

III. SPIRITANS IN INFORMAL EDUCATION WORKS

3.1 Over the years many informal educational works have been founded and continue in a creative response to the needs of people and especially to the youth among whom we work. These works are numerous and varied in their response to local needs and situations. Unfortunately, poverty and social exclusion continue in many parts of the world and governments are not always able to respond to the educational needs of marginalised people or engage in social programmes that tend to have little to do with training and the development of such groups. Consequently, many informal educational works run by Spiritans are small in nature and are aimed at having a high impact on a specific and identifiable group within a community or parish or on a regional level. However, some informal works also have a national or even international outreach. Concrete examples are to be found in the areas of basic literacy, employment programmes for refugees and migrants, skill training for youth leaders, specific programmes addressing the needs of girls and women, as well as shantytown dwellers, formation in technology, catechetical and pastoral leadership training programmes, self-awareness and human development courses, suicide prevention and recovery programmes for victims of torture, self-help and small business programmes, etc. Many of these works seek to help integrate marginalised groups into society or have a focus on engaging people in a process of social and political awareness for the transformation of society as well as seeking to impart a sense of citizenship.

3.2 Informal educational works require Spiritans to engage in a discernment process that starts from peoples lived reality. A good example of this is the now internationally recognised work of *SERVOL*² which began by a Spiritan asking the simple question: “*How can I help you?*” Characteristically, such works tend not to have a “*captive audience*”, as compared to a formal school setting. They generally need a high capacity for creativity and adaptation by those who run them and they tend to adopt an inductive method of responding to specific and concrete needs, for example, the *see, judge, act* method. When asked why Spiritans are involved in informal works, typically the response will include some of the following words or phrases: empowerment, enabling, facilitating, building capacity, helping individuals to take responsibility for their own lives, promoting human dignity, building a better community, etc.

3.3 Many informal works are organised in collaboration with other partners. This requires of Spiritans a particular skill set, not exclusive to informal educational works, that include the following: ability to work in a team; understanding and respect for the cultural context; capacity to source funds, project conception and management; motivating volunteers and participants to give of their time and energy, so as to achieve a particular outcome.

² See *Spiritans Horizons*, Attentive Listening and Respectful Intervention, The *SERVOL* Story, Fall 2013, pp.84-89. *SERVOL* was founded by Fr. Gerry Pantin, CSSp, along with Wesley Hall, a well-known cricketer, in the wake of the so-called Black Power Riots in 1970 in Trinidad and Tobago.