



**SPIRITAN  
INTERNATIONAL**  
Together, for an integral development

# Newsletter

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## Editorial

We are all on a journey... And this journey in which we have the responsibility to travel together is long and difficult one! But our horizon is clear: the integral human development that is at the heart of our mission of evangelisation. The General Chapter of Bagamoyo II insisted on this important aspect of our Spiritan life in the service of the most abandoned, the weak and the derelict. This is what our new Superior General, Alain Mayama, reminds us in what I would call his exhortation "to invent for today and tomorrow a new response to the challenges of our common mission of evangelisation, so as to enter into the dynamics of a concrete evangelising action".

Avenues for this concrete action have already been defined in our "Spiritan Charter for Development". This new issue of our newsletter presents some reflections on each of the 8 objectives we have set for ourselves. We have called on people from all spectra of life, cultural, geographical and linguistic, to address these issues. However we have also given the floor to non-Spiritans! This will allow us to broaden our horizons and to become aware that others, men and women, lay people and religious, associations and congregations, who are also working to "alleviate the pain of the world"!

Sisters Elisa Kidanè and Maria Teresa Ratti are Comboni Missionaries, who speak to us about the irreplaceable role of women in development. Maurizio Bagarani, an Italian doctor currently on mission in Burundi, who talks about health and integral development. Jacinto Pio Wacussanga, an Angolan diocesan priest, draws our attention to hunger as a weapon of mass destruction. Louis Alexandre Babissakana, a lay Spiritan associate from Cameroon, talks about renewable energies as an essential issue for development. Jean-François Salomon, a Mauritian Spiritan, testifies about his experience with poverty in India. Annette Funke, a novice with the Missionary Sisters of Christ in Germany, talks about partnerships. She has twelve years of pro-

fessional experience in development and has worked with the Spiritans in Central Africa. Alberto Tchidemba, Provincial Superior of Mozambique, will share his convictions on the need for quality education as a basis for integral human development. As for me, I share with you my small experience on the subject of water, the source of life, essential to any development.

This third issue of our newsletter will conclude, as usual, with a testimony. It is that of Marielle Lacroix, our financial advisor, who tells us about the path that led her to work with us today in the service of integral human development.

I hope you all enjoy reading this newsletter! I hope that the diversity of its authors will arouse in you new energies in the service of our brothers and sisters and the desire to share your beliefs and your experiences in this vast field of development!

Philippe Engel.



## A word from the 'new' Superior General



Alain Mayama, Superior General

### Bagamoyo 2 and the call to action in integral human development

Faithful to the Gospel, the Church has tirelessly paid attention to the poor as a primary option in her evangelising mission. It sees its mission of evangelisation as intrinsically linked to integral human development. The establishment by the Holy See of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development, which deals with justice and peace, as well as with questions of migration, health, works of charity and the safeguarding of creation, responds to this need for evangelisation, so dear to Pope Francis. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope insists on "the connection between evangelisation and human promotion, which must necessarily be expressed and developed in all evangelising action."<sup>1</sup> Thus, our action in favour of integral human development corresponds not only to a call from the Church<sup>2</sup>, but is also an integral part of our mission of evangelisation in keeping with the principles of our founders and to respond to the needs of population.

Inspired by the vision of our founders Claude Poullart des Places and François Marie Paul Libermann, our Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL 14) and our various General Chapters remind us of our commitment to the "integral liberation" of people and the work of human development<sup>3</sup>. Much is already being done in this direction in our different circumscriptions; examples are numerous. I thank each of you for the work already started. However, we need to go further in the next eight years, because the work of integral human development is a collective process which we are always striving to improve.

If Bagamoyo 1 allowed us to lay the foundations through the creation of the Central Development Office (CDO), the elaboration of a Spiritan Charter as well as the definition of the 8 development objectives for the Congregation<sup>4</sup>, Bagamoyo 2 invites us to go even further, to create, where they do not yet exist, local development offices (LDO) and to define a concrete plan of action at the service of the poorest and most neglected in our different circumscriptions. With Bagamoyo II, we listened and felt that things could be different, and could be improved; that we should do more than talk. The theme of the Chapter, inspired by the prophet Isaiah: "*Behold, I will do something new*" (Is 43:19), invited the capitulants to re-read our charism, the evangelisation of the poor (SRL 4), using a new missionary approach, and to take concrete steps and to live more faithfully our Spiritan vocation in the contemporary world. The emphasis should be on actions that generate new dynamisms in the Congregation and involve the circumscriptions more.

At the level of the General Administration, it will be a question of strengthening the Central Development Office (CDO), of promoting a common vision of development in connection with evangelisation, of investing more in the local development offices (LDO), facilitating the identification, preparation and financing of projects in the unions and circumscriptions, helping and supporting the young circumscriptions to adopt the best ways of investing and managing projects in order to ensure their self-sufficiency, advising and training the key actors of the circumscription offices, and finally improving the networking of the Spiritan development projects with the aim of promoting and making credible the Spiritan know-how in this matter.

The circumscriptions, for their part, will put in place a strategic plan that will place the functioning of the Local Development Office among the activities and works of the circumscription. Emphasis will be laid on the formation of the Spiritan staff of these offices, on the professional skills of employees or lay Spiritan associates. Full time investment of the confreres

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 78 & 186

<sup>3</sup> Maynooth 1.4, 2.1, 2.13, 2.20, 2.22, 5.9, 5.10 et 5.12; Torre d'Aguilha 1.14, 3.4; Bagamoyo 1.3, 1.4, 1, 5.10, 1.26.

<sup>4</sup> See the internet site of the Central Development Office (CDO) [www.spiritane-international.org](http://www.spiritane-international.org)

designated for this service will be required. In the houses of formation, training in integral human promotion and development will be integrated into the different phases of initial formation, with updating during ongoing formation.

The desire of the General Council is to work more closely with you in implementing the directives of Bagamoyo 2 for a renewed image of the Congregation. We therefore call upon you to invent, for today and tomorrow, a new response to the challenges of our common mission of evangelisation, to become part of the dynamics of a concrete evangelising action.

The 8 development objectives of the Congregation will have to be taken on by all. It is obvious that we will not be able to embrace all the proposed objectives, but we will be able to choose some of them to build a plan of action for the circumscription integrated into our mission of evangelisation within the local Church in fidelity to the intuitions of our founders. It is up to each circumscription, each Spiritan and each lay associate to discern the challenges that emerge today, implementing these development objectives in their socio-political, economic and ecclesial environment: the eradication of poverty, access to quality education, the fight against hunger, access to drinking water and sanitation, access to health care, the use of renewable energies, gender equality, and the development of partnerships. The Central Development Office in Rome will facilitate, accompany and contribute to capacity building, but the effectiveness of our mission, as always, depends on our commitment at the grassroots.

Alain Mayama, C.S.Sp



General House of the Spiritans - Rome





**Jean François Salomon**

Originally from Mauritius, he has been on mission in Chennai, India since his ordination in 2013. He did his formation in the Indian Ocean Islands and his theology in Ngoya, Cameroon. He has a Master's degree in Theology relating to inter-religious dialogue from the University of Madras, India.



Slums in Mumbai

## "Working to eradicate poverty: what is at stake for integral human development?"

"Listen to the cry of the earth and the poor". This was the ambition of the international conference on sustainable development and religions held on 7 and 8 March 2019 at the Vatican. This message rings out more than ever in the current context where the Covid 19 pandemic is accentuating pockets of poverty. Pope Francis pleads for an integral human development and not for a purely economic development that exploits nature and our fellow human beings. It is therefore necessary to listen to the cry of the poor and commit ourselves to bring them out of their marginalisation to participate in integral development.

India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world with the largest number of poor people. This paradox is explained by the fact that inequality is based on the caste system, where those at the bottom of the ladder are the most affected. Dalits (untouchables) and Adivasis (aborigines) are the victims of this system where mineral resources are exploited on their land and they only get a few crumbs. A detailed study by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative using the Multi-Dimensional Index in 2010 estimated that 55% of Indians live below the poverty line and this has changed very little in recent years. Dalits and Adivasis form the core of mass poverty in India because of their traditional occupations (degrading tasks) and their very limited access to land. These two groups at the bottom of the caste ladder, together with the Muslim group, are the most marginalised and make up half the population. These groups of people live in precarious conditions and are often victims of injustice. Working towards poverty eradication in this context becomes an important issue in the promoting of integral human development.

The basis of this fight against poverty in India is largely education. Very few people in the marginalised classes have access to education and many drop out along the way. As a result, they are unable to access jobs or positions of power that would lift them out of this marginalisation. Education would give them the skills to access better jobs and thus free them from the caste system that keeps them in systemic poverty. You cannot provide for the economic development of a country by leaving a large part of the population in poverty. This is a time bomb that could explode at any moment and jeopardise social and economic stability. Education would bring about a positive change in the mindset of the people and bring down the alarmingly high illiteracy rate in India. The wealth of a country is not only based on its GDP or growth rate, it is also based on the number of skilled people and the literacy rate. The government and the private sector must therefore work together to provide the marginalised with more access to education to help them climb out of the abyss of poverty. The government invests heavily in the military to acquire military aircraft and advanced weapons rather than fight illiteracy and poverty. During the peak of the pandemic in 2020, during the lockdown, the marginalised class suffered greatly from lack of food as they lived from day to day. The money earned from daily work is barely enough to feed the family. Since they could not work, they found it difficult to get food.

The COVID-19 crisis and the containment measures have highlighted the fragility of India's growth, which has not allowed for the emergence of a significant middle class or the creation of an employment structure that removes the spectre of poverty and insecurity. As a result, the two-month lockdown in 2020 is estimated



Slums in Chennai

to have pushed 75 million Indians into extreme poverty. This increase in poverty is due to the preponderance of informal employment and small family production units, which is explained by the low labour-intensive growth due to the atrophy of the manufacturing sector.

Poverty breeds precariousness and precariousness breeds deep malaise in those who suffer from social inequalities. There can be no integral human development without taking into consideration this aspect of poverty eradication. This can only be done with the participation of all: the government, the private sector, the church and other institutions to reduce poverty. Another issue in India is the caste system that promotes the social and economic divide. This system allows the richest to get richer and the poorest to get poorer... The negative impact of discriminatory and rigid social systems on economic development has often been studied. In the case of India, a study by Amartya Sen, the Indian Nobel Prize winner in economics, and Jean Drèze, showed the correlation between economic take-off and the modernisation of social structures. There is therefore a lot of thinking to be done in order to break down this system and establish a certain amount of justice and equity. Otherwise, the differences between rich and poor will only increase. And this can lead to a social crisis and a deterioration of morals. Poverty pushes people down and does not allow them to progress in life. A poor man, deprived of dignity, recognition and consideration, cannot flourish. It is sad to see a whole family living on the pavement because of poverty... Unfortunately, this is the case for many families in India who cannot afford to live under a roof. The slums are multiplying and are places where the misery of a people is illustrated: prostitution, drugs, alcoholism, insanitary conditions and others... This leads to a lot of delinquency. Today, we must not close our eyes to this poverty that degrades human nature. We must work together to find solutions with the people concerned to get them out of this degrading situation. Poverty is the result of systems set up for economic development that do not take into account the marginalised and respect for nature. No nation can boast of growing economically by generating poor people. It is therefore up to each and every one of us to reflect and work towards a system that cares for the marginalised to combat poverty. Integral human development requires the eradication of poverty. Poverty only breeds indignation and delinquency and makes humans lose their dignity as created by God. It is high time for our governments and decision-makers to take into consideration the human parameters in the development of our countries in order to avoid a social breakdown.

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**Alberto Tchindemba**

A native of Angola, he is currently the Provincial Superior of Mozambique. He holds a degree in Education Science and a master's degree in Human and Social Sciences (Institut Catholique de Paris - Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie)



## Promoting access to quality education: challenges for integral human development.

### Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights points to education as an inalienable right of every individual. Being the driving force for the integral development of the human person it should be inclusive and equitable, thus giving the opportunity of learning to all people without distinction of colour, language, religion, race or social condition. It is from here that in 2015 world leaders came up with a global plan embodied in 17 Sustainable Development Goals whose aim is to improve the lives of people all over the planet.

In this article we propose to talk about access to quality education and its challenges for integral human development today. If we want to change the world, giving it a happier, more dignified, more human and fairer tonality, it is imperative to invest seriously in quality education at all levels. Here we agree with Malala Yousafzai when, referring to radical change in the world, she says: "A child, a teacher, a book and a pen can change the world. Education is the only solution".

Two small points will help us to reflect in depth on this subject, which is a very burning topic in all the countries of the world, especially in developing countries. The discrepancy between what is laid down in the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goal 2015-2030 and today's education; access to quality education: challenges and prospects. In conclusion, we will underline the urgency of investing in quality education for global citizenship.

### 1. Discrepancy between the sustainable development goals agenda and education today.

Studying the education systems of some countries, it is clear how education is often held hostage by politics. The education system of any government wants to train and mould the school-age child according to its interests, according to its governing policy. Hence the constant change of curricula and pedagogical projects that often have nothing to do with the reality of the people.

Looking at the educational policies of some governments in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than half the children do not go to school, we note a lack of interest in the quality of education. Governments are more concerned with presenting statistics with a high percentage of students enrolled and graduating than with the quality of education required at international levels. In some countries like Mozambique, not long ago, the so-called "automatic pass" was practiced; that is, the pupil passes from one class to another even if he or she does not have the required skills. The statistics presented to the world are always good; they are statistics of a country that meets the Sustainable Development Goals, but in practice we are faced with low educational standards associated with rampant corruption that is reflected in all sectors of society.

The bleak picture that emerges with regard to access to quality education raises some questions for us: is it human and fair to engage in an education without quality where children with 8 or 9 years of schooling do not know how to read, count and write properly? An education policy that is only concerned with quantity to the detriment of quality - is it not mortgaging the future of the country? Where is the country heading that is accumulating 'illiterates' who ironically passed through a basic education establishment and today are displaying diplomas



without any skills? How can we achieve lasting, sustainable development if we turn education into a merely cosmetic and lucrative activity that does not penetrate the being of the person and, therefore, does not transform the human being from within?

In our opinion, states should invest and seek excellence practices that lead to effective learning for all students in view of development. The thought of John Amos Comenius, who is considered to be the founder of modern didactics, is quite enlightening when he says that "all men should be fully educated in an integral way, that they should develop the capacity to know the truth and not be deluded by what is false; they should speak wisely about everything. This pedagogy is based on the maxim, to 'Teach All to All'. These foundations would allow man to situate himself in the world as an author".

## **2. Access to quality education: challenges and perspectives.**

In government educational policies there is much talk of access to education for all social strata without distinction of colour, language or social condition. There is often talk of making basic education compulsory for all. In reality, what we see is an education system with two very different branches: poor children who attend very poor schooling in some parts of the world, and rich children who attend high level schools that guarantee them a quality education and consequently a good job in society. This means that children from rich parents have more access to quality education than those from low income backgrounds. Children from rich parents, once they graduate, assume the top positions in society, thus perpetuating social inequality.

In our view, we cannot talk about access to quality education without taking into account issues related to people's basic needs, such as food, health and housing, which, when not met, doom the whole direction of education from the outset. Here we are talking about extra-school factors (hunger, family disintegration, health, violence, access to culture, race, ethnicity, etc.) which play an important role in the teaching and learning process. These factors must be linked to factors within the school, such as infrastructure, the pedagogical project, gender equality, the qualification of professionals in education, the guarantee of a decent salary and, finally, the school-community connection.

Therefore, quality education touches upon various dimensions of society, where the State itself is called upon to respect its obligation of providing quality education and giving equal opportunities to all sections of society. Herein lies the great challenge for the educational policies of governments.

Looking at the world scenario regarding access to quality education, we would say that we have a long way to go so that the "human being receives a quality education, free of inequalities and in an accessible way. Therefore, it is essential that by 2030, governments, institutions and citizens themselves are committed to the task of promoting this right in the most comprehensive way possible; qualifying teachers, making access to education universal, providing the necessary infrastructure and encouraging the student's training as a professional and as a citizen. In this way, several other rights might no longer be limited, since education is the basis for other guarantees". Without a shadow of a doubt, we would say that ensuring access to quality education is the task of governments, which are called upon to combat exclusion by providing equal opportunities for all citizens.





### Conclusion.

By way of conclusion, we would say that access to quality education, as recommended by the Sustainable Development Goals, remains a great challenge for many countries - a mirage. There are basic elements which need an urgent response (access to drinking water, basic sanitation, housing, healthy food, decent infrastructures, precarious training of teachers, etc.) if the desired quality education is to run smoothly. Therefore, in order to have quality education that benefits everyone, it is necessary to have well harmonised inter-sectoral policies in the various areas of society.

Investment in quality education for all becomes an imperative for any education system that aims to give a certain quality of life to its citizens. In fact, any self-respecting education system must necessarily undertake quality education for a global citizenship where students are taught knowledge, values for life, attitudes, critical sense, protection of the environment and certain skills for a healthy life.

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**Jacinto Pio Wacussanga**

Parish priest of Gambos and Coordinator of the South Angola Platform. He is a sociologist and Catholic priest from the province of Huila and has given voice to dozens of communities affected by eviction policies due to an unprecedented drought in the country.



Drought in Gambos



Angola: nearly 1.5 million people affected by drought

## Hunger as a weapon of mass destruction - a cry from the South

Famine in Southern Angola, more specifically in the so-called Angolan semi-arid region (Benguela, Huila, Namibe, Cunene and parts of Cuando Cubango), is an age-old phenomenon, given the region's ecological fragility. The first famines recorded by diarists (explorers, soldiers), date from 1877-79. Curiously, this almost coincided with the great Famine of the Brazilian Hinterland, with the famous allegory of *the "Retirantes" /Migrants* mirrored in the literature of the time. The second wave of famine in the Southern Region, especially in the Provinces of Huila, Cunene and Namibe, occurred as a result of the drought of 1912 to 1915, known as the Exterminating Famine (*Ehululu*, in the local language). There are many testimonies, mainly from the diaries of missionaries, about this terrible tragedy, where the newly created Missions (Gambos, Quihita, Munhino and Huila) were the refuge of those who escaped. The missionaries, with agricultural fields rich in food, attended to the huge influx of the starving, while a good number died by the wayside. Altogether it is estimated that it must have decimated close to ten thousand people.

### More intense droughts

Although droughts are recurrent in this Semi-Arid Region - before 2012 they recurred about every 7 years - there were relatively long intervals that allowed communities to store provisions of food for the drought years. Since 2012 the scenario has completely changed. Droughts began to be frequent (2012-2016, 2019, 2021...). The balance, in human, livestock and ecological terms, is devastating. For example, over 650,000 head of cattle perished in the 2012-2019 period alone. Bearing in mind the size of the agro-pastoral communities in south-west Angola (Huila, Namibe and Cunene), one can guess the impact of this devastating loss on millions of families. Moreover, for the spirituality of the agro-pastoralist, cattle are not just a cog in the wheel of the family and community economy, but a direct complement in the relationship between humans, nature and ancestors. For example, cattle are essential in the question of inheritances and rituals. In the aftermath of this devastating loss there were reports of suicides, because for some there was no future without cattle. In conclusion, as of 2012, we are suffering the effects of climate change, specifically the El Niño effect. At the present moment and in the absence of realistic and impartial statistics - it is very difficult to talk about impartial statistics in a country like ours where academic freedom is still a mirage - it is estimated that approximately more than three million people are in urgent need of food.

### Impact of climate change

A more serene analysis tells us that, long before the impact of climate change reached southern Angola and a good part of the SADEC countries, there were already great internal vulnerabilities. According to the academic Cesaltina de Abreu, the situation was already one of vulnerability when the impact of climate change hit the country. Paraphrasing the vision of the great Brazilian academic, Josué de Castro, before this acute hunger (absolute absence of food and opportunities) chronic hunger (insufficient food and opportunities) was already widespread.

Having said this, let us look at the problem of hunger in Angola from other angles. Factors such as war, political, economic and social exclusion, as well as misguided public policies in the food security sector, contributed greatly to the degradation of the country's food and nutrition situation. As a result, although famine is much more acute in southern Angola, reports of hunger are widespread throughout the country, with unpredictable consequences for Angolan families.

### **Disastrous public policies**

Here are just a few examples. In the field of public policies, in 2009 Angola defined a National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (ENSA). In fact, it has never been applied in practice, and faced with the onslaught of famine ENSA is totally blind to the urgency of the situation. Parallel to ENSA, the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security never got off the ground. As a consequence of this great social and political failure, malnutrition is claiming the lives every year of between 42,000 and 70,000 children aged 0 to 5 years. In fact, the number must be higher, since many mothers are unable to reach the Nutrition Centres, which are based in the municipal headquarters, on foot. This staggering indicator alone would be enough to move the country towards a more solid commitment in the framework of public policies linked to ENSA. To illustrate this, in 2018, the Nutrition Programme of the Ministry of Health received only the equivalent of 0.15 USD, when to recover a child with chronic malnutrition takes between 74 USD to 500 USD, depending on the type of intervention <sup>1</sup>. This is without mentioning other co-morbidities caused by the absence, at high rates, of iron, iodine and vitamin A for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

### **Agriculture, the 'poor relation'**

And, as if such a grim reality were not enough, the Agriculture component is, along with Education and Health, one of the "poor relatives", since what it has been receiving in the last five years, in terms of the State Budget, is below 3% of the total General State Budget. Bear in mind that the family agriculture sector, which does not receive even a penny, is responsible for producing about 95% of the food consumed in the country <sup>2</sup>. As you can see, unlike the Defence and Security sectors, which get the lion's share of the State Budget, no other result can be expected than to plunge the whole country into the "abyss" of poverty, hunger and chronic malnutrition. More than simple technical operations for allocating funds, the choices made by each government clearly illustrate its political commitment to the people. And, in the case of Angola, we have doubts as to whether this Government has a serious commitment to the people.

### **Abandonment of ethnic minorities**

To conclude this brief reflection, if the reality of hunger and malnutrition affects the whole country, one question remains: how are the so-called ethnic minorities being managed in terms of survival? The South and East of Angola are, without a shadow of a doubt, the repository and sanctuary of minority ethnic groups, Bantu

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<sup>1</sup> Abreu, Cesaltina, UNICEF/ADRA/MOSAIKO: Folheto Nutrição, Segurança Alimentar e Agricultura OGE 2018 – Resumo, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.



Women pay a high price for global warming



Thousands of children suffering from malnutrition...





Drought and famine: 800,000 Angolans trapped.



For Angolans: the double penalty of climate change...

and non-Bantu. Of these, the best known are the Kuvale, in Namibe (Bantu) and the San in Huila, Cunene, Cuando Cubango and Moxico. But there are many others – at least a dozen and a half - with immense cultural diversity and profound anthropological importance, demonstrating a rare spiritual value: the ability to protect nature and interact with it. If most of them suffered exclusion during colonial times, due to the fact that they were rooted to their traditions and cultures (nomadism, cultural mobility, recollection), they survived the period of conflicts (Kuvale, Hinga Kwankhwa, Kwamashi, Kwandu, Hakavona, Tyavikwa, Ngendelen-go, Kwisi, Kwepe, Mbukusso, Kwangares, San, Himba Ndzimba, Ndongwena, Ndombondola ). In the post-conflict period, nothing has been done to give them social support. They are often the ones who suffer most from exclusion in every respect. Unfortunately, it is precisely in the area where these groups live that the greatest incidence of drought and famine occurs (Huila Namibe, Cunene and Cuando Cubango). Many of these groups are crossing the border, trying to survive, either in Namibia or in Cuando Cubango. So-called positive discrimination policies are needed, so that they are officially recognised, based on the Constitution and domestic laws, and their *modus vivendi* protected by law. They need to be included in statistics, to have visibility.

### When will there be a state of emergency?

Given the tragedy of famine, illustrated by disturbing data (there must already be well over three million people suffering from famine in the Southern Region), with exponential increase in 'climate migrants' roaming the villages and towns, and over fifteen thousand 'climate refugees' in the Republic of Namibia, since 2019 civil society has been calling for the President of the Republic to decree a state of emergency or public calamity. At its last General Assembly, the Bishops of Angola again called for such a measure. The declaration of a state of emergency would trigger a huge international movement, with the intervention of governments and international agencies specialized in managing crises of this nature, with the speed and effectiveness that is required. Unfortunately, so far, the Angolan government has been stonewalling and has not taken any steps to make this happen. And the dying continues ...

The future of many communities, especially those in southern Angola, is totally precarious. Starvation, to all intents and purposes, has become a weapon of mass destruction, in the words of the renowned Mozambican writer Mia Couto. In some parts of the south, especially in central and southern Huila and Cunene, there have been heavy rains these days. For us Christians, God has responded to the torrent of tears that his children have shed, for only He can help us in this humanitarian tragedy.



The desert can turn green again...



**Philippe Engel**

He was responsible for the Caritas of Conakry and then for the Caritas of Guinea (OCPH). It was in this context that he initiated a large drilling programme in the north-west of the country: "Les forages de l'espoir". This project has resulted in the construction of 423 water points to serve the most vulnerable populations.



The "Forages de l'espoir" team with Bishop Sarah of Conakry



Living water gushes forth!

## Water and integral development

### Water and Sanitation

It's all too easy to forget the wonder of water. In some regions, drinking water is so abundant and easily accessible that we take it for granted. Access to safe drinking water is a basic human right.

Yet, around the world, access to a safe source of drinking water is a daily challenge for billions of people living in poverty. Forced to walk for miles or wait their turn for long hours for water, they suffer the effects of contaminated water on their health.

Millions of them fall ill or die every day because they have no choice but to do without this essential service. Diseases caused by unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation kill more people every year than all forms of violence, including war. This makes it one of the world's most critical health issues. Water must become one of the key priorities of our development activities: our actions, projects and long-term development initiatives must be geared towards helping families to improve their living conditions, reduce their vulnerability to disasters and defend their rights.

Our work must ensure equitable access to water, both in quantity and quality, in order to prevent disease, preserve lives and secure livelihoods. We must also work to reduce environmental health risks by managing sanitation safely, and to involve women and men in the management of water and sanitation resources and the implementation of good hygiene practices to maximize the benefits for their communities.

#### The human cost of unsafe water

2.2 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water in their homes.

2.3 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation facilities, such as toilets or latrines.

More than 80% of the world's wastewater is discharged untreated into the environment.

Every day, more than 800 children under the age of five die from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water.

700 million people around the world could be displaced due to worsening water scarcity by 2030.



November 2021: Drought in Madagascar.

### Water in emergencies

In many emergency situations (such as today with the Covid-19 pandemic), the water and sanitation systems on which communities depend cease to function or are totally overexploited. Disaster victims are often traumatized, hungry, dehydrated and exhausted, making them more vulnerable to disease. Repair or reinforcement work takes time, time that is not available to the people who need the water to stay alive. Without water, one can barely survive for more than three days.

That is why our interventions today must focus on providing safe drinking water and reducing public health risks. We must be quick and efficient in providing water and essential sanitation, even in the most difficult circumstances.

In the face of this crisis, we need to innovate by adopting the many methods and techniques that are commonly used today, such as demountable water tanks, water buckets, water treatment plants and latrine slabs.

### Clean water reduces poverty

There is a close link between access to safe drinking water and poverty. Lack of water, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation have a negative impact on food security, livelihoods and educational opportunities for poor families around the world, especially for women and girls who are forced to fetch water.

If we want to tackle the root causes of poverty we must address water-related injustices. We must therefore support long-term projects with sustainable solutions for access to drinking water and sanitation. In addition, we must strive to address insecurity around water supply through more equitable and efficient management and distribution of water resources.

Safe water and a clean environment should not be a luxury. We must make safe drinking water and sanitation accessible to all people, whoever they are and wherever they live. This is a sine qua non for the eradication of poverty in the world.







**Prof. Maurizio Bagarani**

Specialist in General Surgery and Urology. He was Head of the Department of Surgery of a Hospital in the Province of Rome and Professor of Surgery at La Sapienza University. Since his retirement he has worked in several African countries, mainly with the NGO Médecins sans Frontières. Currently he is a consultant in a Hospital in Bujumbura (Burundi), as Director of Quality Control and Continuing Education.



## Health and integral development

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as **“A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”**. Hence, health as such fits into a much larger context whereby its management cannot remain confined within borders, especially in developing countries.

Rightly so, health is now considered a global governance challenge. Throughout a number of international meetings, several scientific studies have proven the impact that health can have not only on the growth of a nation from an ecological and social development but also on its security and on its stability.

It's been known for a long time that today's main health problems stem from the spread of contagious diseases which find fertile conditions in deteriorated environmental conditions. According to Jameton and McGuire (2002:3,2. Academic Research Library, p. 113.) durable health is the combination of three factors: quality assistance, responsible financing and responsible environmental impact.

In reality, the old concept that the economy is the main factor conditioning the development of society and environment has long been reversed. On the contrary, social challenges and health issues are the main elements that affect the economic development of a country.

In this context, global governance should have played a guiding role within the various organisations' activities and their interface with local governments. Both factors are essential. On one side there are the different organisations, state-run, intergovernment (IGO), non-governmental (NGO's) and community associations. On the other side are the States, often trapped in an unstable democracy. Unfortunately global governance has not been able to guide and master its forces, so much so that it may have contributed to the decline of the States to face the challenges brought forward by health concerns. The absence of coordination capacity, the inability to focus on objectives and the lack of engagement of an active participation on the part of governments has resulted in three negative consequences. Save for the eradication campaign of polio, IGO's, States, community associations usually behave like competitive forces rather than partners. Objectives are often at odds and even when they may be comparable, they are not shared sufficiently amongst the stakeholders. A substantial part of budgets (sometimes up to 70%) made of contributions paid by supporting countries, is channeled to the operations of the structure rather towards existing projects.

The proliferation of NGO's is linked in part to the critics addressed to IGO's and to the various States. A plethora of NGO's operate in goodwill in health-related sectors in developing countries but too often with limited means and funding. The most profitable ones in terms of budgets versus benefits obtained are the religious communities. Unfortunately, private organisations such as IGO's often end up consuming investments in operational expenses. However, this is not the main issue. Objectives set to improve healthcare are often too generic and end up only affecting a restricted segment of the population. Given limited funding available, standards and process quality are equally weak. Limited resources do not allow for adequate tools for a good quality medicine. This means that the impact is mainly “territorial”, limited to a part of the population and insignificant from a statistical



point of view to improve the quality of life of the population. In addition, except for a few exceptions, these organisations operate almost always outside public structures which in itself represents an additional inconvenience in terms of integral development. The third negative point stems from local governments. They are quite eager to accept proposals from various organisations, not only for the personal gain of those in charge of public health but for an overall political return. However, any assistance, even badly targeted and qualified, reduces popular discontent and replaces the direct involvement of the State. Even when an entity works to provide part of the healthcare that governments are supposed to guarantee to its people, incompetence and corruption may result in any health initiatives becoming totally inefficient.

Finally, what conclusions can we draw from the above considerations? Health promotion must play a central role within the development politics of countries requiring assistance. Such role is a stimulus to social and economic growth, to a change in lifestyles, to the improvement of health services and to the protection of the environment. Objectives must aim to target sectors having the greatest health impact: preventive medicine (primary and secondary), fighting child mortality and protection of women, are only a few examples. Global governance must reclaim its role as central management and coordination of all the stakeholders. The latter's limits ought to be overcome with a better coordination of the forces on the field and a better perception of the global sanitary risk consequences affecting poor countries. Local governments must be involved and empowered, especially in the advocating and development of social and environmental integrated sectors.

“Start by doing the necessary, do what is possible and suddenly you will find yourself doing the impossible” (Saint Francis of Assisi).





Par Louis Alexandre Babissakana  
Lay Spiritan Associate, Director of BD-CAM,  
CSSP Province of Cameroon - Yaoundé

## Challenges of using renewable energy in integral development according to the social doctrine of the Church

The challenges of using renewable energies in integral development according to the social doctrine of the Church can be addressed in four points: (i) *a reminder and clarification of the notion of integral development*; (ii) *the place of the energy model in the global climate crisis*; (iii) *the critical role of renewable energy in resolving this crisis*; and (iv) *the contribution of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit*.

### 1. Reminder and clarification of the concept of integral development

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church published in 2005 enshrined the vision of integral development as defined by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter of 26 March 1967, *Populorum Progressio*: "Development cannot be reduced to mere economic growth. To be authentic, it must be integral, that is to say, it must promote every man and the whole man". According to this doctrine of the Church, integral development "requires a conception of the economy that guarantees, at the international level, the equitable distribution of resources and responds to the awareness of the interdependence - economic, political and cultural - that now unites peoples among themselves in a definitive way and makes them feel bound by a single destiny".

Integral development is related to the concept of sustainable development promoted by the United Nations. Sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the Brundtland Report as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable development thus comprises three dimensions - economic, social and environmental - which are balanced and integrated.

The convergence of terminology is confirmed by Pope Francis, who used both the concept of integral development and that of sustainable development in his encyclical letter of 24 May 2015, *Laudato Si'*, on safeguarding the common home. In particular, he stated, "We can no longer speak of sustainable development without inter-generational solidarity." (p.122).

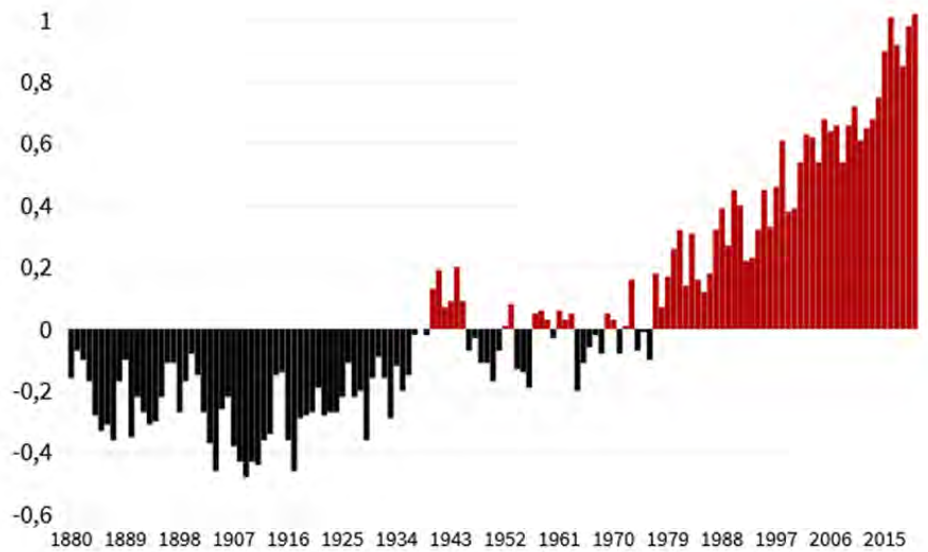
### 2. The place of the energy model in the global climate crisis

The global climate crisis is one of the most important threats facing the world today. Indeed, human activity, in this case industrial activity, has progressively led to a deterioration or disruption of the planet's climate (global warming), manifesting itself in the form of climatic disasters in all regions of the world (notably heat waves, floods, hurricanes, melting glaciers, etc.) with profound and devastating consequences for nature, property and people. Global warming is measured by the average deviation of the global temperature from the annual average. The driving force behind the climate crisis is that this average deviation has been rising steadily, especially since the 1970s. According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the global surface temperature has risen by between 1.06 and 1.26°C compared to pre-industrial levels (see graph below).

As Pope Francis confirms in his letter *Laudato Si'*, "There are, of course, other factors (such as volcanoes, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), but many scientific studies point out that most of the global warming of recent decades is due to the high concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide or CO<sub>2</sub>, methane or CH<sub>4</sub>, nitrous oxide or N<sub>2</sub>O and others) emitted mainly because of human activity. By concentrating in the atmosphere, they prevent the heat of the sun's rays reflected from the earth from being lost to space. This is reinforced in particular by the development model based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which forms the core of the global energy system.



**The average deviation of the global temperature from the average  
(in degrees Celsius)**



« LES ÉCHOS » / SOURCE : NOAA



It is therefore the global energy model centred on and determined by fossil fuel (coal, oil and gas) consuming technologies and industrial processes that is at the root of the global climate crisis. The solution is therefore to convince the whole world to drastically reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and slow down global warming in the interest of the common home.



Image of an industrial site with emissions into the atmosphere. Source: "Les Echos" (Getty Images)

### 3. The critical role of renewables in solving this global climate crisis

It is clear that the drastic reduction of GHG emissions must be achieved by shifting from an energy model based on highly polluting fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) to an energy model based on renewable or clean energy (biomass, solar, hydro, wind, etc.). The planet has already warmed by about 1.2°C since the end of the 19th century. The goal set in 2015 by the Paris Agreement is to keep the average temperature rise "well below 2°C" compared to the pre-industrial era, while continuing efforts to limit this rise to less than 1.5°C. The way to achieve this ambitious goal is to move away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible, by massively expanding renewable energy and strengthening ecosystems, such as forests, that can absorb carbon dioxide from the air. Hence the expected critical role of renewable energy.

### 4. The contribution of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in encouraging the development of renewable energies

It is in this international context of energy transition that the Congregation has chosen to encourage the use of renewable energy as one of its eight (8) development objectives. This objective is based on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 7, which is to guarantee access for all to reliable, sustainable and modern energy services at an affordable cost by 2030.



Image of a solar energy park. Source: "Les Echos" (Ajit Solanki/AP/SIPA)

Thus, in this field of renewable energy, the Spiritan Development Charter defines our strategic and operational orientation for action in three points: (i) working towards access for all to reliable and modern energy services at an affordable cost; (ii) working towards a significant increase in the share of renewable energy in the energy mix offered to populations; (iii) developing the supply of modern and sustainable energy services to all inhabitants of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, small island developing states and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with the aid programmes that concern them.



**Sr. Elisa Kidane** (left), a Comboni Missionary, has lived in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Peru and Italy. She is currently a delegate to the Circumscription of the Generalate. She is originally from Eritrea.

**Maria Teresa Ratti** (right), a Comboni Missionary, currently resides in the Generalate of the Sisters in Rome, working in the areas of Social Pastoral and Communication. She has lived in the United States, Africa and Europe.

## Women for development: Women's contribution to development?

Ours is a time of rapid social, political, cultural and even religious change. We are not only living in a time of epochal changes, but we are also part of a time of great change. In the midst of these rapidly changing situations, which have recently become even more complex as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, which has literally upset all the parameters of our lives - both as a human population and in relation to the various forms of life with which we share existence on earth - women's prominence in various spheres of life has come to the fore in a unique way.

### A biblical icon as a model of development

We could refer here to a myriad of models and examples. We like to imagine women's participation in the great adventure of integral human development by taking our cue from the example given to us by women on the day that marked a new beginning in the history of creation. This is how the account of the resurrection in the Gospel of Mark begins: "When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome bought aromatic oils to go and anoint him. Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb at sunrise. They said to each other, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb? When they looked up, they saw that the stone had already been rolled away, even though it was very large". (4, 1-4)

The time at which all this happened, 'early in the morning', is certainly very significant, because it highlights the boldness that sustains them despite the difficulties of the moment they are experiencing. These women, heedless of all uncertainties and dangers, set out and dared to challenge, with their courage, a whole series of accepted practices that generally relegated them to the margins of their society. They fully believe that what they want to do is a gesture that reveals not only the love that binds them to the Master - even beyond His death - but it is also a gesture that reveals how much they themselves have been involved and have felt a constitutive part of the transformation that He had come to bring about.

Their early morning movement also tells us that they were not sitting on their hands waiting for proposals on how to proceed to be worked out by others. They were used to deciding for themselves, and playing their part where it was necessary. In fact, the evangelist Luke tells us that Jesus "went about the towns and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. There were with him the Twelve and some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna, wife of Cuza, Herod's steward; Susanna and many others, who provided them with material help". (8, 1-3)

Thus, women, then as now, are pro-active and bring all their abilities into play in order to achieve what they care about. The steps of these women of the Gospel still mark the steps of millions of women who, in every corner of the earth, are personally involved in promoting sustainable styles and practices of development, and feel an essential part of realising a dream, generating true progress that can be called integral, just and within reach of every creature under the sun.







## First, the common good

The notion of the 'common good' fills the printed and digital pages of the diverse post-modern public. In this time of increasing inequalities and abuses of the most fundamental rights - both of people and of the environment and creation as a whole - we feel more urgently than ever the need to recover the true meaning inherent in this understanding of our experience of life together. Starting from the universe of women within the vast field of development in this beginning of 2022, we let ourselves be inspired by the Time magazine cover of 27 September - 4 October 2021. From this rather strategic position, the newly elected Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, in office since 1 March 2021, greets us with an optimistic look. She is the first woman and the first African to hold this position since the founding of the organisation (1994), and she immediately expressed the way in which she is going to fulfil her task and responsibility: "What the WTO needs is someone who has the capacity to lead reforms, who knows about trade and who does not want to see business in the usual way. And that someone is me".

The formidable clarity of purpose that paves the way for Okonjo-Iweala in the great sea of global trade makes her immediately perceive how, for example, the drama of the Covid-19 pandemic - which is one of the many dramas to which the most marginalized people are most exposed - lends itself to protectionism and vaccine nationalism. These two enormous challenges, if not adequately addressed, create barriers in society that negatively affect the fair allocation of resources available to ensure that all people have access to adequate care.

To be on the side of integral human development is therefore to fight to ensure the abolition of those privileges that keep alive those barriers that prevent the equitable sharing of all resources aimed at the common good, always and everywhere. We are certain that, with her presence and her expertise, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala will be able to open up new paths based on the common good in the intricate and often ambiguous world of commerce. But that is not all. In fact, we also hope that the struggle experienced by so many women to balance the many accounts and tasks they face daily will receive a renewed impetus from feeling part of the construction of a world that has so much to learn from their shared understanding of being-good (the opposite of well-being) so that life may always be lived with abundance.

## Peace as a multiple and shared horizon

A peace agreement has a good chance of lasting at least 15 years longer if women are at the negotiating table. This has been certified by UN Women, the United Nations agency for gender equality, and if we are familiar with complex geographical situations - and there are always many in the world - we recognise the reliability of this statement.

There are many women who invest their best energies in the service of peace. From the family to education, from civil rights to the defence of the planet. In this field we choose the journalist Maria Ressa, recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Born in the Philippines and now a naturalised US citizen, she co-founded



Rappler, a digital channel dedicated to press freedom in her home country, which is currently suffering tremendously under the hard hand of the despotic government of President Rodrigo Duterte. Having herself suffered enormous harassment by the government, Maria Ressa knows first-hand the struggle to defend herself against the many abuses of a policy that has lost its grip on the common good.

Ressa fights against the misinformation and fake news that an unjust system knows how to put into circulation to paralyse any initiative aimed at weakening its unjust policies. This indomitable journalist is personally paying the inestimable price of her personal freedom, in defence of the freedom taken away from millions of people who are unable to defend themselves against the giants with which the globalised market abounds.

Many other women who believe in the value of peace as a starting point for a better future are on the path that Maria Ressa is walking. They are all determined - supported by their ability to weave paths of justice and reconciliation - to put a stop to the many conflicts that cause tension and suffering in the world, preventing the growth of peace between generations, peoples and the earth.

We find the life and example of Takoua Ben Mohamed very significant; she is a young cartoonist committed to denouncing, also through graphic novels, the impact of racism, colonialism and male chauvinism in the world. For her, it is essential to know the history behind the many 'isms' that condition us, and, above all, to be able to tell it from the side of those who have suffered (and continue to suffer) the wrong of those who exercise domination as a form of control and disregard for the dignity of every person and the most fundamental human rights. One of her wishes is to win the Nobel Peace Prize with a graphic novel! We share her wish!

### In defence of the common CA-u-SA

It is with pleasure, mixed with natural concern, that we report the advent of teenage girls in the commitment to the protection of creation, little women who are tenaciously aware that they have to get involved in issues that are bigger than themselves.

Greta Thunberg was the first to hit the headlines, with her Fridays for Future initiative to defend the Earth, our common home, from the destruction to which it is destined if we do not change our lifestyles. Starting from a non-violent action - such as denouncing in front of the Swedish government headquarters, on a weekly basis, the ecological crisis that endangers the future of those who are young and are robbed of the possibility of a meaningful life - Greta boldly faces the world scene and questions "the fine words of the great" that always end up in the void of a no longer acceptable disengagement. With her, from all over the world, other very young people have taken on the commitment to defend us and the planet that we adults have not been able to honour with respect, nor take care of with sustainable practices. Just a few names: Vanessa Nakate (Uganda), Alexandria Villaseñor (California), Luisa Neubauer (Germany), Anuna De Wever and Kyra Gantois (Belgium).

During the 26th UN Climate Change Conference, held in Glasgow (Scotland) from 31 October to 13 November 2021, attended by state and government leaders from all over the world, Greta and her companions spared no effort to highlight that the





king was naked in the control rooms! This is because they perceived how frustrating it is to discuss without a firm will to decide (if it is still possible) how to remedy the devastation and ecological crisis that is before everyone's eyes!

May the courage of these little big women continue to act as a lever to generate new lifestyles, based on respect and listening to every created reality - for a future full of life, always and everywhere!

### **In the Church, need for a paradigm shift**

As we saw at the beginning of this article, the path of female leadership comes from far away. Like all journeys aimed at renewing life, it has had its share of setbacks and numerous situations of abuse of various kinds. The road is still uphill, but it goes forward.

In our day, however, it is taking on a particular visibility thanks to the reform that Pope Francis is trying to implement first of all within the maze of the Vatican Curia. We would like to focus on one of the many women who carry out a ministry that is undoubtedly destined to accompany the Church towards a paradigm shift, under the banner of synodality.

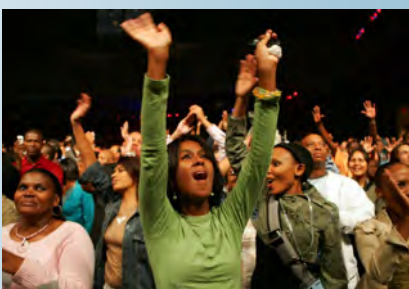
Born in France and a member of the Xaverian Congregation, Sr. Nathalie Becquart is the first woman to be appointed undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops. Before proceeding any further, we feel the need to state that, if the presence of numerous women - among them several nuns - in the various offices, departments and divisions of the Vatican ensures that the waters of renewal will flow more and more towards the true 'aggiornamento' desired by the Second Vatican Council, with the appointment of Becquart the doors of the rooms where the Bishops, gathered in synod, decide for the good of their Churches, from now on will have to count 'her' vote too! Being able to vote is not entirely irrelevant in transformation processes. And the history of women, in all corners of the earth, testifies to the fact that non-participation is an insidious form of segregation.

In the interview given to the monthly magazine 'Women Church World' in October 2021, Sr. Nathalie describes the importance of the evolution of the synod from an event to a process in which grassroots participation is a sine qua non condition for the realisation of true ecclesial synodality. Of the women she says: "Basically, I believe that what they offer specifically is to be an engine of synodality. Because they strongly desire that the Church no longer be a clerical Church reserved for an elite, where a few decide for all. (...) Women strongly wish for more egalitarian relationships, based on respect". We rely heavily on your authoritative presence and expertise.

### **Craftswomen of humanity**

Years ago, in 2011, a group of women in Senegal had the idea of nominating the Women of Africa for the Nobel Peace Prize. The proposal aroused some surprise. The reason behind the request was the following: if the people of Africa exist, it is because they, the women, resist! Africa exists and resists thanks to women, to their setting out, every day, to weave life, to accompany the future.

Moreover, even today, as always, those who want to bet on a better future in Afri-







ca, can do so on one condition: not without the unique contribution of women. The creativity that sustains them, despite the immense challenges they face every day, is the concrete proof that life wants to live precisely through their obstinate no to everything that threatens the dignity and desire for life of which the continent is the womb and cradle. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, we can also say this about the women of Asia, the Americas, Europe and the world. Everywhere, the methodology is the same: to be artisans of a renewed humanity, which women have always generated and safeguarded.

May the endless paths of human migrants, in every place on earth, always be supported by the sure steps that, early in the morning, open to the hope and joy of living the great gift that God always shares with us: that of an abundant and full life!





**Sr. Annette Funke**

Novice with the Missionary Sisters of Christ, with twelve years of professional experience in the field of development, she has most recently been working with the Spiritans in the Central African republic, and was formerly in charge of projects with the Pontifical Missionary Society of the Holy Childhood



## Is solidarity a form of partnership?

Cooperation, partnership and development are big words and not everyone understands them in the same way. They are seen by some as systems of complex relationships, and by others as forms of financial support.

The first difficulty is that the concepts and terms of development are generally conceived by the "North", which means in Europe or the United States, and that the interests and expectations of the North are often dominant. The second challenge of these international partnerships is the real asymmetry of power and influence - due to political and economic power on the one hand and forms of dependency on the other. Therefore, we cannot expect to share the same principles and values, and we don't always find a common vision or goal, as stated in SDG 17.

### What will it take to achieve real partnerships?

In the sense of the SDGs we have a common responsibility for our planet and for humanity.

A partnership requires two or more stakeholders to meet at the same level and to agree on what concerns them each one in a different way so that the different interests of each partner are more or less balanced.

To achieve this, it is important to reduce asymmetry as much as possible.

Some strategies for the more powerful and influential partners are

- **Involve** the different actors in an honest and real way
- Understand oneself as imperfect and as a **learner**
- Be aware of current and historical **inequalities**, in particular the consequences of inherited roles from colonial and missionary era
- Act with a **sensitive** approach to cultural differences and various priorities
- Be prepared to **transfer** skills and responsibilities
- Collaborate in a **transparent** and power-sharing way

Some strategies for weaker and dependent partners include

- Build **capacity** for better expertise in order to influence planning and monitoring
- Create sufficient **capacity** and make leaders available for their often additional tasks to get involved in projects, including communication
- Practice active and transparent **communication** to strengthen leadership
- Establish participation and evaluation systems to ensure that objectives are achieved and sustained
- Increase **credibility** by respecting the conditions set in partnerships and assuming defined responsibilities
- Diversify **financial resources**, including a substantial local financial contribution that allows more scope, self-determination, sustainability and independence

### What is the particularity of Christian communities when it comes to international partnerships in so-called development?

Churches are often rooted at the local level. Their great strengths are their closeness to the people, in particular their access to the poorest and the voluntary commitment of many of their members. This can lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency compared to other local organisations, provided that the professionalism is up to scratch. To turn these strengths into an asset, it is then necessary to ensure

good functioning, good governance, quality and sustainability of the work. Beyond this, the Church has a prophetic character, reminding society and policy makers of human values and rights, solidarity with the poorest, social justice and peace.

Integral human development should then take into account these two dimensions that go hand in hand: the prophetic commitment and the concrete commitment through activities against poverty and discrimination, and for peace, improvement of living conditions and empowerment.

### **The universal Church in transition to new forms of solidarity and fraternity**

The changes in the universal Church observed in the last 20 years are continuing. The vast majority of leadership positions in the South are now held by locals or missionaries from the South. The rich and influential Church in the North is gradually losing at least some of its power. This necessary transition is gradually reducing the existing imbalance between South and North and thus holds great potential for more balanced partnerships, even if the legacy of the colonial and missionary era will always be felt.

This shift in responsibilities reveals challenges. The North is required to let go without abandoning all forms of solidarity and brother and sisterhood, by prioritising other proposals, by gaining more humility and trust, by understanding contextual issues and by accepting differences, by appreciating and encouraging efforts and taking responsibility.

Empowerment and dependency reduction in the South comes with more obligations, burdens and local responses to be found, without being able to refer to others. The pressure on today's leaders is enormous. Internal and external expectations are numerous, diverse and sometimes insatiable, possibilities are often limited and professionalisation takes time and requires a lot of effort, sometimes even sacrifice, and above all a common understanding and community spirit. For the first indigenous generation this is particularly difficult because it is often necessary to change the operational systems and to make the faithful understand that the Church is not a service of spiritual and social provision but a community which lives by the contribution of each and every one. Solidarity is not unilateral but collective.

This transition requires courage by everyone, new ideas, foresight and realistic goals. Without strong and committed teams, good networks and advisors such a transition is hardly possible. Mutual support and solidarity - even in failure - understanding, tolerance and determination will facilitate new forms of equitable partnership.

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* of Pope Francis can inspire and encourage us to experience such forms of solidarity and partnership.







Marielle Lacroix—Financial advisor of the CDO

## Testimony:

### My journey between Canada, Guinea, Italy and the Central Development Office in Rome...

I thought I would tell the story of the journey that led me to the Central Development Office, hoping that my life experience can interest and entertain you.

Here goes!

After completing my studies in administration at Concordia University in Montreal and working several years for the engineering company SNC-Lavalin, here I am, leaving for Guinea in 1983. The Compagnie des Bauxites de Guinée is offering me a contract in Kamsar as a logistics assistant. The attraction of the unknown (I had to look up the country on the map) and the urge to live a new experience is stronger than the magnet of my family and friends and so I am flying away to a country I know nothing about. The night of my departure at Mirabel airport, in the midst of hugs, tears and white kerchiefs, I miss the last call for my Air France flight. Gripped by panic, I rush to the airline's counter where a nice attendant reassures me and tells me that I am being taken care of. I cannot imagine the rest ... a courtesy car comes to pick me up and takes me directly to the foot of the 747! Wow! I feel important but a little stupid nonetheless. I doubt I would receive the same treatment today! On the plane I suddenly realize that I am leaving behind my elderly father, my beloved sister and many friends and who knows when I will see them again. Tears continue to flow throughout the trip until I arrive at CDG. Fortunately, an ex-colleague and sweet friend offers me lodging for a week in her studio in the 13th arrondissement. Exactly what I need to soothe my sorrow. I seize this opportunity to reconcile myself with the French who, I must admit, do not always have a good reputation with us in Québec. They are often called "les maudits français" but we should not generalize ... I have two or three French friends who we also call "improved Frenchies" (the wicked French)! I am straying from the subject: Guinea- Conakry as we often refer to. Again with Air France, I am leaving a week later for the African continent with a somewhat consoled heart, thank you Marie-Claire for your warm welcome. We fly over Mauritania, Nouakchott and its infinite desert. I smile when I hear the reflection of a child: "look mom at the big beach!" I arrive at the end of the afternoon in the capital where it is already night; the country nearly piggybacks on the equator. Disembarking all I can feel is the overwhelming dampness in the darkness. The arrival hall in the old airport is lit by a single lightbulb, a sordid, sad and terrifying sight. I find myself the only "foté" in the middle of this dump. I'm hot, the humidity invades me, I can feel myself fading with every passing minute. Suddenly I hear my name somewhere! Yesssss someone has come to get me! A company employee introduces himself without showing any identification papers. He asks for my passport and he leaves with it, supposedly to settle the formalities. My heart and my mind capsize. Before my departure I was warned about the "traite des blanches" white women's slave trade, OMG what on earth am I doing in this mess? The humidity clams my skin, I miss air, I am afraid for the first time in my life. I do the maths: passport stolen, the closest Canadian embassy is in Dakar, I don't know anyone, the worst scenarios race through my head. After what seems like a century, Mamadou comes back with my passport in hand (praise the Lord) but "you have to give" Luckily I have stashed a few packages of Malboro just in case. The bribe finally gets me out of this hell. A school bus takes me away, I am the only passenger. All I can see are small pit fires where women cook their evening meals. It is pitch black. Fear takes over again. We finally arrive at the "CBG village" transit station before transferring to my destination the next day. I can't swallow anything for supper and I take refuge in my room: dark and damp. I record my travel impressions on tape for my dad and try to sleep with the song of the cicadas and other critters that serenade my arrival. I wake up at dawn with another song, that of the muezzin. "No !! please great Iman, let me sleep another hour." No way José.

After a sleepless night or almost, I am served a slice of buttered bread and jam before heading again by school bus to the airport where the company's Twin Otter is waiting to accompany me to Kamsar. Two hours of waiting before leaving ... I finally arrive at my destination excited but quite wrinkled, I must say. Part of the reception committee was "my godmother" who was waiting for me



Conakry Gbessia Airport



The mining town of Kamsar—Guinea



On the road between Kamsar and Kataco



The rice fields of Bagatai

with the mission to help integrate myself into my new environment. Being of a rather independent nature, this generous soul was quickly thanked and I continued my insertion alone in this new place. A few days after my arrival and just before Christmas, strong tremors wake me up during the night. I learn in the early morning that a magnitude 6.3 earthquake has destroyed a large part of infrastructure in the north-west of the country. Guinea is severely tested; it will take months and years to rebuild because international aid is long in coming. Barely three months later, Sékou Touré, the sanguinary dictator who has led the country since the sixties after independence from France, dies. Disarray and uncertainty reign during the following three weeks.

On April 3, 1984, the military takes power. All means of communication are blocked with the impossibility of getting in touch with my family. With our expatriate colleagues, we collect food supplies and other basic necessities and gather in front of a short-wave radio station to listen to RFI which tells us about the coup carried-out by Lansana Conté and his soldiers. We fear for our safety, armed men roam the streets and we have strict orders not to leave our premises. The company in Pittsburgh send a telex to my family saying that I am safe (we were far away from having wifi!). A few days after the coup d'état the situation returns more or less to normal and I am relieved to learn that there were no casualties. It is palpable that the people are hoping for positive changes with this new government and I hope so for them. And to say that when I was hired the company had assured me that Guinea was a stable country!

This sums up my arrival in a country of a thousand contrasts and faces. I have the pleasure of working with warm and welcoming colleagues that I immediately befriend. I am often invited to their weddings, christenings and other parties. To this day I am still in contact with some of them. It was only more than a year after my arrival that I got to know the Spiritans who had been driven out by Sékou Touré. The new government has allowed them to return to the country and, in 1985, I have the joy of meeting Father Bienvenu, Father Besson and Father Engel who have come to re-settle in the Kataco mission within the Bagatai. Although Kataco is less than 20 km from Kamsar, it often takes more than one hour to make the trip due to the disastrous state of the roads. We often meet on Sundays after mass in the old decrepit presbytery suffering from so many years of neglect. Never mind, gaiety reigns. We bring some imported sweets: cheeses, sausages, wines and Jeanne prepares the "local rice" for us. We take bucolic walks in the palm groves and rice fields, the locals are warm and invite us for a glass of palm wine or simply open their doors to greet us. These are convivial days of which I keep the most precious memories.

It is in this context that I meet the one who will become my husband, Maurizio. He is a surgeon at Kamsar Hospital, "Italiano vero" as Toto Cotugno sang. He too befriends Kataco's mission and often tends the ailments of its inhabitants, providing care and medicine often unobtainable or overpriced on the black market. As a token of gratitude, we return to Kamsar with (live) chickens, peanuts, or palm oil. We spend an unforgettable Christmas in Kataco, probably the most beautiful of my life. The midnight mass in this simple dilapidated church abandoned all these years makes the celebration of the birth of Jesus even more authentic in its poverty. The hymns sung in Baga, the language of the region, bring a paradoxical note, warm and alive. We pitch our tent in front of the presbytery and spend New Years Eve with the fathers and friends who join us to share a makeshift meal. Some time later, with the work of Father Engel, the church and the presbytery will undergo a major repair allowing them to have more comfortable quarters and above all ... access to water. My assignment in Guinea continues until 1987 when I had to make the decision either to return to Canada or to live in Italy. After a brief stay in Montreal, I choose to settle in Rome and start a new adventure. Our son Daniele is born in 1989 and, barely a few months later, the Canadian Embassy offers me a position in their finance section. I have to adapt very quickly to the double life of a mother and a career woman. Fortunately, my mother-in-law who lives right next to us is of precious help because Maurizio is often called upon to work evenings and night duty with long hours away from the family home. With the friends of the Augusto high school where Maurizio studied, we found the FIAG (Federation of Friends of Guinea) and for ten years, with their contributions, we finance micro-projects including the repair of the Kataco school, the drilling of wells, microcredit for a sewing workshop helping young single mothers, information sessions against genital mutilation, the construction of a small school in Sangarédi, all under the aegis of Father Engel who oversees the projects along with the



Kataco Church



Tatave and his Roman friends on his Jubilee



commemorative plaque to Fr. Gustave Bienvenu.

proper allocation of funds during his tenure in Guinea. A few years later Father Engel is transferred to the Spiritans' motherhouse in Monte Mario and we have the joy to rekindle our friendship. However, no longer having a trusted person in the field, the FIAG must cease its activities, but we continue to participate in certain projects in partnership with other NGOs for several years. One day while visiting Rome with Father Engel we find ourselves stranded by a violent rain fall and forced to take refuge in a small bar while awaiting the end of the storm. While chatting I learn that Father Bienvenu (Tatave) would be celebrating his 50 years of priesthood in a few months. In less than an hour we have come up with a project for a surprise party that will take place between Rome and Saint-Georges de Rouelley, Tatave's birthplace in Normandy. We have 3-4 months to set up the mechanisms, invite friends and make the arrangements for: a surprise dinner with friends from France, a mass on the tomb of Saint-Peter, another mass at the catacombs of Saint- Agnes where Tatave said his first mass, a visit to the Pope's gardens in Castel Gandolfo, an excursion to the monasteries of Saint-Benedict and Saint Scolastic in Subiaco and, finally, a good-bye lunch at our residence in Rome. We are lucky to be able to find accommodation for the twenty guests at the French Seminary! So much logistic to manage, but, with our combined talents, the event is a huge success. Tatave arrives in Rome on June 28th with the excuse that we are inviting him for a small family celebration ... internos. He doesn't suspect a thing. That same evening, we invite him to a typical little restaurant in the center of Rome. We enter and suddenly he begins to recognize some friends from Saint-Georges, but he still hasn't caught on. It takes him several minutes to realize that all these beautiful people are here to honor him and celebrate his 50 years of priesthood! The following days are filled with emotions as much for him as for us. This success fills me with happiness. The second part of the festivities takes place two months later in his hometown, Saint-Georges, under the hospices of mayor Raymond Bechet, and friends of our jubilee. I am amazed and touched by the welcome we receive! The celebration continues with a mass enlivened by a group of African singers and dancers, a typical Norman meal at the village restaurant and visits to the surroundings including Tatave's native home. We return to Rome with a heart filled with emotions and memories which we will cherish for the rest of our lives. A month later I received a call from Father Engel telling me that our friend has suffered a stroke and he passes a few hours later. A mixture of grief and elation came over me. What better end could he have hoped for? Tatave: a life of love and dedication consecrated on the anniversary of the fifty years of his priesthood! The Lord will have welcomed him with open arms and from heaven, I know that our friend is watching over us.

My life in Caput Mundi turns out to be pleasant, I love this city although it can be chaotic. Romans are nice people and I admire their philosophy of working to live, not living to work. The Embassy offers me the best of both worlds between Canada and Italy and I am grateful for it. Thirty years have passed quickly and I could write a book about my life and my experiences. I am thinking about it and I would call it "Non-Diplomatic Notes"! After a busy career I decide at the end of 2019 to retire to accept another challenge, that of joining the team of Father Engel and the Central Development Office (CDO) with the mission of supporting the creation and local development of offices (LDO) across the many countries where the Spiritans are present. The idea is to create offices that will become more autonomous, independent and responsible. With training and follow-up, it is expected that the LDOs will be able to better interact within their communities because who better than the people on the ground can understand the realities and the needs of the population? My enthusiasm is overflowing even though I realize the immense scope of the project. This new conception of development involves a major stake. However, I am confident that despite the difficulties the project will be carried through successfully in the months and years that follow. I would like to thank everyone who reads this newsletter for their support to the CDO and the LDO's.





What does integral development mean today and in the near future, that is, the development of every person and of the whole person? (...) It is a matter of integrating into development all those elements that make it truly such. The various systems: the economy, finance, work, culture, family life, religion are, each in its own way, an essential stage in this growth. None of them can be set up as an absolute, and none of them can be excluded from a conception of integral human development, that is to say, one that takes into account the fact that human life is like an orchestra that plays well if the different instruments are in tune with each other and follow a common score.

It is also a question of integrating the individual and community dimensions. The self and the community are not in competition, but the self can only mature in the presence of authentic interpersonal relationships, and the community becomes generative when each and every one of its components is. Finally, it is a question of integrating body and soul. Paul VI already wrote that development is not reduced to mere economic growth; development does not consist in having more and more goods at one's disposal, with a view to purely material well-being. Integrating body and soul also means that no development work can truly achieve its goal if it does not respect the place where God is present to us and speaks to our hearts.

*Extract from the address of Pope Francis to the participants in the Congress organised by the Dicastery for Integral Human Development on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the encyclical "Populorum Progressio" Tuesday, 4 April 2017*



CENTRAL DEVELOPEMENT OFFICE  
Congregation of the Holy Spirit  
Clivo di Cinna, 195  
00136 Roma

Tél. +39 06 35 404 648

Cell. +39 351 210 2428

E-mail: [development-office@cssproma.com](mailto:development-office@cssproma.com)

**Bank details :**

Pax Bank – Köln

Procura Generale dell'Istituto dello Spirito Santo

IBAN : DE 2537 0601 9300 5720 6004

BIC : GENODED1PAX

[www.spiritan-international.org](http://www.spiritan-international.org)

**Contributors to this Newsletter :**

**Editorial committee:**

*Marielle Lacroix and Philippe Engel*

**Translation and proofreading:**

*Fr. Tony Neves, Fr. James Flynn and*

*Fr. John McFadden*

**Coordinator:**

*Philippe Engel*