

Why Should We Act with a Systemic Approach in Mind?

October 2008

Training Booklet n°12

Summary

Introduction

 *Using a systemic approach in projects to solve recurring problems*

 *Using a systemic approach within a team to solve recurring problems*

 *Interview of Patricia de Nava and Yiyi de Souza at the training Seminar on systemic change*

 *A reading of the AIC Operational Guidelines with a systemic approach in mind.*

Introduction

This is our second training booklet on systemic change. A survey among AIC volunteers showed that this concept is already known, albeit under a different name.

For some volunteers:

“The name is new within AIC, but the action is not”, the operational guidelines lead us to it, both concepts are linked.

“That is what I was doing already, but the name was different”.

“That is what I was doing already, but I am going to improve it. It gives me new ideas to improve my work”.

For others, systemic change is something new:

“Systemic change is something new to me” (Reactions after the training seminar in Guatemala in April 2008)

The systemic approach is a tool, a method enabling us to bring about changes. We try to reach our objective by employing a different point of view (see practical exercise). It is a method which can help us to stimulate our actions and to bring about change in cases of distress.

A systemic approach is particularly helpful when we are aware of a problem that we want to solve.

Let us emphasize the use of a systemic approach when there is a recurring problem, when “everything has been tried and nothing works” or when there is a stalemate: “it will never change!

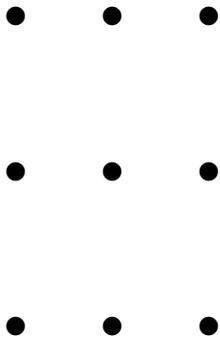
The purpose of this second booklet is to look more thoroughly at **how to use the systemic method to solve recurring problems.**

- Within a team
- Within a project

Hence, we will be able to establish a link between the systemic approach and the AIC Operational Guidelines. This process will lead us to the theme of the February 2009 International Assembly in Mexico.

To begin, let us try a systemic approach to solve the following exercise!

Link the following 9 dots with straight lines without lifting your pencil



 *Think 'out of the box': that is the trick!*

The decisions we make to adapt to the world depend on our vision of that world

Our mental models might also prevent us from hearing, perceiving or envisioning other possibilities, other solutions.

The solution to this exercise can be found on the AIC website: www.aic-international.org

USING THE SYSTEMIC METHOD TO SOLVE A RECURRING PROBLEM WITHIN A PROJECT

Project revival

Background: In Paris, a French AIC team has developed a training project over the last ten years to find jobs for completely destitute women. These women are sent to AIC by the social services, and the project is conducted in partnership with a vocational training organisation. The AIC volunteers are in charge of supporting these women on a daily basis.

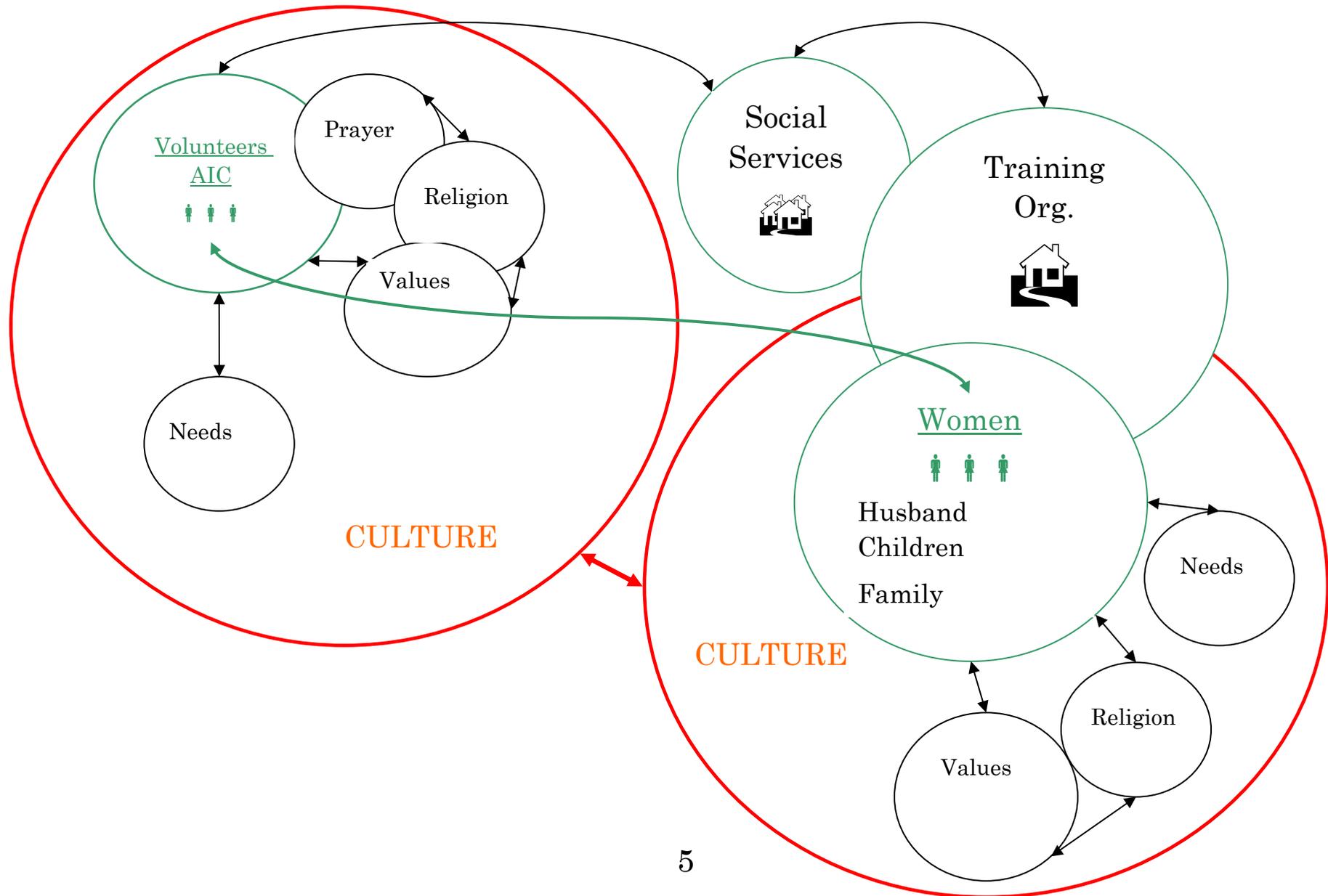
At the beginning the results were very positive: 60% of the women found a job after 6 months' training.

Today the trend is different: **there are almost no women interested in this project.** The project leaders are giving further thought to it and using a systemic approach.

Here are their questions:

- ◇ **Who are we?** : A network of people from the social services, AIC volunteers and a vocational training organisation.
- ◇ **What is our aim?** : Giving each woman enough strength to build her own life plan.
- ◇ **What are the interactions existing in this project?** : The volunteers, the social services, the training organisation, the women, their families, their culture, their moral and spiritual needs, their financial needs and prayer.

Interacting Elements in the "Project" System



◇ **Is each person a stakeholder ?**

	<u>Project development</u>	<u>Project in progress</u>	<u>Project assessment</u>
AIC Volunteers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Training Organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Services	Yes	???	Yes
Trainees	No ¹	Yes	???

◇ **Which system components are critical?**

The needs expressed by the trainees.

¹ The project is proposed when already finalized, without checking whether it suits them or not.

◇ **Which means should be used to reach the above mentioned objective?**

The team leaders call their own choices into question and chose an educational method which they will then test.

The usual meeting, submitting the project to the trainees, will be replaced by **a meeting during which all their requirements will be pooled** and the project adapted accordingly.

This is where we stand at present, the process being under development.

The systemic approach emphasizes :

Interaction among components instead of the components themselves

Operational rules which enable its development

The purpose of the system rather than its causes

The objective to be reached

The stakeholder status of the individual.

USING THE SYSTEMIC METHOD TO SOLVE A RECURRING PROBLEM WITHIN A TEAM

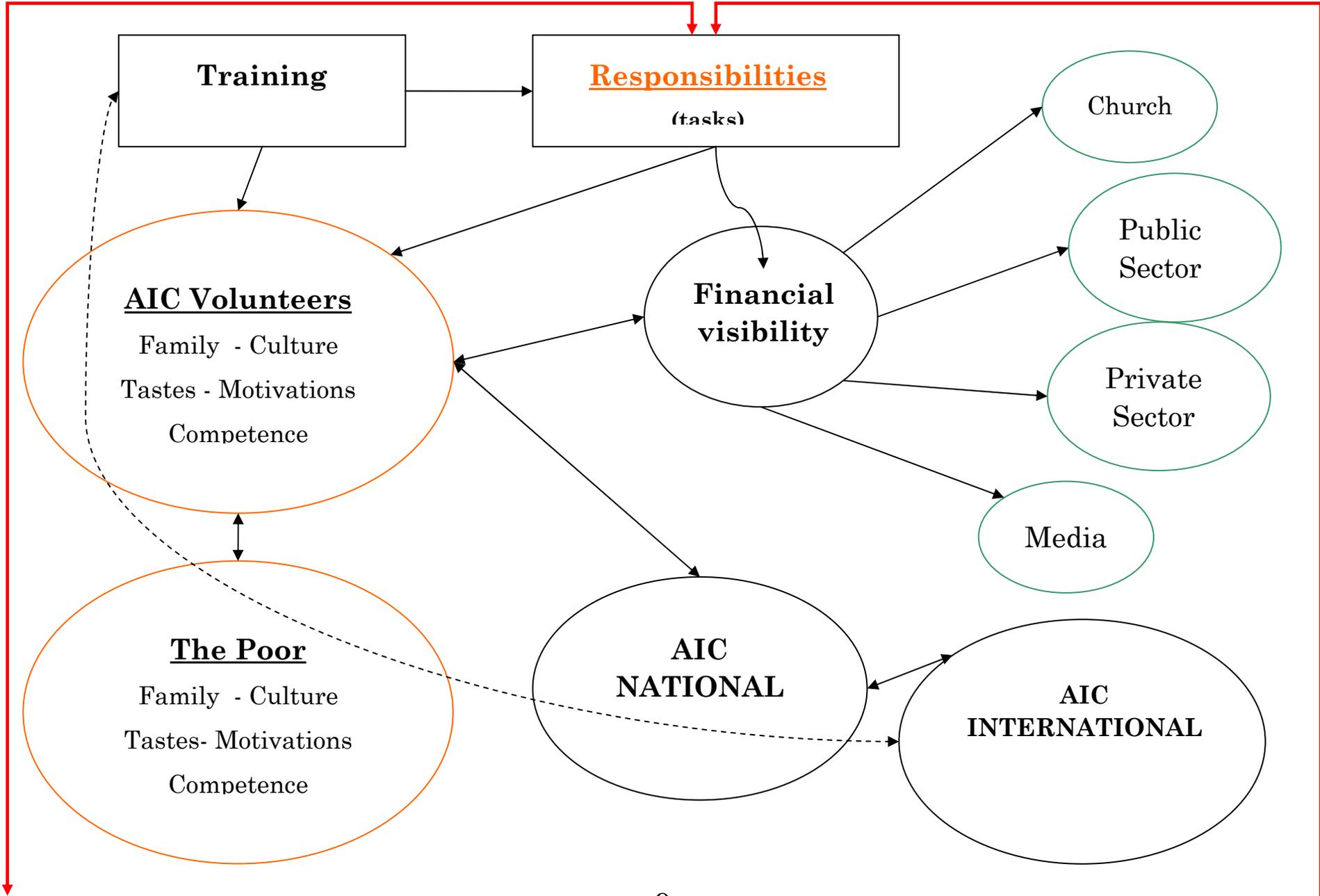
Finding new presidents for the AIC Teams

This is the example of a recurring problem: in all the associations, AIC groups complain that they have considerable trouble finding local, national or international leaders; indeed, present leaders are often overwhelmed and when their tenure comes to an end, the other volunteers do not want to bear these responsibilities because of a lack of time or of skills.

Let us apply the systemic method:

- ◇ **Who are we ?** A team of AIC volunteers
- ◇ **What is our aim ?** Find a president for our team of AIC volunteers who will lead projects that will change the lives of the excluded.
- ◇ **What are the interactions existing in our teams ?**
The volunteers, the social services, the training organisations, the poor, their families, their culture, their moral and spiritual needs, the financial needs, prayer, the Church, the public sector, the private sector, the media and AIC at both national and international levels.

The Components which interact in the “Team System”



❖ **Which tasks should be accomplished ?**

Preparing and chairing meetings, drafting reports, being responsible for all the team members, welcoming newcomers, keeping in touch with AIC National, the social services and the parish, raising funds, keeping the books, saying the common prayer, leading the project.

❖ **Is each volunteer involved in the team activities?’**

TASKS	NAME OF THE TEAM MEMBER IN CHARGE
Leading the meetings	
Drafting reports	
Individual team member responsibility	
Welcoming newcomers	
Contacts with AIC National	
Contacts with social services	
Contacts with the parish	
Fund raising	
Book-keeping	
Spiritual life and prayer	
Project leading	
Responsibility for team activities	

Team interaction	
Training	

◇ **Which system components are critical?**

All individual skills are critical and can be developed and trained. This runs counter to the idea that the team leader has to do everything personally.

◇ **Which resources will be used to attain the above-mentioned objectives?**

- Remain faithful to vincentian spirituality: power and responsibility are themselves a form of service
- Listing all the tasks with the team
- Defining the tastes and skills of each team member
- Making each member responsible for a specific task in order to attain the objectives
- Drafting clear-cut mission proposals which are limited in time and match the tastes and skills of the team member
- These resources will lighten the president's workload and enable her to accomplish her tasks undisturbed. Moreover, they will contribute to each team member's personal development and make it easier to find new leaders.

The systemic approach emphasizes:

Interaction among components instead of the components themselves

The purpose of the system rather than its causes

Operational rules which enable its development

The objective to be achieved, the future

The stakeholder status of the individual



INTERVIEW with Patricia de Nava and Yiyi de Souza

At the training Seminar on systemic change

Guatemala April 2008

Why is AIC using systemic change?

In order to succeed in really changing the lives of the poor, through the numerous AIC projects in various countries of the world and the enormous strength of its 200.000 members.

Why do you think that systemic change is a key value for each AIC volunteer?

The systemic change process gives us the right tools, i.e. a method to increase the effectiveness of AIC voluntary involvement. Small changes can very often transform a project.

What is the link between the Systemic Change and the AIC Operational Guidelines?

There is an obvious relationship. Several AIC guidelines propose a change. The participation of the poor is essential in both. Development, self promotion, solidarity and empowerment are key ideas in both systems **with the participation of the poor**. Within both Operational Guidelines and Systemic Change, **social co-responsibility, networking and participation of the various actors** are essential keys to success.

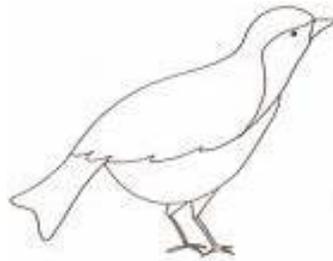
Systemic change, with its deep Christian and Vincentian vision and its specific methodology, leads us to consider the interaction among the various sub-systems influencing the lives of the poor.

Operational Guidelines and Systemic Change are put into practice within projects, as per one of AIC's main Guidelines.

If you had to define Systemic Change by something (i.e. an object, an animal, a colour or a country), what would you choose?

For me systemic change would be a lark. The lark is a bird which flies very high, higher than most birds, but makes its nest on the ground.

Systemic change proposes very high objectives, but these are always rooted in the existence of the poor.



<p>READ THE OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES WITH A SYSTEMIC VISION</p>
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At its February **2008** meeting, the AIC Executive Board decided that the **2009** Assembly would develop a “systemic vision of the operational guidelines”.

Meanwhile we are suggesting a few thoughts and look forward to your answers.

This is the text of the 2007-2009 Operational Guidelines; we will emphasize the “systemic” words.

AIC teams are convinced that:

- •There is an **interaction** between women’s culture and poverty and that
- •All cultures can **evolve**

Hence they commit themselves to:

1. Reacting more strongly to women’s poverty by :

- Creating and developing **discussion fora** in order to **pool** problems, **unite** efforts and find solutions.
- Educating in order to create **gender balance** between men and women
- Bringing about awareness of human rights, primarily women’s rights and their defence, and taking **political action** with a view to applying laws on behalf of women

2. Leading women to empowerment since :

- **Change** has to start with 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 bringing about change in her own culture
- Each volunteer can contribute to **creating conditions in favour of** women’s development.

3. Making Society as a whole responsible by increasing :

- **Networking** aiming at women's development
- Pressure to invoke the **responsibility** of Society
- Raising awareness in the media to promote women's dignity

Reaffirming the values which underpin the volunteers' action:

- Respecting women's dignity
- Women's solidarity
- Strengthening family ties
- Training women to acquire deep and personal Vincentian spirituality

Let us now emphasize the links to the systemic approach

- ❖ **Who are we ?** A network of volunteers organized as an **NGIO**
- ❖ **What is the purpose of the Opérational Guidelines?**
Enhancing our commitment to solve women's poverty
- ❖ **What are the existing interactions ?**
 - A strong link between local cultures and women's poverty
 - A dynamic approach to culture, confident that changes are possible
 - An awareness that culture can only change from within
 - Poverty, communities, families, policies, volunteers

- The need to accompany women on their road to self-esteem and empowerment
 - The volunteers' role,
 - The strength of our Vincentian spirituality, inspiring us to change unfair situations.
- ◇ **How does the present societal system work?** It may be in favour of maintaining inequality, of not changing a given situation.
- ◇ **What are the operational rules of the system?**
Traditions, habits
- ◇ **What are AIC's operational rules?** People's dignity, solidarity, Vincentian spirituality
- ◇ **Which tools should be implemented?**
- Leading women to empowerment
 - Creating conditions to further development
 - Making the whole of Society feel responsible

◇ **How can this systemic approach help us to implement our Operational Guidelines?**

Ligne 1: Reacting more strongly to women's poverty

The systemic approach considers each person as being part of multiple systems which interact: family, community, friends and workplace.

Which are the systems we are using in our projects? The family, the community, the Church, social and political services.

Can we use the interaction of the various components of the system to change poverty? How? By which means?

Line 2: Each person has the necessary personal resources to change a situation

The systemic approach considers each person as a whole, body and mind, with his or her physical, psychological, moral and spiritual needs.

What kinds of needs are expressed by the projects' beneficiaries?

What kinds of needs are we trying to meet?

Ligne 3: Making the whole of society feel responsible

The systemic approach considers the problems to be solved – in this case women's poverty – as key ingredients to the solution. (A 180° reversal of usual responses)

Which stimulating vision of the future are we proposing in our projects?

Thank you for thinking together about those questions.
Please send your answers or at least one answer to one of the questions to

info@aic-international.org, attention :

Laurence de la Brosse.

The following three lines will be thought-provoking and help us to look more thoroughly at our Operational Guidelines, adopting a systemic approach, and to implement them in our actions and projects

At the 2009 Mexico International Assembly

We will be able to pool and share our experiences, successes and difficulties in order to progress and react more efficiently and usefully to poverty.

AIC
Association International of Charities

A mainly women's association organized
at world level, including more
than 250 000 volunteers
in 6000 local teams in 50 countries.

Founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1617
to fight any forms of poverty and
injustice and to give women an active
social and recognized role
in a spirit of solidarity.

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