“Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”

— Pope Francis

The Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Change Agreement: Understanding the Connection

By Dennis Kalob, PhD

The Carmelite NGO enthusiastically supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations last year. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were in force from 2000 to 2015.

The MDGs were a noble effort with mixed results. Some goals were reached or largely achieved, while most fell short. The good news is across the board progress was indeed made. The number of people in extreme poverty was cut in half, hunger was reduced by nearly half, access to primary education was increased significantly and most countries reached gender parity in early education. Also, there was a significant increase in access to clean drinking water.

The SDGs are meant to move global development to the next level over the coming years (to year 2030). Here are, in brief, the 17 ambitious goals that make up the SDGs:

- Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere
- End hunger…promote sustainable agriculture
- Ensure healthy lives and well-being
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education
- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable energy
- Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth…and decent work for all
- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization
- Ensure availability of clean energy
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- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization
Reduce inequality within and among countries
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Conserve and sustainably use the oceans and marine resources
Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development
Strengthen the means of implementation for sustainable development

The Carmelite NGO also enthusiastically supports efforts to address climate change. Of particular importance in this struggle is the Paris Agreement, which was negotiated by representatives from more than 190 nations and finalized last year. Central to the Agreement is the following commitment found in Article 2: “Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.”

It is important to see the connections between the SDGs and the Paris Agreement: human development and protecting the environment. Care for creation requires us to care for one another in the global human family and to protect the natural world.

“Climate change and sustainable development are inextricably linked,” says Alvin Leong of the Pace Center for Environmental Legal Studies, echoing Pope Francis’ words at the top of this article.

Indeed, it is very difficult to contemplate social justice without environmental justice or environmental justice without social justice. This is why Pope Francis has embraced “integral ecology” and wrote eloquently on the subject in Laudato Si’, his encyclical on the environment. “We are,” he says, “faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (paragraph 139).

The most obvious specific link between the SDGs and the Paris Agreement can be found in SDG #13. This calls for “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.” We can achieve SDG #13 if we implement in meaningful and successful ways the Paris Agreement.

But we can dig just a little deeper to see the many links between the two global agreements.

A call for “sustainable consumption and production” found in the SDGs essentially means we must be concerned about waste and pollution, including in our use of energy—fossil fuels in particular. There is no sustainable consumption and production without addressing the causes of climate change.

Excessive heat, increased droughts, more powerful storms and rising sea levels—all features of our changing global climate—threaten global food production, dislocates people from their ancestral homes, and weakens social and political stability. Ending poverty and hunger and promoting healthy lives, as called for in the SDGs,
All Life Has Inestimable Value

“Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person and all efforts must be expended to end it. In the end, we must work together—church, state, and community—to eliminate the root causes and markets that permit traffickers to flourish; to make whole the survivors of this crime; and to ensure that one day soon trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.” People on the Move, N° 105, December 2007.

The migration of people across boundaries is part of a collective human experience. A sinister element has invaded this experience and it must be eradicated: the trafficking of human beings. This practice reaches every corner of the globe. No nation is exempt from this unspeakable crime against the human person and society.

Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of the International Conference on “21st Century Slavery,” stated that human trafficking “constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. In particular, the sexual exploitation of women and children is a particularly repugnant aspect of this trade, and must be recognized as an intrinsic violation of human dignity and human rights.”

Victims of human trafficking are frequently lured by false promises of a lucrative job, education, or a loving relationship. Victims can be men, women, adults, children or foreign nationals. While they share the trait of vulnerability, victims have diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, varied levels of education, and may be documented or undocumented.

While human trafficking spans all demographics, there are some circumstances that lead to a higher susceptibility to victimization and human trafficking. Runaway and homeless youth, as well as victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war, conflict or social discrimination are frequently targeted by traffickers. Foreign nationals who have paid significant recruitment and travel fees often become highly indebted to traffickers or intermediaries. Traffickers control and manipulate these individuals by leveraging the victims’ work visas as well as the victims’ lack of familiarity with surroundings, laws and rights, language and cultural understanding.

Victims face many challenges in getting help. Their identification documents and money may have been confiscated. They may not know where they are, because they have been moved frequently. They are often not allowed to communicate with family or friends. And they may have trouble trusting others, due to their traffickers’ manipulation and control tactics.

Often the traffickers and their victims share the same national, ethnic, or cultural background, allowing the trafficker to better understand and exploit the vulnerabilities of their victims. Traffickers can be a lone individual or an extensive criminal network. Pimps, gangs, family members, labor brokers, employers of domestic servants, small business owners, and large factory owners have all been found guilty of human trafficking. Their common thread is a willingness to exploit other human beings for profit. Human traffickers generate hundreds of billions of dollars in profits. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that forced labor and human trafficking is a $150 billion industry worldwide.

“Every human being, man, woman, boy and girl, is made in God’s image. God is the love and freedom that is given in interpersonal relationships, and every human being is a free person destined to live for the good of others in equality and fraternity. Every person, and all people, are equal and must be accorded the same freedom and the same dignity. Any discriminatory relationship that does not respect the fundamental conviction that others are equal is a crime, and frequently an aberrant crime.

We declare on each and every one of our creeds that modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labor and prostitution, and organ trafficking, is a crime against humanity. Its victims are from all walks of life, but are most frequently among the poorest and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. On behalf of all of us, our communities of faith are called to reject, without exception, any systematic deprivation of individual freedom for the purposes of personal or commercial exploitation; in their name, we make this declaration.” Declaration on International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2014.

by Jane Remson, O. Carm.

Paris Climate Agreement: What are the Key Elements?

- To keep global temperatures "well below" 2.0C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and "endeavour to limit" them even more, to 1.5C
- To limit the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by human activity to the same levels that trees, soil and oceans can absorb naturally, beginning at some point between 2050 and 2100
- To review each country's contribution to cutting emissions every five years so they scale up to the challenge
- For rich countries to help poorer nations by providing "climate finance" to adapt to climate change and switch to renewable energy.

Source: BBC news online

Who Says Climate Change is Serious?

According to Pew Research Center's spring 2015 survey majorities in all 40 nations polled say climate change is a serious problem, and a global median of 54% believe it is a very serious problem. Still, the intensity of concern varies substantially across regions and nations. Latin Americans and sub-Saharan Africans are particularly worried about climate change. Americans and Chinese, whose countries have the highest overall carbon dioxide emissions, are less concerned.

pewresearch.org
will not be possible absent meaningful action on climate change.

The SDG of making cities and human settlements safe and sustainable will not be possible in the context of climate change. For one thing, many coastal communities will be devastated by rising sea levels. Seas have risen 4-8 inches (10-20 centimeters) over the past century, which is already having an impact on many locations. This rise in sea levels is now intensifying with potentially catastrophic consequences for many cities and towns worldwide in the coming century.

It needs to also be noted that dealing with these climate-induced problems will be expensive. Cleaning up after disasters, moving communities, enhancing flood protections and all the other actions that will be needed in the coming years will take up an increasing amount of limited resources (limited, in particular, for poor nations). This will mean fewer resources available for education, healthcare, and other vital services that will be needed if we are to make any progress toward achieving an array of Sustainable Development Goals.

There is no doubt that climate change is a threat to human development as well as to the health of our natural world. Dramatic and immediate action is necessary to address climate change and in so doing, address sustainable human development.

Perhaps it is this realization that can help us to understand the particular importance of SDG #10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Wealth and power is heavily concentrated in a few hands. For many of these people, the current system of production, distribution and consumption is working just fine and they see suggestions of changing the system as a threat to their positions. As long as money and political power is concentrated and not widely dispersed, as it should be in a real democratic world, private interests will trump the public interest.

As Pope Francis reminds us, “As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills.” [emphasis mine]

Inequality is indeed the root of our problems. As a sociologist, I believe it, and I find Pope Francis’ emphasis of this point to be immensely hopeful. Perhaps we have turned a corner. Inequality will be collectively challenged, a more equitable distribution of both physical resources and power will come forth, and in so doing many of our global problems—climate change and poverty, in particular—will be addressed. That is our most sincere hope.

I am, indeed, hopeful. We all should be hopeful. But our hope must not delude ourselves that the struggle will be easy. “Power concedes nothing without a demand,” as the great American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass once said. We must demand fundamental social change, take collective action, and be true to Pope Francis’ vision of a united world always promoting the common good. The future of human society and our natural world depend on it.

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