

Activity Report 2013

2012

AIC aisbl – International Association of Charities – is a network of 53 national associations which brings together Christian volunteers, mainly women, to fight against poverty at a local level.

Through local initiatives adapted to each country, they work alongside people to give confidence back to the most marginalised, especially women and their children.

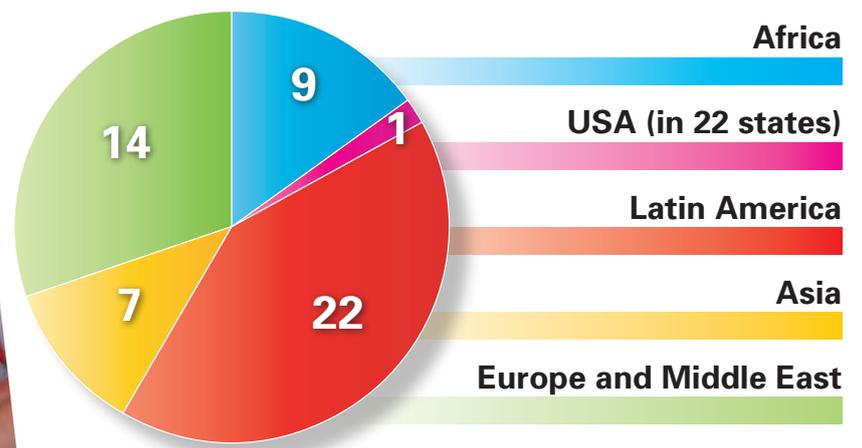
The objective is twofold:

- to make people who are living in poverty self-sufficient and agents of their own destiny, and*
- to involve the authorities in this fight against various forms of poverty.*

This 2011-2012 Activity Report highlights the importance of education in AIC projects, thus responding to the Operational Guidelines voted in 2011:

« Education, working together »

AIC national associations by regions:



2011-2013 Operational Guidelines: *“Education, a two-way process”*

During the International Assembly held in Madrid in 2011, around 300 volunteers from all over the world worked on education as a means to eradicate poverty.

The delegates concluded that in AIC activities, education must be considered as a two-way process that allows each person to identify and value their skills and potential; such interdependence allows for co-creativity to occur.

AIC actions in the field

More than **13 800 projects fighting against poverty** are currently identified over the 53 associations of the AIC network. These projects have the **added value** of:

Local roots

Projects in the field are initiated exclusively by local volunteers, structured in AIC teams. The volunteers, mainly women, are experts in the fight against poverty. Their activities in their immediate environment give them knowledge of the local reality. This expertise is often recognised by public authorities and local and international partners.

Poverty affecting women

Whether it be in the North or the South, the target population of the AIC projects is 80% made up of women and their children. The elderly, very often women, are also a vulnerable group who are a target population of AIC projects. Reports from AIC member associations underline that global population aging is an important challenge in the fight against poverty today.

Attention to the person as a whole

AIC projects place fundamental importance on the person. Volunteers establish individual relationships with the people they work with. They follow methods taught by their founder, Saint Vincent de Paul: attention given to the person as a whole, respect for their cultural identity, permanent concern for their self-promotion, and understanding of the necessity of fighting together against poverty and injustice as well as the importance of knowing the economic, political, social, and religious realities of each community.

Creation of social links

As several studies reveal, the causes of poverty are not only economic. Poverty is also caused by isolation between people. AIC projects, beyond responding to basic needs, have the objective of reforming social links.

Investment in human capital

The activity reports of AIC associations reveal the essential place devoted to education in their activities in the field. Whether it be by formal or informal education or by

skill, experience or knowledge acquisition, the majority of AIC projects have an educational dimension indispensable to the prevention of and fight against poverty, especially that affecting women. Thus, local activities become an opportunity for reciprocal exchange between volunteers and those welcomed, with the goal of working together to escape poverty.

Solidarity within AIC

At the heart of the AIC network, around thirty twinings between local teams in different countries permit links of solidarity to be reinforced. More than material aid, these links allow the exchange of experiences, a stronger collaboration between volunteers, and the building of reciprocal knowledge both of partner groups and of the social, economic, and political context of the countries involved.

OUR PROJECTS

In varied local contexts, each project has its specificity, responding to the diversity of the volunteers themselves and of the populations they work with. However, some trends become apparent, all linked to the cross-cutting theme of education.



Education

Angelita is a woman who is bringing up four children on her own. For the past two years, she has been participating in a fabric workshop implemented by an AIC group in Ecuador. There she learns to make scarfs, ponchos, etc. which are then sold to pupils at a school run by the Daughters of Charity. Three other women involved in the same project have already opened a stall at the local market to sell their products. This is a step towards financial independence and empowerment.

Many AIC projects are based on education and training. For adults, this means above all literacy programmes, professional training projects which aim to get them back into the workplace and educational activities in the form of learning workshops. For children, projects take the form of child-care, pre-school centres, getting children back into school, scholarships for study and homework support.

With the provision of seed capital, some professional training programmes lead to the creation of income-generating activities, often in the informal sector. Other participants in the project find salaried employment in businesses.

Nutrition

When Noéline arrives to school after a long walk, she goes to the school canteen where she eats her only consistent meal of the day. In this small town in Madagascar, AIC volunteers know that many children have difficulties studying because they are hungry. In AIC school centres, volunteers have opened canteens; they are often mothers of children who prepare products that they grow in the community plot.

If education is essential to a person's development, AIC projects often also have a nutritional and health component, as everything is linked. Bad nutrition and poor health are obstacles to receiving an education.



Besides school canteens, other groups of volunteers put into place public canteens which are open to everyone or organise social groceries. Aid in the form of food parcels also has an important place in all AIC groups.

Health

Juanita suffers from kidney failure and must have dialysis three times a week. She is part of a group of kidney deficiency patients gathered regularly by AIC Bolivia volunteers. It represents an opportunity to break the isolation and exclusion which illness can cause, to help one another, and to support the families. Volunteers finance part of the medical material necessary for dialysis and also offer food parcels; an adequate diet is indispensable for the illness's treatment.

In Thailand, some volunteers from an AIC group use a motorbike to get to out-of-the-way places; they visit the sick, organise medical consultations with volunteer doctors, and bring medicines.

In many countries, when there is no social cover for healthcare costs, falling ill quickly becomes problematic. In Latin America, volunteers have opened dispensaries and convalescent homes to welcome the ill from rural areas during their treatment or after being in hospital. In Africa and in Latin America, other volunteers have formed health cooperatives where medicines are offered at social prices. In all the countries where there is an AIC presence, volunteers organise visits to the sick in hospitals and bring care to those with disabilities and their families.

Shelters

Jessica comes regularly to the St Vincent clothing store open each Thursday by AIC USA volunteers. At first, she used to leave

very quickly, embarrassed to be there. However, the warm place, the little coffee, the welcome and the attentive manner in which the volunteers listen to her have all made her feel at home there. She often finds the same people there and now chooses her clothes at a very low price in an atmosphere of complicity and good humour. Behind the clothes you wear, there also lies the question of your self-image and the way others look at you!

AIC shelters are places of listening and welcome which create social links. In the USA as in Europe, there are many clothing stores as well as day centres for the unemployed, for migrants, drug addicts, and the homeless and also for the families of prisoners. In Latin America, many AIC groups have opened retirement homes for the elderly. In Africa, there are also orphanages.

Individual support

Anna has been in hospital for several weeks. Each day, she waits impatiently for the visit of an AIC Germany volunteer. It is a moment of exchange, but above all a great comfort. With the volunteer, Anna can speak about anything and also dares to call the doctor to ask her questions.

As for Pauline, she has two home visits a week from AIC France volunteers. together they speak, read and sometimes go shopping, go to the bank, to the doctor's, get in contact with her family... Bonds are made; what counts is that you are together, listening reciprocally!

There are numerous individual support projects. They are generally put into place at the request of social services. Whether they take the form of home visits, in the main to the elderly, or visiting hospitals or prisons, they are all aimed at breaking the isolation while at the same time giving attention to the person as a whole.



Executive Board Report 2011-2012



The Executive Board (EB) elected in 2011 was made up of 12 members of 11 different nationalities and of eight other volunteers. Between them they shared geographical responsibilities (event organisation on four continents) and cross-cutting issues (event organisation, coordination, training, communication, AIC visibility, projects, twinning, representations, advocacy, fundraising). In 2011 and 2012, their total hours worked come to 19 832 (or for an average of 46 weeks worked a year, over ten hours of voluntary work each week and by each person involved).

3 PRIORITIES

Circulating the 2011-2013 Operational Guidelines

*“Working together:
Education, a two-way process”*

I. Organisation of 2 continental seminars in 2012: one in Brazil for Latin America and the other in Germany for the European presidents.

II. Publication of 3 spiritual training booklets and a Power Point document.

Training AIC national presidents and councils

- International AIC Delegates Assembly in Madrid in 2011.
- Visits to AIC associations in: Cameroon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo Madagascar - Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, - Laos, Taiwan, Thailand, - Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Spain, Ukraine - the USA.
- Publication of training documents: ‘AIC and its member associations’ and ‘The role of an AIC national president’, among others.
- Publication of three Training Booklets: fundraising, communication, and education.

Improved visibility for AIC

A new look for the Websites: the addition of video/audio support and better project visibility: www.aic-international.org and www.aic-solidarite.be

In international organisations (UNESCO – ECOSOC – Council of Europe – Catholic Centres – Cor Unum– CRESCENDO – FAO), AIC representatives **report on the association’s activities**, exert pressure on those in power, and make proposals. Work was conducted with the Secretariat to insure the AIC network’s coordination missions, project support, international solidarity and links with the Vincentian Family.

OTHER FIELDS OF ACTIVITY

Coordination and management of the AIC network

The international secretariat is at the information centre of the AIC network. In close cooperation with the President, it monitors financial management, follows private organisations or public backers, and organises two fundraising events each year: a bike rally and a cultural evening.

It manages the Solidarity Fund which is contributed to by AIC associations. This fund has intervened during flooding for AIC Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador, North Cameroon and the Philippines; during a famine in the Horn of Africa; and during a severe temperature drop in AIC Ukraine and AIC Slovakia.

Support for AIC projects

In 2011-2012, the Projects Service has followed 33 projects in developing countries and has conducted training for AIC volunteers in the following countries: Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, El Salvador, Ecuador, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic and Bolivia.

The Projects Service also promotes twinnings and the exchange of good practices between AIC groups situated in different countries.

Two AIC projects have been awarded prizes: the Lera project in Cameroon: providing education and training to 25 young girls, to allow them to avoid child marriage (the Claire and Jean Delva Prize), and in Mexico, the project « Nutrición Saludable para todos » (Healthy nutrition for all) (the Systemic Change Prize from the Vincentian Family).



Participation in the life of the Vincentian Family

The Executive Board participated in two new commissions: Vincentian Family Collaboration, and Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR AIC

- In March 2013, the International Assembly of Delegates will take place in Bangkok, Thailand. It will be a chance to deepen the Operational Guidelines, to discover the groups based in Asia, and to let ourselves be guided and enchanted by the Vincentian charisma.
- In 2017: AIC will celebrate 400 years since the foundation of the first ‘Charities’, the forebears of AIC groups. This will be an opportunity to redefine our vision and our mission for the world today.



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