

## **Catholic Social Teaching and Social Development in Africa**

A paper presented during a conference on The Catholic Social Teaching and its Social and Political impact on the Development 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> December, in Schloss Eichholz  
Koln/Cologne/Germany

Presented by Sr. Dr. Elizabeth Nduku  
Director Centre for Social Justice and Ethics, CUEA

### **Introduction**

“The development of every person and of the whole person, especially of the poorest and most neglected in the community is at the very heart of evangelization”<sup>1</sup> and this has been the concern of the church following in the footsteps of her founder Jesus Christ as found in Lk 4: 18 "the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". It is essential therefore that “Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural programme must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society”<sup>2</sup>. The centrality of human person in development was also reechoed during the world summit for social development (WSSD) when the entire world committed itself to development. Since the human person is so critical, the development of peoples has the “church’s close attention, particularly the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance, of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active involvement of their human qualities of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment”<sup>3</sup>.

Though this has been the concern of the church for the entire world and especially guided by her social teaching, the continent of Africa has not been able to achieve true and authentic development that provides people with skills and freedom to manage their lives positively. The continent has been and is still a home of conflicts and many evils that have either been imported or borne of social, political and economic injustices within the continent. These have affected Africa’s development consequently affecting the human dignity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesia in Africa, no 68

<sup>2</sup> Cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2235

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI(1990). On the development of peoples. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, No 1 p5

In the midst of this, “the church has the task of bringing the message of the gospel to the heart of African societies and to lead people to the vision of God”<sup>4</sup>. She is to be the salt of the earth and bring flavour to a continent baffled with all forms of injustice. She is to spearhead development which according to Pope Paul VI is the new name for peace. It therefore implies that for development to be realized, the church has to continue to be committed to the course of reconciliation and justice for they are the prerequisite for peace and ultimately development as proposed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> synod.

We note that the CST has been used by the church as a tool to guide its development activities, but a closer examination of the status of its dissemination and implementation in Africa, indicates that it is still alien to many faithful, stays outside parish life, and yet it is the one that influences the church as she engages in her evangelizing ministry. Despite this, the paper attempts to show ways in which the CST has had impact on social development in Africa, the challenges she faces in her role and propose a way forward to ensure holistic development.

## **Development**

Development is multi dimensional and focuses on positive change in social, political, economic, cultural and religious spheres with an aim of liberating humanity from all forms of captivity. For Todaro development represents the entire range of change by which an entire social system is tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves a way from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better”<sup>5</sup>. It is expected to be holistic. On development Pope Paul VI said “the development we speak of cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each human being and of the whole human being”<sup>6</sup>. Development is possible through solidarity which according to John Paul II “is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for everyone else”<sup>7</sup>.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano while representing Pope John Paul II during the 1995 summit exposed the members to the Christian vision of development and said that a

---

<sup>4</sup> Africae munus no 15

<sup>5</sup> Todaro 1981 p 70

<sup>6</sup> Popolorum Progrssio no 14

<sup>7</sup> Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, no. 38,

society which is not rooted in solid ethical values is a society without direction. It lacks the necessary foundation upon which the sought-after social development can be built and sustained. For development to be holistic, it needs to be ethical in all its approaches. Development is attained when the different persons and communities are able to solve their problems with available means and resources at their disposal.

### **Church Social Teaching**

The Church Social Teaching (CST) “is that part of her moral theology which is concerned with social, political and economic charity and justice”<sup>8</sup>. It is directed towards an authentic development of the human person and society in the light of the changing conditions and entails documents that explore and express the social demands of our faith.

The central theme of the CSD is the human person created in the image and likeness of God, and is the reason for all social, political, economic, cultural and religious activities. It provides principles of reflection, criteria for judgment and guidelines for action. It includes a collection of key themes which have evolved in response to the challenges of the day rooted in biblical orientations and reflections on Christian tradition. The major themes of the Catholic Social Doctrine include the Dignity of the human person, Common good, Preferential Option for the poor, Rights and responsibilities, Subsidiarity, Stewardship of God’s creation Solidarity

### **The impact of CSD on social development in Africa**

The CSD and its contribution to social development must therefore be measured from the extent to which it addresses holistic development and on how it liberates people from all forms of captivity.

### **Dignity of the human person**

The foundation of human dignity is God’s plan of creation. God created human beings in His own image and likeness (Gen 1.27) hence the root reason for human dignity. It is also rooted in our call to communion with God (GS 19). Every person regardless of race, sex, colour, national origin, religion, economic status, health etc is worthy of respect. It is not what a person does or what one has that gives a claim on

---

<sup>8</sup> Stratford Caldecott (2001 pg5). Catholic Social Teaching, A way in. Oxford; Catholic Truth Society

respect, but it is simply by being human that establishes one's dignity. Given that dignity, the person is never a means but always an end. In promoting human dignity the church has engaged herself in a number of activities. In promoting human dignity, the church has:

**Condemned oppressive cultures:** Through her teaching the church has challenged some of the African oppressive cultures that dehumanize the person such as early marriage for women, disability seen as a curse, ownership of property, access to social services among others. "Through her justice and peace commissions, the church is engaged in the civic formation of citizens and in this way she contributes to the education of peoples, awakening their consciences and their civic responsibility."<sup>9</sup> This has led to a number of women participating in political governance.

**Respect for life:** The church has championed pro-life campaigns. She educates people on the sacredness of life that should be respected, nurtured and protected by all means. She teaches her followers on their duties and responsibilities in their effort to protect life.

**Poverty:** In the fight against poverty the church has and still spearheads development projects which not only provide people with basic needs but also enable them to have better living standards. In Kenya for instance, the Catholic Church has engaged herself in self help projects. Such projects include agriculture, poultry keeping, goat keeping and kitchen gardens, setting up of kiosks and providing loan facilities at lower interest rates (this is also found in other countries). The less vulnerable and unfortunate have access to credit facilities through micro-finances. Capacity building has been on the increase which enables many people to use their talents and potential to fight poverty.

The CSJE engaged slum dwellers in part of one of the big slum in poverty reduction venture. This has been achieved through establishment of an association registered by the Kenya Government whereby the members can be contracted not as individual but as an association. Through this association, the bargaining power has been enhanced hence reducing abuse of human dignity.

**Health:** The church owns, runs, manages and sponsors many health centres, hospitals and dispensaries that offer specialized and quality treatment to the people. She too

---

<sup>9</sup> Africae munus no 23

provides home based care services for the terminally ill and especially those infected with HIV and AIDS.

In an effort to improve service delivery in its hospitals, Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB), embarked on establishing an information management system. The UCMB is the health office of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Uganda and is the technical arm of the Health Commission of the episcopal conference there, dealing with health related matters. UCMB is an umbrella organisation gathering 27 hospitals, 230 Lower Level Units (LLUs) and 14 Health Training Institutions belonging to the Catholic Church. UCMB alone provides about 40% of the overall health services in the country and has an important role in civil society building and policy influencing. It has through its information and data management systems influenced 65% of the other hospitals in the country.

In 2007 however, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference inducted itself on the role of the church in providing social services for the promotion of justice peace and reconciliation with particular attention to health. They resolved in favor of more participation in the advocacy for health reforms. They resolved to reclaim their ownership and influence of the Christian Social Services commission and to gather the necessary data necessary for advocacy on health issues. This is also true for many African countries.

While this seems to be an effort in the direction of addressing consequences, the mobilization of these hospitals and training colleges provides an advocacy issue and forum to exercise solidarity with others.

**Food and shelter;** Caritas- Uganda feeds the hungry and provides sanitation in the war ravaged north of the country as a response the consequences of structural violence. Caritas also builds advocacy capacity to challenge the structural injustices. "In addition to improving access to food, Caritas Uganda promotes a range of initiatives including democracy building, gender equality and HIV and AIDS eradication. One such programme has been Household Support to Eradicate Absolute Poverty (HOSEAP) and Good Governance in the Catholic dioceses of Kotido, Nebbi, Kasana-Luweero and Masaka. The three-year HOSEAP initiative targeted 6,000 households and included a food security component aimed at orphans and widows to help improve their livelihood, nutrition and general economic status."<sup>10</sup>. In Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi etc, Caritas spearheads projects that address the different needs of the people.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/africa/uganda.html> as at 02/12/2011

**Education:** Education has been used by the church as a tool to bring about development by equipping the citizens with knowledge and skills in diverse fields. The Catholic Church is known for her holistic education. This she has achieved through the different institutions that she owns, runs, manages and sponsors right from kindergarten to university. Some of the institutions include SAUT, CUEA, Uganda martyrs, The Catholic University of Bukavu in DRC, catholic university of Zambia, and other tertiary colleges all over Africa. These institutions too according to Pope John II promote a “continuous and profitable dialogue between the Gospel and modern society. Among the criteria that characterize the values of a culture are above all, the meaning of the human person, his or her liberty, dignity, sense of responsibility, and openness to the transcendent”<sup>11</sup>.

**Economy:** Some Conferences such as Uganda and Tanzania have opened banks that provide loan and credit facilities to the less privileged. This has been major success but probably the question would be, do we make follow-ups to know the kind of investments are made using that money. Are the investments ethical? Do they have respect for human dignity?

**Politics:** In Kenya and Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe there is evidence of constant engagement and liaison with parliamentarians and technocrats. In Kenya particularly after the recent referendum, the Kenya Christian professionals forum with the blessing of the Bishops is engaged in influencing policy and implementation of the New Constitution. The CSJE on invitation of government has been part of drafting the national values and it is our hope that the policy will positively influence delivery of social services for social development.

### **Common good**

It is important to note that the human person is a social being and cannot therefore live in isolation. For a human person to be able to attain fulfillment in life must have concern for the neighbour thus called to respect his/her dignity and strive to work for the good of all “The common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity more fully and more easily”<sup>12</sup>.

According to the CCC, common good consists of three elements namely respect for the person, social well-being and development and peace.

The church has worked towards ensuring equitable and fair distribution of resources to all her members. To ensure that all benefit from the gifts of the earth, awareness

---

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II on catholic universities no 44

<sup>12</sup> Gaudium et spes no. 26

education on the rights of workers, importance of joining trade unions and the demand for better wages.

Tanzania Episcopal Conference developed a sort of manifesto that could guide Christians in the process of electing their political leaders. It stressed a criterion of leaders responsive to the demands of the common good.

## **Solidarity**

Solidarity “is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”<sup>13</sup> that is the good of all and each individual because we are all really responsible for all. “In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. In solidarity, one’s neighbour is not only a human being with his rights but a living image of God the father”<sup>14</sup>. “Solidarity presupposes the effort for a more just social order where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by negotiation”<sup>15</sup> and is not to be limited to material goods.

According to CCC, the virtue of solidarity goes beyond material goods. In the spirit of solidarity and with the instruments of dialogue we learn “respect for every human person, respect for true values and cultures of others, respect for the legitimate autonomy and self determination of others, to look beyond ourselves in order to understand and support the good of others, to contribute to our own resources in social solidarity for the development and growth that come from equity and justice, To built structures that will ensure that social solidarity and dialogue are permanent features of the world we live in”<sup>16</sup>.

Solidarity helps people to feel that they form one family. It creates a bond between all people and fosters a spirit of responsibility, does not aim at elimination of one class by the other, enhances cultural tolerance by bringing people of various cultural backgrounds to participate actively at all levels in building up appropriate structures for their integral development and rejects violence as a solution to social, political

---

<sup>13</sup> (JPII, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38).

<sup>14</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* No. 40

<sup>15</sup> CCC No 1940

<sup>16</sup> World day of peace message, 1986.n.5

and economic injustices. It further recognizes the noble and just struggle for justice, but it is categorically opposed to violence as a means of achieving this noble struggle for justice.

The church in Africa works in solidarity to promote reconciliation, justice and peace. This has been possible through the different regional conferences and especially when they engage in issues that affect their flock. In Africa we have witnessed this solidarity of the church and in particular areas that have been affected by war. The bishops join together in solidarity to visit and also condemn the evils that led to such violence. They have been the voice of the voiceless and truly the conscience of the society. Some of the countries affected are the southern Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi among others.

The Christians contribute in cash and kind to support those in need, provide shelter for them, organizes for counseling and healing sessions among others.

### **Subsidiarity**

The principle of subsidiarity recognizes that society is based on collective or communities of people ranging from small groups of families right through to national and international institutions. It is understood as “the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings, which are the first relationships to arise and which come about thanks to the creative subjectivity of the citizen”<sup>17</sup>

This principle encourages communities to be more involved. It places responsibility as close as possible to the grassroots. The people or groups affected by the decision or policy should have a key decision making role.

The church has worked hard to empower and support community to ensure that they participate in development and decision making processes at the various levels. The establishment of small Christian communities, support of different lay movements and devotion groups in the church and lay participation is a clear indication of this involvement. The church too encourages her members to be actors in the social, political and economic arena so that they can be able to infuse ethical values in the decision making processes.

The participatory approach in Kenya has made the church a force to reckon with. Since 1988, there has been an ongoing civic education through the Lenten campaign. Day to day topics are identified, reflected upon from the perspective of the CSD and given to Christians to discuss during the Lenten season. In what has come to be

---

<sup>17</sup> Compendium no 397



known as the Lenten campaign, issues of governance and service provision become topics for discussion in small Christian communities. This coupled with regular pastoral letters had the effect of raising a critical mass that exerted pressure on the previous regimes for political change. The current Kenyan constitution has for instance captured the principles of CSD within the national values and directive principles of state policy. How this will be reflected in practice is yet to be seen.

## **Challenges**

Though the church in Africa is working hard to ensure social development, it is still facing substantial challenges in all fields either because of structural, political or social issues which to some extent are influenced by individualism and materialism.

**Market driven education:** The Catholic Church emphasizes holistic education that addresses the moral, social, economic, spiritual and emotional spheres. Unfortunately in the current situation education has become market oriented. The danger is that the church is getting into the same as they are targeting the same audience consequently the demand for holistic education is highly compromised and this may lead to a society void of morals and ethical behaviour. No wonder Africa is now than ever affected by war and devastating conditions.

**Economy and Human Dignity:** The human person is the reason and purpose of all activities. Unfortunately human person is seen as a means not an end and is being used to accumulate/produce wealth without respect of their dignity.

**Work:** Working conditions are dehumanizing, wages are equally low, and some employers do not want their employees

to join unions who can be able to fight for their rights. Consequently the level of poverty is worsening and this makes people engage in any kind of work provided they earn their living. The challenge is enormous for the church and especially when she does not have options/resources to put the people in better conditions.

**Shelter:** Housing is also a major challenge. The cost of construction has become so high and rental houses very expensive. In the urban centres many poor people opt to live in the slums where a family of eight may be living in one roof – Father, Mother, and children.

**Food:** Food is also another major challenge since in many families there is hardly a full meal leading to numerous diseases which in turn lead to heavy expenditure on medical bills. All these affect human dignity and by extension the implementation of the CST.

**Politics and Policy makers:** The level of engagement with policy makers seems to be low. Despite the fact that Catholic politicians and administrators come to the churches, when policies that are detrimental to social development come their way, there is little evidence that their decisions are influenced by their Christian formation. The result is that policy decisions are made and the church is usually in a reactionary mode. There is need to engage policy makers.

### **The role of the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics (CSJE)**

The centre was founded by the bishops of Member Episcopal Conferences for Eastern Africa (AMECEA) with an aim of disseminating the CST in the region. In carrying out its mandate, the CSJE has been engaged in dissemination of the CST within the institution and in a number of dioceses of the AMECEA region. It prepares and presents radio programmes on social issues in the light of CST, engages with the slum dwellers in issues of poverty reduction and eradication together with capacity building programmes. The centre too offers short courses to agents of evangelizations and people who are training in different fields so that as they carry out their work, they are able to spice it with CST. The CSJE has developed a degree programme in Justice and Peace but despite its relevance lay people do yet understand how valuable this programme is as they would rather do the presumable lucrative courses. Some thing has to be done in the direction of attaching importance to the CST among lay people. The Centre however experiences challenge of human and material resources in her efforts and especially in trying to reach many areas in the region to disseminate the CST. There is need to harness and consolidate efforts of different actors and institutions involved in the dissemination of the CST so that the whole of Africa can be able to benefit from this reach treasure.

### **Conclusion**

The church has a lot of material in the CSD that has influenced its charitable activities such as health, schools, social among others. Unfortunately, these activities have not led to true conversion of hearts and probably this is why Africa is experiencing a lot of conflicts and challenge of underdevelopment. The principles of the CSD are not witnessed in the lives of people especially by that in authority and the church seems not to be courageous enough to confront the evils.

It is imperative for the church to actively engage in the dissemination and forming the people into understanding and living the CSD. This should be done through catechesis, in the formation houses, SCC and all groups that are engaged in evangelization. In *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict adds that “one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct|”<sup>18</sup>. It may be necessary that more people

---

<sup>18</sup> *Africae Munus* No 22

especially young lay people are trained in CSD as a profession at graduate and postgraduate level so that the first tools available to them in analysis of social development will be those influenced by CSD.

It may be necessary to re evaluate the CSD in the light of African values and see how well we can use these values to teach our people right from the grassroots. For example what is the African perspective of the preferential option for the poor, what does It mean to speak of common good to an African Christian.

Africa needs to be born again in the virtues and values of authentic love, true justice and peace and this will be possible if we make the CSD part and parcel of Christian lives. It needs to be made part of the ongoing catechesis so that all the members of the church can understand and continue living them.