

All conversations surrounding healthcare on the planet today are set either in terms of its universality and therefore the responsibility of the State, or a capitalistic endeavor that competes with all other sectors. The WHO has a broad definition for universal healthcare, referring to national policies that cover a variety of aspects like primary care, end-stage care, improved access, reducing financial risks, and generally improved health outcomes. Though national policies usually define the extent and scope of such services, private sector has a substantial role to play. While I shall stay away from arguing the benefits of healthcare's universality as defined in terms of a social compact (which would indeed require healthcare to be the State's responsibility), public policies surrounding this in the developing world are mired in substantial issues.

To the extent that healthcare is seen as a pivotal sector that supports an economy (by virtue of having healthy citizens that contribute to production environments), a variety of limitations – both external and internal – have held back citizens around the world for long. Be they lack of public funds, inappropriate allocation of scarce capital, corruption and competing priorities, or economic conditions around structural adjustment programs by IMF and the World Bank, nations continue to find themselves unable to cater to the health needs of their citizens. Meanwhile, the private sector has over time built an empire around healthcare, with increasingly sophisticated models for both design and delivery. While the private sector thrives through for-profit models, care is getting increasingly expensive. Of course, poverty is the scourge for most evils: for the enormous numbers of people without access to health, there is a terrible paradox: poverty exacerbates poor health while poor health makes it harder to get out of poverty.

The technology world does have the ability to knock down walls that restrict such access, or affordability. The ability is clear and present, though willingness to adopt for-profit models while ensuring the basic purpose around universality of healthcare is adopted isn't seen sufficiently enough. Examples like RISHI (Rural India Social & Health Improvement) in India, or the Pan-American Healthcare Organization's initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean are seen as developmental in nature, and not as much the collective responsibility of both government and private sector. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals clearly articulate that "Good Health" shall continue to be a top-of-mind global issue that the world needs to address. However, such issues cannot be expected to be resolved through government or multilateral institutional initiatives alone. The private sector has as much a part to play in finding solutions, as in eliminating the disastrous consequences to the economy and civil society on account of lack of access to healthcare. Solutions like the Cardiopad in Cameroon, eHealth Initiative in India, MOTECH in Ghana, mUbuguzima in Rwanda, and many more solutions have resulted from conscientious private sector individuals and organizations coming together, finding solutions to thorny health issues and deploying technologies relevant to the issue.

At this point it is crucial to appreciate the distinctions between Health and Wellness. The former is crucial, the latter a benefit of being part of an economy that doesn't have existential issues. The private sector has the opportunity to incorporate purpose (that of inclusive healthcare) into their for-profit models in a concerted manner. Technologies do have the ability to address most issues with healthcare – that of information and discovery. Most care issues in the developing world are a result of lack of information around discovery of issues, and remedial aspects that don't necessarily require a visit to the doctor. The private sector could very well enable such

discovery in an inexpensive manner such that most people benefit. There is surely profits to be made with such models as has been exemplified in Africa and elsewhere. The intent then has to be a pursuit of “profit with purpose”, where thorny socio-economic issues need to be identified, addressed and resolved. Private sector’s contribution to such opportunities are enormous, and the gains substantial enough to warrant corporate attention. While doing so, of course it is important to ensure that a nation’s socio-economic construct is clearly understood – between an existential and a preferential one. Confusing these can lead to issues that may be destructive in nature, both socially and sociologically.

In closing, I believe that the time has come for the private sector to join hands with governments and civil societies, and build solutions that are seen as unresolvable. For the first time perhaps in 250 years of industrialization, humanity is at that point where problems that have plagued us can finally be resolved. And this is not a moral argument. Instead, it is a capitalistic argument with clear intentions that fortunes at the bottom of the pyramid do exist. Tapping into such opportunities will need to recognize not just this pyramid’s woes, but also their aspirations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bobby Varanasi is one of the acknowledged **Top 25 Globalization Leaders** in the global sourcing space and the Founder of **Matryzel Consulting** – an independent advisory firm that has been acknowledged as one of the **World’s Best Outsourcing Advisory Firms** three years in a row (2013, 2014 and 2015). He brings with him two decades years of experience in consulting and management across IT, Business Services and building global operations. He advises federal governments across four continents on ICT sector development with particular emphasis on policy development, industry-government partnerships aimed at creating domestic resilience through increasing productive (and inclusive) faculties of entrepreneurs. Bobby also advises Fortune 500 customer organizations and emerging market entrepreneurs on strategy, growth, sourcing and expansions. He is often quoted and published in Forbes, fDi, Economist, The Outsourcing, ICT Media BV, Ratio Magazine Africa, etc.

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