



# Doing Development Differently

PETER BLANCHE

Picture left:

“*‘Seeing the excavator at work was a turning point for us. It wasn’t just about removing the sediments; it was about restoring our hope and confidence. We knew that with the river dredged, we would be better protected from future floods.’*”

*Peter Blanche, All We Can’s Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Risk Reduction and Grants Manager, explains how the work of All We Can responds, with its partners, to the changing and challenging situations in local communities around the world.*

Methodism, rooted in social justice with a focus on the local community, is at the heart of the way All We Can works with partners. We’re called to practice faith through love and support for those in need – and helping communities build lasting, impactful change is how we play our part in seeing a more just world.

The development sector has, for a long time, been a mixed blessing for communities in the eyeline of large NGO’s (non-government organisations) looking to see positive changes from thousands of miles away. While the success of some discrete projects may not be in doubt, an insistence on quick fixes and immediate results has helped entrench a colonial dynamic which has stymied innovation and disempowered communities. It’s not enough to keep doing the same thing and hoping for a different result.

This is where the work of All We Can and our country partners becomes increasingly relevant. We know that the problems in need of solutions cannot be understood fully by someone who is not experiencing them. And those challenges, without that fundamental comprehension of context, cannot be overcome with

imported solutions. Our job is to support our partners who do incredible work; we have a focus on helping them establish self-reliance and sustainability, so that the need for external financial assistance is eventually phased out.

Community-led and community-owned transformation has been perhaps best evidenced in our most recent work in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This is a key aspect of our partnership approach and commitment: to support our long-term development partners and communities to adapt to the shifting environments they face. Climate change disproportionately affects our priority countries, and so planning for disaster management is a crucial part of ensuring that the development gains of our partners is not lost. An example of this is the Malawi DRR programme.

In 2023, tropical cyclone ‘Freddy’ impacted the southern part of Malawi. The Lower Shire Basin was affected by extensive and enduring flooding. The Malawian government, declared a state of disaster in the Southern Region’s 16 local authorities, including where our partners operate.

We initially responded to the impact of tropical cyclone Freddy by raising a public emergency appeal and, where possible, supported partners to repurpose their development grant. Due to the frequency of these hazards and disasters in Malawi, All We Can hosted a ‘participatory vulnerability and capacity’ training workshop with our local partners which familiarised partners with participatory methodologies and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approaches to development. Our local partners then supported communities to take a leading role in identifying and prioritising appropriate DRR activities to address vulnerabilities to natural hazards. Some examples of community-prioritised DRR activities included bamboo nurseries, procurement of early-maturing varieties of crops for rainfed agriculture, strengthening riverbanks and early warning system materials, establishing community woodlots, river dredging and village-level action plans.

Our duty to tackle injustice does not stop at our work to address the imbalance of power and wealth in the long-term. As well as supporting local partner organisations to achieve sustainable development, we have a mandate too: to meet immediate humanitarian need where it arises.

That is why we launched a Ukraine appeal following the full-on Russian invasion just over three years ago, where donations from our generous donors funded





holistic support for people there. We were able to offer financial support for winterisation kits to cope with the freezing winters of Eastern Europe, through to the provision of 'summer camps' for Ukrainian refugee children. We could fund immediate relief items, as well as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), child safe spaces (CSS) through to support for the elderly, and supported integration into new countries and communities. We worked with one partner supporting Ukrainian refugees in Poland with access to multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA). MPCA provides a more dignified approach to humanitarian assistance; people can choose how the money is utilised. This was the first time All We Can had supported such a programme, and we continue to support partners' delivery of flexible programmes.

More recently, in November of last year, we launched a joint appeal with the Methodist Church in Britain and the United Reformed Church to meet the humanitarian need resulting from the crisis in Gaza and Lebanon. We have been raising money for partners working on the front line of this humanitarian disaster. Working with three organisations in the region, activities funded by the appeal include the provision of rehabilitation support for injured children, providing daily hot meals to families in the most severely affected areas, as well as an indoor play space to support the psychological wellbeing of children with disabilities.

As the world keeps changing around us, so must we be adaptable to meet what we've set out to do – that is, doing all the good we can, by any means we can and in all the places we can.

Our organisation has undergone a lot of changes recently including welcoming David Thomson as our new CEO who started in the autumn. And as we move into the next strategy phase as an organisation, we're doing a lot of soul-searching to reaffirm who we are and what mark we want to make on the world.

We need to be flexible while remaining true to the change we want to see in the world. We hope – and strive – to make a difference with the communities where our partners work with impactful, locally-led approaches, and remain true to Wesley's challenge for us.

## PETER BLANCHE

*Peter Blanche has been working at All We Can as the Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Risk Reduction and Grants Manager since 2018. His role involves supporting community-led*



*transformation using a Disaster Risk Reduction (risk-informed) approach to local development, coordinating All We Can's response to international emergencies, and maintaining oversight of its Grants Portfolio.*