



# REFLECTIONS AND INSPIRATIONS

from the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIDSE Systemic  
Change Forum

JUNE 2021



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**CIDSE**   
together for global justice

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## INTRODUCTION

From 7 to 9 June 2021, CIDSE organised its second Systemic Change Forum, assessing and advancing the implementation of its systemic change approach as member organisations and as a network. This was done by checking in on the global context and the role CIDSE plays as a network. Is the network acting for the change it seeks? Has CIDSE managed to implement systemic change in its ways of working? Is CIDSE communicating in a systemic way or is it perpetrating old ideas?

This report captures discussions and learnings from the Forum through the voices of some of its speakers and by gathering some takeaways. It complements live sketching by Zsofi Lang during the Forum. See graphics [1](#) - [2](#) - [3](#) - [4](#) - [5](#).

2013

First  
Paradigm shift  
workshop  
Bringing about  
a paradigm shift  
towards a just and  
sustainable world

2014

Second  
Paradigm shift  
workshop  
Acting for  
transformation  
towards a just &  
sustainable world

2018

First  
Systemic Change  
Forum  
Acting to transform  
our relationship  
with nature

2020

Systemic Change  
dialogues on  
transformative  
partnerships &  
communications

2021

Second  
Systemic Change  
Forum  
Change Starts  
with Us

## OUR SYSTEMIC CHANGE JOURNEY

The CIDSE network started its journey towards systemic change ten years ago; the discussion has evolved throughout the years and will do so in the future! Take a look at some of the milestones of our journey.



# THE CALL FOR CHANGE

LIEVE HERIJGERS

CIDSE PRESIDENT

BROEDERLIJK DELEN

BELGIUM



“The **call for change** is ringing loud and clear. We won’t go back to normal, because normal was the problem. Economic inequality. Social injustice. Political polarisation. Climate change and the loss of biodiversity, displacements... The pandemic is only the latest of global shocks affecting our planet.

The pandemic has disrupted all of our lives, though not in equal measure. Once again, the most vulnerable in our societies, all around the world, stand to suffer the brunt. If there is one thing this pandemic has made clear, it is that all things are **connected**. The crises that we face are not isolated. Structural systems of **injustice** and exploitation link them. This is why CIDSE, with our partners and allies, calls for a radical shift in the dominant economic system: a system that is causing the current environmental, economic and social crises, as well as a crisis of values.

We need to transform our current economic model into one that promotes human flourishing on a thriving planet. Creating systemic change requires active cooperation on all levels – from local communities to the State, from organisations to individuals. **International solidarity** is key if we want to secure a better future for the people and the planet. It implies the redistribution of wealth and resources.



Inequality is the result of centuries of **oppression** and it is time to recognise this and correct this. The flow of resources from the Global South to the Global North, enriching the latter at the expense of the former, needs to be reversed. International solidarity implies the **redistribution of power**. Today, power lies where the money is. Our democracies have been unable to address this imbalance adequately.

With our CIDSE network, we should find and promote mechanisms for more effective and fair participation. How can we empower the most undervalued to become actors in their destiny? For **inspiration**, we need only to look at the current social movements. The **decolonisation movement**, for example, is putting self-determination at the heart of its project. International solidarity is about equal partnership and shared responsibility. International solidarity is not unidirectional; it is an act of unity between allies fighting for a common cause. Equality in our partnerships should be self-evident and the mindset of all our human and institutional interactions.



Let us embrace diversity, and learn from each other's perspectives. Catholic Social Teaching inspires us. With *Laudato Si'*, and recently *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis urges us to view the ecological and human crises through an **integral approach**. We must share these insights and to make change happen. And, lastly, international solidarity fosters **hope**. "Hope is an actionable choice," Martin Luther King said. "It is working for something because it is right, not just because it has a chance of success." It is hope that propels us forward in the most difficult circumstances. This promise of hope is evident in the social movements worldwide: from Black Lives Matter to the decolonisation movement, from Buen Vivir to ecofeminism. The voices for systemic change are multiplying and becoming more and more widespread. And it is the **young** who are leading the way. It makes one hopeful for the future. We are in a **transition**, and transitions are tough. But there is power in unity. Let us choose hope over fear, courage over comfort. Let us speak up and inspire others to do the same."







**MANY TERRITORIAL STRUGGLES TRIED TO IMITATE THE PROCESS TO GIVE LEGAL RIGHTS TO THE RIVER ATRATO. THE LEGAL DEMAND REFLECTED THE COMMUNITY'S WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD. THIS WAS ACHIEVED BECAUSE OF SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND ALLIANCES BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS.**



**ELISABETH PÉRIZ**

**SIEMBRA, COLOMBIA**

## THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS

Elisabeth Pèriz highlighted the challenges of defending land rights in the face of climate change and COVID-19, drawing on the story of the River Atrato in Colombia. In the North-west of the country, the Atrato river flows through Colombia's Pacific rainforest, one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. The river is a source of life for many Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities living along its banks. But the environment has suffered badly as a result of illegal mining, logging and the armed conflict. It is often dangerous for local communities to protect their environment. In 2017, the Constitutional Court gave legal rights to the Atrato river in a landmark case. The Court ordered the government to protect the river and stop the gold mining and logging which has led to huge deforestation. This case shows the strength and power of communities working together to defend their fundamental rights, reflecting the close interconnections between people and nature. This case and the process around it gained a lot of interest at national and international level. Many territorial struggles have tried to imitate the process to give legal rights to the River Atrato. The legal demand reflected the community's way of seeing the world. The legal victory was achieved because of social mobilisation and alliances between organisations. According to Elisabeth it is key that networks, such as CIDSE, continue to give visibility to the struggles in the territories in order to show that real alternatives exist, and that new ways of thinking are possible to support communities' proposals to provoke change in the current system.







I WOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE  
US AND OUR PARTNERS TO SURF ON  
THE NEW WAVE OF CHANGE. WHAT  
DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE 60 YEARS  
FROM NOW?



SANDRINE EKOFO

BROEDERLIJK DELEN, BELGIUM

## DECOLONISING ATTITUDES

Sandrine Ekofo reiterated the urgent call for decolonising attitudes in our societies brought about by the unlawful death of American citizen George Floyd and exacerbated by the current health crisis. The Black Lives Matter movement gained visibility across the world and demonstrators claiming the need to decolonise our societies. Amid these events, we should also wonder: is the development sector keeping up? In this sector too, we need to get rid of our colonial heritage. A wide-spread ideology has been that Western societies had to identify solutions to the problems of the South, bring, for example, knowledge to Africa. There was never an actual exchange with partners from the South since the relations were not among equals and were conditioned by funding issues; and power is where the money is. Although these partnerships are unequivocally meaningful, they need to be based on mutual respect; we have to create a partnership that leaves space for the other, doesn't impose a programme, and doesn't look for vested interests. We have to learn that the expertise is not only in Europe, but in Africa too. We have to redistribute power, give space to our partners: they have to be protagonists of their own lives. Our sector has to evolve and for this we need a radical change.







**LAUDATO SI' INSPIRED US AS AN ORGANISATION TO REDUCE OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT. WE WANTED TO RESPOND TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH AND THE CRY OF THE POOR.**



**GRAHAM GORDON**  
**CAFOD, ENGLAND & WALES**

## REDUCING ORGANISATIONS' ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

Graham Gordon presented CAFOD's work as an organisation to reduce its ecological footprint, recognising that this work intersects with the decolonisation of aid, Black Lives Matter, shifting power and local leadership. CAFOD has a long history of working on environmental issues but recently stepped up to a cross-organisational approach, inspired by *Laudato Si'* (2015) and rooted in the reality of climate change and environmental degradation, as shown by partners and by science. One of the four key commitments in the CAFOD Strategic Plan 2020-2030 is to carry out their own ecological conversion, which is not an environmental conversion only, but also how they live themselves as an organisation. They have focused on their operations, international programmes, the Catholic community in England and Wales and governance. 2020 presented some easy wins (e.g. international travel was almost reduced to zero), but also some challenges such as the need for new ways of working and tackling more fundamental questions (i.e. from reducing their travel carbon footprint to debating on their seriousness to shift power to partner organisations and supporting local leadership' voices). One of the big challenges we need to address is how to shift and share power among us as CIDSE member organisations, which could vastly reduce travel and time investment of partners during field trips. Developing new approaches, trusting each other more, giving up power are key.







WE HAVE SEEN THE IMAGE OF THE WHITE SAVIOR FOR DECADES. THIS CONCEPT IS STILL VERY ALIVE. MY WORK IN COMMUNICATIONS IS TO ANALYSE AND CLARIFY THESE COLONIAL CONCEPTS BECAUSE ONLY THEN CAN YOU DECONSTRUCT THEM.

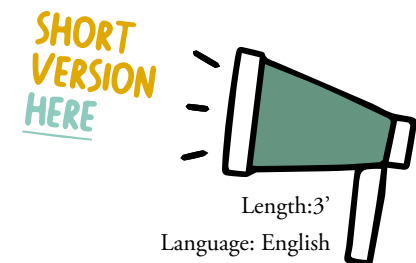


**MARIANNE PÖTTER-JANTZEN**

MISEREOR, GERMANY

## CHALLENGING COLONIAL NARRATIVES

Marianne Pötter-Jantzen focused on persistent colonial narratives and ways to leave them behind: *“even though all of those things we learnt are lies, we still carry them within us.”* She called for organisations to deconstruct communication narratives (e.g. in fundraising and campaigning) that still preserve concepts of “the White savior”. Decolonising attitudes can be achieved first by clearly analysing the root causes of such narratives. She presented some concrete steps taken by Misereor to start this process such as: organising awareness-raising lectures/workshops, decolonisation as part of (discussions on) the organisational Strategic Framework and the set-up of a steering group. Misereor is planning thematic lectures, exchanges among organisations and is encouraging internal multipliers to push the process.





IF YOU WANT TO EDUCATE A PERSON,  
YOU CAN EDUCATE A MAN, BUT IF YOU  
WANT TO EDUCATE A VILLAGE,  
EDUCATE A WOMAN.

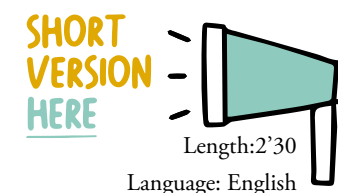


**FR. JULIO CANDEEIRO**

**MOSAICO, ANGOLA**

## PUTTING WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF CHANGE

Fr. Candeeiro reflected on “the courage to act”, focusing on systemic change through a gender lens. We need not only to see and judge, but also to act. This is a challenge for all of us. It is crucial to think systemic change through the gender lens because when we are defending women’s rights, we are really defending human rights. Because of customs, traditions, socialisation and religion, women have been made voiceless and left behind and are on the first lines of multi-level discriminations (racism, colonialism, education, culture, religion...). It is key to put them at the centre of every change that we want to produce in our society. Mosaiko believes that inclusive public policies can change the situation and started the PAPPIA project in 2019 in partnership with FEC, CIDSE’s member in Portugal and the European Union. The objective was to look at public policies in Angola and see how inclusive they are regarding vulnerable groups and specifically women. There are many challenges in the field of human rights and women’s rights; we need to celebrate small victories like this project in order not to lose the ‘courage to act’.







RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS IS FUNDAMENTAL  
IF WE WANT TO ACHIEVE THE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS.



**CLAIRE AMÉYO QUENUM**

**RAPDA- ALLIANCE FOR FOOD**

**SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA (AFSA), TOGO**

## RESPECTING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND PUTTING HUMAN BEINGS AT THE CENTRE OF DEVELOPMENT

Claire Améyo Quenum spoke about women's rights, agriculture, partnerships, and the African platform "Our land is Our Life" which is resisting against land grabbing. She said that women's voice (i.e. their needs and concerns) is not always considered, although they take care of nature and the earth in the same way they take care of human beings from the cradle to the end of life. The political will to make changes remains weak because of the economic interests of countries and the power of corporations and large companies. Respecting women's human rights and putting human beings at the centre of development, requires the consideration of human dignity for all, the establishment of an objective partnership that reduces inequalities between peoples and countries, and that takes care of nature, which is the mother of us all, because the earth remains the foundation of life.



Length: 12'  
Language: French



Length: 3'20  
Language: French



# TRANSFORMATIVE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Systemic Change Forum was a safe space where we were able to question and challenge our own global partnerships and a call to be courageous enough to challenge power structures and move away from a North-South paradigm.



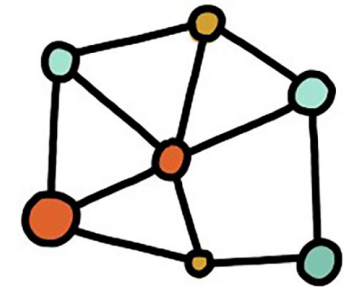
## WE CAN DO THIS BY:

Strengthening and deepening partnerships based on mutual respect, listening, power sharing, space sharing, and trust



Promoting localised/local leadership in political arena and decision-making

Creating synergies and common strategies among CIDSE members who are in partnerships with the same organisations



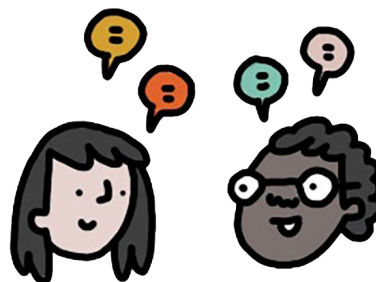
# ORGANISATIONAL COHERENCE

We know that we must not only speak of systemic change but must live it ourselves. We have seen progress in developing an ecological footprint tool, sharing expertise and best practices among members, as well as lessons learned. But this is also a call to address power dynamics within CIDSE's own structures and decision-making processes, as well as to revisit internal policies and working culture.



## THE FORUM SUGGESTED A FEW WAYS FORWARD:

Keep working on organisational change (e.g. allowing space for mistakes but also for self-criticism)



Engaging with the membership on difficult and uncomfortable issues, across organisational boundaries

Exploring new ways of working and communicating that challenge travel and consumption patterns and strengthen the value of partnership and the network



# TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

The Systemic Change Forum highlighted that CIDSE has been good at speaking more progressively about structural change, power, rights, as well as sharing positive experiences of transformative communications. However, we could do more.



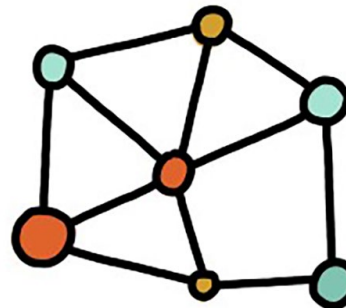
## FOR EXAMPLE, BY:

Leading on appropriate decolonised language use



Engaging, leaving space to, and being accountable to partners in our communications

Accepting to give up our spot in favor of partners to represent us



Working as a network within CIDSE, and sharing our voice and trust among members in public spaces



# INSPIRATIONAL WORDS



**FR. PEDRO WALPOLE**  
**INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL**  
**SCIENCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**  
**PHILIPPINES**

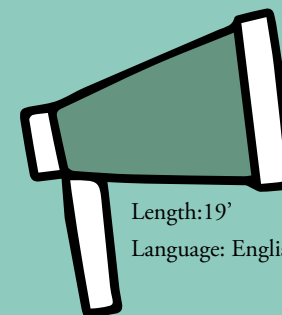
IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS, AWARENESS  
DOES OPEN UP NEW SPACES FOR PEOPLE  
TO PARTICIPATE FROM BELOW. (....)  
WE MUST GATHER THESE VOICES AND  
BRING THEM FURTHER.

I WORK A LOT WITH YOUTH WHO DO NOT  
HAVE HOPE, WHO DO NOT HAVE A DREAM  
ANYMORE. THEY DON'T BLAME ANYONE FOR IT,  
THE WORLD JUST APPEARS TO THEM WITHOUT HOPE.  
AND THIS IS OFTEN IN AN INDIGENOUS CONTEXT.  
AND THE PEOPLE IN THIS WHO GIVE HOPE ARE OFTEN  
THE OLDER PEOPLE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO BRING  
TOGETHER THE GENERATIONS.

Fr. Pedro Walpole reminded us of the importance to find a place in creation, for healing, humility, **acceptance and love**. In all this moving forward, we need to allow ourselves to, at times, step aside.

Furthermore, he reminded us that we cannot step forward without **trust**, and that we need willingness to ask questions even when there are no answers. There is a catalysing effect of awareness, which opens new landscapes to participate from below, to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the land. We must gather these voices and bring them further.

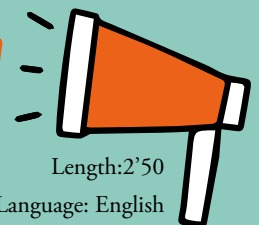
We need to bring generations together, practicing solidarity among generations and genders. We must work with the **youth** who are the most vulnerable and they need to be engaged in our societies. We must keep bringing the awareness and voice from the margins. He also mentioned the interconnectedness between **economy and ecology**: to speak about economy, we should speak about ecology.



Length: 19'  
Language: English

**LISTEN  
TO HIS  
INTERVENTION  
LONG VERSION  
HERE**

**SHORT  
VERSION  
HERE**



Length: 2'50  
Language: English

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