



*The urgent call and challenge to care for creation are an invitation for all of humanity to work towards sustainable and integral development.*

Joint Message of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for the World Day of Prayer for Creation, 1 September 2017



# CLIMATE ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

REFLECTING THE PRINCIPLES OF *LAUDATO SI'* IN OUR TRANSFORMATIVE RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

## TWO CHALLENGES WITH THE SAME CAUSE

The problem posed by climate change cannot be overstated. It is dramatically affecting people's lives – especially the poor and vulnerable – threatening the progress made in reducing poverty.

Climate change is just one example of people's impact on the planet. The way we live 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. As Pope Francis has noted, a link exists between environmental and social challenges: *“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).

We will not be able to alleviate poverty 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 POPE'S CALL TO ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2015, Pope Francis released his Encyclical Letter to the world, *Laudato Si'* – on Care for Our Common Home. In this Letter, the Holy Father presented his positive vision. This is a vision in which everyone works together in recognition that we have one common home; a vision in which we can all experience the hope that is within us. Pope Francis was also very clear in the Encyclical that we face not just a climate crisis but also an environmental and social one. The impact of *Laudato Si'* was considerable. The Encyclical lifted global climate ambition and appealed to us to look across borders and beyond immediate electoral cycles and personal self-interest. Pope Francis contributed considerably to a mood in which there was a belief in making progress; that we were on a shared journey.

## HOLDING OURSELVES TO OUR COMMITMENTS

*Laudato Si'* forms part of Catholic Social Teaching and as such is a living document encouraging people to reflect on the times they live in and how to respond in “universal solidarity” (LS 14). This reflection should be for us all. In this spirit, two years after the signing of the Paris Agreement, this paper offers the opportunity to evaluate how we are currently doing against the ambition we set. We offer a set of principles to support dialogue on how well our current plans address the two linked challenges we face and to help us increase our ambition.

As these principles are drawn from *Laudato Si'* and wider Catholic Social Teaching they place the poorest and most vulnerable people at the centre and assume their active participation in any processes or solutions.

The climate crisis offers us an opportunity to 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 and every person must play their part.

## PRINCIPLES FOR REFLECTION

Climate action must contribute to development for the common good: it must go beyond “greening” our current mode of development. Development for the common good is about *just* development. It is about prioritising the needs of the poorest, and eradicating the vast inequalities in consumption, wealth, and power. The following questions are offered to help countries reflect on their national climate plans in relation to *Laudato Si'*, to make sure they deliver this goal.

### » 1. HOW CAN CLIMATE ACTION ADDRESS POVERTY AND STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS?

The system changes and investments required by climate action represent major opportunities to meet development needs. Climate action can strengthen the fight against poverty through:

- Targeting energy investment at meeting the needs of energy-poor populations, through efforts that expand access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

- Promoting agroecological practices and tailoring solutions to the needs of smallholder farmers to enhance food security and sovereignty at the same time as addressing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.
- Recognition of land tenure and traditional use rights while putting in place sustainable land management practices.
- Ensuring gender-responsive climate plans.
- Strengthening support for climate change adaptation that is grounded in local knowledge and coping strategies, and in which the empowerment of communities to take their own decisions is central.



*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)

### » 2. DOES OUR AMBITION MATCH THE SCALE OF THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE?

Are we living up to our individual responsibilities? To achieve a strong likelihood of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, the required de-carbonisation transition must start immediately and be rapid. The precise meaning of urgent action will differ between countries, just as countries’ economies, societies and poverty eradication requirements differ. The Nationally Determined Contributions must state the ethical and moral basis on which their efforts can be considered a fair contribution and are consistent with the underlying principle of equity. Climate policies must 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.



*What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?*

(LS 57)

### » 3. DO OUR CLIMATE PLANS CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT AS A WHOLE?

Climate action must include investing in protecting and restoring biodiversity, soil, water, air and other natural 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.



*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)

### » 4. HAVE OUR CLIMATE PLANS EMBEDDED DIALOGUE AND INCLUSIVE, DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AT ALL LEVELS?

Climate action must be defined, designed, and undertaken in an inclusive, participatory, democratic way, with the active and empowered involvement of all stakeholders. The Long-term Low Emission Development Strategies and Nationally Determined Contributions that countries are to submit to the Paris Agreement represent opportunities to engage the most affected communities and constituencies, ensuring they are involved in envisioning and developing those strategies. Special care must be shown to indigenous communities and their cultural traditions as “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).

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? Legitimacy and inclusion of stakeholders who typically lack voice and power is critical in such processes.

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. *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”.



*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)

### » 5. ARE WE DELIVERING A JUST TRANSITION?

The transition to a zero-carbon, climate resilient world must not have a negative impact on the poor and marginalised. It must be ‘just’; managing disruptions and paving a path for new decent, green jobs, while revitalising those communities that have been dependent on the fossil economy.

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 wider communities to promote an understanding of ecological citizenship. 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. The vision 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.



*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)

## » 6. DO OUR PLANS AND SOLUTIONS ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT THE PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF ADDRESSING CLIMATE?

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. *Laudato Si'* calls for no less than a global climate mobilisation, demanding our political attention, material resources, personal diligence, spiritual commitment and global solidarity.

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 will be central to addressing the underlying causes of climate change. 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.

Article 12 of the Paris Agreement – which addresses public awareness, information and education on climate change – is essential to the Agreement's implementation. Investment in public education and awareness based on science, faith, and ethics should be strengthened. Such programmes have the potential to generate different lifestyle choices 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. 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. There is much we can do to rebuild our connection with nature and we must learn from those who have succeeded in protecting land and habitat, providing spaces where we can go to rejuvenate and restore our personal relationship with nature.



*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)

This paper is available at [www.cidse.org/resources](http://www.cidse.org/resources).

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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