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IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: FAVOURABLE AND HINDERING CONDITIONS OF PROJECT WORK

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“Today we see {people} trying to secure a sure food supply, cures for diseases, and steady employment. We see them trying to eliminate every ill, to remove every obstacle which offends {people’s} dignity. They are continually striving to exercise greater personal responsibility; to do more, learn more, and have more so that they might increase their personal worth. And yet, at the same time, a large number of them live amid conditions which frustrate these legitimate desires. “(Populorum Progressio #6)

This quote from *Populorum Progressio* is indeed a reminder of what development and the underlying challenges frustrating development are about. Were there no obstacles, no other agendas, and instead a genuine sense of and commitment to the common good across our world, the process of development would be facilitated. It so it seems today that *Populorum Progressio*, a document of its day, doesn’t go far enough to challenge the ills of our time.

SECTION 1

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

South Africa today is a highly complex reality, one in which the aspirations of post-apartheid society have not been realised, in which most people have not been able to achieve their dreams of better housing, education, health care and opportunities. The economic factors underlying this relate to the failure at the dawn of the new South Africa to transfer economic power at the same time political power was transferred to those previously dis-enfranchised, and to the corruption now of those in power who continue to amass wealth at the expense of both the country and the poor. Post-apartheid economic policies have not had the desired results, and massive unemployment, poor education and social services have compounded social ills. Some people, across cultural and political divides, have been heard to say “It was better under *apartheid*.” While that is clearly not the case, it does tell us something of the perceptions people have in a society in which there have been massive changes and much growth despite the present challenges and problems.

As if that were not enough, there is the country’s still-uncontrolled TB, HIV and AIDS epidemic, the biggest in the world. That the epidemic exploded at the same time that the new democracy was finding its feet is a tragic co-incidence of history given the efforts and resources needed to tackle all issues. Mandela’s government did not see the urgency of the situation given the other enormous problems to be addressed. Much later he acknowledged as much. And Mbeki’s government brushed AIDS aside, refusing to acknowledge the relation between HIV and AIDS, and refusing to provide life-giving drugs in the public sector.

“... we as human beings, as communities, as nations, can be so focussed on one particular ‘sign of the time’ (which we are almost literally touching, ‘holding’) that we miss seeing another ‘sign’ which is also of great significance... eg apartheid, AIDS” (Dowling in Bate and Munro 2014:62)

And in addition, there was simultaneously an influx of economic migrants, asylum seekers and illegal immigrants from across Africa and elsewhere, whose numbers are still not fully known and whose

presence compounds the socio-economic problems challenging a fragile democracy. Initially South Africa was keen to open borders given the new political dispensation and the restrictions of the past, but today the state struggles to get a handle on the challenges and to enforce changed legislation.

What has all of this meant from the perspective of the different religions? Non-government and faith-based organisations have joined efforts across various divides to advocate on behalf of the poor and marginalised for better education and services, in anti-corruption drives, and against political machinations. It is sometimes noted that the efforts undertaken, sadly, do not appear to have the same impact that the advocacy of the churches had had previously in denouncing *apartheid* and calling for its end. That said, it can also be noted among other issues that the Vicariate of the Dominican Order in South Africa called for a probe by the Public Protector into so-called “state capture.” The subsequent report of the Public Protector, released ahead of the end of her term of office, ensured that many facts, as opposed to suspicions, about “state capture” entered the public domain.

Defining Church in secular South Africa is no easy task. The numerous African Independent and African Initiated Churches together are the biggest Christian grouping. The mainline churches, including the Catholic Church, have lost members to new prophet-, prosperity- and evangelical- Churches. There are also Muslim groupings. Finding common ground is challenging. Finding common ground to work with government agencies is challenging.

New immigrants to South Africa belong, too, to various religious groupings, including the Catholic Church. These also are the people who struggle to be registered legally, to find housing and work, to ensure a place for their children in school, to access health care, to be accepted as fellow human beings in spaces guarded by others who do not yet have all they have been promised, who still don't have decent housing and who cannot in the current economic climate because they do not always have the skills and qualifications required for what is available. And so xenophobic attacks, political rivalries, mob justice attacks on people who commit crimes or who are perceived for some reason as “other”, rampant corruption across all spheres of society (“If the president can do use public money, so can I” – and especially if there are no consequences for me.) The consequence, of course, are felt by all, and especially by those on the margins. Sometimes too, criminals take over in these situations, and so, eg, not all so-called xenophobic attacks, in which looting of shops and houses occurs, are in fact acts of xenophobia; they are really criminal acts.

It is in this context that development must happen, and in which the Church and State have to work out relationships that benefit society and the poor, and those previously marginalised, and not just the privileged few. Anyone who has followed the news in South Africa in recent years, and now in recent months, will be aware that many cans of worms are being opened, daily it would seem, exposing corruption by senior politicians and government agencies, and in the private sector. Given the ruling party's leadership elections due at the end of this year, turmoil is not totally unexpected. But the levels of corruption and mismanagement, and the range and number of issues that need to be addressed to turn South Africa around are over-whelming.

That said, the issues around development to be faced are found throughout the world wherever those holding power enrich themselves at the expense of others and fail to deliver on their commitments.

SECTION 2

a) SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

“When we fight poverty and oppose the unfair conditions of the present, we are not just promoting human well-being; we are also furthering man’s spiritual and moral development, and hence we are benefiting the whole human race. For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men.” (Populorum Progressio 65)

The Sustainable Development Goals, a new and expanded formulation of the Millennium Development Goals, can perhaps be viewed as one of the blueprints for all societies across the globe to address urgent global issues. Societies together need to serve the common good rather than the narrow, self-serving interests enriching some at the expense of others, and depleting the earth’s resources for short term gains. It is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of these goals since however challenging it is to meet them, or even some of them, they do provide a kind of agenda for all engaged in working towards more equal societies, and helping provide what is often called, in popular parlance, certainly in South Africa, “a better life for all”.

The goals include ending poverty in all its forms everywhere; ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture; ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages; providing quality education; achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls; ensuring clean water and sanitation; achieving affordable and clean energy; promoting decent work and economic growth; facilitating industry, innovation and infrastructure; reducing inequalities; working towards sustainable cities and communities; ensuring responsible consumption and production; taking action on climate issues, on life below water and on life on land; promoting peace, justice and strong institutions; working on partnerships.

Our own country struggles adequately to address each of the goals. This must mean that the development agenda for Church and faith based organisation co-operation with government and government agencies is known. Given the challenges facing the country in so many spheres there is no room for complacency (“It’s not my problem”). Among the agents in South Africa working on addressing the inequalities and historical issues of under-development and poor service delivery are the agents of faith based organisations, their work often hampered by the lack of buy-in from the various government agencies because of other non-related agendas. Today we are perhaps more aware than ever that a Government’s commitment to agreements of one kind or another does not always and necessarily mean that such commitments are implemented, or that Church agencies can always expect collaboration on issues of common concern.

b) CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

“Jesus introduces us to [the] works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these *corporal works of mercy*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget *the spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.” (Misericordia Vultus #15)

Catholic Social Teaching engages us on a more personal level with the context in which we find ourselves, and the principles are perhaps more familiar to some people than are the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at whole societies. These principles include the sanctity of human life and the dignity of every person, solidarity with others, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor and vulnerable, the common good, community and participation.

One such context to be addressed, called for by Catholic Social Teaching, is the reality of HIV and AIDS which in some societies shows no signs of abating. “Liturgy is meaningless if there is no action for justice” says Nontando Hadebe. “In the AIDS crisis, we are given a framework, and we speak life with our faith. Social Teaching gives us the principles for reflection, the criteria for judgement and directions for action.” (Hadebe quoted in Munro 2016b)

In many instances, both in the past and in the present the Church has been in the forefront, guided by its own Catholic Social Teaching. Yet, it is also evident that the Church needs to collaborate with others in addressing the complex development issues of our own time. The agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as of Catholic Social Teaching demands that we read the signs of the times.

“Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love.” (Misericordia Vultus #10)

In our time, the integration of human rights, and of gender is important, and ultimately we have no option but solidarity. Stigma is a moral dilemma and a challenge in all religions and cultures. But Christ is the norm of our sense of morality. (Own notes, Catholic pre-conference on AIDS, 2016)

SECTION 3

PITFALLS/CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

“ The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity. These are signs that the growth of the last two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. Some of these signs are also symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion.” (Laudato Si’ #46)

The SACBC AIDS Office has identified some of the pitfalls around involvement with government in development. Many of these relate to taking on the agendas of government or of funding agencies, perhaps even of society itself, without their necessarily being what the particular church agencies wish to engage with. Our own experience is that the SACBC AIDS Office has had to find ways of working round these obstacles so that the work of the Church related in particular to AIDS care and assistance around improving services can continue in a way that is meaningful for the beneficiaries concerned, and of benefit to the wider society.

Government/Society/Funding Agency Agenda

One very practical example of this has been around the condom issue, a very difficult one to deal with in earlier years of the pandemic from the perspective of the Church’s position, or of the perceived

position of the Church. Some people simply wrote off any meaningful contribution by the Church. In 2014 Bate noted the prejudice which had long been known.

“Despite a pastoral response in health care and social outreach quite out of proportion to the size of the Church in this region, the Catholic Church is largely viewed by society as having a negative impact on the scourge. A simple Google search of AIDS and Catholic Church” reveals...an almost entirely negative set of comments focusing on only one thing: condoms....The reality is much wider and much more nuanced than this prejudice.” (Bate 2014:11)

Similarly I had also noted that

“It sometimes felt as though work around prevention [of HIV infection] was an Achilles’ heel of the Church’s response at a time when so much good was being done in the area of home-based care, and later in the field of treatment. In more recent years the {Department of Health} has been willing to work with SACBC-affiliated projects, even if not everywhere, despite the Church’s known position on condom use.” (Munro in Bate and Munro 2014: 31)

Clearly there is the danger that the Church and its agencies can be side-tracked and the work sometimes derailed when voices, both from within the Church on occasion and from outside provide an obstacle to a caring response to the issue at hand. Clear too, and this may not be denied, is that in the earlier years of the AIDS pandemic the Church’s own position, sometimes stated ambiguously, was particularly open to attack.

Funding requirements

A very big challenge we experienced very soon after the establishment of the SACBC AIDS Office had to do with how our donor funding could be disbursed. The requirements were determined in such a way that no Church based project had any hope of meeting them and being funded. A couple of senior bishops and staff of the SACBC AIDS Office tackled the donor partners concerned, one of them a US Church agency, the other a major pharmaceutical company, indicating that the SACBC would withdraw altogether from the agreement were the conditions not changed. Given that this was the first big grant to be received by the SACBC AIDS Office, the SACBC position was a gamble. But it paid off, and the conditions were largely changed to the point where we could get the programme off the ground.

In a particular situation currently, involving the Department of Health and an inter-faith agency, the SACBC AIDS Office has insisted that the conditions governing a Global Fund award be changed if we are to be a recipient of funding and a service delivery agent. We simply refused to go ahead were our concerns not addressed. Only now, more than a year late are things beginning to move towards the signing of an agreement. After that collaboration can begin in earnest.

Inadequate funding

“South Africa is increasingly expected by donor organisations and foreign governments to take control of its own AIDS problem, and be less dependent on outside resources....Donor organisations have established new priorities for themselves, geographically and thematically.” (Munro in Bate and Munro 2014:30)

Another pitfall is taking on work for which there is inadequate funding. When programmes are put in place in church projects, it is seldom the case that after a few years there really are other sources of money to replace what donors have given, or that partnerships with government agencies are sufficiently developed so that programmes can continue with local funding. The effects of donor

withdrawal, whether government or donor partner, can be devastating in communities where support had enabled a programme to provide a development response in its particular field.

Development in communities, by and large, does not usually happen without investments of funding over an extended period, and of personnel and infrastructure. Inadequate support, of whatever kind, for short periods of time is often counter-productive. The SACBC AIDS Office has very recent experience of this phenomenon. In January of this year, we were requested to initiate new projects to respond to orphans and vulnerable children in two health districts in under-resourced areas of the country. We have subsequently been informed that the funding in those districts will be discontinued from the end of September this year. Reasons have been given by the donor, but for ourselves and the beneficiaries concerned, there are more questions than answers. Collaboration is hard work and demands perseverance.

Volunteers. Those who does the work.

“If the role of religious institutions in the evolution of the epidemic is undeniable, one should not underestimate the influence HIV and AIDS exerts on religion itself. The epidemic changes faith and religious practice in local communities. There is a relation of mutual influence between HIV and AIDS and religion.” (Denis in Bate and Munro 2014: 283)

The SACBC AIDS Office was able to add value to responses of the Church at diocesan and local levels where lay Catholics, members of Religious Congregations and diocesan clergy were involved in bringing Christ’s love and consolation to sick and dying people, and support to their families and others affected by AIDS. In Church and church agencies people committed to sustainable development are guided and motivated by their religious beliefs and experiences. Community-based work and volunteering plays an important role in HIV and AIDS-related healthcare and social services to communities in South Africa. Volunteer initiatives and faith practices in community-based volunteering can be understood as a religious health asset but not as a new form of being church emerging in the time of HIV and AIDS. (cf Madondo in Bate and Munro 2014: 263)

The name “volunteers” does not accurately describe the kind of people who staff AIDS or other development projects across the country. The people who provide services are paid stipends, mostly not salaries, by government agencies or by the donor-funded church projects at which they work. Given the high unemployment rate, in excess of 25%, experienced in the country, and especially among young people (in excess of 40%), it is unrealistic to expect them to volunteer in the same way that people from more affluent backgrounds and societies are able to do. Stipends are not always forthcoming, and are often for time limited periods, leading to an instability and high turnover among (care) workers. Support for programmes is cut by government agencies when related budgets are cut by funding organisations, or when direct donor funding to church agencies is discontinued because of new funding priorities or new focus areas. This results in the ongoing challenges for church agencies, that of developing new partnerships, and of maintaining those that are strained.

Developing partnerships

“There is a need to establish a greater justice in the sharing of goods, both within national communities and on the international level. In international exchanges there is a need to go beyond relationships based on force, in order to arrive at agreements reached with the good of all in mind.” (Octogesima Adveniens #43)

Today some international organisations do recognise the potential of faith communities for the implementation of sustainable development goals to which religious communities had already made

a considerable contribution over many years. This indeed is evident in the call of UNAIDS, again at the International AIDS Conference in 2016, for partnerships with faith based organisations to achieve the 90 90 90 goals. One such positive partnership is the Memorandum of Understanding which exists between Caritas Internationalis and UNAIDS, particularly in relation to scaling up of the anti-retroviral treatment programmes for the treatment of children. This allows for the inclusion of Church and church agencies in the planning processes.

Developing partnerships between the Church and church agencies, and the government and government agencies is challenging. Securing appointments with the right people who can make the decisions is time-consuming, sometimes counter-productive, sometimes highly successful. Cascading its own decisions to other levels of government is a challenge the South Africa National Department of Health itself experiences in some local areas. This in turn impacts on church programmes locally. They sometimes struggle to get the kinds of assistance they require locally despite decisions and strategies approved by the national authorities. So while the Minister of Health may state publicly that government and the churches must cooperate, it does not always happen where it most needs to happen in the lives of local communities.

Bishop Dowling has also noted the importance of church projects needing to collaborate with the local communities themselves, especially in rural areas if projects are to succeed.

“In a rural setting such as I have described, an HIV programme is very dependent on the local community taking ownership and working in partnership with a Church-sponsored programme, with the support of the tribal councils. But even then, problems can arise because of political interference by ward councillors with political agendas, and political party opportunists.” (Dowling in Bate and Munro 2014: 66-67)

The SACBC AIDS Office has had both good and challenging experiences working with the government and with government organisations such as the National Departments of Health and of Social Development. Some of the very positive experiences of collaboration at national level have not played out at provincial and district levels. The various diocesan and FBO projects have similar experiences. Some of them have very good relationships with the officials with whom they interact, while others struggle to get the services they require from clinics and the different departments. “Testing and treatment without pastoral care will not succeed” says Bishop Dowling. “We must engage in partnerships with government, helping deliver holistic care.” (Dowling quoted in Munro 2016b).

Inter-faith collaboration and collaboration with government

“UNAIDS and PEPFAR are looking to faith communities to help deliver services to reach the 90 90 90 goals. Faith communities provide most of the health care services in some countries. But the world of faith is highly complicated, not homogeneous.” (Munro 2016a)

Developing meaningful working relationships with people of other denominations and faith groups works well in some places; in others it is more difficult. The different religions themselves need to grasp the opportunities to collaborate. Also noted is that religions did not/ and do not always take leadership roles willingly re AIDS. They have also sometimes been the source of some of the stigma people have experienced.

There is collaboration between the Catholic Church and other religions in the development agenda at grassroots level where those caring for the sick and working with orphaned and vulnerable children work hand in hand, and there are many opportunities for them to do so. Our own experience, more so in more recent years, has been that as some of our programmes have expanded in certain districts

we have been challenged and given the opportunity to work more closely with groups not directly associated with the Catholic Church. It is also true that sometimes this has been more challenging than working directly with Catholic Church projects. The difficulties have however related only in part to what one might call a “religious ethos”, and more to development issues around poor infrastructure and poorly resourced personnel. These issues are indeed similar to those we encounter when working with government agencies unused to seeing the Catholic Church as a partner.

There are opportunities for faith based organisations for work with government and government agencies, but there needs to be commitment and investment from both groups for positive results to be felt. The National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD) has played a role in trying to bring people of different faiths together around various social projects. They in turn have also experienced difficulties working with government and government agencies. There have been mixed results. The Church in South Africa does not have the kind of relationship with the government and its agencies that is found in some other African countries, where eg the Church delivers the health care services on behalf of the government.

Responding to the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children

“...those who serve the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters serve him. In one study conducted by the SACBC AIDS Office (Munro 2006b), caregivers asked why they were doing the work they did, often with little financial reward beyond a stipend, provided answers recognising this call: “I do it because I am part of the Church and that is our work...” (Munro in Bate and Munro 2014: 32)

The Orphans and Vulnerable Children programme “is always going to be the most challenging aspect of the holistic response which should characterise our church HIV programmes.” (Dowling 2014:69) Providing service in particular to orphans and vulnerable children, and the adults who care for them, has proved very challenging. Recognising Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it is all too easy to get stuck at the soup kitchen and distribution of food parcel stage, rather than being able to provide the kinds of services that help people to take next steps themselves. Some of these include assistance with the establishment of food gardens, and with keeping children healthy and in school (providing the relevant information and testing around remaining HIV- and TB- free, accessing and remaining on ARV treatment, taking prescribed TB treatment.)

Children are not always easily reached as they are dependent on those who care for them, or not in some instances. They also move with family members between places, and follow up on services is sometimes compromised.

Politicization of AIDS

At the International Conference on AIDS held in Durban in 2016 there were calls for partnerships across all spheres and in fact

“There were calls for the re-politicization of the AIDS agenda since while we know the solutions (prevention, treatment, adherence, vaccines) governments are aligned to private sector interests; services are privatised and denied to 90% of the people. The next four years, it was said, are critical if AIDS is to end by 2030, and we are not to revert to where we were in 2000 when the benefits of treatment arrested the numbers of deaths amongst people with AIDS. And at the same time governments must deliver on human rights and gender equality and do away with laws that criminalise AIDS.” (Munro 2016)

Clearly gains made by so many actors in the AIDS response over the past more than 30 years stand to be lost unless countries and governments, the churches and societies, commit to what otherwise will yet evade us.

SECTION 4

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“... some people continue to defend trickle down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.” (Evangelii Gaudium #54)

Gideon Sibanda develops the argument that people-centred leadership is essential for development to take place. The manner in which power is exercised by those who have it leads either to development or to entrenchment of poverty. He notes a paradigm shift from development understood as economic growth to a new understanding of development anchored on social and economic justice, equity in the distribution of resources and participation in decision-making processes (Sibanda 50-58).

A development agenda addressing the concerns of our world today needs to involve all actors, government, faith-based organisations and the beneficiaries of programmes. Clearly it is wider than what it has been possible to discuss here. The global economy, climate change and energy supplies, the effects of fracking and mining, human and drug trafficking, social breakdown and violence against minorities, unemployment, corruption: the list is endless.

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