

Make human rights and environmental protection the fundamentals!

Recommendations for the review of the European Development Consensus

CIDSE, the international family of Catholic social justice organisations, welcomes the EU's intention to update the European Development Consensus to reflect the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030. It is essential that the renewed Consensus becomes part of an integrated EU agenda that addresses all dimensions of EU policy and action, at home and abroad, to realise the vision set out in Agenda 2030.

The renewed Consensus must guard and protect agreed principles of gender equality, ownership, accountability, democratic scrutiny, civil society participation as well as the commitment to policy coherence for development.

CIDSE proposes some key approaches for the renewed Consensus to build on these principles. As a family of Catholic social justice organisations, we have developed these recommendations by drawing greatly from Catholic Social Teaching, especially the most recent Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis "On Care for Our Common Home." They also reflect our ongoing dialogue with peers and partners worldwide on the paradigm shift needed for our global family, present and future, to live in health and prosperity in harmony with the earth and each other. Fully able to tackle the systemic crises we face with climate change, inequality and poverty.

The need for an integrated approach

Para 14 of the Agenda 2030 Declaration acknowledges that the world is out of balance. Making human rights, gender equality, environmental protection and restoration, decent work and indigenous people's rights an integral part of the economic and climate agenda requires an integrated and systemic approach. Such an approach addresses the "intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet" and is built on "the conviction that everything in the world is connected..."¹ Agenda 2030 also asserts the indivisible responsibility to protect human rights and the environment. Para 59 emphasises: "we reaffirm that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our common home."

Yet despite the political rhetoric of an integrated agenda, the reality is very different. When we observe the efforts to implement the SDG agenda: monitoring and reporting efforts, data collection drives, or policy formation, **it appears that achieving the human development dimensions of the agenda is a separate agenda to the need to repair, restore and respect the integrity of the environment. This failure to break with old approaches must be acknowledged immediately.**

Failure to do so will take us further down the dangerous path of further breakdown of societies and cultures, uncontrollable increases in poverty, inequality and violence, further environmental degradation and climate

¹ *Laudato Si'* #16

collapse. It is a warning that has been issued by many religious and cultural traditions as well as science. In a similar vein Pope Francis reminds us that we must realise that creation is harmed where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone.²

To adopt an integrated, systemic approach the renewed Consensus must:

- **Abandon the dominant techno-centric solutions being put forward to address the challenges of the Sustainable Development agenda**

Fostering human innovation to respond to the challenges we face today is a welcome and important step. At the same time, the updated Consensus must not be built on a blind trust that science and technology will provide all the solutions we need. As Pope Francis highlights: “We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build.”³

Instead of blindly accepting “solutions” such as Climate Smart Agriculture, Carbon Sinks or Natural Capital Markets⁴, the Consensus must foster “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality”.⁵ It must **challenge a techno-centric paradigm and strongly reinforce the need to limit and direct technocratic responses to serve human beings as part of the Earth.**

For instance, **to address Agenda 2030’s core challenge of hunger and malnutrition would require an approach that embraces the complexity and multi-layered nature of agriculture and food production and consumption systems.** It requires that policies and practice across the board: trade agreements, finance- and development policy itself - stop promoting and investing in industrial agriculture and the dominant food production and consumption system that it is part of. Such a system is highly dependent on chemicals and fossil-fuel based technology, destroys the livelihoods of small producers, is capital-intensive, destroys biodiversity, is a principle source of climate change and is part of the problem of food waste and harmful consumption. Instead investment and policy must promote a cooperative economy of small producers using innovative, non-polluting and climate-safe agro-ecological practices that safeguard bio-diversity, rely on technology built on cultural practice and community-held knowledge and wisdom; shorter food distribution cycles which foster greater respect for labour, community and the earth, as well as non-wasteful and conscious consumption.

- **Make respect of human rights, gender equality and the environment central values**

Agenda 2030 recognises that the promotion of human dignity is fundamental. It emphasises State responsibility vis-a-vis the indivisible and universal human rights agenda, including the specific responsibility to realise gender equality and women and girls empowerment. This is a critical approach that must be reflected in the Development Consensus: “recognising that human beings are living creatures endowed with a unique dignity.”⁶

The renewed Consensus must address the values of our dominant extractivist economic and social model and throwaway culture.

Human rights violations as a result of or alongside environmental degradation are the products of this model, stemming from the notion that “everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves

² *Laudato Si’* #6

³ *Laudato Si’* #107

⁴ CIDSE, Paris, for the People and the Planet: the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*-what it means for the COP21 negotiations and beyond, October 2015

⁵ *Laudato Si’* #111

⁶ *Laudato Si’* #43

alone.”⁷ “This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all.”⁸ Disenfranchised and vulnerable people, communities and whole nations have been the losers throughout history and continue to be the greatest losers due to climate change.

A renewed development Consensus must be bold enough to challenge the notion of human beings, the earth and its resources merely as potential “resources to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves”.⁹ This requires seeing human beings as “subjects” or authors of their own development and well-being.

Empowerment and human-rights based participation mechanisms will allow great learning from communities and whole nations of indigenous people who already live the solutions and alternatives we seek to forge. This in turn requires states that are strong enough to support and scale-up these alternatives even if it contradicts the interests of the country’s creditors, investors or trade partners or international financial and trade regimes.

A strong state needs a strong and independent civil society and social movements to propose, debate and monitor state policy and practice. We have witnessed this in Germany where despite the political influence of traditional energy companies, a democratic renewable energy policy that social movements have long campaigned for was put in place.

A renewed Consensus must fully address Europe’s own responsibility

A development Consensus that builds on a systemic approach must acknowledge the considerable European responsibility to achieve the new agenda. The European economic and social model has been built on the historical pillage and continued relentless extraction of raw materials, particularly from the global south, to satisfy the needs of European industry and markets. The European model continues to be largely one which “a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption.”¹⁰ “There is also the damage caused by the export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home, in the countries in which they raise their capital”.¹¹ In other words, Europe has accumulated a large ecological debt. Pope Francis states that “developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development.”¹²

Across Europe communities – many on the frontlines of recent austerity policies, **transition and fair-trade towns are paving the way for a new European social and economic model** based on local, circular community-based economies of production and consumption, democratic control of renewable energy and global citizenship. **These models provide a glimpse of what a new Europe in the world can and should do and should be the starting point of a renewed development Consensus.**

Beyond its responsibility at home, Europe’s role and contribution to climate change, environmental degradation and social breakdown in many countries in the global south must be fully addressed. The EU must honour its climate and development finance commitments. It must fulfil its responsibility

⁷ *Laudato Si’* #6

⁸ *Laudato Si’* #82

⁹ *Laudato Si’* #33

¹⁰ *Laudato Si’* #50

¹¹ *Laudato Si’* #51

¹² *Laudato Si’* #52

towards refugees and people fleeing conflict, disaster and loss of livelihood because of environmental degradation and climate change. In global governance, Europe must act fairly and coherently, reducing northern control of the governance and decision making in International Financial Institutions to enable greater voice for the many African countries who are underrepresented. In the area of trade, it must review agreements and negotiations in light of the systemic blockages these pose to achieve the vision of Agenda 2030.

The EU's responsibility abroad also extends to European transnational corporations (TNCs) operations. Increasing European openness to public private partnerships and blending of public and private finance must be balanced with transparency including mandatory financial and non-financial disclosure requirements of all actors; accountability, including regarding extra-territorial obligations to address abuses of the rights of communities in the frontline of TNC operations, and clear rules built on human rights and sustainability principles, including free, prior and informed consent and the precautionary principle.

A commitment to engage in the UN process towards developing a binding treaty on transnational corporations, other business enterprises and human rights would be an important demonstration of EU responsibility in the renewed Consensus.

Conclusion

On the eve of the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015, CIDSE along with voices from different parts of civil society all over the world called on World leaders to walk with all people who are embarking on a new journey to a future where equality, fairness, rights and life in harmony with nature are what matter¹³. In the face of increasing social violence and increasingly hostile environments in which human rights defenders, activists- a large number of whom are women- and communities on the front-lines live and work, this is a journey that is often wrought with risk and can even be life-threatening.

A renewed European development Consensus must acknowledge the increasingly hostile environment for civil society in many countries and make every effort to create a safe environment for activism: by diplomacy and by ensuring that European actors are not complicit in such crimes, or punished when complicity is proven.

A bold and visionary development Consensus can pave the way for Europe to achieve the vision of Agenda 2030. Demonstrate that this is possible!

CIDSE is an International family of Catholic social justice organisations working together with others to promote justice, harness the power of global solidarity and create transformational change to end poverty and inequalities. We do this by challenging systemic injustice and inequity as well as destruction of nature. We believe in a world where every human being has the right to live in dignity.

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¹³ www.cidse.org/sectors/rethinking-development/public-call-to-world-leaders-on-the-occasion-of-the-united-nations-summit-on-sustainable-development-september-2015.html