

# VOICE OF THE RURAL WORLD

2010/02 N°98

« Less is More »  
Acting on the way  
towards decrease

**VMR**

**Rédacteur en chef:**

George Dixon  
FERNANDEZ

**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  
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highlights the rural world's life and activities of the member  
Movements belonging or not to the Federation

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*San Bernardino, Paraguay - March 2010*

*As we announced it already in the previous VMR, we will come back in this number 98 to the main topic of the world meeting that will be deepen in the course of the 4 next years, started in 2010 and that will be ended in 2014.*

*We propose you to better understand the concept of decrease, why it is necessary, in other words to put our reflection and this proposal in the current context and to reflect from our farmers and rural priorities, to make the links with food sovereignty and to make decrease a real political project.*

*But which kind of political project? The suggestion of our resource person, that we are totally sharing, is to built in the North as well as in the South autonomous, pleasant and austere societies.*

*For the North, decrease is not only an objective but a necessity. The societies in the South, even if they are totally impregnated in the ideology of growth, are not only, in their majority, societies of growth, but merely of survival, especially for the rural people and this is one element that can be look as difficult in this proposal. How those societies, sometimes at the boarder of subsistence, foresee the decrease? But...*

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*As a first tool to try to better understand all this, we propose you the vertueux circle of the 8R...Re evaluate, re conceptualize, re structure, redistribute, re localize, reutilize and recycle. You will find this guide in the dossier and we are sure that you will develop this with the grass root groups.*

*The aim of this, as we said, is to build societies with more autonomy, more justice and who are more human. We could formulate this a little bit differently while speaking of a new culture of freedom. In the cadred text that we are proposing you page 7, you'll have the opportunity to read an extract of an article written by David Choquehuanca, Minister of Foreign Affairs from Bolivia, who contributed to the redaction of the new constitution of his country and goes in the sense of what we are developing.*

*We wrote it in the beginning of this editorial; the theme of decrease or of happy growth is really in its beginning. More and more organizations of the civil society are starting to reflect the same, even is sometimes the theme is not call decrease but utilises other words for this project. Don't be afraid or start the debate on the words but better let's try to define together this political, economical and cultural project that will allow all of us to live in a better, fairer and sustainable world. All this work will surely lead to the definition of new parameters to measure the growth or the de growth or any different from of growth that take into account the satisfaction of the basic needs, of welfare, of access to the information...*

*All your interpellations, questions, suggestions are most welcome. We would be happy to read the same and continue the dialogue with you on this topic.*

*Yours sincerely*

*George Dixon FERNANDEZ  
Secretary general*



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## **« Less is More » Acting on the way towards decrease**

*In VMR issue 97, FIMARC World Meeting in Paraguay, from 10<sup>th</sup> until 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010, was largely echoed. The theme of that world meeting was:*

*'Decrease, Cheerful Simplicity,  
A Way Towards Solidarity Economies',  
with 'Less is More' as a subtitle.*

*In this dossier, the intention is to better understand the decrease concept, and we give practical action proposals. It will be up to every movement, organization or group to take up this theme and implement it.*

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## «EVERYTHING MUST BE REGULATED BY THE MARKET»

At the World Meeting, before dealing with the practical issue of decrease, participants were pushed to think about what capitalism is. Some aspects presented by M.M. Bartolomé Ruiz.

(Sentences in inverted commas are Bartolomé Ruiz's quotes):

One of the principles of capitalism is that 'human life and all the life on earth are simple means of production, following a logic that looks for profit. Private interests prevail over public or collective interests, individual over community, individual good comes before common good.'



## Growing inequalities between rich and poor

One of the consequences of capitalism in action is that 'individual selfishness (personal interest) is the regulating principle for social relations. Unlimited build-up of personal or individual wealth is the engine for economic initiative. Social inequality is natural, and it should be considered as a positive factor to incentive the economic initiative. And the natural principle that regulates this process is the market.'



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In other words, it is the law of every man for himself, and may the strongest win. Everyone is invited to develop their own personal capacities, not at the service of common good, but for their own profit and well-being. It is the continuous build-up of wealth and the development of social inequalities, widening as a consequence the gap between the rich and the poor.

One of this system contradictions is indeed this widening of social inequalities. Because 'the logic of unlimited build-up inevitably leads to an economic and political oligarchy. Democracy is adamant; indeed, the world's government is led by an oligarchy.' (Oligarchy: select and privileged group).

Another contradiction should also be underlined: 'Unlimited goods production is incompatible with the limited natural resources of our planet. It is not possible to generalize the consuming model of the rich to all mankind. It should also be underscored that the market – and its so-called natural rules – is far from being something natural; it is an ideology that the power cleverly manipulates.'

### **Reincorporate the agriculture**

A good life is to reincorporate the agriculture within the communities, to recover the ways of live in community as per example the work on the land by cultivating to cover the basic needs for subsistence. This is in this way that the devolvement of land to the community should be realize in order to (re) generate local economies

*David Choquehuanca - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia*

### **Subordinated rural and farming world**

One of the consequences of this system constantly looking for maximum profit is the emergence of speculation, financial capitalism (earning money for the sake of it). It is also reducing the role of the State in all fields, since personal initiative is supposed to regulate social life.

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All this leads to the current crisis in the global economic system, with the negative consequences for the poorest populations.

Other consequences are visible today: poor people's migrations to rich countries. The latter protect themselves by putting up police barriers at their borders. This gives rise to social violence, hunger riots, fanaticism.

In such a global context, the rural world, which has its own logics, is not isolated from current capitalism. 'The market logic impregnates social ties in the farming and rural world. It is a network that covers, threatens and leads the rural world: productions are listed on the Stock Market; capitalists buy and sell seeds, land, machinery, etc. The multinationals network moulds rural people's behaviours to model them to the globalized consuming models.'

*Questions suggested to movements and groups:*

- *What are the consequences of the capitalistic system in your country?*
- *How do rural people and farmers react to the aggression of their ways of life and culture by the capitalistic system?*
- *What does your movement or organization do to help rural people to analyze and understand the stakes related to life in society?*





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## UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF DECREASE

How can we get out of this economic system that crushes everyone, and particularly the poorest? FIMARC, in its reflection based on food sovereignty and social and solidarity economies, suggests a reflection and action towards decrease.

At the World Meeting in Paraguay, during the preparatory works, two points of view, contradictory at first sight, were expressed: ‘This word, “decrease” sounds false to our ears. For us, it is an insult to the most destitute that do not have the minimum...’ (ACAR – Switzerland). ‘Economic growth must stop being the foundation for political decisions. Other values are taken on board in decrease. It is about questioning the economic system in which growth is an essential requirement.’ (ACRF – Belgium).



### Food sovereignty, a basis for decrease

Actually, says Castor M.M. Bartolomé Ruiz, this word of ‘decrease brings ahead three challenges for our action. Structural changes are necessary, in the economic and political system, to achieve global justice. Submissive behaviours that make us obedient to the system must be freed; the challenge is to build autonomous personalities and consciousness that use the other’s existence as an ethical reference, and not only individual success.

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The third challenge is to change our cultural behaviours, into a culture of otherness (acknowledging the other as a person), of austerity, of non-growth (or decrease).

With regard to structural changes, 4 possibilities are suggested: to stop producing non-essential goods aiming at increasing profit, but producing for the essential needs of all at the global level; being done with short life-cycle goods production, to the advantage of products available for all and at an affordable price; the notion of common good must prevail over individual interests, which questions private property of goods and assets; democracy must be experienced at all economic decision-making levels, from local to global, with a renewal in governance methods. Finally, this rationale of decrease is based on people's food sovereignty.

### **Challenges for the action**

- Structural changes inside the politico-economical system in order to reach a global justice
- To free the subjectivities from the symbolic hawsers that maintain them in docility facing the system, by giving us self as challenge to built autonomous subjects who have as references the ethics and the respect of the difference of the others.
- Cultural changes: culture of respect of the differences, of austerity of no growth ( or decrease).

*Castor M. M. Bartolomé Ruiz – World Meeting FIMARC 2010*

### **A « political » project**

In the field of culture, recognizing the other as a person is essential. 'What I am depends a lot on the relation with the others. Caring about the other forces us to get out of ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to put ourselves in the other's shoes.



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Caring about the other is an essential requirement for human beings. We all have to answer the question put to Cain: 'Where is your brother?'.

Austerity is a positive attitude, a creative one that teaches us to live and be wise enough to choose what brings us some quality of life and not quantities of things. Finally, freedom culture pushes us to free ourselves from constraints imposed by the dominating economic system, to decide by ourselves (see text in box).

'Growth' only counts material wealth produced (the famous GDP – Gross Domestic Product). 'One must get out of this economy, and get in decrease society: making sure that GDP decreases and quality of life grows for all. It is about meeting basic needs for all.'

'Decrease is a 'political' project. It consists in building, both in the North and in the South, friendly, autonomous and austere societies. In the North, decrease is not only an objective but a necessity. Societies in the South, even if they are imbued with growth ideology, are not, for most of them, growth societies, but survival societies, among others for rural people.'

*Questions suggested to movements and groups:*

- *How do you understand the word decrease?*
- *What are the positive or negative aspects to implement it?*
- *Which means do you use to trigger a reflection and action amongst rural people towards decrease?*



*Rm10 - Atyra, Paraguay*

## **ACTING TOGETHER TO LIVE BETTER**

The question raised is to know how to get out of the dominating ideology, which conditions us every day?

Do the poor have the right to decrease?

Castor Bartolomé Ruiz explains the '8-Rs virtuous circle':

- **Re-evaluating and re-conceptualizing:** hence re-thinking education, since the learned concepts in the system block our spirit, and prevent us from seeing other opportunities;
- **Re-structuring and redistributing:** this presupposes a change in values and a radical change in social ties of production and distribution;
- **Re-locating:** producing goods and services locally, that meet local needs and that are funded through local savings; when one takes into account the social and environmental costs of transport, many activities could be re-located; the renewable energies sector is adapted to the principle of local production/consumption.
- **Reducing, re-using and recycling:** everything must be thought about from the 'simplicity' angle.



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Then comes the question: Does the South – or rather the poor and poor countries – have the right to decrease? Two aspects should be considered to answer this question. On the one hand, rich countries based their development on technology and entrepreneurship; but also on slavery and looting resources in Southern countries. On the other hand, it is clear that decrease in rich countries is a pre-requisite to have any form of alternative in the South and in poor countries.

In this dynamics, ‘revitalizing local democracy is a tool on the way towards calm decrease. The ‘decrease theology’ implies demystifying the idols of universal consuming religion, for which millions of lives have been sacrificed.

### **For a new culture of freedom**

- Is not free the one who makes what pleases him, but the one who knows how to detect what he likes;
- Is free the one who learns how to desire the minimum of what is necessary to gain the maximum of autonomy
- Is free the one who breaks loose in a critical way from consumerist advertising by putting things in his service and who is not in the service of these things.
- Is free the one who chooses the quality of life in spite of the quantities of goods;
- Is free the one who manages his wishes and who is not governed by the same, to command to his will and is not guided by external implements;
- Is free the one who makes time a way of life and non a productive good.

No one knows being new born, how to be free. The freedom has to be conquest by the training of self-government. To be free, it is necessary to learn how to govern its impulses and desires and not to be guided by them.

*Castor M. M. Bartolomé Ruiz – World Meeting FIMARC 2010*

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## Going to the roots of our motivations and spirituality

A certain number of practical suggestions were made:

- Meeting the essential needs of all human beings, while respecting the environment;
- Giving priority to life: 'Living well is looking for friendliness in the community, where all members care about the others. The important thing is life, along with looking for a simpler life, on the way to harmony with nature, with the aim to save the planet and to give priority to mankind.' (David Choquehuanca, Bolivian political representative);
- Looking for agreements through consensus, respecting differences: It is about deepening democracy, to make decisions together, without silencing the other; listening to the other, respecting their differences and own wealth;
- Living complementarily, which uses the principle according to which all beings living on the planet complement each other; this is then also about looking for striking a balance with nature; all this refers to a life in society that is fair and without any exclusion;
- Agriculture was made to feed the population; it is about implementing food sovereignty, which enables to meet local needs of the populations and to develop local economies; this also implies to protect farmers' or farmers' seeds, and thus to reject Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs); it is also about using water properly for everyone's sake;
- Living well requires respecting and empowering women, who among others are in charge of giving life and protecting all fruit of Mother Earth (the Pachamama); they must also find their place in the whole organization of the community and society.

These action suggestions lead us to ask questions on the reasons for our motivations and our spirituality, which make life and everything we do meaningful.

From the Apostolic Nuncio of Paraguay to  
His Excellency  
Mgr Claudio Giménez Medina  
Bishop of Caacupé

Excellency,

Foreseeing the Worldwide Meeting of the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements of (FIMARC) which will be celebrated in Atyra, from 10 to 25 of March, the Secretary of State requested me to transmit you the following message:

*HIS HOLINESS BENOIT XVI HEARTILY GREETES THE ORGANIZERS AND THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORLD MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RURAL ADULT CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS (FIMARC) AND MOTIVATES THEM TO MAKE USE OF THOSE DAYS OF WORK AND REFLECTION BEEING AN ADVANTAGEOUS OPPORTUNITY TO DEEPEN THE PROFOUND VALUES OF THE GOSPEL AND PONTIFICAL MAGISTER WHICH ENLIVEN THIS ORGANIZATION AND ARE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ITS GENEROUS AND HELPFUL ACTION.*

*THEREFORE, THE POPE RAISES HIS PRAYERS TO THE LORD SO THAT THE WISH OF ALL ITS MEMBERS IN ALL PARTS (OF THE WORLD) BE SALT OF THE EARTH AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD, AND SO THAT THEIR CHRISTIAN AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT BE CONSOLIDATE, AND, ENCOURAGED BY THE WORD OF CHRIST AND IN SYNTHONY WITH THE LIVING TRADITION OF THE CHURCH, THEY CONTINUE LEADING CONCRETE INITIATIVES OF SOLIDARITY AND AUGMENT THEIR PROXIMITY CLOSE TO THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND POPULATION.*

*WITH THOSE FEELINGS, THE HOLY FATHER, REQUESTING THE INTERCESSION OF THE HOLY MARY, STAR OF HOPE, CONVEY TO ALL THE PRESENT PERSONS, THE APOSTOLIC BLESSING, FULL OF HOLY GRACES.*

CARDINAL TARCISIO BERTONE  
SECRETARY OF STATE OF HIS HOLLINESS

While transmitting you the august message, it is my pleasure to confirm you, Excellency, the testimony of my consideration and my respect in Christ.

Eliseo Antonio Ariotti  
Apostolic Nuncio



*Oil painting - Marianela Center, Atyra (Paraguay)*



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International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements

**Responsible Editor**

George Dixon FERNANDEZ, rue Jaumain 15 - 5330 ASSESSE (BELGIQUE)