CLIMATE JUSTICE

Seeking a global ethic

Caritas

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Introduction

As a confederation of Catholic organisations representing both the richest and the poorest countries on Earth, Caritas Internationalis embodies the solidarity the world needs if it is to find sustainable solutions to the effects of climate change.

Caritas has a particular strength and opportunity to develop clear moral arguments, based on the Bible and Catholic Social Teaching, in order to drive political and social action that will transcend narrow personal and national interests in favour of the common good.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us of our shared duty to respect the common good rather than using the Earth's natural resources simply as we wish. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church emphasises the sacred gift that we have received through God's creation and our "human responsibility for the preservation of a sound and healthy environment for all." It also insists that "serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles."[1]

This report seeks to raise awareness of our individual responsibilities as members of a common humanity, and sets out the key policies on which Caritas is campaigning at international, regional and national levels.

Caritas urges governments to support and implement a post-2012 global climate change agreement that will keep global mean surface temperatures as far as possible below a 2°C increase on pre-industrial levels.

In recognition of their ecological debt to the international community, industrialised nations should take the lead in making absolute reductions of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of more than 40 percent (based on 1990 levels) by 2020. This target should be reviewed as the emerging science indicates.

Developed countries must provide sufficient levels of secure financial and technological support for developing countries to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. More broadly, it is also essential that the sustainable development of the people in developing countries is recognised and addressed.

In order to provide immediate and effective advice regarding the human rights implications of actions designed to address climate change, the UN human rights mechanisms must fully participate in the processes of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The environment is a shared good that transcends national borders. Caritas therefore urges states to adopt regional approaches to addressing the causes and consequences of climate change, including the promotion of dialogue and cooperation between neighbouring countries in the management of natural resources.

Caritas appeals to governments to develop and enforce national policy frameworks that facilitate the identification and implementation of climate solutions at the levels of local governments, businesses, civil societies and families.

Caritas Internationalis also asks its own members to help in safeguarding the integrity of creation for future generations through a strategic focus on environmental sustainability and by reducing the carbon footprint of their respective organisations.

Ethiopians battle their tough climate to grow food.
Jan Bierkens/Caritas Belgium

Foreword

By Lesley-Anne Knight, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis

The world is waking up to the reality of climate change. Scientists agree that it is happening – and that humanity is causing it. Engineers claim that we have the technology to reduce carbon emissions. Economists say we cannot afford to ignore it and have devised clever incentives to encourage business leaders to play their part. And politicians have realised that they have, at the very least, to pay lip-service to the cause.

But none of the above has a 'magic bullet' solution. The answer to the climate change crisis lies in the hands of humanity – in a revived sense of solidarity and a realisation that we all have a duty to work towards the common good.

In his recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI defines solidarity as "first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone".[2] To desire the common good and strive towards it, he says, "is a requirement of justice and charity".[3]

Victory over climate change will come at a price, and the lion's share of that price should rightly be paid by those who have benefitted most from the growth and development that is causing climate change.

Like the global financial crisis, the climate change crisis can be seen in terms of excessive borrowing: we have borrowed from the atmosphere and biodiversity of the future. As the economist Dieter Helm has pointed out: "We have been writing a large environmental mortgage on the consumption possibilities of future generations."[4]

It might further be argued that the developed world has also borrowed from the development potential of poorer countries.

These 'loans' must be repaid – there is no global atmospheric fund that is going to bail us out of this crisis. Excessive borrowing has funded excessive consumption, and it therefore follows that those who are in the best position to take action also have a responsibility to do so.

The inescapable conclusion is that – in a spirit of solidarity in pursuit of the common good – the excesses of the past must give way to more moderate lifestyles that permit the development of all peoples and of future generations.

As Helm notes: "We may have to preserve more now, lowering our standards of living, not only to make good all the financial borrowing, but the environmental borrowing too."[5]

There is actually nothing new in this suggestion. Nearly 40 years ago, the Second Synod of Bishops stated: "Those who are already rich are bound to accept a less material way of life, with less waste, in order to avoid the destruction of the heritage which they are obliged by absolute justice to share with all other members of the human race."[6]

What is new is that we now have economists backing up the arguments of the Church.

Pope Benedict too calls upon society to make a serious review of its lifestyle. Quoting his predecessor, John Paul II, he says:

> "What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new lifestyles 'in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments'."[7]

The idea of accepting a reduced standard of living is not, however, going to be a vote-winner for governments. It will take courageous leaders to promote a culture of lower consumption. And they will need the support of the people.

This is why Caritas Internationalis is focussing on the ethical, moral and theological dimensions of the climate change crisis. The scientific and economic

If we are to change the world, we have to change human behaviour; and a fundamental change in human behaviour can only be based on deep-seated conviction, not short-term expediency.

Cuba after Hurricane Ivan struck in 2004.
Ed Foster Jr./CRS

arguments are important, but they are not enough. If we are to change the world, we have to change human behaviour; and a fundamental change in human behaviour can only be based on deep-seated conviction, not short-term expediency.

In this document, we hear from our Caritas member organisations about the suffering that is already taking place as a result of extreme weather events; we examine the theological, moral and ethical arguments relating to climate change; we explore the inescapable obligations that Catholic Social Teaching places upon us; we look at the work Caritas organisations are doing in the field to help people overcome the devastating effects of climate change, and what Caritas Internationalis can do at a global level to campaign for real and effective change.

Pope Benedict speaks of the need for "intergenerational justice". He says, "We must recognise our grave duty to hand the Earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it."[8]

Justice lies at the heart of Caritas Internationalis' strategy in addressing the climate change crisis. Without it there can be no sustainable solution.

Lesley-Anne Knight in Bangladesh.

Living the reality of climate change

The effects of climate change are already a daily reality for many people, particularly for the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

Weather is becoming more extreme and unpredictable, bringing severe storms, more floods and droughts. Glaciers, permafrost and sea ice are disappearing; sea levels are rising; forests are shrinking; water tables are falling; rivers are running dry and seasons are changing. The World Health Organization has estimated that 150,000 people are dying every year because of climate change.[9]

In recent years, some of the worst droughts on record have been experienced in Africa and Australia; there have been extreme floods across South Asia, intense cyclones in Asia and the Caribbean and record heat waves.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that, by 2020, productivity from agriculture in many African countries could be reduced by as much as 50 percent. These negative impacts on agriculture will compromise food security and increase cases of malnutrition.[10]

The scientific predictions are confirmed by the daily experiences of poor communities. Trócaire (Caritas Ireland) has documented anecdotal evidence from people living in resource-poor communities across the globe.[11] Approximately 90 percent of respondents reported significant changes in seasonal weather patterns and 95 percent reported changes in rainfall patterns. Many respondents described more erratic rainfall patterns with fewer rainy days and longer dry spells during the season, as well as the later onset and/or the early finish of the rainy season. Such trends contribute to reduced overall rainfall, which has a devastating impact on the agriculture upon which rural communities depend.

Poor farmers, fishermen, pastoralists and those largely dependent on forest products are most affected by increases in temperature and disrupted hydrological cycles, and have a limited asset base to enable them to adapt to these changes. Such challenges threaten to reverse improvements in the lives of poor people, achieved through the support of organisations such as Caritas.

Climate change compounds the poverty that persists in most developing countries. Since the 1960s, the number of victims of natural disasters has increased by an average of 900 percent. Climate change is among the principle causes that some aid agencies link to the increase in humanitarian emergencies.[12] In Kenya, the premature ending of the March-May rains in recent years has exacerbated the drought caused by several seasons of poor rainfall. In Eritrea, poor rains in 2004 caused drinking water shortages, and in southern Africa, more frequent droughts have resulted in widespread starvation and economic hardship.

It is estimated that two billion people now depend on the fragile ecosystems of arid and semi-arid areas, which are expected to experience further increases in water stress. Some 634 million people, one tenth of the global population, are living in low lying and at risk coastal areas.[13]

Girls scooping water from a hole they dug in the sand of a wadi in South Darfur.
Paul Jeffrey/ACT-Caritas

Caritas organisations around the world are dealing on a regular basis with the impacts of climate-related crises, which are increasing in frequency and intensity. The number of humanitarian disasters recorded has increased from around 200 to more than 400 over the past two decades and seven out of every ten disasters is now climate-related.[14]

Caritas Oceania reports that people in the South Pacific are losing their islands to rising sea levels. Caritas India and Caritas Peru describe how vital water will be lost as glaciers in the Himalayas and Andes

The Island of Ha'apai: Kingdom of Tonga

The Kingdom of Tonga, a group of islands in the South Pacific, is facing the consequences of climate change.

"We are lucky if a year goes past," says Sr Senolita Vakata of Caritas Tonga, "without a cyclone or hurricane hitting our country."

Pangai Ha'apai is one of the island groups in Tonga. Children used to play on the beach and close to home. Now, as waters rise, they are moving inland and children really miss the healthy environment and the freshness of the sea breeze.

Families had easy access to the sea for shallow sea fishing before. But over the last two years, the fish and oysters they used to catch and on which they fed their families are no longer there.

They always built their houses near the beach. Now, you can see the impact of climate change on these houses near the sea. For the last three years, rising sea levels have caused very strong currents and powerful waves which have eroded the land on which their houses are built.

With this coastal erosion, families are facing a battle for their houses, their way of life and for their children's future.

Caritas Tonga

recede. Caritas Myanmar and Caritas Bangladesh have been forced to respond to increasing flooding and destruction caused by typhoons.

Other national Caritas organisations speak about increasing numbers of internally displaced farmers who have become squatters in ever-expanding cities. Catholic Charities (a Caritas member in the USA) observed that those who suffered most from Hurricane Katrina in the southern United States were the poor. Caritas agencies were called to help the people of Haiti when they suffered four hurricanes in 2008.

The effects of climate change will also have an impact on patterns of population movement and settlement. This displacement will come as a result of slow-onset changes such as sea level rise and desertification, as well as rapid onset disasters such as cyclones or tsunamis. Although difficult to predict, it is estimated that by 2050, hundreds of millions of people may be displaced as a result of environmental changes.[15]

In areas affected by landslide, flood, cyclone or tsunami, people are typically evacuated inland as urban migrants. In these cases, the UN's Guiding Principles for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) provide normative assistance and protection for these people. [16]

For those in areas facing a high risk from rising sea levels, loss of territory may be permanent and may require migration across national borders. In such cases, an international law is needed to address the plight of individuals and whole communities who may be rendered stateless. In order for this to happen, a clear definition will be required for the term 'environmental migrant'.

An additional issue related to migration is the often cited link between climate change and conflict. Climate change impact may push populations to migrate to other areas in search of more secure livelihoods. The arrival of migrants may increase competition for resources and services, as well as alter the ethnic composition in host communities, resulting in tensions that escalate into violence. In order to reduce possible future conflicts, governments need to acknowledge the importance of good natural resource management and implement such measures within their national borders. Furthermore, room for dialogue needs to be enhanced between neighbouring countries so that regional programmes can be implemented.

Climate change also has a serious impact on health, compromising food security and causing more deaths and injuries as a result of storms and floods. Scarcity of water, which is essential for hygiene – as well as excess water due to more frequent and torrential rainfall – are increasing the burden of diarrhoeal disease, which is spread through contaminated food and water.

Heat waves, especially in urban centres, cause deaths and exacerbate diseases, mainly in elderly people with cardiovascular or respiratory disease. In 2003, 37,000 people who could not escape brutal heat waves died in Europe. Changing temperatures and patterns of rainfall are expected to alter the geographical distribution of insect vectors that spread such infectious diseases as malaria and dengue fever.[17]

Kenya's pastoralists depend on cattle, but frequent droughts decimate herds and livelihoods.
Astrid De Valon/Trócaire

Climate change is taking hold in Brazil's Amazon and semi-arid regions.
Marcella Haddad/CAFOD (top)
Caritas Brazil (left)

Rising temperatures in Brazil

In the Amazon region of Brazil, yams are an important part of people's diet but they are becoming harder to grow under the increasingly fierce sun.

"We need yams for porridge for breakfast but we don't have enough," says Maria Ferreira.

"Before, we planted yams in the shade or sun and they all grew well. When the sun is so hot it's not good for the earth. Before, the grass was always green. The football pitch is now yellow. It's so dry."

Falling harvests are an indication of how climate change will threaten livelihoods. As temperatures rise, Maria and others in her village leave earlier for work in the fields. Sometimes they have to stop working by ten in the morning because it is too hot.

As food and water become scarcer, Caritas is helping indigenous communities map their resources and campaign to raise awareness about the harmful effects of climate change.

Caritas Brazil meanwhile has been giving emergency help in the north of Brazil where towns and villages have been flooded out. The national Caritas is also giving education and support to help villages cope with water shortages in the semi-arid parts of the country.

Water, either too much or too little, is causing massive disruption to people's lives in Brazil.

Biblical principles

If it is to give a credible response to the ecological crisis, Christian action needs to be based on a profound knowledge of the sources establishing its identity. Foremost among these sources is the Bible, which for Christians is "the source of revelation and the basis of their faith".[18] That said, Bible texts do not offer any directive norms on how to handle the issues of destruction of the environment and climate change. The dangers we now face were unknown in Biblical times. This historical distance must be borne in mind when we consider the issues of our time in the light of Biblical texts. The Bible is not a manual on morality, but it forms a point of reference that assures us of our identity and provides a basis for Christian debate on these issues.

Creation

The starting point for all Christian activity is the Biblical notion of the world as creation. Christian responsibility for the environment begins with appreciation of the goodness of all God's creation. In the beginning, "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Gen 1,31).

The creation story, as narrated in the book of Genesis, obliges us to treat God's work responsibly. God creates men and women in his image, and calls on them to take care of the Earth accordingly (Gen 1,27-28). Of all God's creations, men and women are therefore challenged in a special way to take responsibility for creation[19]. Nevertheless, they are not the Creator; they are a part of this creation, not its master. Pope Benedict XVI clarified the position:

> "To the extent that the Earth was considered God's creation, the duty of 'subjecting' was never understood as an order to make it a slave, but rather as a duty of being a custodian of creation and developing its gifts; of collaborating ourselves in an active way in God's work, in the evolution that God placed in the world, so that the gifts of creation are prized and not trampled upon or destroyed."[20]

Between flood and rainbow

The fragility of the human family's God-given responsibility to care for creation is evident in prehistory. Nature is experienced by men and women as unpredictable and full of dangers (Gen 3,17-19). They are not able to fulfil their responsibility as keepers of this order. But there is a new beginning, with God concluding a covenant with His people following the Flood (Gen 9). This new world order takes account of the competing relationship between the human family and the animals. Henceforth, men and women are permitted to kill animals for food (Gen 9,3). But, on the other hand, they are held responsible for creation, in a more extended manner, and they still are not given any unrestricted power of disposal over it (Gen 9,5-7).

In many other Old Testament texts, one can find references to the understanding of the world as creation, for instance in the Psalms or in the Book of Job, where God

Worshippers at a Catholic Church near Kampala in Uganda offer maize instead of money during collection at Mass.
David Snyder

reveals the greatness of his works. Common to all of these is the notion of the shared presence of God in His creation, which is a gift that has been freely given. Men and women are to act on Earth as custodians and shepherds. They hold a responsibility for creation in trust, and are to "cultivate and take care" of it (Gen 2,15). However, the ultimate knowledge of creation, its origin and starting-point lies with God (Job 38-39).

The Message of the Kingdom of God

The notion of the world as creation that is intrinsic to the Old Testament is also taken as a given in the New Testament: for instance, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is close at hand (Mk 1,15) and with it the message that salvation is already present alongside the reality of creation and life, but simultaneously, in a mysterious way, hidden and repeatedly to be sought afresh.[21] The world, despite all its conflict and ambivalence, is creation, the place of the redemptive influence of Christ and the start of the Kingdom of God.

> "In nature, the believer recognises the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation."[22]

Christian and ethical reflection

The Bible does not offer any concrete rules for dealing with climate policy. Seeking guidance from Biblical texts does not dispense with a need for sensible justification of ethical standards. Christian positions which seek to be conveyed convincingly in a pluralist society need to give an account of the initial thinking which informs them and to bring this into a fruitful dialogue with other disciplines. Moral insight can only call for those things which prove compatible with common sense and appropriate to the context. There is therefore a need for matching normative criteria. One approach for this is offered by the principles of social ethics.

Human Dignity: The Christian narrative

Blessed treasures

Thomas John Carlisle

Help us to harness
the wind,
the water,
the sun,
and all the ready
and renewable sources of power.

Teach us to conserve,
preserve,
use wisely
the blessed treasures
of our wealth-stored earth.

Help us to share
your bounty,
not to waste it,
or pervert it
into peril
for our children
or our neighbours
in other nations

You who are life
and energy
and blessing,
teach us to revere
and respect
your tender world.

Amen

revealing God's creation of men and women "in the image of God", is also to be found in the philosophical discussion of the human person. Common to both concepts is the attribution of dignity to the human person, as an unconditional value which precludes any exploitation. An understanding of this kind, as is also to be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, must contribute towards a consideration of climate change. Respect for human dignity is a central value in the Christian tradition. It encompasses the whole person in all her or his dimensions and includes the right to life and its sanctity at all stages. Climate change and its results threaten the basic right of all human persons to life today and in future generations.

> "Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defence of all of creation."[23]

Solidarity and the common good: In the Catholic tradition, the universal common good is specified by the duty of solidarity, "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good", a willingness "to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting them."[24] In the face of "the structures of sin", moreover, solidarity requires sacrifices of our own self-interest for the good of others and of the Earth we share.

Bringing food to flood victims in India.
Caritas India

Solidarity places special obligations upon industrial democracies. "The ecological crisis," Pope John Paul II wrote, "reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialised."[25] Working for the common good requires us to promote the flourishing of all human life and all of God's creation. In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Our obligations to the one human family stretch across space and time. They tie us to the poor in our midst and across the globe, as well as to future generations. The commandment to love our neighbour invites us to consider the poor and marginalised of other nations as true brothers and sisters who share with us the one table of life intended by God for the enjoyment of all.

All nations share the responsibility to address the problem of global climate change. But historically the industrial economies have been responsible for the highest emissions of greenhouse gases that scientists suggest are causing the warming trend. Also, significant wealth, technological sophistication and entrepreneurial creativity give these nations a greater capacity to find useful responses to this problem. To avoid greater impact, energy resource adjustments must be made both in the policies of richer countries and in the development paths of poorer ones.

The principles of solidarity and the common good remind us that we are all responsible for each other and must work for social conditions that ensure that all people and groups in society are able to

meet their needs and realise their potential. Every group in society should take into account the rights and aspirations of other groups, and the wellbeing of the whole human family. [26]

Pope John Paul II said, "We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the wellbeing of future generations."[27] Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet. Individual nations must measure their own self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions.

Subsidiarity: Most people will agree that while the current use of fossil fuels has fostered and continues to foster substantial economic growth, development and benefits for many, there is a legitimate concern that as developing countries improve their economies and emit more greenhouse gases, they will need technological help to mitigate further atmospheric environmental harm. Many of the poor in these countries live in degrading and desperate situations that often lead them to adopt environmentally harmful agricultural and industrial practices. In many cases, the heavy debt burdens, lack of trade opportunities and economic inequities in the global market add to the environmental strains of the poorer countries. Developing countries have a right to economic development that can help lift people out of dire poverty.

Wealthier industrialised nations have the resources, know-how and entrepreneurship to produce more efficient cars and cleaner industries. These

Climate Change: Why Should Catholic Charities Care?

By Robert Gorman, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, USA.

Climate changes are already occurring here on the low-lying coast of South Louisiana. My home is 60 miles inland, but is only inches above sea level. The Gulf of Mexico creeps closer each year because of erosion and subsidence of the wetlands and barrier islands, rising sea levels, and more intense hurricanes. The poorest members of our communities live right on the Gulf and their homes have already flooded many times over. People call Catholic Charities (CCUSA is a member of Caritas Internationalis) every day for assistance, and Catholic Charities agencies throughout South Louisiana have spent tens of millions of dollars just since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita helping people in their disaster recovery.

Catholic Charities has a moral obligation to protect the life and dignity of each person and the established communities in which they have built their lives. We have a powerful network through which we can provide social services to people most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. We have a prophetic voice for justice that needs to raise climate change concerns to our statehouses, Congress, and the White House. Ultimately, our role is difficult because we are stewards of a world that is not our own. We are part of the biblical covenant obligating us to care for all of God's living creatures. If we believe that God is present in us and to us in all that we see and experience, then we must embrace the role of the good steward—a role that Catholic Charities in its commitment to the common good takes seriously as it finds its voice in the climate change debate.

The CCUSA volunteers programme in Louisiana, where Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005.
Laura Sikes/CCUSA

countries need to share these emerging technologies with the less-developed countries and assume more of the financial responsibility that would enable poorer countries to afford them. This would help developing countries adopt energy-efficient technologies more rapidly while still sustaining healthy economic growth and development. Industries from the developed countries operating in developing nations should exercise a leadership role in preserving the environment.

No strategy to confront global climate change will succeed without the leadership and participation of the United States and other industrial nations. But any successful strategy must also reflect the genuine participation and concerns of those most affected and least able to bear the burdens. Developing and poorer nations must have a genuine place at the negotiating table. Genuine participation for those most affected is a moral and political necessity for advancing the common good.[28]

Only with equitable and sustainable development can poor nations curb continuing environmental degradation and avoid the destructive effects of the kind of overdevelopment that has used natural resources irresponsibly.[29] Poor countries need empowerment, and that means helping the poor to help themselves.

Sustainability: The problem of climate change is, above all, a question of sustainability. The principle of sustainability has its starting-point in responsibility for future generations, for unless there is adequate protection of natural resources in the medium and long term, no life worthy of human dignity is possible on Earth.

The first to suffer from climate change are the poorest countries and their citizens. Here, the challenge is to make the Christian **Option for the Poor** a strong reality. It is a structural injustice that those who have contributed least to the problem of climate change, because they live in less developed and less industrialised regions, are the first to feel the effects. Without ecological sustainability, successes in the fight against poverty can only be of limited duration. Sustainability is therefore included in the UN Millennium Development Goals for combating poverty, because climate change affects the poorest in particular and also exacerbates poverty. Unrestrained economic development is not the answer to improving the lives of the poor. Catholic Social Teaching has never accepted material growth as a model of development. A "mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority," as Pope John Paul II said, "is not enough for the realisation of human happiness."[30]

Climate change is, however, not just a problem for the poor – it affects all people and the basis on which they are able to conduct their lives, as well as future generations. Sustainability is therefore also a question of responsibility towards creation, which is simultaneously the basis for global and intergenerational justice. In our use of the environment "we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole".[31]

In spite of the degree of certainty that has been reached about the problem of climate change, we still have to act in the midst of uncertainty, because the speed and strength of climate change in the coming years and decades, as well as its regional effects, cannot be accurately forecast.

> "The principle of foresight is a decision-making aid which lowers risks and protects the natural means of livelihood for future generations. […] In addition to the principle that the party responsible is liable for damages and the precautionary principle, the Christian point of view also calls for the principle of proportionality: the good cause – environmental protection for the good of mankind and creation – does not always justify the means […] i.e. any harm caused may not be greater than its achieved benefit."[32]

Authentic development supports moderation and even austerity in the use of material resources. It also encourages a balanced view of human progress consistent with respect for nature. Furthermore, it invites the development of alternative visions of the good society and the use of economic models with richer standards of wellbeing than material productivity alone. Authentic development also requires affluent nations to seek ways to reduce and restructure their over-consumption of natural resources. Finally, authentic development also entails encouraging the proper use of both agricultural and industrial technologies, so that development does not merely mean technological advancement for its own sake but rather that technology benefits people and enhances the land.[33]

An elder surveys his scorched crops after failed rains in Northern Uganda in 2009.
Patrick Nicholson/Caritas

Caritas supports farmers in Haiti after the deadly 2008 hurricane season.
David Snyder/Caritas

Caritas in action

Preparing for disaster in Orissa, India.
Jennine Carmichael/CRS

The Caritas confederation is becoming increasingly involved in efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change. Many Caritas members in high income countries have launched education and awareness campaigns that urge reduction of individual and household carbon footprints. Such campaigns are often also linked to advocacy initiatives aimed at pressuring governments to commit to a strong post-2012 agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that binds industrialised countries to strong emission reduction targets and to adaptation funding for developing countries, as well as finance and technology transfers for low-carbon economic development. As a confederation of humanitarian and development organisations, however, Caritas is particularly concerned with the impacts of climate change on the world's poor and ensuring they have the resources to adapt to the changes that are already taking place.

The long experience of Caritas in grassroots development is particularly useful in designing and implementing programmes to help human and ecological systems to adapt to climate change. Climate change adaptation interventions should look beyond the current climatic variability and anticipate future changes. This often involves the input of technical knowledge that requires collaboration with other agencies that have specialist expertise. For example, Caritas Bangladesh works in collaboration with the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies to design and implement programmes in areas that are drought-prone and affected by high water salinity.

In the Philippines and Kenya, Catholic Relief Services (a Caritas member in the USA) works with the World Agroforestry Centre on land-care initiatives that include carbon sequestration and carbon credits. This latter project combines existing expertise in Disaster Risk Reduction and development methodologies and lays the groundwork for new livelihood initiatives in carbon credits and Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). Capacity building activities are also taking place throughout Central America, Mexico and Panama, where technical staff are being trained in best practices to deal with climate change issues with the support and active participation of Caritas members in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama.

Disaster preparedness and risk reduction can dramatically reduce loss of life and infrastructure. In Bangladesh, Caritas has been involved in building cyclone shelters and training communities in disaster preparedness and risk reduction. As a result, more resilient communities have developed with better preparedness skills to cope with cyclones. In 1991, a cyclone with wind speeds of up to 240 km/h struck Bangladesh, causing more than

140,000 deaths. But in 2007, the death toll from Cyclone Sidr, with even stronger winds of up to 260 km/h, was reduced to 3,400, thanks to the work of the government and aid agencies like Caritas."

Caritas also promotes traditional systems and practices that support the environment and converge modern science with traditional ecological knowledge. For instance, in Africa's Sahel region, local farmers have developed intricate systems of gathering, prediction, interpretation and decision-making in relation to weather, which help them to manage their vulnerability to climate change.

Farmers are known to make decisions on cropping patterns based on local climate predictions, and decisions on planting dates based on complex cultural models of weather. Farmers in the Sahel also conserve water in soil through practices such as zero tillage, mulching and other soil management techniques. Communal forest reserves are often a very important resource in traditional societies, providing food, timber and other livelihood opportunities. Caritas Madre de Dios in Perú is working with communities and local government to control deforestation in Southern Amazonia.

In India's Orissa state, Catholic Relief Services is building local capacities to respond to emergencies and mitigate the impacts of climate-related hazards by strengthening self-help groups and organising task forces to deliver first aid, plan evacuation routes and safe shelters, protect clean water sources, save grain and cash in preparation for the cyclone season, formulate sustainable crop and land use plans, and repair and construct water harvesting structures and embankments.

Habibou Abarishi weeds his lettuce plot in Niger.
Lane Hartill/CRS

Green shoots in Niger

Caritas Niger (CADEV) and its partners believe that by diversifying food sources and developing alternative sources of income, people are not left completely exposed to the harsh effects of climate disruption.

As the Sahara desert slowly creeps across Niger, turning fertile land into sand, one of the last things you'd expect to see growing is a lettuce.

"We grew up in a culture of millet," says Habibou Abarishi. Millet alone doesn't offer a balanced diet and the ready supply keeps prices low in times of good harvest. But a CRS (a Caritas member in the USA) project in western Niger, has helped people such as Habibou grow lettuce and other vegetables to feed their family and earn some money in a time of global recession.

Niger and much of the Sahel region remains acutely vulnerable to drought and food shortages. In 2005, a mixture of failed rains, locust damage, high food prices and chronic poverty left over three million people in Niger facing a food crisis.

The Caritas Sahel Working Group has set up an early warning system to alert people to drought so they can store food and be prepared to react and avert future hunger crises. Caritas Niger has also set up communal food banks and feeding centres for malnourished children.

Gilbért Wellindé, Caritas Niger's field co-ordinator, says: "A communal bank is better than individual storage because there is a committee to manage it. Each member of the community gives what they can afford after the harvest. With individual banks, people tend to use up their supplies more quickly, and some have more than others."

Caritas projects in Lebanon (left), Sri Lanka (top), and Zambia (right).
David Snyder/Caritas (left and top)
Sean Sprague/CRS (right)

Caritas Malawi (CADECOM) encourages crop diversification to reduce reliance on a single rainy season, promotes use of livestock to vary the sources of food and income available to households and promotes simple irrigation techniques for improved agricultural input.

Caritas Kenya promotes resilience in drought-prone semi-arid areas by planting drought resistant seeds that can withstand weather variations. Projects in Homa Bay are designed to combine dairy farming with bio-gas production, the residue of which is used for organic farming.

Throughout the Caritas network, the sharing of best practices is being encouraged. Caritas Brazil, for example, sponsors workshops on approaches to sustainable agriculture processes and implements projects to improve food security among landless peasants. Caritas India works with Diocesan Social Service societies to better integrate climate change considerations into local programme planning.

Although Caritas and others in the humanitarian community demonstrate increased capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters, an exponential increase in climate-related disasters could undermine efforts to assist people to lift themselves out of poverty. Caritas agencies work to strengthen these coping mechanisms through interventions in natural resource management, sustainable agriculture, improved water and sanitation measures and community managed risk reduction programmes.

Caritas supports partners with the technical assistance required to conduct research, in collaboration with experts in the field and with local universities. These efforts are aimed at assisting the poor in dealing with the humanitarian consequences of climate change. The research provides people with facts and figures about the expected frequency, magnitude and timing of climate change impacts so that they can make informed

decisions. Additional collaborative initiatives span a wide range of issues, including adaptation technology, renewable energy, food security and environmentally-induced conflicts.

In order to build an effective combined front at all levels, synergy has to be generated between civil society, government and the private sector, and across development sectors. Partnership and networking among like-minded agencies will provide room for sharing and create a greater impact in addressing climate change concerns.

India adapts

Schoolgirl Shweta Easther Marandi realised one day that by changing their household bulbs to LED and compact fluorescent lights, her family could reduce its carbon footprint. Then she encouraged her school friends and her community. Finally she spoke about it with the media.

Shweta is part of the Tarumitra environmental organisation which receives funding and programme support from Caritas. This is one example of how Caritas India encourages people of all ages and all walks of life to take climate change into their own hands.

As the Subcontinent becomes increasingly vulnerable to floods, droughts, sea erosion and other disasters, one thing has become clear to Caritas India: to make significant impact on the effects of climate change, it has to go right to the root causes.

This means not just focusing on providing relief once a disaster has struck, but preparing communities to take a look at their practices and become more proactive so the impact of any calamity is lessened.

Caritas India has set up the CESSS – the Centre for Environmental Studies in Social Sector – to teach small farmers about programmes which promote sustainable agriculture.

In Indian legends, there was a magical tree that could grant wishes. It seems only appropriate that Caritas India has adopted the tree as the symbol of its campaign to combat climate change and is calling on supporters to plant a tree to show their support. Climate change is a part of the long term development plans of Caritas India.

Caritas India

Putting people first

Putting people first: How Caritas advocacy influences international, regional and national policies

> "Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past…[A] new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge…The ecological crisis is a moral issue."[34]
> – Pope John Paul II

Effective action in response to climate change must include changes in individual and community behaviour. These must respect the integrity of creation and offer special assistance to the poor and vulnerable, who suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change. It is the responsibility of all Christians and people of goodwill to show solidarity with the poor and vulnerable by supporting effective policies and action, at local, national, regional and global levels through strategic and specific advocacy initiatives.

Caritas advocates for policies that truly work towards the common good. We seek strategies that put people at the heart of efforts to address climate change, by adopting appropriate mitigation and adaptation policies focused on those who are most vulnerable.

Our response to the suffering of those most affected by climate change involves not only humanitarian relief but also effective action to denounce unfair structures and policies that result in social injustice and human suffering. Caritas is therefore strongly committed to working with present and potential victims of climate change to present their cases to all relevant national, regional and international institutions.

Action at the international level

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): Caritas Internationalis has been involved in exerting increased pressure on policy and decision makers engaged in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to ensure an equitable and binding post-2012 global agreement at Copenhagen in December 2009. A joint Caritas Internationalis and CIDSE campaign entitled 'Grow Climate Justice' mobilised a coalition of 170 Catholic organisations to support this cause.[35]

Human rights based approach and the responsibility to protect: As underlined in a recent study submitted by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights[36], climate change will have implications for the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, such as the rights to safe drinking water, to food, to health, and to adequate housing. The threat to human rights presented by climate change places an obligation upon nation states to protect their citizens against the adverse impacts of climate change by taking effective mitigation and adaptation measures. International human rights law also requires states to ensure that such measures do not themselves violate other human rights.

How can national Caritas organisations be involved in such global advocacy? Given the daily work of Caritas with poor and vulnerable people and its long experience

The launch of the Grow Climate Justice campaign at UN talks in Poznan.
Caritas

Environmental education is vital in flood-hit Bangladesh.
Andreas Schwaiger /Caritas Switzerland

from global to grassroots levels, Caritas can actively voice the concerns of the most vulnerable people through various UN human rights mechanisms, such as Human Rights Special Procedures, treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review.

Caritas Internationalis can bring specific impact issues to the attention of Human Rights Special Rapporteurs, who could be invited to visit Caritas mitigation and adaptation projects in order to share these 'best practices'. Caritas can also work with treaty bodies (or UN Committees) responsible for monitoring the implementation of obligations assumed by State parties, to seek consideration of the impact of climate change on human rights. Subsequent reports and recommendations could serve as effective tools to promote changes in national

Australians aspire to be green

Caritas Australia

This year Caritas Australia launched a new initiative, the Be More Challenge. Inspired by the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero 'Aspire not to have more, but to be more', the Be More Challenge encourages Australians to take action for environmental and social justice by setting themselves 5 challenges – personal, family, local, national and global.

Members of the online community also participate in an annual event – Be More Weekend, which took place for the first time from the 7 - 9 August 2009. Over 6,735 people from across Australia committed themselves, to 'be just. be green. be more' for three days.

Actions included:

- families putting away the car keys and choosing public transport, getting dirty in their local parks by clearing rubbish, conducting a family audit to assess the impact of their daily actions, turning off the TV and playing the Be More board game to learn more about the impacts of global poverty and climate change;
- schools turning off their lights and teaching outdoors, planting vegetable gardens, having no waste days, Be More camp outs with minimal materials and food;
- parishes having parish picnics and forums about climate change and consumption.

A number of participants donated the money they saved on cutting consumption to Caritas Australia to assist climate change adaptation programs in Bangladesh and programs in countries that are working to build community resilience to a changing climate, such as natural resource management in India, sustainable agriculture in Africa, and disaster risk reduction in Pacific islands.

All of these creative actions were taken with a consciousness of our responsibility to act for climate justice and to ensure that Australia takes initiative on mitigation.

Stick people outside the Scottish parliament.
SCIAF

legislation on mitigation and adaptation responses. Finally, the UN Universal Periodic Review, which aims to identify human rights violations in UN member states, could be an important tool to promote appropriate mitigation and adaptation policies.

Other UN agencies and institutions such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organisation (WHO), are also actively involved in tackling the impact of climate change. These agencies contribute, within the respective area of expertise and mandates, to the UNFCCC negotiation process.

Action at the regional, national and local levels

> "Seeing the suffering of our brothers and sisters […] we are moved to respond to the poverty and inequality caused by a development based on environmentally unsustainable economic activities, the improper use of natural resources and increasing unplanned urbanisation that endanger the people who suffer from disasters, all of which is aggravated by the effect of global warming."
> – Declaration by Caritas members in Latin America and the Caribbean, Third Regional Workshop on Environment, Risk Management and Emergencies (Lima, October 2008).

In order to respond to these disturbing trends, Caritas agencies are building their understanding of climate change and its impacts through various initiatives. Caritas India organised a climate change conference in September 2008 and has embarked on a capacity building initiative at the local level to better integrate climate change considerations in its planning.

The Siyabhabha Trust (Caritas South Africa) is looking at how existing local coping strategies can inform climate resilience strategies. Caritas members from Latin America and the Caribbean held a workshop in October 2008 on environment, risk management and emergencies and developed recommendations for the climate justice campaign. Caritas organisations are working to ensure that the priorities of the poor are included in plans for mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Caritas members are engaged in educational and capacity-building efforts to become more effective advocates, at the local and regional levels, to address the impact of climate change in their respective communities. For example, during 2008, Caritas Peru organised workshops with the participation of Caritas staff, in order to prioritise problems, formulate strategic objectives and recommend appropriate measures against the negative effects of climate change.

Catholic Relief Services works with other Catholic organisations to challenge Catholics in the USA to live their faith by recognising the links between their actions and their impact on others around the globe. The CRS campaign promotes the following messages:

- Climate change is a moral issue that demands our action. Care for the poor and acting for the common good are two principles of Catholic Social Teaching that obligate us to address this issue.
- Climate change is a global relief and development issue.
- Climate change is unquestionably a global solidarity issue.
- Education programmes can show people what they can do to:
  - Encourage prayer and thoughtful consideration of the links between care of creation and lifestyle choices
  - Reduce their carbon footprint at home, in their parishes and at work
  - Educate others
  - Advocate with legislators, policy makers, business leaders
  - Donate to programmes to mitigate their contribution to climate change, and help people overseas adapt to its consequences.[37]

The Commission of Catholic Bishops'

Conference of the European Community (COMECE) emphasises the role of civil society bodies such as non-governmental organisations, foundations, grassroots movements, churches and faith-based organisations to interact with governments and market forces to achieve 'eco-efficiency' (doing more and better with less). They also support 'eco-justice' initiatives such as eco-incentives and eco-taxes, in addition to direct regulation. The bishops further remark on "the ability of civil society to enlist political assistance from the grass-roots up, in relation to both quality of life improvements and the direct participation of local, national, and international communities in the choice of development strategies."[38]

Many Caritas agencies are interacting with other networks to promote awareness of climate change and build advocacy strategies to combat climate change. A number of Caritas members (including Caritas Australia, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, CAFOD (Caritas England and Wales), Caritas Bangladesh and Caritas Kenya) are members of national and regional Climate Action Networks that are active in mobilising civil society in demanding stronger commitments from governments in the UNFCCC process to forge a strong agreement in combating climate change. **Caritas Kenya** is a member of the Kenya Climate Change Working Group that is composed of all civil society organisations working in the area of climate change in Kenya. The coalition aims to research, create awareness and contribute towards national legislation on climate change.

View from Europe

On 24 June 2009, the Scottish Parliament passed one of the world's most ambitious climate change legislations – the Scottish Climate Change Act. Finally, a country has agreed to do what is required to avoid dangerous climate change, as opposed to what is deemed politically possible.

This success represented the culmination of two years of hard campaigning by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF – Caritas Scotland), along with their colleagues in the Stop Climate Chaos coalition in Scotland. Thousands of SCIAF supporters then contacted their parliamentarians as part of a campaign that also involved formal submissions to parliament, lobby events and a concerted media drive.

Meanwhile in Austria, Caritas local groups took part in a day of action with churches across the country ringing bells and a "Climate Justice March" through Vienna from the Cathedral to the Ministry of the Environment.

And Caritas Luxembourg chose twenty ordinary people to be part of the "180 Degrees Panel", seeing for themselves the impact of climate change in Bangladesh. On their return home they spread the message of the impact of climate change, something that was brought home to them in May 2009 when Cyclone Aila wiped out one of the villages that they had visited just three months earlier.

Equipped with educational training and an eco-package containing everything from energy-saving light bulbs to power switches that automatically turn off all energy use when leaving home, the unemployed throughout Germany has been able to substantially reduce their energy consumption thanks to a Caritas campaign. So far, the financial benefits of this project has spread throughout Germany, reaching over 10,000 people in 500 villages.

Caritas Germany

Footnotes

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