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Imagine you work as a project manager in developing country 'X'. A need has been identified to build schools and your organisation has been approached to submit a proposal. Specialists in Infrastructure, Project Management and Procurement services, you have an array of technical expertise at your disposal and know that you could deliver to time, cost and quality. It would immediately appear to be a simple decision. Frankly, in the past UNOPS would swiftly spring to action without much hesitation. Today, we first pause as a matter of course and give more thought to how we can bring not only our expertise but also our values to bear.

UNOPS straddles the world of high level development assessments integrating international best practice norms and the world of context-specific local solutions. We make sure to engage with all stakeholders to fully understand their expectations and shape the best possible solutions. This includes local communities to represent their needs, government to more fully integrate with development plans, donors, the private sector and specialist organisations (UN agencies or NGOs).

As a UN Agency that is both cost recovery and non-profit, serving people in need and working with

multiple actors, we have a unique insight into the interplay of drivers and incentives which are all too often seen as competing. We take seriously our responsibility to increase the sustainability and quality of our engagements as we know that while people in need might not always be the ones making the initial investment, they normally are expected to pay for the upkeep and they will certainly pay the price for misguided projects.

It is when UNOPS operates as an honest broker that we add real value, safeguarding the interests of people in need, while understanding the constraints of the public sector to provide basic services and appreciating the value of private sector investment, technical expertise and job opportunities.

To render us fit-for-service in this role, we are currently honing our approach to business development and project engagement. We both seek the right engagements in the first place, and ensure that implementation contributes to development ambitions. A central part of our sustainability approach is the application of our 'Sustainability Marker' which guides our project teams to identify gaps and dependencies as well as maximise opportunities and minimise harm when developing projects across the



social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability. Applying the Sustainability Marker even prior to project start-up gives teams a chance to influence project design.

As well as having technical expertise and exercising considered judgement, part of the job description for an honest broker is the demonstration of consistent excellence. At UNOPS we are committed to the adoption of international standards as our quality assurance. This is now part of our DNA as an organisation, interwoven into all that we do. In our projects we strive to comply with industry standards, such as those accredited by the ISO. Not only are we in some cases the first in the UN system to do so but we are also often able to introduce them in countries where these would not be normal practice. Corporately, through adherence to the EFQM Excellence Model, we routinely assess and ensure our continued relevance and competence. We have found this really helpful in aligning approaches and results.

In conclusion, as an honest broker, when we accept projects such as the school in this article, we will reduce the environmental impact in the construction, build the schools to the appropriate international standards with context-sensitive design, incorporate components for equitable social inclusion, reduce running and on-costs and where possible use local labour and materials to support livelihoods. We will also be very intentional in developing local and national capacity through sharing the skills, knowledge and behaviour underpinning excellence, to assist private or public sector institutions to manage projects like these themselves.

Ultimately, if we are really serious about our mission, our greatest contribution to a sustainable future will be to not only demonstrate excellence in what we do and how we do it, but while doing so work ourselves out of a job.

## About UNOPS

UNOPS is an operational arm of the United Nations, helping a range of partners implement \$1 billion worth of aid and development projects every year. By implementing around 1,000 projects for our partners at any given time, UNOPS makes significant, tangible contributions to results on the ground.

UNOPS mission is to serve people in need by expanding the ability of the United Nations, governments and other partners to manage projects, infrastructure and procurement in a sustainable and efficient manner. UNOPS vision is to advance sustainable implementation practices in development, humanitarian and peacebuilding contexts, always satisfying or surpassing partner expectations.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE