

The Behrhorst Ripples

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As a youngster I delivered eggs to the Behrhorst clinic. My mother raised chickens and sold them, along with eggs, as her small business. That's how I first met Dr. Behrhorst. During my teenage years I was actually hired to help clean at the clinic. At times, Dr. Behrhorst and I got into conversations about how to help people stay healthy once they've been treated at the clinic. Already then we were talking about preventive health care and community development work! Really, it was Dr. Behrhorst's son, Christian, that became my really good friend since we were only a year apart. My first child was named after him.

I come from a family which is very grounded in strong values of justice and respect for all people. Those are the values that I saw at Behrhorst, not just in Dr. Behrhorst. Others there such as Roland Bunch, staff of World Neighbors, connected with Behrhorst, really exemplified the values that I had first learned from my parents. Roland really believed in compassion; I would call it well-calculated compassion. That is, as we help people, make sure that things are well planned and done well, right from the start. How I wish that more development projects practiced thoughtfulness as I learned from Roland.

I have played a variety of roles in community development, through World Neighbors, through PAVA, as a Peace Corps trainer, etc. During the violence, my life was in grave danger and friends made plans for me to leave the country. But I chose to stay, not only for my family's sake, but also because my own roots are here. In 1995 – 1999, I was the projects coordinator for Behrhorst Partners for Development, and I have worked all over our country, in villages, at municipal levels, and even the national level, assisting the President's Wife. Today I am a consultant and what money I earn I often use to help groups, especially women's groups, which have limited resources.

I have seen much money spent in community development through the 38 years that I have been involved in social and economic projects. I have seen programs come and go. And I have seen changes, not always changes for the better. I'd like to say this about

undertaking any new program: If you don't have plans to make it sustainable, don't even start.

If there is one change that saddens me, it is the increasing dependency that I observe in people. This is a very negative result of NGOs and government help. When people think about what they can get from NGOs, their own sense of responsibility erodes. This is a mental change, an attitude which is very damaging. It is an attitude of losers, with others considered to be the winners, those who can give them something. How sad! When a young person wants a bicycle to go to school, the first question ought to be, "How can I raise that money," rather than "Who or which organization will give that to me." We need to be cultivating mindsets of productivity, not passive receptivity.

To me, the best work that organizations like Behrhorst can do is what I would call popular education, based on self awareness as proactive agents of change. Good decision-makers (i.e., how many children shall we have? Where do we want to be 10 years from now?) based on beliefs in their own capacities to effect improvements in their own lives, their families' lives and the quality of their communities.