

A Decade of Action to Deliver Agenda 2030, what does this mean for Caritas in Africa?

Caritas Africa hosts a side event at the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, in Victoria Falls Zimbabwe.

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In September 2015, over 190 Nations approved the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This global participatory process engaged diverse stakeholders and as a result different religious traditions including the Catholic Church embraced the objectives of the SDGs. At a regional level, the African continent has a strategic framework – **Africa Agenda 2063: The Africa we want**- that aims to deliver on Africa’s goal for inclusive and sustainable development. This elaborate 50 year strategy manifests the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom and collective prosperity for all Africans.

Before the launch of the SDGs, the Holy Father Pope Francis on **June 18th 2015**, released an Encyclical Letter on ecology dubbed *Laudato Si* (English: *Praise be to you*). The Encyclical has a subtitle on “*Caring for our common home*”. In the Letter, the Holy Father observes that Agenda 2030 is a great step forward for global dialogue marking a vitally “new and universal solidarity.” The 17 SDGs have been clustered under the five Ps – **People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnerships**. Pope Francis calls for a conversation that involves everyone in view of the linkages between actions by human beings and the environmental challenges that the world is currently facing (Laudato Si, 14). This call by Pope Francis to engage everyone in the conversation on sustainable development is at the heart of the UN 2030 Agenda which has a commitment to “**Leave no one behind.**”

The **sixth session** of the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (2020 ARFSD) opened on Monday 24th February at Elephant Hills Resort in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. A variety of consultative forums took place throughout the entire forum under the theme “**2020-2030: A Decade to Deliver a Transformed and Prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.**” The official opening took place on Tuesday, 25th February with opening statements by the Deputy General Secretary of the United Nations Amina MOHAMED, Emmerson MNANGAGWA, President of Zimbabwe, Youth Representative among other speakers.

According to the summary report on Africa’s progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the progress of Africa on the SDGs is mixed. The report indicates that poverty rates declined from 43% in 2013 to 32.5% in 2019, access to primary education, health care and electricity are improving. The same was also reported for gender parity in schools and representation of women in National Parliaments. The report however indicated that progress was insufficient on many goals and that there were many variations amongst many countries in Africa. The number of people living in poverty was reported to be high due to the high growth of population. During the reporting period the absolute number of poor people increased from 388 million in 2013 to 422 million in 2019. It was also reported that millions of children were not receiving quality education and only 60% of pregnant women are attended to by health care personnel. The UNECA report called on African governments to engage the **youth, women’s groups, the private sector, civil society and development partners** to work together to convert existing national development strategies into action.

The Caritas Africa Regional Executive Secretariat participated in the consultative forum for Major Groups and Other Stakeholders and other numerous side events that took place at the 2020 ARFSD. The Caritas Africa delegation drew representation from the Regional Executive Secretariat, Caritas Congo ASBL, National Catholic Justice, Peace and Caritas (NCJPC)/ Liberia, Caritas South Sudan, Caritas Sierra Leone, Caritas Uganda, Caritas Zambia and the host Caritas Zimbabwe including the Diocesan Caritas of Harare and of Hwange. The Most Rev. Alexander THOMAS, Archbishop of Bulawayo and President of Caritas Zimbabwe came to Victoria Falls to meet the Caritas Representatives and give them his pastoral guidance regarding the side event.

On Wednesday, 26th February Caritas Africa hosted a side event at the 2020 ARFSD on “**Partnering with Faith Groups to achieve sustainable development in Africa**”. The aim of the side event was to highlight the role played by Faith Based Organisations in the contribution to the transformational principles of Agenda 2030 and Africa’s Agenda 2063. Caritas Africa recognises that a multi-stakeholder approach is critical, for all actors to collectively attain sustainable development in Africa. In addition, religion is a major political, social, cultural and economic factor in Africa. Diverse faith communities occupy a critical space in the sustainable development agenda globally.



*(Caritas Africa Side Event Panellists: 1st from the Left, **Mr. Albert MASHIKA**- Regional Coordinator of Caritas Africa, **Ms. MUSAMBA Mubanga**- Programme Specialist, Livelihoods and Climate Change at Caritas Zambia, **Rev Fr. McDonald NAH**- Director of National Catholic Justice, Peace and Caritas in Liberia, **Mr Amson SIBANDA**- National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch at UN DESA, **Mr. Lee CHILESHE**- Ag. Director Ministry of Development and Planning at the National Government of Zambia and 6th on the Right, **Ms. Lucy ESPILA**- Research, Communications and Advocacy Consultant from Kenya).*

In his presentation at the Caritas Africa side event, Mr. Albert MASHIKA, the Regional Coordinator of Caritas Africa, indicated that Caritas Organisations in Africa were keen to engage with Government actors on mechanisms that had been put in place to ensure inclusion of Civil Society in the implementation of SDGs. Mr. MASHIKA also called on Government and development actors to implement the SDGs through the transformative principles of Agenda 2030 as opposed to focusing on Specific SDGS.



“There is a need to counterbalance the current trend among SDG practitioners to only focus on standalone goals , interventions should instead work toward: (1) leaving no one behind (2) Tackling inequalities (3) Participation and Dialogue and (4) Integration environmental support and protection in our work.’

(Mr. Albert MASHIKA- Regional Coordinator of Caritas Africa)

Mr. Lee CHILESHE the Ag. Director, Ministry of Development and Planning in the National Government of Zambia, in his presentation, recognised the important role played by the Civil Society in Zambia. He further indicated that the Government of Zambia would be keen to work with Faith Based entities in the preparation of the 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) report that would be presented at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York.



(The Caritas Africa Side event was held on 26/02/2020 at Grass Island 1, from 1.00-2.30 pm at the Elephant Hills Resort in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe)

Mr. Amson SIBANDA, Chief, National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch at the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) shared with the forum on highlights from the 2019 HLPF and outcomes from the SDGs Leaders’ Summit.

“The Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit stresses the urgent need for concerted, accelerated action by Governments, local authorities, the private sector, civil society, academia and the scientific community at all levels to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In the lead up to the SDG Summit, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs set up an online platform to capture new and ambitious SDG Acceleration Actions. Moving ahead on the Decade of Action for SDG implementation by 2030 called by the Secretary-General, this platform will continue to mobilize ambitious actions and track their progress- Mr. Amson SIBANDA – UN DESA



(Ms. MUSAMBA Mubanga Programme Specialist- Livelihoods and Climate Change- Caritas Zambia)

Ms. MUSAMBA Mubanga, Programme Specialist Livelihoods and Climate Change at Caritas Zambia shared lessons learnt from the “**Bringing Agenda 2030 to Life**” research project that was conducted by CAFOD and University College London in Partnership with Caritas National Organisations in Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zambia. The research amplifies voices from the ground through concrete case studies that demonstrate policies, projects and processes that contribute to the transformative principles of Agenda 2030.

The National Director of Catholic Justice, Peace and Caritas, (NCJPC) Rev Fr. McDonald NAH made a presentation on the initiatives by Faith Actors to contribute to the SDGs. He observed that Faith actors have forged partnerships through interfaith forums at sub-national, national, regional and global levels to influence legislation, shape policy and to implement various programmes that lead to the realisation of the Agenda 2030. As a result funding for development and humanitarian aid is being channelled through faith based communities.



*“At the heart of the UN Agenda for the year 2030 is the commitment to ‘**Leave no one behind**’ this can be compared to the Biblical parable of the shepherd who sets out to find the one lost sheep. Indeed, this reflects our deeply-held faith convictions and practices. Over the years, Faith based Organizations **advocated for the vision of inclusivity**. Now we have a unique opportunity with the SDGs to intentionally fulfill this vision.” (Rev Fr. McDonald NAH- Director of NCJPC Liberia)*

The Catholic priest stressed the need for multi-stakeholders to view faith communities for their development potential as opposed to viewing them for their diverse religious differences. He informed the forum that NCJPC Liberia would be working closely with the Government of Liberia to mobilise civil society to prepare a consolidated report that would be annexed in the 2020 VNR report for Liberia. Finally, as part of Localisation of SDGS, NCJPC Liberia had scheduled a

meeting to engage Catholic Priests on Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. This information would then be cascaded down to the small Christian communities through Parishes and Church Structures.

The Catholic Church in Africa, through Caritas, its Social-Pastoral arm, has significantly contributed to the social transformation of Africa through investing in education, health care, community development, sustainable livelihoods and food security, peace building and conflict transformation initiatives and support towards democratic processes and good governance.

The Caritas network in Africa brings together 46 National Caritas Organisations. Each National Caritas collaborates with Diocesan Caritas at a sub-national level in their respective countries. The Diocesan Caritas Organisations work closely with Local Caritas at a local level. A survey conducted in 31 out of 46 Caritas Africa Member organisations revealed that Caritas is present in 372 Dioceses and 15,000 Parishes in Africa. This demonstrates the development potential of faith communities and the capacity to localise the global goals with the aim of accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In 2020, 16 African countries will be presenting a Voluntary National Review at the 2020 High Level Political Forum in New York. Caritas Africa is desirous to work with Governments, multi-stakeholders and different faith communities through the respective Caritas Africa Member Organisations to contribute to the VNR process as we all work together in the decade of action to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa. This will contribute to make people have life in its fullness (John 10:10).
