



A School Feeding Program in Nigeria: Tetra Pak's Business and Development Goal

Case B

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AUGUST 2006. After the meeting with His Excellency Alhaji (Dr) Abdullahi Adamu, the Executive Governor of Nasarawa State in December 2005, Bjorn Wille and Mandla Mbau felt that they had got their message squarely across. H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu had been taken by surprise by some of the details he was given about the delays, the penalties, the extra costs... Given H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu's powerful position, the program management team had not brought up these finicky operational problems directly with him. There was a clear leadership gap that might have been avoided if a local executive director and the continuous local presence of a Food for Development Office consultant had been planned from the outset. H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu agreed with Wille and Mbau that action needed to be taken so that the legacy he had dreamt of leaving was out of danger. He resolved to insist upon accountability – in the case of the de-worming product, for example, he was going to insist that every unit be accounted for before approving further disbursements of funds.

They had agreed that the human resources problem was the main sticking point. A senior executive director needed to be appointed to head the program staff and provide the leadership the program was so sorely missing. So much money had been wasted on delays and port and LoC penalties that a position could

easily have been paid for from the outset. All had recognized that this had been a flaw in the program design. H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu had agreed to recruit a Nigerian executive director and Tetra Pak had committed to recruiting a counterpart to work full time at the program site and groom and mentor the executive director.

H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu undertook to upgrade the government houses in which Tetra Pak staff worked. Mbau would work hard to support efforts for the all-important localization of the product, and the Tetra Pak team would continue to capacity-build and keep the funding flow going. Nine months later, a lot more water had run under the bridge. In June 2006, Mbau had asked to meet with Wille to tender his resignation. It was time for him to move on. In September 2006, before he left, they discussed latest developments. Had they overlooked anything and was there further room to maneuver?

In January 2006, Wille and Mbau felt that they had an opportunity for a fresh start. They had cleared the air with H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu, corrected any misconceptions and managed to convince him to commit to some fundamental changes. Their main concern had been that Tetra Pak should not be dragged down with a failing program. But now things looked more optimistic. They felt inspired to

set about making the changes and achieving Tetra Pak's altruistic and commercial goals.

In the immediate term, H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu was true to his word. When the program staff sent an invoice in January for stocking a supply of de-worming agent for 2006, H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu refused to sign and asked for each unit to be accounted for. Fears of corruption were calmed. It transpired that imperfections in the monitoring process had contributed to lack of accountability for the drug. This was corrected.

In February, H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu made a momentous decision. He would run for President in the 2007 elections. This was mainly good news, but there were a certain number of short-term and potentially long-term drawbacks associated with this move. H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu was an inspiring politician, but if he did not win and the opposition went into office, the school feeding program could potentially be jeopardized unless a successor were wholly convinced of its merits. Without localization of production firmly in place, it would be difficult to convince. If H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu did win, the continuity of the program was definitely assured, and probably on a national scale. However, in the immediate term, this also meant that, busy at the best of times, H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu would be pulled in every direction as he got his campaign off the ground while trying to assure business as normal in his state. This made the search and selection of an executive director post even more pressing than before, but with the new turn of events, H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu did not have a lot of time to act on this either. It was a bit of a "Catch 22" situation. In March and April of 2006, the supporters of H.E. President Olusegun Obasanjo (GCFR) made a failed bid for a change to the Nigerian constitution to allow the President a

third term of office. In the face of huge political and public opposition, the president backed down. The key question was – would the next president be H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu?

Wille set about recruiting a counterpart for the executive director. It was no easy task. The Tetra Pak West Africa office was small and had no human resources department. Hiring the counterpart was a time-consuming process. Wille advertised, sorted and filtered the applications himself and finally arrived at a short list. Wille and Brian McGuinness, MD for Tetra Pak West Africa, finally selected Julian Wolfson in April 2006. Wolfson was a 29-year-old Canadian citizen with a strong academic background in nutrition, as well as excellent project management skills. In spite of his youth, he had worked with feeding and nutrition projects both in Africa (Ghana) and in other highly challenging environments such as Afghanistan. He also had first-hand experience of impact assessment studies, and was familiar with the work of GAIN. Wille and McGuinness took the view that, being young and dynamic, Wolfson would have the necessary drive and energy to push the program, while remaining flexible and receptive to advice and guidance. The initial plan was that he would start work at the program location in Lafia, Nasarawa in June 2006.

Markus Huet, the FfDO consultant based in Malaysia had lent some valuable support to the program design and subsequently to capacity-building efforts. However, it had been a problem to provide the necessary follow-up after his visits and momentum was often lost between the visits. It was now envisaged that Wolfson would take over these responsibilities when he came on board. Huet, who had been coming periodically for intense capacity-building stints, discontinued his visits in 2006. In July 2006, Mbau set about obtaining a Nigerian work permit for Wolfson.

In March, 2006 Berry Magarinos from GAIN went to Nigeria and visited the Program Office and Tetra Pak offices in Nasarawa State:

Before the mission, I was not clear on the role of the local government and what the local officers were doing. But I observed that the local team needed to be more proactive on solving some of the issues around the logistics in the office. They were being trained in project management, but it was more training than learning. There is a difference – training provides technical tools, but learning leads to a behavioral change. You can achieve the latter, but it is a matter of time and effort. Julian’s intervention will make a big difference.

In June 2006 Mbau handed in his resignation. Wille was not altogether surprised. Mbau was a young and enthusiastic executive with plenty of potential. He had been in Nigeria since 2002. Four years later, it was time for him to move on. Nevertheless, Mbau was also frustrated at the pace of change in Nigeria. Being an African, the lack of urgency he often encountered about the altruistic goals of the school feeding program bothered him. He said:

Building and developing a nation and encouraging investments from business and government are not necessarily motivators for the program staff. The complacency endemic to the system as a whole is a challenge.

McGuinness was offered another professional opportunity with Tetra Pak outside Nigeria. In April 2006 it was decided that Wille should move from South Africa to Nigeria. It was clear to Ulla Holm and Wille that Wolfson would need back-up, and with Mbau and McGuinness leaving, Wille’s focus could mainly be on accelerating the localization of the product and also the expansion of the program to other states in Nigeria. Wille could also cover his

global role from Nigeria just as well as he did from South Africa. Holm commented:

For us that have been involved with the different stages of developing the implementation of the program in cooperation with the local program secretariat and other local teams, the achievements so far are extremely positive. As we are breaking new ground here, there have been many challenges for all parties. The fact that Björn Wille now has moved to Nigeria shows our commitment to give the best possible support to a continued successful roll out of the program and eventually the start of local production to assure sustainability.

Wille’s move was scheduled for September 2006. Bureaucracy intervened with Wolfson’s work permit and instead of starting in June 2006, he would also arrive in Lafia only at the end of September 2006. But in the meantime, Wille was encouraged by local and African reactions to the food program:

The schools are now actually coming to the warehouses and fetching the product themselves. This is an indication that the program is well received. There is also interest from other African governments. To me these are signals that what we are trying to do is sustainable economic development.

Several so-called “home-grown” school feeding programs involving cooked meals using local raw materials had been introduced in 11 other Nigerian states at around the same time that the Nutri-Sip program had started to operate. Providing fresh cooked meals to numerous children in under-resourced schools in difficult rural environments proved a much more substantial logistical and public health challenge than the distribution of a drink like Nutri-Sip. By September 2006, all of these programs had shut down, yet the Nutri-Sip program was still going strong.

Wille was encouraged by first signs of the product's impact on children's health:

Teachers in the schools are already reporting that kids' health has improved; they are more bright-eyed and attentive, with fewer children tending to drop off to sleep in class. The enrolment rate has gone up by as much as 25% in some schools – and more girls are also being sent to school. Test grades are higher and children have an improved ability to concentrate. But we are waiting for the results of the impact study...

GAIN subcontracted Helen Keller International's (HKI) office in Nigeria in June 2006 to lead the data collection for the impact study in selected schools. GAIN and HKI collaborated with Cornell University to design a research protocol to measure the impact of the program on the nutritional status of the school children and to carry out a cost benefit analysis on the effect on the local economy. With support from the Nasarawa School Feeding Program Committee (NSFPC), the plan was to use local people for data collection to ensure local ownership. The impact assessment study would be carried out on two schools new to the program and the protocol would be strictly followed in these cases. The initial aim had been to commence the study in March 2006 but for technical and practical reasons it was decided to postpone the date until the end of October 2006, after the school summer vacation and the Ramadan feast (during which at least some of the children would be fasting).

By June 2006, the numbers of schoolchildren being fed on the program were at a level of 170,000 with a revised objective of adding 4,000 per week (instead

of the initial 10,000) and reaching 200,000 by the end of 2006. This was not quite 50% of the planned initial target of 450,000 children by that date. Progress was being made slowly but surely, but nevertheless in the planned direction.

By August 2006, there was still no word on progress with the recruitment of the executive director. Wille had provided H.E. Governor Dr Abdullahi Adamu with some of the applications that they had received for the counterpart post from Nigerian nationals and Mbau drafted the profile of the type of candidate to be sought (refer to *Exhibit 1* for the ideal candidate profile developed jointly by Tetra Pak and the state government). The Tetra Pak quarters in the government compound were still awaiting an upgrade; electricity, water and plumbing continued to be a problem. However, Wille had confidence that once Wolfson was on location, many of these practical issues could be cleared up. The localization process was also moving along slowly but surely and some serious investor interest had been identified. The government was following up. Significant developments in this regard would be essential before the April 2007 elections but it all looked very positive. Wille's own presence in Nigeria was bound to make a difference in that respect.

As for the School Feeding Program, during the school break in July and August, not a lot could happen, but they would all have to put their shoulders to the wheel once schools were back on track in September, Wolfson was finally on board and Wille had transferred to Nigeria.

During his debriefing with Mbau, both men focused the discussion on how the future of the program

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1. The Micronutrient Initiative was launched as a result of the 1990 UN Summit for Children, with the mission of eliminating micronutrient malnutrition; sponsors included UNICEF, the World Bank, the International Development Research Centre, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).
 2. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, commonly known as BRAC, was founded in 1972 as a donor-funded relief agency.

could be further secured. Had they covered all the traces and could more be done in the immediate or long term to assure success?

Exhibit 1. Ideal candidate profile for the Executive Director of the Nasarawa State School Feeding Program

The person should have the following attributes:

1. Good understanding of supply chain management and the various cost drivers in the supply chain.
2. Preferably, some knowledge in operational finance.
3. Good administrative skills.
4. Management experience, including previous experience in managing people.
5. Project management experience directly gained from handling projects, including defining deadlines for the various tasks to be completed and actually having met the deadlines as defined.
6. Good knowledge of computer software such as MS Excel, MS Word, project management tools and others.
7. Good command of English, both written and oral.
8. Strong networking and relationship-building skills.
9. Self motivation with a high amount of energy in order to get the task done.

Source: Company Information

