

# The distinctive role of the Catholic Church in development and humanitarian response



**7** ways the Church makes a difference

## **Written by Graham Gordon**

Additional research by Jerome Foster, Ellen Martin and Francis Stewart

Edited by Seren Boyd

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to all staff and partners who provided examples and other information: Kayode Akintola, Nana Anto-Awuakye, Bernard Balibuno, Ulrike Beck, Winston Berrios, Gabriele Bertani, John Birchenough, John Bosco, Dadirai Chikwengo, Yadviga Clarke, Fergus Conmee, Barbara Davies, Tom Delamere, Clare Dixon, Aisha Dodwell, Hombeline Dulière, Yael Eshel, Nikki Evans, Montserrat Fernández, Eddie Flory, Gisele Henriques, Cecilia Ilorio, Lucy Jardine, Verity Johnson, Linda Jones, Agnes Kalekye, John Kalusa, Kezia Lavan, Moise Liboto, Mary Lucas, Howard Mollett, Conor Molloy, Mwila Mulumbi, Emily Mulville, Ibrahim Njuguna, Catherine Ogolla, Solomon Phiri, Julian Pinzón, Sonia Pritchard, Paul Rubangakene, Nelly Shonko, Richard Sloman, Janet Symes and Neil Thorns

Cover photo: Sister Yvonne Mwalula carrying gourds as part of the Households in Distress (HID) programme in Zambia (Source: Ben White)

# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction and purpose of this paper</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Section 1. The role of the Church in development</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Section 2. Seven ways the Church makes a difference in development and humanitarian work</b>	<b>17</b>
1. Rapid, local and inclusive humanitarian response	18
a. Spotlight on the coronavirus response	18
b. Responding to conflict, migration, natural disasters, and food shortages	22
2. Influencing social norms and behaviour	26
3. Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation	29
4. Strengthening democratic governance through citizen participation	34
5. Speaking truth to power, witnessing and accompanying suffering	38
6. Providing quality and inclusive healthcare and education	42
7. Supporting sustainable livelihoods	45
<b>Ways forward</b>	<b>48</b>

## Executive summary

Faith and religious practice are central to most people's lives in the global South. Religious institutions are at the heart of society, the cornerstones of the community, with a long reach into even the most remote communities. Religious leaders hold people's trust and often have authority and influence where state and local officials do not.

Understanding the role of faith and faith-based organisations is therefore central to effective development and humanitarian response, and to building mutually beneficial partnership across a wide range of issues and actors.

In the UK, meaningful engagement with faith actors will be core to the work of the newly formed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, as well as the development of a new strategic framework for ODA. There is no more important time to do this as we collectively seek to respond to the current pandemic in the most effective way.

The Catholic Church is making a distinctive contribution to development and humanitarian response in many different contexts, from sheltering Syrian refugees in Lebanon to peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, from upholding indigenous people's rights in Guatemala to helping facilitate free and fair elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its long-term relationships, commitment to communities and acceptance by the local population mean that the Church is often the only institution that stays put when conflict erupts, as it did in South Sudan. And, as it has done in Colombia's civil war, the Church has borne witness to people's pain and shared in their suffering. When disasters strike it is already on the scene, ready and willing to respond as seen in Bangladesh and the Philippines. The Church has used its presence and role in communities to tackle the spread of diseases such as Ebola and the Coronavirus.

*The involvement of faith groups in the response to the threat of Ebola remains among the best weapons for convincing the people to adopt good practices and attitudes to put an end to this deadly outbreak.*

**Théophile Kaboy Ruboneka Catholic Bishop of Goma, DRC**

Its scope, reach and influence mean the Church is already a valued partner for governments, business and international organisations.

However, its potential as a development and humanitarian partner remains largely untapped. This is in part due to a misunderstanding of its structures, mission and ways of working, as well as an instrumentalised approach by development actors that wants the Church to implement projects and programmes that have already been designed without their involvement. This paper should go some way to addressing those misunderstandings.

Its potential has also been compromised due to the Church's own failings and inconsistencies. The Catholic Church has not always got things right and, in some cases, it has been on the side of the oppressor or has taught and behaved in ways that stigmatise or restrict human rights. It is no secret that there have been controversies and conflicts between Church organisations and other development actors. These issues have been well documented elsewhere. We do not address them here but recognise that they form part of the backdrop of engagement and partnerships.



## Reach and scope

The Catholic Church has a global presence, with around 1.2 billion adherents globally.<sup>1</sup> The diocesan and parish structures give the Church a national and local presence in nearly every country and community.

The Church includes the formal structures of bishops and priests, with the Holy See as the governing body in Rome. The Pope appoints bishops who are accountable to Rome and have responsibility for overseeing the work in their dioceses. The Church also includes the local congregations and religious orders, development organisations and service organisations, base communities and solidarity groups. Each of these can play a specific role in development and emergency response.

Development and humanitarian professionals will encounter these different faces or expressions of the Church in distinct ways and it is important to understand how they work, the added value they bring and the best ways to build effective partnerships.

## Mission and vision

What unites these diverse expressions of Church is the mission of the Church and its vision of development.

The **vision of development** is for the whole person and all people, rooted in the inherent dignity of all people as being made in the image and likeness of God, having equal value and worth. It is a vision of a world transformed to reflect the Kingdom of God, where all people, communities and the earth may flourish and where all people and institutions work for the common good. It is both individual and collective, personal and structural.

The **mission and nature of the Church** is dedicated to bringing about this vision:

- The Church is called to serve all people, and to have a “preferential option for the poor”, for those people and communities that others may have overlooked, those who suffer discrimination, injustice or oppression. It serves people based on need, regardless of race, gender and religion.
- It is rooted in local communities, sharing in people’s lives, suffering, hopes and dreams, often where few other institutions are present, building a deep understanding and trust.
- The Church is also called to transform society and has a profoundly hopeful outlook on what change is possible, while continuing in the prophetic tradition of denouncing injustice and oppression and speaking truth to power.



*In the 20 years I have been a priest in Colombia, I have lived with armed conflict. I have had to deal with all the armed groups... and feared for my life many times. If you're a priest who is committed to the people, you have to make yourself a target of the armed groups. I was singled out and threatened many times as I stood alongside people forced to flee their homes, remained with those who stayed and endured, and picked up dead bodies, even when armed groups forbade us.*

**Fr Sterlin, priest in Diocese of Quibdó<sup>2</sup>, Colombia**



1 <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>

2. <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/1207/peace-must-be-more-than-just-a-declaration-in-colombia->

## Distinctive contribution

The nature of the Church has enabled it to have a distinctive role in development and humanitarian response in different contexts.

We have grouped these distinctive roles of the Church in seven broad categories, while recognising that the Church will often be fulfilling many, if not all, of these roles at any one time.

- 1 **Rapid, local and inclusive humanitarian response**
- 2 **Influencing social norms and behaviour**
- 3 **Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation**
- 4 **Strengthening democratic governance through citizen participation**
- 5 **Speaking truth to power, witnessing and accompanying suffering**
- 6 **Providing quality and inclusive healthcare and education**
- 7 **Supporting sustainable livelihoods**

Below we offer snapshots of how the way the Church has worked on these issues in different contexts, and the impacts in people's lives. The main report goes into greater detail for all of the examples.

### 1 Rapid, local and inclusive humanitarian response

Church agencies can often act immediately in any humanitarian response due to their presence in the communities. The Church's rootedness in communities and ongoing work with vulnerable populations means that church institutions are often already aware of those in most need and can target their response, as they have during Covid-19. In **Bolivia**, the Church provided food and hygiene kits for men and women in prisons and for migrants left in a precarious situation due to lockdowns. In **South Sudan** and **Kenya**, the Church has used local



Photo: Inmanuel Chayan Biswas/Caritas Bangladesh

Saba shows a member of Caritas staff the damage her shelter suffered in the recent monsoon season. Providing safe shelter and responding to coronavirus in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

radio to reach the most remote areas, including indigenous communities, providing accurate public health information in local languages.

The global Caritas network is the second largest provider of humanitarian support and is capable of a global, coordinated technical and financial response. It works across borders, such as providing food, shelter, legal advice and even long-term family homes for Venezuelan refugees in **Colombia**, **Brazil** and **Peru**. Church agencies can often reach people within the first 24 hours by drawing on local resources and volunteer capacity, such as in the **Philippines** where Caritas mobilised hundreds of volunteers to support 650,000 people affected by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

The Catholic Church response is rooted in the commitment to serve all people, regardless of religious beliefs and affiliation, such as in the Rohingya response in **Bangladesh**. In the Rohingya refugee camps, Caritas has provided 275,000 people with safe, dignified shelter, with lighting, toilets and bathing areas, as well as women and child-friendly spaces.



*We are there as [an] expression of love to the people. The gospel says, 'When I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was shelter-less, you gave me shelter.'*

**Atul Sarker, Caritas Bangladesh Executive Director<sup>3</sup>**



3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoVKNjAoK-Y>

## 2 Influencing social norms and behaviour

Being rooted in communities and an integral part of people's lives, the Church has often been able to influence social norms and behaviour in a positive way to change the way that communities treat people. This applies particularly to the treatment of vulnerable people or those who have been stigmatised, excluded or regarded as second-class citizens. Due to their trusted role and presence, the Church's leadership and service ministries have been successful in addressing many previously taboo subjects. This has led to a reduction in early child marriage in **Malawi** and sexual exploitation being tackled in **Guatemala**.

In **West Africa** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, church and other faith leaders were able to help stem the spread of Ebola by leading by example in getting vaccinated and by teaching how the newly required safer burial practices were compatible with religious traditions and beliefs. In Zambia church development organisations have supported communities in changing land-tenure laws to allow women to own land.

In **Mozambique** the Church has spoken out against the previously taboo subject of trafficking in human organs for witchcraft. This was in a context where people have been afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation for themselves or their families and of becoming victims of witchcraft themselves. The detailed research into the extent of trafficking and teaching around human dignity changed the debate on what is seen as culturally acceptable in terms of trafficking human organs for witchcraft.



Photo: Tommy Trenchard/ Caritas Internationalis

*Caritas has trained priests and other faith leaders to spread Ebola prevention messages and instigate handwashing at all ceremonies in DRC.*

## 3 Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation

The Church is active in peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation at all levels, due to its trusted role and presence in communities. It is seen as an impartial actor seeking the common good and speaking out for those whose voices may not be heard. Taking an empathetic approach, the Church has brought warring communities together in **Kenya** and **Ethiopia**, which has led to community reconciliation, protection of land and livestock, and a significant reduction in loss of life.



Photo: Sam Phelps/ Catholic Relief Services

*Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga of Bangui joins Muslims in prayer for an end to the crisis, Central African Republic.*

Through peacebuilding programmes with a practical focus, church development agencies have brought together groups that see each other as enemies and helped them work together towards a common goal, overcoming animosity and prejudice. This has been through sports camps and recreational activities in **Lebanon**, seed and tool distributions in **Uganda** for communities who are accepting returnees (including former militants) back into their midst, and tree-planting projects in **Myanmar** involving different religious groups who might previously have seen each other as enemies.

At national level, the impartial role of the Church means that its leaders can play a crucial role in peacebuilding, such as in **Colombia** via the Truth Commission and in **South Sudan** as part of the mediation team brokering peace at national level. The Vatican supported the work in South Sudan by convening a high-level meeting with leaders in Rome in the run up to signing the peace deal in 2019.



*We are working with traumatised, war-torn communities on peacebuilding and reconciliation. By bringing together Dinka and Nuer people across the main ethnic divide, and persuading perpetrators and victims to meet face to face, we can address the grievances that are fuelling the conflict, including endemic violence against women.*

*This is what the Church's Action Plan for Peace is doing, community by community.*

**Father James Oyet, Secretary General of the South Sudan Council of Churches**<sup>4</sup>

## 4 Strengthening democratic governance through citizen participation

The Church has mobilised citizens to engage in democratic processes to promote government policies and business activities that help communities thrive and protect the environment, such as in **Peru** where they have supported indigenous communities to engage peacefully with companies and local government and gain access to water for agriculture and community livelihoods.

In the **UK**, thousands of Catholic parishes and schools have taken action in support of climate change, meeting their MPs and taking part in marches, as well as changing their lifestyles by switching to renewable energy and finding other ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

The Church has played a significant role in many countries in strengthening democratic governance through training and supporting citizens to engage with government and providing oversight for free and fair elections and the transition to democracy.

In the **DRC**, the Church used its presence and reach within the country to strengthen democratic accountability and to advocate for free and fair elections. It has a presence in all 26 provinces, through the provision of services such as schools

and health centres, and the Church is one of the few institutions that commands wide respect and trust across a big and divided country. The Catholic Bishops' Conference trained 40,000 citizens to act as electoral observers in the 2017 election and played an informal oversight role in judging election results, limiting the opportunities for electoral fraud and contributing to a reduction in violence during the election period.



*Livesimply award celebration, St Benedict's Garforth, Leeds diocese, UK.*

## 5 Speaking truth to power, witnessing and accompanying suffering

The Church has a calling to speak truth to power and has used this prophetic voice to call out governments with authoritarian tendencies and companies that are not respecting people's rights. This has led to the Church being targeted with violence and many people losing their lives. In **Nicaragua**, the Catholic Church authorities led a march against a culture of impunity and corruption; the Church was then invited to try and mediate to end the political stalemate.

The role of accompanying and witnessing suffering has meant the Church has often uncovered and exposed human rights abuses, mass killings and abusive treatment of vulnerable populations, which would otherwise have gone unreported. This was the case throughout the internal armed conflict in **Colombia** and with the Gukurahundi massacres of the early 1980s in **Zimbabwe**.

Through speaking up, the Church aims to offer a vision and a hope for the future for citizens in times

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/27/din-over-brexit-us-border-wall-south-sudan>



Photo: Montserrat Fernandez

*Mayan indigenous women participating in a human rights workshop in Guatemala.*

of difficulty and despair, and a voice of peace in times of violence. This is seen in the many pastoral letters that national and regional Bishops' Conferences and individual bishops have written, such as at the end of the civil war in **Sri Lanka**, after a thawing of relations between **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**, and ahead of elections in **Kenya**. These letters are usually read out in churches across the country and often attract national media coverage, influencing the national debate.

**Pope Francis** has also spoken out on many issues of global importance, including releasing his encyclical *Laudato Si' – on Care for our common home* – just months before the 2015 climate change talks in Paris, seeking to highlight the urgency of climate change and to influence the level of ambition of governments and business.

In **Brazil**, where many people have been killed as they have tried to protect their land, the Church's land commission (CPT) has helped communities bring perpetrators to justice and gain titles for their land. They defend the rights of poor families and communities through the justice system when they are threatened with eviction, or when they are seeking compensation for resettlement after being removed from their lands. They work with communities throughout this process, helping them stay organised so that they do not give up on their claim to land or abandon their land due to agricultural production and commercialisation pressures.

## 6 Providing high-quality and inclusive healthcare and education

Due to its size, reach and parish structure, the Catholic Church has almost global coverage. For decades, the Church institutions have been providers of high-quality and inclusive healthcare and education in

many countries, including in communities where the state has limited resources and limited reach. The healthcare provision is often recognised for its quality and personal approach, such as in **Liberia**, **Eritrea** and **Zimbabwe**. Healthcare services draw on a range of religious orders and volunteers who have the time and the vocation to care for the whole person and who have a commitment to treating everyone with dignity and respect.

The schools tend to be popular due to the quality of education and the values-based teaching. They can have wider impacts in society due to the links to the wider community and issues they face. For example, in **El Salvador**, religious orders work with the children and their families to build self-esteem and provide alternative prospects outside the dominant gang culture. In **Bangladesh**, Catholic schools have provided access to education for the Adivasi population, who would otherwise be excluded from wider educational opportunities.

The infrastructure and reach of these schools and health centres can also complement the development and humanitarian work of the Church. They can act as shelter or distribution centres in times of emergency, as voting stations or electoral oversight offices, as trusted places for dialogue and mediation, and as reception and rehabilitation centres.

In **Eritrea**, the Church has supported the government in delivering healthcare in remote areas which state services struggled to reach. Groups of religious sisters, including the Sisters of Charity and the Comboni Missionary Sisters, traveled long distances by vehicle to remote villages to check on people's health. They also brought midwifery delivery kits, which resulted in reduced maternal and infant mortality rates.



Photo: Ana Manganaro Clinic

*Supporting mother and child health & nutrition in Guarjila, El Salvador*



## 7 Supporting sustainable livelihoods

Church development organisations are present at local level and support many communities, both rural and urban, towards sustainable livelihoods. Their ongoing presence and wide range of interventions enable them to engage in the full spectrum of community activities, including sustainable agriculture, conflict resolution, women's participation, organisational development, and health and sanitation provision. The length of time the Church has served these communities, and its focus on serving each person and promoting the common good, means that it is widely trusted.

This has in turn meant that people are willing to learn new methods of farming and land use practices from the Church, to become more sustainable both economically and environmentally, as seen in climate-resilient agriculture in **Zimbabwe**.

Through its presence on the ground, the Church has also enabled the flourishing of different models of development that protect the environment and put people first, such as its role in supporting legislation to protect water sources in **El Salvador**.

Through Caritas's "family as a development unit approach" to farming in **Zambia**, farmers have seen increased yields through organic farming, as well as better nutrition, which together has enabled communities to send all the children, including orphans, to school. It has also led to improved soil quality, reduced erosion and carbon capture through tree planting, as well as increased participation of women in decision-making and reduced levels of family conflict.



*Tabeth watering her plants in the Jekesa Fungwa community vegetable garden, Zimbabwe*

## Ways forward

There is an opportunity for more effective partnerships between donor governments, international organisations and the Church at all levels.

In the UK, meaningful engagement with the Church and other faith actors will be an essential part of the work of the newly formed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the development of a new strategic framework for ODA.

This paper suggests four ways this can happen:

- 1 Implement an evidence-based learning programme with faith actors**, analysing what has worked and what has not worked in previous partnerships with the UK government. This could start with areas of mutual interest, such as humanitarian intervention, peacebuilding and responding to pandemics including Ebola and Covid-19.
- 2 Ensure deeper and ongoing engagement with faith leaders and faith groups at local and national level** in political analysis, programme design, development and implementation. This should be a key pillar in the work of all UK Missions overseas, engaging with faith actors as valued partners, rooted in local contexts with invaluable social, cultural and political capital and insights.
- 3 Develop a strategic approach to working with faith actors**. The FCDO should develop a cross-departmental strategy to engage with faith actors, seeking input from a faith advisory group. It could start with a focus on issues where there is already strong engagement, such as in humanitarian response, peace-building and democratic accountability.
- 4 Provide long-term support for effective partnerships with faith actors**, especially for issues where they are often the only actors who can intervene effectively, such as in peacebuilding or humanitarian response, and in contexts that other actors struggle to access.

# Introduction and purpose of this paper

Most people in the global South engage in some form of religious and faith-based practice on a regular basis. For many, faith and religion are central to their own development, to life decisions and to community practice. Religious institutions are often the main reference points and most trusted institutions for the majority.<sup>5</sup> Expressions of faith tend to be more public and community-based than in the global North, where there is greater separation of public and private lives.

Understanding the role of faith and faith-based organisations is therefore central to building effective and mutually beneficial partnerships across a wide range of actors. This paper therefore aims to give a deeper understanding of the distinctive role of the Catholic Church in humanitarian and development work, drawing on a wide range of examples.

The Catholic Church is a complex institution, which may look different in different contexts. In many countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America, the Church and its pastoral, social development, health and education ministries permeate society. Most of the population will profess to be Christian, often with a majority belonging to the Catholic Church and sharing many beliefs, norms and values.

In other countries, however, particularly throughout Asia and the Middle East, the Catholic Church is often a minority. Nonetheless, it has a mission to serve the whole population and a commitment to the common good, so will seek to contribute to the wider society from that perspective. Due to the coverage of its health and education services, the Church will often have a significant presence even where Catholicism is a minority.

## Untapped potential

Whatever the local, national and even international expressions, there is significant untapped potential in the Catholic Church as regards development and humanitarian work. This needs to be understood better for the Church to have a greater impact

in partnership with other organisations such as governments, business and international organisations.

A common misconception among development and humanitarian workers is simply to see the Church as another service provider, implementing projects that have already been designed and decided elsewhere. As we outline, this ignores the role of the Church as embedded in communities over the long term, and its deep understanding of the history, culture, hopes and fears of the local population. It also overlooks the role of the Church, clergy and lay workers as trusted voices who are committed to the common good and who can engage with people from a standpoint of shared values and beliefs.

Another mistake is to equate church organisations with large secular development and humanitarian organisations and focus more on bureaucratic and financial requirements. To do so is to ignore the significant volunteer and pastoral potential of the Church, the accompaniment of communities in their struggles and dreams, and an approach to people rooted in human dignity.

Furthermore, the Church has sometimes been assumed to be seeking its own benefit or favouring its own people and therefore is overlooked as a partner. This ignores the Church's commitment to the common good and to the development of the whole person and every person, regardless of race or religion,<sup>6</sup> which is central to Catholic Social Teaching and the social development institutions of the Church.

This paper aims to show the distinctive role that the Catholic Church plays in development and humanitarian work, rooted in its mission and vision, structures and presence on the ground.

It highlights where the reach of the Church into local communities has enabled an immediate response to coronavirus in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Bolivia and Brazil, and to humanitarian disasters in the Philippines, Syria and Venezuela.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2000) *Voices of the poor*

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.caritas.org/who-we-are/>

It shows how the Church can influence social norms to respond to stigma and discrimination, resulting in land rights for women in Zambia and in a reduction in child marriage in Malawi.

It looks at its community peacebuilding and mediation role in Kenya, Ethiopia and Colombia, where the Church has prevented further loss of life through being a trusted broker bringing warring groups together.

The voice of the Church is clearly shown through pastoral letters which can often represent the national mood and give people confidence to speak out themselves.

Finally, the paper outlines where local church development agencies have helped to develop environmentally friendly farming practices and spoken out for the protection of the environment, such as sustainable agriculture in Zambia and protection of water in El Salvador.

This paper comes with two caveats. Firstly, it is not a 'warts and all' portrayal of the role of the Catholic

Church in development. The examples chosen, often from CAFOD partners, show the Church at its best. As has been well documented, the Church has also sometimes been part of the problem and has been involved in oppression, injustice and discrimination against different groups in different ways throughout its history. The Church may not always act as single unified institution within a country or dioceses, meaning that sometimes different church leaders can remain silent on injustices while others speak out, or some may condone discriminatory behaviours which others condemn. This may sometimes explain the reluctance of development professionals to engage further.

Secondly, the Catholic Church often works in ecumenical, interfaith or wider civil society coalitions. Some of the examples focus more on these coalitions, while trying to show the distinctive contribution that the Catholic Church has been able to make due to its structure, reach, mission and approaches.



Photo: Nella Waga

*Sister Modeasther Karuri, Caritas Nairobi programme manager distributes supplies in Kenya*

# Section 1. The role of the Church in development

## CHURCH STRUCTURE AND PRESENCE

The Catholic Church has a global presence: 16 per cent of the world's population profess to be Catholic – which equates to about 1.2 billion people and 50 per cent of all Christians.<sup>7</sup> The diocesan and parish structure means that the Church also has a local presence in nearly every country and community.

The Church includes the formal structures of bishops and priests, with the Holy See as the governing body in Rome. It also includes the local congregations and religious orders, development organisations and service organisations, base communities and solidarity groups, spanning many lay people and initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

Development and humanitarian professionals are therefore likely to come across the Church in different forms, depending on the context they are working in and the type of work they are doing.

This may be at a local level, through a local parish or congregation of committed believers, or a group of nuns or priests administering in a school or hospital. For others, it might appear as a bishop with whom they meet to advocate together on behalf of the poor and marginalised, or through a Catholic university.

People's experience may be through one of the service ministries and their programmes, such as Caritas, Justice and Peace, migration or prison work, which are often working in rural communities and with vulnerable populations. Or their interaction may come through the official offices of the Holy See, the central governing body of the Church, based in Vatican City, or through the Nuncios or ambassadors in different countries.

It is important to understand how these different parts work, and how they fit together, in order to develop partnerships with the most appropriate bodies.

## VISION OF DEVELOPMENT

The global Catholic Church has a distinctive vision of development, which underpins its mission and how it works.

This vision is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), which is a living tradition that has, over time, adopted a method of 'seeing, judging and acting' on social, environmental and economic issues.

*Seeing* means paying attention to the 'signs of the times' in wider society, accompanying and listening to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities. Judging brings the CST principles (including human dignity, solidarity, the common good, participation preferential option for the poor, care for creation) to bear on the problem. Acting requires a response, whether that be pastoral care and accompaniment, challenging injustice, serving people's immediate needs or long-term programmes.



Photo: Abyei

*Father Karlo Kaw preaches during Palm Sunday Mass at the Catholic Church in Abyei, a contested region along the border between Sudan and South Sudan*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>

<sup>8</sup> The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, outlines the various expressions of the Church, including the image of "the people of God" (9-11), indicating that the Church does not just refer to the structure of the institution, the hierarchy or the clergy, but also to the communities of people brought together by God. *Lumen Gentium*, 1964.



## Key Catholic Social Teaching Principles that guide development and humanitarian response

### Dignity

Every human person is made in the image and likeness of God. This is a gift that we all share as fellow human beings; we are all infinitely loved by our Creator. It is simply by being, not by doing or having, that we have dignity. Our work and participation in building the common good, as agents of our own destiny, is an expression of this dignity.

### Participation and subsidiarity

Participation means that all people have a right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society, and in the decisions that affect their community, in accordance with their dignity. Subsidiarity means that the defence of this dignity need not rely exclusively on the state, but on decentralised, democratic institutions and civil society. Participation in decisions that affect people can therefore happen at their most local level when appropriate.

### Solidarity

Solidarity arises when we remember that we belong to each other. Solidarity is about alliances not purely based on contract but relationships recognising our interdependence, between all people on the planet and between past and future generations.

### The Common Good

The Common Good is the name for the necessary conditions for people to live with dignity and ensure the goods of the earth are used for the benefit of all people.

### The preferential option for the poor

Jesus sought friendship with the poorest and most vulnerable people, those seen as outcasts in society, showing that God's love sides with the oppressed, not the oppressor. In addition to what justice demands, this principle asks us to see the world from the perspective of the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities.

### Peace

Peace-making is a core value of the Gospel, called "blessed" in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 1-12). It involves promoting non-violence, reconciliation, conflict-resolution, but also putting in place the conditions that can foster lasting peace.

### Care for Creation

The earth is our common home. It is not our possession to exploit or abuse, but to look after for future generations, recognising the worth of all living things. Climate change and ecological devastation are harming those who are least to blame for industrialisation and pollution, so care for creation a matter related to justice and the common good.

The corresponding vision of development is one which promotes the development of the whole person, all people and the planet. It is a vision of a world transformed to reflect the Kingdom of God, where all people, communities and the earth may flourish, and where all people and institutions work for the common good. It is both individual and collective, personal and structural.

It is rooted in the inherent dignity of all people, being made in the image and likeness of God and having equal value and worth, both men and women alike. Jesus promises "life to the full" (John 10:10) and that is a promise for each and every person. The mission is therefore to serve the whole of society, irrespective of race or religion.



Development must also respond to the pressing issues of our time.

According to Pope Paul VI: *“Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person”* (*Populorum progressio*, 1967).

After the 2008 financial crash, Pope Benedict XVI called on the state and market to work together in service of the common good, recognising that the market by itself had failed to provide basic goods and freedoms, to respect the dignity of the human person and precarious workers and families (*Caritas in veritate*, 2009).

In the face of the impacts of both over-development and under-development, Pope Francis calls for an urgent ecological conversion and redefinition of progress in response to a culture of waste, the loss of biodiversity, and the threats of climate change. He calls for an integral ecology approach which recognises that everything is interconnected and where all creatures are recognised as intrinsically valuable, independent of their usefulness. Development is therefore a holistic approach that promotes human flourishing, which includes caring for our common home and looking after God’s creation, both for current and future generations (*Laudato Si’ – on Care for our common home*, 2015).

In the current Covid-19 crisis, Pope Francis laments the lack of a coordinated global response in a world where nationalism, populism and individualism are growing. He calls for *“a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis”*. He argues that we need to take the opportunity to rebuild from coronavirus in a new way which puts people and planet – not the economy – at the centre. We need to learn from the mistakes of the last financial crisis to which the response did not involve rethinking the model of development, but instead deepened some of its most damaging characteristics: *“It appears that the actual strategies developed worldwide in the wake of the crisis fostered greater individualism, less integration and increased freedom for the truly powerful, who always find a way to escape unscathed”* (*Fratelli tutti, on Fraternity and social friendship*, 2020, pp 170–79).

## MISSION AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Part of the mission of the Church is to work to bring about this vision of development of the whole person and of all people, in harmony with our common home.

Before looking at how the Church has played a distinctive role in development, we outline briefly three aspects of the Church’s mission.

### 1 Called to serve all people, especially the most marginalised

The Church as an institution and as the people of God is called to serve the people and communities in which it operates, without expecting anything in return (Luke 4:18–19). This service is focused on all people, but the Church is to have a preferential option for the poor (*Laudato Si’*, p 158) and to pay particular attention to those on the margins of society, those people and communities that others may have overlooked, those who suffer discrimination, injustice or oppression. While the Church is impartial, the vision of development and commitment to the common good compels the Church to work for justice and peace and to speak out for those who are not treated equally.

Pope Francis’s papacy began by highlighting this aspect of a priest’s vocation, inviting pastors to have the “odour of the sheep”<sup>9</sup> – to be sharing in the struggles and messiness of the people they minister to. The way in which priests and religious orders are situated in a local community, accompanying their everyday struggles, sharing hopes and dreams, enables them to find a voice and way of addressing people which cuts across distinctions of class, race or privilege.

It may enable them to have moral authority within the community, country or even further afield. This is not due to any formal hierarchical or institutional position, but only comes through service, as modelled by Jesus the servant king who washed the disciples’ feet (John 13) and who encouraged children to approach him while his ministry was in full flow (Matthew 19).

9 Pope Francis’ homily at Chrism Mass, 2013

Service is always done in partnership with those whose lives it involves, as the Church sees people as “artisans of their own destiny” (*Populorum progressio*, p 65), with dignity and in the image and likeness of God and with the capacity to contribute to society. This leads the Church to engage in dialogue with all people.

## 2 Rooted in local communities, with global reach

The Church’s rootedness in communities means that it is present before, during and after any events, and its presence outlasts most other actors. This enables an immediate and sustainable response to emergencies and engagement in long-term development, accompanying communities and their own processes.

The continued presence enables long-term relationships of trust to be built up, as people know that the Church will always be there and will serve them regardless of their beliefs or affiliation, and will exercise impartiality through its commitment to justice and peace in the political sphere. This has enabled the Church to play a role in mediation, convening dialogue and peacebuilding, acting as a trusted broker amid conflict.

It also allows church leaders and others to engage with people based on values, spiritual and emotional concerns, which can help motivate people’s extrinsic values such as caring for the most marginalised, volunteering to serve others, inclusion and protecting the environment. This is particularly relevant in countries like most in Africa and Latin America, where religion is part of everyday life and where the separation between public and private spheres is less marked than in Western societies.

The reach of the Church is also global, which means that it can reach all people, whether in the most

remote communities or in seats of power at national and international level. It also allows the Church to see the manifestation of global challenges such as migration and climate change from diverse local perspectives, through the experiences of individual women, men and children.

## 3 Called to transform society

The Church has a clear and hopeful vision of how the world could be in the future, based on its vision of integral human development and belief in a God who is active in human society. This includes looking after the world for both current and future generations.

It is here that the Church is called to continue in the tradition of the Old and New Testament prophets, with their dual calling to denounce injustice, oppression and suffering, and to point towards what needs to change. Jesus uses the image of “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13–16). On the one hand, this is essentially hopeful and that gives a constant motivation to work for a better world. However, it may lead to confrontation with those in power or with vested interests when either the poorest people or creation is suffering.

A priest is primarily engaging as a pastor with a spiritual responsibility for the people under his care. By addressing people firstly as parishioners and human beings, a priest’s voice can cut through distortions of the truth by those in power. St Oscar Romero could address members of the Salvadoran military as human beings rather than killing machines, who were subject to God’s law before any human law or allegiance.<sup>10</sup>

This prophetic voice is the Church addressing not only the world, but also the Church itself where it has been complicit in injustice or discrimination and needs to change or even repent of past wrongs.

<sup>10</sup> “The Church in the Service of Personal, Community and Transcendent Liberation”, Homily of St Oscar Romero, Fifth Sunday of Lent March 23, 1980, p. 22

## Section 2. Seven ways the Church makes a difference in development and humanitarian work

The nature of the Church has enabled it to have a distinctive role in different contexts.

We have grouped these distinctive roles of the Church in seven broad categories, while recognising that the Church will often be fulfilling many, if not all, of these roles at any one time.

- 1 Rapid, local and inclusive humanitarian response**
- 2 Influencing social norms and behaviour**
- 3 Peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation**
- 4 Strengthening democratic governance through citizen participation**
- 5 Speaking truth to power, witnessing and accompanying suffering**
- 6 Providing quality and inclusive healthcare and education**
- 7 Supporting sustainable livelihoods**

The rest of the paper looks at each of these areas of impact in turn, explaining the role of the Church and illustrating this with examples from across Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East.

Within the first section on humanitarian response, we have added an extra section at the start on how the Church has responded to the current context of coronavirus.



Photo: Ben White  
*Beauty's family at home. Households in Distress (HID) programme, Zambia,*



# 1 RAPID, LOCAL AND INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE



Photo: Caritas Mutare

*Food distributions and sharing health and hygiene messages during the coronavirus outbreak in Zimbabwe*

## a) Spotlight on the coronavirus response

As the coronavirus pandemic has spread throughout the world, it has claimed many lives and brought considerable suffering to millions of people. Existing health systems in many countries have struggled to cope and the resulting restrictions and preventative measures have affected the livelihoods and coping strategies of many of the most vulnerable people in society.

Through existing health centres and healthcare workers embedded in the communities, the Church has been able to complement the services of governments, through providing PPE kits and handwashing facilities, in countries such as **Ethiopia**. The existing community outreach workers often know the most vulnerable members of the community and have been able to target emergency food and hygiene supplies to migrants, Indigenous Peoples, and people in prison in **Bolivia, Brazil and Guatemala**.

As a trusted voice in society, the Church in **South Sudan and Kenya** has been able to ensure that awareness-raising campaigns through local radio stations and door-to-door visits have reached indigenous and rural communities in ways that are culturally appropriate and that will bring about behaviour change.

## Emergency relief for prisoners and migrants

The national healthcare system in **Bolivia** has been stretched beyond its coping capacity due to coronavirus and it was already struggling to reach into many rural areas. Quarantine restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus and try to protect the healthcare system from unsustainable demand have limited people's ability to go out and buy food, and how far they can travel. These rules are causing extreme hardship for migrants and communities of indigenous peoples in cities, whose livelihoods depend on informal labour. Food supplies to prisons have been drastically reduced and relatives have not been able to visit inmates to provide much needed food or hygiene products. Migrant families, including Venezuelan refugees, are living in temporary shelters, including bus terminals, and have effectively been cut off from opportunities to find work or food or provide for their families. Restrictions have also caused suffering to children in orphanages and elderly people in care homes: these institutions have been closed to visitors including family members and other support networks on whom they rely for basic provisions.

Pastoral Social Caritas Bolivia (PSCB) has targeted its support towards these most vulnerable groups, who also face discrimination from the wider population and are less likely to receive voluntary or state support. PSCB has worked as a UNHCR implementing partner due to its nationwide networks of local diocesan teams, and their knowledge of the most vulnerable members of the community and how to reach them. These diocesan teams have provided food and hygiene supplies to prisoners in nearly every prison in the country, both male and female, as well as to migrants in the cities of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí. They have provided one meal a day as well as essentials such as toilet paper and hand sanitiser, and medicines where possible. This was possible due to the PSCB's existing relationships through its prison ministry and its work with migrants, as well as its ability to mobilise a volunteer base ready to serve the local community.

## Using health networks to distribute hygiene kits and make cash transfers

As cases of coronavirus started to increase in **Ethiopia**, the Catholic hospitals and health centres have used their reach to provide hygiene materials and raise awareness among rural populations of how to protect themselves against the virus. Through the existing presence and work of these health facilities in small towns and rural areas, the Church has an awareness of the most vulnerable groups – such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), elderly people, street children, and people living with disabilities – and has been able to target its interventions accordingly. Using the hospitals and health centres as a base, health workers, outreach workers and volunteers have gone to key places where community members will pass through or congregate in everyday life or will come to seek advice. These include marketplaces, bus stations and checkpoints, places of worship and social organisations. They have provided hand sanitising materials to community members and installed handwashing points, alongside training on good hygiene and social distancing. As trusted members of the community, who speak the local language and are part of the local culture, the health workers have contributed to the behaviour change needed to prevent the rapid spread of coronavirus.

In addition, due to travel restrictions, reduced access to local markets and rising food prices in the lean season of June to September, the purchasing power of poorer households decreased dramatically, leaving them vulnerable to malnutrition and hunger. Figures issued by the Ethiopian government and humanitarian partners identified 16 million people in immediate need of support, more than doubling the figure for six months previously.<sup>11</sup> In Tigray and Addis Ababa, the Catholic Church Social Development Commission (Caritas Ethiopia) worked closely within the Ethiopian government's planned response. It was able to use its existing networks to work with community leaders to identify those in need of immediate support and provide unconditional cash transfers. Through the global Caritas network, Caritas Ethiopia was able to raise funds and repurpose existing programmes to reach 1.4 million people through its early-stage emergency interventions.

<sup>11</sup> Revision of 2020 Humanitarian Requirements: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-government-and-partners-release-revised-humanitarian-response-plan>



## Reaching rural and indigenous communities through local radio

In many countries, the Church has been a key partner with government agencies in awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the spread of coronavirus, reduce stigma and promote behaviour change. The Church has often played a role in reaching marginalised groups, using its own network and resources when government access has been difficult or resources insufficient.

In **Kenya**, the government has used national newspapers and social media to inform the population about coronavirus and promote preventative measures. However, it has been harder to reach poor and marginalised communities that lack access to smartphones and television, and where literacy levels are low. Fear and stigma were fuelling a great deal of misinformation about coronavirus, causing confusion. Radio is the primary way many rural communities receive their news, so the Kenyan Bishops Conference used the existing network of 15 Catholic radio stations, local community radio stations and local public speaker announcements to raise awareness. As the Church is a trusted institution, its messages have credibility, and the community is more likely to act on them. In addition, amid increased stigma around coronavirus, making many reluctant to go for testing, the Bishops Conference ensured that the messages focused on empathy and inclusion, as opposed to blame, discrimination and exclusion.

In **Guatemala**, it has been a challenge to reach indigenous communities with culturally appropriate information in their own languages. Working with the communities themselves, the national Caritas has prepared public health messages in many of the indigenous languages such as Q'eqchi', Poqomchi', Ch'orti', Kaqchikel and Garifuna. It has disseminated this information through local and regional radio stations in partnership with the Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools (FGER) and Radio Tezulutlán, reaching a total of 10 million people.

In **South Sudan**, much of the rural health infrastructure was destroyed, and supply chains for medical equipment and medicines were disrupted during the civil war. The rural population is therefore at substantial risk, particularly older people and those with existing vulnerabilities such as chronic medical conditions or disabilities. Prevention becomes a strategy of survival for many.

When the first cases of coronavirus were detected in South Sudan, the Society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate) were already present in Gogrial State, involved in peacebuilding and humanitarian response. Before infections spread, DMI started to build awareness of coronavirus and prepare the communities to respond through existing networks such as peace and reconciliation communities, women's self-help groups, parents and teachers' associations and school peace clubs. Working with the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF, they prepared messages in local languages on social distancing, handwashing and the importance of staying at home, disseminated through local radio. This countered fake information widely circulated on social media and reduced stigma around people perceived to be coming from the virus-prone locations. The Catholic Radio Network (CRN) in South Sudan has worked hard to reach remote communities with information about coronavirus in local languages. Radio programmes involved religious leaders and medical experts and invited questions from listeners about everything from transmission from mother to child in birth, to burial practices, to transmission via food. Public health messages were also delivered via loudspeakers, posters and door-to-door visits in areas with no radio coverage.



Photo: David Mutua

Lokwii with a radio from CAFOD partner Caritas Moroto for listening to public announcements in Uganda.



Photo: Grito dos Excluídos Continental

*Emergency support to homeless people in São Paulo, Brazil during coronavirus.*

## Strengthening community health services and providing food

PSCV (Pastoral Social - Caritas Verapaz) works with indigenous communities in the Diocese of Verapaz, **Guatemala**, in healthcare, agriculture and the prevention of violence against women. The Mayan people, some of the poorest in the country, are geographically harder to reach and indigenous communities are suspicious and reluctant to use government health services, due to past experience of discrimination. Coronavirus restrictions have limited communities' access to markets, so they can neither sell their products nor buy food for a balanced diet. Furthermore, the suspension of community savings schemes has denied them access to emergency finance. Being rooted in these communities, PCSV has provided food parcels to 30,000 people in need, as well as distributing hygiene kits and promoting good hygiene to prevent the spread of the virus. This has included translating government information into local languages.

Due to the increased restrictions on visiting health centres for non-emergency treatment, it has been vital to ensure that indigenous health workers and midwives in the communities can operate as safely as possible. To this end, PCSV has provided PPE equipment for them and supported their training. PCSV has also provided telephone consultations

for those with health concerns and encouraged the community to refer suspected Covid-19 cases for testing and treatment. Due to previous discrimination, PSCV staff have accompanied indigenous community members to government health centres and have signed a formal agreement with the health ministry and local council to ensure a supportive, good-quality and non-discriminatory testing environment for all.

**Brazil** has been one of the countries worst affected by coronavirus. The Catholic Church and its community volunteer networks have been key in providing people with basic items, spreading solidarity and providing correct information to the most vulnerable. In April 2020, the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) and Caritas Brazil launched a nationwide emergency solidarity campaign called 'Time to take care' (*É Tempo de Cuidar*). By September, this campaign had benefited more than half a million people. Volunteers in 100 dioceses across Brazil collected and distributed 3,000 tonnes of food, 300,000 hot meals, 25,000 hygiene kits, 13,000 sets of PPE, clothes and shoes, which were distributed to those hit hardest by the pandemic. They have disseminated WHO guidance to counteract misinformation, much of which has come from official government sources as part of a polarised and destructive political debate showing scant regard for the most vulnerable.





Photo: Tommy Trenchard/Caritas Internationalis

*Caritas food distribution at a church in Marabo, DRC, a town that was hit badly by Ebola.*

## b) Responding to conflict, migration, natural disasters, and food shortages

Church agencies are often first responders in the event of a disaster. Their presence in the communities means they can reach people within the first 24 hours by drawing on local resources and volunteer capacity. The global Caritas network is the second largest provider of humanitarian support, and is capable of a global, coordinated technical and financial response. It also works across borders, such as responding to the **Syria crisis in Lebanon and Jordan**, and supporting Venezuelan refugees in **Colombia, Brazil and Peru**.

The Catholic Church response is recognised for serving all people, regardless of religious beliefs and affiliation, and this enables access to all communities of different faiths and none. With this focus on serving the whole population including those who are hardest to reach, Caritas agencies ensure that no-one is left behind in a humanitarian response such as in **Bangladesh**.

The focus is also on strengthening local organisations so that they have increased capacity and leadership in any current and future responses and can continue to serve people after the acute crisis has passed, such as in the **Philippines**.

## First responders and reaching the hardest to reach

Caritas agencies and other Church partners are often amongst the only organisations with access to the worst-affected parts of the country that other humanitarian agencies are not able to reach. In **Syria**, local faith-based groups and networks were amongst the frontline responders getting assistance into besieged areas like Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta, and Caritas agencies are amongst the few NGOs with access to parts of the country under Government control. In **DRC**, it was Church health facilities that first reported cases of fatalities from the Ebola outbreak in 2018 in parts of the country where government, UN and INGO presence is weak or absent.

In the **Philippines**, the national Caritas (NASSA) responded<sup>12</sup> to the devastating 2013 Typhoon Haiyan (local name, Yolanda) by providing survivors with emergency kits, shelter, water and sanitation. Its network of leaders, parishes and volunteers throughout the Philippines enabled the Church to be first responders: they were already on the ground, before any international help arrived. The Church used its local buildings and schools that remained standing as temporary shelters for the worst affected and most vulnerable people. After the immediate response, NASSA supported the community in constructing disaster-resilient houses and in rebuilding their livelihoods. Fundraising and technical support for NASSA was coordinated through Caritas Internationalis, which mobilised



Photo: Kamogetsu Phuti/Caritas Mutare

Distributions of food and essential household items for people affected by Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe.

43 national Caritas Agencies to support the relief effort, reaching 650,000 people. NASSA has used reach and rootedness in local communities and links with local government to train priests and parish volunteers on disaster prevention. They have streamlined and coordinated community-wide early warning systems with clear evacuation points and responsibilities assigned, aiming to reduce loss of life in any future emergency. NASSA has increased its capacity so that it can now lead any disaster response through its technical expertise, experience and volunteer network.

In **Zimbabwe**, the police and army responded violently to political demonstrations in January 2019, with reports of mass beatings in some urban areas. Many people, in particular young people, were traumatised by the violence. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) trained animators were sent into communities to offer immediate psychological and pastoral support to those affected. The animators were given letters of recommendation by the Church, reiterating Catholic teaching and explaining that they were carrying out their pastoral duties. As the Church is trusted, they were able to gain access to communities that were not allowing others to enter. At the same time, the Church used its hierarchical structures and authority to speak out against the violence and plead for peace and democracy to prevail. In a pastoral letter to all Zimbabweans, Catholic bishops wrote:



*We call upon all people to exercise tolerance towards each other and to express their constitutional rights in a peaceful and nonviolent manner. Peaceful protest is provided for in the Constitution. Regrettably, citizens' protests and acts of civil disobedience degenerated into violence, destruction of property, injury and loss of life. We urge you to always shun violence and be mindful to respect everyone's rights, especially those who do not agree with you.*<sup>13</sup>

**Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference pastoral letter**



12 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgQ2Hd\\_h8jl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgQ2Hd_h8jl)

13 <https://catholicchurchnewszimbabwe.wordpress.com/2019/01/>



In **South Sudan**, the Society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI) has been working in Gogrial State since 2012 in peacebuilding programmes, education and women’s empowerment through savings and lending groups, and training in leadership and public speaking. Due to a long-standing conflict between the Apuk and Ajugo communities over borders and access to grazing land and water, up to 13,000 people have been displaced, mainly women and children. Land has been destroyed or left fallow and many IDPs have been dependent on emergency food aid. Despite ongoing insecurity, the peacebuilding efforts of the DMI Sisters, and their ongoing presence and accompaniment, have enabled these IDPs to feel secure enough to return home. Due to their long-standing presence and the trust they have from both sides, the DMI Sisters have been able to continue to work closely with the communities. Often, they have been the only organisation working in some areas of the state.

## Cross-border humanitarian action

In **Jordan**, Caritas is one of the few organisations providing a constant source of support to the large numbers of Iraqi refugees, a group who are largely discriminated against and marginalised in their host nation. Motivated by the Church’s teaching to reach out to the poorest and most marginalised in

society, Caritas helps to ensure that the refugees have access to education. It also provides training in vocational skills and business development, such as soap- and furniture-making, to allow the refugees a degree of self-sufficiency and a chance to integrate in the wider community. Caritas also supports Syrian refugees in the region, teaching the refugees and providing catch-up classes and social spaces for those outside formal school systems. Caritas also makes use of the many church buildings to provide safe spaces for refugees. One such building is the Our Lady of Peace Centre in Amman which provides not only a space for refugees to socialise but also safety and security while they wait to be relocated to a third country.

**Bangladesh** has a minority Christian population, yet Caritas Bangladesh is welcomed and is trusted by local communities due to its explicit focus on the development of the whole person and all people. An approach to development that sees everyone as a neighbour means that Caritas has been particularly well placed to respond to refugee crises. The recent Rohingya refugee crisis, which began in 2017 in Myanmar, has seen the mass migration of the Rohingya Muslim people to neighbouring countries. An estimated 700,000 refugees fled to Bangladesh alone in what the UN described at the time as the “largest humanitarian crisis in the world” and the result of mass “ethnic cleansing”. In the refugee



Photo: Graham Gordon

Venezuelan refugees and migrants crossing into Colombia.



camps, Caritas Bangladesh has provided 275,000 people with safe, dignified shelter, with lighting, toilets and bathing areas, and women- and child-friendly spaces. Explaining the motivation behind Caritas' response Atul Sarker, Caritas Bangladesh Executive Director, stressed that Caritas' positive refugee work in Bangladesh is driven ultimately by the Church's teaching:

*God had prepared me to take care of people with the heart... We are there as [an] expression of love to the people. The gospel says, 'When I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was shelter-less, you gave me shelter.'*<sup>14</sup>

**Atul Sarker, Caritas Bangladesh Executive Director**

According to the UNHCR<sup>15</sup>, around 4 million people have left **Venezuela** since 2014, the largest exodus in recent Latin American history. Children, women and men have fled violence, insecurity, scarcity and increasing poverty. Caritas Internationalis launched a global appeal which has enabled local Caritas agencies to reach more than one million Venezuelans in Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru. The presence of the Catholic Church in each country and its reach into local communities have enabled a coordinated cross-border response to meet migrants' needs.

In **Colombia**, the Catholic agencies were initially the only ones to respond in Cúcuta, as thousands flooded across the border in 2017. Soup kitchens provided 2,000 lunches a day for the most vulnerable people, with daily responsibility rotated round different Catholic orders with the necessary volunteer capacity to help. Due to lack of food back in Venezuela and based on the trusted relationships between churches in Colombia and Venezuela, they

have also given food rations to Venezuelan priests crossing the border back into Venezuela so they can distribute it to those who cannot leave. The Catholic Church is also providing legal and travel advice throughout the country, and in Bogotá they have a house for migrants, to help them establish themselves before moving on. Caritas Colombia (SNPS) has been lobbying for children born in Colombia to Venezuelan migrant parents to be recognised as Colombian citizens; otherwise, they are effectively stateless.

In **Venezuela** Caritas has reached out to support 100,000 of the most vulnerable people among those unable to leave the country. Its focus has been on improving access to food, nutrition, water and sanitation, and healthcare, and strengthening communities affected by the crisis. After identifying 12,000 children as malnourished, it provided nutritional support, and more than two-thirds of these children have since regained normal nutritional status.

The Church in **Brazil** has been trying to change the perception of migrants and the treatment they receive. In Roraima, there has been over 500,000 Venezuelan migrants, which equates to about ten per cent of the local population. The Church has sought to lead the way in accepting and welcoming the migrants, in seeing them first and foremost as brothers and sisters, focusing on their inherent human dignity and promoting practical solidarity. The Bishop of Roraima, Dom Mário Antônio da Silva, has launched a campaign promoting tolerance and integration, asking people to welcome migrants into their homes and provide for their needs.<sup>16</sup> The Church also runs Portuguese courses for Venezuelans as way of helping integration. This is linked to a national campaign by the Catholic Bishops' Conference for people to adopt Venezuelan families wanting to stay, and to help them move them away from the regional capital where there was tension and fewer opportunities for work and integration.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WovKNjAoK-Y>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://diocesederoraima.org.br/index.php/2019/03/26/em-carta-enviada-as-dioceses-dom-mario-estimula-acolhimento-de-venezuelanos/>

## 2 INFLUENCING SOCIAL NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR



CAFOD's country representative for Sierra Leone and Liberia Kayode Akintola (right) addresses attendees of a COVID-19 awareness training for religious leaders at CAFOD's office in Freetown.

The Church has positively influenced the way that communities treat people, particularly vulnerable people or those who have been stigmatised, excluded or treated as second-class citizens. One example is mobilising communities to support people living with HIV in **Ethiopia**. This been done through the example and leadership of priests, bishops and religious orders, local communities and the Church service ministries such as Caritas, and Justice and Peace.

Church leadership and service ministries have managed to raise many previously taboo subjects and facilitate discussion at local level. This has led to significant change, including: a reduction of high rates of early child marriage in **Malawi**, legal reform addressing the lack of access to land ownership for women in **Zambia**, and an end to the silence over issues of sexual exploitation in **Nicaragua**. This has translated into behaviour change, as well as greater protection or inclusion of people who had previously suffered in silence.

All of this progress is rooted in the Church's trusted relationships with communities, its presence and reach at the grassroots through health and other outreach workers, and the ability to appeal to people's faith, motivations and values. This was the case in **Mozambique** where the focus on teaching around human dignity changed the debate on what is seen as culturally acceptable in terms of trafficking human organs for witchcraft.

The Church has also been able to influence behaviours to prevent the spread of diseases. The public vaccination of dozens of church leaders in the **DRC** helped slow the spread of Ebola.

## Challenging discriminatory or harmful practices

In **Zambia**, Caritas Solwezi has been working for many years with the chiefs and communities in the rural areas of North Western Province on issues of decentralisation, literacy and election monitoring. With mining companies threatening to displace communities, Caritas Solwezi started to work with the chiefs and their advisers to document land ownership so that people could claim compensation in the event of displacement. They found that certain groups, including women, people with disabilities and people living with HIV, were excluded from the land allocation.

They raised the issue of exclusion with the local chiefs, who were willing to look at their traditional practices from a new perspective and who changed the customary land ownership laws to allow previously excluded groups to own land.



*The chiefs were open to dialogue on this issue and keen to work with Caritas because they see Caritas as a faith-based organisation, whose main objective is the option for the poor, and who are a neutral actor without a political agenda. Caritas has gained credibility due to various interventions and are trusted to do what they say. They are also present in many tribal areas where the government has little presence.*

**John Kalusa, Caritas Solwezi, Zambia**



In **Nicaragua**, the Mary Barreda Association, a faith-based organisation founded by a group of Catholic women, worked with girls who had been sexually exploited. Low self-confidence and lack of awareness of their rights mean that many girls end up in commercial sex work. Mary Barreda helps increase girls' confidence, raises awareness of their rights, and provides training to enable viable employment opportunities in the future. Due to its

recognised expertise, schools and police services actively seek the group's help to educate and protect girls they are in contact with. Within three years of first accessing support, 95 per cent of these girls are free from exploitation.<sup>17</sup>



*I feel good because Mary Barreda helped me to learn to develop my skills, I learnt about my rights, and how to stand up for myself as a woman. They taught us many things and thanks to Mary Barreda I now have a job.*

*They taught me to be independent.*

**Marling, participant in training course with Mary Barreda, Nicaragua**



To tackle discrimination against people living with HIV, the Ethiopian Inter-faith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action collected more than 100 success stories of faith leaders who had positive relationships with people living with HIV, through setting up counselling services or support groups, for example. The stories demonstrated that all faith groups had similar teaching on the need for pastoral support for people living with the virus. They collated the stories in a book, which was a guide and source of inspiration for local faith leaders to take seriously their pastoral supporting role and contribute to destigmatising HIV.

The high-profile leadership of priests and bishops can also be a signal to the local community about what is permitted within their faith in relation to community-focused behaviours. This is particularly effective in countries like the DRC where more than 90 per cent of the population belong to faith groups and more than 60 per cent of services are provided by faith-based organisations. The Church's role was vital in overcoming resistance to vaccination against Ebola. Bishops were vaccinated in public, alongside 74 other religious leaders, to show that rumours against the vaccine were false and to set an example to the local population. The vaccination rate increased dramatically after this.

<sup>17</sup> CAFOD (2018) Believe in Change: A toolkit for the Catholic community to promote gender equality, p82



*The involvement of faith groups in the response to the threat of Ebola remains among the best weapons for convincing the people to adopt good practices and attitudes to put an end to this deadly outbreak.*

**Théophile Kaboy Ruboneka Catholic Bishop  
of Goma, DRC**

## Tackling social taboos

In **Malawi**, the Justice and Peace (CCJP) groups facilitated community open days to openly discuss high levels of child marriage and the impacts on girls and women, something which had previously not been discussed. This was made possible through the tight links that the CCJP Committee members have with communities on the ground. The open days provided a forum for discussion around gender issues, where the rest of the community listened and proposed plans for change. Moreover, the impartiality of the Church and respect for its authority enabled the CCJP to include local faith leaders, village chiefs and committees in these discussions. This has resulted in a decrease in child marriage (by 55 per cent in one area) and an acceptance of women's participation in community structures and has even inspired some local leaders to introduce bylaws to review and ban these and other harmful cultural practices.<sup>18</sup>

In **Mozambique** the Church has spoken out against the previously taboo subject of trafficking in human organs for witchcraft. This was in a context where people have been afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation for themselves or their families and of becoming victims of witchcraft themselves.

Two ground-breaking studies by the Church in trafficking in the south of Mozambique (2016)<sup>19</sup> and in the north (2018) have exposed the extent of the problem. The project received coverage on national TV programmes and the national press, making it into a national issue that needed to be addressed. The greatest factor in changing people's views was that the Church had approached the issue from the starting point of human dignity. They worked at a deeply personal level to help people reflect on others as being made in the image of God and therefore with inherent dignity and worthy of equal respect. With the Church rooted in communities and with 60 per cent of the population belonging to the Catholic Church, this human dignity approach has been popularised at grassroots level through volunteers, priests and schools, to challenge traditional beliefs and behaviours that allow or justify trafficking.

In some of these cases, there has also been a change of behaviour and norms within the Church itself. The Church too has had to face up to some of its own discriminatory behaviour, for example towards people living with HIV or where it has turned a blind eye to child marriage or gender-based violence.



Photo: Louise Norton

*A project in Colombia to tackle conflict in the area and improve dialogue and peacebuilding. A youth dance group set up by FUREC. Many of the dancers haven't been to school.*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p79

<sup>19</sup> CEMIRDE (2016) Study on trafficking in human organs and body parts in Southern Mozambique

### 3 PEACEBUILDING, MEDIATION AND RECONCILIATION



Photo: Lousie Norton

*Rosana's family. Conflict and peace in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia.*

The Church, through its leaders and development organisations, has helped convene neutral spaces for dialogue in situations where there is a lack of trust or social cohesion, or even conflict. Church leaders are seen as being trustworthy due to their impartial approach, which means they speak up for those who are suffering, with an agenda that seeks the common good rather than their own benefit.

Their presence in communities means they understand the local context and they are trusted by local populations to be serving the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

This has led to community reconciliation and reintegration, often where local communities have been in conflict with each other over natural resources, such as in **Kenya** and **Ethiopia**. The church approach is often rooted in empathy, in learning to see other people as fellow human beings, made in God's image and worthy of respect, as was the case in **Sri Lanka** for people on opposite sides of the civil war.

In many cases, the Church has been able to promote community integration and reintegration, often through practical projects that benefit the whole community and provide a way of working together for a common aim. These include sports camps and recreational activities in **Lebanon**, seed and tool distributions for communities accepting returnees in **Uganda**, and tree-planting in **Myanmar**.

At national level, the impartiality of the Church means that its leaders are often the ones driving peace processes and being sought out to broker dialogue between warring parties or to chair peace and reconciliation commissions. It is recognised that their commitment to the common good compels them to speak out for justice and in favour of those who have suffered violence. The Church in **Colombia** has been involved in the Truth Commission at different levels and in **South Sudan** the Church has been part of the mediation team to broker peace at national level.



## Community dialogue and peacebuilding

In Kenya, there had been waves of violence and killings between different ethnic groups in Maralal, centred on land disputes and cattle raiding. The local Caritas engaged communities by helping them get to know and learn to trust each other through an empathy project. They set up local food markets, with a 'no-smoking' policy which meant weapons were not allowed, and community members could interact freely with each other. They also gained the trust of the communities to work with young community warriors (*morans*), whose role it had been to steal cattle from other communities. The young people were retrained to become peace ambassadors in the area, and in turn role models.

In **Oromo, Ethiopia**, the local Catholic Church used its trusted role and presence in the communities to bring together elders from different ethnic groups who were in constant competition for water, livestock and pasture. As part of a community-based conflict transformation and peacebuilding programme, the Church brokered discussions between these elders. Through the talks, they found ways to overcome the conflict, with the

establishment of peace committees and early warning systems. As a result, fences have been removed, cattle are free to roam and there has been a significant reduction in the loss of life.

In **Sri Lanka**, the Catholic Church is one of the few institutions which bridge the ethnic divide between Sinhalese and Tamil people. As such, it is trusted by both government and people. During the war years, ordinary Sinhalese and Tamil people had little contact. Caritas Sri Lanka organised exchange visits for families to stay with a host family from the opposite community, and the resulting empathy led to greater understanding between the two communities and a commitment to build peace at village level.

## Community integration

In **Lebanon**, Caritas Lebanon has been able to break down barriers between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host population, amid growing tensions, a breakdown in communication and increasing stigma and discrimination. The Syrian refugees are largely Sunni Muslim, whilst the Muslim population of Lebanon is split between Sunnis and Shias. Christians make up just under half the Lebanese



Photo: Thom Flint

Fr Sterlin, a priest in the Diocese of Quibdó, Colombia, visits Romero House, London.



population. Within this complex and religiously diverse country, Caritas's commitment to work with all people and promote social cohesion, peace and reconciliation is vitally important. Caritas assumed the role of a trusted mediator between the two groups and set up a range of peacebuilding and development projects, such as summer sports camps, conflict-resolution workshops, and community Christmas and Easter activities. As a result, resistance between groups has broken down and friendships have blossomed.

In Gulu, in **northern Uganda**, Caritas played a key role in reintegrating people back into their communities who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). When the conflict was at its most intense, most internally displaced people (IDPs) were attended to in church buildings, church schools and church-run refugee programmes in the camps. The Catholic Church was perceived as impartial from a party-political perspective, and clearly on the side of the people, winning it far more trust than many other organisations. From 2002 onwards when many people started escaping the LRA, Caritas Gulu set up a rehabilitation centre where they could work with people before they returned to their communities. They spent a lot of time tracing families and focusing on acceptance and reintegration, and provided communities with seeds and tools so that the whole community would benefit from accepting people back:



*The Caritas staff became like counsellors. Slowly the former soldiers disclosed codenames and information about their stories, they were treated for medical conditions and given counselling. Caritas staff then helped to trace their families. They kept visiting the families to help prepare them and remove the blame from being ex-soldiers. They also prepared the neighbouring families, who may have suffered.*

**Paul Rubankagene, Caritas Gulu, Uganda**



Paul Rubankagene – Caritas Gulu, Uganda .

**Myanmar** has suffered ongoing conflict at community and national level, which has often been articulated along religious lines. The result has been divided communities, displacement from the land, and isolation and entrenched poverty for some groups. The Catholic Bishops' Conference provided a space for priests to understand and recognise the challenges they were facing, such as discrimination, ongoing community tensions and poverty. The Bishops' Conference then trained the priests in listening, mediation and inter-faith dialogue for peace. As a result, many more parish priests implemented projects designed to bring benefits across the whole community and to encourage dialogue and engagement among groups who traditionally saw each other as opponents. One of the priests organised tree-planting as a neutral activity, inviting the local Buddhist and Muslim leaders to share about their teaching on love and peace in an effort to promote community understanding and tolerance. It was the first time these leaders had engaged together, and it helped the local community to have more understanding of other religious groups.

## National-level mediation

**Colombia's** internal conflict has lasted for 60 years and the country has the highest number of displaced people in the world. Caritas Colombia (SNPS) and the action teams in local dioceses have a long history of accompanying different communities through armed conflict, through a permanent presence of priests, nuns, lay staff and volunteers. Their vocation to serve and be with the people has meant that they have stayed living in communities experiencing violence when many other organisations and institutions have left.

During much of the violence, the Church was the only trusted institution and people would report human rights abuses by the state and armed forces to local priests and church workers. As such it has played a role as a witness to the suffering of the most vulnerable sectors of the population.



*In the 20 years I have been a priest in Colombia, I have lived with armed conflict. I have had to deal with all the armed groups... and feared for my life many times. If you're a priest who is committed to the people, you have to make yourself a target of the armed groups. I was singled out and threatened many times as I stood alongside people forced to flee their homes, remained with those who stayed and endured, and picked up dead bodies, even when armed groups forbade us.*

**Fr Sterlin, priest in Diocese of Quibdó<sup>20</sup>, Colombia**



SNPS and CINEP (the Jesuit research and education organisation) kept a database of all those killed during political violence. Based on this information the Catholic Bishops' Conference was the first organisation to publish credible data on massive internal displacement due to violence. Its report in 1995 came at a time when the government was still denying the existence of displacement and people seeking refuge. This information has been shared with the Truth Commission and brings to light what happened in the more remote regions where the state was not present, or where the state was committing abuses and refused to acknowledge them. Without the Church, victims of the armed conflict would have never been at the negotiating table in Havana, and nor would there be a chapter on their experience in the peace accords.

Based on this role of living with, accompanying and bearing witness to the suffering of the population, church leaders and institutions have had more formal roles in the peace process as respected and trusted national actors. Mgr. Héctor Fabio Henao, Director of Caritas Colombia, has been appointed as the President of the National Peace Council that is responsible for promoting peace and reconciliation in Colombia. This Council met for the first time in 2019, with the Colombian president and leaders of the National Liberation Army (ELN), with the aim of securing a lasting peace, reconciliation and coexistence of all groups throughout the country.

In **South Sudan**, during decades of civil war which led to its independence in 2011, the Church was the only institution which remained on the ground when others were evacuated. It stayed with the people, accompanying them in pastoral as well as practical ways, suffering and at times dying with them. Still today, the Church is respected by those on all sides of conflict, which enables it to reach those in need, with vital emergency, development and peacebuilding programming. The Church spearheaded many local peace and reconciliation

processes, through its grassroots networks as well as through its national and international reach. Due to the widespread trust it had earned, and its ability to rise above divisions on political, geographical and ethnic lines, people continuously looked to the Church for leadership and guidance, and the Church could speak to the whole population. At national level, church leaders had access to political and military leaders, often being able to speak frankly with them at a spiritual and moral levels as their pastors. They also convened reconciliation retreats and continue to be actively engaged in high-level mediation support to the warring parties.

Bishop Paride Taban, winner of the Four Freedoms Award<sup>21</sup>, has been involved in peacebuilding for 60 years, engaging fearlessly with political and military leaders. He was held captive for a time by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) after speaking out against them. On his retirement, he founded Kuron Peace Village in 2005 in Eastern Equatoria, where young people and community leaders learn how to live peacefully together and acquire conflict-resolution skills.

The Church in South Sudan, as well as Archbishop Odama from Gulu in neighbouring north Uganda, also played a role in bringing the parties together to sign a peace agreement on 12 September 2018, which provides for some stability and a framework to hold different parties to account. With further mediation from Archbishop Odama, this eventually led to a power-sharing government, sworn in in February 2020. The South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) has developed its own home-grown and church-led Action Plan for Peace (APP). This goes beyond political processes and aims to root peace processes at community level, through addressing root causes and long-term effects of conflict through advocacy, impartial forums, healing and reconciliation.



*We are working with traumatised, war-torn communities on peacebuilding and reconciliation. By bringing together Dinka and Nuer people across the main ethnic divide, and persuading perpetrators and victims to meet face to face, we can address the grievances that are fuelling the conflict, including endemic violence against women.*

*This is what the Church's Action Plan for Peace is doing, community by community."*

**Father James Oyet, Secretary General of the South Sudan Council of Churches<sup>22</sup>**



In 2019, a high-level retreat was held in the Vatican for the President and Vice Presidents elect of South Sudan, organised by the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Pope addressed the leaders, asking them to go forward in peace, keep disagreements in the office but hold hands in front of the people. He then knelt to kiss the feet of each leader. *"I was shocked and trembled when His Holiness the Pope kissed our feet," President Kier later told the South Sudan Parliament. "It was a blessing and can be a curse if we play games with the lives of our people."*

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/our-work/programmes/kuron-peace-village-in-south-sudan>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/27/din-over-brexit-us-border-wall-south-sudan>



## 4 STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE THROUGH CITIZEN PARTICIPATION



*Climate Peoples March in the UK.*

The Church has played a significant role in many countries in strengthening governance. It has done this through training and supporting citizens to engage with their governments, speaking out against abuse of power, and providing oversight for free and fair elections and democratic transitions.

The Church has been able to do this due to its presence and reach into communities, the level of trust it enjoys and its impartiality in working for the common good, enabling it to cut through polarised and personalised political debates.

The Church has mobilised citizens to engage in democratic processes so that government policies support human flourishing. This has involved holding the government to account for their actions and seeking greater transparency and participation, for example through budget monitoring in **Zambia**; formalising tax systems in **DRC**; supporting communities to engage with companies over rights to land, water and natural resources in **Peru**; and promoting climate action in the **UK**.

## Election observation

In **Zimbabwe**, the Church set up the Ecumenical Peace initiative in the run-up to the 2013 elections. The initiative brought together the major church bodies from across the country with the aim of ensuring that the elections were free from violence. The reach into local communities that different churches had, notably in highly contested constituencies, and the presence of individual church leaders and organisations actively encouraging peace and tolerance, contributed towards a significant reduction in violence compared with previous elections.

In the **DRC**, the Church used its presence and reach within the country to strengthen democratic accountability and to advocate for free and fair elections. It has a presence in all 26 provinces, through the provision of services such as schools and health centres, and the Church is one of the few institutions that commands wide respect and trust across a big and divided country. To ensure transparency and credibility in the 2018 elections, the Catholic Bishops' Conference (CENCO) put in place a Parallel Voter Tabulation process using its network of national, regional and international observers. The Church deployed more than 40,000 observers at polling stations across the country to collect and monitor the results in real time. This was possible because people knew CENCO and trusted them to be impartial observers on the ground.



Sara A. Fajardo/CRS

Archbishop Paulino casts his ballot in Juba, Sudan.

This geographical coverage gave the Catholic Church quicker and more accurate results than the government-run electoral body (CENI). CENCO took the unprecedented step of announcing that they knew who the winner was before the official government announcement, which made it much more difficult for the results to be manipulated in favour of the ruling party.<sup>23</sup>

## Supporting citizen engagement in decision-making

In **Zambia**, the national Caritas monitors the national budget, amid concerns over the lack of pay for schoolteachers and over the lack of funding for medicines in hospitals. This is because government money has been channelled to debt repayments and lost due to corruption. Through these monitoring processes, the Church aims to ensure that the national conversation is orientated towards good governance and the common good, to influence in turn the political and funding priorities of the government. This is against a backdrop of increasing political polarisation along geographical, religious or ethnic lines and where people are expressing their grievances through violence.



*We engage with people at parish level so that they can 'breathe out' and speak openly about the issues they face. They see this as a process of healing...these coming months will be a process of listening to people at local level and of bringing those issues to national level, but also of helping to heal the divisions that have been caused recently due to increased identity politics.*

**Fr. Cleophas Lungu, General Secretary, Zambian Conference of Catholic Bishops**



23 <https://www.ft.com/content/9d30b554-1005-11e9-acdc-4d9976f1533b>



Many people in **DRC** have limited access to information on the taxes they are due to pay. The informal system for the collection and management of taxes contributes to a culture of intimidation as small business owners have to deal with unofficial tax collectors. It also results in tax revenue losses for local municipalities due to high levels of corruption. The Church, through the Jesuit-run Centre for Action for Business Directors and Managers in Congo (CADICEC), has been working with decentralised local authorities in Kinshasa to develop new technologies for tax collection and increased citizen access to official tax information. Together, they have introduced a mobile banking system for tax payments, which has reduced the contact citizens have with informal tax collectors. This new way of working has been possible due to the trust the local population has in the Church. As a result of CADICEC's work, relationships between citizens and local authorities have improved through the shared goal of reducing informal taxation for the individual and increasing tax revenues for local municipalities. There has been an increase in taxes collected in all municipalities involved in the project, with over half seeing an increase of more than ten per cent.

**Peru** is a country with dozens of socio-environmental conflicts, largely to do with access to natural resources by multinational companies in indigenous and peasant communities' lands. High in the Andes, glacial Lake Parón provides drinking and irrigation water to about 25,000 people in Caraz. The water flow was managed by a company to generate electricity at a power plant and this frequently damaged farmland and crops. The Episcopal Commission on Social Action (CEAS) has been working for years with local communities to help them analyse their problems, know their rights and organise themselves. The affected communities demanded change from the company and the government, as well as the establishment of a technical working group involving all actors to manage the water flow and protect the lands. CEAS supported this engagement by providing technical advice, interpreting technical documentation and helping community leaders to formulate position papers and proposals. Community members have been able to do their own research and analysis of their situation and water quality and quantity. As a

result, the company formally recognised that the priority use for the water is for human consumption and livelihoods, and two sluice gates were installed that are jointly controlled by the energy company and the community.

A key strategy has been to empower community leaders, particularly women, so that they can participate on their own in the Round Table meetings without CEAS being present:



*I am participating in the Dialogue Roundtable to protect Lake Parón. I am the only woman representative from my sector. Before I could not talk. I was very nervous, and I was scared. Now I am much more confident and animated. I have learnt a lot about the rights of women and how to protect the environment, protect our water and the lake... I would like to tell other women that with the support of CEAS you are able to talk in front of others. We can work together on the land and we can be women leaders.*

**María, community delegate, Caraz, Peru**



In **England and Wales** CAFOD has been mobilising supporters, schools and parishes around action on climate change for a number of years. Thousands of supporters have marched for climate justice and have written to the UK government, World Bank and other global institutions. Dozens of school children, young people and adults have met with their MPs and taken part in mass lobbies to show the urgency of acting on climate change and that this is an issue that requires urgent political action. Inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, including Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si' – on Care for our common home*, the Catholic Bishops' Conference in England and Wales has spoken out on the need for climate action and the need to conserve and protect



God's creation, showing Catholics that this is a key expression of their faith.

As the Catholic community in England and Wales calls on action from elected leaders and business, many are also changing their own lifestyles to be part of the solution and to show the strength of their commitment. Thousands of churches and individuals have switched to renewable energy providers and various dioceses have announced

that they are divesting from fossil fuels. Nearly 100 parishes and schools have become part of CAFOD's *livesimply* scheme<sup>24</sup>, an award for groups showing commitment and action to protect the planet and live in more sustainable ways. CAFOD as an organisation has committed to be net-carbon-neutral by 2030, in line with what we have been asking others to do, a commitment that will impact programmes and operations in the UK and overseas.



Monsignor Hector Fabio Henao - Caritas Colombia visits Romero House, London.

24 <https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Livesimply-award>

## 5 SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER, WITNESSING AND ACCOMPANYING SUFFERING



Photo: Pavel Martiarena Huamán

*Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea, Peru.*

The church has a calling to speak truth to power and has used this prophetic voice towards governments, companies and the international community. The Church is called to be politically impartial, in that it is above party politics. But its commitment to the common good and ‘a preferential option for the poor’ puts the Church firmly on the side of democracy, justice and defending the rights of the most vulnerable people and communities.

This prophetic voice includes speaking out against authoritarian regimes and those causing the population to suffer, such as in the case of **Nicaragua**, and against companies and authorities who are damaging communities and the environment with impunity, as has happened in Brazil. Part of speaking truth to power is accompanying those who are suffering, and bearing witness to their hardships, standing with them before those in power in times of need. The work of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) in standing with indigenous communities in the face of land evictions and human rights abuses is a case in point. The Church has also uncovered and exposed human rights abuses, mass killings and abusive treatment of vulnerable populations, which would otherwise have gone unreported, such as in the case of **Colombia** and **Zimbabwe**.

A very specific way the Catholic Church speaks out against injustice is through **pastoral letters** written by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference or individual bishops, in response to situations of national importance. Regional Bishops’ Conferences will replicate this at continental level. These letters are rooted in the daily reality that church leaders experience in their parishes, the national political content and scripture. They are directed at diverse audiences – Catholics and people of good will – to encourage specific responses, as well as towards those with the power to bring about peace and justice. The letters will often reach most of the population as they are published in the national media and distributed through Catholic radio networks. They will be read out to church congregations across the nation and form part of discussion groups through Justice and Peace and smaller Christian communities.

They have been particularly powerful tools where civil society space has been limited. They get coverage where the Catholic Church is in a minority, such as **Sri Lanka** or **Eritrea**, because they are often seen as vocalising the views of a large section of wider civil society. Where Christians are a majority and the Catholic Church has a strong presence, such as **Kenya**, **Zimbabwe** or **Brazil**, they are seen as a compelling voice against authoritarian tendencies or unjust systems and structures. The letters often elicit a response from the government, which may open up dialogue. They have also been picked up internationally to galvanise action. However, these letters have also had repercussions for the Catholic Church and its institutions: speaking out has often come at great cost, even loss of life.

Saint Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, was outspoken in condemning disappearances, poverty and social injustice and was murdered while celebrating mass. Sister Dorothy Stang, defender of poor communities and the environment in Brazil, was brutally murdered on her way to a community meeting. Christophe Munzihirwa Mwene Ngabo, Archbishop of Bukavu, DRC, spoke out against human rights abuses during conflict and was shot in cold blood the day after he issued a plea for peace on the local radio. Neima Abiad Idris, from the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, wrote songs that promoted peace and forgiveness. She stayed when war reached her village, seeking reconciliation with the perpetrators of abuses and was tragically killed from a bomb that hit her home.

## Witnessing and accompanying

REPAM is a network of the Catholic Church working across the **Amazon region** to help the local Church respond to the context and challenges they face. The people and groups involved have their lives rooted in the communities, including: the itinerant missionaries who are lay members of the Church and will travel for days to remote areas of the Amazon to share their lives with the communities there; NGOs working on justice issues; and religious orders committed to serve different communities over decades. REPAM also has first-hand experience of human rights abuses and environmental destruction, including people's removal from traditional lands, contamination of water sources, illegal logging and the militarisation of indigenous lands. The network has been able to support indigenous communities to document human rights abuses by state actors and private companies and has accompanied them to bring these cases before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights, bearing witness to their suffering and demanding action.<sup>25</sup>

Between 1983 and 1987 in **Zimbabwe**, the Zimbabwe National Army carried out a series of massacres in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, known as the Gukurahundi massacres. The Church, through the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), has been a driving force in ensuring justice and accountability on behalf

of those killed, and providing some relief to their families. The CCJP was the first group to document the massacres publicly through its 1997 report *Breaking the silence*<sup>26</sup>, making initial calls for justice and peace for those affected. Since then, almost four decades since the massacres, the CCJP is still striving to ensure those who continue to suffer are supported and those responsible are held to account.

For decades, the role of the Church in **Brazil** has been to serve the most vulnerable communities. It



Photo: Marcella Haddad/ Caritas Internationalis]

*Burning of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil.*

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EN-REPAM\\_report\\_on\\_violation\\_of\\_HR\\_in\\_the\\_Amazonia.pdf](https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EN-REPAM_report_on_violation_of_HR_in_the_Amazonia.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Zimbabwe (1997), *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988*



has done so at national level by speaking out and engaging with those in power. At local level, it has set up specialist pastoral offices in communities and districts to defend people's land, to defend the rights of indigenous peoples, and to promote justice and peace. Priests, lawyers, staff (lay and clergy) of the pastoral offices will live among communities and sometimes spend days travelling to reach the more remote ones.

CPT, the Pastoral Land Commission in Brazil, has been accompanying communities for decades to defend their land and seek justice. They guide landless families through the bureaucratic processes of gaining formal land titles, and brokering agreements between authorities, big landowners and companies. At the same time, they defend the rights of poor families and communities through the justice system when they are threatened with eviction, or when they are seeking compensation for resettlement after being removed from their lands. They work with communities throughout this process, helping them stay organised so that they do not give up on their claim to land (which can take up to 30 years) or abandon their land due to agricultural production and commercialisation pressures.

Conflict over land and protection of the environment can be a deadly business: CPT has registered more than 965 murders in the state of Pará between 1975 and 2019. CPT accompanies family members and communities to try to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice, to establish case law and to challenge a culture of impunity. One such case is that of José Claudio Ribeiro da Silva and Maria do Espírito Santo<sup>27</sup>, a couple who lived in the municipality of Nova Ipixuna in the south-east of Pará. CPT helped the farmers there – coordinated by José Claudio and Maria – to create a 22,000-hectare forested settlement, with an abundance of native species, all of which protect the soil and water sources. Loggers and ranchers wanted the wood and land for themselves: José Claudio and Maria were murdered in 2011. CPT, led by land rights lawyer José Batista Gonçalves Afonso, brought the case to court. Even though the murderers have now been convicted, they are still free. José Batista has also travelled to European capitals to raise awareness of the situation of environmental defenders like these,

and to fight for access to justice and stricter controls on companies operating in indigenous lands.

## Speaking out for justice

The Church, as an institution or through individual priests, bishops, religious orders or service institutions, will often raise its voice against injustice, especially where citizens fear for their own lives if they speak out.

From 2013, **Nicaragua** has seen protests over a wide range of issues, including: living standards; authoritarianism and corruption; loss of civil society space; lack of concern given to environmental destruction; loss of land and widespread poverty. The crisis worsened in 2018 and the Catholic Church amplified the voices of the most vulnerable suffering under the authoritarian regime and spoke out for change. Led by Monseñor Silvio José Báez, the Catholic Church organised a march for justice and peace where people could express their demands for change peacefully. The Bishops also used their Lent Pastoral Letter to articulate the voice of the people against corruption, crime and the abuse of power, and to call for government and citizens to live lives of integrity and not to lose hope in change. With a crisis of trust in state institutions, the Catholic Church was seen the only institution worthy of trust, so Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes was supported by both the government and citizens movements to mediate a national dialogue to seek a solution. Unfortunately, this did not lead to the desired change and the Church has continued to speak out since then, remaining committed to standing by citizens in seeking democracy, the rule of law, peace and justice. This has included pastoral visits to console those who are suffering, with a Catholic clergy delegation travelling to Diriamba following the killing of 17 people in July 2018.

In an increasingly polarised political climate in **Brazil**, and amid frequent killing of human rights defenders with impunity, the president of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, Monseñor Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo, spoke out<sup>28</sup> in September 2020. He gave a widely publicised address, appealing to citizens and leaders for tolerance of differences and greater respect for democratic institutions,

27 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/climate-change-time-now-brazil-land-rights-rainforest-theresa-may-a8975601.html>

28 [https://www.religiondigital.org/luis\\_miguel\\_modino\\_-\\_misionero\\_en\\_brasil/presidente-episcopado-brasileno-sentimiento-hostilidad\\_7\\_2266343363.html](https://www.religiondigital.org/luis_miguel_modino_-_misionero_en_brasil/presidente-episcopado-brasileno-sentimiento-hostilidad_7_2266343363.html)

denouncing persecution against human rights defenders, and calling on the government to tackle inequality and to prioritise jobs and livelihoods for millions of poor people. Amid increased deforestation and removal of indigenous communities from their lands in the Brazilian Amazon, he appealed to all Brazilians to protect the Amazon.



Photo: Louise Norton

Archbishop Edward Tamba Charles of Freetown, Sierra Leone, outside the Palace of Westminster, UK. Faith Leaders at Westminster for Ebola Response.

## Bishops' pastoral letters

In Easter 2019 the **Eritrean Bishops' Conference** wrote a letter appealing for peace and national reconciliation, calling for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and urging government action on poverty, migration, injustice and the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The letter has enabled ordinary citizens to find a hope and a voice but has also resulted in Catholic schools and hospitals being forcibly closed down by the government.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the civil war in **Sri Lanka**, the Bishops' Conference wrote a pastoral letter on reconciliation and rebuilding the nation based on religious and political pluralism, respect for human dignity and

human rights, and putting the Church at the service of the greater good.

In the 2019 outbreak of Ebola in eastern **DRC**, government and international community health workers were viewed with great suspicion and there was resistance to vaccination. The Church wrote letters to the local population, urging them to participate in vaccination programmes to help stem the spread of the disease.

Ahead of elections, such as recently in **Kenya**, Bishops often write letters trying to influence the way the elections are conducted, calling on all candidates to commit to non-violent means and to show restraint in their language, as well as urging democratic participation of all parties. The Catholic Church is often seen as an unofficial voice of democracy, peace and tolerance, setting the tone for its members and the wider public.

In August 2020, the **Zimbabwean Bishops' Conference** issued a pastoral letter<sup>30</sup> highlighting corruption, poverty and human rights abuses. The Bishops condemned a brutal crackdown on dissent by the government, highlighted the need for resolution of unresolved past hurts and underlined the desperate plight of those suffering unemployment and food shortages. The letter was met with a blistering personal attack on Archbishop Robert Ndlovu by a government minister.

Following the publication of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si' – on Care for our common home* in 2015, pastoral letters have increasingly focused on the need to respond to the social and environmental crisis that the world is facing. In 2018 the **Latin American Bishops' Conference** (CELAM) published a pastoral letter<sup>31</sup> which called for new models of development which prioritised human rights and environmental protection. In 2019, at the start of Lent, **Bishop John Arnold of Salford** wrote to all schools and parishes in his diocese asking people to make changes in their lives to protect the planet. These letters speak to the signs of our times, seeking action by those in power and by each citizen.

29 <https://www.comboni.org/pt/contenuti/110473>

30 <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/40248>

31 <https://www.celam.org/celam-presenta-oficialmente-carta-pastoral-sobre-cuidado-de-la-casa-comun-2374.html>



## 6 PROVIDING QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION



Photo: David Mutua

*Sister Jacinta Njeru, from the Matercare Hospital, Isiolo with a community member in Kenya.*

Catholic Church institutions have been providers of high-quality healthcare and education in many countries and communities where the state has limited resources and limited reach, particularly in Africa.

The schools tend to be popular due to the quality of the education they offer and their values-based teaching. The healthcare, with its approach on treating the whole person, rooted in each person's dignity, is recognised for both its quality and holistic approach.

Catholic schools and hospitals are the face of the Church for many people. They can also serve as shelter or distribution centres in times of emergency, including pandemics, as voting stations or electoral oversight offices, as neutral places for dialogue and mediation, and as reception and rehabilitation centres.



## Healthcare

In **Liberia**, during the Ebola crisis, many government facilities in local communities were closed, leaving a gap in local knowledge, information and capacity to manage the crisis effectively. By contrast the Church's health facilities remained open. Motivated by a sense of vocation and a broader commitment to help those most in need, the church health workers were willing to risk their own lives to ensure people still had access to services. Helping the sick is seen as an integral part of the Church's core mission.<sup>32</sup>

In **Eritrea**, In Eritrea, the Church has supported the government in delivering healthcare in remote areas which state services struggled to reach. Groups of religious sisters, including the Sisters of Charity and the Comboni Missionary Sisters, travelled long distances by vehicle to remote villages to check on people's health. They also brought midwifery delivery kits, which resulted in reduced maternal and infant mortality rates across the board. The Catholic Engela Community Health Hospital, in the Diocese of Segeneity, was renowned for the strong bonds of compassion and personal connection between patients and professionals, because of its ethos of love, care and the inherent dignity of all. Through building relationships and trust in this way, the Church can reach into communities and engage them in a way that other institutions may not be able to.

In response to the spread of HIV in **Zimbabwe**, the Church, through the Little Company of Mary Sisters, was among the first institutions to treat the situation as an emergency. They were motivated to reach the poorest people, who were worst affected. Led by Sr Noreen Nolan, they undertook research into the virus, commonly referred to then as 'the slimming disease' and set up a station called *Dananai* ("Love each other") at Murambinda Mission Hospital in Buhera to support those who were suffering, and to advocate for more help from the government. Being embedded in communities means the religious sisters know where to find the most vulnerable, often female-headed, households. They have targeted their support to guide children back to school and connect the women back into social networks if they have been isolated, working to reduce stigma and discrimination in the communities. The success of the Church's existing



*The fathers of the babies at the Kariyangwe new mothers group in Zimbabwe.*

deep networks in these communities has meant that other agencies increasingly make use of these networks as the means to deliver more general social care.

## Education

The Fe y Alegría network exists across Latin America and aims to provide education to children from poorer backgrounds in a way that is relevant to their local contexts and focuses on the whole person. **El Salvador** suffers from high rates of violence and La Chacra district is a poor urban neighbourhood on the outskirts of San Salvador, suffering from decades of gang violence. The Sisters of St Clare have a small community in La Chacra, and through the Fe y Alegría school they have worked with children and families in four of the local communities connected to the school to tackle the causes and impacts of crime. Psychologists have given support and counselling to children and families who have been affected by crime. The sisters have also developed training programmes focusing on life skills, small-business development, sports and the arts – as a way of both building self-esteem and of providing alternatives to gang membership.

In **Niger**, despite only one per cent of the population being Catholic, the Church is responsible for a significant amount of education, offered alongside national education programmes in all the main

32 Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, Islamic Relief Worldwide (2015), Keeping the faith - the role of faith leaders in the Ebola response

cities. It also plays a crucial role in facilitating access to education for all groups, with its own government-accredited programme for accelerated learning. The programme offers support for children who have fallen behind in their studies, with an intensive teaching programme to help children fit back into the appropriate stage of the government educational system. The programme is widely regarded as a success and has contributed to increased education levels as well as a greater pool of professionals within the country. Even serving government ministers having benefited from its programmes.

In **Bangladesh**, the Catholic Church is responsible for 111 schools, two colleges and one university. These education establishments are often in more remote areas, giving access to education to more excluded and underrepresented populations. Specifically, the Church has enabled access to high-quality education for many indigenous Adivasi people, who would not otherwise be able to attend school. According to Joyti F. Gomes, secretary of the Bangladesh Catholic Education Board, the secret to success of the Catholic schools is the focus on “complete human development” and flourishing, rooted in Catholic Social Teaching.



*Eric, the art teacher and the children's drawing art class. Young people and non-violent communities building a peaceful society in El Salvador.*



## 7 SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS



Photo: Hannah Caldwell

*New ways of earning a living following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines*

The Church development organisations are present at local level and support many communities, both rural and urban, towards sustainable livelihoods. Their ongoing presence and wide range of interventions enable them to engage in the full spectrum of community activities, including sustainable agriculture, conflict resolution, women's participation, organisational development and health and sanitation provision. The length of time they have served communities and their understanding of local people mean that communities are open and willing to learn from them new methods of farming and land management, to become more sustainable both economically and environmentally, such as in **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**.

The Church is also a witness to the destruction of land and livelihoods through unsustainable models of development that remove people from their land, cause environmental destruction and human rights abuses and that lock local communities into unequal relationships. The experience of the Church on the ground, the calling for a "preferential option for the poor" and "care for our common home" compel the Church to seek long-term structural solutions, such as in **El Salvador**.



Farming practices across **Zambia** differ, but it is not uncommon to burn land, plough up the soil and plant it with maize as a monocrop, using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This is in part due to the government's encouragement of maize farming, with the promise of a guaranteed market and therefore guaranteed income, as well as fertiliser subsidies. This has robbed farmers of control of their livelihoods, leaving them dependent on government subsidies and pricing. It has also resulted in livelihoods becoming dependent on one crop and therefore more precarious, and has had significant negative effects on the environment.

Caritas Monze has been working over many years with communities in Monze and Livingstone Dioceses, seeking to adapt to the changing reality and to find alternative, sustainable livelihoods. The long-term presence of Caritas in the communities means that it is known and trusted and can reach all members of the community. It has taken a "Family as a Development Unit" approach, which has ensured the active participation of all family members in decision-making, planning and benefit-sharing. In a context where rural households place high value on the family, this has opened up space to engage whole families on issues of conflict resolution, human rights, livelihoods and tackling gender-based violence.

The support to help families invest in organic agriculture has produced some striking results. Among the greater variety of crops being grown that are suited to the local climate and soil



Photo: Thom Flint

*Climate Resilient Agriculture in Marsabit, Kenya.*

conditions, there are some that act as natural pesticides, removing the need for additional chemical inputs. The trees planted have helped reforest the land, reduce soil erosion and take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Increased crop variety means better nutrition and reduced spending on healthcare, as well as more produce to sell and more money for school fees. This is also contributing to long-term behaviour change in the community, with some village leaders imposing a ban on cutting down trees and fines as consequences for those who do. More broadly, the women have been more actively involved in community decisions and there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of cases of gender-based violence being brought to the village chiefs for mediation.

In **Zimbabwe**, food security is increasingly threatened by unpredictable rains, leading to floods and droughts, coupled with river erosion and outbreaks of pests or disease. Caritas Gokwe and Caritas Hwange have been supporting climate-resilient agriculture (CRA) for climate-vulnerable rural communities. This has focused on teaching them climate-resilient techniques such as crop rotation and diversification, including promotion of small grains such as sesame and millet that are drought-resistant and open-pollinated, making them good for harvesting, storing and replanting for at least five years. As a result, 20,000 households have reported a 20 per cent increase in crop or livestock production and are in greater control of their own lands and livelihoods. The "small grain campaign" has been such a success that traditional leaders have created a policy that all homesteads must dedicate at least one acre to small grains as an insurance against drought. The Church is in a unique position to help implement CRA programmes like these as it is embedded within local communities, with an awareness of local experiences of farming and potential aptitude for innovation. It is also well respected and trusted for its service to all people, meaning that farmers are receptive to learning new techniques and new ideas if they know this education is at the initiative of church partners.

**El Salvador** is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America and has suffered from environmental deterioration, including severe water shortages for domestic

use and agriculture. In 2011 the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) warned that the country was approaching a water stress situation, with the government declaring a state of emergency in 2015.

In this context, metal mining posed a serious threat to livelihoods and to the environment. High demand for water in mining operations threatened to restrict water use for the population, while mining activity resulted in contamination of the existing water supply, as well as conflict over land. Mining in El Salvador had traditionally been small-scale mines, but with the end of the civil war in 1992, the government started planning for larger mines. For over 20 years, the population has resisted this expansion and organised campaigns to stop licences being granted, fearing environmental destruction, removal from their land and destruction of livelihoods. In 2009, the government passed a moratorium on further licences, pending a full review. These efforts to protect the environment prompted international legal proceedings initiated by two mining companies, who feared for loss of earnings. The mining companies lost in court, which resulted in growing popular pressure to prohibit mining.



Photo: Graham Gordon

Solomon Phiri, Caritas Monze, Zambia.

Responding to the groundswell of public opinion and using the standing and influence of the Catholic Church in El Salvador, the Archbishop of San Salvador, José Luis Escobar Alas, presented a legislative proposal to Congress in 2017 to turn the existing moratorium on metals mining into an outright ban. The proposal had been developed via the University of Central America (UCA) and Caritas, both part of the Catholic Church, working closely with civil society groups and citizens who saw their livelihoods threatened by mining. Within weeks, and with large popular marches to show support for the proposal, Congress passed a law which prohibited mining for gold and other metals, making El Salvador the first country in the world to impose such a ban. On presenting the proposed legislation, the archbishop said:



*We are representing the feelings of the population, who want to protect the environment. What interests us is the common good. We can't pass on a contaminated country to our sons and daughters, to our grandchildren and to the future generations.*

**José Luis Escobar Alas, Archbishop of San Salvador**



Building on this success, the UCA and the Catholic Church presented a study on water management in Latin America, aimed at resisting proposals to privatise the water supply in El Salvador. It drew on positive examples from other Latin American countries which have a state body to manage the water in the interests of the people. After presenting the study, the archbishop said that it reaffirmed the commitment of the Church to defending the rights of the country's poor, and protect the environment, demanding a "fair, efficient and equal" water law.

## Ways forward

There is an opportunity for more effective partnerships between donor governments, international organisations and the Church at all levels in international development and humanitarian response.

In the UK, meaningful engagement with faith actors will be an essential part of the work of the newly formed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the development of a new strategic framework for ODA.

Below we offer four ways forward to support these partnerships, with specific suggestions for what they mean for the UK government.

### 1 Evidence-based learning programme with faith actors

The starting point for effective partnerships is a deeper understanding by development and humanitarian professionals of how the Church works in different contexts. We hope this paper goes some way towards that, but much more needs to be done.

For the UK government:

- The FCDO should instigate an evidence-based learning programme on working with faith actors, which would build evidence on how faith actors operate and include a rigorous analysis of what has worked and what has not worked in previous partnerships.
- It should start by focusing on specific areas where faith actors have clearly demonstrated an added value, such as humanitarian response, peacebuilding, and promoting democratic governance.

### 2 Engagement with local faith groups throughout any intervention

There needs to be deeper and ongoing engagement with faith leaders at local and national level in political analysis, programme design, development, and implementation.

For the UK government:



Photo: Angela Neil

Ten 10-year-old children from St Peter's Roman Catholic School, Billericay, UK, dressed in superhero costumes to mark the tenth anniversary of the Climate Change Act 2008



- Country Missions need to engage local faith and community groups, who are rooted in the local context and are trusted leaders, as equal partners in the design and implementation of any intervention.
- In the development of all programmes, UK Mission staff should seek ongoing advice from faith leaders about the cultural, social and religious beliefs and behaviours that could support or hinder any intervention, for example in responding to pandemics such as Ebola and Covid-19 or in developing climate resilient agricultural practices.
- This could include an annual dialogue with faith actors as well as ongoing collaboration, and the establishment of an advisory team of faith actors in country.

### 3 Strategic approach to working with faith actors across the FCDO

There needs to be a commitment to true partnership that plays to the strengths of different actors and recognises what the Church can do well. This requires moving away from simply treating the Church as an implementing partner for already-agreed projects and programmes and recognising the different roles that different partners can play in any given situation.

For the UK government:

- The FCDO should set up a working group with the involvement of faith actors to develop a cross-departmental strategy to engage with faith actors. This strategy should form a key plank of the new strategic framework for ODA.
- It could start with a focus on issues where there is already strong engagement, such as in humanitarian response, peace-building and democratic accountability.
- An advisory group of faith-based actors would advise the FCDO on appropriate approaches, highlighting challenges and opportunities from the ground.

### 4 Long-term support for effective partnerships with faith actors

There needs to be long-term support for areas where the Church and other faith groups are often the only actors who can intervene effectively, such as in peacebuilding or humanitarian response in contexts that other actors struggle to access.

For the UK government, this could include:

- Support for religious leaders in peacebuilding. This will involve supporting the training of religious leaders, amplifying their voices and ensuring their protection as they call for peace, as well as including them in all dialogues that the government is involved in at country level. It could also involve financial support to local peacebuilding efforts, especially where conflict has led to significant loss of livelihoods, land and resources, and where communities will need to see practical signs of progress if they are to buy into reconciliation processes.
- Support to faith-based organisations on emergency preparedness and response. Support needs to be channelled to country-level platforms of faith-based NGOs that have humanitarian experience and can bridge the gap between formal government and UN humanitarian coordination processes with national and local religious leaders. UK faith based INGOs with long-term partnerships and trust with local FBOs and religious leaders would be key partners in this.
- Support for faith organisations tackling climate change and regenerating the environment. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* – on Care for our common home has challenged the Catholic Church to recognise the interconnected nature of the environmental and social crises and to respond to both the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. In many countries the Church is speaking out for climate justice, working on the ground for environmentally sustainable farming and business practices and supporting lifestyle changes. Greater support and new partnerships are needed to increase the reach and impact.



The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) is the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales and part of Caritas International.

Charity no 1160384 and a company limited by guarantee no 09387398.

Registered office:  
Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB

Tel: 00 44 7095 5348  
Email: [cafod@cafod.org.uk](mailto:cafod@cafod.org.uk)  
Website: [cafod.org.uk](http://cafod.org.uk)

Printed on paper from sustainably managed forests