

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR 2005

In 1946, John R. Mott, the founder of Agricultural Missions and Nobel Laureate for Peace for that year, in his Nobel lecture stated:

“There is an irresistible demand to strengthen the leadership of the constructive forces of the world at the present momentous time. This is true because of stupendous, almost unbelievable changes which have taken place in recent years on every continent.” Remember, Dr. Mott was speaking in 1946 and the adjectives he chose to describe the rate of change in his time ... Stupendous, almost unbelievable. I wonder how he would describe the changes that are taking place in the current time when we contemplate the fact that over 75% of all documented human inventions, throughout recorded history occurred in the last 50 years!! The changes of today are occurring much faster than in the times of Dr. Mott. Many of us have no memory of 1946, when Dr. Mott made his remarks I quoted above, but we do not need to do so in order to grasp the magnetite of change and its impact on humanity. Just think of the changes in communication and transportation of just the past decade or two and the discoveries that are being announced every day and this will give us an idea of how change itself has changed.

Dr. Mott continued:

“The summons (for constructive leadership) has come to wage a better planned, more aggressive, and more triumphant warfare against the age long enemies of mankind – ignorance, poverty, disease, strife and sin.”

Fifty years after Dr. Mott said those words we still have those same age long enemies of mankind with us –ignorance, poverty, disease strife and sin. Arguably, the situation has not improved for the vast majority of the world's population that has doubled since 1946. While global wealth has increased, so have the rates of global poverty. The only conclusion is that the “rich gets richer and the poor gets poorer.”

It is notable that Dr. Mott did not mention injustice as one of the enemies of humankind. Perhaps in his day this term was not used to describe one of the main enemies of humankind. If Dr. Mott were to be resurrected in this time, he would find the same age long enemies of humankind plus a few more. But I think what would surprise him most is how sophisticated we have become in creating and perpetuating means and methods that contribute to and strengthen these age long enemies of humanity. He would be surprised to find global free trade and the WTO and more surprised to actually find out how they contribute to these age long enemies of humanity. He would be surprised at the developments in biotechnology but perhaps more surprised to find out that genes can be patented and become private property and farmers can be hauled before the courts for saving and exchanging seeds. He would be surprised to find out that knowledge –even traditional knowledge– can be appropriated and patented, but even more surprised that medicinal plants and knowledge used for generations have become private property. He would be surprised to see the state of the world's water resources, but even more surprised to find out that water is being privatized. And he would be surprised to find out that the market is God and the market is sin. He would be surprised to find out that through global free trade, global food companies are aggravating the age long enemies of humanity by dominating markets, buying up seed firms and forcing down the prices of farm products from grains to tea, coffee, bananas and milk, to name a few. He would be surprised to find out that thirty companies now account for a third of the world's processed food; five companies now control 75% of the world's trade in grain, two companies control 50% of the banana trade and that Wal-Mart controls 40% of the retail food sector in Mexico and on and on and on. He would find out that free trade is not fair trade and the poor, individuals and countries, are the losers, the ones that suffer.



Unlike the era of Dr. Mott, the lives of people are inextricably linked no matter where they live. The concept of the "global village" has become a reality and what farmers do in the Midwest of the United States has direct and almost immediate impact on farmers and rural communities in just about any country. Agricultural Policy of the United States and the European Union affect just about every farmer in the world in mostly negative ways.

The context in which we work today is much more complex than in the era of Dr. Mott. And this complexity is a reflection of the multitude of ways that have been created to support national, regional and individual self interest and transfer wealth from the poor to the rich and exacerbate the age long enemies of humanity.

During the 75 years of its existence, Agricultural Missions has and continues to address these age long enemies of humanity. In response to a continually changing context, the organization has changed its program emphasis and modalities of work. But despite the changes, both external and internal, one thing has remained constant: OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE FOR RURAL PEOPLES. This has been affirmed again and again throughout our history, at the various times that the leadership and partners gathered to consider the future of the organization.

There is no escaping the pervasive influence of globalization in all its forms. It dominates the context in which we work even as it dominates the lives of our constituents. We are within it and part of it. Globalization defines the major context of our ministry and influences our programs as we seek to alter its course and deal with its impacts. We here are in the fortunate or unfortunate position of being aware of this process and how it impacts us as individuals and as a society. This knowledge confers upon us the responsibility of challenging the injustices of the global system. We recognize that these injustices are not new. What is new is that they are fast becoming codified in law, backed by international treaties and trade agreements and forced upon all nations. There is little doubt that these agreements and the structures that oversee them are being developed by the industrialized nations for their benefit first. The hope is that the "trickle down" theory would result in eventual benefit to all nations and all peoples. But so far this has not proven to be true. What we have seen is the supplanting of democracy and decision-making at the local level as corporate interest and rights are elevated above those of citizens. We are witnessing the "race to the bottom" to see who can produce goods and services for the least cost regardless of the human and environmental costs. We are witnessing pollution and environmental degradation that threaten the future of humanity.

During 2004 Agricultural Missions continued to accompany and support those confronting the negative impacts of globalization and challenging the injustices of the system even as its terms are being negotiated. While we cannot claim that the dragon has been stopped in its tracks, but we can certainly claim that its speed has been considerably slowed. Global grassroots opposition has made considerable progress in slowing the pace of negotiation and getting the attention of governments as they negotiate these agreements. Emboldened by considerable grassroots support and the education and advocacy of civil society, the governments of developing nations are successfully standing up the industrialized nations in the negotiation of various aspects of trade agreements. Even in the United States, opposition is growing to the free trade agenda, driven by the record trade deficit, outsourcing and the loss of jobs and concerns of competitiveness of small businesses. Opposition is even growing in the US Congress, albeit for reasons unrelated to the global good. The FTAA and CAFTA are in trouble and even the WTO is under stress as nations protect narrow national interests that conflict with a just vision of global free trade.

As this movement grows and presses for greater participation and openness, increased democracy and social justice, Agricultural Missions continued to be there to accompany and support these movements



through facilitation of networking and communication, education and advocacy and technical and logistical support. One of the challenges we face at this time is to support the struggles against the injustices of the global system while trying to ameliorate the impacts. It is a struggle that must be waged on several fronts at the same time. While we support the efforts to change the system, we also provide material support to those affected and those trying to find viable alternatives.

While the Annual Report for 2004 will give you some specific examples of the forms of accompaniment and support we provided, I would like to highlight some details that may not be included in the report.

PROGRAMS

The staff continued to work within the framework of the three major program areas as indicated in the 1993 recommendations of the Organizational Structure Task Force:

- Consciousness – Raising, Witness and Advocacy for Future Direction in Rural Mission,
- The Rural Network Program and
- The Rural Sustainability Program that includes: 1) Gender and Development, 2) Earth, Culture and Spirituality, 3) Rural Legal Assistance, 4) Rural Training, 5) Appropriate Technology and 6) Social and Racial Justice.

We continued to place special emphasis on the program for Consciousness – Raising within our church and community based constituencies, with both staff and board participating in numerous denominational, ecumenical and community activities in the US as well as overseas. The Consciousness – Raising Program in conjunction with the Rural Network Program constitute the major efforts in education for advocacy and are responsible for the major portion of staff time and financial resources.

Some major events and activities under these two programs in which AMI staff and Board participated included:

- Board Study Session on Water held at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico
- Campaign against the practices of the International Financial Institutions in Washington, DC in conjunction with other organizations.
- Via Campesina general and youth congresses in Brazil
- Joining Hands Against Hunger Campaign of the PCUSA
- Peace and Justice Conference of the PCUSA
- Schools of Mission of the Women's Division of the UMC
- Agrarian Ecumenical Study Tour to Cuba
- Impact of globalization on small farmers at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives
- Globalization and women farmers at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

Through the Rural Sustainability Program, we continued to address issues of justice on several fronts, to mention a few:

- I should begin on a positive note by again mentioning the victory for farm workers in their long struggle against Mt. Olive Pickle Company. AMI was among the first to endorse the boycott and working with the National Farm Worker Ministry, brought the issue to the National Council of Churches that also endorsed the boycott and worked to bring the parties to the table.
- Our staff worked closely with our host, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in their struggle against Taco Bell, in their efforts to improve the lives of farm workers who harvest tomato used by the restaurant chain. The CIW is trying to pressure Taco Bell into negotiating a three-way contract similar to the Mt. Olive contract. Our support for CIW includes logistics and planning for public witness events and the "truth tour." We have also assisted with educational activities in the churches.

- Our commitment to gender equity continued to be unwavering and is central to all our programs and activities. We supported networking activities and events in Latin America, education and advocacy aimed at changing the structural causes of gender inequity in Africa and challenging gender discrimination through the political process, and economic activities of women aimed at improving their standards of living and their status in society.
- Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the patenting of seeds present a very serious threat to the livelihoods of farmers, food security of many communities, environmental integrity and possibly human health. During the year, we continued to oppose the patenting of seeds and the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) provisions of treaties relating to seed saving, traditional medicines and traditional knowledge. We provided education on these issues and supported opposition to the corporations and the actions of regulatory agencies that do not protect the public interest.
- The lands and other resources of rural and indigenous peoples continue to be appropriated and stolen by both “legal” means and by force. AMI has long supported the rights of indigenous peoples and rural communities to protect their lands, water and other natural resources and this continued to be so during 2004. We supported several local organizations and movements through education, advocacy, facilitating legal services and organized opposition to government’s actions or inaction that threaten the resources of rural communities.
- We provided direct support to 36 partners activities in 18 countries, including those supported through designated funding. Staff also conducted a total of 30 network visits with partner organizations and institutions in 11 countries.

IMPACT

In most instances it is very difficult to quantify the impact of work that we do. I think of AMI as a mango tree growing in the commons, one like I knew as a boy. We can quantify the number of mangoes it produced; we can count the numbers of people who picked mangoes for themselves. It is more difficult to quantify those who got mangoes picked by others. It is difficult to quantify the impact on nutrition. It is probably impossible to tell how many seeds from this tree grew in other places and how many people benefit from them. I think you got the idea. Having said that I can still give some numbers. Over 4,000 persons attended workshops, conferences and other events at which AMI staff made presentations or participated in the organizing. A total of approximately 6,000 families benefited from the support we provide our partners for community based activities aimed at supporting sustainable livelihoods and improving the capacity of local organizations.

And what have we learned from these travels and interactions with partners? One important thing we have learned it that despite the negative impacts of globalization, life must go on and partners are crafting alternatives and developing ways to cope. They are building local institutions for governance and education, they are building local economies based on their own initiatives and resources and they are becoming increasingly vocal and militant in their opposition to injustice, despite the risks. And the risks there are. In the post 9-11 world, people who dare to stand up for their rights run the risk of being branded as terrorists and being treated as such.

We have learned that our partners appreciate the mutual respect and the special nature of the relationships that they have with AMI – relationships that have been cultivated through personal contact and time spent in communities. We have learned that the leadership and accompaniment we provide are sources of inspiration and hope far beyond that which we ourselves imagined. We have learned that despite the special relationships that exist between us, these partners do not depend on us and their institutions, organizations and struggles can and will go on even if we were not there.