

In memory of Howard



Howard was a man who thought big.

“Don’t go for a 100,000 euro project” he said the first time we discussed CTC in 2002. *“You need to go for a million with a multisectoral research programme if you really want to change things”*.

Prior to this I had been struggling to make progress pushing forward a new model for treating starvation.

Everyone I spoke to was interested, but few were prepared to actively support the idea. That all changed during that first conversation with Howard. He not only immediately understood the CTC model, but straight away realised I was going about promoting it in the wrong way. After 2 years of hardly moving forward and not going to scale, within 3 months of Howard’s engagement, we had a million in the bank and Concern were backing the field research. Thereafter he was the key strategist, guiding the process to get the model accepted as global best practice. Whilst I was the big mouth of CTC, Howard was the brains behind the scenes. Without him, tens of millions of starving children would not have been treated and hundreds of thousands more children would still be dying of starvation each year.

Only later did I fully realise why Howard was so quick to understand and add value the CTC concept. It was that the community-based ideas central to the model were nothing new to him – he’d been working that way in India for almost 20 years.

He and Pauline had gone to India in 1968, when after finishing post-graduate studies in animal nutrition, he turned down a lucrative position in Northern Ireland. Instead, he travelled to Medak, a small town in Andhra Pradesh, to supervise a dairy farm. Faced by drought, he quickly realised that he’d have more impact working with marginalized arable farmers than with dairy. He then spent the next 15 years developing effective and sustainable methods to make their small farms profitable, freeing them from generational cycles of debt-induced poverty. He combined his community-level work with research, collaborating with ICRISAT an international agricultural research agency, to develop methods of multiplying crop yields, including the Agri-Cot tilling

machine. His humility and humanity meant that he could learn from the farmers as they learned from him; working together in true community-based development, years before the phrase was even coined.

Howard's love of India never faded - he cherished the deep bonds of friendship he had made there, as well as the Telegu language, the landscape and the biryani! He never forgot India and the people he worked with never forgot him - nearly 40 years later, his Indian friends wrote of his "selfless service to the Telegu people" in a heartfelt tribute to Uncle Dalzell Dora posted on facebook.

He also never forgot the village fortune teller who looked at his palm and proclaimed, "I see a lot of money passing through your hands, and you will have none of it." Although he never made money for himself, he had a keen business mind and believed that engaging the private sector was critical in promoting positive, large scale, sustainable change.

He was actually an accomplished businessman in his own right. In 2002, he was instrumental in transforming Concerns' original micro-credit and savings programme in Cambodia into AMK, an independent hugely successful microfinance institution. Today AMK is providing access to finance for about 1 million of Cambodia's under-served population. As a director and chair of their Social Performance Committee, the systems and safeguards Howard led them to put in place, has ensured that the organization stays committed to its social goals and focused on assisting low income people.

In 2005 we were lucky enough that he became one of the first directors of Valid Nutrition, a charity set up to research and manufacture nutritional products in developing countries. Making therapeutic food out of crops grown locally in countries afflicted by malnutrition became a real passion for him. It drew together his enthusiasm and knowledge of agriculture and nutrition, whilst allowing him to work on harnessing the power of the private sector. He remained a vital source of strategic advice for Valid right up until his death. Even a few days before he died, I was on the phone with him discussing how we could get around the various obstacles that had been out in the way of rolling out Valid's new low cost plant-based therapeutic food.

His effectiveness was due in a large part to his personal warmth. He was great at keeping in touch with individuals all around the world and had regular contact with a huge network of people who knew and respected him. Friends from India, colleagues from Concern, those from a multitude of development agencies whom he had met over the years, government officials, neighbours,

those from the Blessington men's shed and fellow board members at Sight-savers where he spent 6 years as a trustee – the list was long and varied and the people often influential. One thing most had in common was that at some time or other Howard had helped them. He was adept at making the odd phone call or going for a quick (or not so quick) pint to unlock key blockages. Time and again this moved us forward when the rest of us had somewhat run out of ideas.

Over the 30 years I've known him he has had a profound effect on my life, both professionally and personally. It was Howard who introduced me to Claire my wife, although I don't think he quite envisaged what would happen when he arranged for us to work together on the first CTC conference. The only time I think I saw him genuinely surprised was when I invited him round for dinner and he realised the address I gave him was Claire's house.

All through, he's been a friend and mentor and a constant source of inspiration. For a short man with wonky eyes he was a true giant with unparalleled vision; he was amazingly effective in what he did – it wasn't just his intellect, strategic nous, determination, wisdom and compassion – although it was all of those. Above all the quality that made him so especially effective, was his unerring ability to never let his ego get in the way of the task at hand, always putting the interests of others before his own. His impact in bettering the lives of countless people was hugely inspiring. I and many others will truly miss him, but his legacy will continue to improve the lives of poor people throughout the developing world, for years to come.
