

Ensure the Right to Food, protect Human Dignity everywhere:

make Migration a free choice, not a necessity

The Caritas worldwide Confederation salutes the recurrence of World Food Day 2017 and welcomes the opportunity to dedicate it to Migration, a theme that - together with Food Security - is very much at the heart of Caritas concern and daily work. Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are among the root causes of migration.

Caritas defends human dignity and the right to food for everyone; it works to enhance the well-being of all people in need. We promote small-scale agriculture, particularly family-based, and agroecology as successful strategies for food security and sustainable rural development. Caritas especially promotes the role of women, as critical food producers and providers, and because of their central role in agriculture, by defending their access to education, labour and production resources.

Climate change leads to decreased crop productivity, which threatens food security. Smallholder farmers depending on their crop for their livelihood are extremely vulnerable to climate change. Food insecurity and poverty exacerbated by climate change are a major driver of migration, forcing people from their homes in order to feed their families or find more productive livelihoods. However, an elementary expression of human dignity is the possibility of living in one's homeland, and therefore not being forced to migrate because of lack of food. We aim at a world where migrating results from a deliberate choice.

Guaranteeing the right to adequate food must be the guiding principle and goal of all relevant policies and cooperation strategies. It means ensuring that the most vulnerable – the 815 million undernourished people in the world – are both the beneficiaries and the drivers of agriculture and food security policies in all countries. These policies and cooperation strategies towards the most vulnerable must be exclusively focused on this objective, with no concern for the limitation or control of migrations.

The 2017 joint report from the FAO, IFAD and WFP on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World announces an increase in the number of people suffering from hunger¹. For the first time in 10 years, the number of undernourished people rose up to 815 million, 38 million more than in 2016. This is a dramatic setback while all nations committed to eradicate hunger by 2030 with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report clearly links this rise to conflicts and climate change, especially because most of the ongoing conflicts are exacerbated by extreme climatic shocks such as droughts, floods or storms. Environmental degradation, often the consequence of these factors, in turn affects food availability and undermines livelihoods.

The resulting increased pressure over natural resources induces displacement of population. Though the Caritas vision is that migration should be a deliberate choice, the reality shows that forced migration as a result of climate change is bound to escalate in the future. This phenomenon is being gradually discussed² and understood at international level, so that “environmental migrants” should be given legal protection to ensure the enjoyment of their human rights.

¹ The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017.

² In the Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si”, Pope Francis highlighted this plight: “There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.”

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‘Share the Journey’, the recently-launched global migration campaign of Caritas Internationalis, aims to promote constructive personal interactions by bringing local communities, migrants and refugees closer together through a vast array of activities. Caritas’ campaign is a call to action to policy-makers, politicians, potential migrants and receiving populations to connect with each other, with the goal of enabling migrants and refugees to have a voice in public policies that affect them.

Caritas’ mobilization and awareness-raising efforts rest on the assumption that food insecurity is a significant cause for forced migration. Once a migrant’s journey has begun, lack of protection or work combined with little or no access to adequate and nutritious food are significant push factors that compel people to keep on moving from place to place. We strongly believe that by understanding the dynamics that compel people to move - through sharing one’s journey and experience - can better address what lies at the heart of forced migration.

Migration policies and measures must not penalize the poor and most vulnerable ones. Respect for human dignity as the cornerstone of Caritas requires from governments to treat access to sufficient and nutritious food for everyone as a human right at all times, specifically for the ones at highest risk, who are forced to flee their country and need safe refuge.

Caritas organizations know the root-causes of migration and intervene to mitigate them. At the same time, they see the link between agriculture, rural development and migration as a virtuous circle. The following experiences demonstrate it:

Sahel region

In the degraded ecosystems of Sahel, food insecurity and malnutrition are fertile grounds to generate exodus and migration. Intervening on this situation requires protecting the environment on a large scale, as well as creating appropriate conditions to favour the livelihood of small scale farmers, which contribution is indispensable to ensure food security for most people. Caritas in the Sahel region undertakes initiatives promoting secure and sustainable access of women and youth to agricultural land, to irrigation water, to solar energy, as well as capacity-building on migration. These initiatives strengthen resilience, setting bases for food security and countering the systematic departure of women and youth on migration.

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia over 85% of the population's livelihood is based on agriculture. Rural workers make up most of IDP and irregular migrants. One of the main causes of migration in Ethiopia is poverty, due to food insecurity and inability to produce enough food to sustain the family, as the Ethiopia rural setting is exasperated by climate change, the limited land size owned by households, and very low productivity.

But agriculture is also the main job opportunity for those who reach destination countries. Migrants are the working force that contribute to the sustainable production of food in their host countries and major contributors of remittances for their country of origin. In many destination countries migrants are the main work force to contributing to agricultural production in continents like Europe and North America. The hard physical work required by this sector is covered by migrants from different neighboring countries: e.g. the Mexicans in the United States, the Mozambicans and Zimbabweans in South Africa, the Africans in Europe are the main workers in the agriculture sector of their host countries. Ethiopian migrants in the Middle East are engaged in the camel rearing and animal production.

A study done on rural migration indicates the potential job creation for youth offered by agriculture in many regional states. Horticulture production, cereals for bread, beer production, cotton for textile production are indicated as areas of intervention for rural job creation. On its turn, agriculture is also a main activity for returnees to be reintegrated back in their society. Caritas organizations testify that returnee migrants can engage in activities such as fruit tree plantation, horticulture, animal production and rearing, where they can bring the skills learnt in host countries, so as to recover their livelihood.

Caritas reminds the world's decision-makers that:

- Migration should always result from a free choice. Improving food security, fighting against climate change are essential to guarantee human dignity, while contributing to making migration a free choice.
- Agricultural policies should support and strengthen rural livelihoods to help smallholder farmers to adapt to climate change and contribute to mitigation. This includes pro-poor agricultural policies that support increased land productivity through the promotion of climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as agroecology. Investments must be directed at local and small-scale level, aiming at boosting local systems of food production, stockpiling, distribution and access to local markets. Financial and technical assistance should be provided to improve production and develop resilience.
- Vulnerable farmers in developing countries must have access to land security, a pre-condition to increase local investment and small-scale sustainable agriculture development. Planning and investment in habitat improvement and integrated water resource management, with adequate community involvement, should be prioritized.

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