



**Name:** Michael Victor Thomas

**Country:** United Kingdom

Date of birth: 23rd July 1940

**Home and office address:** 48 Churchward Avenue, Swindon,  
Wiltshire SN2 1NH, UK

**EMail:** mvthomas72x@yahoo.co.uk

The report of my activities below covers the period between 1980 and 2014, during which time I made 4 visits to Sierra Leone, 4 to India, 1 to Kenya and 4 to the Cameroon. These were all in connection with monitoring the projects that have been funded by the two charities I helped to establish - Plant a Tree in Africa in 1985 and Future in Our Hands Education and Development Fund in 1995. I wrote a book on environment and development ('Countdown') and obtained an MSc in Environment and Development Education, during this period.

Before reaching the age of 32 I had believed that extreme poverty in the South was primarily due to 'natural' disasters like drought, earthquakes and severe storms, large population increases and wars. It was in the 1970s that I became more aware of the extent to which the systems of trade and finance dominated by the rich countries of the West contributed to poverty and hunger. This awareness made me feel both guilty and angry, but I also realised that these emotions would be of no use to anyone, let alone myself. I had to become more involved in addressing these issues. But How?

I became more involved after watching a BBC television programme called 'Global Report' about the lives and campaigning activities of individuals from around the world. One of these was a member of a Norwegian movement named 'Future in Our Hands' which was founded in 1974. As a result of the interest generated by this programme, a UK branch of FIOH was launched at a meeting at the Africa Centre in London on 30th Oct 1982. It was my introduction to the philosophy of the Future in Our Hands movement and the book of the same name by the founder, Erik Dammann, that led me to believe that there was much more that I could do on a personal basis. I realised that whatever I decided should be coupled with a commitment to a relatively simple way of life, a greater sharing of my wealth with those who were poor and a commitment to campaigning for changes in unjust systems of trade and finance. The message was clear and simple, but I also realised that trying to apply this philosophy would require complex solutions that were in direct opposition to the conventional economic growth approach to development and the distribution of wealth. I came to realise that the fundamentals of economic growth were exploitation, greed, competition, gambling, corruption and extreme inequality between the rich and the poor. Seen in this light, it was clear that the FIOH philosophy was counteractive to the status quo and would be seen by most politicians and business people to be both foolish and naive. Indeed, most people in the West were likely to share the view that the increased consumption associated with economic growth was something to be applauded. Even if the wealth created was not shared fairly, at least some of it would 'trickle down' to the poor! Another aspect of FIOH that appealed to me was that it was not primarily a structured organisation and what mattered was that its participants should try to adopt a lifestyle that reflected values like co-operation, sharing, fellowship and truth.

Different groups and branches could adopt different structures for practical organisational and legal purposes, but should encourage their participants to accept the value-based philosophy of the movement. Of course there are no guarantees that this will happen in practice because this approach is based on trust. Since I became the UK co-ordinator of FIOH the efforts I have made to increase the number of participants have not so far yielded very much success. A similar experience followed the efforts I made with Richard Douthwaite to establish a branch of the movement in Ireland. Richard later wrote several important books on alternative economics including 'The Growth Illusion', 'Short Circuit' and 'The Ecology of Money'. He also

helped to found the increasingly influential 'Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability'. Sadly Richard died in Jan 2012. I came to an early conclusion that although the movement's message was initially aimed at 'affluent' people in the West, the value emphasis had international relevance. With this thought in mind, I placed a free advert in an internationally distributed magazine.

The first responses to my article in the New Internationalist came from Sierra Leone and India. 'The New Internationalist'. From the subsequent correspondence and direct contacts I have had with individuals abroad, groups were formed in Ghana, Sierra Leone Kenya, India and Pakistan. There are also womens' co-operatives in Kenya and the Cameroon bearing the FIOH name. My activities have been strongly influenced by the concepts of 'counteraction' and 'the unfinished' as described in Erik Dammann's book 'Revolution in the Affluent Society'. Despite the disappointments in the UK and Ireland, the registered charities, Future in Our Hands Education and Development Fund and Plant a Tree in Africa that I have been able to establish with the help of my wife and some friends, have supported many sustainable projects in poor countries. These initiatives have also brought me into contact with individuals from around the world who have expressed an interest in the movements' philosophy and provided me with the opportunity to experience the problems that poor people face at first hand. I visited Sierra Leone (with my daughter Clare) in 1988 and again in 1992 to help with work in a slum area named Kroobay in the capital Freetown. I visited again in 2001 in connection with a project to help people affected by the civil war reestablish farming activities in Yonibana and Lunsar (90 miles from the capital), but had to return home after only 2 days because of a threatened rebel attack on the capital. The cancellation of my outward flight from Heathrow because of an instrument failure during take off, proved to be fortuitous. Had I left when I had planned, I would have been in Lunsar at the time of a rebel attack. In 1998 I visited Kenya in connection with tree planting projects around Kisumu near Lake Victoria. During my visit, Rom Wandera (co-ordinator of FIOH Kenya) and I helped women from ten local groups establish a womens co-operative. We also took the first steps towards establishing a 21st Century Kisumu Forum (Agenda 21) and organised two meetings at the local museum to facilitate this. Rom died in Jan 2012.

In 1999 I visited Bamenda and Kumbo in the NW Province of the Cameroon in connection with an FIOH Fund project to cut down half a million eucalyptus trees which had been lowering water tables and reducing crop yields. One of the results of this problem was that many women had to walk up to 15 miles to find new farming areas. The eucalyptus were to be replaced with indigenous nitrogen-fixing trees for agro-forestry. I also ran some workshops with the partner NGO, Strategic Humanitarian Services, to introduce the idea of a savings and credit union co-operative to several womens' groups. During my visit a pilot nursery for 80,000 tree seedlings was established. I returned to the area in 2001 with my wife to monitor the main project. The Eucalyptus Replacement Project was carried out in two phases and included the replacement of 1.5 million eucalyptus trees with 3 million indigenous trees for agroforestry and water catchment protection. A significant outcome was that 4,500 women were able to farm close to their homes. I carried out a further monitoring visit for Phase II in Feb 2009.

In 1991 my wife and I visited Orissa and Tamil Nadu in India to see the work of the New Hope Rural Leprosy Trust and the Rural Integrated Development Organisation. We were able to see the houses built by the tribals of the Sitheri Hills with money raised in Swindon during 1987 (the UN International Year of Shelter). We both visited Orissa again in 2000 to see some of the areas devastated by a cyclone in the previous year. We were also able to see the considerable expansion of the work of New Hope which even included the building of a hospital for surgery on people with leprosy and eye cataracts, including postnatal care and rehabilitation.

I visited both New Hope and HEARTS again in 2004 with an FIOH volunteer from Norway, Siri Ohren. We visited tribal areas in Orissa, a leprosy colony in Puri and HEARTS children's homes in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

My wife and I have also been privileged to receive many visitors from abroad into our home - from Guatemala, India, Sierra Leone, Tibet, Pakistan, Kenya, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Brazil. In association with our contacts abroad, we hope to build a web site that will offer some perspectives on the way poor people live and present practical and hopeful ideas for creating a better and fairer world for everyone. In 2010 my book 'Countdown' was published and copies can be obtained from me phone 01793

532353 or mvthomas72x@yahoo.co.uk priced £8.00 plus postage. Qualifications: MSc Environmental and Development Education, C Eng, A Inst AM Present organisational post: Future in Our Hands International Co-ordinator, Chairman - Plant a Tree in Africa and treasurer for FIOH Education and Development Fund and the Cap and Share campaign.

At the time of updating this report (November 2014) I am seeking funds for projects to help stop[ the spread of ebola in Sierra Leone and a schools environmental education programme in the NW Region of Cameroon.

**Personal Data**

Wife: Glenys Leonie Thomas

Children: Lynette Catherine Thomas and Clare Louise O'Driscoll.

**Qualifications:** MSc Environmental and Development Education, C Eng, A Inst AM

Employment: Senior civil engineer (retired 1992)

**Present organisational post:** Future in Our Hands International Network Co-ordinator, Chairman - Plant a Tree in Africa and treasurer, treasurer FIOH Education and Development Fund, former treasurer Cap and Share campaign.

**Publications:** *A Guide to the Preparation of Civil Engineering Drawings* and *Countdown - responding to a global crisis*