



## BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCY



## Message from the Board President, Rev. Leo Woodberry

Despite many challenges, 2019 was another amazing year in the long history of Agricultural Missions, Inc. We continue our work with farmers throughout the US South along the Black Belt as well as globally. In 2019, we were able to join Climate Action Network International in Costa Rica to begin a strategic planning process for this organization, which consists of 1,300 nongovernmental organizations in 120 countries. We also visited several of the villages that are involved in our West African initiative.



*Rev. Leo Woodberry, Board President,  
Agricultural Missions, Inc.*

We were able to visit villages in Sierra Leone and Liberia and see the wonderful progress that has been made in terms of putting in community wells, community pumps, and seed barns and helping people grow their own gardens so they can expand their cash crops and provide their families with diets that are much more nutritious. This will allow many children who could not previously attend school to now pay the costs of their uniforms and books.

In addition, we know that there have been growing turmoil and challenges around the immigration policies in the United States. So we visited the state of Arizona in order to talk with lawyers at the Florence legal services organization. We talked with former detainees who were held in immigration detention centers. We also spoke with some amazing organizers who try to ensure that the human rights, as well as the civil and legal rights, of our immigrating brothers and sisters are held and maintained.

This is important because we can see the ties between racism, globalization, and immigration. In 2020, we will be releasing a study and a position paper. Agricultural Missions, Inc., was only able to continue to do this most needed work during 2019 because of your continued support. As we grow, we are dealing with yet another level of concern in the form of COVID-19, which can have devastating impacts on farmers around the world, as restaurants are closed down and farmers no longer have markets for their products. And as family members and farmers themselves become ill due to COVID-19, they will no longer be able to harvest their crops.

The United Nations is predicting that the spectrum of starvation looms over so many communities and nations. “As the number of infections in vulnerable countries grows – among populations who are already malnourished, weak and vulnerable to disease – a ‘[crisis within a crisis](#)’ could emerge,” says Dominique Burgeon, Director of the Emergency and Resilience Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). We are asking for your continued support to assist those who are in need.

Agricultural Missions, Inc., is a Christian-centered ecumenical organization that remembers the Christian edict of Jesus Christ written by the Apostle John in 1 John 3:18: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in-deed and in-truth.” So, God bless you, stay safe, and let us continue to move forward together.

Yours truly,  
Rev. Leo Woodberry

## Message from the Executive Director, Mikhiela Sherrod



Dr. Mikhiela Sherrod, Executive Director, Agricultural Missions, Inc.

Dear Friends,

Looking back on 2019 brings to my mind one word – *transformation*. The year started out rather simply but quickly defined itself as one in which AMI was uniquely positioned to provide context for and raise awareness of challenges facing farmers and rural communities experiencing unprecedented devastation and transitions related to climate change. Also of urgent concern to AMI were immigrants who were suffering relentlessly from racist attacks and policies that separate, criminalize, and disenfranchise families seeking asylum or a way to make a living.

We reaffirmed our decision early on that the voices of farmers, rural communities, immigrants, and people of color would not go unheard. We participated in climate networks such as US Climate Action Network (USCAN) and Climate Reality Project. We met with AMI board members and partners in Phoenix, Arizona, to learn firsthand about the legal and human toll the war on immigrants is taking on families and advocates and its intersectionality with racism, globalization, and climate change. We visited our partners in Africa and raised funds to support unemployed Africa youth in developing and launching agricultural-related businesses. In all of this work, we remained steadfast in our commitment to learn, advocate, and participate in solidarity with our partners.

Our role has and always will be to educate and advocate on behalf of our partners. The current shift and refocusing on how to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate is an underlying and urgent thread in all of our work. From Africa to Asia, from Central and South America to North America, no one has escaped the changing climate. Farmers and communities are suffering, having to move, rebuild, or farm on higher land due to floods, rising temperatures, and devastating storms. This has an impact on access to food, jobs, and housing. Another challenge comes with the decline of the fossil fuel industry and expansion of renewable energy. While this change, if done right, is preferable for the potentially positive environmental impact, it also brings a potential danger for our partners if policy and industry standards aren't just and inclusive of marginalized, low-income, and rural communities as is often the case. We have much work to do to educate and engage our partner organizations and communities so that we can design and advocate for a framework that allows for a just transition that centers racial equity and justice in its provisions.

We invite new and long-standing partners to join with us in advocating for immigrants, farmers, and rural communities in the US and globally. In the words of Fredrick Douglass, "Power concedes nothing without a demand," and together we can make those demands a reality.

In continued solidarity for all who advocate on behalf of justice,

Mikhiela Sherrod, Executive Director  
Agricultural Missions, Inc.

## AMI'S VISION

To become a leading ecumenical organization recognized for standing with and connecting rural networks and faith communities in challenging the injustices of globalization.

## AMI'S MISSION

To support people of all faiths and spiritual consciousness around the world in the struggle to end the poverty and injustice that affect rural communities, and work toward the creation of a peaceful and sustainable society.

### AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC. PROGRAMS

#### Rural Network

Facilitates exchange of communication, personnel and knowledge among peoples' organizations.

#### Consciousness-Raising, Witness and Advocacy for Future Direction in Rural Mission

Education and training among representatives of member denominations and agencies, and North American church and community-based constituencies, leading to advocacy and support on issues important to AMI constituencies.

#### Rural Sustainability

- Gender and Development
- Earth, Culture and Spirituality
- Appropriate Technology
- Social and Racial Justice
- Rural Legal Assistance
- Training

#### Capacity Restoration of Community Organizations Affected by Disasters

Assists partners in restoration and rebuilding of their capabilities to function effectively following disasters and to address specific issues of injustice, resulting from or exacerbated by disasters.



*Safe water for the first time - Newly constructed well in Makondeh Village, Bombali District, Sierra Leone.*



*AMI team members listen to the members of the Matopie Farmers Group. Matopie Village, Tonkolili District, Sierra Leone*



## THE WEST AFRICA INITIATIVE

**THE WEST AFRICA INITIATIVE** continues to make progress in improving the lives of rural farmers and their families in Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the end of 2019, there were 24 groups in Liberia with a total of 700 members, while in Sierra Leone there were 27 groups with 800 members. In previous years, AMI has worked with our in-country partners to improve economic and food security, health and nutrition, and access to clean water. The organizational capacity of local partners was also improved, and now the West Africa Initiative (WAI) of Liberia and the Village to Village Federation in Sierra Leone are managing the implementation of the program in their respective countries.

In 2019, the WAI program focused on implementing the Youth Agriculture Program (YAP) in three selected communities in each country. The initiative engages youth in establishing sedentary farms using improved farming practices that are environmentally sustainable; this is instead of the widely used shifting cultivation practices that contribute to deforestation and loss of biodiversity. These groups will serve as models for extending this initiative to other groups in the future.

During the year, an AMI staff/board team, consisting of board president Rev. Leo Woodberry, executive director Dr. Mikhiela Sherrod, guest Loretta Slater, and program coordinator Winston Carroo, visited selected communities in both countries. During this visit, team members visited several groups to view their work, discuss their accomplishments and challenges, and interact socially. The groups and communities expressed enthusiastic appreciation to the team for the visit and support. ■

## WEEK OF COMPASSION

On July 20 to July 24, AMI attended the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) biannual General Assembly held in Des Moines, Iowa; it was themed “Abide in Me.” The Week of Compassion – the relief, refugee, and development agency of the denomination – is a long-term supporter of AMI’s international programs in capacity building. The assembly offered opportunities for supported organizations to host booths as a way for the church’s congregations to connect with the work done in the United States and internationally. AMI’s executive director, Dr. Mikhiela Sherrod, attended AMI’s booth at the Assembly and attended the Week of Compassion’s Dinner for its partners, which highlighted select organizations. ■



GENERAL ASSEMBLY THEMED:  
**ABIDE IN ME**



## **THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF GLOBALIZATION, CLIMATE CHANGE, RACISM AND IMMIGRATION 2019 STUDY SESSION – PHOENIX, ARIZONA**



*AMI Study Session participants visit with Florence Project lawyers and social workers.*

The purpose of the 2019 Study Session was to help those in attendance understand the intersectionality of racism, globalization, climate change, and immigration. We hoped to achieve the following objectives:

- Contextualize the impact of racism and globalization over the past decades.
- Understand the historical racism underlying practices and policies contributing to current conditions in climate change and immigration.
- Examine current and proposed peoples' movements and policies that positively and negatively impact immigration, climate change, globalization, and racism.
- Identify policies and strategies that can secure support and buy-in across borders.
- Provide space for youth and emerging leaders to assume leadership roles in identifying solutions and engagement strategies for a younger demographic.
- Identify goals and an international network of leaders and activists working collectively to implement a holistic approach to these issues.



When we planned and were together for the Study Session, none of us could have predicted what was just around the corner for the US and the world: a pandemic. This virus is no respecter of race or classes either, but we should be outraged to observe that deeply rooted realities of systemic racism and economic disparities mean people of color and poor people are the most severely impacted. In her opening remarks at the Study Session, doctoral candidate Sarra Tekola of Arizona State University said of climate change, “Those most affected are those least responsible, and those least affected are those most responsible.”

Back in November, we had hope that one day soon we would come to a time of reckoning in this country with the centuries-old patterns, structures, and cultures of racism. Ms. Tekola called for that in addressing climate change, with its roots in colonialism, always accompanied by racism. Todd Miller, an author and journalist, pointed out the mass migrations to be expected due to climate change and its economic consequences, migration mostly of poor people and people of color. Our panel of people who visit immigrants in detention centers emphasized how racist policies of exclusion are fundamental to the harsh, often unfair treatment by ICE and the courts. People at Puente – a human rights movement and one of the sites we visited – underscored the racism underlying community issues of policing, education, and access to health care. They talked about the “attrition strategy against migrants,” and we are now seeing this strategy on steroids. The walls Mr. Miller discussed are getting higher, and the legal walls are more effective than the much-touted border wall in keeping people out and forcing people to leave. Let us take lessons from this moment to apply to future conversation and action concerning climate change and how it intersects with racism, globalization, and immigration.



PUEENTE Headquarters, two staff members speakers.

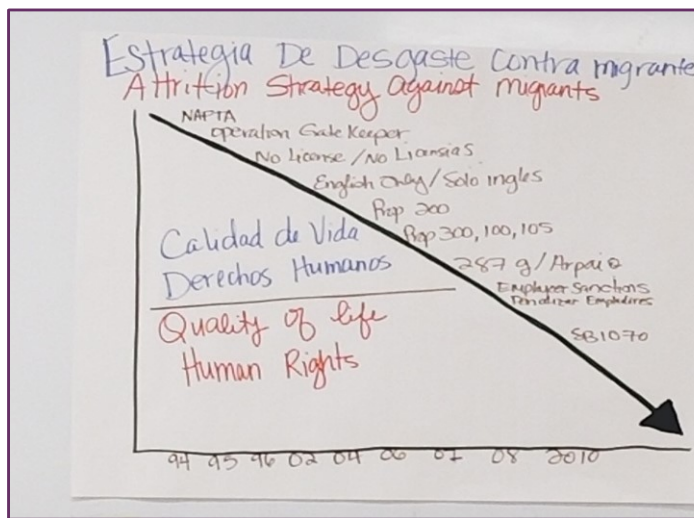


Diagram depicting “attrition strategy against immigrants.”

Two students - one from Arizona State University and one from Tuskegee University – are in the process of analyzing the study sessions proceedings and determining if objectives were accomplished. The results will be published and used by Agricultural Missions as the framework for launching a semi-formal international network of leaders and activists to set long and short term goals as well as list of proposed activities necessary to accomplish those goals. ■



**Franciscan Renewal Center**  
Peace. Renewal. Good.

AMI held its Annual Board Meeting at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, AZ November 19-23, 2019.



## CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK STRATEGY PLANNING MEETING IN COSTA RICA



*US Attendees Representing USCAN*

AMI's executive director joined six members of USCAN, the US node of CAN, at the CAN strategic planning meeting from March 18 to March 21 in Costa Rica; members of nodes representing other countries also attended. The meetings aimed to discuss and agree on: 1) the CAN International network's key strategic objectives for 2019, including aligning national and international goals and activities; 2) collaborative activities around key moments such as the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Climate Action Summit, COP25 (25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)), and other events in 2020; 3) a collaborative approach to achieving increased ambition in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) by 2020 toward a 1.5 degrees pathway; and 4) new areas of interest and diplomatic levers for ambitious climate policies.

Interim CAN Secretariat, Tasneem Essop, opened the meeting by expressing a desire to shift the network toward an equitable framework. This was reinforced by the USCAN attendees, who grounded discussions over four days in equity-centered, action-oriented transformative change that respected, uplifted, and integrated the prominent role of grassroots movements within the CAN framework. This led to what became known as "The Big Shake-Up," resulting in a committee of USCAN and other attendees gathering prior to the session start time to strategize how CAN could make this shift toward transformational change. The weeklong meeting concluded with key strategic objectives and next steps, which centered on grassroots organizing and inclusion, linking national and international activities and goals for 2019 and 2020. ■



# ARM IN ARM

## BUILDING A DECENTRALIZED MOVEMENT



*ARM IN ARM Planning Team*

AMI executive director Mikhiela Sherrod joined a group of about 14 members of USCAN committed to participating in a yearlong intentional effort to study, discuss, and debate movement theories and strategies. The planning group's motivation was grounded in a sense that nothing we were doing in our respective work felt powerful enough to grapple with the magnitude of the climate crisis and racial injustice, including what was needed to face it and move the needle.

Out of this emerged the DNA for what would become Arm in Arm. The purpose of Arm in Arm is to **organize our communities to ignite a transformational era that ends the climate crisis by centering economic and racial justice**. It aims to engage 3.5% of the population in the US and build toward massive decentralized escalated actions through 2023, including calling for mass work stoppages and boycotts when the moment is ripe. These actions, known as **disruptive humanitarianism**, are a form of civil disobedience where the nonviolent disruptive actions provide a benefit/s to others or to a community. Arm in Arm works through autonomous local hubs in a distributed organizing model with existing organizational supporters provided by its National Core Support Team. Hub members agree to a set of principles and are encouraged to highlight local issues in their actions in addition to joining national and local movements aligned with Arm in Arm's principles. Anyone can participate by starting a hub or joining one. More information can be found at [arminarm4climate.org](http://arminarm4climate.org). ■



## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

### Denominations and Religious Agencies

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
- *Week of Compassion*  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
*United Methodist Women*

### Foundations/Other Support

G.E. Foundation  
The Whitney M. Slater Foundation  
U.S. Climate Action Network

### Individuals

Dr. Winston Carroo  
Rev. Cheryl Greene  
Mr. & Mrs. Theodore and Martha Groene  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph and Selena Keesecker  
Mr. Michael Matejka  
Mr. & Mrs. David and Doris Rivera  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald and Anna Sibley  
Mr. & Mrs. Edward and Gertrude Pennick  
Anonymous Individuals via Network for Good

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Joan Charles**, Grenada Community Development Agency (GRENCODA)

**Terence Courtney**, Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund

**June Kim**, Member-at-large

**Edward Pennick**, Member-at-large

**Raymon Shange**, Carver Integrative Sustainability Center, Tuskegee University

**Anaid Velasco**, Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (CEMDA), Mexican Center for Environmental Rights

**Rev. Leo Woodberry**, Kingdom Living Temple

## STAFF

**Mikhiela Sherrod**, Executive Director

**Winston Carroo**, Program Consultant, West Africa Initiative

**Doris Rivera**, Administrative Assistant, NY Office



**COMING IN 2020****AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC.**

Agricultural Missions, Inc.'s response to the COVID-Pandemic. The impacts of this pandemic are exacerbated by the inequities in social and economic systems on a global scale. The poor, people of color and minority communities are experiencing higher rates of infection and death as well as increased unemployment and economic insecurity. In the next year, AMI will be working with our partners in the United States and Africa to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and to build local community resilience.

## We Need Your Help

### Every Penny Matters

**Help Make a Difference****CONTRIBUTION FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of Contribution: \_\_\_\_\_

Project/Program Designation (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to Agricultural Missions, Inc., and mail to:**  
 Agricultural Missions, Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1505, New York, NY 10115

**You may also make your contributions through our website:**

<http://www.ag-missions.org/donate>

ALL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT!**



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