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THE POLAND EXPERIENCE

SPECIAL ISSUE 2014

FAITH ACTORS WORKING ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

Tatra Mountains, Poland - © iStock

We are the first generations able to raise the level of the oceans, melt the polar ice, extinguish species and turn the currents in the ocean back on themselves. Such power comes with great responsibility. Those who are affected by climate change are not the ones causing it. Moreover, due to climate change, communities which are oceans apart are unwittingly brought closer together for all the wrong reasons: be it a family in North America buying a big, fuel-thirsty car, or a reluctance in Europe to insulate our homes, the devastating impacts of burning too much coal and oil on an island in the Pacific sinking beneath the sea, or on

a drought-ridden area of sub-Saharan Africa are not to be underestimated. The issue at hand is a cause for great alarm in need of urgent attention: the poorest, most vulnerable people are the ones who are currently paying the price for our decisions.

In November 2013, the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP19) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Warsaw, Poland. Among the many organisations participating, CIDSE – an alliance of Catholic development organisations fighting poverty and inequality – brought together testi-

monies from Africa, Asia and Latin America and voices from the Catholic Church speaking out on climate change and its impacts on the most vulnerable communities.

CIDSE organised a series of events, engaging with Polish civil society and the Church in a bid to a dialogue inside Poland on environmental protection. There people raised questions on Polish energy and climate policies and on how faith-based communities can contribute to climate justice. Therefore we want to continue raising awareness for the need to change our economies and our consumption towards more

sustainable societies harming neither the environment nor the people.

In this paper, CIDSE has gathered different views from stakeholders in Poland and beyond, with the aim of building on the dialogue initiated around the COP19 talks. Our long-term commitment to advocate for greater climate justice will continue, with the overall goal of reaffirming our responsibility to act against climate change, and highlighting concrete alternatives for lifestyle change.

*Bernd Nilles,
CIDSE Secretary General*



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ABOUT

What is CIDSE?



CATHOLIC ORGANISATIONS WORKING TOWARDS A PARADIGM SHIFT

By Bernd Nilles (CIDSE), Fr Marian Subocz (Caritas Poland) and Rev Prof Stanisław Dziekonski (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University)

For almost 50 years, the Catholic Church and lay organisations including Caritas and CIDSE, along with many others worldwide, have been working to end poverty and to build a more equitable world. Despite great achievements, new challenges constantly arise, calling on us as Catholics, and on all people of good will, to keep up our efforts. Today, economic growth often goes hand-in-hand with increased inequality: exclusion remains a reality for many people and food insecurity persists, whilst misguided policies increasingly create social, financial, economic and environmental crises. In this context our task grows daily and the need for a paradigm shift becomes ever more compelling.

For this we need to address the root causes of injustice. This is particularly true for climate change. Our behaviour in developed countries causes a serious threat to humanity, and this threat is one that hits the poorest – those who have contributed the least to the problem – the hardest. We as Catholic organisations are deeply involved in the climate challenge and its causes, such as the appropriation by a select few of the common inheritance of all; or overconsumption of

fossil fuels and the belief in endless growth.

In the words of the Holy Father (Evangelii Gaudium, 188): “The Church (...) hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might.” In this context we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: ‘You yourselves give them something to eat!’ (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor (...). The word ‘solidarity’ (...) refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”

Bishop Gomes from Bangladesh, a country severely affected by climate change, visited Poland last November and spoke at the conference organised by Caritas, CIDSE and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. He explained how climate change is already leading to sea flooding, which in turn is causing salinisation of the land, thus making it unsuitable for agriculture and thereby creating major food security problems.

The historical responsibility of developed nations for climate change and the urgent need for vulnerable countries to cope with its effects resonate with the words of Pope Francis in the Evangelii Gaudium, 2 & 53: “(...) Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor ... Today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.” Our call for climate justice springs from the need to reconsider economic models based on satisfying endless demand; creating ever greater inequalities and life-threatening environmental damage. In a world where few have a great amount, we must rethink the dominant economic models, so that everyone can live a dignified life on earth and preserve natural resources for generations to come.

In this work to build a fairer world, our organisations worked closely together at the UN Climate Conference in Warsaw in 2013. This series of articles highlights various views on climate justice, not only from a Catholic and faith-based perspective, but also from a variety of players.

climate justice, development finance and business & human rights. It works for a paradigm shift towards sustainable ways of living and producing to overcome the structural causes of poverty, inequality and injustice in the world.

As a lay-led Catholic network, CIDSE believes in a world based on peaceful, fair foundations where the lives and choices of rich and poor alike are transformed through solidarity.



“The effects of climate change are being felt now all over the world, and are affecting vulnerable people the most.”

- Chris Bain, Former CIDSE President
(January 2011 - January 2014)

WHY WE NEED CLIMATE JUSTICE

Interview with Chris Bain

CHRIS BAIN HAS BEEN THE DIRECTOR OF CAFOD (CATHOLIC AGENCY FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT) SINCE 2003, AND PRESIDENT OF CIDSE FROM JANUARY 2011 – JANUARY 2014. CAFOD WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL CHURCHES AND SECULAR ORGANISATIONS IN 40 COUNTRIES IN THE SOUTH, AND PLAYS AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS. BEFORE TAKING UP HIS CURRENT POST AT CAFOD, CHRIS’ PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE INCLUDED ROLES AS HEAD OF PROGRAMMES FOR ASIA, PACIFIC, EASTERN EUROPE AND THE CARIBBEAN FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE OVERSEAS, AND HEAD OF CAMPAIGNS AT OXFAM.

CIDSE and CAFOD (Caritas England and Wales) are aid agencies, not environmental organisations. Why the campaign to stop climate change?

We believe that Creation is God’s gift for all people and we have a responsibility to care for it. Many of the communities we work with in Africa, Asia and Latin America are suffering from more frequent and extreme floods and storms or more extreme and frequent droughts. Many farming families have told us that they are struggling with changes in the weather patterns – in some countries the rains are coming at the wrong times to germinate crops, or crops aren’t receiving enough rain to flourish. Our vision is a world where everyone can enjoy a healthy environment and benefit from their fair share of the Earth’s wealth and resources.

The effects of climate change are being felt now all over the world, and are affecting vulnerable people the most.

How have you seen the effects of climate change in your work?

We see how the vulnerable communities we work with suffer daily from the various impacts of climate change. In 2012, 18 million people faced hunger because of drought in the Sahel in Africa. It’s simply intolerable.

What is your greatest hope for the work on climate change? And what is your greatest fear?

The price of food is likely to increase by 70 to 90 percent by 2030, and that is without taking into account the effects of climate change, such as drought, floods, desertification and land degradation. The consequences on poor people’s lives will be terrible. Fortunately, an ambitious, fair and legally binding international deal on climate change can be sealed in 2015, if all governments engage actively. All countries have a responsibility to protect the climate, but developed countries bear the greatest responsibility and must show leadership. Most of these developed countries, including the EU, are failing to address the current climate challenge adequately, and do not show enough political will to change the game.

How would you answer someone saying “we should care for the poor in our own country first”?

I would remind them that our faith calls us to live in mutual, harmonious relationship with the planet, which is our common home. We must all show solidarity with those around the world whose lives are already being threatened by climate change.

Is climate change also a threat to European countries?

While it is too early to say definitely that the storms that flooded the UK in February were caused by climate change, we know that extreme weather events will become more common. Drought, floods and storms are likely to intensify and change the lives of people everywhere, including Europe and with it Poland.

What, in your mind, is the single most important thing people can do to combat climate change?

I think that a good place to start is with the question posed by Pope Francis: are we “truly cultivating and caring for creation?” Or are we “exploiting and neglecting it?” His answer to these questions was that “cultivating and caring for creation is God’s indication given to each one of us... it means nurturing the world with responsibility and trans-

forming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.”

What is at stake?

For the International scientific community represented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, climate change is unmistakable and unequivocal: it can be said with 95 percent confidence that it is due to human activity, such as burning of fossil fuels. Unless we change our way of living, the world’s average temperature is likely to increase by 4°C by the end of the century, which will have a dramatic impact on mankind worldwide.

Climate change is already affecting vulnerable communities around the globe today. They have to cope with its devastating effects, such as more frequent extreme weather events, shrinking food resources and water shortages – impacts that are putting their lives at risk. Europe is also exposed to the consequences of a changing climate, as demonstrated by the recent examples of forest fires in Greece, droughts in Slovenia and flash floods in Poland and the Czech Republic.



A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUES

Interview with Dominika Dzwonkowska (UKSW)



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DOMINIKA DZWONKOWSKA HOLDS AN M.A., AND A PHD IN PHILOSOPHY (GAINED IN 2005 AND 2011 RESPECTIVELY), AS WELL AS AN M.SC. IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FROM CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY IN WARSAW (UKSW). SHE WORKS AS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT THE INSTITUTE OF ECOLOGY AND BIOETHICS, WHERE SHE LECTURES AND CARRIES OUT RESEARCH ON ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY (SINCE 2013 SHE HAS BEEN THE POLISH INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE AT THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS). DR DZWONKOWSKA HAS EXPERIENCE IN WORKING WITH NGOS AND BUSINESS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY AND EDUCATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

Why is climate change not just a moral but also an environmental issue?

It is commonly thought that we should look for the reasons behind environmental deterioration mainly in external causes, such as in the scientific and technological model, in which environmental degradation is justified in the name of progress. In addition, people do not link the ecological crisis with questions of morality. Thomas Hill wrote a most interesting article on this topic in 1983 reflecting on the type of people prone to destroy the environment. This article demonstrated how important human morality is when it comes to considering environmental issues and that reflection on environmental issues also relates to human morality.

How would you explain the concept of 'environmental virtue'?

'Virtue' is one of the key concepts in ethics. It can be defined as a personal and intrinsic human characteristic that makes a person do things that are morally right. Values are human traits which enable compliance with moral principles. In Greek, the concept of 'areté' comes from the comparative and superlative form of the adjective 'good' and the verb 'aristeuein' which means 'to be the best', or 'to surpass others'. A virtuous person is one who exceeds others in complying with moral principles. Regarding the question of environmental virtues, this concept started to appear in environmental ethics when

it was recognised that environmental protection was not just a matter of its preservation, but also referred to the inner being and its morality.

Which environmental virtues are involved when we talk about climate protection?

There are many aspects of environmental virtues and deficiencies we need to consider when talking about climate protection. In my opinion, it is worth viewing virtues in contrast to their main environmental opposites. The following are of crucial importance: care versus contemporary man's selfishness, moderation to reduce greed and excessive consumption, respect as a counterweight to arrogance, wisdom as opposed to ignorance and responsibility to help overcome indifference.

Which of the virtues would you highlight as key when it comes to discussing climate impact in developing countries?

In addition to the above, so-called intergenerational justice is certainly crucial, especially when we consider that 80 percent of the Earth's resources are being consumed by 20 percent of the population, and that the ratio of consumption in the U.S. is 32 times higher than in some developing countries. This scenario is particularly sad when we know that those most affected by climate change are the underprivileged inhabitants of developing countries.

What could the Catholic Church in Poland do to make people more aware of the concept of environmental virtues?

It would be excellent if the Catholic Church in Poland were to preach the idea that protection of the environment is a moral issue. It could also make use of the support of the Polish eco-theologians' scientific community, and of Catholic organisations aware of environmental issues.

It is also worth mentioning that theological vocabulary has crept into the environmental language of the Ministry of the Environment's social campaigns. The Ministry encourages people to rethink the issue of waste; considering burning waste as a sin. The Church has the potential to use its power and experience to support efforts to overcome the ecological crisis.

Do you think the climate crisis could be an opportunity for change towards an ethical model of development?

The word 'crisis' in Greek means a 'breakthrough': the decisive turning point. Every crisis, including the climate crisis, is an opportunity to transform civilisation into a new and perhaps more ethical model of world development. But the question is if and how we use this opportunity.



Homily

Cardinal Nycz's appeal PRAY FOR HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY



© Piotr Dziabik

With the COP19 Climate Conference in Warsaw in 2013, climate was high on the political and public agenda in Poland. The topic was picked up by media, politicians, NGOs and Church leaders. During the Mass with ecumenical prayer (held on 17th November in St. John's Archcathedral), Metropolitan Bishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz, called on all believers to "surround the climate change conference with our prayers," and went on to explain: "The climate change conference is discussing the world, everything that God has created, everything that he has entrusted to us humans." He asked believers gathered in the Cathedral for their "support and prayers for all politicians, scientists and people from all over the world deliberating in Warsaw at the moment."

Masses and prayers regularly take place during climate conferences; they are special moments for decision makers and citizens to reflect on the meaning of their actions and on their consequences for vulnerable people worldwide.

The Cardinal explained in his homily why protecting the environment was such an important issue. He specifically referred to Polish examples: "When we are in the Żywiec Beskids, we see dry trees that have fallen prey to unwise human activity through industry, which not only poisoned the world of plants and animals, but also the whole human environment, our being in this world. That is why it is so urgent to solve these problems in a reasonable and wise way," he suggested. He warned us of the impact of our actions, and reminded us that "humans still want to expand the limits of their autonomy in the world, rightly given to them by the Creator, yet fail to see if such expansion will serve them or might perhaps turn against them," calling for wise use of God-given gifts by mankind.

The Cardinal reminded the audience that "we also know that in tackling these complex issues we must uphold fundamental justice among men, justice for people living in different regions of the world", putting the climate issue in the context of justice and global solidarity.

In conclusion, he appealed to everyone to pray: "Brothers and Sisters, we need to pray, so that the process of solving these problems is accompanied by wisdom and a sense of human responsibility", he said, stressing to all the need to avoid the "self-destruction of the world." Cardinal Nycz also attended the climate justice conference at Caritas Poland in Warsaw, to hear reports and testimony from scientists and from Asian, African and Latin American partners experiencing climate change.

"A concerted effort as a movement by the Church is yet to emerge, but the Church has a huge unmatched network and potential to make a change."

- Fr Frederick D'Souza



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CARITAS INDIA'S CALL FOR JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

INTERVIEW WITH FR FREDERICK D'SOUZA

FATHER DR FREDERICK D'SOUZA HAS BEEN THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CARITAS INDIA SINCE 2012. HAVING PREVIOUSLY WORKED AS THE SECRETARY OF THE JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA, HE IS CURRENTLY THE DIRECTOR OF THE NORTHERN (DELHI) REGIONAL FORUM, AND DIRECTOR OF CHETANALAYA — THE SOCIAL ACTION WING OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF DELHI.

What is the role of Church leaders in fighting climate change?

We at Caritas India have an environmental policy, approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Asian Bishops recently met to discuss the effects of climate change and possible ways forward.

A concerted effort as a movement by the Church is yet to emerge, but the Church has a huge unmatched network and potential to make a change. We at Caritas, for example, are running many initiatives on sustainable agriculture and disaster risk reduction.



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Do you think the whole Church can get behind action against climate change?

Documents on the social teaching of the Church, such as 'Caritas in Veritate', have clearly brought out the stewardship role of the Church as a custodian of God's creation. Caring for nature and creation is very much part of Christian spirituality dating back to St. Francis

of Assisi. We need to sensitise the clergy and religious leaders. Those who speak from the pulpit can lead and unite parish communities on climate change, and start small activities. Our numerous Catholic schools can contribute much. Religious communities can spread the message.

What is your message to citizens in the North?

Pope Francis has begun his papacy with a modest lifestyle. This has inspired millions and many are returning to the Church. By choosing to live simply, he is taking a bold step to reduce carbon emissions. Maybe he didn't think of it that way and simply lives his personal spirituality; nevertheless, this approach has implications on the environment.

In this light, my message to the people in the North is to give up the comforts you can and contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Let us do it as a part of our faith in action.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Catholic development agencies are grounded in the social thinking of the Church. Our commitment to a fairer world is rooted in our belief that all humans – women and men alike – possess the same dignity and rights, in which fair political and economic models and active citizen involvement play an important role. This belief is also based on the recognition that dignified human life is only possible in a safe and respected environment, where natural resources are unspoiled and are not there to satisfy one person's greed but are to be used by the whole human family, which embraces both current and future generations. It is on this basis that we are committed to climate justice, as climate change is a rising threat to human dignity, stopping people from flourishing and serving as a sign of our disregard for God's creation.

It is in this spirit that CIDSE, together with Caritas Poland and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, organised an international conference entitled 'Faith actors working towards climate justice.' This event was an opportunity for faith-based organisations, Church representatives, Southern partners, and international and Polish civil society to exchange views on technical, societal and political ways to address the moral responsibility that is climate justice. Among the panelists were Church representatives from developing countries, notably Bishop Theotonius Gomes from Bangladesh and Fr Frederick D'Souza from India, who, hailing from countries seriously affected by

climate change, called for effective climate measures and proper funding systems for climate mitigation and adaptation. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to Poland and Head of the Holy See delegation to COP19, reminded the audience that "it has become clear that human civilisation is able to impact global environment ... such as, for example, the greenhouse effect, which concerns the whole globe."

Speaking about the question of equity between developed and developing countries, he highlighted the issue of shared responsibility in climate action and explained how countries gathered in Warsaw were "trying to define in what way and to what extent any new agreement would define how developing countries were to meet their obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, more importantly, the degree to which the industrial countries needed to demonstrate political will to offer economic support to countries that are still developing. "Moreover", he continued, "we need to define a different development model; one based on a new energy system, which would be less dependent on fossil fuels and which would, instead, be based on greater energy efficiency and the use of alternative energy sources."

Given the seriousness of the climate crisis, shared responsibility, prayers and action must rise up from local level to the international arena to trigger the change needed.



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Humanitarian Aid in the Philippines - ©Wheeler A. Borrow

“WE MUST REALISE THAT IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE INFLUENCE POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE IN THE POOREST COUNTRIES.”

HUMANITARIAN AID AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN POLAND

Interview with Janina Ochojska Okonska

JANINA OCHOJSKA IS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF THE POLISH HUMANITARIAN ACTION (POLSKA AKCJA HUMANITARNIA, ALSO KNOWN BY ITS ACRONYM PAH). SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY LEADER, HAVING BEEN INVOLVED IN THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY CHAPLAINCY DURING HER STUDIES AND SINCE 1976, AND SERVING AS A DISSIDENT AND AN ACTIVIST IN A SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT IN TORUN. JANINA COORDINATED FRENCH MEDICAL AID AND FOOD SUPPLIES FOR POLISH HOSPITALS AND ORGANISED CONVOYS OF SUPPORT FOR BOSNIA. THE EXPERIENCE SHE GAINED HELPED HER TO ESTABLISH THE POLISH HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOUNDATION.

JANINA OCHOJSKA HAS RECEIVED MANY PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS, SUCH AS THE TITLE OF ‘WOMAN OF EUROPE’ IN 1994 GIVEN TO HER BY THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IN BRUSSELS, AS WELL AS THE ST GEORGE MEDAL AWARDED BY ‘TYGODNIK POWSZECHNY’ (A POLISH CATHOLIC WEEKLY MAGAZINE) AND THE LECH WALESA AWARD FOR PROMOTING OVER MANY YEARS THE IDEA OF INTERPERSONAL SOLIDARITY THROUGH CHARITIES. IN 2011 JANINA OCHOJSKA WAS AWARDED THE COMMANDER’S CROSS OF THE ORDER OF REBIRTH OF POLONIA RESTITUTA. IN THE SAME YEAR, SHE RECEIVED THE HUMANITARIAN HERO OF THE YEAR PRIZE FOR HER CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF HUMANITARIAN AID.



(Private)

What does PAH do to help victims of climate change?

Polish Humanitarian Action has been providing humanitarian aid to the victims of armed conflicts, natural disasters and long-term poverty for twenty years. It provides solutions to problems such as access to water and food shortages resulting from, amongst other things, climate change. Events such as typhoons and hurricanes have always occurred, but over the years we have seen a clear increase in natural disasters: their number is currently four times higher than forty years ago.

Do Poles generally support the poor in developing countries suffering from the negative consequences of climate change?

Polish people are very keen to help victims of natural disasters if appropriate media coverage is provided.

After typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines in 2013, we raised over a million zlotys within two weeks, and more than 1.6 million by the end of our campaign. These funds will help to build more than a thousand homes and schools. After the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, aid exceeded our expectations: we raised 1.3 million zlotys and were able to rebuild two nursery schools in Kesennuma.

Obviously, there is a link between the level of media coverage and aid, the more individual stories shown in the media, the higher the support from donors. This was the case in the catastrophes mentioned above. The conflict in Syria is a different case. It is reported in the media from the perspective of politics and warfare. Consequently support is significantly less. We can see that Poles would rather help victims of natural disaster than victims of war.

How has international aid changed in recent years in Poland?

There has certainly been increased understanding of the concept of humanitarian aid; it can clearly be seen even in the amount of money we raised. “Water boreholes in South Sudan” (*the slogan was created for our activities in this region*) found its way into school textbooks. Three quarters of Polish people believe that human-

itarian aid should be supplied, especially in the field of water and sanitation, which are our major concerns. However, this understanding is still incomplete; as such, in addition to providing aid, one of PAH's other activities is a campaign to educate the public. There is also the matter of legislation. A development aid act was passed recently but it did not provide for modern, truly effective aid through public funding.

What would be your message to our readers who are concerned about climate change?

We must realise that in our daily lives, we influence positively or negatively the situation of people in the poorest countries. Wasting energy, water and food; all of these actions have negative consequences, both in terms of contributing to climate change and squandering resources that could be used for other purposes.

Poles throw away 9 million tons of food every year. If the money spent on food which was then thrown out were used for humanitarian aid, we could really change our world. Such linkages are very simple but we are not aware of them on a daily basis. Nevertheless, we need to be aware that we have an impact on the life of people in other regions of the world.



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CLIMATE AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGER

Africa is deeply affected by climate change, with desertification, droughts and flash floods exacerbating food insecurity. Like other countries, Niger is severely threatened, with 4.2 million people being food-insecure according to FAO. Within the country, Caritas Niamey is running several initiatives to address the effects of climate change and food insecurity, such as distributing drought-resistant seeds, providing

equipment to farmers to reduce their carbon footprint, and training communities on food security and best farming practice. At international level, Caritas Niamey is involved in advocacy, mainly on climate finance for adaptation and mitigation measures. Mrs. Dissarama Sabine Attama, Director of Caritas Niamey, joined the CIDSE delegation at the COP19 Climate Conference in Warsaw.



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TOWARDS A POLISH ENERGY TRANSITION

INTERVIEW WITH DR ANDRZEJ KASSENBERG

“WE KNOW THAT POLAND COULD BECOME AN INNOVATIVE COUNTRY WITH AN ECONOMY BASED ON HIGHLY SPECIALISED SERVICES BY 2020–2025, BUT WE LACK THE IMPETUS THAT COULD LEAD TO THESE CHANGES.”

How would you describe Poland's climate and energy policy?

The Polish energy sector is in a difficult situation. For more than twenty years, this industry, which is State protected, has not been modernised and is now in need of reform. A significant portion of our production capacity and industrial infrastructure is obsolete. In addition, due to EU requirements, inefficient, highly polluting energy industry components will have to be shut down in the near future. This situation may lead to a permanent shortage of electricity. Polish energy intensity is 2.2 times higher than that of the EU27 average, which gives us great opportunities for improvement. There may even be scope for us to save up to 25 to 30 percent of our energy.

Our main problem is the coal-based structure of the energy industry. It generates the highest external costs caused by energy production in the EU and contributes to the loss of 1.2 million business days per year. The development of renewable energy has been too slow and lacks a clear strategy that takes into account economic needs and the importance of energy policy. We will be condemned to late and, in effect, costly reforms.

Will an ambitious environmental policy be beneficial to Poland?

The need to modernise the obsolete energy infrastructure involves high operational costs. However, we can take advantage of this situation and create an innovative energy sector. The problem is that the powerful fossil fuel and energy lobbies are not interested in this fundamental change. Therefore, strong and resolute EU environmental and energy policies, including reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increasing the share of renewable energy and improving energy efficiency

should support those changes. A decision to modernise the energy industry will result not only in increased economic development but also in the resolution of social and environmental issues that will benefit our country.

Do Polish CO2 emissions affect the populations of poor countries?

Many developing countries are badly affected by climate change. Unless we reduce global CO2 emissions, this trend will continue. If Poland sticks to coal-based energy, even if more efficient, emissions will remain high or will produce even higher GHG emissions. According to estimates, GHG emissions in 2050 could rise by 25 percent compared to today's level. Although the Polish contribution to global CO2 emissions, currently standing at one percent, might be considered insignificant, and whilst the country's contribution to historical emissions since 1900 presently stands at only two percent, we are still as a nation responsible for those damaging climate changes.

If we move from our coal-based economy – 92 percent of our electricity is generated from coal – to an economy based on renewable, more efficient energy, we will be able to reduce our GHG emissions by more than 60 percent by 2050. We definitely have the opportunity to achieve this. If Poland can succeed, other countries should be able to do even more.

What will be the biggest challenge for Poland in achieving this goal?

The main challenge consists of breaking hostile stereotypes and myths about low-emission energies which are fostered by the fossil fuel and energy lobbies hand-in-hand with certain politicians. So far, Polish civil society has not put pressure on politicians to demand changes to promote an innova-

tive, green economy. It seems that there is no real interest in the wider public debate on this subject, and economic and social lobbies promoting these types of changes are still weak and isolated. We know that Poland could become an innovative country with an economy based on highly specialised services by 2020–2025, but we lack the impetus that could lead to these changes.

A proper climate policy could build the foundations for a modern, ecologically friendly and highly developed Poland. Currently scepticism and conservatism prevail, but we tend to forget that the shift to low emissions energy is a long-term strategy. If Poland contributes to shaping this shift as part of a European Union energy strategy, it could help us mitigate the negative effects of this transformation and would enable us to follow the optimal modernisation path for our country.

What steps need to be taken?

We need to look at altering existing tax policies to create a basis to promote the desired ecologically friendly behaviour of individuals, households, governments and businesses. Research and educational policies are also vital in supporting both the design and sale of Polish inventions (including low CO2 emissions products and services), and training people employed in expanding sectors.

The consistent use of measures to support changes in key sectors such as energy, housing and construction, transport, industry, agriculture and waste management is also crucial.

Everything needed to achieve long-term environmental policy goals will help Poland's development and give our citizens not only economic, environmental and social benefits, but also immeasurable health benefits.



THE NEED TO CHANGE TO A FAIRER, MORE PEACEFUL WORLD

Despite the unequivocal findings of climate science, the international community is currently not doing enough to address the climate change challenge, and UN climate negotiations remain arduously slow, with most policy decisions failing to meet people’s needs, whether they concern a shift to low-carbon societies, support to developing countries’ efforts to adapt to climate events such as droughts or flooding, or financial support for vulnerable countries to adopt sustainable paths towards development.

Nonetheless, in recent years, civil society has organised major campaigns to urge world leaders to take account of the realities of climate science and the principles of justice. These campaigns demonstrate that local mobilisation can trigger a global shift to a fairer and more sustainable world. For instance, IESR – an Indonesian partner of our England and Wales member CAFOD – designed a campaign called ‘Low Carbon Society’, aimed at raising awareness among

the urban middle class and young people about the effects of their carbon footprint, in order to create a different society by changing mindsets and lifestyles in the community.

Alternatives for change already exist, such as energy efficiency and moving to renewable energy sources. Beyond much-needed individual initiatives, what is crucial today is strong political will to develop and implement the right policies at international level. 2014 is a critical year: States must be ready to come prepared to Paris in December 2015, when a new multilateral, fair and binding agreement for tackling climate change must be signed by all countries. For the deal to be fair, leaders must take practical steps to ensure that each country will contribute to the international effort, according to its respective responsibility for climate change and its capacity to cope with climate impacts. Meanwhile, the European Union, and with it Poland, has the opportunity to show political leadership as

it is currently designing its 2030 climate and energy policies. This is a great opportunity to shape Europe’s future progress towards a low-carbon economy. These measures should increase energy efficiency and the usage of renewable energy in Europe, thus ensuring safe and clean energy for Europeans, while reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, in a spirit of solidarity and differentiated responsibility, climate finance is the central tool through which vulnerable countries can access funding to use for climate adaptation.

Consequently, the international community needs to understand the serious consequences of an inadequate post-2015 climate agreement: short-term ambitions must be replaced by long-term ambitions so that climate justice can become part of economic and social discourse and then be integrated in a new narrative of global human well-being.

PAPAL PRONOUNCEMENTS ON CARE FOR CREATION

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

EXCERPT OF THE HOMILY GIVEN IN ZAMOSC (POLAND), 1999

“The beauty of this land leads me to appeal its preservation for future generations. If you love our native land, do not let this appeal go unanswered! In a special way I call upon those who have been entrusted with responsibility for this country and its development, and I urge them not to neglect their duty of protecting it against environmental destruction.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI

CARITAS IN VERITATE, 2009

“The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.”



POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE ON UN WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY, JUNE 2013

“Cultivating and caring for creation is God’s indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of His project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.”