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IT'S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE!

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AS THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE POST-2015 AGENDA

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"This economy kills!" While these clearly expressed words of Pope Francis in his first apostolic letter *Evangelii gaudium* prompted many experts from central Europe's businesses and press to question the Bishop of Rome's economic expertise, this statement has fallen on fruitful ground as we look ahead to the global post-2015 debate. The crucial ideas that are behind the tightly formulated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been familiar to Catholic social teaching for some time. It is all about individual human beings – and increasingly the natural environment – in their entirety and complexity, which in view of the economic and political contexts that are unjust, marginalising and concentrate on profit, are impaired in their capacity to develop and evolve and are therefore the focus of attention and the efforts of socio-political forces.

With the formulation of and demand for verifiable implementations of the eight MDGs proclaimed in 2000, the international community, individual states, numerous NGOs and specialist institutions have been actively involved and have passively financed, provided advice and invested a great deal of vision, energy, power and commitment in the fight against global poverty in its many forms. The integral, multidimensional concept of poverty, which in keeping with the Human Development Index (HDI) coined by Amartya Sen et al. determines the MDGs as a fundamental dimension, has made a significant contribution to learning to see the faces of poverty in relation to its causes and effects. Poverty can no longer be reduced to poverty of income and debated based on national GDP. In relation to this some initial approaches to reducing poverty and opening up more opportunities to live, develop and expand have been presented with greater variety, which reflects the complexity as well as the importance of this matter.

INITIAL STANDPOINT

Much has happened since the turn of the millennium. But 2015 will provide a sobering, albeit appreciative evaluation of efforts. It is important to appreciate what has been achieved already (see Klasen/Lange 2013).

- An unprecedented consensus has been reached as to what the goal of development policy should be.
- The MDGs are based on an agreement between the developing as well as industrialised countries and therefore serve as a reference framework for the work of many international NGOs as well as bilateral development programmes.
- With regard to the individual MDGs as well as in individual countries or regions the specified goals have been achieved and more than fulfilled (e.g. the reduction of absolute poverty as income poverty).

However, it is also important to point out that several of these objectives could only be achieved at a global level, i.e. as a mathematical global average. Not enough consideration has been given to economic and social inequalities and poor governance within states or the impact of civil and other wars, geographic disadvantages and environmental disasters, which at a national level prevent a sustained reduction in poverty in its various dimensions in terms of the MDGs. Other goals such as the school enrolment rate are just about achieved in quantitative terms but their quality leaves several questions unanswered, as to whether the intention underlying the goal has therefore been fulfilled.¹

For the discussion of other post-2015 development goals these dimensions need to be considered as much as the factors promoting poverty, which have gained huge attention in the last 15 years – environmental degradation, food speculation and sovereignty, political and economic shifts in power on the global map, climate change and the impact of environmental disasters as well as the renewed spread of diarrhoeal disorders, malaria and other diseases.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AS A GUIDELINE

If now on the eve of the year to be evaluated, 2015, the main point of the discussion is about further development goals for the international community to reduce poverty

and improve the quality of life for the particularly vulnerable people in the world, Catholic social teaching provides a framework, which may serve as a guide to holistic, sustainable development for all people and sustainable protection for the environment.

The aim of Catholic social teaching is to formulate and call once again for the Church's social responsibility for people throughout the world, especially the poor and structurally weak as well as the responsibility of governments and the international community in their current particular context. The absolute dignity of the individual is the starting and end point, which can be translated into guiding concepts such as the global common good, solidarity, personality, subsidiarity and sustainability.

With regard to the already ongoing discussions of the progress of post-2015 development goals, based on social teaching we can refer to the following aspects.

THE IMAGE OF MANKIND

Many people still live in situations, whose injustice is outrageous, in which there is no respect for human dignity. The Christian view of mankind, which Catholic social teaching is based on, refers to the dignity (*dignitatis*) of the individual. This is inalienable, inviolable, innate and established in the image of God. The task of organised societies is to enable human beings to lead a life they can cultivate in keeping with their dignity. From this image of mankind another concept of development emerges, which includes the growth of one's own abilities and the creation or safeguarding of conditions that promote these development opportunities.

Catholic social teaching speaks about a right to development. It is based on the principles of common origins and the shared purpose of the human family; the equality of each individual and community, which is founded on human dignity; the general provision of the earth's goods; the inclusive nature of the concept of development; the centrality of the human person and solidarity (see *Compendium of the Church's Social Teaching*, no. 446).

The concept of economics

Even the development of MDGs indicates an expanded concept of economic activity as the basis for measuring development, whose purpose is not only to accumulate profits and to sell products and services. The extension of

the development concept in the context of MDGs refers to a concept of economics, which understands the actual goal of the economy as a service to humanity and indeed the whole individual in relation to his or her material, political, health, spiritual and legal needs. This attitude is confirmed by Catholic social teaching (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 64) and is even extended in relation to a concept of work, which regards gainful employment as one among many forms of economic activity (see *Caritas in veritate*, no. 38). An extended concept of economics highlights the various forms of economic activity, which are usually performed unpaid but are economically essential – such as carer occupations, cultural works, voluntary work and bartering. "Seeing these connections is important when dealing with the goal of including all aspects of economics and employment: life worthy of a human being for all of earth's peoples." (Social Mission Statement, no. 160).

An extended concept of economics is strictly anthropocentric, as people with all their skills and possibilities are the focus of social, political and economic activity. This makes it a requirement that economic order and its development must be constantly guided by the welfare of people. The ordering of the economy must be subservient to the social order of people and not vice versa (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 26). Alongside the concept of quantitative economic growth should be placed that of qualitative growth, which, as intended in the MDGs, focuses attention on the question of the quality of life or living conditions for all human beings. Discussions about the conditions and opportunities of a post-growth society are also instructive in this regard for discussions of the post-2015 agenda (see Paech 2012; Seidl/Zahrnt 2010).

THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY

The extension of the concept of poverty beyond the single dimension of income to a multidimensional perspective has already been initially implemented in the MDGs. An awareness of restricting or violating the social and cultural rights of those affected by poverty in terms of violating their human rights refers to the dimension of just access. What is it that prevents people from actively and passively exercising their involvement in social, cultural and political fields? Connected with this is the question of awareness of to what extent people affected by poverty are also regarded and treated as subjects of international welfare, as is the intention of MDG number eight ("Construction of a global development *partnership*"). Poverty is usually

associated with a lack or *in*-ability (not being able / having / achieving / producing / determining...). Catholic social teaching, whose image of mankind refers to absolute dignity, with its definition of the “preferential option for the poor” (*Puebla* no. 1134; see Holztrattner 2005) has emphasised especially in Latin America that it will approach those affected by poverty as equals and work to improve their situation. John Paul II speaks of the positive effect on the moral and cultural growth of all mankind that is capable of being involved with reducing poverty. If poor people are no longer seen as a problem but as brothers and sisters and as subjects of a solution to a problem, they can “become the bearers and pioneers of a new and more humane future for the whole world” (Message of world peace, no. 14). Learning from the poor has been a key concern in liberation theology circles for some time. Currently the debate about *the good life / sumaj kausay* takes the form of how economically well developed countries and societies can learn from those, whose economic conditions place them among the poor.

THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENT

In discussing the post-2015 agenda we can no longer avoid including the natural environment as relevant to poverty or the lives of those affected by poverty. For some time Catholic social teaching has pointed out that the environment must not be misused as a storehouse of resources to be exploited, but in a basic recognition of our mutual dependency and reliance on each other, we must protect God’s creation and keep it sustainable. The currently ongoing ecocide should be countered with a credible human ecology (*Centesimus annus*, no. 38), which attempts at an individual and community level to solve this ecological question in a humanitarian way.

It is the environmental issue in particular where the implications of global injustices become clear as the result of a limited concept of economics. Because a minority of the world’s population claims more for itself than is just (in terms of distributive justice), other people, the environment and in the long term, due to climate change, everyone will have to endure all the effects of this behaviour. The example of climate change, however, also shows that the poor in turn are less able to protect themselves from disasters than those who mainly cause them. This dimension should be included in principle in relation to future development goals. The role of countries and states that are causing climate change should be discussed just as

openly as the responsibility of states “to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces.” (*Centesimus annus*, no. 40).

THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

What is crucial for the effective development of the post-2015 agenda is ultimately the dimension of political participation (*Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, no. 189ff). This is linked to both the goal of access to education as well as to issues of gender equality. Only with the broad participation of various groups of the population will developments become possible, which reinforce self-reliance based on the principle of subsidiarity and at the same time arouse an awareness of shared responsibility based on the principle of solidarity. In the words of Pope Francis solidarity requires, “the creation of a new mindset, which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all” (*Evangeliium gaudium*, no. 188). This also applies at the level of states and international institutions; that poor countries gain proper access in order to represent their interests, as well as rich countries living up to their obligation to make their contribution to the global common good. “With due respect for the autonomy and culture of every nation, we must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind; the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity” (*Evangeliium gaudium*, no. 190).

Development is such a right that includes obligations. Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all, and must be shared by [...] all parts of the world” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 32).

SUMMARY

Catholic social teaching may highlight several points of view in relation to the current discussions of the post-2015 agenda and thus provide some guidance. What is important is to point out that major terms of future declarations of will such as *global justice, poverty reduction, sustainability, socially and environmentally fair development* have to be associated with condensed definitions

of specific, verifiable, obligatory implementations. It has to do with the development of a culture of thriftiness, which survives on social, political and economic micro, meso and macro levels when reviewing decisions in relation to their sustainability vis-à-vis their fellow men and the environment. This is why it is important to develop your own social conscience as well as drafting motivating visions of a peaceful, sustainable and positive lifestyle for all the people together. It is also beneficial and advantageous for rich countries and nations if a good life for all is sought – especially for the poor of today and for all future generations.

1 Using the example of school enrolment, the number of children has increased in absolute terms, although the associated serious questions of infrastructure have not been solved (school buildings, class size, availability of teaching materials, etc.) and training of the increasingly needed teachers (quality of the educational and didactic training etc.).

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