

Reflections of Catholic Women on the Sustainable Development Goals in the framework of the post-2015 Development Agenda

“We must do far more to advance women. If we want to give more strength to the reciprocity between man and woman. In fact, it is necessary that women not only be listened to more, but that their voice carry real weight, a recognized authority... we have not yet understood in depth what the feminine genius can give us, what women can give to society...” - Pope Francis –

Premise

More than one hundred women - coming from different Continents, lay and consecrated, all actively engaged in society and in the Church – gathered by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO) and the World Women Alliance for Life and Family (WWALF), met in Rome from May 22 to May 24 for two days of reflections on the post-2015 Development Agenda. This Agenda will be carried out through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), being currently debated at the United Nations, almost all of which include women as a cross cutting theme. Inspired by the Social Teaching of the Church and the recent statements of Pope Francis on women, the participants in the Conference formulated the following wishes.

Poverty and Environment

(Goal 1, 2 and 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- We aspire to a development model that encourages solidarity, care for one another, combats exploitation, especially of those who live in poverty, reduces inequality, and is sustainable. Without sustainable development we will not reduce poverty. Poverty should not only be looked at in its material dimension but also in its social and spiritual ones.
- We need to listen to the voice of the affected communities, when implementing the SDGs, and work towards making them self-sufficient and resilient as well as providing them with the means to do so.
- We wish that the exposure of the poor to economic, social and environmental shocks, including human trafficking and dangerous forced migration, be reduced (1.5). Poverty induced by climate change shows, indeed, many forms: it has an impact on health, it induces internal and transnational migration, and it impacts the livelihoods of people, very often women due to their unequal status.

Goal 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- We affirm the need to protect ancestral knowledge, which helps to cope with climate change and protect indigenous seeds (2.5).

Goal 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- We affirm that access to sanitation should not only be adequate and equitable, but also *safe*.
- We are aware of the need to protect and preserve the world's natural resources as they are a common good to all humanity; water, for example, should not be used as a diplomatic weapon.
- We wish that the power of multinational companies in the mining and agricultural sector be controlled: their activities often have a detrimental effect on the lives of the poor through land grabbing, investing in mono-agriculture, using toxic substances as well as leaving toxic waste. Moreover transparency in supply chains must be increased.

Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- We need to change our lifestyle because it is not sustainable and use our power as consumers. Part of it is to reduce food waste. Food production is using a lot of natural resources; if we waste food, we waste natural resources (12.5).
- We are all part of creation and people depend on nature. We need to increase understanding of the importance of nature in our lives and live in harmony with it(12.8).

Goal 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- We hear the cry of the poor: fighting climate change is defending the poor.
- We desire that the human life be valued in the climate change debate; human beings should not be deemed only as 'carbon footprints'. The SDGs are void of the human security aspect.

Human Ecology and women's dignity

(Goal 3 and Goal 5)

Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- We wish to clarify that healthy life is to be understood regarding the health of the person as a whole - including the most vulnerable, the unborn, the sick, the disabled - along all stages of the life of the person, with all its dimensions (physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional).
- We would like to ensure that health and safety at the workplace is considered a public health issue.
- We consider that the value of the elderly needs to be promoted; they give memory and wisdom to the people. Their participation in a community needs to be ensured. We need to care for them in all situations of their lives, including when they are affected by diseases and dementia.
- We think fertility awareness and education are fundamental in the promotion of responsible parenthood. Responsible parenthood requires allowing couples to freely choose the size of their family using natural family planning.
- We think maternal health and protection of mothers are essential elements to ensuring health for all.
- We believe education for correct nutrition is essential.
- We would like to suggest, with regards to those affected by substance abuse, that their reinsertion should be promoted as well as preventing children from falling victims.
- We are worried about the increased sexualisation of children that is leading to a rise in sexually transmitted diseases, obsessive concern of our young with their body image, anorexia, etc..

Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- We would like to suggest that empowerment of women and girls be understood as respect for the dignity of women, strengthening them, educating them, giving them a voice when they have none, helping them to develop abilities and assume responsibilities.
- We think it is important to promote the formation of women to enable them to value their femininity, their access to education at all levels, because a well-prepared woman is less prone to manipulation.
- We believe that maternity is key to understanding femininity, maternity not just as a biological concept but also spiritual.

- We think it is key that the family be reaffirmed as the basic unit of society, because healthy families lead to healthy societies. The family is a space for the complementary roles of man and woman in favour of the care and education of children.
- We are wondering how women are empowered when we allow the exploitation of the wombs of poor women with maternal surrogacy and commercialization of the services of third party reproduction. This is a clear violation of human rights that should be addressed. Along those same lines, a woman's right cannot be promoted if she is even denied the right to be born, so gender-selective abortions should also be condemned.
- We believe that working mothers should be protected, family policies should be implemented so that a family may be free to decide to grant care for their children. The social role of maternity should be clearly recognized together with a revalorization of the domestic care work.
- We would like to see a clearer rejection of all sorts of exploitation of women including prostitution, pornography, human trafficking, and the use of women as objects in the media.
- We would like to reinforce women's presence in all decision making processes, in the family and in society.
- We think it has to be clearly stated that forced abortion, forced sterilization and forced contraception are clear violation of human rights of women.
- We believe it is key that women are included in all efforts in society towards peace building and that women are included in peace negotiations.
- We fear the ideological use of the term gender whenever it leads to not recognizing the sexual differences and when it goes against the view of Christian anthropology. However, we recognize gender is not always an ideology, it is also a concept that helps address the differences. If we are using the term gender, we should clarify what we mean, we mean men and women.
- We would like it to be stated that men should also be encouraged and supported to become fathers, to assume their responsibilities, to protect women and children, to protect the right to life, education, how are the SDGs encouraging men?

Education and Work

(Goal 4 and Goal 8)

Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- We affirm that education is a human right (this is not synonymous of free education).
- Education "for all" also means quality education. Ensuring opportunities for all. By this we draw attention especially on the situation of children who are not officially registered, migrants or refugees who often have not access to education.
- We affirm that any education has to focus on relations, because development is the fruit of good relations.
- We affirm that educating youth in the field of Economy, Ethics and Finance is paramount to change the models of development.
- We affirm that *vocational education* is not less important than other higher levels of education such as university.
- We affirm that lifelong learning opportunities are necessary to avoid marginalising some groups (for example, people over 60 years old) from society, in particular in the field of new technologies.
- We affirm that education is a right for all those who, for whatever reason have not had the opportunity to receive it, for example literacy programs should be available where and when needed.
- We affirm the need to take particular care of educating the elites considering the impact they have on development and the good of society.
- We affirm the need to give special care to children (especially girls) who are prevented from attending school programs for fear of being abused by their teachers.

Goal 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- We affirm that the struggle against corruption (at political, financial and administrative levels) requires our utmost attention to correct a bad use of resources.
- We affirm our concern for the increase of unemployment worldwide and the poor working conditions to which thousands of workers are submitted; we reaffirm the need of decent work for all as stated in n. 63 of *Caritas in Veritate*.
- We affirm our concern for women who are deprived of the freedom of choice in selecting their work.
- We affirm the need to be vigilant with regard to a development model which does not respect equitable growth for all and avoid any exploitative practices.
- We affirm that there can't be sustainable development if consumers are not aware of their moral obligation to consume goods in a sustainable way.

Peace and Development

(Goal 16 and Goal 17)

Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- We believe that intercultural and interreligious dialog, in particular the freedom of religion, should be promoted, that institutions where people can meet and innovate respecting/regarding human rights for the common good should be created and that support to citizens and communities initiatives applying human rights through concrete actions should be given.
- We acknowledge the great value of both maternity and spiritual maternity recognizing that women are major guardians and defenders of life –from conception to its natural end-, giving women means and empowering them to realize their functions with dignity far from physical and psychological violence. We affirm the urgent need to end forced abortion and female feticide (16.1).
- We affirm the urgent need to end abuse, modern slavery, maternal surrogacy, exploitation, human trafficking and all forms of violence against women and torture of children (16.2).
- We ask governments to be transparent in arm trades and request the United Nations to prohibit arm selling to countries in conflict. Banks should be obliged to give information relative to arms trades (16.4).
- We ask that governments and organizations to help those associations and social projects where women are protagonists and to help peace development in countries where conflicts and natural disasters exist (16.4).
- We need to fight corruption: corruption steals from the poor (16.6).

Goal 17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

- We need to emphasize the responsibility of Catholics and Christians to pay taxes as a moral commitment (17.1).
- We need to minimize public debts without conditions for poor countries; this will give them the way to development (17.11).
- We need to foster global partnership that implements the right to development based on international solidarity (17.12).