could be perceived as the company trying to limit family size to increase productivity by reducing the time women workers spend on family responsibilities.

Similarly, SHOPS Plus's WPI program in India integrated FP into broader corporate health programs that companies were already providing for their workforces. This helped overcome employers' discomfort with promoting or providing FP as a stand-alone program and made for a relatively easy addition since programs were already in place.

- 6. Build trust and replicate success by leveraging existing partnerships and by employing test-and-learn approaches.** Corporate engagement and partnership development depends on building trust between partners, and leveraging or generating evidence of success can help in that process. This has manifested itself in two ways under SHOPS Plus: (1) By identifying existing corporate partnerships and leveraging them for FP/RH, SHOPS Plus was able to move more quickly. (2) By using a test-and-learn approach, the project built trust, reduced risk, demonstrated success, and prepared pilots for adaptation and scale.

Learning from experience

It can be helpful to identify corporates who already have successful development-focused partnerships and support them or add FP/RH to their activities. For example, Viamo had an existing partnership with Airtel, an MNO in Nigeria. Through this partnership, Viamo's platform provided information on health, agriculture, and other topics to Airtel's mobile subscribers in Nigeria. SHOPS Plus was looking for ways to further support 2,000 FP service providers it had trained in Nigeria. The project leveraged Viamo's existing partnership and platform with Airtel to give the providers continued access to refresher information. SHOPS Plus then negotiated to ensure that the specialized content would remain on the platform for one year after project activities in Nigeria ended in 2020. Since the user group is so small relative to the customer base, Viamo and Airtel may not see enough usage to warrant maintaining the content after that. However, the activity was successful in helping trained providers continue to strengthen their knowledge after the live SHOPS Plus training. In future activities replicating this model, development professionals may consider whether any market-based approaches could help sustain the efforts longer term.

It may also be useful to start with a smaller engagement in a specific geography. Initial activities can be discrete and help establish the relationship and build trust. "Quick wins" can include activities such as a fundraising or information campaigns. They can also be a pilot designed for adaptation and replication if successful. Employing a test-and-learn approach minimizes the company's financial and reputational risks, while also building evidence from which the initiative can be adapted, scaled, and sustained, if successful. SHOPS Plus's health-focused partnership with Twinings was designed in just that way—work with the tea supplier EPK to apply a partnership model in Kenya's Nandi County, with the idea that it could be replicated in other communities where EPK operates and even with other suppliers in Twinings's supply chain.

We can also learn from successful test-and-learn approaches applied in corporate partnerships in other sectors. There may even be opportunities to include FP/RH activities in existing non-health partnership activities. For example, CARE and Cargill have a long-standing partnership. CARE is an NGO that provides international development support and emergency relief in over 90 countries. Cargill is a United States-headquartered MNC that provides food, agriculture, financial, and industrial products and services to its business customers. Cargill's business depends on

and affects rural agricultural communities around the world, and improving their agricultural practices and well-being is a key part of its sourcing and sustainability efforts. In the early 2000s, CARE and Cargill began exploring how to support development activities more strategically, leading to the Rural Development Initiative (RDI) in 2008. Cargill funded RDI with US\$10 million to help 100,000 farmers in eight countries improve their productivity and livelihoods over five years. Initial successes led to further investment and scale-up, including expanding to topics like gender-equitable food security, climate change resilience, and women's economic empowerment. RDI's *Decade of Impact* report shared that Cargill's total investment of US\$25 million had supported 2.2 million people across 10 countries in 10 years.³ Although RDI does not focus on FP or even on health, it is an example of how an initial project can help secure longer-term commitment from a major MNC. It is also the type of existing corporate partnership that other donors and development organizations might be able to leverage to incorporate an FP/RH component.

- 7. Ensure adequate resources to manage partnerships: planning, inclusive outreach, processes for decision making, consistent communications.** Corporate engagement works best when there is a designated point of contact at both the development organization and MNC, and the ability to clearly communicate and manage expectations. Similar to other types of partnerships, development professionals should be prepared to invest resources in corporate engagement and in partnership development in order for these to succeed.

Developing and managing a partnership requires time for active management by both the development organization and the corporate partner. In SHOPS Plus's experience, corporate partners typically have multiple competing priorities, even if they have dedicated staff focused on CSR or sustainable development. It is therefore important for donors and implementers to proactively ensure communication is flowing and keep the engagement moving forward. Partnership management requires early, frequent, and transparent engagement as well as the use of skills, such as relationship management, facilitation, negotiation, public presentation, and marketing. SHOPS Plus's partnership managers often emphasize the importance of ensuring there are adequate resources to manage partnerships relative to the size, number, and complexity of the partners involved.

³ For more information: CARE and Cargill. "A Decade of Impact in Cocoa Communities: More than Ten Years of the CARE-Cargill Partnership." February 2021. <https://www.cargill.com/2021/care-and-cargill-report-highlights-a-decade-of-impact> / Synergos. "Businesses as Bridging Leaders: A guide on cross-sectoral partnerships." June 2019. <https://www.synergos.org/news-and-insights/2019/businesses-bridging-leaders-guide-cross-sectoral-partnerships>

In addition, the length of time required may be longer than anticipated. Donors and implementers sometimes assume that companies are nimble and can move quickly, but this may not be the case for a particular company, industry, or activity.

For example, even for seemingly small activities, it can take longer to secure the multiple commitments and approvals needed in large corporations or when multiple internal or external stakeholders are involved—this is especially true for MNCs given their size and organizational complexity. In addition, it can also take time to build the relationships and trust necessary among corporate contacts, and for them to build internal buy-in with their colleagues—building internal buy-in is also important for USAID and implementers. All of this lengthens the time it takes for a partnership to develop.

For example, Twinings and MTV SAF had already made public commitments leading up to FP2020. And Twinings had a specific country in mind. Nevertheless, it still took six months of discussions with Twinings and other stakeholders to formalize everyone’s buy-in. With MTV, the entire process took about one year, including six to eight months between contract signing and activity implementation. These timelines are not unusual in corporate engagement.

The time and resources required for corporate engagement and partnership may be higher when companies have not made such a public commitment, because more time will likely be needed to identify entry points and develop initial contacts.

In addition, after partnership countries and activities are selected, it is helpful to have a part-time or full-time staff person in the country where activities will be implemented who will be responsible for following up regularly with the partner and other stakeholders.

8. Identify and nurture internal champions within all partners. Document progress and lessons learned and anticipate turnover.

Engagements start through personal relationships, which are essential to success and scale. Changes in personnel can significantly disrupt engagements, particularly during the early phases. As discussed above, managing corporate engagement and partnerships can be an intensive effort for all partners. Therefore, identifying and nurturing internal champions can be instrumental in moving from initial engagement to partnership building and in ensuring the partnership achieves its objectives.

We’ve learned that you need to be persistent, without being a burden to the companies. You need to be ready and willing to make multiple phone calls, have multiple meetings, get passed around to different people, repeat conversations when staff change, and be patient with the companies’ policies and approval processes (which can often take longer than our own). **The time it takes to develop these partnerships can be a challenge when balancing with our program needs and project deadlines. But slow, steady and deeper engagement with interested corporates pays off.**

Komal Khanna
SHOPS Plus India Chief of Party

The social case: Leaders within corporations do care about social problems, and the more they learn, the better they can contribute.

Learning from experience

SHOPS Plus's partnership with Twinings involved diverse stakeholders—Twinings; EPK, Twinings's Kenyan tea supplier; the Nandi County government; a local women's community group; and smallholder farmers who were selling tea to EPK. It was important to cultivate champions within each of these stakeholder groups—and at times multiple champions at different levels—by sharing the business case adapted to each stakeholder's perspective and asking for their feedback. SHOPS Plus then nurtured these relationships through frequent communications, including written documentation about decisions and next steps. This was particularly critical for Twinings and EPK due to staff changes and multi-level approval processes at both firms.

One of SHOPS Plus's experiences in Madagascar illustrates what happens when internal champions do not exist or do not have the time to dedicate to moving the process along. SHOPS Plus sought to broker a partnership between USAID/Madagascar and Telma, an MNO. However, Telma's value-added services had been outsourced, so the company did not have a strong interest in partnering around its value-added services. In hindsight, it might have been useful to reach out to the outsourced company to assess its interest. In the words of the SHOPS Plus engagement manager, "I don't think there was enough excitement and momentum for this to take off." SHOPS Plus organized workshops to brainstorm potential activities and many ideas emerged, but none of them crystallized. The project drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) listing a suite of activities that could be considered, but the MOU was never fully signed. Besides the importance of having internal champions, two additional lessons learned were: ① If there is not yet a concrete plan for what to do, even if only for a first activity, then an MOU might not lead to actual activities. ② Context-specific conditions matter, as they inform the business case and return on investment, as in the example of Digicel in Haiti.

9. **Consider serving as a third-party convener, broker, connector, and/or technical expert.** SHOPS Plus partnership managers highlight that some of the project’s key contributions to corporate partners came through its role as an objective convener, partnership broker, connector, and technical expert. USAID missions and implementers are well-positioned to play these roles—facilitating new relationships across multiple private (and sometimes public) sector stakeholders, verifying the credibility of partners and ideas, and providing technical expertise in FP and other health priorities.

Although one of the key contributions of donor-funded projects is technical expertise, keep in mind that partnership development and management requires more than FP experts. For example, staff need to be able to:

- identify and clearly articulate aligned interests and the partnership’s value proposition;
- present to corporates in their language and in a concise, crisp, clear, compelling manner;
- create convincing content that appeals to both the private sector and to other key stakeholders whose support is needed; and
- understand the difference between project “needs” and project “wants” to be able to compromise appropriately.

Following the FP2020 Summit in 2017 was an opportune time for SHOPS Plus to begin conversations with potential corporate partners that had already made public commitments to support FP/RH, including several non-health MNCs and their affiliated foundations. These types of major convenings can be leveraged, whether specific to FP or focused on related issues such as women’s empowerment. These events can be used to identify corporates that already have the internal buy-in and point people to engage in exploratory conversations and partnership building.

● ● ● How To: Building the Business Case / Value Proposition of Participating

Building a business case is a critical step in corporate engagement after development professionals have identified the problem they seek to solve and determined that corporate engagement could help lead to more sustainable health outcomes. By explaining the value proposition for an MNC's participation in achieving FP/RH objectives, USAID and implementers can use the private sector's own business case framing to gain initial buy-in from corporate contacts and help them build buy-in internally. In addition, understanding the corporate's core competencies, objectives, and pain points can help determine ways in which they could contribute to addressing the development problem. The business case can be further fleshed out over time as development staff learn more about the corporate actor, but considering these steps from the start can help understand the types of information to collect when doing background research and in conversations with a potential partner—it also helps staff understand the information that a corporate contact may need when presenting the business case internally.

1. **Identify the corporate actor's core business, key stakeholders, and social and environmental objectives.** Before developing a case for why a corporation should invest in a health initiative, it is important to understand the corporate actor's core business. Consider:
 - What is the company's market share in key products and geographies?
 - What is the company's footprint in specific geographies? Are you speaking with the right stakeholder?
 - Where is their supply chain located and how it is structured and managed (e.g., is it outsourced)?
 - What are the key inputs required to produce the company's primary products or services?
 - Does the corporation rely on highly skilled labor, public land, or relationships with other companies to manufacture, distribute, or market its products?
 - Who are the company's key stakeholders, and how does the company maintain or strengthen relationships with them?
 - What are the company's main "pain points"? What are the industry's main "pain points"?
 - What is the company's public reputation? Are there any pending lawsuits?

Also examine: Does the company have any social or environmental objectives or relevant public commitments? What types of partners and partnerships have they supported in the past? Do any of these objectives or past partnerships have areas of overlap with FP/RH, such as by focusing on health, the empowerment of women and girls, or youth development?

Keep in mind that if the company has a separate affiliated foundation, the foundation's objectives and partnership criteria may be different from the corporation's, even if they are related. Learn about the relationship between the corporation and its foundation, whether one or both might be interested in partnering, and what types of resources and objectives each one might bring to the table.

Try to explore as many of these questions as possible before speaking to the corporate directly, such as by browsing its website, reading its annual reports, and learning from others with industry knowledge. It is important to review information from a diversity of sources. It is also important to not enter the conversation with set assumptions, but instead to leverage the research to validate (or adjust) what was found, delve even more deeply into areas of potential shared interests or pain points, and uncover new elements that may not have been obvious from publicly available information.

2. **List possible benefits to the corporate actor from investing in the health initiative.** Consider FP programming from the corporate actor's perspective and make a list of benefits the actor might get from the programming. Would it help the company reach or communicate with customers in a new market or more customers in an existing one? Improving brand equity by investing in social initiatives can help expand or strengthen a company's customer base. It can also help the company to attract high-quality talent. Also consider the benefit of avoiding costs and mitigating risks. How can investing in a health initiative reduce the company's costs? Will healthier employees be more productive and less likely to miss work? Will making a health investment in a community contribute to the company's good standing with local officials and community members, thus mitigating the risk of penalties, red tape, strikes, or complaints?
3. **Estimate the value of potential benefits that may accrue to the corporate actor if it invests, or the costs of not investing.** After identifying the potential costs and benefits to the corporate, collect primary and/or secondary data to better understand its financial, societal, and reputational impacts. When making key business decisions, companies leverage robust market analyses and secondary data to determine the size of a potential new market, customer demand, cost savings from a new investment, and more. Similarly, when investing in social or environmental impact, corporations may be more receptive if they receive strategic market research, recommendations, and scenarios. Gathering and analyzing this information in great

detail can take time, so it is important to balance the upfront work required to get conversations started and invest more in relationships as they advance and demonstrate greater potential (see Practical Tip #2).

Quantify as much as possible, but where the potential costs or benefits cannot be quantified, use examples from similar cases as evidence. For example, are data available on employee or worker turnover rates, the cost of recruiting and hiring a new employee, and/or the cost of employee absenteeism? Are there data on the cost of shutting down a manufacturing site for three months due to local community unrest or poor relationships with local government? The company may be willing to share some of these data, but secondary data such as academic studies on lost productivity or case studies on other firms can often be found online. Secondary information may not be a perfect match to the country and company being examined, but that is okay—companies are accustomed to using secondary data to inform their decisions. Making educated projections about future savings, revenue growth, or worker productivity might be required; this is a common practice for private companies and is acceptable as long as assumptions are noted. Proof of concept and existing evidence about similar partnerships or activities can be especially useful in gaining buy-in from a potential corporate partner.

4. **Keep it brief and simple, and clearly outline the corporate’s role.** Summarize the proposed health initiative or partnership and the potential value it can create for the company in a simple slide deck or short proposal. The point of contact at the company will likely need to make the same pitch to their leadership, so it is important that what is provided is easy for them to communicate. Outline the proposed concept simply, keeping in mind that they may not have ever heard of a “family planning sensitization event” or an “integrated delivery model.” Avoid technical jargon and limit information on the development context to the most compelling story or statistic. Clearly articulate what the company will have to do and what it will gain.
5. **Show the corporate contacts what success looks like by using industry examples.** Many of the people working in non-health MNCs have not worked in the health industry and may have never engaged on health or FP/RH. Even if they are open to the idea of partnering generally, they may not understand what a partnership on FP/RH would look like and how it would benefit their organization. Where possible, provide examples of similar programs that other corporations have invested in, ideally corporations in the same industry. Include what the company did, how the engagement evolved, and the development and business outcomes that were achieved. Make use of memorable images and highlight key numbers that will stand out to the corporate contacts and to the internal stakeholders that the contacts will need to convince to get internal buy-in.

Looking Forward



There is no “one size fits all” approach to engaging corporate actors on development issues, particularly when it comes to engaging corporations outside the health industry on FP. Donors and implementers must not only tailor approaches to the country context, but also to the corporate actors involved—their industry, their specific business and social objectives (which may vary over time and across geographies), and the way they approach cross-sector partnerships. Successfully engaging non-health MNCs requires thinking creatively to cast a wide net with outreach informed by strategic research and analysis. Implementers should also go into this journey with the expectation they may need to engage many corporates in exploratory conversations before they identify the right conditions for partnership development. However, the engagement process is an iterative one—an opportunity to learn more about a company, its industry, and the types of initiatives that might be of interest, whether to that company or to another down the line.



People on stage during the 2019 launch event for the MTV Staying Alive Foundation's Nishedh campaign in India.



Annex A: Case Study from SHOPS Plus Kenya (Twinings)

Twining's: Multi-stakeholder collaboration to sustainably improve health care access for women in the tea supply chain in Kenya

Context

The global tea industry depends on tea produced by suppliers in lower- and middle-income countries. These suppliers often produce tea on large estates that employ a largely female workforce and/or purchase harvested tea from nearby smallholder farmers. The estate workers and farmers are not employed by the global brands that use this tea in their products, and the farmers are not formally employed by the tea processing companies to which they sell their tea.

Twining's is a global tea and beverage company founded in 1706 and headquartered in the UK. Its ethical tea program, *Sourced with Care*, aims to improve quality of life in the communities from which Twining's buys tea. At the 2017 FP2020 Summit, Twining's committed US\$250,000 to expand its women's health program in its Kenyan supply chain from 6,000 tea workers and farmers to an additional 40,000 women.

Initial Engagement and Partnership Design

SHOPS Plus connected with Twining's at FP2020, offering its expertise to help the company achieve its objective in Kenya. After six months of discussions and partnership building, SHOPS Plus had secured buy-in for a pilot project from Twining's, one of Twining's key suppliers in Kenya, the county government, and a local community group.

During initial discussions, Twining's shared information about its broader ethical sourcing program and specifically about its initial investments in women's health, which aligned with growing industry interest in increasing worker productivity by investing in workers' health. Twining's had participated in the HERHealth program managed by [BSR](#)⁴ since 2015, aiming to improve women's knowledge and awareness of health and other issues through peer health educators at some of its tea-supplying sites. The company recognized that women still lacked sustainable access to the health products and services they needed, but Twining's was not interested in indefinitely funding health care for the thousands of women in its supply chain—the company felt that local tea suppliers and other industry players should also contribute. Twining's also wanted to be able to develop a model that could be replicated in several tea-supplying communities.

⁴ BSR is an organization of sustainable business experts that works with a global network of companies.

In May 2019, SHOPS Plus and Twinings formalized a partnership through an MOU. The partners agreed to collaborate to develop and pilot a strategy to sustainably expand access to health products and services for women in the company's Kenyan supply chain, with a focus on RP/FH services.

To support these objectives, SHOPS Plus conducted a rapid assessment—including desk research and qualitative research with female workers and smallholder farmers—to identify gaps and opportunities in access to health services and products. The project found that the products and services women seek are often not available at the nearest facility, and that women must invest significant time and money traveling to the next facility option. Moreover, monthly direct deposit of tea income can mean women do not have access to cash when they need it. However, the assessment highlighted two opportunities: Conveniently located public health facilities do exist, though often with limited or unreliable product or service offerings; and many women belong to women's community groups called *chamaas*.

Using the assessment findings, SHOPS Plus developed several models for Twinings's consideration. The company then requested that the project present the models to one of its key suppliers in Kenya, EPK. SHOPS Plus, Twinings, and EPK together selected one of the models, and EPK agreed to pilot it in Nandi County. The pilot seeks to create a sustainable source of health care services that requires limited recurring investment from Twinings by leveraging engagement and contributions from EPK, the county government, a local *chamaa*, and a service delivery partner. SHOPS Plus facilitated a participatory co-design process that has generated collective action and buy-in to mobilize both financial and in-kind resources from all partners.

Implementation

The pilot adapts the private sector clinic model of a local social enterprise, Afya Research Africa (ARA), which was brought on board to lead local implementation. SHOPS Plus worked with Twinings to make its financial contribution to the pilot through a direct grant to ARA.

The pilot aims to strengthen an existing local public sector health dispensary as well as an existing *chamaa*. The health dispensary was conveniently located for workers and smallholders but did not offer many services due to limited human resources and health products. The model seeks to improve the dispensary by leveraging initial co-funding from Twinings, continued investment from EPK, in-kind support from the county government, and future revenue from the *chamaa*.

The model expands the facility's capacity and supports the *chamaa* to formalize its lending services, including through the introduction of a mobile banking enterprise that will increase the *chamaa*'s revenue. A portion of the *chamaa*'s new revenue will support the health facility, and any additional profits could be reinvested or paid out to group members. The women's group also participates in the facility oversight committee, giving the *chamaa* a formal role to ensure the health facility is providing quality care that is responsive to community needs.

Working with the local county government has been critical to success and sustainability, but it has also been time consuming, requiring an additional MOU and multiple meetings to secure government commitment to dedicate additional staff and ensure products are supplied to the facility.

Possible iterations of the health facility model from the Twinings partnership:

Public facility—This iteration upgrades a public facility and therefore no user or patient fees are charged. The pilot in Nandi County follows this version of the model.

Private or community facility—This iteration supports a private or community facility whose pharmacy has limited or unreliable product supply. A revolving fund is established for a community pharmacy, with users paying prices that enable the pharmacy to cover costs and re-stock. Although prices are charged, users' overall expenses are typically lower than the alternative of traveling to a distant public facility or paying full commercial prices.

Case Snapshot: Twinings

Development goal: Sustainably expand access to health services and products for women in Kenya.

Corporate partner: Twinings is a multinational tea corporation sourcing from Kenya.

Corporate incentives: Strengthen brand image of leadership in CSR and ethical sourcing among consumers and in the countries where it operates. Improve worker health and productivity. Demonstrate commitment and build goodwill with local government.

Partnership activity: Pilot a model that creates a sustainable source of health care services for women in tea-producing communities by expanding the services offered by a public sector health dispensary with a plan for financial sustainability after initial involvement by Twinings and SHOPS Plus. The model aligns catalytic donor funds, routine corporate operations, public sector funding, and community-led income-generating activities for sustainable service delivery.

What each partner brought to the table:

- **USAID:** SHOPS Plus had in-depth knowledge of the Kenyan health care system, expertise in private health care delivery models, and the mandate to help facilitate public-private engagement.
- **Corporate partner:** MNC Twinings connected SHOPS Plus to its supplier in Kenya and provided a financial contribution through a direct grant to the local implementing partner.
- **Local firm:** Twinings's supplier, EPK, leveraged its close relationship with the local government to gain public sector buy-in and will provide ongoing investment.
- **Local government:** The county government is providing in-kind support (staff).
- **Local community:** A local women's group will contribute funds from a new revenue-generating activity.
- **Local implementing partner:** The social enterprise ARA has experience implementing a private sector clinic model. Twinings's co-funding was through a direct grant to ARA.

Key Lessons Learned

Practical Tip #9: Consider serving as a third-party convener, broker, connector, and/or technical expert.

Corporations outside the health industry are interested in investing in improving health and well-being in their supply chain, including in FP. They may not know the best ways to do this and can benefit from the technical expertise, health industry knowledge, and networks of development partners. Twinings brought a relationship with EPK, which in turn had strong relationships with local government and communities, while SHOPS Plus brought FP expertise and the ability to facilitate collaboration with local implementing partner ARA.

Practical Tip #4: Do research to understand the corporate stakeholders involved and develop a business case that attracts the main contacts and helps them gain stakeholder buy-in.

Large companies have complex international supply chains that may involve weak or indirect connections between the global firm and the people in its supply chain. Because workers in the supply chain may not be the company's own employees and because other firms are involved, it can be even more challenging to align incentives and develop clear business cases for each partner's investment in workers' health.

Practical Tip #8: Identify and nurture internal champions within all partners. Document progress and lessons learned and anticipate turnover.

Corporate partnerships with MNCs may require aligning incentives across multiple private companies and building a multi-stakeholder coalition in which each partner brings resources to the table. The various stakeholders or partners do not always understand each other's potential in addressing a shared challenge—an informed catalyst, such as a USAID project, can facilitate the process.

These partnerships need time to build trust and for champions in each partner organization to navigate their internal processes. This was exactly the case with Twinings, which wanted to improve the well-being of women in its supply chain who did not have direct employment or supplier relationships with Twinings itself. The multi-stakeholder partnership that SHOPS Plus facilitated brought in Twinings, local supplier EPK, the Nandi County government, a local community group, and a local implementing partner—all of whom had to be aligned and engaged.

Practical Tip #6: Build trust and replicate success by leveraging existing partnerships and by employing test-and-learn approaches.

Developing the activity idea and gaining buy-in from the multiple stakeholders involved in this multi-stakeholder partnership required consistent management and coordination time from SHOPS Plus staff.

Practical Tip #7: Ensure adequate resources to manage partnerships: planning, inclusive outreach, processes for decision making, consistent communications.

The SHOPS Plus partnership with Twinings was designed as a test-and-learn activity from the start, with a pilot in Nandi County that was intended to demonstrate whether the model could be replicated in other communities where EPK operates and with other Twinings suppliers. The pilot may also serve as an example for other corporations working with smallholder farmers.



Renovated Chepsire Health Dispensary.

Photo: Mbogo Bunyi

Results

At the time of writing, the pilot is underway in a tea-producing community in Nandi County served by the Chepsire Health Dispensary. The community now has a continuously operating, enhanced public facility that offers additional services and longer hours to serve women. During the first 11 months, the facility provided 6,155 services, including 2,879 services to adult women, 267 of whom received long-term FP methods. The project estimates that the facility will deliver over 45,000 services over five years.

Partners will monitor key health and financial data to understand the model's effectiveness and ability to achieve sustainability. Based on pilot performance, SHOPS Plus and Twinings will determine whether the model or specific parts of it can be replicated in other tea-supplying communities in Kenya and potentially other sourcing countries like India. With SHOPS Plus's support, Twinings also wants to influence the broader agricultural industry and will disseminate lessons from the pilot to key industry actors.



Annex B: Case Studies from SHOPS Plus India (MTV Staying Alive Foundation and Workplace Interventions)

India has a young population, with almost half of people below the age of 25 according to the Indian census report for 2018. The country also has a high unmet need for contraception. In 2016, India would have had to nearly quadruple the number of new women accessing FP per year in order to meet FP2020 goals. For example, 22 percent of young married women in India ages 15 to 24 had an unmet need for FP in the National Family Health Survey for 2015–2016. Despite this unmet need, the use of short-acting contraceptive methods (e.g., condoms, oral pills) declined in urban areas between 2005 and 2015, the year that the global SHOPS Plus project began. This decline was especially noteworthy in the 15–29 age group, which has a significant impact on overall access and use because youth represent such a large share of India’s total population. Challenges with access are particularly significant among low-income youth.

SHOPS Plus India ran from 2016 to 2021. At the start of implementation, the project conducted research to investigate unmet need for FP and declining use of FP methods. For young married couples in urban areas, SHOPS Plus found that poor uptake of oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) resulted from myths and misconceptions about OCPs, fear of side effects, and the limited appeal of OCPs compared to other modern methods. Similarly, the project’s research with unmarried youth ages 15 to 24 identified that low contraceptive use was influenced by reasons such as few conversations on SRH due to pre-marital sex being taboo, myths and misconceptions around contraceptive methods, and negative perceptions about condoms.

Before SHOPS Plus India, large-scale communication campaigns focused on youth and their reproductive choices had been rare in the country. The project aimed to be a pioneer of youth-focused messaging for contraceptives by using platforms commonly used by this target group, with the aim of increasing demand for FP goods and services by improving knowledge, norms, and beliefs and increasing consumer engagement to trigger positive behaviors. The team implemented the program using social and behavior change communication, innovations with the private sector, and WPIs. Strategic partnerships with reputable corporates enabled SHOPS Plus to leverage its brand recognition and geographic reach in the country.

The case studies below review SHOPS Plus India’s partnership journeys for two examples: the MTV SAF and WPI program.

MTV SAF: Partnering to reach low-income urban youth with trusted health information

Context

MTV is a global entertainment company that positions itself as “the leading youth entertainment brand,” reaching more than 500 million households globally through television, social media, in-person events, and other channels. MTV is owned by ViacomCBS, an American multinational mass media and entertainment conglomerate. In India, MTV operates through Viacom18, one of India’s fastest-growing entertainment networks and a joint venture between Viacom and Network18, an Indian media conglomerate owned by Reliance Industries.

The MTV SAF was founded in 2005 and promotes safer lifestyle choices for youth, particularly involving SRH and HIV. SAF is linked to ViacomCBS through the in-kind support the corporation provides as well as use of the MTV brand. Since 2009, SAF has implemented an award-winning “edutainment” campaign for youth in Africa. The MTV Shuga campaign is a television drama accompanied by radio, digital, and social media that blends SRH messaging with fictional stories young people can relate to, aiming to shift beliefs and feelings in order to drive behavior change. When SHOPS Plus connected with SAF, the Foundation was interested in adapting this model for youth in India.

Initial Engagement and Partnership Design

Both SHOPS Plus and SAF were interested in a social and behavior change communication campaign that would increase awareness of FP among India’s youth, increase youth engagement, and ultimately drive action. The partners decided to co-develop and co-fund a radio drama called MTV Nishedh Live (*nishedh* means “taboo” in English), which aimed to encourage young people to engage in healthy dialogue around SRH issues, provide them with information on available contraception methods, debunk myths and misconceptions, and encourage shared responsibility and consent. Accompanied by other promotional channels, radio was selected over television in order to target poor urban youth specifically, which was USAID’s desired audience. MTV Nishedh Live also focused on helping young people understand tuberculosis after SAF received an educational grant from Johnson & Johnson, the American MNC that sells medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and consumer health products.

The partnership activity was ultimately successful. However, complex partnerships of this magnitude face challenges. In this case, partner stakeholders included USAID, the SHOPS Plus global headquarters in the United States, SHOPS Plus India, SAF in London, Viacom18 in India, and Johnson & Johnson. SAF was a new entrant to the Indian market and was leveraging Viacom18’s relationships, with one SAF staff member in the Viacom18 office to manage the complex multi-stakeholder partnership. The complexity and limited bandwidth of corporate partners in India led to more time and management required for SHOPS Plus—it took six to eight months after contract signing to begin activity implementation.

Implementation

SHOPS Plus supported SAF's development of the SRH component of the Nishedh Live radio series, on-the-ground activations, and social and digital media activities. The project provided technical inputs to the show's script and additional content for promotional material. SAF provided creative development and publicity expertise, and its connection to Viacom18 offered a large network and name recognition among youth to maximize reach—among other entertainment brands, Viacom18 owns MTV India, which alone has a reach of over 245 million people.

Nishedh Live consisted of 15 episodes that ran over eight weeks in 2019 on Red FM in the cities of Mumbai, New Delhi, Dehradun, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, and Jamshedpur. Each episode was 30 minutes long and followed the story of a character tackling issues such as modern contraceptive use, stigma around LGBTQ issues, and myths surrounding safe contraception methods. Radio hosts then discussed the issues highlighted in the narrative and encouraged listeners to call in with questions and thoughts. Each episode also mentioned the SHOPS Plus helpline, which offered callers the opportunity to speak with trained counselors. The radio series was promoted through a [microsite](#) and a multi-channel digital campaign created and managed by SAF. The microsite—which is still online but is not being regularly updated—provides all 15 episodes, information about clinics throughout India, and the askNivi chatbot, which offers confidential information about SRH in Hindi or English through the WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger messaging apps, which are very popular among Indian youth across income groups.

Case Snapshot: MTV SAF

Development goal: Increase awareness and uptake of FP products and services among low-income urban youth in India, which has a large and growing population of youth but limited sources of youth-focused trustworthy information about FP.

Corporate partner: MTV SAF is affiliated with MTV, a global entertainment company that positions itself as “the leading youth entertainment brand.” The Foundation’s goal is to equip young people with the knowledge, confidence, and resources to make informed choices about their SRH and HIV. Founded in 2005, the Foundation primarily operates in Africa.

Corporate incentives:

- **MTV and Viacom18:** Reach and engage youth by identifying, developing, and distributing content that might interest them—particularly in growing youth markets such as India
- **MTV SAF:** Leverage the partnership to enter a new country (India)

Partnership activity: Leverage and complement SAF’s broader Nishedh (“taboo” in Hindi) campaign to engage and increase awareness of FP specifically among low-income urban youth in India through a radio series, on-the-ground activations, and social and digital media activities.

What each partner brought to the table:

- **USAID:** SHOPS Plus provided knowledge of the challenges in reaching youth in India as well as technical expertise to ensure accurate messaging about FP in the radio show and additional content for promotional material.
- **Corporate partner:** MTV SAF brought experience from its Shuga campaign in Africa, creative and production capabilities, and the opportunity to reach a significantly larger audience than SHOPS Plus India could have reached alone. SAF worked with MTV’s local subsidiary (Viacom18) to leverage the network and name recognition that MTV India has among youth in the country. Creative development of the campaign happened with the SAF team, which had a local coordinator housed in Viacom18’s office in India.
- **Local partners:** Radio stations broadcast the campaign’s information series. SAF also worked with Rishtey (a general television channel) and VOOT (a video-on-demand platform) to extend reach for the broader Nishedh campaign.

Key Lessons Learned

Practical Tip #1: Be clear about the problem that you want to solve.

Development practitioners should be clear about their programming needs and objectives and bring that clarity to conversations and design meetings with corporate partners. SHOPS Plus and MTV had aligned messaging around safe behavior for youth, which was critical during the design and implementation of the radio series and accompanying promotional campaign. However, USAID was interested in focusing on low-income urban youth, while MTV and Viacom18 are experts in targeting urban youth in general. This difference affected the campaign's creative development and execution plan. For example, part of the campaign was being planned for execution in colleges and universities, which seemed to be a disconnect given USAID's target audience. Interventions were paused while partners realigned and together addressed how to ensure that low-income urban youth were specifically targeted, which required coordination time and knowledge sharing from SHOPS Plus.

Practical Tip #7: Ensure adequate resources to manage partnerships: planning, inclusive outreach, processes for decision making, consistent communications.

The corporate stakeholders involved in the SHOPS Plus partnership with SAF in India have a complex series of relationships, which is not unusual among major MNCs. While this can bring significant resources and scale—in this case US\$1 million in cost share—it can also take time and patience to navigate. In addition, despite their size and resources, large MNCs may not have personnel dedicated to managing a large development-focused partnership, thus requiring management and coordination time from the development partner. The SAF partnership took about one year to develop and execute, with six to eight months specifically between contract signing and the start of implementation.

The benefits that corporates can bring must be balanced with the time and effort involved in managing partners and ensuring high-quality outcomes. MTV had limited managerial and financial capacity in India, requiring SHOPS Plus to invest in substantial partner management to move the process along. This partnership is also an excellent example of the skills that are required in partnership management, such as negotiation, presentation, marketing, and a strong and consistent focus on the end goal.

Results

The impact of radio shows can be difficult to measure compared to, for instance, television campaigns in countries where reach-and-recall studies are possible. However, in many countries, radio is a critical communication channel, particularly for populations who have low incomes or reside in hard-to-reach areas and therefore have less access to television, the Internet, and other media.

SHOPS Plus and SAF estimate there were 2,500 plays of the Nishedh radio program and over 17,700 visits to the microsite page. Approximately 80 percent of the overall Nishedh campaign audience were men, and 70 percent were in the target audience of 18 to 24 years. Of those who were aware of the Nishedh campaign, the number of people who used a contraceptive method in the previous three months doubled for OCPs, injectables, and IUDs, and increased by 86 percent for condoms between December 2019 (pre-campaign) and June 2020 (mid-campaign).

Each episode in the radio series was used to promote the SHOPS Plus helpline, which saw a large spike in the number of calls received during the eight-week series, with 1,500 calls requesting counselling and information about contraceptive methods. The multi-channel digital campaign (executed through the microsite, Facebook, and Instagram) and targeted media buying from October 22 to November 30, 2019, garnered the following results:

- 71,624 engagements across Facebook and Instagram
- 34,301 website page views
- 14,879 website users
- 5,617 Facebook page followers

WPIs: Partnering with a range of corporate partners in India to increase young workers' health knowledge

Context

Given its demographic conditions, India has in recent years seen a large number of young people entering the urban workforce—more than 12 million youth between 15 and 29 years old are expected to enter India's labor force every year over the next two decades. At the same time, corporations have increasingly implemented corporate wellness initiatives aimed at improving employee health and well-being, which can strengthen productivity, reduce absenteeism, improve retention, and attract new employees. This has led to the emergence and growth of service providers like Indicare Health Solutions, Swasti Health Catalyst, and 21cceducation.com, which design and implement corporate health and wellness programs. Although FP is an important part of well-being, particularly for young workers, it is typically not a part of such programs.

Initial Engagement and Partnership Design

SHOPS Plus India had a multi-pronged social and behavior change strategy to reach married and unmarried youth through multiple touch points, including at work. The project aimed to build awareness of FP and gender-equitable behaviors, encourage conversations about FP, and improve contraceptive uptake. As part of this, SHOPS Plus wanted to design a sustainable WPI model by piloting a private sector-driven intervention to build FP awareness and capacities of young workers through corporate wellness programs.

WPIs can be implemented in the workplaces of companies of different sizes and geographic reach. When considering MNC engagement in particular, development programs can target an MNC's own workplaces or encourage the MNC to support or promote WPIs with their subsidiaries or in their supply chain. For example, international apparel brands are part of BSR's HERproject and support WPIs on health, financial inclusion, and gender equality in their own factories and among their suppliers in countries such as India and Bangladesh.

SHOPS Plus's WPI program was private sector-driven in two ways. First, the project conducted a consultative assessment and collaboratively designed the WPI model with the private sector and service providers. SHOPS Plus held initial stakeholder meetings with organizations that implement WPIs in India, such as the International Labor Organization, as well as service providers like BSR and Indian corporate wellness program providers. Through these consultations, SHOPS Plus concluded that even when workplace health programs and tools include a focus on FP, the typical approach of relying on peer education leads to a loss of interest over time, suggesting a different approach is warranted. With these initial findings, the project collaboratively designed the WPI approach with human resource managers and senior personnel in diverse private sector industries, ranging from large factory operations and infrastructure firms to services such as call centers, retail, and hotels.

Second, SHOPS Plus partnered with a local corporate wellness program provider, Indicare Health Solutions, to pilot the WPI with an initial group of corporations and institutionalize FP integration into Indicare's existing service offering. The pilot aimed to demonstrate to both corporate wellness providers and their corporate clients that there is value in including FP in corporate wellness programs.

Implementation

After consultations, SHOPS Plus recognized that the FP wellness program would need to consider differences among worker populations in different workplaces, such as manufacturing and construction, which tend to employ workers with lower education levels compared to industries like software services and hospitality. In addition, the project's target group of 18- to 29-year-olds is not homogenous, differing in where they are in their life journey, knowledge of FP, and preferred learning mechanisms (e.g., digital vs. non-digital). SHOPS Plus therefore used a mix of channels to successfully reach different audiences with interactive components:

- **In-person:** Face-to-face sessions and health consultations, audio and visual material to reinforce learning in the workplace, theme-based events to continue engagement, and games to test and reiterate information
- **Digital component:** Interactive mobile application called *Qulke* (meaning "without hesitation" in Hindi), which was developed for individual engagement and access to on-demand information about FP, with audio, video, and text content in English and Hindi; a link to an e-commerce portal to purchase condoms and other wellness products; and an integrated chatbot to enable personalized counselling

The mix used was adapted to each workforce's needs. For example, for construction workers, all sessions were face-to-face and ended with distribution of printed materials. In contrast, for software services workers, the project used a mix of online and offline sessions and rapidly connected workers to *Qulke*.

Case Snapshot: WPIs with Corporates Across Sectors

Development goal: Increase knowledge and use of FP products and services among low-income urban youth in India.

Corporate partners:

- **Corporate workplaces:** WPIs can be implemented in the workplaces of companies of different sizes and geographic reach. In India, corporate partners spanned manufacturing, construction, software services, and hospitality.
- **Wellness company:** Indicare Health Solutions is a leading wellness company in India that provides health and wellness programs to corporate clients.

Corporate incentives:

- **Corporate workplaces:** Provide employees with health information that improves their health and well-being, thereby improving worker productivity and retention.
- **Wellness company:** Strengthen its service offerings of health and wellness programs for corporate clients using credible information and engaging material.

Partnership activity: Pilot a WPI with 10 of Indicare's corporate clients in Delhi NCR to increase access to information and FP uptake among urban workers between the ages of 18 and 29 earning between US\$2 and US\$14 per day with corporate employers with over 5,000 staff. The pilot aimed to demonstrate the value of integrating FP into corporate wellness programs to stimulate interest among companies in paying for this service. The WPI pilot included group sessions and material on FP at factories and offices, as well as the launch of a smartphone application for easy, comprehensive, and discreet access to FP information and products.

What each partner brought to the table:

- **USAID:** SHOPS Plus provide FP expertise and took on the role of market facilitator, demonstrating to actors in the corporate wellness market why and how FP could be integrated into corporate wellness program.
- **Corporate clients:** During the design phase, human resource managers and senior corporate personnel met, particularly in roundtable discussions, to inform the design of the WPI. Once the WPI had been designed, corporate clients signed up for a demonstration of the FP-integrated employee wellness program.
- **Corporate implementer:** Indicare integrated FP into its health and wellness program for corporate clients. This included liaising with its corporate clients to identify those interested in piloting the FP component in their workplaces and implementing the new FP component with clients that elected to participate.

Key Lessons Learned

Practical Tip #5: Anticipate and address corporate hesitance related to FP/RH.

Integrating FP into broader corporate health programs can get better buy-in. The SHOPS Plus WPI in India integrated FP into the health programs that corporates were already running for their workforce. This not only helped overcome employers' discomfort with organizing a standalone FP program, but also demonstrated to wellness companies like Indicare the business case for pitching FP as part of broader health and wellness programs.

Practical Tip #7: Build trust and replicate success by leveraging existing partnerships and by employing test-and-learn approaches.

SHOPS Plus India's WPI approach was designed to employ a test-and-learn (or proof-of-concept) approach from the start by piloting the integration of an FP component into corporate wellness programs to demonstrate its value to corporate wellness companies and their corporate clients.

In addition, WPIs should be tested in different settings. SHOPS Plus tested the FP wellness program in both traditional sectors like manufacturing and construction, which generally employ unskilled workers, and in new services sectors like software services and hospitality, which have a larger proportion of higher-skilled workers. This helped identify the appropriate model for different types of workplaces.

Lastly, having a test-and-learn approach from the start can help projects adapt if conditions change. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, SHOPS Plus moved face-to-face sessions to online platforms and mailed two newsletters on FP to more than 2,000 workers instead of relying on in-person distribution of printed materials at work.

Results

The WPI was piloted in Delhi NCR with 10 corporates in the manufacturing, construction, software services, and hospitality industries—several of these firms are MNCs or part of international corporate groups or of Indian conglomerates.

The pilot reached 5,818 workers through 68 face-to-face group sessions. In addition, it generated more than 8,000 unique user registrations on the Qulke smartphone application. More than 70 percent of the 17,588 downloads of the Qulke application were by people ages 18–29, suggesting its resonance with the intended target group. Qulke’s high user engagement was demonstrated as well, with an average time spent by users on the app exceeding five minutes and content around relationships and romance, condoms, and pregnancy being most viewed.

Since the pilot’s conclusion, Indicare has continued engaging with interested corporate clients. Besides institutionalizing the WPI design into Indicare’s service offering, SHOPS Plus also helped establish a foundation for the intervention to scale by partnering with the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India, one of India’s leading industry associations, to generate interest among association members in a paid model for FP wellness programs.

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