



TRAINING BOOKLET 2018

AIC confronts the challenge of sustainable development Let us protect our “Common Home”

Written by the AIC International Secretariat





TRAINING REFLECTION: FEBRUARY 2018

AIC confronts the challenge of sustainable development Let us protect our “Common Home”

The theme of our 2017 Assembly of Delegates (Châtillon) was: *400 years with Saint Vincent on a journey towards the future in our Common Home*. As a result, during our discussions about the various topics, the idea of sustainable development was always at the forefront of our minds.

In light of the importance of this theme and the need to make all the volunteers who could not participate in the Assembly aware of it, the reflections of February, March and April 2018 will explore this theme. The reflections are based on the forthcoming Training Booklet prepared by the AIC International Secretariat.

1. Introduction

Until recently we have lived on this planet earth believing that its resources were infinite. Today we are aware of the fact that its resources are limited. In the words of Pope Francis, we also know that we are responsible for the earth as “**our common home**”.

Some years ago we began to hear talk about climate change, about the need to protect our planet, about the **Sustainable Development Goals** (objectives developed by the United Nations). We also listened to people speaking about the urgency to act and to live in a different manner and to do so in order to protect life on this planet.

Perhaps we have felt powerless in confronting these great challenges or perhaps we have felt that all of this is beyond our reach.

Let us now, however, ask ourselves: What can we do? What should we do? How should we change our manner of consuming and working and living? Does not change begin with some small daily gestures, small gestures that ultimately generate tremendous results?

During the AIC International Assembly (March 2017) we reflected upon and discussed this new theme of sustainable development.

As Father Mauricio Fernández (AIC International Spiritual Advisor) told us: *“In light of the fact that there are 150,000 volunteers who are involved in more than 10,000 projects, imagine their impact if each one of them committed themselves to the protection of their surroundings! The solution is in our hands and depends on the small gestures that we make to preserve life, to preserve our planet, our “common home” which has been created by God.”*

Therefore, let us unite our efforts, let us act together and respond to this call!

2. From the Encyclical *Laudato Sí*, to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals

Pope Francis was the first pope to challenge us with regard to the manner in which we protect our planet. In his encyclical, *Laudato Sí*, published in 2015, the Pope exhorts mankind to become ever more aware of the need to safeguard our “common home” (read the Training Reflections of November and December 2016).

In his encyclical, the Pope refers to integral ecology, that is, an environmental, economic and social ecology. All of those elements are bound together! *“Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature”* (*Laudato Sí*, #139). The Pope tells us that we must confront the very causes of poverty.

In the footsteps of Pope Francis, in December 2015 the United Nations published the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, objectives that are in line with the teaching of the encyclical.

Those Sustainable Development Goals constitute a new program for development (2015-2030) and a universal call to put in place measures that will end poverty, while at the same time protecting the planet and guaranteeing peace and prosperity for everyone. The development goals are as follows:



AIC is committed to five of these objectives:

Objective 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

This is, indeed, AIC’s primary goal and has been since the time of our establishment in 1617 by Vincent de Paul. We number about 150,000 and are working on four continents, actively engaged in some 10,000 projects to combat poverty.

Objective 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Since 2011 education has become a priority among our various lines of action. Among adults we are focused on literacy programs and vocational training that will allow people to obtain gainful employment. We also run specialized workshops as a means to promote on-going education. For children we support day-care centers, pre-school programs, programs that enable children to be reintegrated into the educational system; we also provide scholarships and other forms of assistance so that children can continue their studies.

Objective 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Women continue to be the victims of discrimination and violence in every part of the world. In the AIC network 70% of the beneficiaries of our work are women and their children. These women want to live a dignified life and struggle to make their dreams a reality. The education of women of all ages is an essential instrument in reducing the inequality between men and women.

Objective 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Education in the area of sustainable development and the protection of our environment are integral components of many of AIC's activities. In reality, we want to protect our "common home" and give particular attention to the protection of the environment in all the area of our work... this presents us with a new challenge!

Objective 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

AIC works as a network and this promotes the exchange of experiences, synergy, and complementary action... all of which enable us to engage in the struggle against poverty. Furthermore, twinnings between various groups help create a culture of solidarity.

Through its representatives AIC also collaborates with different international organizations, for example, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Human Rights Council, CRESCENDO. AIC also forms part of the Vincentian Family, an extensive network of more than two million people who are inspired by the charism of St. Vincent de Paul.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Share the concrete steps that you are taking to care for the planet.
2. What projects is the group considering in order to care for our "common home"?
3. Review the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and discern as a group projects that could be developed in order to attain one or more of these objectives.



TRAINING REFLECTION: MARCH 2018

AIC confronts the challenge of sustainable development Let us protect our “Common Home”

During the AIC International Assembly in March 2017, we reflected together on possible local, national and international initiatives to look after our « Common Home ».

Everything begins on an individual level, with a personal change of attitude. Each one of us can be part of the solution. There are various attitudes, that if they are embraced, will allow us to make a difference... and we have the ability to make that decision with regard to accepting or rejecting those attitudes.

Once we have made that change on an individual level, we are able to act on the local, national or international level and finally, able to integrate those changes into our activity as AIC members.

During the exchange of ideas that took place in the workshops, thousands of suggestions were made... these were written down (on leaf-shaped post-it notes) and then stuck on the image of a tree that was placed on the wall of the meeting hall.

Suggestions for action on an individual level:

- Turn off the lights in empty rooms;
- Do not leave electronic devices connected;
- Use lightbulbs (LED) that consume less electricity;
- Lower the heating temperature in rooms and the house;
- Be aware of water consumption when showering, brushing teeth, washing hands, etc.;
- Wash dishes in a basin;
- Water plants with the water that was used to wash vegetables;

- Use the shorter wash cycle when washing clothes.

Recycle:

- Separate organic waste and use it to make plant fertilizer;
- Recycle plastic, for example, plastic water bottles;
- Use reusable plates, cups and utensils.

Fight against waste:

- Buy only that which is necessary;
- Eat in a responsible manner;
- Buy in a manner that expresses solidarity;
- Bring your own bags when buying at the supermarket.

Preserve nature:

- Avoid toxic cleansers; use vinegar;
- Use less soap in washing machines;
- Reuse printed paper when printing draft copies of documents;
- Print less.

Intergenerational communication:

- Speak with family members about these matters and express your concern;
- Listen to younger family members, who are often better informed about environmental matters through their schools.

Suggestions for action on a neighborhood, city and regional level:

Food:

- Do not throw away surplus food;
- Create community gardens that allow people to:
 - reestablish a relationship with the earth;
 - grow fruits and vegetables that can be eaten and shared with others;
 - socialize;
- At fairs and markets engage in exchanges of products from other regions;
- Promote the use of natural fertilizers;
- Give preference to the cultivation of edible plants.

Transition in the use of energies:

- Develop projects that allow other sources of energy to replace the use of crude oil;
- Reduce energy consumption by using low consumption lighting, for example, in greenhouses.

Preservation of nature:

- Clean contaminated sites and gather up abandoned garbage;
- Decontaminate the soil and the land;
- Make a commitment to reforestation programs;
- Sensitize people to the reality of climate changes - droughts, cyclones, forest fires;
- In places where there is no indoor plumbing; encourage people to use latrines.

Recycling of waste material:

- Organize with children the collection of plastic which can then be sold, and the money utilized to finance projects in the area of health or the cultivation of food;
- Recycle electronic devices.

Construction:

- Insulate buildings well;
- Install solar panels;
- Install insulation panels behind radiators.

Education:

- Sensitize people to environmental problems;
- Encourage companies to change their methods of production;
- Engage in the struggle against poverty.

AIC's Suggestions for Reflection:

1. Share within your group about how many of these initiatives to care for the planet you are currently undertaking, at an individual level and as a group.
2. How do you pass the need to care for “our Common Home” on to beneficiaries?
3. Do you have any other ideas, in addition to those described above?



TRAINING REFLECTION: APRIL 2018

AIC confronts the challenge of sustainable development Let us protect our “Common Home”

AIC’s work with regard to sustainable development:

Here are the 9 AIC grassroots projects presented during the 2017 General Assembly, that already include elements of sustainable development, for example, education with regard to the protection of the environment and the sorting of waste products; the utilization of local products with regard to food distribution; the construction of model homes with recycled bricks (bricks made from recycled plastic bottles and recycled garbage), sustainable agriculture and community gardens; planting trees to limit soil erosion and the utilization of solar panels.

You can find out more about these projects on our website: www.aic-international.org

AIC Belgium – Waremme: distribution of food to families in vulnerable situations

It’s a recipe for quality food distribution with an emphasis on sustainable development: encouraging a balanced diet, offering seasonal fruits and vegetables each week, involving the beneficiaries and getting them to participate, valuing people’s skills through practical actions and creating a friendly, welcoming and respectful atmosphere. This is what the volunteers from the Waremme group in Belgium offer every week.





AIC Brazil – Campina Grande: education about the environment for 30 children and adolescents living in a marginalized community

Alongside school support activities and meals, the volunteers offer workshops teaching about peace and citizenship, raising awareness about preserving the planet to guarantee a better future and art workshops to encourage artistic and cultural awakening.

AIC Colombia – Mocoa: Construction of a model home with recycled bricks

Making eco-bricks to build a ‘model’ home is a good example of AIC Mocoa in Colombia’s sustainable development action. The project encourages the creation of useful materials from waste and highlights the need to develop innovative ideas. The whole community is involved in this process, including elderly people from a home run by AIC volunteers.



AIC France – Saint Valery-en-Caux: community garden

The volunteers in Saint-Valery-en-Caux have begun the cultivation of a community garden for disadvantaged people. The objective is to be able to offer people healthy and seasonal fruits and vegetables while at the same time revalorising vegetable gardening, the people who do it and market vegetables. This activity allows people to feed themselves and relearn techniques that have been lost, even in rural environments. It’s an easy project to carry out in terms of means, but it does require perseverance and a certain humility in the face of the whims of nature (no season or year is the same as the previous season or year). One learns how to live in accord with the rhythms of the seasons.



AIC Madagascar – Manaskara/Vohipenko: sustainable agriculture

For some time, the AIC volunteers in Manaskara have engaged in the cultivation of rice with mothers and their older children... putting into practice the advice of agricultural technicians who are concerned about preserving the environment and making the fields more productive.

The AIC groups in Ambolos and Vohipenko are engaged in projects that revolve around the cultivation of food and the planting of fruit trees. Families raise their own poultry and utilize the excrement of the poultry for fertilizer.



These two AIC groups collaborate with the Diocese of Farafangana's Green Plan, which is geared towards protecting the environment.

AIC Philippines – Pampanga: manufacture of solar lamps and fight against erosion



It's thanks to the support of the Department for the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that the AIC volunteers from the Pampanga region in the Philippines have been able to begin an environmentally sustainable tree planting project in order to prevent the erosion of the hillsides of the mega-dykes. These dykes, built at the foot of a volcano are designed to stop lava from covering the surrounding inhabited areas.

The AIC volunteers are participating in an exciting five year environmental project: planting 500 tree seedlings per hectare and maintaining a 7 hectare plot on the slopes of the Mont Pinatubo dykes. By preventing the erosion of the dykes, the trees that are planted will help to save lives if there are typhoons.

Furthermore, some volunteers have learned how to make solar lamps by putting together the component pieces, in order to sell them to disadvantaged families. There are three objectives in this: stop the families from having to pay for electivity, which is expensive; stop the use of candles – a frequent cause of fire and finally, protect the environment, as these solar lamps don't produce any pollution.

AIC United Kingdom: education for sustainable development

The AIC volunteers are raising awareness in the parish communities and the parish school about the concern for sustainable development. They are doing this through concrete and practical education with regard to environmental issues. They promote simple lifestyles and solidarity with those living in poverty. People are invited to make simple gestures, for example, reducing and



controlling their use of energy by insulating and using low energy consumption light bulbs, recycling, car-sharing, utilizing left-over food; etc.



AIC Vietnam - Ho Chi Minh: Waste sorting for better sustainable development

Garbage and waste are a societal and an environmental problem. Better sorting at source will reduce the cost of recycling and create a more favourable environment, facilitating the treatment, recycling and reduction of waste. The volunteers'

objective is to encourage society to sort its waste. Everyone is invited to get involved. *"Next time you change the dustbin, have a look,"* say the volunteers, *"Is there anything that shouldn't be there. Probably. Try to reduce by half the amount of waste you produce at home."*

AIC USA – Sustainable distribution of food

The AIC volunteers improve the distribution of food by putting a focus on greater sustainability: including for example, more fresh fruit and seasonal vegetables. They are careful about people taking only that which is necessary or which they can consume before the product spoils. The volunteers, concerned about bettering their activity in the future, state that the distribution of fresh products to people in need is simply a step towards more sustainable use of natural resources.



Conclusion

Little by little, we are coming around to the idea of transforming our lifestyles, so they consume less energy and are more respectful of nature and mankind.

Following Pope Francis and the UN who have spoken about the urgency of protecting our planet, let's act to address this challenge! Think of future generations!

- Let's commit to making a small gesture towards the environment each day at home
- Let's get together in AIC groups to decide together what aspect of sustainable development we could include in our actions.
- Let's mobilise ourselves to support the initiatives being implemented by our local, national or regional authorities in the area of sustainable development.

AIC's suggestion for reflection:

1. If possible, visit the website www.aic-international.org during your meeting to get more information about the projects mentioned above and see if you could use them to inspire yourself to implement one or more similar sustainable development projects in your group.
2. What initiatives have the local or regional authorities put forward near you in the area of sustainable development. How do you think you could mobilise yourselves to support them and bring new ideas?
3. After having studied the three training reflections on the protection of our “Common Home”, what concrete commitments could you make as a group to take better care of our “Common Home”?
4. What do you consider you have learned by studying these three training reflections on the protection of our Common Home?

Translated:
Charles T. Plock, CM
Eastern Province, USA