DELEGATES’ ASSEMBLY
22 – 25 February 2009, Mexico

AIC 2009 : CHANGE THE WORLD... WOMEN CAN

AIC
23 Rampe des Ardennais
B-1348 Louvain la Neuve
e-mail : contact@aic-international.org
www.aic-international.org
CONTENTS

Programme...........................................................................................................p. 5
Inaugural speech (Marina Costa).............................................................................p. 7
Ten seeds of Systemic Change (P. Robert Maloney, C.M.).................................p. 11
Systemic Change Progress (Patricia P. De Nava)..................................................p. 15
AIC Operational Guidelines: A step forward thanks to systemic experience
(Nicola Foroni, facilitator)......................................................................................p. 17
Meeting of AIC association Presidents.................................................................p. 30
Closing Speech (Marina Costa)...............................................................................p. 31
Message from the new AIC President (Laurence de la Brosse).............................p. 34
PROGRAMME

Sunday 22 February 2009

09.00 Inaugural Session
   - Assembly Opening  M. Costa, Présidente Internationale AIC
   - Welcoming Address  L. Ferráez de Cámara, Présidente AIC Mexique
   - Delegations Introduction  Agnès Dandois, Sérétaire générale AIC
   - Introduction of Assembly themes  M. Costa, Présidente Internationale AIC

10.30 «Ten seeds of Systemic Change in the Life and Works of St. Vincent»
   Father R. Maloney, CM, President of the Systemic Change Committee

11.30 Progress made by the Systemic Change Committee  P. Palacios de Nava
   Member of the Systemic Change Committee, in charge of AIC’s contacts with the Vincentian Family

12.30 Eucharist

15.30 « AIC Operational Guidelines : a step forward thanks to the systemic experience» 1st part  Nicola Foroni, facilitator

Monday 23 February 2009

09.00 Spiritual Breathing

09.15 «AIC Operational Guidelines: a step forward thanks to the systemic experience» 2nd part  Nicola Foroni, facilitator

12.30 Eucharist

15.30 « AIC Operational Guidelines: a step forward thanks to the systemic experience» 3rd part  Nicola Foroni, facilitator

In the evening: Presentation of associations’ projects

Tuesday 24 February 2009

09.00 Spiritual Breathing

09.15 Meeting of AIC associations’ Presidents – 1st part

14.15 Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica
Wednesday 25 February 2009

09.00 Spiritual Breathing

09.15  Meeting of AIC associations’ Presidents – 2nd part

12.30  Eucharist
15.30  Statutory Assembly
   -  Financial Report
   -  Associations : Admissions and Resignations
   -  Executive Board Election

In the evening: Meeting of associations by continents
Dear volunteers, dear Sisters, dear Fathers and friends, welcome to Mexico and our international Assembly:

**AIC 2009: «Change the World….Women can»**

Thank you all for being present, willing to share experiences and thoughts and to shoulder our responsibilities in these very difficult times for our world and society, particularly for the poor on whom we want to focus our work.

On behalf of AIC I would like to thank AIC Mexico’s national President, Ligia Ferraez. It is thanks to her invaluable support and availability that the international Assembly could be organized here.

“Women and Poverty in different cultures” is the theme chosen for our Assembly. It was initiated during our 2007 Rome Assembly and we would like to develop it more thoroughly, as many volunteers told us at the time that they were personally experiencing dire poverty and discrimination problems.

We realized that women often live in poverty because they are the victims of blatant inequalities and discrimination resulting from local cultures. Hence, volunteers play an important part in creating favourable conditions for transformation.

After four days spent analysing the relationship between women, poverty and local cultures, new **OPÉRATIONAL GUIDELINES** have been defined:

**ENHANCING OUR INVOLVEMENT TO SOLVE WOMEN’S POVERTY**

1. Enhancing the commitment to solve women's poverty
2. Supporting women on the path to “personal responsibility”
3. Making society as a whole aware of its responsibilities

The Assembly follow-up by the associations and our contacts with various groups have given rise to the following questions:

- How are we challenged by the suffering derived from women’s poverty and inequality? As volunteers we share this pain: we listen, accompany and show empathy.
- How can we implement the Operational Guidelines to bring about a genuine social change through women’s responsible involvement both as beneficiaries and volunteers?

As already stated during the 2007 Assembly, we are convinced that a key part is played by the method of:

**SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

This process was introduced by the Vincentian Family who, faced with the steady increase of poverty, decided to set up a Committee representing the various Family branches.
This Committee studied the problem and analyzed projects which were completely transformed thanks to this new method.

Operational Guidelines and Systemic Change interact and are mutually beneficial.

- The Operational Guidelines suggest ways of transforming poverty and can help us to implement the Systemic Change by applying it to our actions.
- Similarly, the Systemic Change method can ease the implementation of Operational Guidelines, enliven and stimulate them and motivate us to produce genuine changes by changing a whole system.

The progress reports and information which the countries provided to AIC during the last two years clearly emphasize that the AIC groups have worked hard to implement the Guidelines and become acquainted with the Systemic Change Method. In this connection I would like to mention a few interesting actions which could be thought-provoking even if I am sure that each of you has many more examples in your associations.

Some groups, motivated by the specific training received at the 2007 Assembly, by the training booklets and the AIC Prize for microcredit, health mutual fund and cooperative projects, have succeeded in bringing about:

- Microcredit and cooperative projects to support women who do not have access to bank loans and who sometimes, like in Africa, are discriminated or abused because they are widowed. In this case, women are trained by the volunteers to manage the project both financially and technically and to organize their activities; they are **encouraged to discover that each of them has the resources to construct her own life plan** as indicated in the second Operational Guideline.

- Health mutual funds where volunteers work together with single widowed or abandoned mothers who are entitled neither to medical nor to social benefits. These funds help these women to move from survival to a long term vision. They participate in the fund from its inception by paying a monthly fee and are taught preventive health care, hence they are **evidence that change should come from the person and her situational awareness**.

These projects and many others, which you will present tomorrow evening, are the result of many Vincentian groups’ motivation to enhance their commitment to solve women’s poverty and to promote change as suggested in the first Guideline. Many AIC activities (workshops, health care centres, clothing projects, accommodation for the homeless, clubs for elderly or mentally disturbed women) are specialised areas where people can be helped and can establish social and interpersonal bonds. These relationships can grow thanks to the volunteers’ friendliness, attention and empathy. **These exchanges** enable participants to improve their own image, speak freely, make friends and rebuild social bonds. This attitude **encourages people to share their problems, unite their efforts and find solutions**.

I would also like to mention a project focusing on values underpinning AIC’s action as mentioned in the Operational Guidelines (**respect, women’s dignity and solidarity, strengthening of family bonds, spiritual training**). This project aims at creating sound families living in a sound environment. It endeavours to include and commit the whole family i.e. all its members as well as systems interacting with the family by enhancing links and capabilities.

All these project reports highlight the importance of volunteer training to welcome, serve and listen to persons in dire straits. Training is essential to achieve results. Guidelines underline that each volunteer can **contribute to creating conditions in favour of women’s development**. Experience shows that this is a major responsibility requiring each volunteer to follow a permanent and specific training to be able to lead people on this path.
The third guideline invites us to **making society as a whole aware of its responsibilities in women's promotion**. We witnessed an increasing number of networks and partnerships with public organisations as well as an improvement of their quality.

It is highly encouraging to know that an association has been chosen to cooperate with its Ministry of Education to change pre-school education. The AIC group was chosen because of:

- Its project’s efficiency since it uses alternative informal educational development techniques.
- Its capability to network with other development stakeholders.

This is a genuine Systemic Change, a 180° turn, involving the social system: we no longer need to seek involvement and consultation, as the authorities are choosing us for our competence and innovation.

- Another inspiring example to raise society’s awareness is the organisation of the « First Social Forum » by AIC Paraguay last September. This group invited the newly elected authorities as well as the public and private sectors dealing with social work.
  
  The Forum’s objective was « Solving poverty and its causes in our social and cultural context by means of Systemic Change ». It was attended by the country’s First Lady as well as by representatives of various ministries; they set up a coordination team with representatives of all social sectors willing to work with the Systemic Change method in order to restore Paraguayan society’s moral, human and Christian values.

Reports show us that many countries have organized seminars and specific meetings to study Systemic Change more thoroughly and that others participated in meetings with the Vincentian Family on the same theme. Indeed, by applying AIC’s Operational guidelines to these projects we can implement the Systemic Change Committee’s strategies.

However, we are fully aware that many volunteers do not always know how to apply the Systemic Change method to their specific field conditions. Our challenge is to monitor the Operational Guidelines implementation considering the value added by the Systemic Change method, by means of tangible tools leading to social change. They can give us the motivation, capabilities and means to reach our aim.

The methodology we are going to use is neither theoretical nor intellectual but practical. We are going to shape it together and use our own lives’ experience to develop it. A seminar is a common experiment calling for more than the contributor’s participation, it requires everybody’s involvement. As you know, a seminar for the lay advisors and leaders of the Vincentian Family in Latin America was held here a few days ago. Its objective was to train people who could become Systemic Change trainers. Some of you participated in this event and will be able to contribute to our work thanks to the lessons they learned.

The AIC Assembly is organised back to back with this seminar to highlight the two events’ complementarity and hence provide a more comprehensive training.

Indeed we know that we are all part of multiple systems, among which the AIC and Vincentian Family systems. We are aware that each of us is responsible for the systems’ overall dynamics and correlation. These two consecutive events enable us to have a better understanding of how the various parts of the systems are connected and to develop the quality of our collaboration.

Other AIC meetings will be organised as a follow-up to the Vincentian Family seminars on Systemic Change. One of them will take place in Younde, Cameroon in July for the African associations and another in November in Bangkok, Thailand for Asia.
I would like to thank all the friends who prepared this meeting: Lili Ferraez, AIC’s Mexican national President whom I would like to thank for her invaluable support and availability. It is thanks to her that the Assembly is held here today.

I would also like to thank the Executive Board members, María Eugenia Magallanes y Lourdes Mavy Cortés who, thanks to the wonderful support of Alicia Duhne and AIC Mexico’s numerous volunteer teams were remarkable in managing the organisation and logistics. I would like to thank them for their commitment, their team work and creativity in preparing this Assembly.

Many thanks also to the International Staff’s members for their commitment in carrying out all the additional work related to an international Assembly. They have been extremely competent and efficient and thanks to their generosity they were able to overcome the problems which the organisation of such an Assembly entails.

Many thanks to the leaders of the Vincentian Family seminar, Father Silvestre Sanchez, Father Adrian Acosta et the provincial Visitor Father Silviano Calderón, who enabled us to meet here and supported us in organising our Assembly.

The practical work of AIC’s 2009 Assembly is going to start with a fervent moment of Vincentian spirituality which will give us the opportunity to entrench our work in our mission’s roots and our founder’s vision.

Father Robert Maloney, President of the Systemic Change Committee will address:

«Ten Seeds of Systemic Change in the Life and Works of St.Vincent de Paul»

After this presentation, Patricia de Nava, former AIC international President, member of the Systemic Change international committee and in charge of relations with the Vincentian Family, will speak of

«Progress made in the Systemic Change Method »

and present concrete tools to assist us in our work.
TEN SEEDS OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE
IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ST. VINCENT

Father Robert Maloney, C.M.
Chairman of the International Commission for Systemic Change

The concept of “systemic change” is a modern one. It was unknown to St. Vincent and his contemporaries. Like all of us today, Vincent accepted as given, and sometimes as God-given, many of the structures that surrounded him. They were like the air he breathed. For the most part, he simply took them for granted. Vincent was born and died in a multi-tiered society, with a monarchy, nobility, clerics and peasants. He would never have dreamed about changing those structures radically, as revolutionary France did 150 years later.

But, within the context of his time, Vincent expressed many ideas related to systemic change. It is useful for us to examine these seminal thoughts, since they help us to situate a systemic change mentality in the spirituality of the Vincentian Family today. So, let me entitle these brief reflections “Ten Seeds of Systemic Change in the Life and Works of St. Vincent.” I will give each of the seeds a name, using the terminology found in systemic change projects today. One could do similar things in regard to the life and works of Louise de Marillac, Frederick Ozanam, and other heroes in the Vincentian Family.

1. “affective and effective love” ➔ changing social structures

The full phrase, which Vincent repeated over and over again, is that our love is to be both "affective and effective." He says, for example, "The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender; it is effective, because they serve the poor concretely." Today, we are conscious that sin affects not just individuals; it deeply affects social structures too. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. Some of these unjust societal structures keep the poor poor.

Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan dramatizes the principle that love of God is displayed in love of neighbor. But today we recognize more and more that effective love involves not just binding up the individual victim's wounds and pouring oil on them, but also making sure that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is safe for all in the future.

2. evangelization “by word and work” ➔ integral evangelization: witness, preaching and human promotion

Vincent was deeply convinced that what we say and what we do must reinforce one another. Witness authenticates words. What we say is credible only if our actions corroborate it. In other words, Vincent sees witness, service, preaching, and teaching as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process.

Today, the unity between witness, evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of Vincent's spirit, is one of the main emphases in the Church’s social teaching. First, do. Then, teach. That is Vincent's rule for "effective" evangelization.

---

1SV IX, 475, 592, 599; XI, 40.
2SV IX, 593.
3Cf. Synod of Bishops, 1971, Justice in the World, in AAS LXIII (1971) 924: "...action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are integral elements in the preaching of the gospel." Cf. also, Centesimus Annus, 5.
3. “spiritually and corporally” → holistic service

St. Vincent loved to say that we minister to the poor “spiritually and corporally.” He used this phrase in speaking to the three principal groups he founded: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. He tells the Daughters of Charity that they should tend not only to bodily needs, but also share their faith with the poor by their witness and their words. And he warns the members of the Congregation of the Mission that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms. Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, even the most abandoned.

So, Vincent encouraged his followers to examine various elements in the lives of the poor to see what their most urgent needs were: nourishment, health care, education, job opportunities, and spiritual care. He focused on the whole person and wanted to treat the person holistically.

4. seeing Christ in the face of the poor → quality

Vincent wanted quality, competence, gentleness and respect to characterize the service provided in a project. He insisted that not only should we do good, but that we should do it well, with adequate resources and at the same time with warmth and concern.

To encourage quality service, he returned repeatedly to the fundamental vision that inspired his entire life and work: seeing Christ in the person of the poor. He stated this eloquently to the Daughters of Charity: “This is what obliges you to serve the poor with respect, as your masters, and with devotion: that they represent for you the person of Our Lord, who said: “Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, I will consider it as done to me.”

5. “Chatillon” → organization

When he gathered the initial group of women to form a “Confraternity of Charity” at Chatillon-les-Dombes in November 1617, Vincent stated, in the Rule he composed for them, that the poor sometimes suffer more from a lack of “order” in the help offered them rather than from a lack of charitable persons who want to help.

So, he organized them. He believed that well-intentioned charity must also be well-organized, that it must be planned and executed with precision and care. Vincent was a precise planner and organizer. This was one of his greatest gifts. It helped make his works effective.

6. contracts and rules → solid foundations as the basis for sustainability

Through his life, Vincent negotiated detailed contracts and wrote precise rules as he set up all the groups he founded. He wanted those groups to be firmly established so that their service to others would be long-lasting. The contracts provided for the financial stability of the groups. The Rules conveyed the structure and described the charism and the spirit of the groups he founded. Both the contracts and the Rules played a foundational role in preserving these groups into the future. It is helpful to note that Vincent saw no conflict between trusting in Divine Providence and providing for the future by laying firm financial foundation and setting up structures that would make his projects sustainable.

4 SV IX, 59, 593; XI, 364.
5 SV XII, 87: “If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the gospel to the poor but not to comfort them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works...”
6 SV XI, 393.
7 SV X, 332.
8 SV XIII, 423.
7. simplicity → transparency

Vincent tells us again and again that the poor are attracted to those who speak and live simply, who are transparent in what they say and do. This is also one of the fundamental aspects of successful systemic change projects: their leaders have developed the ability to listen to the poor, to speak with them simply and transparently, and to involve them in the project at every stage, from the initial discernment of needs, to planning the project, to carrying it out, and to evaluating and adjusting it in an ongoing way.

8. petites écoles → education and job-training

Vincent and Louise de Marillac were deeply committed to the education and formation of poor young people, especially so that they might have the skills to work. For that reason, with Vincent’s support, Louise founded the “petites écoles” and made the instruction of poor young people one of the principal works of the first Daughters of Charity. So, right from the beginning, schools have been a part of the charism of the Vincentian Family. Louise taught in these schools herself. She insisted that the instruction given should be clear and practical.

Today, the schools of the Vincentian Family have over a million members. Beyond the schools, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups offer formation to more than 120,000 young people.

Education and job-training are extremely important in bringing about systemic change. In Populorum Progressio, whose 40th anniversary we celebrated last year, Pope Paul VI wrote: “Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit.”

St. Vincent and St. Louise were concerned not only about the education of the poor, but also about the education and formation of the servants of the poor; that is, of us, the members of the groups they founded or inspired. The formation of leaders is crucial in systemic change projects.

9. collaboration among all strata of society → networking

Vincent knew how to network. He brought together rich and poor, young and old, clergy and lay, men and women. He had the ability to recognize and call forth people’s gifts. He saw that collaboration was the key to success in serving the poor. So, he forged bonds, built bridges, and fostered unity among very diverse groups of people. He knew how to draw these people into his captivating vision of life. On his one side was Anne, the Queen of France, a woman of broad culture and also of political intrigue; on his other side was Marguerite Naseau, a peasant girl who did not know how to read or write. He drew together women and men of every rank in society, by sharing his vision with them and getting them excited about it. He was a wonderful networker.

10. his role at court → advocacy

While Vincent is best known for his practical works of charity, he also served as an advocate for the poor before the highest authorities, at times at considerable risk to himself. On two occasions he intervened personally to try to bring about peace, when war was wrecking the lives of the poor. He went right to the top.

At some time between 1639 and 1642, during the wars in Lorraine, he went to Cardinal Richelieu, knelt before him, described the horrors of war, and pleaded for peace:

“Let us have peace. Have pity on us. Give France peace.” Richelieu refused, responding diplomatically that peace did not depend on him alone.

---

9 SV XII, 171, 302.
10 Populorum Progressio 35.
One of Vincent's biographers relates an even more striking episode, which he takes from an account written by Vincent's secretary. In 1649, during the civil war, Vincent left Paris quietly, crossed battle lines and forded a flooded river on horseback (at almost 70 years of age) to see the queen and to beg her to dismiss Mazarin, whom he regarded as responsible for the war. He also spoke directly to Mazarin himself. But again his pleas went unheeded. Vincent attempted to speak with leaders on both sides and at times felt that a settlement was near, but ambitions and intrigues thwarted his efforts. His attempts at peacemaking earned him the enmity of Mazarin, who, in his secret diary, records him as an enemy. By the time peace finally came, Vincent had been removed from the Council of Conscience.

All those involved in systemic change projects today emphasize the importance of advocacy and need to build a shared vision with diverse stakeholders: poor communities, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, etc.

Those are ten seeds of systemic change in the life and works of St. Vincent:

- “affective and effective love” → changing social structures
- evangelization “by word and work” → integral evangelization: witness, preaching and human promotion
- “spiritually and corporally” → holistic service
- seeing Christ in the face of the poor → quality service
- “Chatillon” → organization
- contracts and rules → solid foundations as the basis for sustainability
- simplicity → transparency
- petites écoles → education and job-training
- collaboration among all strata of society → networking
- his role at court → advocacy

As a fruit of these seeds, so fundamental in our Vincentian Family’s spirituality, we have been reflecting over the last two decades on the appeal that Pope John Paul II addressed to the Vincentian Family in 1986:

*Search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long-term solutions – adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so you will work for the credibility of the gospel and of the Church.*

I encourage you today to reflect on these ten seeds, which are fundamental in a systemic-change mentality. Seeds are small. They develop only gradually. Like seeds, creative beginnings are recognized only later when they have grown into full-scale creative works. A seed is beautiful not when it is thrown into the ground, but when it blooms as a flowering tree. So too, a germinal systemic change project, like a seed, will bear fruit only if it is nurtured, watered and tended patiently. In fact, all the members of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change who have been engaged in successful systemic-change works say: “Start small. Move forward patiently step by step.” So I encourage you today: sow many seeds. Let your ears be open, as were the ears of St. Vincent and St. Louise, to new, creative ideas. Support new initiatives begun by others. In these challenging times, encourage creativity, and be courageous and persistent in putting creative ideas into practice. Examine the plight of the poor in its concrete context, but examine it as a whole field. Then, seek, with the poor, to plant seeds that will transform the entire field and make it blossom anew.

---

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE ON THE PROMOTION OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Patricia P. de Nava
Committee for the promotion of Systemic Change

Patricia de Nava, member of the international Committee for the promotion of Systemic Change, in charge of AIC’s relations with the Vincentian Family and a former AIC international President, is going to present practical tools which can help us implement the Operational Guidelines with the value added of the Systemic Change method.

A USB containing all these tools will be handed to each national President.

Information on the progress made by the international Committee for the promotion of Systemic Change

1. The « Hope Seeds » book

It contains the process followed by the Committee

- **General Explanation of the process concept and the systemic approach**
- **Systemic Change Background:** The Committee started by telling success stories (projects) in which several members actively participated. Personally I started by mentioning AIC’s Operational Guidelines, which led to many successful strategies adopted by the Systemic Change Committee. I then presented the AIC Madagascar story.
- **Systemic Change Strategies:** The stories’ analysis produced various ideas which were summarized and listed according to their main topic: strategies focussed on Missions (trend and direction) on People (focussed on the poor because they are in the best position to change their own situation) on a Task (organisation) on Solidarity and Participation (political action and networking)
- **Explanation and Foundations of these strategies**
- **Difficulties and challenges...**

2. «Toolkit» to reproduce the Systemic Change workshop prepared by the Vincentian Family.

Each participant received a USB containing the following tools:

- General presentation of Systemic Change;
- Folders about the various projects, the Committee, the Vincentian Family etc;
- Pictures of «Saint Vincent et le Systemic Change»;
- Videos on certain projects (Akamasoa, Federation of Homeless People in the Philippines);
- Systemic Change Prayer;
- Song with music and words, etc.
3. **Six regional workshops to reproduce the Systemic Change workshop**

In addition to the Latin American workshop organised in Mexico from 15 to 24 February 2009, regional workshops will take place in Brasilia, in Africa (Yaoundé, Cameroon), in Asia (Bangkok, Thailand), in Eastern Europe, in Western Europe and in the United States.

4. **Assistance to launch Systemic Change projects or to change existing projects.**

Motivate the Assembly participants to implement Systemic Change projects or change the existing ones.

**Create change, women can!**
the participants...
the speakers ...

the interpreters

the team work
The statutory Assembly ...

The election of Executive Board

The presidents

Treasurer

General Secretaries
By applying the Operational Guidelines, the AIC members commit themselves to:

ENHANCE THEIR RESPONSE TO WOMEN IN POVERTY:

1. Strengthening their commitment to respond to women’s poverty
2. Supporting women on the path to « personal responsibility»
3. Making society as a whole aware of its responsibilities

In order to make the Operational Guidelines' implementation easier during the training seminar, we will work on discrimination, since it is one of the major causes of women’s poverty.

To enhance our response to discrimination related poverty, it is important to analyse its cause by means of a systemic approach. It will make us aware of the roots of discrimination and how to confront it considering all the underlying components of the social system.

The successive processes of personal and social awareness will show that we live in a society which discriminates against women and that we all have experienced discrimination in our own lives. Being aware and realising how discrimination occurs enables us to identify with women facing discrimination and more specifically with women living in poverty (they are twice discriminated against because they are women and poor) and to put ourselves in their shoes.

When confronted with such discrimination, we all develop either defence … or change strategies

Our own experience will give us the strength to change.

Personal and social awareness have enabled us to identify a few important factors changing discrimination and enhancing our response to women’s poverty:

- considering all the discriminatory system components
- being aware of our own change capability
- discovering social structures creating discrimination
- knowing that, for change to occur, the individual and social levels must be connected.
- identifying Operational Guidelines strategies related to individual and collective change
- committing ourselves to bring about social change and hence enhance our response to women's poverty.
INTRODUCTION

Background:

- It will be based on our actual experience and we will endeavour to maintain a link between analysis and real life.
  - We will start from individual experience and apply it to society.
  - Starting from real life and society we will endeavour to identify and expand change indicators derived from experience.
  - We will study discrimination and its consequences by highlighting individual and structural links.
  - The Operational Guidelines and Systemic Change will help us to understand how discrimination operates and how it can be overcome.
  - We will analyse AIC’s action and how to improve it.

Work Method:

- We will use various techniques involving participation and collective building approach.
- We will use various means such as drawings, speech, writing…
- Since we speak of women we will use the feminine gender, whilst naturally including men, who will try to act objectively and from a male perspective.

We invite you to relax and explore new fields both from the contents point of view but also from a building and learning perspective.

1st PART: PERSONAL AWARENESS AS A WOMAN

1st activity

- **Objective:** as a starting point, each participant delves into herself to remember actual experiences linked to her awareness and self-enhancement and on how she evolved and gradually changed.

  **Technique:** Personal thoughts: each participant recalls a happy childhood event, brings it back to life and expresses it by a drawing.

2nd activity

- **Objective:** Each woman recognizes that women interact and interrelate.

  **Technique:** Groups are formed – A drawing is made of what was recalled and we speak of what brought about a change: awareness, personal resources.

The drawing establishes social links. We show our drawing and explain it to the others. Thereafter we study what the change allowed.

3rd activity

- Each woman accepts the idea of « self-building » and of contributing to women’s development.

  **Technique:** Writing something positive about oneself, what we are proud of, drawing a self-portrait on a card.
Finally, each participant goes to the middle of the room, puts her (his) portrait on the floor in a circle, reads her (his) card and mentions what she (or he) is proud of.

**Items on which the volunteers insisted:**

- If we reproduced this activity with our group’s volunteers and with our projects’ beneficiaries we would very much improve our work..

- We must become aware of our personal change capability. If we change, we will know how to make change in each woman’s life easier.

- I can’t want to change structures if I don’t change my own way of being and how I see my brother or sister..

➤ **Systemic Perspective:**

- We are all part and parcel of a system, hence each personal change has an impact on our social circle because we are all linked.
- Things do not change automatically; if they change it is because people change..
- We should not distinguish between external change and our own.
- Our own experience gives us enough strength to change: changing part of the system brings about a change in the whole system.

**2nd PART: SOCIAL AWARENESS FROM A WOMAN’S PERSPECTIVE**

1st activity

- **Objective:** The participants recognize that they have various identical features and go from the individual to the social dimension.

  *Technique: groupings by category:* participants are requested to split up into different groupings, e.g. language, eye colour, age etc…

**Items on which the participants insisted:**

- We all unavoidably belong to a group.

- Some participants believed that they belonged to a group but the group did not recognize them as such. Another felt successively excluded from all groups (because of her eye colour)

- For others it was the reverse: various groups wanted to include them.

- We can all work together.

- Each person has different features and diversity should not be confused with discrimination, which is how diversity it treated in the social system.

- Our identity is built according to how we are perceived by others and by ourselves, it derives from two systems: personal and collective.
Systemic perspective

- Each system is subdivided in sub-systems, governed by explicit, implicit or even sometimes « mythical » rules, i.e. rules derived from customs and traditions.
- Each system is arbitrarily defined and this division is not always rational. For example, in the “age” sub-system, a 70 year old participant went over to the 50 year old group because that is how old she felt.

Group demarcation is not easy, there are many interferences and we were not always absolutely certain where a group ended and where another started.

3rd PART: DISCRIMINATION

1st activity

- **Objective:** Awareness of how discrimination is perceived by each person

- **Technique:** Discrimination experiments. We are all on one side of the room against a wall. The exercise takes place in absolute silence and without touching each other. Each person who at least once in her life felt discriminated oppressed or humiliated should cross the room and go to the opposite wall in order to be part of the categories which will be subsequently enumerated. After having crossed the room the persons look at those who crossed with them and at those who remained on the other side and then go back to their starting point

*Example of discrimination categories: being a woman, being poor, too young, too old not being sufficiently educated, discrimination because of one’s religion, racial origins, physical limitations, language, physical appearance or being an AIC volunteer or simply a human being.*

*Finally, any person having discriminated, oppressed or humiliated another person at least once in her life should cross the room*

2nd activity

- **Objective:** identify discrimination structures and their personal and social impact

- **Technique:** Working groups – Which lessons have we learnt: We have to reflect and learn from what we felt during the exercise, why it happened and connect what happened during the first experience with our present life, our projects and actions and with social transformation.
Questions:

1. People are asked to reflect and analyse what they felt when they crossed or did not cross the room, what they experienced when only a few or when many crossed, when those who had discriminated where invited to cross the room as well
2. What have we learnt about discrimination?
3. What does that mean about our projects and why?

On what did the volunteers insist:

- **discrimination is one of the major causes of poverty.**
- **structurally, women and the poor suffer more.**
- **sometimes discrimination only happens from time to time, sometimes it is permanent and pervasive and one is not even aware of what is happening. What is recurrent slowly impacts on mentalities.**

➤ **Systemic perspective:**

- It is important to consider how the system components fit together: we go from the personal to the social and then back again to a personal experience. There is a constant interaction: I personally have an influence on people around me and I can change them but people also have an influence on me and can change me.

- Each person is part of the system: I am a system component – it was important for each person to be subjected to the experiment. That is why we performed this exercise. The starting point changed and we started from our own lives.

- If I understand what happens in my own mind when I am discriminated against, I can understand what others feel when they are in a similar situation.

- The work created social links. The learning process started after people had recounted their own experience.

- There was a collective construction process.
4th PART – a) HOW DOES DISCRIMINATION COME ABOUT? HOW CAN IT ARISE?

- **Objective:** Recognizing how social discrimination takes place (structural dimension of discrimination). After having tackled personal discrimination, we go from the personal to the social: at birth, human beings have a whole series of characteristics: origin, colour, sex, social status, language, culture etc. Consequently any discrimination related to one of these features, which are inherently human, is a structural discrimination of all human beings.

**Technique:** Working party – we resume our analysis to see how social discrimination arises.

**Question:** How does discrimination occur?

Participants have identified various components among which:
- individualism, division, personal interest
- generating opposing views
- abuse
- converting differences into discrimination
- systematic denigration
- repeating and reiterating small events to make them feel natural
- silence, gestures, indifference, intolerance, negation
- non verbal communication
- cultural unawareness
- subjective perception, a gap between our mental picture and objective reality
- lack of organised resistance to discrimination
- stereotypes conveyed by social communication means

Each group indicates its answers on a board and submits them to the other groups. All groups have the same first two questions. All the sheets are like petals placed around the circle where our portraits were put after the first session. It looks like a flower with our faces in the centre and our questions and answers around them.

**Systemic perspective:**

- Each system should be considered in its complexity, as a whole with its own dynamics.

4th PART – b) WHICH INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES HAVE WE USED IN OUR EXPERIMENT; CAN WE USE THEM IN OUR PROJECTS?

- **Objective:** Recognizing that we are capable of bringing about change.

**Technique:** Working party – Identify strategies used individually and socially to counter discrimination

**Questions:**
1. Which individual strategies can be used to counter and face discrimination?
2. Which collective strategies can be used to counter and face discrimination?
3. How are these strategies established within AIC?
Participants have suggested a lot of strategies, let us list them by category:

* Passive resistance Strategies:
  - Discrimination denial (it does not exist, it is not important...)
  - Avoidance (avoiding occurrences, as well as places and people)

Active resistance strategies:
  - Attempting to overcome it (studying, improving, ...)
  - Attempting not to be influenced (failing to notice, to consider...)
  - Self-assertion (self-awareness, pride)

These are all individual strategies; they are an individual response to a social phenomenon. To bring about genuine change, it is necessary to transcend our individual strategies and to broaden them. We have to transcend our own work and experience to establish social strategies leading to structural change.

* Social strategies leading to structural change:
  - Listening and entering into a dialogue to face discrimination and question it both on our own and in a social environment
  - Encouraging solidarity (defending human rights, taking public positions, creating clearing houses and empowerment mainly for women in order to compare problems, unite efforts and find solutions)
  - Educating to end cultural discrimination (awareness of values and respect)

* Strategies within AIC
  - Organising and coordinating to fight discrimination: political actions, lobbying, prevention, networking)
  - Enhancing representation at all levels, involve institutions and authorities
  - Speaking out and advertising in the media using new technologies and defending the truth
  - Living according to the gospel’s values and spreading them, praying
  - Enhancing AIC’s capabilities and training to bring about change
  - Putting each volunteer’s qualities at the group’s service
  - Being open-minded to look at reality with a different logic

➢ Systemic perspective
➢
  • To bring about change, poverty should be looked at from various aspects not only from an individual perspective but also from a social one. Change can only take place if both dimensions are considered.
  • Each system endeavours to create a balance and consequently strategies to counter discrimination.
  • The above suggested strategies show that change requires unity and involvement of all social stakeholders.
  • The numbers of strategies show that Systemic Change does not exclude anything or anybody; we have information means and sources available.
  • What we do is less important than how we do it.

WE, AIC VOLUNTEERS ARE CHANGING AND THE WORLD WILL CHANGE
CONCLUSION

AIC’s Operational Guidelines enable its members to commit themselves to:

ENHANCE THEIR RESPONSE TO WOMEN

The work we performed on discrimination enables us to improve and reorganise our knowledge of Operational Guidelines to highlight the three personal change levels within AIC and society. *The changes will be in italics*

It is important to realise that the three Operational Guidelines cannot be disconnected,

if we want change to materialize, we have to apply them together
AIC 2009 – 2011 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

We are convinced that

- There is an interaction between cultures and women’s poverty
- All cultures can evolve;
- **People have to change to bring about change.**

The AIC teams commit themselves to:

1. **ENCOURAGE PERSONAL CHANGE AND RESPONSIBILITY AWARENESS**

   We are convinced that:
   - Each volunteer can change her own way of seeing and acting;
   - Change should come from the person and her awareness of the situation
   - Each woman should find the resources to construct her own life plan within herself;
   - Each woman is capable of **evolving and bringing about change in her own culture.**

2. **WITHIN AIC, ENHANCE THE COMMITMENT TO SOLVE WOMEN’S POVERTY**

   - Creating and developing discussion fora in order to pool problems, unite efforts, create leadership and find solutions;
   - Creating a better gender balance;
   - Training to promote human rights (especially women’s rights and their defence) and political action (to foster laws beneficial to women

3. **MAKING INDIVIDUALS, ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE AWARE OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES**

   Enhancing :
   - Networking to promote women ;
   - Lobbying to involve society;
   - Media awareness to promote women’s dignity.

Reaffirming the values underpinning AIC’s action:

- Respect for women’s dignity;
- Women’s solidarity;
- Strengthening family bonds;
- Training towards a deeper and more personal Vincentian spirituality
## TECHNICAL SHEETS

**SUNDAYS: 15:30 – 19:30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>TECHNIQUE</th>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>MATERIALS</th>
<th>IN CHARGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Participants are informed of the work plan for the next day and a half and invited to explore new learning methods involving a collective awareness process using various techniques.</td>
<td>10'</td>
<td>Road map for the day and a half</td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ (15:40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL AWARENESS AS A WOMAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Myself, as a woman</td>
<td>Participants relax and close their eyes:</td>
<td>5'</td>
<td>Text Sheets Coloured felt-tip pens</td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A text is read while they keep their eyes closed and remember facts related to their awareness, surpassing and progress</td>
<td>10'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• They all open their eyes and start to draw what they felt.</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td>→ (16:15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working Group</td>
<td>Forming groups of 5 people who feel related and pooling of drawings;</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td>Sheets Paper Coloured felt-tip pens</td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Each group draws written conclusions about:</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What it felt</td>
<td>Nicola</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What produced change (awareness, personal means)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Personal and social development derived from mutual experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Forming larger groups (20 people) i.e. 4 groups of 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Pooling of each group’s results and written summary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ (17:15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PAUSE</td>
<td>20' → (17:35)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators and Nicola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>Each group presents its conclusions;</td>
<td>60'</td>
<td>Paper discs Coloured felt-tip pens</td>
<td>Nicola and 2 or 3 assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The facilitator gives an overall view on facts, their implication, the work’s « systemic » aim and its relationship with AIC’s Operational Guidelines.</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td>→ (18:55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-portrait</td>
<td>Each participant draws her self-portrait on a paper disc;</td>
<td>10'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She writes a (positive) sentence about what she is proud of on a piece of cardboard</td>
<td>5'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Each participant reads her sentence (2 or 3 minutes available) quickly and then puts her self-portrait down on a large paper disc (flower heart) and the cardboard with her sentence on a giant-size pre-existing AIC symbol. At the end, the flower and the giant-size cardboard are fixed on the wall.</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td>→ (19:30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>TECHNIQUE</th>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>MATERIALS</th>
<th>IN CHARGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>Participants remember yesterday’s activities and focus on subject</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>A participant summarises yesterday’s activities.</td>
<td>10’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participants recognise that although their identities are different they belong to a social background</td>
<td>By working group</td>
<td>The group stands up and splits up according to various criteria derived from categories indicated by the facilitator.</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They identify social discrimination mechanisms and their personal and social impact</td>
<td></td>
<td>When the groups are formed the name/identity of all the groups are checked and changes are made if required.</td>
<td>35’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Each woman acknowledges discrimination’s structural dimension and is capable of acting to bring about change</td>
<td></td>
<td>Groups are made up according to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Continent</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Mother tongue</td>
<td>35’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Eye colour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Skin colour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOCIAL AWARENESS SEEN THROUGH WOMEN’S EYES</td>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>Dialogue between participants et facilitator to make a few comments on technique.</td>
<td>20’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>The facilitator asks everybody to put their materials aside, switch off their mobile and go to one end of the room.</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He indicates that this technique is serious and intensive and that it has to be followed to work properly.</td>
<td>35’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He explains that there is going to be to and fro as categories are announced</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In accordance with this technique, categories are announced one by one</td>
<td>35’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By working group</td>
<td>Working groups are formed (6-7 groups of about 20 persons) at a specific location;</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td>Guides</td>
<td>Nicola and voluntary facilitators by groups of two or three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Each group develops its own socialization mechanism, a thinking process and its position (based on the guidelines established yesterday evening));</td>
<td>60’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The session ends with each group embracing.</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECT</td>
<td>OBJECTIVE</td>
<td>TECHNIQUE</td>
<td>PROCEDURE</td>
<td>DURATION</td>
<td>MATERIALS</td>
<td>IN CHARGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>• Participants recollect the morning events and concentrate on transformation</td>
<td>Presentation - meditation</td>
<td>• The facilitator introduces the morning’s dynamics, speaks about the groups’ work, the dynamics’ meaning, the personal and social pain felt during the exercise, its implication, the work’s objective and its relationship with AIC’s Operational Guidelines. He then guides the afternoon’s work according to the participants’ ability to overcome this situation</td>
<td>15’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nicola</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| SOCIAL AWARENESS SEEN THROUGH WOMEN’S EYES | • Participants recognise that their identities are different and that they belong to several social backgrounds • They identify social discrimination mechanisms and their personal and social impact • Each woman acknowledges discrimination’s structural dimension and is capable of acting to bring about change. | Working group | Each group analyses and answers three questions 
How does discrimination occur? 
Which strategies can we use or are we using to eradicate it? 
(Write your conclusions about the first two questions on the colour sheets)
1 of the following 6 questions (1 question per group) 
How do the AIC groups solve these problems? How can they be changed or given more weight? 
How can we enhance lobbying to make society more aware of its responsibilities? 
How are these problems dealt with in the media? How can we influence them? 
How can we create women’s awareness and improve conditions in AIC groups to promote their development? 
How can we promote women’s solidarity to enhance common behaviour, either in groups or socially? 
Which personal part can each volunteer play within the group and society to bring about change? (Write the answer to your question on a flower petal prepared for this purpose) | 40’ | Cartons de couleur 
Pétales de fleur en papier | Nicola et les facilitatrices volontaires par deux ou trois |
| | Plenary | Each group gives the answers to the first two questions to the others (discrimination) and writes them on two white flower petals; 
• Comments. | | 30’ | | Nicola |
| | | | | (16:55) | | |
| | Plenary | Each group presents its work, we comment and improve it, if required; 
Each group sticks the petal around the flower heart; 
The flower is hanged on the wall when completed. | | 45’ | | (18:30) |
| | Presentation - dialogue | The facilitator makes a general comment on the work of the last day and a half, uses a Power Point presentation to show the awareness change process and comments on how it is related to AIC’s Operational Guidelines and work 
• Discussion with the participants. | | 30’ | | Nicola |
| | | | | (19:15) | | |
All participants assess the session (one day and a half) on the basis of the following assessment criteria and put a cross in each square if the criterion is met. Assessment criteria:

- Atmosphere
- Methodology
- Usefulness (is it going to be useful in the future?)
- Participation (mine and the others)
- Learning (What have I learnt?)
- Discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faces</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       | All participants assess the session (one day and a half) on the basis of the following assessment criteria and put a cross in each square if the criterion is met. Assessment criteria:
|       | - Atmosphere
|       | - Methodology
|       | - Usefulness (is it going to be useful in the future?)
|       | - Participation (mine and the others)
|       | - Learning (What have I learnt?)
|       | - Discussion. |
|       |  |
| Nicola | 15' → (19.30) |
24 and 25 February 2009

MEETING OF THE NATIONAL PRESIDENTS OF AIC MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Agenda

Tuesday 24 February

- Presentation of AIC’s Progress Report and of the Executive Board
  M. Costa, international President and A. Dandois, Secretary General

- Presentation of the Executive Board’s candidates
  Each candidate

- Recruitment of new volunteers: Round Table
  Agnès Dandois, Secretary General

- Associations’ Training Documents : exchange of good practices
  Laurence de la Brosse, President’s Assistant

Wednesday 25 February - Morning

- AIC and national associations’ fund raising Policy
  Christine de Cambray, Treasurer

- Celebration of the 350th anniversary of Saint Vincent de Paul’s death
  P. Manuel Ginete, international Advisor

  M. Eugenia Magallanes, AIC Representative at the Vincentian Family.

- Projects and Twinnings
  Natalie Monteza, In charge of projects

- AIC Website
  Roseline Desguin, In charge of AIC Website

- Representations
  Anne Sturm, In charge of AIC Representations

Wednesday 25 February - Afternoon

AIC STATUTORY ASSEMBLY

Report : see Annex 1.

Around 21h. : Meeting of associations by continents
The AIC 2009 Assembly is closing today.

«Change the World ... women can»

We are starting a new stage in our outreach to the poor, motivated by what we have learnt from each other thanks to the diversity of our cultures and experiences. Our collective work during this assembly has strengthened existing bonds and collaboration. We are leaving for home strengthened by our shared feelings. These feelings are stronger than friendship since we all have the same ideals, a common mission, shared experiences and accepted challenges. We are united by St. Vincent de Paul’s spirit, AIC’s membership and the Vincentian Family.

On the first day, with Father Maloney’s assistance, we concentrated on the principles of Saint Vincent’s spirituality; they assisted us in our commitment to change whilst remaining faithful to our founders’ ideas. To reach this objective we were given concrete tools to bring about this change.

We were then trained to enhance the change potential of our projects, challenging women’s poverty in accordance with the Operational Guidelines and Systemic Change.

I would like to emphasize a few interesting aspects resulting from our work, which will enable us to look at the future with courage and hope. The Operational Guidelines’ first sentence asserts that «there is an interaction between cultures and women’s poverty». Discrimination is an important factor in this interaction; it is present in every culture and a major cause of women’s poverty. During this seminar we used a process of collective learning to understand how discrimination occurs and how discriminatory situations, excluding and marginalizing women, can be changed.

- The first activities taught us about building together and realising the importance of women’s bonds and interrelations. Since we are now acquainted with the method, we can apply it in our groups. We can also act to encourage volunteers and beneficiaries’ participation. We can consequently develop discussion fora, join forces and find solutions, starting on an equal footing and moving forward together. Volunteers will thus be able to create conditions in favour of women’s development.

- Thereafter we studied discrimination. The first Operational Guideline shows the need to eradicate major forms of discrimination, inter alia gender imbalances, human (especially women’s) rights violations and discriminatory laws.
We started from our own experience and used role play to enhance our awareness of society’s structural discrimination. It demonstrated that many of us have already been discriminated against. Some, however, asserted that they had never been subjected to personal discrimination during their lives. Actually this is impossible in our present society. Many under-privileged women do not have the strength and self-esteem to react; as a consequence they are oppressed, humiliated and discriminated against. In order to help them, we must understand how these discriminatory structures operate and commit ourselves to change them. If we ignore or defeat discrimination because we feel strong enough, this means that we are using individual means to fight against structural discrimination. This behaviour cannot result in discriminating structural changes or changes to women’s poverty.

Our personal experience advocates using strategies to change discrimination mechanisms generating and increasing women’s poverty. We have to identify discrimination, face it, act together, organise ourselves and work together to fight it. Each AIC member can contribute to creating conditions in favour of women’s development.

- The number of recommended strategies shows that Systemic Change does not exclude anything or anybody; we have information means and sources. Each volunteer or beneficiary can find the resources to construct her own life plan within herself.

- What is important is not what we do but how we do it. All projects, even the most urgent ones or those requiring crucial attention, can bring about change. It all depends on how we set them up. We can give food, clothing, organise training workshops, open schools or grant micro-credits, it is important not to focus only on personal attention. We have to consider the system as a whole and understand what can be done to bring about social change. How? By encouraging networking, lobbying by creating awareness and using communication means to promote woman’s dignity

- During our work, we always went from the personal to the social level and vice versa. It showed that both belong together and that we all live and act in a society. Different dimensions co-exist and various systems interact: people change when the world changes and the world also changes if people change. Consequently, things are not changing but people are.

- This interaction is crucial for AIC’s Operational Guidelines because they belong to a system. To bring about change the Operational Guidelines should not be considered individually but rather as “the Operational Guidelines’ overall system” and they should be applied as a whole.

These are, in my opinion, the essential facts. I am convinced that you will find more to enhance our response to women’s poverty and to continue our progress.

Since I became a member of the international Executive Board, AIC has made a lot of progress. It has evolved with time and understood that requirements changed. AIC has always remained faithful to Saint Vincent’s bold and creative project because it is innovative and teaches us to have faith in human kind but particularly in women who should become responsible for their own future.

The newly elected international President and Executive Board have to continue AIC’s mission in these difficult times of global economic, cultural and moral crisis. This is a major challenge because of the ruling development model.
Saint Vincent asserted that you should always be prepared for any event in order to make the most of a situation for the poor even under adverse circumstances.

We know full well that AIC alone cannot overcome those enormous problems. It can however cooperate on the social level and concentrate all its strength on global level thanks to all the women, volunteers or beneficiaries who want things to change. They can collaborate to obtain new freedoms, social justice, rights, and construct their own future.

I presided over AIC for years with devotion, conviction and passion while completely aware that I could count on each of you. Thank you so much for everything you taught me. You the volunteers and your experience are an inexhaustible source of motivation and creativity for AIC. Your availability and commitment enable us to progress.

I will not congratulate Laurence, our new President, or the new Executive Board members, because leading AIC is not an honour but a service. However, I would like to thank them on behalf of everybody for having accepted this task and I trust they will always have the strength, dynamism and knowledge to continue meeting the enduring challenges of the world and poverty.

I hope that you will never tolerate injustice and that you will go on dreaming because dreams are essential for change.

On 27 September 2009, we will celebrate the 350th anniversary of Saint Vincent’s and Saint Louise’s deaths, it is a golden opportunity to think about our origins and the long way we have travelled while always remaining true to our mission.

In this connection I would like to conclude by quoting Pope John Paul II:

«You should not only remember and tell a glorious story; you must build it yourselves! Gaze into the future, where the Spirit is sending you out to pursue this great work.»
Dear AIC friends,

First of all I would like to thank you.

Thank you for your confidence today, I hope that I will be worthy of your trust throughout my assignment.

You can be sure that I will do my utmost to meet your expectations, but to succeed I count on your support.

I count above all on the new Executive Board members, national Presidents, Staff members, advisors, my assistants and the interpreters.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the former presidents for their work. I must say how extremely lucky I am to know Claire, Geneviève, Dilde, Patty, Anne and Marina personally.

I would like to thank Anne and Marina in particular for sharing their knowledge of AIC with me and for their friendship. I know that I can count on them.

I feel solid ties with all of you, as we are links in the AIC chain.

Today’s AIC is the fruit of all the actions of ALL volunteers, ALL continents, at ALL levels, over ALL these years, ever since Saint Vincent showed us the way.

At present, AIC has more than 200,000 volunteers worldwide: we are really a strength on which the poor can rely.

Let us forge ahead!

We must try to do even better in 2009. The challenge we have to meet is even more difficult owing to the global crisis.

Together, within AIC we have to stand firm against the motives governing our present world: materialism, unbridled greed, exploitation of the poor, corruption etc.

We have to oppose the law of the strongest, as in the Gospel.

The world is in turmoil but AIC should stay the course: we must defend our values body and soul: solidarity, spiritual assistance, justice, sharing etc.

We are an association of women who help the most needy, but also sometimes women. We help them to feel proud, to socialize.
We help them to take ownership of their own life. We encourage them to be more present in local, regional and national public organisations: the women's voice must be heard!

We all know that this world crisis is hitting the weakest first and foremost and that hardship is more and more commonplace.

At the same time, funds are becoming scarcer as businesses, governments and individuals find it harder to delve into their pockets.

We must ALSO meet this challenge because it is essential to raise funds for projects and volunteers’ training. AIC totals 16,000 projects throughout the world. We must encourage and support them if we do not want to shatter thousands of people’s hopes.

Consequently, what can actually be done to fulfil this mission?

1- Acting to bring about genuine social change: during this assembly we understood that for a situation to change, people have to change, we have to change, and this is an endless process.

   We have to convey to our associations what we have experienced together here. The next training booklet will suggest practical examples.

   We must also develop a fundraising policy: we are aware of its urgency if AIC wants to go on supporting projects and training

   This policy will have to be implemented at all levels (local, national and international) at once; moreover it will increase AIC’s visibility, challenge new volunteers and increase our pride in belonging to AIC.

2- Prepare visit schedules for the Executive Board members

   The Presidents with whom I talked highlighted the importance of these visits in making volunteers feel fully fledged AIC members. The Executive Board is going to meet during the next three days to prepare this schedule.

3- I would also like to emphasize that our pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe has been a key moment for each of us.

   With the Virgin Mary’s assistance, we renewed our commitment; we are convinced that she « grants and bestows upon us her love, help and protection »

   Besides this commitment we have to meet another challenge: how can our service be both « body and soul » in today’s world?

   How can we be a spark for our contemporaries who are looking for a meaning to their lives?

   How can we give people comprehensive service, as recalled by Father Maloney?
To conclude, let us follow the road suggested by our Pope Benedict XVI in his 1st January 2009 speech.

Let us put the poor in the foreground and do our utmost to make solidarity a global issue.

Yes this is AIC’s creed!

Yes, change the world… women can!

Yes, let us change and the world will also change!

Long life AIC!