

An Interview with the First Lady, Mrs. Barbara Mogae

Honourary Member of the National IYV 2001 Committee

What did you feel when you received the letter of invitation for you to be an Honourary Member of the National Committee for the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001?

We all like to feel useful so I was quite delighted to be thought useful in promoting volunteerism. We always need someone to marshalling group of people too. It is a pleasure to be a member of the Committee.

How do you see yourself as the First Lady and as a volunteer at the same time?

I call myself the wife of the President. A position of privilege, full of responsibility. I was to step into the role, as all the previous spouses had been involved in volunteerism.

How do you see the spirit of volunteerism in Botswana especially affecting the youth?

I believe there is not sufficient volunteerism in Botswana. There is some but not enough. For the youths, it's necessary for their own self-development because people concentrate on themselves in early life. We need to build a society, which we want to live. We can only do it if we participate in the process of building the society. Volunteerism, like sports, helps in developing character. You get to know the basis of community, you learn to deal with others and see different aspects of life that you are not open to see or experience otherwise. Young people enter the adult life fairly protected. It would be useful if at a young age we learn how the society functions, what are its needs, and what are the shortfalls and material circumstances of people.

Do you think active volunteerism in community home-based care will reduce HIV/AIDs infection in Botswana? If so, how?

I hope so, as we can't carry on through the fright of actual suffering. We have to start seeing some decline in the role of infections. Seeing HIV/AIDs infested patients at first hand will open our eyes to the sufferings.

We also have to change our attitude towards life. In Botswana, it is the young women and the mothers who nurse their sick. One believes they are the best teachers as well. We should address both boys and girls. Teach them self-pride and self-respect. One's body is like ones embodiment. If you really love someone then there has to be mutual consent and respect. I 'd rather wait. It's a long-term relationship. Both the parties should be willing to work towards it. There has to be behavioural change. We can't behave like animals. To me condom is not the answer. Parents have to take more responsibility for their children. Some ethnic communities in Botswana chaperon their children. Batswana youth also have to take behavioural responsibility. They have to learn to respect their elders at home and in the community.

How do you encourage others to join in this effort?

Tidy your countryside, village. It's your responsibility as a person. It reflects on us as Batswana. Each one has to adapt a ward, outside church, our yard. All of us have to do

our share in the community. It's our country Botswana. No one else is going to clean for us. Now hopefully people are convinced and converted to the idea of cleanliness and clean environment.

How else can we promote volunteerism?

I believe we all need to have a technique. Those who have ideas should come forward. For instance there are schools and hospitals which need help. In so many schools, it is not rudimentary reading books. Unfortunately, parents and teachers have delegated the whole responsibility to the government and the government does not have enough funds. Parents and teachers should come forward and do something about it. Even if everyone donates a book it will help build a library. Give the old magazines to hospitals. Schools could be painted. All they need to do is approach a paint company.

Ask others whenever a volunteer work has to be done. Plan it ahead and organize it well. So that people don't come just to mill around. There has to be a purpose and the event has to be well instrumented.

We always had volunteerism in the form of *Mothato* system. People took tremendous pride in it by being useful. They felt self-worth in their voluntary works. Volunteers built Jwaneg School and Shashe Local. We also need to recognise volunteerism by awarding President's Award to outstanding volunteers.

How do you visualise volunteerism being sustained beyond IYV 2001?

We have to define for ourselves future vision 2016. We need to redefine out "botho". What is it that we have to do as an individual to develop this society that we want tomorrow? All of us have to wake up to that effect. And if there is not enough money, then devote your time.

Do you have any special message to volunteers in Botswana?

I would like to say thank you to the National Committee for IYV 2001 and to keep up the work. To young people we say join volunteerism in your towns, villages, churches, and schools. It will help build character and society that we have to live in tomorrow.

To the men: join us so that you don't feel left behind. Hurry up because the train will leave without you. Somehow it is thought that only women and children go to church. But when you are lying in a coffin, you are on your own. Like the South Africans, we have to form a forum and encourage them to come forward.