The AVSI Foundation

The AVSI Foundation is an international, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1972, with headquarters in Milan, Italy and an office in Washington, D.C. Globally, AVSI’s mission is to support human development in developing countries according to the social teaching of the Catholic Church, with special attention to education and promotion of the global dignity of every person.

Since 1991, AVSI has been registered as a PVO with USAID, and is officially recognized by the Italian Government and the European Union. AVSI holds general consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, New York, with UNICEF, New York and is listed in the ILO Special List of NGOs. At present, AVSI is operating in 38 countries in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the Middle East and South-East Asia in the following sectors: social and educational, distance support, urban development, healthcare, work, agriculture, food security and water, energy and environment, humanitarian emergency, migrations, international adoptions.

More than 60 organizations now make up the informal AVSI network, which works systematically on the implementation of projects and common reflections on development, sharing methods and experiences. The network is one bound by operative friendship and includes founding members, participating members, as well as partners.

Drawing on AVSI’s methodological approach that focuses on the needs of the person in his/her entirety and on partnerships with local institutions, AVSI’s programs and those of networked organizations often extend into more than one sector and across the divisions of civil society, business, and the state. This cross-sectoral and community-level approach makes each intervention more effective and sustainable.

Over the course of forty years, AVSI has developed a method of work which takes into account the various realities experienced in all parts of the world. This method is a conceptual framework of the values which AVSI means to promote through its presence in the world, and can be defined in five principles:

1. Centrality of the Person: Every person is a unique being connected to humanity by his/her own particular needs, beliefs and relationships. This is what provokes AVSI to share this sense of life through educational encounters leading to a help that goes far beyond poverty conditions or material needs. It is precisely this that makes beneficiaries equal to project staff, and reduces class or cultural differences to a simple acceptance of life events within a global meaning.

2. Starting from the Positive: Positivity is a sign that goodness is present and possible; it indicates points to hold on to, and allows for hope and possibility of change in one’s life. Each person is a capital without which humanity would be poorer. AVSI starts an action from what is present in terms of competence, resources, expectations and desires - not from what is lacking.

3. Doing With: There is a risk in developing countries that people are made the objects of help, and are not active participants in their own development. Little can ultimately become a mutual endeavor.

4. Subsidiarity: The development of intermediary bodies represent the first level of a society’s response to its own needs. With a logical solidarity, localized groups and organizations can express initiative for the common good.

5. Partnership: Forming partnerships gives sustainability to actions by empowering local mechanisms with support, guidance and resources without sacrificing their freedom of action. It is these organizations which can then continue to act as positive agents for change within their communities.
AVSI D.R.C.

The history of the AVSI Foundation is rooted firmly in eastern DRC. It was in 1972 that the first AVSI Volunteers arrived in the Ruzizi Valley of South Kivu to begin work on the “Centr e de Dévelop pement Communautaire de Kiringye” north of Uvira to advance the socio-economic recovery and development in an area suffering from prolonged conflict following independence. Expanding in the late 70s to Bunyakiri in South Kivu and Walikale in North Kivu, then to Goma in 2002 and Bukavu in 2006, AVSI DRC has remained committed to its’ principle of “working with, not for” the beneficiaries; stressing the importance of each individual’s participation in project goals, a sense of accomplishment and confidence is nurtured, allowing knowledge passed on through projects to transform beneficiaries into protagonists of his or her own future, with a resilience and ability to solve problems from within.

Forty years later, as the original rice mill in Kiringye continues to operate, AVSI DRC has expanded to include three operational bases and 12 field bases with more than 300 Congolese and expatriate staff and more than 200 community volunteers. Funded by donors including UNICEF, ECHO, the Pooled Fund and private Italian donors, AVSI DRC is currently involved in the Food Security, Non-Food Items (Emergency), Education, Protection, WASH, Construction and Health sectors in eastern DRC. AVSI currently implements ECHO Food Security projects in North and South Kivu, numerous Education and Protection programs in North Kivu and is serving as an implementing partner of the multi-sectoral UNICEF RRMP and PEAR+ programs in South Kivu. AVSI is registered in DRC at the central and local level, with specific agreements with the involved Ministries to carry out its humanitarian and recovery activities, and is an active participating member in the cluster system in both North and South Kivu, co-leading with UNICEF the Education cluster in North Kivu and the Early Recovery cluster (RRC) in South Kivu. In South Kivu AVSI also serves as secretariat focal point for the Education Sub-cluster in Uvira.

Focused on providing holistic support to children and families through emergency and early recovery interventions targeted at those most in need, AVSI recognizes that advances to the education of a society result in benefits which last far beyond project activities. As such, educational aspects are incorporated into AVSI’s emergency and stabilization interventions alike. Recognizing also that community involvement is one of the keys to fundamental changes within eastern DRC, AVSI has developed a strategy to address needs through innovative approaches aimed to involve the communities involved.

Mobile training teams were established by AVSI for the first time in 2007 with a project in North Kivu as a way to improve the quality of education through teacher training in targeted schools in remote areas. Since February 2010, the same approach has been adopted in South Kivu, particularly in the context of the RRMP Program. In addition to the nearly 500 classrooms built since 2006, AVSI has trained more than 3,500 teachers and 1,200 members of school parents committees as a way to spark community investment in education.

Through the Fair approach, AVSI has been involved in broadening the way in which materials can be delivered to those in need, involving local traders and sellers which otherwise would be left out of the process of providing for the communities in which they live. Having applied the Fair approach to RRMP Education and NFI distributions as well as to ECHO food and seed distributions, it’s become clear that by promoting involvement of beneficiaries great improvements can be made.

Whether it be a large-scale emergency distribution, the coordination of a Child Friendly Space, a training of a School Parent’s Committee, or the establishment of fish farming activities for a family, investments in people are at the core of the AVSI activities in DRC. Building synergies within our partner organizations and with local organizations AVSI, thanks to the integral support of donors such as UNICEF, ECHO and the Pooled Fund, continue to search for ways to further improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid in eastern DRC.
There is a risk in developing countries that people are made the objects of help, and are not active participants in their own development. Little can ultimately improve in one’s life if he or she is not able to be the protagonist for change.

A founding principle of AVSI is therefore to “do with” rather than to “do for.” Responding to needs and identifying solutions together with those involved, the starting point for this action is a relationship with the beneficiary that can only be established through dialogue and sharing.

The Fair Approach

While the direct distribution of Food and Non-Food Items (NFIs) has proven to be an effective way to bring life-saving materials to a population in need, it’s clear that each family has unique needs that may not be best served by “one-size-fits-all” assistance. Distributions run the risk of being a humbling, impersonal experience for those assisted, with beneficiaries potentially reduced to numbers. Rooted in the recognition that an individual is best suited to decide what they need for themselves, NFI Fairs are an alternative method by which began as a pilot program in UNICEF’s RRMP Program in 2009 and has grown to nearly 50% of the RRMP’s NFI distributions in 2011. The Fair approach has already been incorporated into AVSI-ECHO Food and Seed distributions as well.

Rather than receiving a pre-composed selection of goods, at an NFI, Food, or Seed Fair beneficiaries are given cash vouchers worth between 20-to-100 US$ which can be used to buy what they choose in a market setting. Between 40-100 participating vendors identified from local markets sell goods in a setting designed to replicate a local market. Beneficiaries are able to browse, compare, and bargain with vendors in the same way they would at the local market. Following the completion of the fair, vendors are paid the cash equivalent of their vouchers.

Constantly trying to seize upon opportunities to integrate educational activities into the Fair system, AVSI was the first to include participative theatre and recreational activities within the RRMP NFI Fairs. Designed to spread awareness on issues ranging from education to child protection and hygiene, the participative theatres, focus groups discussions, awareness campaigns and recreational activities provoke involvement and discussion while serving also as a key source of information for all involved.

In addition to the more than 95% of participants surveyed having reported a preference for the Fair approach, it has become clear that, especially in the case of NFIs, there exists a logistical benefit to Fairs as well. Importing and organizing the products necessary for large-scale distributions can be a slow and costly process. Vendors, oftentimes from the distribution area and already familiar with Fair methods, are able to mobilize in less than a week in many cases, leaving intact prepositioned emergency stocks. Promoting the freedom of choice while invigorating the local economy and capitalizing on educational opportunities, the Fair approach to Food and NFI distributions is a prime example of the ways in which community desires can be parlayed into improved results.

As a way to illustrate in more detail the Fair process, what follows is a description of an RRMP NFI Fair. With the exception of a few specifics, the workings of the AVSI-ECHO Food and Seed Fairs are essentially the same. Each Fair is the result of careful planning and analysis. Market analysis are conducted in order to avoid any potentially negative impact on the local economy. Thanks to AVSI’S donors and other humanitarian organizations, this is all possible in a timely manner, even in areas otherwise cut-off from other humanitarian need.

The Steps of an NFI Fair*

Immediately following the displacement of people as a result of conflict or natural disaster RRMP Partners’ multi-sectoral needs assessments (MSA) teams conduct field-level assessments to examine what interventions may be required. Visiting the communities affected and discussing needs with local leaders and individual families, factors including the severity of impact, the complexity of access and the presence of humanitarian actors can be identified and prioritized based on a pre-defined scoring system. The results of these assessments are fed back to the RRMP Steering Committee, OCHA, and other humanitarian actors in the Cluster System as a way to coordinate and prioritize actions. Following the Committee’s decision to undertake an NFI Fair, potential beneficiaries are again surveyed to further understand their needs, while local vendors are surveyed to determine their ability to provide these goods necessary in a location central to the beneficiaries.

Communities arrive on a pre-determined day to the NFI Fair where, following identity confirmation they are briefed on the way in which the Fair system works, including details on the vouchers and their rights as buyers. Measures such as hand washing stations and hygiene sensitizations are a part of this process designed to avoid the spread of disease.

Following the distribution of vouchers, beneficiaries enter the Fair to shop for items ranging from pots and pans to clothing and building supplies which are sold by vendors who have been sensitized on the process as well, ensuring that market prices and the rights of beneficiaries are respected. Participative theatre and sensitizations are carried out during the Fair in order to spread information and awareness on pertinent education topics. Upon completing their purchases, beneficiaries are then paid the cash equivalent of their vouchers at a secure location following the closure of the Fair.

* See photo on reverse side.

AVSI Principle #3: “Doing With”

Families (persons) received NFI Vouchers through the course of 4 (four) AVSI RRMP NFI fairs in 2010-11

Value of goods (in US$) sold by local vendors during the course of the AVSI RRMP NFI fairs in 2011.

Families (persons) received seed and/or food vouchers through AVSI-ECHO fairs in August, 2011 and February 2012

Value of goods (in US$) sold by local vendors during the course of the AVSI ECHO Seed and Food fairs in August, 2011 and February 2012.
A member of AVSI’s RRMP MSA team carries out a household evaluation of food stock present in the home of a host family in Ngandu, Mwenga Territory, South Kivu.

Residents of Ngandu and the surrounding villages gather to take part in a needs assessment carried out by AVSI in June, 2011 as part of the MSA process. The area ultimately received aid in the form of an NFI distribution.

Participants are registered prior to entrance at an AVSI RRMP NFI Fair held in the Kalonge area in June, 2011.

With multiple steps in the sensitization process, beneficiaries are briefed on their rights following instructions on the way in which to use their vouchers. Informing both sellers and buyers as to their roles and responsibilities helps to avoid confusion and/or exploitation during the Fair itself.

NFI Fair, Kalongi, South Kivu, June, 2011.

Buyers bargain with a vendor for goods at the Kalongi NFI Fair in June, 2011.

The ASO Drama group involves local school children in a sensitization on child protection at a Fair in Kalonge.

Just prior to checking out of the Kalongi NFI Fair beneficiaries received a complimentary jerry can and mosquito net.

“I was very happy to see all of these items here like iron sheeting, jerrycans, saucepans and clothing... These are all things which since 2000 I have not had the money to buy. The way to return to what was is still long, but this is a happy day.”

- Cirangane, NFI Fair participant, Kalongi.
Disparate Needs

Displacement in the Kivus is as unpredictable as it is widespread. Communities may flee with nothing but the clothes on their backs, or may have time to transfer belongings; displacement may last anywhere from a few days to many months. Typically preferring to remain close to home, the majority of displaced will seek refuge in nearby villages, straining the already scarce resources of these host communities.

Upon return, communities rebuild with no guarantee of safety, and no guarantee that the entire process will not repeat itself again soon, with communities potentially shifting between being displaced to being returnees to being host communities several times within the year.

Responding to the humanitarian needs of a constantly fluctuating population has proven to be one of the greatest challenges in the Kivus. Due to the dynamic nature of conflict, needs of neighboring communities may be entirely different, and a community’s needs may shift at any moment. Thanks to the continued support of donors such as UNICEF, ECHO and the Pooled fund, AVSI continues to be able to respond to the spectrum of needs present in eastern DRC. In situations requiring immediate emergency intervention, such as mass displacement or famine, the Rapid Response to Movements of Populations (RRMP) and ECHO Programs have proven to be an effective response mechanism to provide essential food, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and emergency relief supplies to those affected. For areas of increased stability, the Program of Expanded Assistance to Returnees (PEAR+) is able to provide an integrated assistance package aimed to help communities with the longer-term goal of rebuilding their lives.

In order to operate effectively in the context of ever-changing needs and security, AVSI’s projects have by necessity developed a fluid, pragmatic approach to intervention. Pilot programs introduced as pieces of the RRMP projects in years past, for example, have become pillars of today’s interventions. Continuous reflection as to how to improve service delivery has resulted in a continuum of support able to respond to a variety of needs present.

As part of the AVSI interventions in South Kivu in March 2012 there will be an NFI Fair in Hombo Sud, as part of the RRMP Program, as well as a Food fair in Kalonge as part of AVSI ECHO projects.

Hombo Sud Context*

On December 23rd, 2011, following attacks by the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) rebels in the territories of Shabunda, Kalehe and Kabare in South Kivu, communities began moving along the Hombo Sud - Bitale axis towards the relative safety of the 106th Regiment of the Forces Armé République Démocratique du Congo (FARDRC). With villages burned, and property looted, those fleeing generally moved in with host families within the villages in which they settle.

Following an assessment in early February, 2012 by IRC, and RRMP partner in South Kivu, it is found that approximately 7,500 households (approximately 37,500 individuals) are displaced along the Bitale - Hombo Sud axis. Homeless, these displaced are crowded, with the risk of outbreak of contagious diseases imminent; many families have no bedding, sleeping on the dry banana leaves; basic household items such as cooking utensils and water containers are generally not present due to the looting by the FDLR and the long distances traveled, and the area poses a high risk for malaria.

In respect to the NFI portion of the assessment, the area was given a score of 4.3-out-of-5, prompting an NFI Fair to be held by AVSI in Nyamirera as well as an NFI Fair to be held by IRC in Bitale. The AVSI NFI Fair will serve approximately 3,200 households from March 6-11, 2012.

Kitutu Context*

During an assessment in mid 2011 it was found that due to the isolation, destruction of production facilities, loss of food stocks, seeds and tools as a result of insecurity and displacement, 93% of the population in Kitutu Health Zone was observed to have a poor/limited diet. Twenty-two percent were suffering from malnutrition.

In response, an AVSI ECHO Food Security Program is currently ongoing in 27 localities in the Kitutu area. Activities including family fish farming, cash for work programs for pond and road rehabilitation, community and household agricultural activities including farming and micro-projects such as mills are ongoing. From July, 2011 to-date, approximately 1,734,790 IDPs and 817,250 Returnees

Oriental: 436,082/172,366
North Kivu: 557,023/436,005
South Kivu: 658,300/199,799
Katanga: 51,485/0,080

* As of 20 May 2011
http://www.internal-displacement.org

AVSI Principle #1: “Centrality of the Person”

The first principle of the AVSI method of humanitarian assistance is that the person is at the center of all actions. Every person is a unique being connected to humanity by his/her own particular needs, beliefs and relationships.

This reality is what provokes AVSI to share this sense of life through educational encounters leading to a help that goes far beyond poverty conditions or material needs. It is precisely this that makes AVSI ECHO projects.

Considering the extraordinary number of people affected by conflict in eastern DRC it is especially important that each individual is treated not as a number, but as a valued part of their society. With a meaning and value to their actions, a person can empower others also, bringing benefits far greater than would be possible without their involvement.

AVSI Principle #1: “Centrality of the Person”

1,734,790 IDPs
817,250 Returnees

Oriental: 436,082/172,366
North Kivu: 557,023/436,005
South Kivu: 658,300/199,799
Katanga: 51,485/0,080

* AVSI briefing pg. 4/4
Les Nations Unies ne sauraient être tenues responsables de la qualité des limites, des noms et des désignations utilisés sur cette carte.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - République Démocratique du Congo