

CVSA and Volunteer Service Today: Seize This Time to Change the Course of History

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The endeavors into which each of us invests our volunteer time are of no small significance in the bigger picture of what future we are forging for mankind.

Over the last several years, as we were compiling the current edition of *INVEST YOURSELF*, other CVSA volunteers and I have talked with hundreds of community and volunteer leaders. When the biggest economic meltdown in history hit their communities—and their organizations’ budgets—it was like a massive avalanche had descended on them which very few had heard coming. In some areas, unemployment rose from 7% to 18% within 14 months. In that same time, homelessness in many areas jumped by more than 10%. Staff from organizations listed in *IY* have reported that they have found families living in their cars on the edge of town, or in tents on public campgrounds.

Under the current economic conditions, the needs have quickly become greater than ever, while the resources to address these needs have become harder to assemble. This is in large part because the constituencies who have traditionally made up the base of support for the organizations represented in *IY* — individual donors, local churches and organizations, small businesses — are themselves facing foreclosure, debt, loss of income or donations due to job losses among their own memberships, loss of consumer spending in local economies as workers lose income. These historic support bases now find *themselves* in need of relief as the economic disaster spreads.

In a single weekend, governments of the wealthiest nations of the world diverted more money to bail out their leading financial institutions than they have invested in the last decade to the ending of hunger, illiteracy and disease in the world. Most community leaders we talked with shared CVSA’s view that simply standing by was not an option. Most agreed that simply hoping for change in the decision-making priorities that place greater significance on saving wealthy banks that were “too big to allow to fail” than on the survival needs of the people, was an unsound approach to solving our local, national or global problems.

We can look at the history of social movements and progressive change and know that nothing changes for the better until people organize and impel those changes out of necessity.

But what do we do with that understanding? We need caring people to step forward with a goal-oriented, professional approach to the work of volunteer service and action, to organize and provide the urgently needed leadership for bringing together those suffering the most under the current set of priorities, to take a real role in changing them.

For decades, CVSA has been describing volunteer service as a process of taking responsibility for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters, taking responsibility to right the wrongs being done to others, taking responsibility to end injustices and to correct policies that are harmful to people and to the earth which allows us to be alive. These days, volunteer service is also about rebuilding our communities, our country and our world which is suffering greatly under one man-made crisis after another: food, water, energy, climate change, financial collapse. Taking responsibility starts with questioning why certain conditions and problems exist in the

first place. The best way to then find the answers is to get materially involved in working for the solutions along with the people whose lives depend on those problems being solved.

The strength of each of our organizations will grow as we share with each other our experience and knowledge of how to do that work successfully. How will we build a society in which health and nutrition for those denied it, sound and affordable housing for those without it, employment at wages people can live on, care for our elderly, safety and education for our children and youth, the end of hunger, the end of exploitation and a reverse in the practices that are destroying the planet —all become the country's and the world's actual priorities?

At the time of the publication of the previous edition of *INVEST YOURSELF*, the 60th Anniversary Edition, non-government organizations and the member nations of the UN General Assembly had just assessed the progress and lack thereof made during the first 5 years of pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs, agreed to at the beginning of the 21st Century in September 2000 by all the member nations of the UN, established the goal of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in the world by the year 2015. They declared this an international priority, with the underlying analysis that the world can never have peace and an end to war until these material conditions of deprivation are ended; they acknowledged that the resources and abilities to make these systemic changes existed—only the political will to do so was missing.

We are well past the half way point to that date with destiny.

Yet much of the progress made by many developing nations in the last decade has now been lost in 2009 alone. In September 2009, the UN issued a report titled *Voices of the Vulnerable: the Economic Crisis from the Ground Up* which describes how, just in the past year, there has been an increase of 100 million people suffering from hunger while infant mortality may increase by an additional 200,000 to 400,000 each year from now to 2015 if the current economic crisis continues as it is.

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said about the situation, *“The global economic crisis is not ‘over’ as some have begun to predict, but rather it has just started for hundreds of millions of people around the globe.”* He admonished that, *“The near poor are in danger of becoming the new poor, as the clock is running out on the coping strategies of the vulnerable and poor. Many options, such as dipping into savings and selling assets, have been exhausted by previous crisis or were non-existent in the first place.”*

According to the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Olivier De Shutter, *“The right to food is not the right to be fed after an emergency. It is the right to access the means to produce food or the means to an income that enables the purchase of adequate food.”*

Hunger is a growing specter in the U.S. as well as in the developing nations. Official unemployment rates in the U.S. have reached 15 percent in several rural localities—parts of Washington State, California and Michigan, for example—and, in a handful, have exceeded the 20 percent mark. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the jobless rate for men rose to 10 percent in June 2009, the second highest on record since World War II. When you combine the number of people who are officially counted as jobless with those who are working part-time because they can't find full-time work and those who have stopped looking for work but would take a job if one became available—we have 30 million Americans, or 19 percent of the work force, unemployed.

As you read these pages, the process of an astounding amount of capital being concentrated in the hands of a few major banking conglomerates continues, while a massive

concentration of housing and land assets are moving into the hands of a few financial institutions — at the same time millions of homes are being foreclosed on.

The crisis is in no way over, and people need answers and help now. The resources to solve these problems clearly exist. They are simply not in the hands of those who need them and who, therefore, are in the best position to determine how they should be used.

Where does CVSA come into this?

With your participation and support, CVSA can help strengthen the volunteer organizations that are on the front lines of the growing poverty in communities worldwide, serving those in need, bringing people together and not allowing anyone to be left isolated, misinformed or desperate.

CVSA's role is to get more volunteers involved through the distribution of this catalogue, through speaking engagements and by providing independent, non-government organizations who join us with information, training and consultation on tactics, strategies and processes for growth. We can act on the knowledge that using trial and error as a method of work is a waste of time and human energy; we know collective experience is more powerful than that of any single individual or any single organization. We need more volunteers to join us in building mechanisms for aiding each other organizationally, sharing our knowledge and experience in this work.

Calling on the leaders of all the 192 nations that make up the body of the United Nations to take their responsibility in building a new, viable and sustainable international economic order seriously and with vigor, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua, the President of the 63rd UN General Assembly said,

“The main focus of this new step will be life in all its forms, humanity with all its peoples and ethnic groups, the Earth as a mother with all its vitality and an economy that creates the material conditions for making all this possible. We will need the material capital we have built up, but the focus will be on human and spiritual capital, whose most wholesome fruits are fraternity or brotherhood, cooperation, solidarity, love, economic and ecological justice, compassion and the capacity to coexist happily with all our differences, in the same shared home, the great and generous Mother Earth.”

The people involved with the organizations you will find in ***INVEST YOURSELF*** represent the human capital d'Escoto speaks of as the most important component in building that better future. You will find examples of leadership through action; examples of ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things through working together. You will find material manifestations of hope that there are better ways to produce and distribute our food in order to end hunger, care for the earth so that it cares for us and tend to the basic human needs of all the world's people.

For all these reasons, we heartily welcome you to the pages of ***INVEST YOURSELF***. We urge you to join our ranks with whatever time, skill, experience and desire to learn and to serve that you can bring.

I will end with this warning: Investing yourself may change you, your world view and your future. We are counting on you to take that step to be part of changing the future for all of us through volunteering your time, energy, skills and desire for a better world.

Please contact CVSA anytime with questions, offerings of assistance, feedback and reports on your volunteer experiences that we can share to benefit others.