Q & A

Ms. Passman at the 2010 Clinton Global Initiative event in New York, with participants from the Global Give Back Circle program in Kenya.

A CONVERSATION WITH PAMELA PASSMAN, CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL CORPORATE AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS, MICROSOFT

Over the past decade, IYF has collaborated with Microsoft to empower young people around the globe to be successful workers, learners, & citizens. YOUth magazine spoke with Ms. Passman to explore the company's collaborative approach to community investments and its vision for the future.

How do your CSR programs support or complement the business side of Microsoft?

The starting point for everything we do is our company mission, which is to enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential. Technology is an indispensable enabler of growth, development and human potential. So both as a business and through our Citizenship programs, we aim to contribute to innovation, skills and education, and to the role technology can play in addressing society's challenges.

We approach our Citizenship efforts in much the same way we approach our business—by partnering with other organizations which bring complementary skills and resources to take on big challenges. For example, as a business we work with nearly 700,000 partners and in our Citizenship programs we work in partnership with thousands of public entities and NGOs worldwide.

This alignment and focus on issues where we have expertise, together with our emphasis on partnership, is what enables us to make an impact locally and globally. The two elements reinforce each other, because when local communities and economies grow and succeed, so does Microsoft.

Q&A

What is the role of the private sector in helping to prepare young people for the 21st century workforce?

It's a government imperative, a societal imperative, and a sustainability imperative for business that we address the problem of large numbers of young people who are coming out of formal education with few job opportunities. What will happen to them? Every year, there's another incoming group of young people trying to enter the workforce, in the Middle East, in Africa, in Latin America. The sheer numbers are overwhelming, and the impact on social infrastructure is dramatic.

That's one of the reasons Microsoft has been investing in workforce skills initiatives and partnerships for more than 25 years, with a strong focus on youth education and entrepreneurship as well as lifelong learning. But we also know today's challenges call for a new generation of partnerships with the public sector as well as communities.

An example of this commitment is our Elevate America initiative, launched in 2009 in the U.S., where we've been working with state governments to promote greater access to certified technology skills training as part of the response to the recession.

I do think there will be further impetus for such partnerships on employability and entrepreneurship among business, governments and NGOs in the years ahead. The challenge of resetting economies on a

sustainable long-term growth path requires fresh thinking and complementary approaches. For its part, the private sector has a major stake in employability issues, to sustain the flow of skilled workers and customers for their products. But one of the key lessons of the economic crisis is that all of us—governments, businesses and communities—are in this together and need to work together. One of the things we try to do is to develop incentives for this kind of multi-sector collaboration to take place.

What do you look for when choosing your partners?

We see working in partnership has a multiplier effect, with each sector bringing its resources and expertise to the table. This enables us to scale in a way that we can't do alone. Microsoft can be a catalyst to bring the various stakeholders together.

Among our potential nonprofit partners, we look for and work with organizations that have a record of successfully implementing programs, strong local knowledge and the passion and capability to connect with and empower their communities. It's how we can ensure that our contributions, whether cash or in-kind, can have the most significant impact.

For example, through our Community Technology Skills Program, we support community NGOs in providing digital and other essential skills training to local people including the unemployed. Since we launched the program in 2003, we have worked with more than 1,500 NGOs around the world, and been able to reach some 190 million people—including seniors, unemployed youth, refugees, and people with disabilities.

Our partnership with IYF is a great example of what we look for in NGO collaborations. First, IYF has a strong focus on building the capacity of local partners which mirrors our approach in many ways. Second, IYF has deep expertise in youth empowerment programs and a keen interest in using technology to improve program delivery and expand scale. Third, IYF is a thought leader, engaging public,

private and civil sectors, as well as youth themselves, in a dialogue about pressing issues such as education and job opportunities.

Why is investing in young people's entrepreneurial success part of your Citizenship agenda?

Microsoft was founded 35 years ago by young entrepreneurs and that spirit remains as the company has grown. So one of our primary goals is to create economic opportunities for individuals around the world through the power and potential of technology. Although we know that information technology skills are only increasing in demand in the workplace, we also know that most economies are driven in large part by small businesses and entrepreneurs. By supporting these individuals with training and other resources we help to grow local economies. But we can't do it alone, and partnerships with civil society organizations provide the full range of services needed to support entrepreneurs and their businesses.

IYF's *Youth Empowerment Program* in Africa, which Microsoft is proud to support and be involved with, is one such example. In Sub-Saharan Africa, one in five young people is unemployed. This program provides training in technology skills, life skills and entrepreneurship, and access to employment services, to disadvantaged young people between the ages of 16 and 35. We're pleased that 10,000 African youth have undertaken these training and employment services programs; and at least 70% of

> ## "Young people are crucial to an 'ecosystem of innovation' that we need at all levels of our societies."

Pamela Passman [far left] joins IYF's Susan Pezzullo [center] and Souktel co-founder and YouthActionNet Fellow Jacob Korenblum [right] for a panel discussion at IYF's Youth Leadership & Livelihood Conference in Washington, DC.

them have benefited from internships, job placement, income-generating self-employment or community service opportunities.

In addition, the local NGO partners we work with have increased their capacity in project design, curriculum development and delivery, and measurement and evaluation. There has also been valuable regional and cross-organizational learning for the partners. This is a good example of the multiplier effect that we seek to generate through our partnerships with IYF and other organizations.

Why is building the capacity of NGOs a priority?

Community and civil society organizations play a vital role in reaching and assisting underserved people and communities. Supporting these organizations with technology to better achieve their missions enables us to help make a difference to the people and communities they serve. It also helps us to better understand the communities they serve, helping us see new applications of our technology. And by using our expertise and our resources, Microsoft can help these organizations operate more efficiently, build capacity, and deliver more services.

For example, Microsoft has a close partnership with NetHope, a global consortium of over 30 leading NGOs dedicated to finding and implementing the best use of available technology to improve NGO operations and efficiency. Our partnership focuses on the critical role of technology in development and humanitarian relief efforts around the world. Microsoft provides cash grants and software donations for strategic technology improvements, and hosts conferences to share expertise in the NGO technology leadership field.

Why does Microsoft place an emphasis on citizen empowerment?

I believe it is incredibly important to empower citizens, including today's young people, not only in terms of jobs but also in terms of their own role in society. The ability to reach out, to communicate, and to access and use information is critical to that process. We've seen an extraordinary movement across the Middle East and North Africa over the past few months where young people feel empowered and rise up to change their communities. It's very hard to stifle that sense of empowerment once it starts.

We know that in every community and country, the challenges people face need to be transformed into innovative approaches and opportunities. Whether it's in job creation, environmental sustainability, better healthcare or good governance, innovative solutions arise from people applying particular knowledge and skills, combined with entrepreneurship and collaboration. Young people are crucial to this "ecosystem of innovation" that we need at all levels of our societies.

While visiting Microsoft's CSR programs, did you meet one or two individuals whose stories were particularly memorable?

Every field visit that I make is inspiring—the amazing people who are benefiting from these programs and our partners and employees who are doing extraordinary things every day around the world.

One remarkable woman I've met is Rana Hada from Iraq, who participated in the State Department's Women in Technology (WIT) program in the Middle East, which Microsoft is proud to support. After surviving a traumatic bomb attack in April 2006 at the University of Baghdad, Rana spent a year recovering from serious injuries that confined her to a wheelchair. Despite Rana's horrific experience, she was determined to continue her education and enrolled in WIT courses at the Iraqi Al Amal Association. Upon graduating from the training in 2008, Rana was hired as a trainer for the Microsoft Unlimited Potential and Professional Development courses. Recently, Rana was selected to attend the Arab Women Technical Network Forum in Beirut. The life journey that she's taken, it is just breathtaking. **Y**

Editor's Note: Shortly after this interview, Ms. Passman announced her departure from Microsoft to establish and lead the Center for Responsible Enterprise and Trade-CREATe, as its founding President and CEO.