

Investing in the Changemaker; the Overlooked Dimension of Sustainable Development: *Wellbeing & Leadership of Public Sector and NGO Workers to Accelerate Development Outcomes*

THE PROBLEM: A MISSING INVESTMENT

The world's most pressing challenges are not receding, they are compounding. Of the 169 SDG targets, only 35% show adequate progress, while 18% have regressed below the 2015 baseline. Across every sector, the gaps are stark: an estimated 638–720 million people faced hunger in 2024, 272 million children remain out of school, 2024 was the hottest year on record, driving the highest climate-related displacement in 16 years.¹ On health, the global maternal mortality ratio remains nearly triple the SDG 3 target of 70 per 100,000 live births, with low-income countries at 346 and conflict-affected countries as high as 504, against just 10 in high-income countries.² The financing challenge cuts across all of this. Developing countries face an estimated \$4 trillion annual investment, gap more than 50% higher than pre-COVID-19 pandemic estimates, while official development assistance actually declined 7.1% in 2024, with further cuts expected.³ The sustainability of our planet depends not just on more funding, but on investments and funding that actually make lasting impact. And the people and leaders on the frontline who drive this impact have a critical role to play.

Meanwhile, an important overlooked dimension could accelerate government and non-profit sector outcomes: the human behind the people and leaders on the frontline who must drive sustainable change. Through government and donor interventions, meaningful investments have been made across key sectors, but insufficient investment is being made into the leaders on the frontline in those sectors for impact that multiplies faster. Typical human-related investments by governments and funding partners relate to technical training for more workforce in critical sectors such as health, education, security, etc. Yet technical training without personal resilience results in leaders functioning sub-optimally to drive meaningful change. For example, the personal wellbeing and resilience of the nurse or doctor working under pressure in a resource-constrained environment, while also managing his personal and family challenges, directly shapes whether a patient's life will be saved, and therefore, health indicators and targets⁴. Moreover, across government more broadly, workers receive years of technical training but virtually none in management, leadership, or self-care. They are expected to make high-stake decisions daily, lead teams, coordinate scarce resources under pressure, and sustain performance in chronically under-resourced environments, with no preparation for the human demands of their role. **Investing in the person behind the worker or field agent is critical to achieving true and lasting change across priority sectors.**

Traditional Interventions ✓

- ▶ Technical training & protocols
- ▶ Pre-set online training
- ▶ Team-buildings
- ▶ Performance indicators tracking

What gets overlooked ✗

- ▶ Well-being & resilience
- ▶ Leadership under pressure
- ▶ Mental health & self-confidence
- ▶ Work-life balance

The people required to lead the change in the public and social sectors must be strengthened for more resilience, so they can drive the much needed transformation required across our countries.

THE SOLUTION: EMBEDDING LEADERSHIP & WELL-BEING PREPARATION OF WORKERS INTO PUBLIC AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS

In 2025, CherishClub was contracted by ENABEL to run a leadership training and coaching program for female leaders at primary healthcare level in 3 out of the 12 regions of Benin. *What started as a female leadership-focused program ended up covering 83 primary healthcare leaders – male and female – and revealed telling results on the potential of wellbeing and leadership training to accelerate health outcomes already activated by existing interventions into people, products, systems, and equipment.* Upon such results and innovative approach, Regional Health Directors requested expansion to frontline actors across the country.

CherishClub's Leaders on the Frontline program is a 6-month leadership and well-being coaching intervention designed to strengthen the human layer that technical investments alone cannot address. It targets frontline professionals (in government, local and international NGOs) who face life-and-death decisions daily; and community leaders who decide daily on scarce resource allocations and management, without the necessary skills.

¹ United Nations (2025). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hall, L. H., Johnson, J., Watt, I., Tsipa, A., & O'Connor, D. B. (2016). Healthcare Staff Wellbeing, Burnout, and Patient Safety: A Systematic Review. *PLOS ONE*, 11(7), 1–12

IMPACT: WHAT INVESTING IN PEOPLE LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE – THE HEALTH SECTOR EXAMPLE FROM BENIN (2025)

83

Health leaders & professionals coached

99%

Participants had significant improvements in behaviors and leadership skills

100%

Participant satisfaction

5,544

People indirectly impacted



Key outcomes details

- ▶ **Ranked #1 well-being progress indicator** for 100% of participants
- ▶ **100% achieved measurable improvement** in work-life balance
- ▶ **Significant reduction in complaints** in the Regional Health Office
- ▶ **More positive and supportive Leadership**, greater team cohesion
- ▶ **Behavioral and human changes** with ripple effects across the health system

*"Before this program, I was mentally sick. I had initiated my resignation process. I could no longer manage the high demands of my work as a health professional and my family. **The tools I gained from this training changed everything.** Now, I do more in less time and colleagues come to me for advice on personal organization and productivity. – Feedback of program participant, in front of her supervisor"*

Note: Outcome-level indicators (impact on service utilization, mortality) are tracked over 3–10 years. Evaluations are planned and underway. Pilot-tested intervention with strong process and short-term results.

WHY THIS. WHY NOW.

The world is not just behind on resources; it is behind on human capacity. Global employee engagement has dropped to 20%, costing the global economy an estimated \$10 trillion annually.⁵

In the public sector, high workload, bureaucratic pressure, and emotional labor are the primary contributors to burnout, with cascading consequences on job performance, mental health, and public trust.⁶ In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the SDG gap is most acute, 72% of workers say they intend to leave their roles², a retention crisis that directly undermines the continuity of the services governments and NGOs are trying to deliver. In contexts like Sierra Leone, physicians describe a deep sense of helplessness from limited resources, and in the absence of any formal institutional support, turn to informal peer networks just to cope.⁷

In the social sector (NGOs), The need for services keeps growing. The people delivering them are burning out. And the systems meant to support them were never built for this. The two most cited drivers of burnout are funding pressures and relentlessly increasing demand for services⁸, forces intensified by the pressure to achieve the SDs. Workers describe their motivation eroding under relentless workloads, the emotional toll of serving vulnerable populations, and the constant strain of doing more with less.⁹ 95% of nonprofit leaders express concern about burnout, yet funding for staff wellbeing remains one of the least prioritized line items in the sector.¹⁰

A track record around the world

Since 2021, CherishClub has impacted 2,000+ leaders and 20,000+ people across 20 countries in Africa, Europe, and the Americas – working with Enabel, TechnoServe, ARISE IIP, CHAI, the Benin Ministry of Health, Dalberg, the Hewlett Foundation, and others.

A scalable model

The program is designed to reach 10,000+ frontline workers and 100,000+ people indirectly by 2030 across Sub-Saharan Africa, are CherishClub is currently building the human and technology infrastructure required to support this scale.

YOU TOO, CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ACCELERATE RESULTS ACROSS THE WORLD

If you are investing in government capacity, social sector impact, workforce development, or human capital, we invite you to co-create with us.

Here is an opportunity to accelerate results of your government & NGO investments by embedding leadership and well-being into your programming, and finally address the missing link between investment and outcomes.

Get in touch: hello@cherishclub.com | www.cherishclub.com

⁵ Gallup. (2025). State of the Global Workplace: 2025 Report. Gallup, Inc. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

⁶ Pereira, M. et al. (2024). Navigating Burnout in the Public Sector: Strategies for Enhancing Employee Well-Being and Organizational Performance. ESIC Journal, 8(3). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384970763>

⁷ Wurie, H. et al. (2024). Perceptions of burnout among public sector physicians in Sierra Leone: A qualitative study. PubMed Central. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11404797/>

⁸ Urban Institute / Candid. (2025). Funding challenges, increasing demand drive staff burnout. <https://candid.org/blogs/nonprofit-staff-burnout/>

⁹ Givebutter. (2025). Nonprofit Burnout: Top Statistics & Tips to Break the Cycle. <https://givebutter.com/blog/nonprofit-burnout-statistics>

¹⁰ Center for Effective Philanthropy. (2024). State of Nonprofits 2024: What Funders Need to Know. CEP. <https://cep.org/news/press-releases/nonprofit-leaders-cite-burnout-as-a-top-concern-in-a-new-study-on-the-state-of-u-s-nonprofits/>

