

# Bringing Real Needs of Real People to Enhance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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On the morning of Friday, 25 September 2015, in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York, United States of America, Pope Francis stands before high-level representatives and dignitaries of 193 States, officers of various Non-Governmental Organizations, and a good number of journalists accredited to the UN. Without counting those virtually connected from every corner of the earth through the “miracle” of instantaneous communication, thousands and thousands of eyes are looking at him; thousands and thousands of hears are waiting for his words. After few seconds of meditation, he starts his historic speech before those who gathered to seek an agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*“The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope”, Pope Francis said. However, “solemn commitments are not enough, although they are certainly a necessary step toward solutions. [...] Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion”. In order to respond to this demand, “we need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges [never forgetting] that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity, guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that [...] we are dealing with real men and women who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights. To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny”.*

The speech of the Holy Father received a standing ovation of long duration, giving the impression that the audience fully agreed with Pope Francis’ clear and convincing rationale. But what about the next step? How would this call be put into action? Would his outcry succeed in pushing governments at putting the human person at the center of integral development?

The text of the Resolution *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on that very day that Pope Francis had addressed this body. The 17 Sustainable Developments Goals are introduced by a promise: “We [Member States of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization] are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet”. But, again, is this enough? In order to enhance the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the real needs of real people must constantly and forcefully be brought to the national, regional and global decision-making arenas. In order words, a constant and strong advocacy in favour of the most in need is required.

Moses Maimonides, a preeminent medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher, said, “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”. Humbly, I say “teach a man to fish and make sure that the river has fish to be fish: you feed him for a lifetime”. In fact, advocating in favour of the most in need requires both words and actions aimed at contributing at the elimination of the root causes that create those needs: if we teach a man to fish, but the river has no fish in it, his family, his children and his community will still suffer from hunger. The role of the international community through plans such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the role of non-governmental organizations – such as Caritas Internationalis – through their daily work at the very grass-root level is exactly to find joint solutions to the suffering of men, women and children, most especially of the most disadvantaged.

The heart of Caritas Internationalis, which is at the center of the Catholic Church in relation to its teaching in the area of charity work, throbs for serving those who live in the most resource-limited settings, both in developing and developed countries. Caritas Internationalis finds its very reason for existence in the service rendered by hundreds of thousands of professionals and volunteers who, in 200 countries and territories of the world, day by day and night by night, help its diocesan and national members to distributing life-saving commodities among millions of people in need, being with them and for them in every circumstance – not only during emergencies or crises, but also before and after.

However, these daily actions will never suffice if they do not inspire – and, consequently, are not complemented by – broader and targeted global efforts aimed at eliminating the root causes that make people vulnerable, facilitating access to integral human development for all. And this is the reason why a “second arm” of Caritas Internationalis has been established through its delegations to the United Nations and other multi-lateral organizations based in New York, USA; Rome, Italy; and Geneva, Switzerland.

The role of these delegations is quite simple, on the paper: to bring the voice of those in need and to influence the global decision-making process so that just solutions could be found for protecting and promoting their dignity of human beings. However, in order to fully accomplish this role, strong involvement of diocesan and national Caritas members – as well of the local church – is required. In fact, the “second arm”, which acts the global level, can fully accomplish its job only if it coordinates with the “first arm”, that is, the local level. In turn, the “first arm” should make every possible effort to help the “second arm” by shedding light on the daily battle waged by millions of people, worldwide, in order to survive.

Elimination of the root causes that make people vulnerable requires clear and joint commitments; these include, for example, distribution of enough and nutritious food to eat, provision of accessible and good-quality health care services, assurance of decent work to provide financial support to one’s own family and others in their local communities, offering decent housing to provide a roof over their heads, and provision of good-quality education so that they may become active and productive members of society.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses such fundamental human needs in terms of goals, to be reached by 2030: Goal 2 (*“end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”*), Goal 3 (*“ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”*), Goal 8 (*“promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”*), Goal 11 (*“make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”*), and Goal 4 (*“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*). But the final result should be the same: to create the conditions to improve the lives of all human beings, but particularly of the most disadvantaged.

*“Whatever we do, we must always remember the people”*, said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of World Health Organization at the 68<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly. *“Remember the people”* must also be the refrain sung by the 193 Members States of the United Nations all along their journey to reach the goals set up in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The melody of such a refrain will be given voice by those who cannot wait until 2030 to have their lives improved, since it will be too late.

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