

“Every little helps”



SOCIAL COMMITMENT. May 27th of this year saw the fifth anniversary of “Proyecto Horizonte – Ushpa Ushpa”. “What started as a relatively simple idea has meanwhile grown into a substantial project,” says Christian Rühmer who, having joined WestLB New York in 2005, currently heads the local Investment Management/Portfolio Exit Group. Five years ago he launched this project in Mineros San Juan, a Bolivian community on the outskirts of Cochabamba. Its goal is to improve the prospects for people – and children, in particular – through education and community support.

The “Proyecto Horizonte – Ushpa Ushpa” has developed into a model for successful collaboration between a village, highly motivated and well-trained supporters and sponsors. Founder Christian Rühmer (2nd photo, centre) ist delighted about this

Like many people Christian Rühmer had often asked himself how he could make a commitment in the social field. At some point he no longer felt satisfied with supporting various charities and advising micro-finance institutions in his spare time. “I then set out to find a project of my own. This project would preferably be working with kids in a country not yet covered by the major aid organisations,” he recalls. In addition, he felt it important that he could initially handle the task single-handedly: “I didn’t want to ask others for support until I could demonstrate how their donations would be used.”

While searching for a suitable project in early 2004, he came across Osvaldo Castro, the head of a local chapter of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a catholic lay organisation which was already doing work in Bolivia. They quickly teamed up and started to plan the construction and operation of a daycare centre in Mineros San Juan. “Rather than merely offering the kids a place to stay during the day, we wanted to make sure that they could spend their time in a meaningful way which helps their development. This is why we started to look for qualified educators and psychologists early on,” Christian emphasises. The daycare centre opened in December 2004. Today some 160 children attend the facility, which has since undergone expansion.

However, this was only the beginning. Christian Rühmer recalls: “The more we got involved with the locals and the way they lived, the more we came to realise that we could not simply release the six-year-olds into an unsupported environment. If we really wanted to improve people’s lives on a long-term basis, we would have to expand the project and include both the youths and their parents.”



Proyecto Horizonte – Ushpa Ushpa (Sociedad San Vicente de Paúl)



As a first step they drafted a five-year plan aimed at improving overall development in Ushpa-Ushpa. The plan comprised numerous new ventures, from the construction of a school and a night school for adults to the building of a healthcare centre and various activities to promote community life. One such activity is “Tantakuna”, which brings together women to make arts and craft items for sale. “Tantakuna” also operates a bakery, a knitting group, a convenience store as well as various educational and information efforts. Since 2007 community members have had access to microfinance funding for household improvements and business start-ups.

Of course, all of this needs to be funded. The main source of revenue for the project is donations, which initially came mainly from colleagues as well as friends and family. In the meantime support is also received from other aid organisations, which have become aware of the project. “Thanks to the help of Markus Koch, n-tv’s Wall Street correspondent, and his charity Börsianer Handeln e.V., we were able to complete the construction of the school on schedule,” explains Christian Rühmer. On November 28, 2008, some 540 pupils proudly received their first report cards.

Impressive progress has been made in many areas. More than 75 staffers as well as numerous volunteers support the project today. There is still a long way to go to reach the important goal of managing the financial resources locally in Ushpa-Ushpa. But even after five years of highly committed work Christian Rühmer never tires of recruiting new volunteers into the effort and collecting donations. “This is no longer just an exciting project but also a great responsibility. The key to our success is the

support we get from so many people around the world. Every little helps and we make sure that all funds are used efficiently and transparently,” says the project’s founder.

Christian Rühmer draws strength primarily from the gratitude extended by the local population and the progress seen in the development of the community. “It was quite a feeling celebrating the project’s fifth anniversary with some 3,000 people on the sports ground in May of this year,” he warmly recalls.

Information for prospective donors based outside Germany as well as general information on the project can be found at www.ushpa-ushpa.com

Proyecto Horizonte is registered as a charity in Bolivia and is therefore eligible to receive donations. Fund-raising in Germany is handled by “Verein zur Förderung des Kindergartens in Ushpa-Ushpa e.V.”, a zero-overhead charity specifically set up for this purpose. All donations are fully channelled through to the project; the only deductions made are for international bank transfer fees.

If you would like to support the project, please contact Christian Rühmer or visit www.ushpa-ushpa.com

