



## LEADERSHIP CASE FUEL

Children who go to school on an empty stomach are disadvantaged before lessons even begin. Their concentration is impaired, as is their memory. They are tired and disengaged. They get sick more often, missing classes. Hunger exacerbates anxiety and depression, compounding the negative spiral.

In South Africa, there are millions such children. Childhood hunger is a gross social injustice that burdens the future of the country.

It has not gone unnoticed: dozens of civil society organizations and corporations have responded, but their uncoordinated school feeding programs often only have served to muddy the waters around the government's own comprehensive National Schools Nutrition Program (NSNP).

The NSNP is designed to help non-fee-paying public schools provide every student with a balanced, nutritious meal before 10am each school day so they can make the most of their time at school. Unfortunately, those meals were being served either too late to have a lasting effect, or not at all.

This is the problem that fast-food executives, colleagues and Africa Leadership Initiative (ALI) Fellows Charles Luyckx and Gary Campbell set out to solve.

Charles and Gary always clarify that despite their experience at Nando's, an international fast-food company, they did not simply impose corporate logistics systems on government. But if their private-sector experience was crucial for anything, it was a certainty that the end goal must be possible: delivering millions of meals on time is achievable, because they'd seen it.

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AND BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE.”**

Charles and Gary recognized the work that was going on; but they saw the gap between intention and effectiveness. Motivated by the avoidable wastage and failures in the system, they weighed in with what became FUEL, an initiative developed not to add another source of feeding, but instead to boost the effectiveness of the NSNP.

How they arrived at this work is a case study in a unique quality of leadership.

FUEL was born from a teatime conversation at an ALI seminar, says Charles. One of his class Fellows, then employed in the Office of the President of South Africa, talked about the hunger she observed on an official school visit, and suggested Charles, then

## ABOUT CHARLES AND GARY

**Fellows of the Africa Leadership Initiative-South Africa (ALI-SA) and members of the Aspen Global Leadership Network.**

Charles Luyckx and Gary Campbell are chartered accountants who met working for fast-food business Nando's. Charles was a UK founding director, and Gary the commercial director.

Co-founded FUEL in 2007 when Gary returned to his home country of South Africa. Charles procures funding and Gary is the CEO.

**2012 McNulty Prize Laureates.**

an executive at Nando's, do something about it.

Charles was in. "I believe that insofar as it gives people choices, education is one of the critical issues of our time," he says. "A meal can make the difference between a day learning and a day wasted on hunger."

At that time, his Nando's colleague in the UK, Gary, was about to return to his native South Africa. Gary was hungering for something meaningful to sink his teeth into, and was excited about the suggestion that he investigate the country's school feeding landscape. It was a particularly fraught time for impoverished schools: deep flaws had been exposed in the school feeding program of one of the poorest provinces; the entire program had been suspended there. For three months, 5,000 schools received no food at all.

"I had these hypotheses where we would buy stuff centrally, have hub-and-spoke distribution models, and thus make a great start on solving the problem," Charles says.

“IT'S THE BIGGEST INSPIRATION IN THE WORLD TO KNOW THE SYSTEM HAS ADOPTED OUR METHODOLOGIES, AND THAT MILLIONS OF SCHOOLCHILDREN ARE BEING IMPACTED.”

On the ground, however, Gary soon discovered the challenge was more complex than what economies of scale and efficient distribution could fix. He discovered an elaborate system of stakeholders: a chain going from central government, through nine provincial authorities, to innumerable schools, all with different approaches and experiences. And there was no data about efficiencies and effectivity. The original hypothesis was, Charles laughs, obliterated; and Gary set to work developing a new one.

"It was a massive shift from what I knew," he says, describing a process of applying a beginner's mind to the exploration. They discovered that even when schools received sufficient food in time, they often failed to provide the meals on schedule—in other words, a significant dimension of the problem lay in accountability and reporting.

Without data, officials were at best random in addressing problem areas. For Charles and Gary, whose experience lay in the development of logistical systems, this presented an opportunity.

However, just as they had had no knowledge about the school feeding landscape, neither had experience working with government. Gary made it his goal to get through the labyrinth of personalities, structures and politics of the relevant government departments. He needed buy-in for systems that would allow

## ABOUT FUEL

- **FUEL (Feed. Educate. Uplift. Love.) is a fully-funded non-profit partnership** between civil society, business and the government.
- It works within South Africa's Department of Education to co-create and implement the Monitoring, Reporting and Response (MRR) methodology, to **support and hold schools accountable in providing nutritious meals** on time to over 9 million students.
- On-time delivery of meals has **improved by 26% in seven of nine South African provinces** (data forthcoming on the remaining two).
- The Department of Education has **adopted FUEL's methodology** and is working closely with them to institutionalize it nationwide.

those responsible to measure their effectiveness, and to take steps to fix what wasn't working. This immensely daunting task required difficult and humble advocacy work. Gary, according to Charles, is temperamentally a perfect fit: "He brings great skill and great functionality—and he never elicits defensiveness," says Charles. "He has an ability to win people over at all levels of the system."

A pivotal moment in the early days of FUEL came when it was active only in one of South Africa's nine provinces, the largely rural North West Province. Methodological trials were making good progress, but then, says Gary, "FUEL's champion there, the Department of Education CFO, was replaced, and we realized we had been working only at the top of the system. We had left the rest of the system—the program managers and field workers—behind."

It wasn't the first time FUEL had felt the weaknesses of a top-down approach, but it was the most crippling, and it showed them a better way. "Up until that stage we had been unclear what our methodology was, but then we realized we had to link measurement tools directly to the people in the system," Gary says.

FUEL gained the necessary permissions to interact directly with field workers, and began a comprehensive change program. Since change is best supported by a sense of ownership, co-creation was elevated as a core principle. Even in a deeply bureaucratic and politicized system, this is what ultimately achieved the deep buy-in FUEL was able to foster.

"Managing change in any system is tough, but doing so in a government system is tougher than most," Gary confirms. "Further, the historical legacies of race, class and systemic exclusion in South Africa bring a definite added challenge." The only way to achieve broad acceptance, was to intentionally give ownership of

the customized tool to those who had to work with it.

The flip side of sharing credit was what FUEL calls “non-threatening accountability.” “The more one gives credit to the system, the more effective the system is,” Gary says, of the positive reinforcement that led to desired behaviors. It helped that the behaviors being reinforced—monitoring delivery of food to schools and to students, reporting the right information to the right places, allowing for corrective responses—were logical, and that the focus was on improving the end result, not on the activities conducted. “You have to start with a desired end result in mind, which we call defined success. We define it every day, and we measure consistently,” he says.

## “LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT PROVIDING THE RIGHT RESOURCE, AT THE RIGHT TIME.”

Gary emphasizes consistency as the key factor in building trust. “Often, I don’t see why government should trust people who come and offer help,” says Gary. “It’s not our system we’re working in, it’s theirs. They have been let down very often. It takes a long time for officials to trust that what you tell them has no hidden agenda. It has taken 11 years of consistent behavior to get where we are now.”

It is worth looking at the notion of consistency. For any organization, but perhaps especially one with a single direct funder, the passage of time is potentially a source of great stress. “Many funders might have drawn a line at, say, three years,” says Gary. “Or they might have become impatient with our focus, and wanted to shift attention to broader engagements. What Charles has made possible by holding steady throughout, is that we have been able to assume stability.” While the relationship between Charles and Gary is unique to FUEL, it’s clear that sustained and patient funding is essential for this kind of exploratory, evidence-based innovative approach to bear fruit.

What makes it possible to hold steady in the face of setbacks, and in light of the peculiarly volatile and sometimes toxically corrupt political environment of South Africa? “A huge strength in our collective DNA,” says Charles of his long standing working relationship with Gary, “is that we have been so committed to the result that the risks weren’t a deterrent. If results take time, they take time. You just persevere until you succeed.”

Gary adds that a kind of modesty is helpful. “We’re happy to be small, pulling a long lever, and retaining focus. That has really helped us.” Outside wisdom has also been invaluable for the core team’s process: “Our Africa Leadership Initiative network—the greater collective—has provided critical support at various stages; advice, insight and encouragement.”

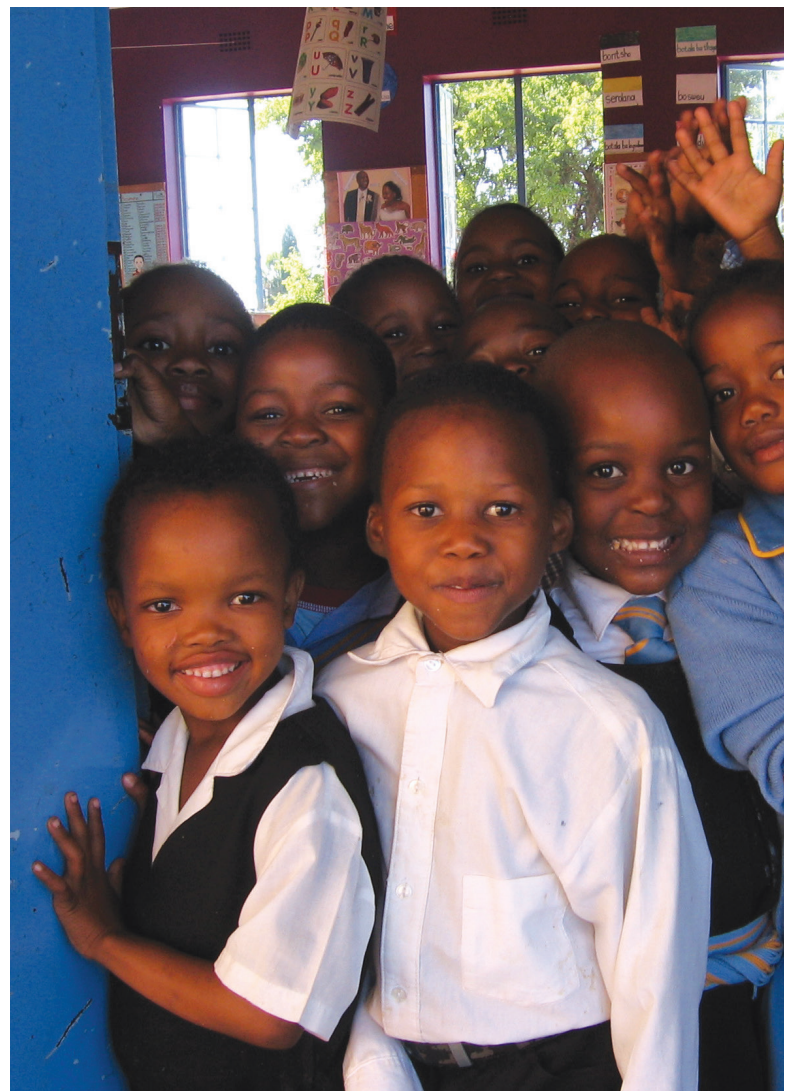
FUEL’s impact has been profound. In 2009, the first baseline assessment in the North West Province showed that just 55% of primary schools were serving a nutritious meal before the 10am target. By 2016, that figure stood at 82%. In another largely rural

province, Mpumalanga, the figure went from 68% to 90% in just a few years.

But FUEL’s work will be done, they say, only when officials take ownership of the system across all nine provinces, so that FUEL’s own role shrinks to one of maintenance. They are confident they are getting there. Gary points out that two major dimensions of sustainable change have been fulfilled. First, there is a broad coalition engaged in the effort, with approximately 500 people in the system who have adopted and continue to use the MRR methodology. Second, the Department of Education has skin in the game: it has adopted the methodology, integrating FUEL’s key performance indicators into the DNA of the government’s Department of Education.

When their work within education is done, say Charles and Gary, there will be other challenges. Delivery of public sector services in South Africa have challenges well beyond the NSNP to nearly all areas of service provision, from the health to business sectors. Charles and Gary have already seen how the methodologies they have developed, and the connections FUEL has built within government departments, are opening up opportunities to initiate accountability programs in the broader system.

It’s an exciting prospect. “If you unblock the blockages in government systems, you release incredible resources and benefits for people,” says Charles.



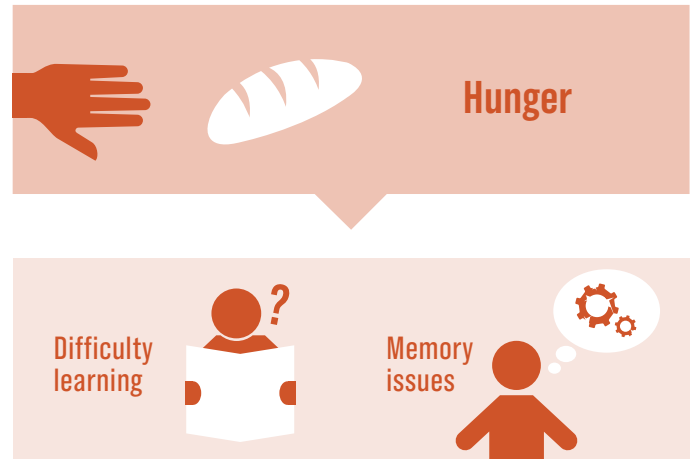


# NUTRITION IN SOUTH AFRICA'S SCHOOLS

In South Africa, two-thirds of children live in poverty. Of these children, about half show physical symptoms of malnutrition.



Chronic hunger prevents a student from learning effectively, and leads to diminished concentration, energy and memory.



The government commits less than 3% of its education budget to the school meal program.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED

### It doesn't matter who gets the credit.

"Leadership is about providing the right resource at the right time. Sometimes it's inspiration and courage; sometimes it's greasing the wheels. Leadership is recognizing what is required, and being happy to play that role. Emerson said that there is no limit to what you can achieve and what you can get done if you don't care who gets the credit."

### There's exponential power in collaboration.

"Where people can leverage one another, rather than reinvent the wheel, that's something we should aspire to."

### Maintain your focus on your goal.

"Keep asking yourself: what does success look like? It's critical to zoom in and say: 'What am I trying to do?' If I'm not clear what I'm trying to do, I won't do it well."

### Trust is built over time.

"Relationships are built on trust, and that takes time. You can't take a microwave approach to trust."