



*The time to find global solutions is running out. We will only be able to find adequate solutions if we act together and in agreement. Hence, there is a clear, definitive and urgent ethical imperative to act.*

Pope Francis,  
message to UNFCCC Conference  
of Parties, December 2014

# CLIMATE ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Reflecting the principles of *Laudato Si'* in our transformative response to the climate crisis

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## INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* – on Care for Our Common Home is ground-breaking while remaining deeply embedded in Catholic tradition. It has inspired an expansive and profound understanding of the climate crisis and the social crisis with which it is inextricably interwoven. An Encyclical constitutes the highest-level moral teaching document of a Pope, and *Laudato Si'* (LS) is the first to be issued on the theme of the environment, embedding the issue firmly in the context of social justice (Tucker and Grim 2016). Through *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' reaches out to “every person living on this planet” (LS3<sup>1</sup>).

The global Catholic family was closely engaged on the issue of climate change in the run-up to the Paris Agreement. As the Agreement is built from national levels up to an international treaty, the focus and engagement must be targeted at the national level in order to strengthen and implement the Paris goals.

This report is intended to help governments and other stakeholders reflect on how they should respond to the challenge of climate change in light of *Laudato Si'* and broader Catholic Social Teaching. It provides guidance on how tackling climate change can also address the underlying issues of environmental degradation, poverty and inequality. The guidelines in this report enable members of the global Catholic family to engage with their governments' climate plans and help adapt the principles of *Laudato Si'*.

This document comprises:

- » Section 1: Introduction to climate change and the international response
- » Section 2: Principles contained in *Laudato Si'*
- » Section 3: Guidance based on the principles outlined in Section 2 for a just and comprehensive response to climate change
- » Section 4: Conclusion

## CLIMATE CHANGE IN CONTEXT

The scale of the problem posed by climate change cannot be overstated. Climate change is dramatically affecting people's lives – especially the lives of the poor and vulnerable – threatening the progress made in reducing poverty. If we fail to address it, climate change will have grave implications for the environment, society, human rights and the global economy.

Despite the huge challenge posed by climate change, it is only one striking example of people's impact on the planet. The way we live today is causing environmental degradation, destruction of ecosystems, and large-scale land, water and air pollution. At the same time, people are living in poverty and there is increasing inequality and overconsumption. In *Agenda 2030* and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015, the international community recognised the link between environmental, social and economic challenges and the need for a coherent response to these challenges. *Laudato Si'* describes this link as “integral ecology”.

We will not be able to alleviate poverty and develop in a progressive way without recognising the connection between ourselves and nature, and the important role nature plays in enabling us to develop. Likewise, we will not tackle climate change without addressing the social, economic and political factors that drive our current development pathway, putting us at odds with the stability of the planet on which we depend. At the heart of this problem is a need for our own cultural and spiritual transformation, “an awareness of our common origin, our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared by everyone” (LS 202).

The climate crisis offers us an opportunity to deeply reassess our fundamental vision of development and engage in an unprecedented level of cooperation and solidarity within and between countries. Our actions will affect not only current generations but all generations to come. To succeed, every country, every government department and every community must play its part.

“Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

(LS 49)

<sup>1</sup> The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs in *Laudato Si'*

## THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Paris Agreement was signed in December 2015 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and paved the way for an international approach to dealing with climate change. The agreement represents a watershed as it recognises climate change as a long-term, structural challenge that requires universal cooperation and solidarity to meet it. Importantly, the Agreement also captures the importance of education and engagement with the public if we are to make progress.

The Agreement sets out a goal of holding global average temperature increases to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, aiming for a limit of 1.5°C. To achieve this goal, net zero global greenhouse gas emissions need to be reached in the second half of this century. However, to do this while protecting the poorest and most vulnerable people, the solutions chosen must tackle wider systemic issues and not simply reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Prior to the negotiations, individual countries submitted their contributions to the agreement – now referred to as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – which are to be periodically revised to increase their ambition. This is necessary as existing contributions are not sufficient to limit climate change to agreed levels and achieve what is needed for people and planet. A recent United Nations analysis of the NDCs concluded that they “cover no more than a third of the emission reductions needed, creating a dangerous gap.” (UNEP, 2017). Preventing temperatures from exceeding the agreed limits is only possible with urgent action.

As countries revise their NDCs and develop national policies for dealing with climate change, there is an opportunity to ensure that the policies, processes and actions implemented are done holistically, for the good of the planet and for all people.

## THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF *LAUDATO SI'*

This section briefly outlines the core set of principles drawn from the rich teaching of *Laudato Si'* and the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching it follows, applying Scripture to the environmental crisis the world currently faces.

The principles look well beyond issues of climate change and climate action. They examine the root causes of the crises we face. The principles also highlight the need for a transformative vision of development that is fundamentally different to the 'business-as-usual' path that has led us to this point.

This section examines these principles individually, while acknowledging that they are in many ways mutually supporting and overlapping. This document aims to enable them to be integrated into our response to climate change (see Section 3).

### » HUMAN DIGNITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Every person is created with a unique (equal and inalienable) dignity and should have the conditions to develop accordingly. This calls for a new, overarching narrative, a new vision of human flourishing that looks beyond conventional economic or quantitative criteria. It calls for a new path of integral human development for the common good.



*...every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons" ... How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!*

(LS 65)

### » INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Humankind is deeply interconnected with the planet in myriad, complex ways, with positive and negative outcomes. Given the scale of human-caused disruption, it is no longer feasible or effective to pursue specific, discrete solutions for each distinct part of the problem. In fact, pursuing separate solutions for each issue is counter-productive. Humankind today faces one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Effective solutions demand integrated approaches that combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protect nature.



*We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.*

(LS 139)

## » COMMON GOOD AND THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF GOODS

The earth is God's gift to all. It is a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. In addressing the ecological crisis, therefore, the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged must be paramount. All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to the above principle. Furthermore, in a world of gross inequalities, it is not simply material resources which must be shared, but also human knowledge and ingenuity. This is a golden rule of social conduct and the first principle of the whole ethical and social order (LS 93).



*Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.*

(LS 157)

## » PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

The perspective of the poor must be central to decision-making. Social justice must focus on the unmet needs of the poor, the marginalised, and those left behind by our current inequitable mode of development. Human beings only fulfil their own identity when they attend to those who are most affected by ecological degradation and who have contributed least to the problem.



*In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.*

(LS 158)

## » DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION

Shifting to a just and sustainable path of development requires honest dialogue about current development models and practices, and a shared vision for our future path. Dialogue is genuine only if it entails the informed and empowered (and free) participation of all parties affected, especially the most vulnerable to social and ecological degradation worldwide. And participation is in good faith only if it is not controlled by powerful voices.



*I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.*

(LS 14)

## » SOLIDARITY AND JUSTICE

There is an ethical obligation to secure justice for other people, other generations, and other creatures. In the Anthropocene era, as we struggle to live with fulfilment within our planetary boundaries, this requires global and spiritual solidarity.



*We require a new and universal solidarity... Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation.*

(LS 14)

## » CHANGE AND HOPE

Humankind needs to radically and urgently change its conduct (LS 4). This needs to be underpinned by an 'ecological conversion' that takes people from indifference to loving awareness, from individualism to unity, from selfishness to generosity, from alienation to solidarity, and from despair to hope. The problems we face will be solved not only by the good, heroic deeds of individuals, but also by communities of all types and sizes acting with unified purpose.



*The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.*

(LS 13)

## AN INTEGRAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE: APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES OF *LAUDATO SI'*

The following section shows how climate action can and must be a boost to development for the common good. It sets out the guidance nations can take from *Laudato Si'* (along with the principles in Section 2) to improve and enhance their response to the climate crisis. It identifies six areas of guidance, and articulates objectives and approaches for climate action that are consistent with *Laudato Si'*. Table 1 sets out the links between the principles and the guidance given in this section.

**Table 1.**

Links between *Laudato Si'* principles and the six key areas of guidance for climate action

	Human dignity and quality of life	Interconnectedness and integral ecology	Common good and the universal destination of goods	Preferential option for the poor	Dialogue and participation	Solidarity and justice	Change and hope
Address poverty and strengthen human rights	X		X	X			
Match the scale of the challenge		X					X
Consider the environment as a whole		X				X	
Use dialogue to progress climate action				X	X		
Promote an equitable vision of a just transition			X	X			
Encourage a personal and spiritual dimension						X	X



## KEY GUIDANCE: CLIMATE ACTION SHOULD HELP TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS

“An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.

(LS 164)

Achieving the principles of a *Preferential option for the poor*, *Common good and the universal destination of goods* and *Human dignity and quality of life* means:

- » Food security and sovereignty for all
- » All people have access to energy
- » Sustainable land management and recognition of land tenure and traditional use rights
- » Strong support for climate change adaptation

Climate action will require public investment of many types, from new energy infrastructure to investments in adapting to the impacts of climate change. This is an opportunity to promote development for the common good. Just as Pope Francis said of economics and politics, the goal of climate action is “to serve humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable” (Pope Francis letter to Prime Minister David Cameron 2013). If climate action is poorly designed and implemented there is a risk that it will have the opposite effect and exacerbate poverty and undermine development for the common good. Climate action can reinforce gender-responsive action, which is essential for meeting development needs: providing more equal access to resources for women is shown to increase agricultural production; more equitable investment in women’s and children’s education and health is shown to increase economic growth; greater representation of women in positions of political power (such as parliaments) is shown to improve environment outcomes.

There are many ways in which climate action can contribute to development needs, including in the following four areas.

### Food security and sovereignty for all

Reducing emissions from land should contribute to development efforts. While the expansion of crop land and agricultural modernisation have contributed to an increase in food production, they have also led to greenhouse gas-intensive agricultural practices and the release of large amounts of carbon from the land. Socially, they have deprived small-holders and agricultural labourers of their livelihoods. Addressing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture can be done in way that ensures food security and sovereignty, for example, agro-ecological practices can support smallholder farmers while increasing food security and reducing land emissions. A positive effect can also be seen in associated impacts such as housing options or livelihoods that rely on sustainable forest resources.

### All People have access to energy

Climate action must be undertaken in a way that does not hinder the fight against energy poverty. Investment in new energy infrastructure must be specifically targeted at meeting the needs of energy-poor populations, through efforts that expand modern energy access to underserved populations. More than 1 billion people are still without access to electricity. Nearly three billion people lack access to modern cooking methods.

The vast majority of those people – around 87% of electricity-poor households and communities – live in remote rural areas. Local electricity systems powered by renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind and hydro power, are in most cases the quickest and cheapest ways of connecting these people. There is a real opportunity to invest in solutions that address both climate change and energy poverty.

### Sustainable land management and recognition of land-tenure and traditional use rights

Sustainable land management and forest practices should be adopted, ensuring protection of the rights of rural communities, particularly indigenous peoples. Legally-recognised tenure rights lead to reduced deforestation and lower carbon emissions compared with forest areas with unclear tenure rights (Stevens et al. 2014). They can strengthen indigenous communities and other vulnerable rural communities, reducing pressures to move to urban areas, thereby reducing the rural-urban gap while protecting forest stocks and non-timber resources. Land use can also be managed to enhance quality of life. For example, in some countries, the priority is to halt suburban sprawl and adopt more efficient urban planning and transit strategies in ways that accommodate rapidly urbanising populations and enhance quality of life. Smart, mixed-use, transit-oriented growth in urban areas can improve access to affordable housing close to decent employment.

### Strong support for climate change adaptation

Climate adaptation can strongly contribute to development for the common good. Those communities that are most vulnerable to climate impacts are also invariably those that have been left behind on the conventional development pathway. They are living in the most precarious locations, have benefited marginally from conventional economic growth, and have enjoyed relatively little public investment in building community resilience. Community-based adaptation can support development for the common good. Adaptation efforts that are grounded in local knowledge and coping strategies, and in which the empowerment of communities to take their own decisions is central, are likely to be far more effective than strategies imposed externally (Reid 2009; Schipper et al. 2014).

## KEY GUIDANCE:

### CLIMATE ACTION MUST MATCH THE SCALE OF THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades.”

(LS 25)

Achieving the principles of *Interconnectedness and integral ecology*, and *Change and hope* means:

- » Defining climate goals in a sufficiently ambitious way
- » Acting with a level of urgency consistent with our climate goals

#### Defining climate goals in a sufficiently ambitious way

The Paris Agreement adopted an objective to keep temperature increases “well below 2°C” and to “pursue efforts” to keep warming below 1.5°C. However, the way these targets have been translated into emission-reduction scenarios and pathways is often insufficient. The carbon budgets and emissions pathways outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change correspond to a set of specific probabilities (66%, 50%, and 33%) of reaching the temperature goals. These probabilities are alarmingly low. From the standpoint of prudent public policy, if a danger is deemed

an urgent and irreversible threat to human society, then a policy course that imposes a one-in-three, one-in-two, or even two-in-three risk of failing to avoid that danger would not warrant serious consideration.

From the perspective of the *Laudato Si'* teachings, if our climate action is benchmarked against budgets and pathways with such high likelihood of failure, our current efforts would have to be judged half-hearted, a failure to recognise the interconnectedness of environment and society, and an abdication of our duty to protect the poorest and future generations. Nations should work within the UNFCCC to define the temperature limit in a way that makes the probability of failure explicit, and that does not implicitly impose intolerable risks on the world's poor and disenfranchised.

#### Acting with a level of urgency that is consistent with our climate goals

To achieve a strong likelihood of keeping global warming below 2°C or 1.5°C, the required de-carbonisation transition must start immediately and be rapid, “using all means possible” (Pontifical Academies 2015). However, the carbon budget available if these limits are not breached is already small and is shrinking fast as emissions rise. Only 200 Gigatons CO<sub>2</sub> can be emitted from 2017 forward if warming is to be kept below 1.5 °C, and 800 GtCO<sub>2</sub> if warming is to be kept below 2°C. At current rates, the 1.5°C budget would be exhausted in 6 years, and the 2°C budget in 23 years.<sup>2</sup>

In its assessment of the Paris Agreement pledges, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP 2015) concluded that mitigation efforts need to increase *threefold* compared with the existing pledges to be on a 2°C pathway.

The precise meaning of urgent action will differ between countries, just as countries' economies, societies and poverty eradication requirements differ. While the Paris Agreement is based on *nationally determined* contributions, nonetheless those contributions must collectively achieve the Paris Agreement's objectives.

All countries must:

- » Define climate plans and strategies that are *explicitly* consistent with overall climate goals
- » Quantify the expected impact of policies at local, national, and global levels to ensure consistency with these goals
- » Plan adaptation action consistent with the level of projected climate change
- » Cooperate internationally, providing support as necessary to enable poorer countries to take action

<sup>2</sup> These figures are taken from Table 2.2 of the IPCC Synthesis Report, updated to account for the last five years' (2012–2016) carbon emissions, as reported by the Global Carbon Project (Le Quéré et al. 2015) and estimated for 2016, as equal to ~200 GtCO<sub>2</sub>. Current fossil fuel combustion rate amounts to emissions of approximately 35 GtCO<sub>2</sub> per year (neglecting additional emissions from land use change and cement production).

## KEY GUIDANCE: CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT AS A WHOLE



*When we speak of the 'environment', what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live.*

(LS 139)

Achieving the principles of *Interconnectedness and integral ecology* and *Solidarity and justice* means:

- » Protecting and investing in restoring the world's natural habitats and systems
- » Not accepting false solutions

Not only is climate inextricably linked to our social crises, it is also only one of several interlinked environmental crises. The integral ecology of *Laudato Si'* is an exhortation to respect, cherish and preserve the environment, inspired by the need to sustain the home on which we are profoundly dependent and to recognise and fulfil our "sublime fraternity with nature" (LS 221). Indeed, "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue" (LS 217).

### Protecting and investing in restoring the world's natural habitats and systems

We must not endanger other aspects of the world's natural habitats and systems in our efforts to limit climate change. A climate-myopic, carbon-centric environmental policy will exacerbate the pressures on other planetary boundaries. Climate action must include investing in protecting and restoring biodiversity, soil, water, air and other natural systems.

This guidance has clear implications for some options being considered for mitigation. In principle, some could play large roles in displacing fossil fuel sources, but these come with their own environmental and social risks. Large hydroelectric dams (World Commission on Dams 2000), nuclear power, and large-scale bioenergy (energy derived

from organic materials) (Sagar and Kartha 2007) where it serves the household energy needs of over a third of humanity in traditional cookstoves or open fires. Efforts to reduce the enormous human health, socioeconomic, and environmental impacts by shifting to cleaner cookstoves and cleaner biomass-derived fuels have had some success, but much more needs to be done, possibly including the expanded use of fossil-derived fuels. Concurrently, biomass is rapidly expanding as a commercial energy source, especially for transport fuels. Bioenergy can positively contribute to climate goals and rural livelihoods; however, if not implemented carefully, it could exacerbate degradation of land, water bodies, and ecosystems; reduce food security; and increase greenhouse gas (GHG) risks that cannot be neglected as we find ourselves increasingly motivated to respond to a destabilised climate.)

### Not accepting false solutions

This does not mean we should delay emissions reductions. A concern is that we may choose to do so, intending in the future to make up for it by deploying 'negative emissions' technologies and processes on a large scale which could suck the CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere. However, most of these measures are still technologically unproven and, even if they ultimately prove feasible, may involve ecological and social costs that society deems unacceptably high. These measures may also prove less effective in reducing the impacts of climate change than predicted, particularly if climate system 'tipping points' or thresholds have already been passed. As we develop climate strategies today, it would be premature – and very risky – to take for granted that 'negative emissions' options will be available in the future. This is a gamble that allows 'emissions overshoot' in the near-term, at the cost of mortgaging the human rights of vulnerable people and communities on the uncertain prospect that currently unavailable technologies will definitely be broadly deployed later.

Perhaps an even greater concern is that, as an alternative to reducing greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently, society will resort to geoengineering (spraying sulphur into the atmosphere to cool the earth by reducing sunlight) to deal with climate change, despite its "unfamiliar and unquantifiable risks", and the fact that "there is no substitute for dramatic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the negative consequences of climate change" (National Research Council 2015). Geoengineering is the epitome of a technocratic approach to a problem whose root causes are societal, economic, cultural and political.

## KEY GUIDANCE: CLIMATE ACTION MUST PROCEED THROUGH DIALOGUE, AND AT ALL LEVELS MUST BE PARTICIPATORY, INCLUSIVE, AND DEMOCRATIC

“ We need to stop thinking in terms of “interventions” to save the environment in favour of policies developed and debated by all interested parties.

(LS 183)

Achieving the principles of *Dialogue and participation* and *Preferential option for the poor* means:

- » Meaningful engagement and decision-making at national and local levels
- » Taking a cross-sectoral and government approach to addressing climate change
- » Ensuring greater equity in international negotiations

Climate action must be defined, designed and undertaken in an inclusive, participatory, democratic way, engaging the active and empowered involvement of all stakeholders.

### Meaningful engagement and decision-making at national and local levels

The Paris Agreement commits countries to develop “Long-term Low Emission Development Strategies” (Paris Agreement, Article 4), as well as submitting Nationally Determined Contributions every five years. It is vital that the most affected communities and constituencies are involved in envisioning, developing and deciding those strategies. The process of generating strategies could form the basis of a society-wide dialogue on equitable and sustainable development paths, giving a platform to individuals, communities and diverse constituencies for discussion of the priorities and principles raised in *Laudato Si'*: What is quality of life? What is the nature of progress? How can we act in solidarity? What must we do to realise justice?

It is critical in these discussions to engage and benefit from the perspectives and inclusion of those most affected at the most local level, both to give voice to their concerns and priorities, and to benefit from their wisdom and empower them to influence their future. As *Laudato Si'* says: “The local population should have a special place at the table: they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending

immediate economic interest” (LS 183). The challenge is that such approaches to deliberation are most important when institutions of representative democracy and justice are weak, yet these are the contexts in which they are also most difficult to undertake effectively. They can end up reproducing power imbalances, reinforcing gender disparities, rationalising existing injustices, and providing the illusion of inclusion without substantive involvement (Few et al. 2007; Aylett 2010).

Examples of processes for effective dialogue and equitable participation that could serve as models have emerged over the years. Promising examples include the various initiatives on community-based adaptation (Reid 2009), scaling-up initiatives (Schipper et al. 2014), participatory urban planning (UN-Habitat 2014), and Rural Climate Dialogues fashioned after ‘citizen juries’ (IATP 2016). Legitimacy and inclusion of stakeholders who typically lack voice and power is critical in such processes. As *Laudato Si'* emphasizes, “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed” (LS 146).

*Laudato Si'* makes a significant appeal to those in political office to avoid short-termism and to look beyond their immediate terms of office – to “leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility” (LS 181).

Tackling climate change will have wide impacts and will require action across all sectors of the economy. A joined-up approach within national governments will therefore be required, with all departments or ministries engaged in the long-term planning process.

### More equity in international negotiations

While climate action is now primarily driven at the national level, international negotiations play a vital role, in particular the regular ‘stocktakes’ that assess how countries’ efforts are proceeding and what more is necessary; provisions for transparency and exchange of experiences and information; and – not least – obligations and institutions for providing technological and financial support. Formal negotiation forums need to be reformed to make them procedurally more equitable.

While the UNFCCC has been relatively open to civil society participation (especially compared to international trade and financial decision-making processes), facilitating civil society participation in global decisions remains challenging, and there are many proposals for ways to improve the UNFCCC process. These include facilitating access to decision-making venues such

as the annual Conference of Parties, the Green Climate Fund and the Clean Development Mechanisms Board, and providing grievance mechanisms and appeals processes for stakeholders adversely affected by mitigation and adaptation activities (or otherwise advocating for their human rights) (Johl and Duyck 2012). A reverse concern arises with respect to the influence of vested interests in decision-making, where fears of undue influence in climate negotiations (Slezak 2016) have energised efforts to limit corporate involvement following the model of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control exclusion of the tobacco industry from negotiations (Louaillier 2016).

Outside of international climate change forums, other fora such as trade and investment agreements, intellectual property rights regimes and security alliances that ultimately influence our development path and course of environmental degradation or restoration also require more equitable procedures for participation if domestic action is to be effective.

## KEY GUIDANCE: PROMOTE AN EQUITABLE VISION FOR A JUST TRANSITION



*A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.*

(LS 194)

Achieving the principles of *Preferential option for the poor* and *Common good and the universal destination of goods* means:

- » Recognising the climate as a global commons
- » Leaving no one behind in the climate transition
- » Creating decent, green jobs in the new economy
- » Ensuring climate action helps correct power imbalances

Development for the common good is much more than ‘greening’ our current mode of development to reduce its harms to the environment. Development for the common good is about *just* development. It is about prioritising the needs of the poorest, and abolishing the vast disparities in consumption, inequalities in wealth, and imbalances in power, as well as ensuring that policy and practice are coherent with these priorities. Urgent mobilisation on a scale necessary to address the climate challenge will have costs and will cause disruption. It is essential that those costs are borne

fairly among nations, communities, and individuals, and that the disruption is alleviated and compensated as fully as possible.

### Leaving no one behind in the climate transition

Economic inequality contributes to environmental degradation and climate change, and is also a reflection of unjust development and unequally distributed gains (Gore 2015). A radical shift to a lower-emission economy will release “gales of creative destruction” that accompany technological transitions (Schumpeter, 1942). Today, our economies include many forms of employment that are dependent on greenhouse gas-emitting practices – from fossil resource extraction, to the manufacture of combustion vehicles, to agro-industrial production. The domestic equity challenge must be faced if the many people who fear being “left behind” are to embrace a high-ambition climate transition. The transition to new decent, green jobs must include the poor and marginalised having an ownership of the common goods. This includes the technical and intellectual aspects.

Governments must set out an equitable, long-term vision for the transition which must include ecological education. In doing so, they must engage both with those workers and communities whose livelihoods are potentially in jeopardy due to climate action and with wider communities to promote an understanding of ecological citizenship. The vision of governments must be coherent across economic, trade, environmental, social, education, and labour policy, and provide a consistent context for enterprises, workers, investors and consumers to support a just transition. They must build upon social dialogue and democratic participation of relevant stakeholders, including workers and trade unions, based on legitimate, informed, empowered engagement. Human and labour rights should be the foundation for an effective and smooth transition, attending to their strong gender dimension to promote equitable outcomes.

Climate policies should be analysed with respect to their distributive impacts to understand clearly the ways in which they may benefit the poor and marginalised. Analysis should go beyond their costs and aggregate economic benefits to address the distribution of impacts among different socio-economic classes and stakeholders – the impact on basic needs, on the fundamental elements of well-being, and on rights to access and opportunity. For instance, carbon taxes are regressive in some contexts – they impose higher burdens as a percentage of income on poorer households than wealthy households. However, this regressive contribution to inequality can be assessed (Grainger and Kolstad 2009), and compensated by a progressive rebate (Metcalf 2008). This type of analysis of the potential regressive impacts should be done for all types of climate action, and counteracting measures put in place (Büchs, et al. 2011).

### Climate action should help correct power imbalances

Tackling emissions from fossil fuels and agriculture and land-use will require the right technologies and practices, but it will also require challenging the economic, social and political forces that keep vested interests paramount and keep us on our high-emissions development pathway. Ending the global reliance on fossil fuels will require countries to take steps to explicitly reverse the political dominance of fossil fuel interests (Oreskes and Conway 2010; Mann 2014; Mulvey and Shulman 2015; Evans et al. 2015; Brulle 2014; InfluenceMap 2016). Listening to local communities and enabling decision-making at that level can shift this balance and lead to long-term solutions, “while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instil a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land” (LS 179). Such a shift will also support moves to better land management and urban planning by countries taking a stand against those forces – whether real estate developers or logging concessionaires or agri-businesses – that currently subordinate good land practices to short-term profits.

### Recognition of the climate as a global commons

If we are to respond effectively to the climate challenge we must acknowledge that, ultimately, the climate is a *global commons* - it is a shared inheritance from God, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. No country can preserve and protect a global commons on its own.

This means that countries must view any actions not as ‘theirs’ but as part of “one world with a common plan” (LS 164) that considers what kind of world we are leaving for future generations. It means taking action to reduce emissions is because *everyone* has a part to play and in doing so encouraging others – their negotiating partners, their trading partners etc – to reduce *their* emissions as well.

For this to work, a country must act in accord with *its fair share and understand intergenerational solidarity*. If people in one country see that other countries are not doing their fair share – that they are ‘free-riding’ – they will think twice before putting any real effort into reducing their own emissions. Even though the global climate regime is built up of Nationally Determined Contributions, it is still necessary for nations to define their contributions against the backdrop of a common plan.

- » Nations, as they define and table their NDCs, must explicitly state the ethical and moral basis on which their efforts can be considered a fair contribution
- » The stated principles should be consistent with the underlying equity principles stated in the UNFCCC (succinctly expressed as “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”) and those core principles of *Laudato Si'*, most importantly the *Common good*, *Preferential option for the poor*, and *Solidarity and justice*
- » Nations should be sufficiently explicit and detailed so that the same principles and approach can be applied to other nations; this will make clear what each nation expects of others, and foster a transparent dialogue on global climate equity
- » Nations should include financial and technological support in their explanation of their contribution, as support and international cooperation is necessary for an effective climate response

## KEY GUIDANCE: ENCOURAGE A PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSION FOR THE COMMON GOOD



*The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion.*

(LS 217)

Achieving the principles of *Change and hope* and *Solidarity and justice* means:

- » Technologies employed for climate action must be judged to serve socially determined goals
- » Investing in cooperative solutions to problems, building resilience, social capital and effective governance
- » Investing in public education programmes and awareness based on science, faith and ethics
- » Rebuilding our connection with nature

While effective climate action relies on an extraordinary transformation in the technological basis of the global economy, the personal and spiritual transformation required is perhaps even more extraordinary. Technology must play a key role in responding to climate change, but *Laudato Si'* cautions that “The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings” (LS 109). Technologies must always be assessed from the perspective of their instrumental role in serving socially determined goals. Similarly, financial instruments (such as offsets for land-use emissions) must be scrutinised as to their effectiveness and their equity implications.

As Pope Francis expresses it: “The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (LS 217). It requires that: “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (LS 229).

Striving for personal betterment, whether inspired by religious or secular humanist tradition, is a longstanding and perhaps eternal task. But now we have the additional motivation of a global existential crisis to focus our minds and our hearts. And there are many steps we can take.

We can focus on investing in cooperative solutions to problems, building resilience, social capital, and effective governance at various levels that will serve us well in the future (Adger 2003). While supporting greater solidarity and mutual concern, this can provide an alternative to the inwardly-focused responses that contribute to the isolating of individuals and fracturing of communities. It is important that we resist the temptation to isolate, allow trust to falter, and build walls, whether on the individual level or inter-cultural levels. Social trust, and the broader ideas of social capital or social cohesion, will be indispensable for achieving environmental sustainability (Bridger and Luloff 2001; Kolstad and Wiig 2012; Ostrom 2008).

Investment must be put into programmes of public education and awareness based on science, faith, and ethics. Such programmes have the potential to generate different lifestyle choices and which can play their part in sparking greater change. We need to be honest about the good and the bad; fossil fuels enabled huge human advances but they must now be left in the ground or else they threaten to make our planet uninhabitable. We are reminded by Pope Francis that, “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning” (LS 205).

Many economic thinkers have been developing ideas about the changes in human culture, attitudes and values that might accompany a shift to a ‘post-growth’ world that is seemingly needed to halt resource depletion and environmental degradation (Jackson 2009; Schor 2010; Victor et al. 2013). A transition would build upon and simultaneously spur a greater understanding of sufficiency, value for free time, community bonds, and self-provision.

There is much we can do to rebuild our connection with nature and our spiritual bond with the other creatures with which we share this earth. Although in many societies those connections to nature have been diminishing in recent generations (Louv 2008), many have succeeded in protecting land and habitat, providing spaces where we can go to rejuvenate and restore our personal relationship with nature.

The urgency necessary will require us to question our priorities. Each litre of petrol that feeds a needlessly large personal vehicle, each tonne of coal burned to power luxuriously large homes, each hectare of land cleared to provide for meat-intensive diets must be seen as a trade-off against the welfare of the poor today and in the future. Indeed, *Laudato Si'* calls for no less than a global climate mobilisation, demanding our political attention, material resources, personal diligence, spiritual commitment and global solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* is a profound and challenging call to action. It presents an unflinchingly honest assessment of our global crisis and a morally forceful exhortation to respond. The Pope states plainly: "It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face." He searches out the "roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms, but its deepest causes" (LS 15). Ultimately, the Holy Father calls into question our

reckless development path, fraught entanglement with technology, inequitable structures of power, and wilting relationships with each other and with nature. He calls for an ecological conversion, and for a restored commitment to development for the common good.

For those who are thriving under the status quo and hold dear their positions of comfort and power, the Encyclical is a dire alarm. But for the rest, it is a welcome and reassuring promise that change is possible and that there is cause for hope.



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CIDSE is an international family of Catholic social justice organisations, working together 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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