

AVSI-USA NEWS

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AVSI-USA IS PART OF THE [ASSOCIAZIONE VOLONTARI PER IL SERVIZIO INTERNAZIONALE \(AVSI\)](#) INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

AVSI-USA Mission: To support the AVSI network by leveraging resources and contacts in the U.S. in order to enhance and broaden the achievements of member organizations in promoting human dignity in developing countries.

2005: The Year of Development?

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Aid and Debt Relief for Africa: The Uganda Case

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The Uganda Case: Background on the Catholic Medical Bureau

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The Uganda Case: One Hour of Work that Changes Life

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Back to School: The Memory Project Connects Students US-Uganda

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Through collaboration between AVSI and The Memory Project, art teachers in the US will be guiding their students through an art class with a social cause—providing hand-made books and portraits for orphans and other vulnerable children in Uganda. AVSI is pleased to announce that The Memory Project has committed to support the services that the AVSI network provides to orphans and children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in the northern regions of Uganda.

MAKSORA, A Great Friendship in Russia

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Novosibirsk, located in the south-central region of Russia, is the largest city in Siberia, boasting a rich cultural, academic and business life. But embedded within the city exists deep pockets of vulnerable populations; desperate single mothers, neglected orphans, the marginalized youth who are sick and the poverty stricken. Serving among and along side these at-risk groups for the past five years is the nonprofit organization MAKSORA, a partner within the AVSI Network.

Brazil: A New Nursery School in Honor of Giussani

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On September 13, 2005, the doors of the *Msgr. Luigi Giussani Nursery School* opened, welcoming 200 children from families facing conditions of extreme poverty in Joanes, a suburb of Salvador Bahia, Brazil.

2005: The Year of Development?

Over the past year and up until these very last days, a great deal of attention has been given to the situation in much of **Africa** and the issue of humanitarian assistance, including debt relief. Both within the recent board meetings of the World Bank and the IMF, as well as at the G8 summit and the myriad concerts for aid, numerous expressions of good will and solidarity with the poor have been uttered. Following the flurry of events and declarations, it appears that official development assistance will increase by \$50 billion by 2010, equal to a doubling of current aid levels over the next five years.

At the recent United Nations World Summit which concluded on September 16th, development themes also ran through much of the debate and are present in the content of the final declarations, including special attention to the challenges faced by Africa. On the one hand the UN is struggling with its own internal problems, mission and role in the ever-changing global arena, and some left the Summit disappointed by the lack of consensus and strong action. But, as was mentioned in the debate, the UN is not a super-government but the reflection of the perspectives of many states; thus it should not come as a surprise that consensus among the diverse perspectives is rare. The UN should fulfill its role as a forum for nations to work together for the common good, with the underlying premise of respect for universal human rights.

In front of this enduring debate, one question continues to arise for us at AVSI: **why is it then that our AVSI staff in Africa, some with decades of experience in the field, keep insisting that the future health and happiness of millions of Africans is not only a matter of money**, i.e. that “development” cannot be purchased even at a very high price? How can we make sense of the surge of attention and attractive

campaigns to “make poverty history”, in particular in Africa, with the reality that official development assistance is a very limited tool to actually change the lives of the very poor?

Behind the emotionally charged fundraising events, there is a need for a dose of realism, and at the same time a perspective that does not condemn Africans, but one that sees the human person at the center of all development. Critiques of the excited rhetoric surrounding foreign aid are also numerous, with voices such as Nancy Birdsall, of the Center for Global Development, pointing out that the cases of successful development have not depended on international aid, but on internal factors and leadership. This argument shifts the focus back onto the developing countries themselves, but we want to take a step further beyond the policy level and to the person as the protagonist. Repositioning the individual person, and by necessity his family and community, at the center of concern in a discussion of poverty reduction and aid, we can understand more clearly that development depends on human freedom. The alternative is to place statistics or economic indicators as the objective of development, as is being done with the Millennium Development Goals, for example. Though positive for their role in mobilizing attention to the grave and very basic problems faced by so many people around the world (like access to primary school or pre-natal care), the MDGs and other targets oftentimes mislead since they give the impression that more resources is the simple solution.

Money is necessary but not sufficient for development. This is because the real actor is the person, and therefore his/her mentality and human heart is behind every action. Fundamentally, development must prioritize an education to reality and responsibility in

the fullest sense, and this education needs to take place within the life circumstances of the individual person. Consider for example a marketing campaign about HIV/AIDS transmission that tries to inform young people about the need to be tested for the virus; how effective can even the most clever ads be in the long run? Alternatively, consider an encounter between a community volunteer counselor, who is HIV positive herself and full of positivity and hope for her own life, taking the initiative to meet with an individual to share her life and experience.

Consequently, **pre-fabricated solutions generated outside and based on even sophisticated models do not start from reality, and do not value the uniqueness and potential of the individual and his society**; such solutions (i.e. “development interventions”) end up being violent and ineffective since they do not truly work “with” the people, but follow an ideology. In contrast, to start from the reality of what is there, from the circumstances but also the kernel of potential, is the necessary alternative. And yet, starting from the positive within reality is not only a matter of study and research. While research is extremely important and a commodity which many developing societies cannot indulge in, it is the substantial proximity to the man in the street, the everyday person and the conditions of his life that is fundamental.

While we are arguing that promises and plans to increase official development assistance (ODA) including debt relief should be taken with a grain of salt, we do recognize the necessity of such resources and the gesture of global solidarity they express. **The central question is really how ODA is being channeled**

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2005: The Year of Development? *continued*

inside the country and who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the funds.

This theme has been circulating around international development and IFI circles for a while now: questions over “absorptive capacity”, together with awareness of rampant corruption, and now the urgency of “development effectiveness” and “results management” are only some of the catch phrases echoing this concern.

How can development assistance funds be effectively utilized to benefit societies?

Reflecting on both the problems and achievements of development projects over time, one conclusion is that **subsidiarity** is part of the solution to the democratic deficit, the lack of accountability and the concern over effectiveness which is eating away at the confidence in the development assistance industry. Subsidiarity, supporting individuals at the lowest level of society, i.e. through local organizations and associations, is also a method founded upon genuine respect for the rights of nations and peoples. This call for a greater role to be played by the non-profit, private sector was echoed at a recent conference of experts on development economics and politics hosted by the Center for Global Development in Washington, DC. In no way could we advocate for blind disbursement of money to non-profit or faith-based organizations for the sole reason of their being non-profit or faith-based. Instead, the process should be objectively grounded in evidence-based criteria of demonstrated effectiveness and results.

From our experience in Africa, we would like to suggest that it is **the extent to which the government and its leaders exercise the political will and capability to engage the private and non-profit sector in true collaborative partnerships that will determine the effectiveness of increased resources.**

Of what should the spending consist?

Across the UN World Summit and the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF, there is a broad consensus that priority should be given to the areas of education and health, with stress also placed on youth and employment. At the same time, there is regular and necessary mention of the need for peace in many parts of Africa and the role of the international community in supporting peace efforts to the extent possible. In the area of human development, we would like to stress that the factor that underlies the utilization of money is that of human resources, understood as more than just technical capacity, but also sustained personal responsibility towards the community and country.

In Africa we have seen that among professionals there is a need for education to responsibility, and this implies a direct encounter with the professional as a human person. Increased funds or a beautiful intervention design for the education sector will not necessarily bring with it an injection of motivation or remove the risk of absenteeism and lack of

commitment on the part of teachers, for example. Instead, money should be spent on on-the-job training of teachers to engage themselves fully with their work and to see their students as individuals with the immense human desire; training and sensitization of parents to take seriously the education of their children; networking among those school communities which are taking seriously the task of educating the next generation. These are the investments that are beginning to transform the educational experience in Africa and elsewhere.

The external environment is still necessary, and must be conducive to productive investments and work. Therefore, the roles of the IFIs, the UN and the WTO are not to be overlooked. Just as the more advanced countries need to continue to be active to create new solutions and take the difficult decisions to make the global economy a more equal playing field, so must the developing countries take seriously their responsibility to work against corruption, and renew their commitment to health, education and employment.

Our concern and experience leads us to stress one word, **charity**, which summarizes the core and condition of any fruitful undertaking in this environment. Charity, the gift of oneself to the other, facilitates the fulfillment of one's life and destiny, for both the development worker and the “beneficiary.” Such a gesture is made possible because of something great which one experiences and not because of morality or pity.

Significant events of 2005

January: *Investing in Development*, of the UN Millennium Project <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/>

February: the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness <http://www.aidharmonisation.org/>

March: *Our Common Interest*, UK Commission on Africa report <http://www.commissionforafrica.org>

July: G8 Summit at Gleneagles <http://www.g8.gov.uk>

September: World Summit, UN General Assembly and MDGs +5 assessment <http://www.un.org/summit2005>

Aid and Debt Relief for Africa: The Uganda Case

We can take as an example the case of Uganda, which was one of the first countries to receive debt cancellation through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Internal and external evaluations of HIPC in Uganda suggest positive results, and the World Bank presents this case as an example of strong civil society collaboration with government. AVSI's participation in the Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau has provided us with insights into how NGOs can present their own proposals for collaboration with the Ministry of Health and receive government funding.

Part of the success of the HIPC initiative in Uganda is due to the country's early experience creating and implementing a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which was a national predecessor of the newer Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP, now a mandatory pre-requisite for HIPC). Within the context of increased national leadership in the challenge of reducing poverty, and processes of administrative and financial decen-

tralization: "[Civil society organizations] CSOs engaged actively and effectively to bring in views from the 'grassroots' as well as their own experience into the policy formulation exercises of the Government." (World Bank, "Uganda Process Case Study") This multi-year process allowed for all sides to develop trust, and in particular for the government to recognize the resource and leadership potential of civil society.

Within the PEAP framework, a national level poverty conference was held, bringing together government officials, CSO representatives, and business representatives in a collaborative effort to draft the poverty strategy. The work was divided into sectoral workplans, one of which was the health sector. The Health Sector Plan was prepared by the leadership of the three national faith-based medical bureaus (the Catholic, Protestant and Muslim Medical Bureaus), thus reflecting the significant role that the non-profit, private health providers have in Uganda. As an extension, the bureaus joined the Health Policy Advisory Committee to support reform

and the planning efforts of the Ministry of Health.

Once the debt relief was made a reality, a Poverty Action Fund (PAF) was created as a mechanism to ensure that the funds released from HIPC would go to the Priority Poverty Areas as identified in the PEAP. The Poverty Action Funds would be subject to heightened levels of monitoring, including by civil society, and would be subject to less political control. A Steering Committee for the Poverty Action Funds was created and included government officials, CSOs and donors, with members of Parliament and the media later assuming a role; a decent percentage of PAF funds were allocated for monitoring and publicity of the PAF. The large role assumed by civil society in monitoring and publicizing the PAF was due to the CSOs own initiative and persistence; recognizing the importance of ensuring that the money reaches its intended recipient and recognizing the role of civil society as a watch-dog to stand up for its own rights, with the Uganda Jubilee 2000 campaign playing a key role in mobilizing civil society oversight.

The Uganda Case: Background on the Catholic Medical Bureau

The role of faith-based health providers in Uganda cannot be overlooked, particularly in rural areas. In the face of a crisis in the late 1980s of resources, capacity and new epidemics (namely HIV/AIDS), many of the country's **private not-for-profit health (PNFP)** providers were no longer able to cope with the increasing costs of service delivery. Higher user fees meant reduced access for the most vulnerable groups of society, including children, women and the poor. Recognizing the crisis, the government intervened to support the PNFP sector with grants disbursed directly to individual hospitals

and health centers through a private-public partnership (since 1997/98). These resources were main available through Uganda's debt relief under HIPC.

The Health Sector Strategic Plan, part of the country's Poverty Eradication Action Plan, defines a Minimum Health Care Package that citizens have the right to access, and officially recognizes the place of the PNFP sector within the National Health System while envisaging "strengthening this collaboration through the development of service

contracts and increasing subventions to the NGOs." (from the HSS, quoted by Giusti, "Why the Health Budget Must be Increased") Despite the recognition of the important role played by the PNFP sector in supporting the country's health, a debate over government funding for the PNFP sector continues.

The Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB) was established in 1955 with the main purpose of overseeing the procurement of medical drugs and equipment and distributing aid provided by the government to the voluntary health sector, thus linking together the Catholic

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Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau, continued

hospitals and facilities. The UCMB also produces studies of hospital management within the network as part of a strategy to encourage the accelerated reduction of user fees. Also, in collaboration with the Protestant and Muslim Medical Bureaus, the UCMB conducts studies of issues of concern at the PNFP hospitals nation-wide. These umbrella organizations “can collect and make use of information to strengthen the pro-poor ethos and enhance self-regulation. They can also provide the much-needed additional managerial capacity so often wanting at the implementation level in a resource constrained environment.” (Daniele Giusti, UCMB)

In recent years, the network has begun to tackle the issue of monitoring the services and management of the facilities, a particular challenge with limited funds and a sys-

tem extending over large geographic regions. The UCMB has worked closely with AVSI and the Ministry of Health to implement data and information systems to improve efficiency and quality. Now, each hospital receives an annual feedback report comparing efficiency and cost data with the other hospitals: “In the absence of realistic ‘gold standards’ of performance, this approach stimulates comparisons and triggers processes of steered change in an environment long dominated by crisis management.” The initiative includes

training staff and equipping hospitals and clinics with technology, and has received recognition by the Uganda Ministry of Health as a model of public-private partnership. Refresher courses continue to be offered to help keep users in the hospitals up-to-date with the fast changing information and communication technology.

Health System in Uganda

Government: 57 hospitals; 1,169 lower level health units

Catholic Church: 27 hospitals; 213 lower level health units

Total PNFP*: 40% hospitals; 28% lower level health units

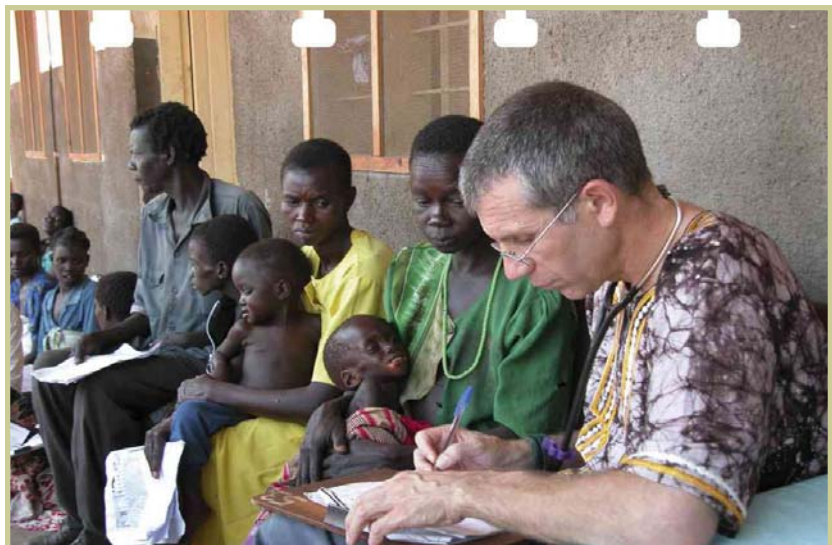
*PNFP = private not for profit

The Uganda Case: One Hour of Work that Changes Life

Convinced of the usefulness of this network of private health providers, the international AVSI network launched a campaign to raise funds for the Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau. The initiative was titled, “One Hour of Work that Changes Life,” and after one year has collected around \$350,000 by encouraging supporters, and in particular health care professionals, to offer the monetary equivalent of one hour of work to the cause. The funds are directed to the UCMB’s project of improving the monitoring of services and quality as well as the training of doctors within the UCMB network.

The experience of this network of Catholic hospitals and clinics has demonstrated the possibility for constructive linkages between civil society and government in order to **“make the services work for poor people.”** Yet, for sector wide reform to be achieved in Uganda, the organization of the small service providers into networks has

been crucial. In addition, the small providers is key to substantiate the experience highlights the key role of work being done, improve efficiency, and information and communication support the voice of the not-for-profit health sector in dialogue with the government and outside supporters. quality control. The availability of data covering a large network of



Health-care Provider in Uganda with Patients

Back to School: The Memory Project Connects Students US-Uganda

School is back in session for young people across this country, and the world over. This year, hundreds of high school students who have enrolled in art class may be surprised to find out what's in store for them. Through collaboration between AVSI and The Memory Project, art teachers will be guiding their students through an art class with a social cause—providing hand-made books and portraits for orphans and other vulnerable children in Uganda.

While volunteering at an orphanage in Guatemala, Ben Schumaker, an American college student was struck by one young man in particular. As is typical of many orphans around the world, this young man has no memorabilia of his youth; no cherished pictures of family or friends, not even of himself or his mother. Without visual reminders, this man felt he had lost something of his history and the joyful innocence of his childhood. It is easy to overlook the importance of photographs until one does not have any to flip through and be reconnected with the people who are important to you.



US Art Student Creating a Portrait

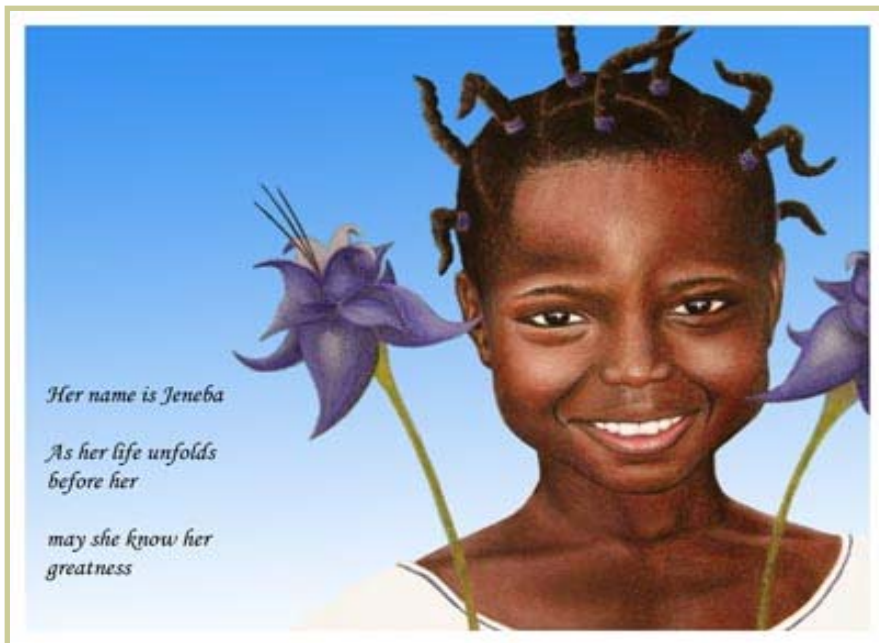
Upon returning to the US, Ben was moved to respond to this provocation by combining his love for art and his concern for social issues with the creation of The Memory Project. The Memory Project provides photographs of children from around the world who have been orphaned, displaced or affected by war to art

classes throughout the US. Each art student is tasked with creating a portrait of that child. This hand-made, colorful portrait will be sent back to the child as a lasting memory of their childhood and their immense value.

In addition to the portraits, which are painted by the schools' most talented artists in advanced classes, The Memory Project also coordinates the creation of colorful story and picture books, also to be sent to orphans in the US and abroad.

During academic year 2004-2005, just its first year of operation, The Memory Project spread to a number of schools around the country and provided hundreds of students the chance to participate, thanks to the dedication of their extraordinary teachers. Ben is pleased to announce that 100 schools have pledged to participate in this upcoming school year with an anticipated 200 more schools signing on by the end of next month.

The Memory Project has committed to support the services that the AVSI network provides to orphans and children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in the northern regions of Uganda. AVSI looks forward to the opportunity to present the children, their teachers and librarians with these special books and portraits and to tell them about their young American friends.



One of the Posters Created by Ben to Raise Funds

Read more about The Memory Project at www.thememoryproject.org.

MAKSORA, A Great Friendship in Russia

Novosibirsk, located in the south-central region of Russia, is the largest city in Siberia, boasting a rich cultural, academic and business life. But embedded within the city exists deep pockets of vulnerable populations; desperate single mothers, neglected orphans, the marginalized youth who are sick and the poverty stricken. Serving among and along side these at-risk groups for the past five years is the nonprofit organization MAKSORA, a partner within the AVSI Network. MAKSORA in seeking to identify the individual needs of these people has been able to provide the human companionship necessary for their social and cultural development through a variety of exceptional programs.

Saint Sofia Mothers' House was established by MAKSORA in (date) in an effort to address the needs faced by single mothers. Located in the Leniskij district of Novosibirsk, Saint Sofia's provides temporary lodging for young expectant mothers as well as single mothers of children under a year and a half of age facing a crisis. Much more than a shelter, Saint Sofia's provides support to these women through a team of social workers who educate them on topics such as their role and responsibility as a mother, personal care for themselves and their babies in

addition to offering concrete services such as medical, legal and job orientation.

Also within the Leniskij district, the pediatric ward of the municipal hospital is "home" to 40 young patients who due to illness and poverty have found themselves within the confines of this poorly functioning hospital for the duration of their illness. Once young and energetic like their peers, these youth suffered from boredom, isolation and stagnation having no access to even the simplest pleasures such as drawing or coloring. Taking the lead and with the cooperation of the local government, MAKSORA stepped forward and initiated a program to bring color and beauty to these children by engaging them in the creative process of art. Starting in May of this year, a psychologist and several volunteers from MAKSORA have been visiting the hospital twice a week teaching these young patients how to make pieces of art from ordinary materials: used bottles and tin cans, paper napkins, cotton and wool pieces, dough, stones, paper and flour. The elaborate creations of the children at once indicate the success of the program

and reflect each child's individual beauty and potential. This program was further recognized in a documentary that was produced and then broadcast on a national television news program.

Another successful program targeting the youth within the Leniskij district took place within an orphanage. A professional development training program was implemented to orient those young adults who will be entering the job market soon. This program, designed to provide meaningful and relevant information on the experience of work, included role playing and theoretical discussions, field trips, laboratory exercises, and exposure to the different professions, leaving the students with an understanding of the fundamental meaning of work and thus allowing them to enter the workforce with their "eyes wide open". To encourage their openness to the outside world and help to alleviate the fears associated with leaving the orphanage, MAKSORA took nine boys and girls from this program on a week long trip to the Ural Mountains.

The tour, a true adventure for these youth who had never set foot outside the city of Novosibirsk included hikes in the mountains, a visit to the ancient city of Suksun a hot-air balloon festival and an escapade through Ekaterinburg, one of the largest Russian cities. In this way, AVSI and MAKSORA hoped to demonstrate that the beauty of the world is a sign of the undeniable positivity of life, and as such is a sign of hope for them as they take the first steps toward adulthood and venture out into that same world.

Read more about Maksora at:

www.maksora.ru/ENG



Young Patient Enjoying the Art Lessons offered by MAKSORA

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The New Nursery School in Brazil

A New Nursery School in Honor of Giussani, Brazil

On September 13, 2005, the doors of the *Msgr. Luigi Giussani Nursery School* opened to welcome 200 children from families facing conditions of extreme poverty in Joanes, a suburb of Salvador de Bahia, the state capital. The nursery school is one of the concrete results of a three-year project for integrated physical and socio-economic upgrading of the Ribeira Azul area (135,000 inhabitants) which AVSI implemented in cooperation with the State of Bahia and in an agreement with the World Bank through the Cities Alliance initiative. Conceived of as more than just a dignified educational space, the life of the school springs from a tradition of education that considers each person in his or her entirety.

In February, while attending the annual evaluation of the urban development project, a representative of the Government of Bahia proposed that the new nursery school be named in honor of the founder of the international Catholic movement, Communion and Liberation (CL), who had just passed away the evening before. Through this gesture, the public official recognized the person who gave his entire life to educate young people and to communicate a method of educating which has been the inspiration behind the vision and commitment of many AVSI staff around the world in since 1996 in Salvador de Bahia.

Quite appropriately a photograph of Msgr. Giussani and a passage from "The Risk of Education", his central text on education hangs within the front portals of the new school: *The fundamental idea in the education of the young is the fact that it is through the younger generations that society successively rebuilds itself; therefore the primary concern of society is to teach the young. Although expressed in different ways in each individual, this properly human dimension always reflects the same substance, for behind the diversity of different cultures, customs and expressions, the human heart is one and the same: my heart is your heart, and it is the same heart that beats in men and women who live far away in other countries and continents. The first concern of a genuine and appropriate educational method is the education of the heart of man, just as God made it.*

At the ceremony, the Governor of the State of Bahia, Dr. Paulo Souto, praised the relationship with AVSI as a true collaboration and reciprocal commitment which has never tended toward self-affirmation or the logic of power, but instead has been guided by the common good and human development. The urban revitalization project that AVSI has managed together with the local government in Bahia has been a positive experience of public support for community initiatives.

Read more about the Ribeira Azul project in the Cities Alliance 2005 Annual Report, pgs 51-54. www.citiesalliance.org