



MEDIA RELEASE

Caritas Internationalis hosted a side event of UN 2023 Water Conference on ‘Community Led Water Management and Governance Practices’

This year the UN 2023 Water Conference invited Caritas Internationalis to host a virtual side event titled: *Community Led Water Management and Governance Practices: Cases of Local Experiences to Accelerate Implementation* from its headquarters in New York. The event brought together Caritas representatives from Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America who highlighted best water practises necessary for sustainable development in the areas of health, nutrition and disaster risk reduction. The event was moderated by Ms. Susan Schneegans, Communications Officer for Natural Sciences at UNESCO.

As an international confederation of Catholic charities made up of 162 member organisations operating in over 200 countries and territories around the globe, Caritas has acquired a wealth of localised knowledge and expertise on human-centred approaches to sustainable water management. Caritas Internationalis is committed to Pope Francis’ call for “an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (Laudato Si).

Caritas Internationalis commits itself to the Water Action Agenda of the UN 2023 Water Conference by pledging to the continued collection of expertise on water, specifically on the water and sanitation sector, water-food security nexus, and water-climate nexus from local and indigenous members of the communities of care that came to be via Caritas Internationalis’ *Together We* campaign on integral ecology, and, further, to sharing examples of lived experiences and best practices, and implement solution oriented sustainable practices on water, including individuals, partners, and institutions at all levels, from the local community level to the global stage.

“Caritas communities are communities that care for our common home and for the poor together as one. Their role will be crucial to developing and promoting holistic approaches to water management and governance in ways that are just and sustainable,” said Caritas Internationalis Global Campaigns Manager Alfonso Apicella. Through the *Together We* launched in 2021 several “communities of care” made up of faith groups as well as members of the general public, have emerged and developed expertise and best practise for water.

According to the *United Nations World Water Development Report*, 2 billion people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water, 3 billion people worldwide are currently experiencing water scarcity and over 4 billion people are without access to basic sanitation. In his opening remarks at the event, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, described water as a “common good” and praised Caritas for their water projects: “Caritas organisations are encouraging this movement that demands listening and opening a new path of recognition of water defenders, and collaboration with them.”

During the webinar, Mr. Paul Borsboom of Cordaid (Caritas Netherlands) addressed the theme of Water for Health in relation to the human right to safe drinking water and the human right to sanitation. Mr. Borsboom said that the Catholic Church, through the Dicastery of Integral Human Development, is leading an initiative to improve water and hygiene (WASH) conditions in healthcare facilities in Mali, Haiti, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Niger, Congo and Yemen. From the installation of mechanical hand washing devices, hygiene education campaigns to the construction of solar pumping systems “Caritas was able to use its network to support local authorities’ measures and reach the most vulnerable as identified by local communities,” said Mr. Borsboom.



Mr. Welcome Sibanda, Development Coordinator for Caritas Zimbabwe Archdiocese of Bulawayo, spoke on Water for Sustainable Development. He said integrated watershed management is a best practice approach led by local communities ultimately for their benefit. Through this approach “communities are able to really interpret the water cycle” to then apply effective agricultural practices, in line with agroecology and seed systems, to ensure farmers and households are food secure through ecologically-sustainable practises. Food reserves enable local communities to have continuous food production all year round. Mr. Sibanda said more still needs to be done to engage local leadership to support sustainable water policies.

On the topic of Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment, Mr. Alirio Caceres from Caritas Latin America and the Caribbean, said: “We cannot continue to deal with two separate crises. There is not only an environmental water crisis and a social water crisis, there is a single socio-environmental crisis.” Therefore, in light of water as a common good, an approach to water must consider “a dialogue between environmental ecology, social ecology, economic ecology, and cultural ecology”. Caritas Latin America and the Caribbean promotes regenerative agriculture, also known as climate change agriculture, due to the need of revitalized soil to maintain agricultural production and food security.

“[Water cooperation] is essentially how all the different actors work together at different levels, to be able to come to a peaceful management of water resources and its use,” said Mr. David Tsetse from Catholic Relief Services (CRS). He said that there are two ways to manage water for people now and for future generations: a water security strategy that addresses water resource management taking into account the whole water cycle for the service of homes and institutions; and governance and finance. In Guatemala, CRS is working with local communities using a participatory approach to program planning and engagement that takes into consideration the contribution of different stakeholders to define solution water solutions for their communities.

In support of community led water management, Caritas Internationalis asserts partial or fragmentary solutions are not enough and that a holistic approach, utilising the lens of integral ecology, derived from the observation of the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world, must be built and maintained. Ecologically sustainable economies and lifestyles, a spirituality of conservationism and political participation, and advocacy from the grassroots up by communities of care all serve as key aspects to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Sustainable Development Goal 6).

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