

Caritas Internationalis Key Messages for the UN High-level Political Forum 2017

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This brief provides key messages from Caritas Internationalis for the 2017 United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. The messages reflect the broad vision of Caritas agencies on the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Caritas Internationalis sees the implementation of the SDGs as an opportunity to do development differently and to translate our collective set of values into policies for a better future. Through coordinated efforts, Caritas has been influencing the negotiations that led to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Many Caritas agencies both in the global North and South are currently involved in national and regional implementation processes. We're responding to the challenges faced to deliver the SDGs: changing political and asocial landscapes and priorities, lack of resources and political will or low capacities. These are also limiting the ability of communities to get their voices heard. With the level of expertise, large support base and access to decision-makers, Caritas has started to steer debate around SDGs while supporting civil society platforms to improve their interaction with governments.

Key messages

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presentations should outline how inclusive and participatory the process has been at national level. In terms of content, we believe the HLPF offers an opportunity for governments to deliver on the following issues:

An effective review

The HLPF is the main UN platform to discuss about the SDGs. It is therefore a meaningful space where governments can go beyond presenting their own commitments and achievements and contribute to a constructive and robust review of the commitments of others, including civil society stakeholders, academia and the private sector. **The UN, governments and all parties involved must ensure that the HLPF is a space for open, genuine, honest interaction and that good examples that lead to real change are well documented and shared.** Only such an approach can secure mutual learning and real long-term global progress to deliver the SDGs.

Reaffirm commitments

This year's HLPF is the second after the adoption of Agenda 2030 and it should serve as a call on governments to reinforce their commitments, political will and full support to achieve the SDGs by 2030. In doing so, **governments must do more than list existing efforts.** They should highlight that **Agenda 2030 is a transformational tool and report how they have given or plan to give an impulse to the necessary changes when implementing the SDGs.**

Create a proper governance structure

Achieving the SDGs and ensuring true mutual learning requires a clear governance structure. **Countries presenting a VNR should detail their governance settings including multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder mechanisms** in place for the planning, implementation and accountability of the

SDGs. They should also state how they plan to bring HLPF discussions back to the national and the local level, with local authorities as a key actor.

Balance all pillars of sustainable development

Achieving the SDGs will only be possible if all three pillars of sustainable development are implemented in a balanced way. This means that **economic prosperity must be shared, social protections must be put in place for all while the environment is safeguarded**. All goals are interlinked and indivisible. Governments should use the VNRs to share efforts to balance all three dimensions of sustainable development across all SDGs and to avoid compromising human development goals over economic or environmental goals.

A universal agenda for all

Agenda 2030 must be implemented across developed and developing countries. While different countries may face different challenges, by signing the Agenda 2030 governments across the world have agreed that securing a sustainable future is everyone's responsibility. **Governments from the Global North have a particular responsibility to deliver this Agenda in a way that national policies don't cause harm in other parts of the Globe**. VNRs should be an opportunity for them to outline plans to achieve the SDGs domestically while supporting developing countries, in particular fragile and least developed nations to do so. VNRs should ensure **Policy coherence** for a truly sustainable development.

Engage a broad range of stakeholders

National governments are accountable to all their citizens, especially those most marginalised and left behind, and must ensure there's civic space for them to engage in delivering and monitoring the SDGs. Civil society and faith-based groups often have better access to communities through networks because they've built up trust. Given this deep-rooted connection, governments should engage with civil society organisations in developing national indicators, contributing data and reaching out to vulnerable groups. The role of faith-based organisations is crucial, given their widespread activity at grassroots level. **The HLPF is an opportunity for governments to share experiences about mechanisms to include civil society groups and faith-based organisations in a meaningful way**.

Integrated SDGs with the Paris Climate Agreement

The impacts of climate change on poverty eradication, hunger, forced migration and sustainable development are clear and those linkages must be brought to the HLPF discussions. Agenda 2030 recognises the UNFCCC as the primary forum to deal with climate change. However, policy coherence for development (PCD) and mutual influence are paramount when it comes to realising sustainable development. Governments must therefore use the **HLPF as a platform to share initiatives on how to implement both the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement in an integrated and coherent way**.

Include Parliaments

In most countries, the role of national parliaments will be crucial to translate the SDGs into country-specific development priorities, monitor their implementation and ensure the Government is accountable to the people. The same is true for regional parliaments, as for example, the European Union. Many lessons can be learnt from mechanisms used by Parliaments during the MDGs. **Governments should therefore report on the role that national parliaments will have in monitoring the delivery of the SDGs, and should include a self-assessment of the parliament in question about their meaningful involvement**. The HLPF is also an opportunity for representatives

of different parliaments to interact with each other, other Governments and civil society. This should be highlighted in the structure of HLPF discussions.

Post-HLPF

Governments should hold thorough debriefing sessions at national level after the HLPF with CSOs and other stakeholders to review the process and inputs received. A collaborative debrief process should provide the ground to exchange honest feedback and help address remaining gaps and potential challenges ahead. Such a follow-up process will provide the ownership and coordination needed between relevant stakeholders, experts, institutions and practitioners throughout the implementation and monitoring process up to 2030. It can also help raise national awareness about the SDGs.

Accountability at all levels

Governments have pledged to achieve the SDGs and leave no one behind and are therefore accountable to all their citizens and to one another. They must consider the impact of policies and actions on other people's prospects for sustainable development. However, monitoring the SDGs alone does not ensure accountability. **Governments must therefore create robust accountability mechanisms and can do so by building on existing mechanisms at local and regional level.** This way, functional bodies can address issues related to specific population groups and represent their views better when it comes to SDG delivery.

Indicators

It's critical to set up a robust framework of indicators at national level, based on the agreed set of global indicators and supported by additional financial resources to develop them. Such a robust framework should enable Governments to identify how to measure progress for those most vulnerable and marginalised. **Civil society including faith groups are well placed to developing national indicators, providing (qualitative) data and monitoring implementation because of their access to and experience with marginalised groups at local level.** Such consultation processes must be inclusive, allowing enough space and time for adequate input.