

sphere

Fall 2011 . Published by DevTech Systems, Inc.

To mark its fiftieth anniversary this year, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is honoring "the visionaries whose spirit of innovation has improved millions of lives in the developing world." Accordingly, this edition of Sphere is devoted to the experiences of DevTech Systems, Inc. (DevTech) staff in the international development field, including their work on USAID-funded projects. This issue showcases why staff members chose to do development work and some of their most memorable experiences. DevTech salutes USAID on this important anniversary and is proud to partner with the Agency on programs throughout the developing world.

DEVTECH

DevTech Systems, Inc.
1700 N. Moore Street, Suite 1720
Arlington, VA 22209 USA
www.devtechsys.com

Establishing a Firm that Provides Innovative Solutions to Development Challenges
By Jorge Sanguinety, Founder and CEO

The idea of founding DevTech first occurred to me in 1964 while reading a leader in *The Economist* that described the work of a "super-consultant" firm. The article mentioned a major development project in the Italian Mezzogiorno that struck me as a fascinating venture that could be conducted by a private firm with funding from various sources.

When I made this discovery, I was an economic planner at the Central Board of Planning in Havana, Cuba. Throughout the next two decades my interest in development economics continued to grow, and not only from the perspective of a practitioner. I had become increasingly aware that the economic development of countries was not solely "economic", and that we needed to learn more about the scientific basis of the development process. At that time, I found my work in academia (universities and think tanks, with brief stints in private financial institutions) too narrowly specialized. As much as I admired it, academia was forcing me to work in a somewhat isolated, perhaps virtual, world. It made me feel that I was losing sight of the "big picture" of development.

I was moved by a strong sense of independence and an intellectual inclination to determine where development could occur. Consequently, I left my position as Director of the Latin American Program in Applied Economics at American University and founded DevTech in 1984. My objective was to immerse myself in the world of development assistance and become more familiar with the obstacles in its path. In this field, the problems are not simply economic, political, or sociological, but contain aspects of all the social science disciplines. On the other hand, without the structured knowledge that academic research produces, it is very easy to lose oneself in the thicket of the realities of development.

That is why DevTech has always been committed to the practice of development while still being aware and knowledgeable of some of the most relevant outputs of the academic world. It was designed this way so that knowledge could guide our practice, which in turn could potentially contribute to the development of further knowledge. I am especially proud of DevTech's ability to provide innovative and effective approaches to development while maintaining high ethical standards. At the same time, we face the challenge of conveying to clients the complexity of the development assistance practice – which requires a sophisticated approach rather than a perfunctory or bureaucratic one.

Helping Children in Developing Countries Build Better Futures through Education

By Kirstin McCarthy, Education Specialist

I entered the field of international development after exploring various career paths. I had been a teacher and had worked on domestic education policy. My colleagues were surprised when I left the domestic policy field, looking to use my Spanish skills and work on the challenges that children face in other countries. Why, my D.C. think-tank friends wondered, would I want to focus my time and energy on children in other countries when the need in our backyard is so great? In the U.S. in 2008, about 72 percent of public school students graduated from high school. That figure is a dramatic improvement. We had been hovering just above 60 percent for a long time. Many of those who do graduate from high school lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills to gain meaningful employment and make life decisions.



Youth working on a team assignment for a project sponsored by DevTech in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

I believe that children who cannot read in the Dominican Republic or who drop out of school to work on a sugar cane plantation in the Philippines are just as deserving of solutions as those kids who face difficulty learning and graduating in Washington, D.C. At DevTech, I have managed programs that support students who are involved in exploitive forms of child labor. Our programs aim to help them exit these dangerous work situations and return to school. For these students, we try to illuminate the costs and benefits of giving up the small wages they are earning now for the long-term payoff that an education promises. Research shows that for each year these

children stay in school, their earnings increase by 10 percent over their lifetime, and their nation's gross domestic product increases as well. They are less likely to enter the justice system, more likely to be healthy and raise healthy families, and more likely to ensure the same future for their children.

As it turns out, the work I was doing domestically is not that different than the work I do now. I believe that the desire to learn is universal. I am convinced that all children yearn to be able to read. What is more, all children deserve the chance to make education work for them, to both improve their quality of life and to be curious and informed about the world around them.

Fostering Democratic Institutions and Robust Economies in Latin America

By Phillip Church, Senior Economist

Development work became my passion and professional career after I spent a year as an impressionable university student on a Fulbright Scholarship in Montevideo, Uruguay. That period was a politically turbulent one in Latin America. Military dictatorships throughout the region were giving way to pro-democracy movements much like the “Arab Spring” is introducing change in the Middle East today. With Ché Guevara in the mountains of Bolivia and Fidel Castro in Cuba, the U.S. was fearful that new civilian Latin American governments might be pulled into the sphere of Soviet communism. In Latin America, sustained U.S. commitment to the region's development through President Kennedy's “Alliance for Progress”, USAID and the Inter-American Development Bank fostered fledgling democratic institutions and robust, if at times faltering, open national economies.

I am pleased that I have participated in that development process, initially as a USAID career Foreign Service economist and then as Senior Economist at DevTech. In Latin America, pockets of poverty remain; social and economic injustices have not all been vanquished; and new challenges of environmental degradation and global climate change need to be addressed. Still, I feel confident that Latin American countries are up to the task and that U.S. support can manifest itself best in the form of collaboration between more equal partners. My experiences in

Latin America also encourage me to believe that the current generation of development practitioners can make similar contributions to helping Middle Eastern and African nations advance successfully toward equitable economic prosperity and social justice – much as has happened in Latin America. However, a sustained U.S. political commitment is required that is comparable to our development assistance competencies to do the job and stay with it until it is completed.

Assisting Women Affected by War to Rebuild Their Lives

By Natalie Donahue, Proposal Coordinator

My most memorable experience in the development field occurred while I was in Bosnia serving as an intern for the U.S. Department of State. While there, I volunteered with Women for Women International, an organization that assists women affected by war to rebuild their lives by providing training and creating economic opportunities for them. I was invited to observe one of the organization's training courses, after which I went to a program participant's house to see what she was growing in her greenhouse and the items she had knitted to sell at the market. What was supposed to be a quick visit turned into a long conversation with several of the training participants. Before I knew it, I was being treated to a lunch made solely from the vegetables and fruits from my host's garden. I was also treated to a fashion show of products she and the other program participants had made for their newly-formed co-operative business venture that the organization had helped them learn how to create.

This experience made a strong impression on me because I was not only the recipient of Bosnian hospitality (which is unsurpassed in my travel experience), but was able to observe how the organization I was volunteering with was positively affecting the lives of women. This inspired me to conduct more research on gender issues worldwide. It also had an effect on my career path as it led me to seek out organizations that make gender issues a focus of their development activities. This was one of the primary reasons I was attracted to DevTech, as I will be able to continue to work on gender issues in the future – making this a truly rewarding experience in more ways than one.



Women showing the handicrafts the program enabled them to sell (Kakanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Strengthening Economic Growth and Diversification in Southern Africa

By Alan Goodman, Communications Specialist

Growing up in a close Jewish family with observant, ambitious parents, I was certain at a young age that I was destined to do two things when I grew older: become a successful doctor and go to Israel to learn more about my religious heritage (all the better if I could combine the two). Being so singularly focused on one foreign country, I had neither the curiosity nor the inspiration to learn much about any other part of the world.

That changed, however, when I joined several of my high school teachers and fellow students on a trip to Malawi. We spent a week in the country learning as much about it as we could in such a short amount of time. Malawi was experiencing drought and famine at that time. I had never imagined, let alone witnessed, poverty on that scale before. Several children and adults trailed us throughout the week, pleading with us to give them food and money, and to take them with us when we returned to the U.S. A visit to an overcrowded, understaffed orphanage in Lilongwe was particularly painful, especially when we learned that it might be forced to close due to insufficient funding. Making matters worse, some government officials with whom we spoke did not appear to have either the capacity or the will to address the severe economic, public health, and human rights problems in their country.

On our flight home, I could not shake the haunting images of the sick, hungry, and desperate people we had met in Malawi. I concluded that my long-imagined pilgrimage to Israel could wait while I turned my attention to Africa. I recognized that I might not return to the continent for several years, but I was determined to be as well-prepared as possible when the time came.

After working at a few international organizations in Washington, D.C., I learned that the development firm that managed the southern Africa trade hub was seeking international trade expertise there. I accepted a position based in Botswana and had the opportunity to travel throughout the region and work with various governments, businesses, community organizations, and media outlets. In the process, I gained a better understanding of the U.S. Government's approach to helping countries in the region expand and diversify their economies. I was proud to have played a small role in the trade hub's efforts to improve the lives of people in the region, and grateful to have had the opportunity to meet so many extraordinary and dedicated people. This experience set me on the path to working on economic and public health projects in numerous other developing countries in Africa, Asia, and South America – continents that continue to surprise and inspire me.

sphere

Established in 1984 by economist Jorge A. Sanguinetti, Ph.D., DevTech Systems, Inc. is a consulting firm that focuses on four practice areas:

- Data Services, Performance Management, and Evaluations
- Education and Youth Development
- Gender
- Public Financial Management

Sphere is published by:

DevTech Systems, Inc.

1700 N. Moore Street, Suite 1720

Arlington, VA 22209

Tel: 703.312.6038 Fax: 703.312.6039

9200 South Dadeland Boulevard, Suite 204

Miami, FL 33156

Tel: 305.666.5150 Fax: 305.900.3132

devtech@devtechsys.com www.devtechsys.com

The opinions expressed in Sphere are entirely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect a statement or position of DevTech Systems, Inc., the U.S. Government, or any other entity.

Thank you for being an electronic subscriber. If you would like to receive printed copies of Sphere, please send an email to: devtech@devtechsys.com

DEVTECH

DevTech Systems, Inc.

1700 N. Moore Street, Suite 1720

Arlington, VA 22209 USA

www.devtechsys.com