Expanding economic opportunity is arguably where firms have the greatest potential to create what Michael Porter and Mark Kramer have called “shared value,” or value for both business and society. Business activity can create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, cultivate inter-firm linkages, enable technology transfer, build human capital and physical infrastructure, generate public revenue for governments, and offer a variety of products and services to consumers and other businesses, including those operating at what has been termed the “base of the economic pyramid.” Each of these impacts has multiplier effects on social and economic development. If supported by responsible business practices, more inclusive business models, and financial, technical, institutional or policy innovations, they can make major contributions to poverty reduction and serve core business interests at the same time.

Despite its significance, the role of companies in expanding economic opportunity along their value chains has been one of the least recognized and evaluated aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR). As a result, the CSR Initiative at Harvard has made expanding economic opportunity one of its core areas of focus. In October 2007, together with FSG Social Impact Advisors, IFC, and the International Business Leaders Forum, the CSR Initiative hosted a leadership dialogue on the role of the private sector in expanding economic opportunity in developing countries. More than 100 leaders from business, government, civil society, and international development agencies participated in the dialogue, including corporations from seven industry sectors (see page 11).

In the dialogue’s opening keynote, Sir Suma Chakrabarti, former Permanent Secretary of the UK’s Department for International Development, stated, “Without growth, we will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals. And we will not achieve growth without a vibrant, competitive and innovative private sector – from street traders in Kampala to derivatives traders on Wall Street.” Through a series of panels and industry and cross-industry working groups, participants analyzed existing initiatives and generated practical ideas, recommendations, and proposals for advancing the economic opportunity agenda. The following pages summarize some of the key points and follow-up actions that emerged from the dialogue.
What is Economic Opportunity?

For the poor, livelihood choices – in employment and entrepreneurship – are constrained by a wide range of interdependent obstacles, ranging from geographic isolation to market failures, weak institutions, and political exclusion. This suggests that when we think about eradicating poverty, we should think broadly about creating economic opportunity. Economic opportunity is not a solution in itself; rather, it is a context in which individuals can create their own solutions. It is a combination of factors that enables the poor to manage their assets in ways that generate incomes and options.

These factors – assets, productivity tools, markets, and enabling conditions – are depicted below. A key question for the dialogue was, “What role can large companies play, in collaboration with others, to help deliver or improve these factors, and thereby expand economic opportunity?”

**THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SYSTEM**

How Do Companies Play a Role?

Background reports prepared for the dialogue mapped and analyzed initiatives that are expanding economic opportunity in the following industry sectors: extractives, financial services, food and beverage, health care, information and communications technology, tourism, and utilities, with a forthcoming paper on the auto sector. These papers explore two related and often complementary approaches that firms are employing to expand economic opportunity along their value chains:

• **Building inclusive business models.** Inclusive business models involve the poor in corporate value chains—whether as employees, entrepreneurs, suppliers, distributors, franchisees, retailers, customers, or sources of innovation—and are or have the potential to become financially viable. Keynote presenter Nancy Barry, President of Nancy Barry Associates—Enterprise Solutions to Poverty, spoke of four important models of inclusion: supplier relationships, distribution relationships, franchise or network enterprise models, and selling products that increase the income or assets of the poor, such as finance and ICT. Multinational companies are implementing a wide range of innovative models, including those listed on the following pages. Their leadership is essential, as MNCs and their foreign affiliates together account for more than a quarter of global GDP—even more if their extensive value chains are factored in. As several participants emphasized, emerging market companies are also valuable sources of innovation in inclusive business models, and there is a need to better understand and learn from what they are doing. Similarly, we must learn from the poor themselves about their needs, aspirations, and capabilities. As Professor Stu Hart from Cornell commented, “We need a process of co-creation by business and the poor. We cannot come from outside and expect to understand the needs, assets, and capabilities of the poor without immersing ourselves in their communities, staying with families, and identifying and working with local NGOs, social entrepreneurs, and small-scale enterprises.”

• **Implementing complementary strategies.** Companies are also implementing complementary strategies to enhance the commercial viability and economic opportunity impact of inclusive business models. These include developing human capital, for example through training programs; building institutional capacity, for example in NGOs, governments, local businesses and business associations; and shaping public policy. In some cases these strategies are funded through business development and operating budgets, but in many situations they are supported by corporate philanthropy and social investment or by cooperative funding arrangements with foundations and development agencies. It is also common to see companies implement these “complementary strategies” in a stand-alone fashion, sometimes with significant impact and scale.

As Michele Kahane from the Clinton Global Initiative stated, the distinction between inclusive business models and complementary strategies “is not an either/or. The Ford Foundation’s 8-year Corporate Involvement Initiative demonstrated that all of these strategies are needed, often simultaneously. They can be carried out by different organizations, or by the same one. But they are all important.” Some of the ways in which participating companies are collaborating with others to implement these different strategies are summarized in the following table. More detailed examples and analysis, incorporating dialogue participants’ insights from the industry-based working groups, can be found in the final industry reports available at http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/mrcbg/CSRI/pub_reports.html.
## Creating Inclusive Business Models

- **Microsoft**’s Partnerships for Technology Access are customized, multi-stakeholder PC sales partnerships designed to transform the ability of governments to provide public services and the ability of citizens to receive the benefits.
- **SABMiller** sources sorghum, a substitute for barley used in its Eagle Lager, from more than 10,000 small-scale farmers in Uganda and Zambia.
- **BP** is marketing biofuel stoves that reduce indoor air pollution to low-income households.
- **ExxonMobil** uses a company-wide National Content Strategy to identify and adapt best practices in SME linkages for replication in different contexts.
- **Pfizer** has contracted with the Malaysian firm Pharmaniaga Manufacturing Berhad, reducing the cost to Pfizer of manufacturing tablets and at the same time providing growth opportunities for a local business and, by extension, local citizens.
- **Citibank**’s Global Microfinance Group offers savings, insurance, remittance products, loan guarantees, securitizations, and bonds to microfinance institutions.
- **Starbucks** is working with a variety of partners in the Conservation Coffee Alliance to source sustainable, premium coffee that can be branded on the basis of origin from small-scale growers in Chiapas, Mexico.
- **ICICI Bank** has partnered with social enterprise BASIX to offer weather-indexed crop insurance to small farmers in India.
- In Thailand, **Nestlé**’s distribution chain includes 400 micro-distributors and 4,000 micro-retailers.
- **Sanofi-Aventis** transferred all production of a rifampicin-based drug used to treat tuberculosis to a site in South Africa, allowing the company to decrease production cost per treatment by 35% and add jobs and
- In Argentina, Brazil, and other countries, **Suez**’s Water for All program required neighborhood associations to petition for and help build water infrastructure, reducing construction costs and enhancing the sense of ownership and commitment among customers and government authorities.
- **Sandals Group** in Jamaica is working with the government agricultural development authority to increase and diversify the produce it can source from local farmers; six groups representing approximately 70 farmers now participate, earning a total of $5.5 million in sales in 2002-2003.

## Developing Human Capital

- **Microsoft**, **Cisco**, **State Street**, and others have joined forces in the five-year, €60 million European Alliance on Skills for Employability to provide technology access and training to help workers become more competitive and meet employers’ staffing needs.
- **The Coca-Cola Company** has customer development training centers throughout Latin America; these centers provided business management, marketing, finance, and other programs to more than 21,000 small, independent retailers in 2005.
- **Cisco Systems** is training and certifying thousands of professional network administrators by working with the UN Development Programme, the US Agency for International Development, and others to extend its Networking Academies in the least-developed countries (LDCs).
- **Chevron, BP, ExxonMobil, Sonangol**, and **Total** have collaborated to establish a business support center providing supplier training in Luanda, Angola.
- Since 2001, **Abbott**’s HIV/AIDS program in Tanzania has trained over 10,000 professional and community-based health care workers in HIV care, counseling and testing, equipment operation, and hospital management, increasing local skills and incomes.
- **ABB** in Tanzania trained local residents to operate and maintain an energy mini-grid the company installed in the rural community of Ngarambe.
- **Westpac** offers a range of services tailored to the needs of Australia’s indigenous populations; the company also supports the government’s Family Income Management program, helping indigenous families reach their financial goals.
**EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY: A SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANTS’ INITIATIVES**

### Developing Human Capital

- **Starwood Hotels & Resorts** has established 27 enterprise development centers associated with its haciendas in the Yucatan in Mexico, enabling local communities to earn incomes reviving traditional Mayan jewelry-making and crafts.
- **The Abdul Lateef Jameel Group** has brought other auto distributors together with government partners in Saudi Arabia to offer a comprehensive training and job placement program for young people.

### Building Institutional Capacity

- **IBM** and **ICICI Bank** are partnering with FINO, a technology service provider in India, to develop open-source applications for microfinance institutions.
- **Chevron**’s Angola Partnership Initiative established NovoBanco, a private microfinance bank targeting micro, small, and medium enterprises; API is also working to strengthen the capacity of municipal governments to plan, budget, and implement projects that benefit local communities.
- **General Motors** has supported development of the National Minority Supplier Development Council in the United States, which provides certification, access to finance, and consulting services to minority-owned firms; NMSDC also operates a database of more than 15,000 minority-owned firms and facilitates business linkages with larger firms expertise in South Africa.
- **Novo Nordisk** is taking steps to build its own capacity to expand economic opportunity in developing countries through an economic footprint model that helps the company understand both its direct and indirect impacts.
- **Unilever**, **British American Tobacco**, and **Diageo** are leading **Business Action for Africa**’s Business Action for Improving Customs Administration in Africa (BAFICAA) project, working with PriceWaterhouseCoopers, local businesses, and government officials to implement customs reforms in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.
- **Tribanco** in Brazil has partnered with IFC to develop a wholesale capacity-building function in which its credit officers train its small retailer clients, who offer their customers consumer finance.
- **SAP** is helping build the capacity for good governance in resource-rich developing countries through software solutions that enable mutual transparency and accountability among companies and governments in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.
- **Unilever**’s Project Novella in Tanzania, which seeks to develop a sustainable supply of Allanblackia nuts and oils for margarine, has built institutions including an Allanblackia Board, farmers associations, rural banks, and agricultural institutes.
- **Pakistan State Oil Company** has established a computer training institute in the rural Sindh province to increase the skills and earning potential of rural residents.

### Shaping Public Policy

- **WBCSD** and **SNV** in Ecuador brought the President’s office into the dialogue around its efforts to build inclusive value chains in the agribusiness sector; now government policy has made $90 million available for financing and capacity-building for small farmers seeking to supply larger firms.
- **Merck**’s $1 million a year Competitiveness Initiative for Latin America works with local business, government, and non-profit partners to drive the development of competitive life sciences sectors in Mexico and Brazil; the Initiative has conducted research, developed business cases, and advocated for policies and incentives that favor innovation and new business formation.
- **Ashoka** and the **World Bank Institute** partnered to look at what kind of policy change is necessary to facilitate disruptive innovation in health care.
- **The Business Trust** in South Africa supports policy dialogue between business leaders, Cabinet ministers, and the President and establishes collaborative partnerships to achieve national development objectives.
- **Serena Hotels** has helped shape the Kenyan government’s National Tourism Sector Development Strategy through its participation in the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers.
- **The Malian government has learned from EDF**’s experience creating rural electricity companies and reformed the regulatory and policy environment accordingly to facilitate the entry of new firms.
Is this “CSR”?

Economic opportunity has received relatively little attention from the CSR community to date, partly because of a perception that it is “not CSR.” As one participant put it, “businesses are inherently about expanding economic opportunity.” Another said, “the economic opportunity thing is such an obvious benefit for both communities and companies, but it is so hard to articulate the benefits inside the company.”

Sir Suma stated in his opening keynote, “one could argue that the most basic social responsibility of a company is to help generate growth that expands economic opportunity for all and is sustainable. But corporate social responsibility usually has a more specific meaning – although it means different things to different people. Many people see CSR as essentially about either philanthropy or the promotion of minimum social and environmental standards.”

There were concerns by some participants that CSR is too dominated by defensive, “do no harm,” risk management-style attitudes and approaches as opposed to more proactive, innovation-driven efforts to leverage value chains for positive development impact – what several participants preferred to call “corporate social opportunity.” Similarly, participants questioned whether expanding economic opportunity was a business activity or corporate philanthropy. Some argued that unless companies’ efforts were part of a commercially viable, core business proposition they could never be sustainable or achieve scale, while others pointed to strategic philanthropic initiatives that had done just that. The vast majority of examples cited in fact fell somewhere in the middle, using hybrid models that combine commercial investment, corporate philanthropy, public, and/or foundation funds.

At the CSR Initiative at Harvard, we think of “CSR” as voluntary actions that companies take through their core business activities, their social investment or philanthropy programs, and their broader engagement in policy dialogue that are explicitly managed to have positive net impact in society while also benefiting the company, directly or indirectly. Different types of activity, with different motivations, funding sources, and operational models, will be effective for different companies and contexts. There is no simple “one-size-fits-all.”

In the case of expanding economic opportunity, it is precisely because economic multipliers are a function of companies’ commercial, profit-making business activities that they have so much potential to create public value. At the same time, corporate philanthropy, patient capital, public-private investment models, cross-sector partnerships, and public policy dialogues can all play vital roles in leveraging and enhancing these economic multipliers, thus extending the overall reach and development impact of business operations.

The terminology debate is by no means over, as we struggle for more commonly accepted language to describe the wide variety of activities companies undertake, or are being asked to undertake, to enhance the net impact of business in society. As one panelist put it, “CSR is dead! Long live CSR.”
Why Collaborate?

The difficulty of building effective collaborations even across different functions and business units within the same company, let alone between companies or between business, government, and civil society actors, was a common refrain throughout the leadership dialogue. At the same time, an equally common refrain was that such collaborations were vital to overcoming the market failures, governance gaps, institutional weaknesses, and resource constraints that can undermine efforts to achieve impact and scale in expanding economic opportunity.

Six main categories or levels of collaboration were identified in the discussion and in the background papers prepared:

- Alliances between different business units and functions within individual companies.
- Collaboration to implement inclusive business practices within individual company value chains, e.g. with suppliers and other business partners, intermediary organizations, state and local governments, foundations, and public agencies.
- Local collaboration with communities or citizen’s groups to safeguard the company’s “license to operate” and/or ensure better delivery of essential goods and services like water and energy, such as formal community participation and monitoring agreements, shared learning, business co-creation models, community consultations, and stakeholder engagement strategies.
- Collective action among companies within the same industry sector.
- Collective action among companies across different industry sectors, such as financial and ICT companies working with agribusiness, utility, or health care companies.
- Cross-sector collaborative action among companies, governments, international agencies, and civil society groups, ranging from global networks and alliances (such as the Global Alliance for ICT and Development) to national economic development initiatives (such as South Africa’s Business Trust and the Angola Partnership Initiative).

Brian Whittaker, CEO of South Africa’s Business Trust, an alliance between the government and over 100 corporate partners, succinctly said, “I am a believer in working together, but an equally strong believer that this is not a religion, not a panacea, and not easy!” Some of the issues raised in his presentation and reinforced in the various panels and working groups included:

- The political, policy, institutional, and technological context shapes what sort of collaboration is necessary and desirable, what roles are feasible, and where the boundaries should be drawn between different public and private partners.
- It is important to draw the line at what can and cannot be done together. Companies must understand, respond to, and in some cases strengthen or supplement – but not take over – the roles of government, which a number of participants emphasized is especially challenging in weak governance zones.
- Risks of collusion, cooption, and conflict of interest often arise when non-traditional partners come together. These need to be acknowledged and managed along with often-cited tensions among organizational cultures, languages, strategies, and motivations.
- Participants often need to go “beyond business as usual,” which requires a combination of high levels of leadership and, increasingly, the development of protocols and even regulatory frameworks.
What Can Be Done to Advance the Economic Opportunity Agenda?

The cross-industry working group and final plenary session of the dialogue were intended to generate an “ideas marketplace” of thoughts, recommendations, and feasible proposals to advance the economic opportunity agenda. Participants in the dialogue surfaced ideas in two broad categories: research, analysis, and best practice sharing and on-the-ground projects. Their ideas are summarized below.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

Research, Analysis, and Best Practice Sharing

1. More detailed examples of inclusive business model innovations at the firm level. SNV, for example, is doing a study of the inclusive business prospects of 500 companies in Latin America. UNDP’s Growing Inclusive Markets team will soon release a report containing 50 new case studies and an online case database of at least 100. Ashoka’s Changemakers website is also a good source of inclusive business innovations, from firms and social entrepreneurs alike.

2. Examples of internal processes and mechanisms for mainstreaming inclusive business approaches within companies, such as organizational structures, reporting lines, incentives, and training and leadership development models.

3. Analysis of models for external training, stakeholder engagement, and joint business-community learning geared at better understanding low-income markets, risks, and opportunities.

4. More in-depth analysis of different matchmaking, brokerage, and business linkage support mechanisms, such as intermediary organizations, physical centers, and virtual platforms geared at overcoming market failures and information and resource constraints in linking low-income producers and enterprises to large corporate value chains.

5. Research on innovative funding mechanisms. What mechanisms exist? How are they structured, governed and funded? Who do they target? Are they effective? What can we learn from sector-focused financing mechanisms? DfID has undertaken evaluations of its Challenge Funds, which are publicly available on its website, and IFC is assessing some of its enterprise development funds.

6. Analysis of paths to achieve scale, such as replication, public policy integration, and other means.

7. Mapping and analysis of public policy innovations, mechanisms, and incentives that require, encourage, or support more inclusive markets and inclusive business models.

8. Similarly, mapping and analysis of models for corporate engagement in public policy shaping such as collective advocacy platforms; business-government leadership dialogues; voluntary accountability and transparency mechanisms; and efforts to strengthen public institutions and systems such as capital markets, training, and health systems.

9. Enhanced data collection on low-income households and SMEs, through improved national household surveys generating time series data, to better understand these potential customers and value chain partners.
On-The-Ground Projects

1. Development of either physical, location-based or virtual, internet-based platforms for intermediation – including identification of business ideas and opportunities and matching of potential partners, funding, and other resources – between large companies and SMEs or small-scale farmers. This could begin with a targeted, location-specific convening of companies from different sectors that could experiment with more integrated, systemic approaches for sharing the costs and risks of innovation focused on a particular geography or value chain.

2. Establishment of new inclusive business innovation funds, perhaps combining public and private capital from multiple funders and drawing on lessons from existing enterprise funds, challenge funds, and other blended value financing mechanisms.

3. Encouragement, incubation, and funding of more commercially-oriented intermediaries that can help catalyze value chain linkages with SMEs and smallholder farmers – helping to identify opportunities and build capacity. Technoserve and E+Co are examples of such intermediaries. IFC has built a new business line providing advisory services in these areas.

4. National and local dialogues with key decision-makers on inclusive economic growth. Develop platforms for companies to engage more systematically in policy discussions on growth and poverty reduction and key obstacle areas such as access to infrastructure and trade capacity-building. In WBCSD and SNV’s experience in Ecuador, key success factors in convening such dialogues included the involvement of senior executives; the existence of established national networks and a business intermediary organization; allocation of dedicated human resources within participating companies; a participatory approach that includes SMEs; and trust.

5. Workforce development initiatives. Establish and support joint initiatives for skills development and upgrading, in both technical and management skills. For example, Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Deutsche Telekom, and others have joined forces in a five-year, €60 million European Alliance on Skills for Employability providing technology access and training for workers. The Management Education Research Consortium (MERC) works with African business schools to develop locally-relevant case content, helping to train the skilled managers African businesses need.

6. Integration into investment analysis. Collectively encourage socially responsible investment (SRI) analysts and other investors to integrate the economic development contributions of companies more explicitly into their evaluations, in the same way they now increasingly include environmental performance indicators, in order to strengthen companies’ incentives to engage in inclusive business models.

Three common themes emerge from this collection of ideas and proposals. One is the need for intermediation to fill gaps in the market environment – for example, to get information flowing, build skills and technical capacity, facilitate access to finance, broker relationships, and help operating norms and standards coalesce. Another is the potential for greater cross-industry collaboration, both in filling these intermediation needs and in stimulating inclusive business model innovation. And finally, a reality check: collaboration, especially across non-traditional partners, is still emerging as a management discipline, and it requires much greater experimentation, analysis, and evaluation.
The CSR Initiative’s Next Steps

The CSR Initiative’s Economic Opportunity Program undertakes research and outreach on mechanisms by which companies and other actors collaborate to expand economic opportunity in developing countries. The program aims to understand how these mechanisms work and how effective they are at catalyzing large-scale, systemic impact on local economic development – enabling the poor to manage their assets in ways that generate incomes, options, and future opportunities.

The program’s first phase, conducted jointly with UNIDO, produced a comprehensive report on partnerships to foster small enterprise, promote economic growth, and reduce poverty in developing countries, as well as two country reports – Tanzania and Vietnam – examining specific examples in context.

The program’s second phase, conducted with FSG Social Impact Advisors, the International Tourism Partnership, the Overseas Development Institute, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the World Resources Institute, and additional individual experts, mapped leading collaborative initiatives to expand economic opportunity in eight key industry sectors: automotive, extractives, financial services, food and beverage, health care, information and communications technology, and utilities (water, energy, and waste management). An overarching analysis and eight industry-specific papers are being completed.

Based on our research findings thus far, the recommendations from the October leadership dialogue, and consultations and relationships with our various stakeholders, the Economic Opportunity Program’s third phase, beginning in the first quarter of 2008, will be a series of “deep dives” into specific collaborative mechanisms for expanding economic opportunity. We will focus on intermediation or “market-making” mechanisms that facilitate the participation of smallholder farmers and SMEs in corporate value chains by addressing specific gaps in the relevant market environment. These mechanisms include online platforms, physical centers, and intermediary organizations generating information, brokering relationships, training and building capacity, providing advisory services, facilitating access to finance, and disseminating best practices. Our first step will be to inventory and categorize leading-edge examples and select a sample for in-depth field research. We will complement our research with targeted convenings in specific geographies, bringing companies together across industries to explore more integrated approaches to common intermediation needs.

ENDNOTES


Publications in the CSR Initiative’s Economic Opportunity Series

2007

*Expanding Economic Opportunity: The Role of Large Firms*
Beth Jenkins

*The Role of the Automotive Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Forthcoming

*The Role of the Extractive Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Holly Wise and Sokol Shtylla

*The Role of the Financial Services Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Christopher N. Sutton and Beth Jenkins

*The Role of the Food and Beverage Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Ramya Krishnaswamy and Marc Pfitzer

*The Role of the Health Care Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Adeeb Mahmud and Marcie Parkhurst

*The Role of the Information and Communications Technology Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
William J. Kramer, Beth Jenkins and Robert S. Katz

*The Role of the Tourism Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Caroline Ashley, Peter DeBrine, Amy Lehr, and Hannah Wilde

*The Role of the Utilities Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*
Christopher N. Sutton

*Business Linkages: Lessons, Opportunities, and Challenges*
Beth Jenkins, Anna Akhalkatsi, Brad Roberts, and Amanda Gardiner

*Building Linkages for Competitive and Responsible Entrepreneurship: Innovative Partnerships to Foster Small Enterprise, Promote Economic Growth, and Reduce Poverty in Developing Countries*
Jane Nelson

2006

*Tanzania: Lessons in Building Linkages for Competitive and Responsible Entrepreneurship*
Tamara Bekefi

*Viet Nam: Lessons in Building Linkages for Competitive and Responsible Entrepreneurship*
Tamara Bekefi

*Leveraging the Development Impact of Business in the Fight against Poverty*
Jane Nelson

*Investing in Social Innovation: Harnessing the Potential of Partnership between Corporations and Social Entrepreneurs*
Jane Nelson and Beth Jenkins

For more information about the CSR Initiative and its Economic Opportunity Program, including downloadable copies of all CSRI reports, please see [www.ksg.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI).