

Editorial: In honour of Alan Gibson

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I first met Alan Gibson on 24 September 2007 in Chiang Mai, Thailand at a seminar on developing service markets and value chains. Alan sat beside me in the morning plenary and introduced himself. Later that day, he invited me to join a group heading out for dinner. I was new to the field of service markets and value chains – I had come from the microfinance world and was looking for a change. I cannot imagine a better person than Alan to introduce me to the new world of market development; I was fascinated by what he had to say. We ended up talking until the wee hours that night, not noticing as everyone around us made their way back to the hotel.

We kept in touch over the years, periodically seeing each other as our work paths crossed. We peer reviewed each other's work and I continued to learn so much from Alan. Meeting him changed my life. His work profoundly influenced my approach to development. And I have never encountered a more brilliant mind.

Alan Gibson (1961–2018)

Alan grew up in Scotland, eventually moving to Bangladesh in 1989 to become Research Manager for a local NGO (Friends in Village Development Bangladesh). It was in Bangladesh that Alan met Mark Havers who later invited Alan to join him at the Durham University Business School. During their time there, Alan and Mark developed the idea for the Springfield Centre which they eventually established in Durham in 1995. Long-time readers of this journal may remember Mark's contributions during his time at Springfield; over the years, Springfield has continued to participate in the journal's success through varying roles. Mark left relatively early, leaving Alan to build Springfield with his new partner Rob Hitchens, and subsequently David Elliot. In 2014, Alan formally left the Springfield management team although he continued to work closely with Springfield as Associate Director until his death on 6 February 2018. And while this special edition is a memorial to Alan's work, I am certain he would not want the reader to be left with the impression he achieved what he did on his own. Because of his death we want to honour his leadership and therefore in this special edition we refer to Alan's thinking and influence; however Alan always saw Springfield as a collective endeavour. It is therefore important to emphasize that his legacy is Springfield.

I unearthed an old CV of Alan's from the web where he describes Springfield as 'focus[ing] on the market systems (making markets work for the poor or M4P) approach to development and its application to different economic and social systems such as agriculture, financial services, product and commodity markets and services'. It goes on to say:

The Springfield Centre's main activities include:

- Training: both in the UK and abroad;
- Development projects: mainly medium and long-term partnerships with particular organisations;
- Research: which provides the basis for new programme development; and
- Consultancy: specific studies undertaken at the request of clients.

Worth noting are the words 'mainly medium and long-term partnerships *with particular organisations*' (italics mine). Alan was always very particular about the work he was willing to take on. It had to be 'valid'; that is, it had to make a difference, and the people he engaged with had to be willing to change – or he simply wouldn't work with them. Alan was serious about making a difference. I thought the story someone shared during his memorial was telling. He said: 'Alan once said to me that he wished he could be invisible so he could live among the poor and really understand how they lived'.

As evidenced by this special edition, Alan had a tremendous impact on the people he met, those he taught, and those lucky enough to work with him. Although often frustrated by the inability of people, and particularly aid agencies, to change, Alan continued to 'do the right thing' and insisted on honest, thoughtful work. He didn't shy away from things that were difficult. He set the bar high – for himself, as well as others. People often said, 'Alan doesn't suffer fools'. And it was true; however he also had the most incredible patience and willingness to teach and mentor those genuinely eager to learn. As his partner of 20 years at Springfield, Rob Hitchins said: 'Alan was a legend. He was insightful, articulate, passionate and witty. He was courageous and principled. He had conviction and integrity. He made a genuine difference'.

This special edition honours Alan and his contributions to development and to all those who benefited from his intelligence, kindness, modesty, and lest we forget, his wonderful sense of humour.

This effort began as a *Gedenkschrift* – a book honouring a respected person in a particular field. Similar to a *Festschrift*, which is presented during the honouree's lifetime, a *Gedenkschrift* is presented posthumously, sometimes called a 'memorial publication'. The terms, borrowed from German, and literally meaning 'commemorative-writing', can be translated as 'celebration publication' or 'celebratory (piece of) writing'. A *Gedenkschrift* generally takes the form of an edited volume, containing contributions from the honouree's colleagues, students, and friends. The essays usually relate in some way to, or reflect upon, the honouree's contributions to their field (Wikipedia, 2019). While no longer a *Gedenkschrift*, I find the concept fitting. This special edition is about honouring Alan and his significant influence on development practitioners. It includes contributions from Alan's former students and colleagues, all of whom learned from Alan how to 'Make Markets Work for the Poor'. The experiences in this issue are drawn from many different sectors and geographies and are shared by people who were influenced by Alan's thinking, challenged themselves to implement the M4P approach, or supported/influenced others to adopt it, and who were willing to reflect on both the successes and

challenges. M4P has been around for almost two decades. What have we learned? What are some notable projects that bolster our belief (or doubts) in the framework? What is the thinking that is driving market systems development today? How can we continue to promote the M4P approach?

For readers who may not be familiar with M4P (also referred to as Market Systems Development, the Systemic Approach, or Systems Development), in short, it is a practical approach to development focused on achieving sustainable, long-term development outcomes for the target group. The aim is to facilitate change in how market systems work to benefit the poor. A **market system** consists of a range of *functions* as well as the *system actors* that perform these functions. **System actors** are permanent players in the market system and include the *private sector*, *public sector*, and *civil society*. A combination of different types of actors are required for a system to function well, at scale, and to be inclusive. **Development actors** are outside the market system and include funders and implementing organizations (sometimes acting as facilitators).

While the objectives of M4P are similar to all development objectives, the approach is different because it applies the operational principles of *facilitation* to catalyse *systemic change* – that is, change in the underlying dynamics of a market system (i.e. incentives, capacities and relationships of system actors) – which leads to sustained positive development outcomes at scale. Facilitating change requires a clear vision of how the market system will function in the future without development actors; that is, who will ‘do’ and who will ‘pay’ for key market functions on an ongoing basis. This requires identifying the relevant market functions, who currently performs these functions and who currently pays for (or resources) them. When *development actors* are performing or paying for market functions (i.e. market research to regularly inform market players, sector coordination, advocacy, etc.) it is necessary to identify which *system actors* have the incentives and capacity to do so in the future. (For a full description of the market system, see Jake Lomax’s article ‘Market system diagrams, or: how I learned to stop worrying and love the doughnut’.)

This edition begins with a debate between Prudence Beignet and Gareth Davies reflecting on some of the challenges of implementing M4P and why the aid industry struggles to apply the approach. Beignet argues that M4P is misunderstood and that the valid role of government as well as civil society are often lost in favour of an exclusive focus on the private sector – a problem that arises likely due to the use of the term ‘markets’ in M4P. In response Davies suggests that the guidance and tools have been refined and nuanced over the years to capture the experience of applying M4P in a wide range of sectors, and that numerous efforts to build capacity exist. He then goes on to question the political economy in which M4P programmes (and development programming more generally) are designed and delivered. Beignet in turn emphasizes the lack of incentives for the aid industry to change in order to effectively implement M4P, to which Davies agrees – there is a need to do more to build the incentives of funders and implementers to fully adopt the approach in earnest – and goes on to offer a number of ways we might do this. The question remains, however, how feasible is it really to change incentives, whether these be the incentives of system actors or of development actors?

Financial inclusion is an area Alan focused on during the last few years of his life, and he particularly enjoyed working with the author of the first paper, Mayada El-Zoghbi. The admiration was mutual as El-Zoghbi begins by acknowledging the tremendous influence Alan and Springfield had on CGAP as it sought to determine how best to influence donors and public investors supporting financial inclusion to have more systemic impact on the lives of the poor. El-Zoghbi recognizes that while some progress has been made, challenges remain. Operationally, funders continue to do pretty much the same things as before but simply use different language. And similar to Beignet and Davies, El-Zoghbi maintains that the political realities of the aid business do not support taking an M4P approach. She suggests in order to increase the application of M4P there is a need to demonstrate and document success, use language that resonates with non-experts, make learning easier and faster, and support internal donor agency staff to better understand the approach.

In the second paper, Kate Fogelberg, who worked closely with Alan at Springfield where she remains today, describes how a large international NGO working in the sanitation sector shifted from a more traditional development approach to adopt M4P. Fogelberg reflects on what is required to make this shift, beginning with the importance of understanding why change is needed followed by how this change can happen. Fogelberg argues that organizations need to ultimately ask different questions to determine what is working (and what is not), and to be honest about how sustainable change will happen, at scale. This often requires new and different skill sets, and thus difficult decisions around resources, both human and financial. To really shift to an M4P approach requires that funders agree on different ways of working and on different outcomes, and if not, then organizations must have the courage to walk away from funding if agreement cannot be reached – not always an easy process.

Both Fogelberg and author of the next paper, Julian Hamilton-Peach, bring some humour into the edition – something I am sure Alan would appreciate. Hamilton-Peach describes how he was influenced by Alan when brought in to turn around a large failing project in Nigeria. Hamilton-Peach was a student of Alan's in the early days of the legendary Springfield training in Glasgow and continued to benefit from discussions with him over the years. The result in Nigeria was long-lasting and large-scale economic change. For those readers currently running M4P programmes/organizations, this paper provides many pointers on how to practically apply M4P and to make it work.

Moving from the most populous country in Africa to applying M4P to 'thin' markets – those in remote areas or with sparse populations, new or fragile economies – Aly Miehlabradt shares what she has learned. Miehlabradt worked with Alan over a number of years including teaching an elective at the Springfield training. Miehlabradt argues M4P can work in thin markets but emphasizes the need to really understand the underlying causes for thinness and to be creative, and especially pragmatic, when applying M4P principles. She also suggests there is a need for additional frameworks and better tracking systems which are more suited to thin markets, and that applying M4P in thin markets requires facilitators

to address multiple constraints at the same time, rather than just one or two critical constraints.

The fifth paper is written by Jake Lomax, who also worked with Alan at Springfield and benefited from Alan's mentorship right up until his death. Lomax discusses the importance of the most famous M4P tool, the market system diagram (familiarily known as the doughnut). He argues doughnuts are central to analysis as the lens for understanding what a market system is and are what allows us to investigate and address the root causes of market system underperformance. And although a high-quality doughnut-led diagnostic process does not by itself guarantee a good M4P programme design, it is a key step that needs to be done internally (not outsourced) and regularly, with the findings properly and consistently integrated into implementation. Lomax argues the problem is not so much the capacity to use doughnuts; rather it is usage and practice – we need to 'eat doughnuts and sleep doughnuts' if we are to fully implement M4P.

In the final paper, Jim Tomecko, a long-time colleague and friend of Alan's, shares a history of how the field of enterprise promotion shifted to take on a more market systems approach, and with positive results. Tomecko provides a clear overview of how the old approach led development actors to substitute for the market rather than develop it, and how, with the M4P approach, true scale and sustainability can emerge. Tomecko appropriately distinguishes the M4P approach from value chain analysis, terms sometimes used interchangeably often incorrectly. While value chain analysis may be part of the analysis, he points out that M4P works beyond the production and short-term solutions to facilitate sustainable solutions for the long term. Tomecko concludes with a summary of his view of why M4P has succeeded and what the remaining challenges might be.

May you rest in peace, Alan.

Joanna Ledgerwood

Reference

Wikipedia (2019) '*Festschrift*' [online] <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festschrift>> [accessed 3 February 2020].