

Solving Problems that Concern You: Diversified Giving Portfolios

by Paul T. Penley, PhD

Do you give for the good feeling you get or for specific results you want to achieve? To be honest, most of us land somewhere in-between. We see a need and want to help. But, what if we see a big problem and actually want to solve it?

If you want to start solving problems that concern you instead of just supporting projects you admire, then I recommend a diversified giving portfolio that addresses the problem's short-term and long-term effects and provides credible solutions to the root causes. You can't stop AIDS in Africa with more meds. You can't stop the pain in the lives of orphans with orphanages. You can't stop the cycle of urban poverty with more affordable housing. Any viable plan to change the direction of a community's downward spiral must take a more comprehensive approach.

What does that look like? Take, for example, the plight of an increasing number of orphans in Swaziland. To truly solve the problem of their increased suffering, you can devise a diversified giving portfolio that addresses causes and symptoms. Specifically you can identify organizations that are "best-in-class" for each of the following areas:

1. Abstinence Instruction
2. Relationship/Parent Coaching
3. Parent Attrition Prevention: HIV/AIDS prevention, Substance Abuse Counseling, Employment Opportunities for Impoverished Heads of Household, etc.
4. Orphanage/Group Home
5. Foster/Village Member Care
6. Adoption

Why is it necessary to support effective programs in all these areas to solve the problem? Think about it. The majority of orphans in Swaziland are a direct result of the AIDS pandemic that has reduced the national population over the course of 10 years from its projected 1.2 million people to 912,000 in 2007. Children do not have parents because over 16,000 adults die every year from AIDS. To mitigate the suffering from HIV/AIDS medication would help, and to prevent the spread of the HIV virus abstinence education must also be added to the giving portfolio. For those

children whose parents do not die from the disease, many struggle to care for children because of lack of economic opportunity. So microenterprise initiatives are also critical to keeping children in independent family contexts. If these initiatives could be combined with parental training and adult counseling programs, the root causes for increasing orphans in Swaziland could be addressed to ensure long-term change.

However, short-term symptoms still need attention. That is the reason for supporting orphanages and a culturally fitting foster care program. For example, Children's HopeChest employs village grandmothers who oversee multiple child-headed households in a village to ensure their health and development without having to place them in an orphanage. Adoption programs with local orphanages also contribute to solving the short-term symptoms of this deeply rooted problem. In all of these programs, the solution to the problem remains the same: reduce the number of children without parents and promote the return of displaced children to a healthy family context.

We do not necessarily need more giving, but we do need smarter giving. So the next time you go to give, consider solving a problem with a comprehensive solution: a diversified giving portfolio. If you do it right, you can track real change on a large scale through appropriate post-grant impact analysis. And if you cannot afford to support organizations addressing all the root causes and long- and short-term symptoms, then identify organizations that take a comprehensive approach or partner with others who do. Smarter giving can solve the problems that concern you.

If you need help evaluating organizations, understanding cultural dynamics, or analyzing root causes and short-term symptoms, call 719-329-1515 and speak to one of our philanthropy advisors at Excellence in Giving about becoming a short-term or long-term client that solves the problems that concern you most.