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VMR

Rédacteur en chef:
Mme Daisy HERMAN

Secrétariat:
FIMARC aisbl
rue Jaumain 15
5330 ASSESSE
BELGIQUE
Tél/fax: 32-83-65 62 36
www.fimarc.org
fimarc@skynet.be

Compte bancaire:
ING 310-0756026-94
IBAN
BE87 3100 7560 2694
BIC/SWIFT
BBRUBEBB

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Philip BISWAS, Bangladesh

*Coverpage: Traditionnal Musical Instrument
Orissa, India*

Periodical published by FIMARC in 4 languages which
highlights the rural world's life and activities of the member
Movements belonging or not to the Federation

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In our intent to understand the social and solidarity economy, in the last number of the VMR we provided you with a reflection upon fair trade, a kind of trade that can be a true alternative if it is understood and developed as proximity trade, when there are close contacts between producers and consumers, which allows setting a fair price for producers.

We will continue the reflection upon solidarity economy and deal with another important issue, i.e. solidarity finance. How important is it in this world, dominated by the financial capital, investments and speculation? How can we give a new meaning to our savings, taking into consideration the solidarity and sharing criteria that we defend? How can we give money its true value back, i.e. an exchange means among others, and which should not be a tool used to speculate or put pressure on the weakest people?

If, at the beginning, solidarity finance was considered as “*a set of financial operations aiming at facing the difficulty met by collectivities in decline and populations caught in the vicious cycle of poverty when they try to get access to the capital*”¹ but things have changed. Global problems, projects taking the environment into account, with an outward-looking attitude, allowed the sector to develop, allowing more people to get access to credit and savers to give a more ethical meaning to their savings.

The debate has just started. There are other forms of solidarity finance than the ones practiced by banks, even ethical ones. In Africa, they have tontines, social money, savings and credit funds, managed by small collectivities but these examples can be seen all around the world. Nevertheless, it is not the panacea and like faire trade, there are limits and some shift risks... Since we could write a whole dossier about it, we will not deal with social money in this VMR, even if they can also lead to democratic governance while creating a local process managed by people themselves and allow getting out of traditional financial mechanisms, which most of the time have a speculation component. We will come back to this issue.

We interviewed Philip Biswas, who recently received a prize for his action in the field of micro finance in Bangladesh.

You will also find the usual headings, news from the different countries and coordinations and the international calendar.

We hope you'll enjoy this VMR. Don't hesitate to send us your reactions and to share your experiences in the field of economy and solidarity finance.

Daisy Herman
Secretary general

¹ Bourque, Gendron, 2003



Action of the Movements

Uganda

In Uganda, rural women usually develop their activities on plots ranging from 0.5 to 1.5 hectares. Saint Jude Training Centre, created in 1990 by John and Josephine Kizza, trains the peasants living in the region and pays a special attention to women.

The training program is focused on organic agriculture modern techniques, which uses all the available land and recycle waste, which in turn generates the energy that families need for their biogas.

Since 1990, 180 000 people have been trained in the centre, which has been nationally recognized for its activities and because it shows that it is possible to live a decent life, even on very small plots of land.

*Ms Josephine Kizza
Director of St Jude Centre*

Cameroon

Generally created in a group of women, the tontine is a system in which all women pay fees on a specific date and in which the capital is allocated in turn to the members of the tontine. This way, they can have a certain amount of money to develop an income generating activity, to pay school costs or face unexpected expenses.

Faced with economic and family problems and the lack of access to credit in the traditional systems, the tontine is a very common solution in Africa. Besides its economic role, the tontine allows developing strong social relationships among its members.



Madagascar

The nickname of Madagascar is “moramora country” (the country where everything goes slowly) does no longer match reality. Actually, all around the country, people, and especially official authorities, are now ready to fight for a fast and sustainable development in the country.

Launched on the initiative of the President of the Republic, the MAP (Madagascar Action Plan) is aiming at developing the country, facing the challenges of globalization and achieving the Millennium development goals. The plan includes 8 commitments: good governance, the development of infrastructures, the transformation of education, the integration of health and development of family planning, the protection of the environment, the development of the rural world, the economy and the private sector, national solidarity.

Nevertheless, even if the plan is generous in its ideas, it raises some issues since it resolutely comes within the frame of the neoliberal economy, with the desire to make the country competitive on international markets...

Burma

In its 12th annual meeting, the Human Rights National Institutions Forum drafted a common statement in which they expressed their concerns about the situation in Burma.

The statement expresses “the serious concern about the precarious human rights situation in the country and, more particularly, the governmental repression of the peaceful protests that caused the death and displacement of hundreds of people.”

The group asks the Burmese government to respect basic human rights principles.

If you also wish to support the action for the Burmese people, you can sign the online petition on this website:

http://www.avaaz.org/fr/stand_with_burma/tf.php?cl_tf_sign=1



Bangladesh

On Friday 13th October 2006, the Bengali Muhammad Yunus received the Nobel Prize for peace for creating the Grameen Bank, a bank for the poor and owned by them. Created thirty years ago in Bangladesh – one of the poorest countries of the planet – to offer micro credits to the excluded of the bank system, the institution allowed the social reintegration of several millions of people.

Today, the Grameen Bank is an important institution that has developed its activity in the field of telephony, among others.

Micro credit can also be a good business since the interest rate is usually pretty high but, considering the small amounts of money involved, the reimbursement rate reaches 98%.

Muhammad Yunus is ready to recognize it and says “we are doing business, not charity. Our final goal is to help our customers, who are our stockholders, to get out of poverty”.



Indonesia

The exportable goods production sector plays an important part in the development of the Indonesian agriculture, especially since it generates exchanges with other countries, it creates jobs, represents 13% of the country total workforce and it significantly contributes to the country gross national product. In 2005, the total amount of exchanges in the agricultural sector reached 9,141 million dollars and, in 2006, from January to May, 4,584 million dollars, which represents a 34.72% growth compared with the same period in 2005.

El Salvador

Last 15th October, the organizations of El Salvador celebrated the Rural Women World Day. The theme selected, similar to that of the World Food Day on 16th October, was “the rural woman, the essential pillar of people’s food sovereignty”. Women had the chance to show their food and craft products and to take part to a conference on the role of the rural woman in community development.

Peru

In August 2007, the epicenter of the earthquake, which reached 8.0 on Richter magnitude scale, was located off the Paracas peninsula and affected the whole region, especially the cities of Pisco, Chincha and Ica.

The official report of the Peruvian Civil Defense stated that 540 people had died, that more than 1000 people were injured and 170 000 were left without a house.

Besides the human victims, the earth quake did considerable damage in the whole region and destroyed 50 to 80% of houses, infrastructures, roads and bridges and cut the access to water and electricity.

Even if the first rescue teams could reach the cities quite quickly, it took time to organize the distribution and the rescue teams reached later the most remote villages of the rural zones.



Local market - Peru

Latin America

October 12th is one of the most important mobilization days on the continent. This is precisely the day when Indigenous people remember the historic debt caused by the European conquests that caused the genocide of their ancestors and the destruction of their way of life. In 515 years of struggle and resistance, indigenous people have tried to have their rights respected, among others the right to land, water and for the safeguard of their identity and culture.

The coordination of Indigenous people's Organizations says the objective of their resistance is to fight neoliberal economic models, to deny free trade agreements, to claim the respect for their land, natural resources, biodiversity and to ask the States to ratify the Indigenous People's Declaration, approved by the Assembly of the United Nations.

Germany

The KLB keeps on intensifying its contacts and cooperation with the initiatives taken in Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, it is a member of the Bureau of Saint Stefan Social Center in Saniob, Rumania.

The main objective of the center is to accommodate the homeless and neglected children from poor families. The Center also offers facilities to organize seminars and conferences on issues related to the Church or agriculture.

The resources generated by the renting of the Center, which also uses products from the neighboring farms and workshops, are used to pay the accommodation costs of children from the street.



Romania

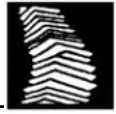
Poland

Two fairly important projects are currently being developed by PACRO at the national level.

The first one is a Summer Camp project for children coming from low income peasant families. This year, 250 children could take part to the project, 50 of them were from the province of Swietokrzyskie and 45 from the province of Opolskie. Most groups were accommodated in Dlugie Youth Center, located near Gorzów Wielkopolski, whose administrator is a member of one of PACRO's associations.

The second project is the Youth Community Centers program. Two organizations are already operational in Lublin and Elk. The Centers organize extracurricular activities such as prevention classes and seminars on health or rehabilitation programs for disabled children.

By the end of 2007, 20 other similar centers should be created in the poorest regions of the country, i.e in Eastern provinces.



Money at the service of social and solidarity economy

Money cannot be the only goal of the economic activity. Dominated by financial capitalism, the economy, boosted by the new technologies, the impressive progress of global trade, the over multiplication of financial exchanges, tends to deny all social constraints in the name of competitiveness. It generates impressive wealth but they are allocated very unequally. It generates jobs but also precariousness, insecurity and sometimes the exclusion of some people. Because of this economy, the future of men and women, their jobs, incomes, roles in the city, often depend on the decisions made under the pressure of financial necessities.

Can we give a new meaning to our personal and collective commitment? Can we reconcile employment, social cohesion and participative democracy? Can we make sure that the weakest can make a dignified living out of their jobs? Can finance serve the social promotion of all men and women, and especially poor countries? This is the ambition of this dossier, i.e. to highlight the fact that solidarity finance can contribute to a viable social and solidarity economy in our world.

This dossier is the follow-up to the two previous ones, i.e. "Another economic system, solidarity economy (VMR N°86); "Fair trade puts human being at the center of the economy" (VMR N°87).

PAVING THE WAY FOR A SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY CHANGE

On the global exchange market, the amount of transactions has multiplied fivefold since 1980. Figures are so impressive that it is difficult to really grasp what they mean: 1 500 billion US dollars per day. This figure has nothing to do with production funding since most transactions are speculation related. The system has devastating effects all around the world and we can wonder if finance is against people.

In several countries men and women have the conviction that money can be at the service of a real human development in the frame of a social and solidarity economy.





Solidarity and self-management values

In 2003, 600 000 micro credits were granted to small businessmen in the South, in 45 countries, by 131 local financial institutions.

In France, 36% of the population is ready to subscribe to solidarity savings. In this system, you do not just invest your money depending on the financial profitability but you also take into consideration ethical and solidarity criteria.

Called “Muso” in Haiti, solidarity funds have three goals, i.e. to collect villagers’ fees to lend the money to concrete projects, to collect fees to face hard times, to receive external funds. With more than 400 “Muso”, peasants can be their own bankers and insurance agents.

In India, thanks to micro credit, groups of “untouchable” women urge other women from other casts to join them in their actions and to pave the way for a solidarity change.

In Peru, thanks to the “New Hope” association, many economic activities are being developed using micro credit, which also fosters self-management and solidarity. In this country, 3.1 million small and micro companies produce 40% of the national wealth and employ 76% of active people but do not have access to traditional financial services. Micro credit can be a means to develop their activities.

In group, we talk about the different dimensions of our lives

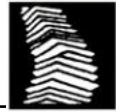
In Brazil, groups of women recycle cardboard to produce stationery. In the framework of this common work, they also discuss the different dimensions of their lives, i.e. relationships between men and women, the need for having incomes, children education... Women learn by themselves and are in touch with other groups, which allows mutual learning.

In Burkina Faso, some associations empower women using communication and training programs. The economic work – processing of local products – increases their standing and gives them incomes. In groups, they talk about their lives, about human rights, health, and try to improve their situation as women.

All this has been achieved at local community level. Nevertheless, they cannot ignore higher scale economic mechanisms. Between 1990 and 2000, direct investment flows from abroad to developing country went from 35 to 180 billion; the objective was to foster the creation of companies and jobs. Actually, according to the UN, money goes to countries that already have profitable economic capacities, and most of the profit goes back to donor countries. In 2003, the UN Development Program (UNDP) indicated that in 32 of the poorest countries, the average amount of the wealth generated by the foreign public aid was 17%; the amount of Southern countries' internal resources remains preponderant.

Questions to groups and movements :

- *What solidarity economic activities are carried out in the region ?*
- *Who and what groups are involved in these activities ?*



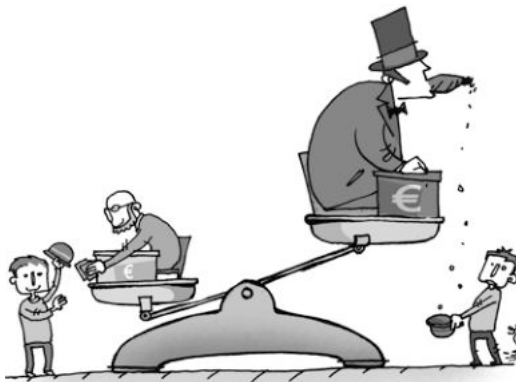
THE HUMAN BEING AT THE HEART OF ECONOMY

In these multiple achievements, we can see points of agreement. We have to meet people's local needs, create local jobs and a local development process, value human beings, especially women. This is why we have to choose the economic niche that will ensure success, strengthen initiatives, promote local and traditional cultures, developing partnerships and solidarity relationships.

A social and solidarity development project, with micro finance, requires the approval of local authorities and the community. We have to inform all people. It requires training, motivation, support to all and a technical assistance. We especially have to capitalize on people's local capacities and on the groups working for the development of their community.

Fighting injustice and poverty

Solidarity finance does not only follow financial criteria. It grants access to credit to the excluded, poor communities and businessmen who don't have much money. It is based on local stakeholders and networks. It puts Human Beings at the heart of economy. It puts the association of people above the capital. Thus, it favors democratic values, while ensuring the success of economic activities, in order to achieve a society of men and women equal in rights.





Solidarity finance underlines most underprivileged people's right to economic initiative, since they can carry out local development projects. Micro finance includes micro credit, cooperatives and solidarity funds. But it goes beyond finance. It allows training, teaching to write and read, confidence, self-confidence, production, sharing of goods, and management of individual and collective projects.

People and groups gather together to carry out economic projects in order to solve injustice and poverty related problems. Solidarity finance groups, in their search for justice and equity, give life to local democracy, good governance, they develop the education, training, for women among others, they share and fight together.

The human and social project is essential

Thus, money is not the master but a tool, which raises the question to know if these multiple achievements thanks to micro credit, local cooperation, solidarity fund, tend towards a social and solidarity economy or if they could lead to traditional financial mechanisms.

The values experienced in these groups act as a safeguard against this drift: mutual trust, empowerment of all people, group responsibility, a rotation of the mandates, training on financial management and economic reflection, strengthening of the concept of citizenship. A group of women who make clothes do not just make them, they also develop social and solidarity relationships.

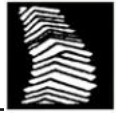
Solidarity economy leads to new forms of political structures, which requires true citizen participation. This is a tool for reflecting and experiencing a fairer allocation of richness. It means that the human and social project is essential, and the economic project is the useful aspect. Human beings can now control their destiny, individually and collectively.



In the many groups of women, the evolution is striking. They all become self-confident, find their place in the group, discover their talents and skills. The group fosters their emancipation and a social change for their members and the community. All groups are just one drop of water in the ocean but these groups, in many countries, are in a solidarity network. Women get some power and economic freedom because they get money from their work. They can take care of themselves, take up responsibilities, have a positive image of themselves and take part to the associative and political life.



Togo, July 2007



“Think about the change you need, not about the thinking you need to change”

Solidarity finance must serve a local development program. It must take into consideration all the aspects of the local life, i.e. health, education, food, citizen participation, democracy. We must be heading for a fairer world. We cannot only produce for consumption but we also have to act for economic mechanisms based on fair and transparent rules, on fundamental human rights.

This requires means to evaluate the achievements and their impacts. We must assess the financial results and check the social goals of the human and community development. At the same time, we must draw the attention of public authorities on their responsibility in the implementation of an education system for all, the access to health for all, access to housing, the minimum goods you need to live a decent life.

Democratic solidarity is a tool for developing other economic and social relationships with the same rights for all. Solidarity finance strongly criticizes the dominant economic system and insists on a general idea, i.e. to think about the change you need, not about the thinking you need to change. We have to resist the liberal market, the “all is money” philosophy, to put Human beings at the heart of economy.

Questions for groups and movements :

- *In solidarity economy and finance, what are the essential human values ?*
- *How do these achievements allow the promotion of women ?*



IN A PROCESS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Solidarity finance serves local needs. “Only hands put together can gather up flour spilled on the floor” (African saying). It means that we have to join forces, to act together, to develop together activities that increase the standard of living of the local populations. In Thailand, an organic rice market generates incomes for producers and healthier food for people. Other activities are carried out in this process such as a rice bank, agricultural cooperatives, training centers for peasants, organic products shops, production of medicine with medicinal plants.



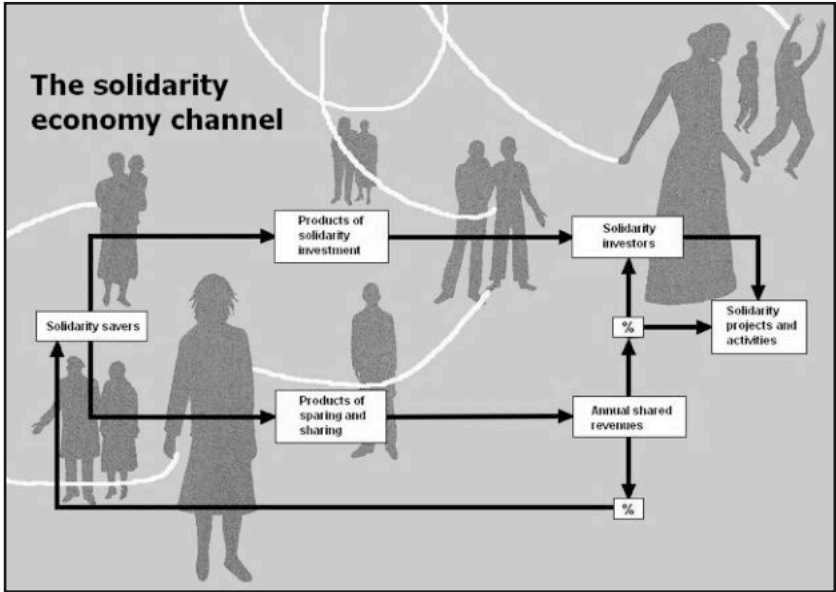
Community workshop, Benin July 2007

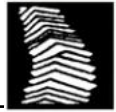
In Brazil, in one region, a community wants to build a school. An aid NGO gives the money they need to build the school. Since all people help, they only use 30% of the money, making the most of the local workforce. 70% of the money received was allocated to other community projects. The balance is positive: local development, local economy, mobilization of local human resources, democratic management system.

Citizens claim the right to be informed and to take part to any development project and political decision: definition, implementation, evaluation and follow-up of the development policies in a community. We always have to find new solutions to increase the social impact of solidarity finance. It can generate tensions between the need for putting figures on the results for a viable economic activity and the need for citizens to be more in control.

To influence public authorities

We can all do something to foster the development of the solidarity finance perspective and at the individual level we can support development organizations. This support can also lead to a change in people's consumption habits through fair trade and it can also have an impact on a country's political decisions. We also have to save money "differently", favoring solidarity criteria. Fair trade and groups of producers and consumers are tools that can be used to implement solidarity finance. Since it wants a different globalization, solidarity finance puts Human beings at the heart of economic concerns.





At all levels of the country, public authorities have to foster solidarity finance, using tools for transparency, following up civil society's innovations and making sure that companies and the financial world take on board the social and environmental dimensions in their projects.

Thus, citizens must have an influence on the State, for a political voluntarism at the service of micro finance: to tax idle and speculation capital, to foster investments in services or in local communities, to value local productions and local markets. We are in a process of food sovereignty in the framework of social and solidarity economy.

Resisting fate and the reign of money must mobilize all citizens, who should trust the future of the political and economic democracy.

Questions for the groups and movements :

- *What actions are carried out to make sure that finance serves a solidarity human development ?*
- *How are the groups and movements acting to influence the economic and political decision makers ?*

To take into account all the dimension of the person

Rural people are the victims of neo liberal policies, in particular young people, who are forced to migrate to get a job, a situation which speeds up poverty in many rural regions deprived of their living strength for the future. It is urgent to make engaged choices in terms of solidarity economy so that young people will stay and work in their country.

We are convinced of the need for a holistic approach, taking on board political, cultural, social and environmental dimensions as well as the reality of our multicultural world. It is therefore vital to invest in education, to act legally in favour of the respect of rights – mainly of the most underprivileged- to get mobilized to convince and to lobby at the local and international level.

*(Extracts from the Final Declaration of the International
MIJARC-FIMARC Seminar - May 2007, Belgium)*



**The interview of this number is dedicated to
Philip Biswas from Bangladesh.
Philip Biswas is Executive Director of
Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF) and
President of Bangladesh Sustainable
Development Forum (BSDF) ,
Associated Organization of FIMARC.**

***Philip, could you please
introduce yourself ?***

My name is Philip Biswas and I am 58 years old. I am married and blessed with two sons. We belong to a small Catholic Community of Shimulia Parish under Khulna Catholic Diocese. I do belong to a marginalized farmer's family. My parents had five sons and three daughters and I am the youngest one. After completing my study I joined Caritas Bangladesh as Zonal Manager and later in 1982 we formed Rural Reconstruction Foundation to help to rural farmers community that we belonged.

My wife and me are the founders of Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF) and I am the Executive Director of it.



I am also the President of Bangladesh Sustainable Development Forum (BSDF) run under FIMARC platform. Currently there are 22 movements working together under this forum.

Could you tell us something about RRF ?

RRF is the acronym of Rural Reconstruction Foundation. It is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-political and non-sectarian, voluntary development organization that was established in March 20, 1982 aiming at promotion of socio-economic emancipation of the underprivileged in the Southwestern part of the country in Bangladesh.

The formation of RRF is based on the trust on the verse of Holy Gospel “ Love your neighbor as thyself” which aspires for a just society where every individual irrespective to race, color, caste and religion shall have equitable shares of resources in the community.

RRF strongly trusts on “Holistic Approach” for genuine development of the community through people’s active participatory process in planning, decision-making, implementation etc. to give concrete shape to

the concept of people’s active participation, RRF has been adopting non-directive participatory development approach in its working strategy.

What is the vision and mission of RRF ?

RRF envisages Bangladesh society to be economically productive and equitable, socially just, environmentally sound and genuinely democratic. The commitment of RRF is based on comprehensive development of underprivileged men, women, youths and children towards establishing a civil society with respect of full democracy, liberty, equality, justice, peace and solidarity.

To reach our objectives, we are organising different training programs, we are promoting development through small-scale income raising activities as well as opportunities for preventive, curative and nutritional health facilities ; we are also providing legal assistance to women against violation and injustices and credit supports for income raising activities for self-employment.



Bangladesh, 2002

Recently you got an award for a micro finance initiative, can you explain us why and how you started micro-finances programs ?

Bangladesh one of the poorest countries in the world. Being a very small territory- it has a large number of population over 150 millions that it can't feed three meals a day. The multidimensional aspect of poverty, especially the confrontations faced by the extreme poor requires a holistic approach in order to wrestle the challenge of the extreme poor. Development practitioners, policy-makers and academics alike will have to understand and address beyond household level factors, both market and non-market crea-

ting the poverty traps.

Moreover, they will have to understand household level resource based poverty and deprivation, transforming socio-political relationships at various levels that perpetuate poverty for the extreme poor.

If a person is poor, she/he tends to spend all available cash to meet up the basic needs. Poor households, with their limited amount of income face crises on a more frequent manner and need to gather money by taking loan from the available sources.

Having the scope to maintain savings accounts and access to loan gives these poor households the opportunity to accumulate small savings into large sums. In the long run, suitable and flexible financial services allow such households to hold back some money from consumption safely

Rural Reconstruction Foundation was awarded the best Microfinance Institution for 2006 as one of the most innovative local Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) in Bangladesh getting technical supports from Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF). These technical supports includes a wide area of providing training of staff and clients' capacity building, design and develop demand-driven financial services, effective implementation of program, analyzing financial statements, regular monitoring of target versus achievement and developing guideline and framework for achieving long-term organizational goals.

What are the elements that make your program successful ?

RRF believes that the poor are disadvantaged because the financial institutions and individuals with which they must deal are unreliable.

Therefore we have decided to publish written notes to our clients, informing them of the possibilities, warning them and training our staff to give them all facilities and information. RRF's clients are not beneficiaries and its work is not a program. The institution depends upon useful products and a commercial focus for its long-term survival as an institution providing demand driven financial services to its clients, especially extreme poor.



Bangladesh, 2002



The key to providing flexible financial services to the poor is proper cost control. Operating at very low cost is the only way to overcome the high relative transaction costs associated with small deposits and loans.

We are also convinced of the necessity of honesty. RRF places honesty and sincerity at the top of its priorities for hiring, and all employees must provide one personal guarantor of good standing before they may work in RRF. All RRF employees will respect our clients, young and old, successful or destitute, able and disabled, men or women. To succeed, we have to know and listen to our customer.

How does it concretely work ?

The poor can and do save. The fact that they do not often save in institutions is the result of a lack of opportunity, rather than the lack of desire or ability to save. To open an account, clients has to be a member of a group and may visit RRF Field Organizer. Any member can open account, but those under 15 years of age cannot take loans, and their guardian must accompany them. As soon as an account is opened the client will get a passbook with photograph in it.

The passbook is the receipt for all transactions, so client has to carefully look after it and make sure it is up to date and accurate at all times.

Clients are satisfied with RRF services because they have gone against the conventional delivery of microfinance. RRF provides door-step services and take away the stress and extra costs that usually comes.

RRF was started with a mission and that mission was to deliver financial services to the poor particularly to the extreme poor from what they had been abandoned for long. People, who live hand to mouth, sleep many nights in empty stomach, they inevitably started to believe that financial service is not for them, they would keep living in empty stomach. It is their fate. But RRF had different idea. RRF was started with a promise to be able to reach these broken heart people to serve with the financial services, to help them to lift up their self-believe that they also can dream for a better life, can buy some better food for their hungry families, can manage medicine for their children, can send them to school by using financial services.

However, RRF has to continue their effort to make people smiling who forgot to smile through continuous innovation and high level of efficiency. Time is not far for them to become market leader as local institution in the area of financial innovation and poverty outreach.

NDLR: We would like to heartily thank Philip for the interview that was much more complete than the text provided below. Due to lack of space in this voice, we just published some extracts. Would you be interested to receive more complete text, please just ask for the same to FIMARC secretariat.



Training session, Bangladesh 2002



General Information

The members of the Bureau met in Assesse from October 29th to 4th November. It was the occasion for the outgoing Ecclesiastical Assistant, Father Didier Lefebvre, to pass on the torch to the new Ecclesiastical Assistant, Father Abraam Maher. Besides the follow-up and the evaluation of the ongoing programs, the Bureau had to prepare the next EXCO meeting that would take place in Germany in April 2008.



*Bureau meeting
Assesse, November 2007*

The Asian coordinators met in India last November to prepare the Asian seminar that will take place in Bangladesh at the end of January 2008. The coordinators also took part to the exposure program organized by the INAG for 20 peasants from South Korea.

After a short stay in Thailand, accompanied by the coordinator of the region, the delegation could discover the achievements, especially in the field of organic agriculture, in the States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The Human Rights Council decided to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food for 3 years and asked him to analyze more particularly the means for overcoming the old and new obstacles to the realization of the right to food and to present his recommendations on the measures that could be taken at the national, regional and international level.

The Human Rights Council met for 3 weeks to hold the first part of its 6th session from September 10th to 28th. The second part will last one week, from December 10th to 14th, and include a demonstration on the occasion of the Human Rights International Day, on December 10th, which will mark, this year, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The International Conference of NGO's in contact with the UNESCO will be held in Paris from December 5th to 7th 2007. The Liaison Committee, elected during the Conference, meets at least 3 times a year to study a reflection theme related to the priorities of the UNESCO program.

The Secretary of State invited Catholic Non Governmental Organizations to participate to a 3 day Forum in Rome at the beginning of December. The objective of the Forum was to analyze the international situation, its difficulties and challenges in order to define the objectives and modalities of a future cooperation between the Holy See and these NGO's. The Apostolic Nuncio before the European Communities, Bishop Dupuy, invited the NGO's that have their headquarters in Belgium to a preparatory meeting on the Forum last 6th November.

Delegates from Indonesia, Madagascar, Uganda and India met for a week in India to work on the issue of vanilla. In 2004, the program, initiated in 2003 during the Social Forum in Mumbai, allowed 4 Indian peasants to experience the reality of small producers in Madagascar. Since then, contacts have developed and led to a meeting between these 4 countries. The objective of the meeting was to share the preparatory work on a serious study on production costs in order for them to get associated and set a fair price for their production. At the end of the meeting, the delegates created the "International Alliance of organic spices producers".



*Vanilla Program
Palai India, October 2007*





*INAG General Assembly,
Kanyakumari, India - October 2007*



PUBLIE PAR

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Editeur responsable

Daisy HERMAN, rue Jaumain 15 - 5330 ASSESSE (BELGIQUE)