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The New CSR: Symbiotic Private-Public Partnerships ^[1]

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Several MPD students and I had the opportunity to attend a panel hosted by UPS and UNICEF last week on the topic of humanitarian relief efforts. While the subject matter of relief efforts was fascinating, it was the unique, symbiotic relationship between UPS and UNICEF that held my attention during the course of the panel. The two organizations have developed a true private-public partnership, in a way that holds many lessons for us as diplomacy practitioners.

One of the key takeaways from the discussion was that Corporate Social Responsibility in its truest form has to go far beyond writing a check. Corporations often develop areas of expertise that are truly helpful for charities too in their work, and lending knowledge is almost more valuable than funds. In this example, UPS facilitates UNICEF by helping them to ensure the transportation of goods they have collected runs in the most efficient and stable way possible. Caryl Stern, President and CEO of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF cited UPS' help during the earthquake in Haiti as essential to providing effective aid during the disaster. UNICEF was tasked with providing hundreds of kits including essential supplies to Haiti - but they would have to deliver them to an area with no functional airport - and no roads. Together, UPS and UNICEF mobilized in 48 hours to deliver thousands of goods by plane, truck, and finally foot. This was only possible with UPS' knowledge of logistics, and UNICEF's capacity to mobilize quickly during a disaster, and provided a massive amount of relief to those affected.

Finding and building this type of partnership isn't easy, however, and in this case it blossomed out of the initiative of the corporation rather than the non-profit. Dan Brutto, President of UPS International, talked about how after writing years of checks it became important to UPS that they find an NGO to work with in a partnership, rather than in sponsorship. Here's a video where he details the company's concept of Humanitarian Relief Logistics. Connecting with UNICEF required research into a wide variety of organizations, before settling on one they felt they could make a deep investment into. Brutto's advice to corporations looking to foster stronger charitable programs was to find an NGO where they can make a difference - and also to make sure that they are well-managed and have a way to work together.

Stern highlighted in kind that NGOs should not ignore the business imperative of their partners - she said one of the first things she does with potential partners is to discuss what they can put on the table to make the partnership attractive. NGOs can make strong business propositions for companies by helping them to trumpet their contributions, and must be conscientious of their bottom-line needs and goals.

The approach taken by the two organizations holds important lessons for conducting corporate diplomacy. Through UNICEF's reach as a charitable organization that does valuable

work around the world, UPS is able to reach out to people in places they may not otherwise, and make a difference in their lives. Importantly, they are able to do so in a tangible way that demonstrates what they know best - logistics. Private-public partnerships are an area of increasing importance as corporations are beginning to recognize the value of engaging with international groups. By partnering together they are able to extend their reach and influence farther than they could on their own. In a recent Economist Intelligence Unit study, 42% of global corporate executives said that interaction with NGOs and charitable organizations was important to their business. Taking the UPS-UNICEF example of a symbiotic partnership, rather than sponsorship, will enable these organizations to reach out in more impactful ways to a wider public, with mutual benefits. While nobody would deny that non-profit organization cannot function without the charitable contributions of sponsors, the complimentary relationship detailed by UPS and UNICEF provides a model to learn from, where partners benefit more from working together - as does the rest of the world.

Sarah Myers is a first year Master's Candidate in the Public Diplomacy program. A Washington, DC native, she spent the last three years working for a media research company based in Singapore and traveling around Asia. Her studies are focused on corporate diplomacy, private-public partnerships and digital diplomacy.
