

SOCIAL FORUM 2012 “People Centred Development and Globalisation”

Speech by Dr. Maria Mercedes Rossi (APG23)

Good Afternoon! First of all I would like to thank the Secretariat of the Social Forum for giving me the opportunity to present the experiences of APG23 in Participatory Development.

(In my presentation after a short introduction and explanation of our guiding principles on development, I will describe two projects implemented by APG23 with local communities in Zambia to answer to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children in the context of the vicious circle created by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and poverty.)

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII is an International Lay Association of Pontifical Right funded by Fr. Oreste Benzi in Italy. APG23 has got Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

It is made up of people from different states of life who share their life directly with people living in poverty and marginalised. The members are also committed to removing the causes of poverty and marginalisation and to being the voice of the voiceless through a non-violent action.

The Association is present in 27 countries on five continents sharing life with *children in need, youth, persons with disabilities, old people, Roma and Sinti, prisoners, drug users, alcoholics, vulnerable women, people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS...*

We run 298 family-homes, 34 Therapeutic Communities, 31 Daily-centres, 13 Co-operatives, Houses of Prayer, Fraternity homes, night shelters, open families etc. and carry out development projects. We have also a Nonviolent Peace Corps where volunteers operate for peace and reconciliation in zones of conflict.

APG23 is committed to promoting the so called “society of Gratuitousness”, a society that is based on the awareness that everything (hearth, people, resources etc.) is a gift from God; a society that is based on the values of being, sharing and relating, where the most vulnerable persons in society, the people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, and marginalised persons set the pace of the human family’s march.

Our advocacy action for respect of human rights and a better world based on social justice and solidarity, led us to start a permanent presence at the United Nations in Geneva. We advocate, among other priorities, for the implementation of the Right to Development and the recognition of the right to International Solidarity.

APG23 carries out several development projects throughout the world following guiding principles on development that are inspired by the direct sharing of life with the people living in poverty and marginalised, by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and the principles affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter and the Declaration on the Right to Development.

Development of individuals and peoples cannot be reduced just to economic growth and material wealth. True development should respect, first of all, human dignity as a core value and should be integral, encompassing all the dimensions (political, cultural, economic, social, ethical and spiritual) and aspects of human life, including the religious dimension. People should come first above profit, above the particular financial interests of some individuals and corporations, above anything else. People should be empowered and become protagonists of their own development rather than remaining objects of assistance and charity that on long run create dependency.

Our experiences on the field, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, shows that development is successful if centred on the human person and on human communities and ensures active and meaningful participation.

The two projects that I will describe have been implemented in Zambia, in the Copperbelt province. Zambia, with an estimated adult HIV prevalence rate of 14.3% and an incidence of poverty estimated at 64%, is at the heart of the African AIDS belt. HIV/AIDS has become a major public health and development problem, affecting the lives and social welfare of a large proportion of the population and having a devastating impact

in all sector of society, especially before the advent of antiretroviral treatment.

HIV and AIDS accounts for half of the estimated 1.3 million orphans and vulnerable children in Zambia. The vicious circle of AIDS and poverty, where AIDS increases poverty and Poverty increases the spread of HIV, has seriously undermined the wonderful coping mechanism of the African extended family to absorb and care for children left behind by the death of their parents. The number of children dropping out of school, exploited and/or sexually abused and who end up roaming the streets, has increased considerably during the past decade.

The Rainbow Project, is a multi sectoral “model of care” on a large scale meant to help a large number of orphans and vulnerable children. Rainbow Project has been implemented and experienced in the Copperbelt Province for the past 13 years (since 1998). It has also been implemented in Kenya and Tanzania since the year 2002.. The spirit of Rainbow is to keep the children in related or non-related families, mobilising the community and networking with different community-based organisations (FBOs or NGOs) that are already active in the field in order to empower what is already existing and add what is lacking. The aims of extending coverage of assistance to children in need, of supporting the traditional extended family model and make nation aware of the AIDS emergency are achieved through an operational network of more than 34 CBOs that provide comprehensive support in defined areas with interlinked interventions based on needs assessment and respect of local culture. The collaborative efforts by the organisations are co-ordinated and organised in a defined area trough the “Rainbow Unit” as exemplified in the Rainbow Intervention Plan. Capacity building and advocacy for the rights of children are essential components of the project. Community participation is its strength.

Rainbow has developed an agricultural micro credit scheme using the "Twin-Track approach", which aims to find a balance between short term needs and long term self-sustainability. The aims of microcredit program are: to improve the standard of life of vulnerable families, to reduce dependency syndrome among vulnerable families, to develop personal independence and self confidence, to empower families to be self sustaining even after the program has ended. In the first track each Rainbow centre identifies twenty five vulnerable families who will go through farming and management skills training for ten days. Then, each family is given an average of one hector of land to cultivate maize, beans and groundnuts and receives, as a loan, agriculture in-puts in terms of seeds, fertilizer and tools.

The second track refers to assistance in terms of food, schooling, medical support provided for four months in the first year in order to meet basic needs so that families will not resort to using their loans for daily survival. The program last for four years; in the second and third year the program provides agriculture refresher courses, agriculture inputs (seeds, fertilizer and tools) and agricultural technical assistance, In the fourth year the agriculture inputs (seeds, fertilizer and tools) are given as a grant. The repaying back of the loan is done in terms of bags of harvested products. Taking into account the structural poverty and the on going HIV/AIDS pandemic, the loan are given without interests.

The average percentage of repaying back is around 95 and 98%. Micro finance can be an effective way to break the vicious circle of HIV and poverty, in favour of a virtuous circle - composed of the opportunity to start an economical activity and the possibility of increasing the number of healthy and educated people, all leading to higher hopes for the future.

If we measure the degree of community participation in Rainbow project by using the model of the spider gram elaborated by Rifkin and others in 1988, where the gradients from 1 to 5 starting from the centre to periphery indicate the increasing amount of participation, we can see that the project scores very high in all the different aspects (need assessment, leadership, management, resource mobilisation and implementation).

Chichetekelo Youth Project (the word Chichetekelo means Hope in the local language..) began in 1997 with the aim to enabling youth from the dumping and street areas of Ndola to become self-reliant and restore their own dignity by providing them with an opportunity for total transformation in their lives. In this way, youth will be able to guarantee to themselves and their families sustainable household food security and basic needs.

The project deals with both the root causes and symptoms of the phenomenon of children living on the streets.

Integral development of youths is achieved through:

- a. Education: since education is the first instrument for freedom
- b. Skills training: to enable the youth to become self-reliant in the future
- c. Job opportunities: to create jobs opportunities both internal and external to the project
- d. Spiritual formation: to discover the deep meaning and value of life

The project aims also to prevent vulnerable youth roaming the streets and from being more exposed to high risk behaviours. The project also aims to be completely self-sustaining.

CYP is articulated in three phases: phase one located in Kansenshi area with a drop-in centre, a transient home and activities like daily and night visits on the streets, counselling, recreation, family tracing and reunification; phase two in Nkwazi Overspill where 130 children attend daily the rehabilitation centre (among them 36 reside in the centre..) and there recreational activities, a community school, spiritual formation, a girl child program ; and phase three located in Misundu area with an hostel for 100 youth where a 3 years training in carpentry, mechanics and agriculture is offered plus educational, medical, psychosocial support and family empowerment. Job opportunities are created internally (commercial farm and ice cream shops opened by CYP in the commercial centres of Ndola and Lusaka) and externally to the project (including stages in private companies).

So far, Chichetekelo project has supported more than 400 youths and has contributed considerably to reduce the number of children living on the streets of Ndola.

In this project, according to the spider gram model, community participation is higher in need assessment, resource mobilisation and organisation and lower in management and leadership. Anyway, CYP involves representatives of youth and their families in the Executive board and works closely with the Residential Development Committees.

Rainbow and Chichetekelo projects work complimentary and at different levels as comprehensive approach of APG23 to the situation of orphans and vulnerable children.

The two projects exemplify People-centred and participatory Development where community participation is key to success.

Local communities know very well what is good for their own development; it is a matter of offering opportunities to express themselves and be empowered.