Influencing change: EU-CORD’s vision for global justice

At EU-CORD we want to live out and advocate for global justice. We have a shared vision for a peaceful world where basic needs and human rights are met for all, including vulnerable and marginalised people; where the economy works for all and where development doesn’t do harm to our planet.

We do so because we believe that every human being is created in the image of God: all people have inherent dignity, equal rights and responsibilities. We also believe in a God who is restoring broken relationships, and therefore we strive for a world that is just, peaceful and reconciled.

Everyone has talents and capabilities as well as diverse needs. We believe that humankind has an opportunity to reflect God’s continuing creativity by being co-workers with Christ. All people deserve a favourable space for economic activity—in an economic system that serves the people, and not the other way round.

Underpinning this, we believe in the inherent good of the created world which is intimately interconnected with the social world of people. Right relationships includes recognising our place and responsibilities in the midst of a richly varied, abundant and balanced creation allowing humanity and the rest of creation to live and to flourish.

As EU-CORD, we take inspiration from Ecclesiastes 4:12 ‘A cord of three strands is not quickly broken’, and we therefore believe in partnership and collaboration. This applies to our programmes work as well as to our advocacy work. We are partnering with God, we are collaborating as people working for different Member organisations with partners around the world, and we work with wider civil society and other stakeholders who share our aims.

Social justice: An inclusive and peaceful world where basic needs and human rights are met

We want to see a fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities and benefits in society, leading to a more just society, where every person can take up his or her responsibility for their own life as well as for the well-being of each other.

We want to work towards equality, participation, empowerment and peace, and we strive to end marginalisation, exclusion and conflict. We consider the enjoyment of equal rights as the starting point for a just development. In a just society everybody can participate, irrespective of differences in gender, race, religion, social background, ability etc. Equal participation empowers people, makes them aware of their rights and responsibilities and enables them to exercise these. We believe that this social balance contributes to a fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities and benefits, and we believe that more equal societies are more likely to be peaceful.
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To achieve this, we must address the societal barriers that prevent some people from participating on an equal basis with others. On one hand we see that development actors, including governments, are successfully removing these barriers and obstacles in various areas of development and are able to create a conducive environment with equal chances for more and more people. On the other hand, we notice opposite forces at work, intentionally or as undesired effects, causing new barriers to emerge and leading to increased socio-economic gaps or new forms of inequality, exclusion and marginalisation.

Barriers to development are very real, yet not always visible. They can take many forms and expressions, depending on the context, ranging from negative self-images, stereotyping societal mindsets and attitudes to physical, social and institutional barriers. This leads to various degrees of denial of participation as well as to outright exclusion and discrimination, unfair and unequal treatment of diverse people who do not fit the ‘general norm.’

The complex reality of policy design and policy implementation on national, regional and global levels can produce positive results in one area, while annihilating or diminishing rights in others. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim “to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.” This requires an inclusive approach with deliberate measures to ensure that marginalised people are not left behind. It also requires policy coherence so that positive measures in one area are not offset by negative consequences in another.

The concept of ‘leave no one behind’ is present in all the international post-2015 frameworks: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda for Humanity adopted at the World Humanitarian Summit. Yet there is a long way to go. For example, a study from 2015\(^1\) has confirmed that three-quarters of persons with disabilities do not have adequate access to basic assistance, including water, shelter, food or health services in a crisis. Half of the participants also reported to have no access to disability-specific services, such as rehabilitation or assistive devices, and a lack of access to social workers or interpreters, particularly in conflict settings.

In our work on social justice we identify three key areas:

Firstly, it is important that the voices of marginalised people are strengthened so that they are able to lobby and advocate for their own causes. That implies that the self-organising capacity of the marginalised and excluded people is built and opportunities are created to let their voices be heard at local, national and international levels. To ensure that marginalised groups are supported to exercise their rights, member organisations of EU-CORD work to address the needs of marginalised people from a rights-based perspective.

Secondly, and equally important, EU-CORD as a platform, addresses other development and humanitarian actors, particularly the European Union, its institutions as well as the related multilateral agencies and government representatives to the EU. These actors are asked to take the diverse needs of marginalised and excluded people into consideration in their development, humanitarian and disaster risk reduction policies and practices. In this context, we encourage the

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EU to be a champion and to position itself and its Member States in international processes accordingly, and we lobby the EU to implement international frameworks and agendas that are already emphasising the need for the inclusion of marginalised groups.

Thirdly, we know that peace is not only based on the enforcement of human rights and a more equal distribution of wealth, but also on dynamic state and civil society institutions which are characterised by constructive relations with each other and the populations they serve. So we ask policy-makers at all levels to work for governance structures that contribute to more peaceful societies as well as for supporting and sourcing civil society organisations with the same aim. We further want to see and therefore lobby the EU to engage in and encourage dialogue and diplomatic solutions in conflict contexts around the world. This is where the EU has to prove its role as a ‘peace project’ whose external action policies, especially its economic policies, are coherent with the values it promotes. We will further encourage the EU and its Member States to support those global and local actors that are helping to build sustainable peace, and we believe that the significant untapped potential of faith actors in that context should be given better recognition.

**Economic justice: A world where the economy works for all**

We at EU-CORD are passionate about justice in all its forms. In order for both profit-making and not-for-profit activities to flourish, every government bears responsibility to create and uphold a just legal framework for recognising, protecting and encouraging the full range of human responsibilities.

For many people all over the world it is not evident that they can exercise the responsibilities they have in their personal relationships, families, economic enterprises, schools, churches, the media, non-profit organisations, politics, and government. Earning a living, starting an enterprise, exchanging freely with others, making profits can be a distant dream, just because people lack economic opportunities.

Economic injustice, in many forms, deprives human beings of the opportunity to thrive economically. The root-causes differ from context to context: Lack of tax justice, unfair trade agreements, lack of private property rights, government neglect of money laundering, monopolisation, modern slavery, unacceptable economic inequalities - they all affect the economic opportunities of millions in the world.

Government’s calling is to establish and maintain public justice for the common good by facilitating an economy that will result in wholeness and completeness. A just and sustainable economy, where people and communities flourish, both physically and spiritually. This economy is one that works for everyone and one that operates within the planet’s natural limits.

This implies that governments should work on building and encouraging institutions of private property, rule of law, free association, free exchange and a culture of trust, which serve to create a positive climate for business and entrepreneurship, promote the freedom to pursue productive work free of oppression and theft, and to promote a culture of enterprise that unleashes human potential. Constitutions, laws and policies establish the conditions for such an economy.
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At the same time, government’s responsibility is not confined to the protection of private property and the promotion of market freedom and economic growth. Market economies exist as part of complex societies under public law and increasingly within an international context. Unregulated markets and unbridled free trade however lead to unjust outcomes for society and unsustainable outcomes for the environment.

Since the market itself is part of the public domain, it properly falls to government to create a policy environment which encourages economic activity; provide the legal definition of corporations, labour organisations, and property; determine tax and tariff policies; mandate health and safety standards; guard against restrictive monopolies and other dangers to public health and well-being; and promote the sustainable management of limited natural resources.

With the continuing growth of international economic inter-dependence governments bear ever-increasing responsibility to work together to build international institutions and agreements that will strengthen justice, including economic, social and environmental justice, among all peoples and states.

EU-CORD, its Members and their international partners outside Europe will advocate with policy-makers at different levels, especially with the European Union for just economic policies that take social and environmental considerations fully into account. We will monitor and signal how these policies work out, for the better or the worse, for marginalised people. We will contribute to policy making processes with constructive ideas about how to improve economic policy and practice to the benefit of all.

Environment justice: A world where development doesn’t destroy our planet

We take a holistic approach to the different dimensions of social, economic and environment justice where, underlining the concept of natural capital, it is the environmental sphere that encompasses the social and the economic spheres. We therefore hold that a world where all ecosystems and creatures are able to flourish is also the best and only genuine foundation for social and economic justice.

While some international progress has been made on environmental issues, such as phasing out ozone-depleting substances and new protected areas and ecosystem restoration programmes around the world, this has been overwhelmed by massive losses to biodiversity, forested-areas, coral reefs, potable water, long-term soil fertility and also unstable weather and crop yields due to human-induced climate change. Growing populations with the desire for resource-consuming, wasteful lifestyles are placing massive strain on finite resources and the environmental systems that are essential for sustaining life².

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² For example, 1.2 billion people already live in water basins where human water use exceeds sustainable limits, the rising demand for food production is reliant on there being more and more land available, and before the Paris Climate Summit in 2015, the world was on track for a 3.6°C to 5.3°C long-term temperature rise – far beyond the 1.5°C limit needed for a safer future.
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To reduce the risk not only to humanity and the global economy but also to the integrity of our planet, we should remain within the safe operating space of recognised ‘planetary boundaries’. Although as a result of human activity, we have already crossed the safe threshold for four of these boundaries: climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change and altered bio-geo-chemical cycles (phosphorus and nitrogen).

This adverse impact on the environment could undo our efforts to reduce poverty. Vulnerable people around the world suffer most from the effects of a changing climate such as vicious cycles of floods and droughts, reducing people’s ability to make a living and forcing many people into poverty. Children miss out on schooling; people go hungry; families have to separate to find work; crops are often ruined.

The planet is our shared home and therefore we all have first and foremost a shared responsibility for its care. Environmental justice requires a moral framework; everyone should consider the impact of their lifestyle on the environment. Furthermore it requires joined up thinking by policymakers and practitioners alike, recognising that a sustainable world needs social and economic goals to be framed within a context of ecological flourishing.

There are signs of hope. Sustainability is taken more and more seriously by global leaders and citizens around the world. Consumers are increasingly interested in transparent supply chains and sustainable ways of production. More and more faith communities are discovering the need to act and the transformational contribution they can make.

Although far from being perfect, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been adopted by 149 Heads of State and Governments in New York in September 2015. It includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it clearly calls the international community and all stakeholders “[…] to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations”.

Equally not perfect at all but surprisingly positive were the outcomes of the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015. In the Paris Agreement, nations signed up hold “the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees”. It further states that the world needs to “achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century”. This is not the clear commitment to shift to 100% clean energy by (not after) 2050 as many civil society organisations and governments of the most affected countries would have liked. Nevertheless, it means that for the first time ever the governments of the world have accepted that the safe level of emissions is effectively zero, and that the fossil fuel era is coming to an end to be replaced with 100% clean energy.

EU-CORD aims for a dramatic shift in values and social norms that underpin and govern our societies’ behaviour. These also define the boundaries of the political possible within which governments and politicians operate. We believe that this in turn should help deliver powerful changes in policy at both national and global level – including what the law allows (in terms of legislation and how it’s enforced), and what the economy incentivises (how process, taxes and information affects patterns of spending, investment and so on).
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We will look into ways for pushing the EU towards truly sustainable consumption and production patterns. We do this by a self-critical assessment of our own lifestyles and ways of operating as organisations, and we want to challenge ourselves to be positive examples. There is a lot to learn from the people in our partner countries when it comes to a ‘circular economy’, which is a lot about re-using resources, reducing waste, producing clean energy and creating new ‘green’ jobs, and we want to see the EU being serious about it in its policies on the issue.

As EU-CORD we will advocate for ambitious action plans at EU and Member State level, so that the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 will not only be implemented but will rather be seen as minimum sustainability standards. We will also lobby the EU in its transition from the concept of “Policy Coherence for Development” towards “Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development”. We welcome this step, but we know that there is a lot to do for the EU to adjust all of their policies in a way that serve the politically rather “soft” goals of social and environment justice.

Global justice: A world we want to work for together

Global justice is a big aim, but as a network we are bringing together a wealth of expertise and ambition. Our interconnectedness reflects the inter-linkages that exist between the three areas of social, economic and environment justice. There is no single issue that relates to a specific social, economic or environment action that doesn’t have an impact positive or negative on another justice area. It is the nature of their interdependence that that makes it hard to work on one area to the exclusion of another but there can also be an inherent tension between them.

Social exclusion diminishes access to services, including education and employment, which tends to entrap people into a cycle of poverty. Social empowerment, fighting negative attitudes and damaged self-images, will lead to economic empowerment and vice versa. Providing opportunities for employment of marginalised people often has a direct effect on their social status within the community. Barriers in the form of inadequate policies and environmental obstacles, need to be removed, before sound and balanced economic growth can take place.

Equally important is the connection between social justice and environment justice. The disastrous results of environmental degradation are first and foremost hitting the poorest and most vulnerable people in our communities.

Economic justice however is only possible if social and environment justice are established. In order for both profit-making and not-for-profit activities to flourish, every government bears responsibility to create and uphold a just legal framework for recognising, protecting and encouraging the full range of human responsibilities. Government’s calling is to establish and maintain public justice for the common good by facilitating an economy that will result in wholeness and completeness. A just and sustainable economy, where people and communities flourish, both physically and spiritually. This economy is one that works for everyone and one that operates within the planet’s natural limits.

Justice affirms the dignity of the human person and seeks the common good for all members of the human family. In our time, these are universally expressed through the language of human
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rights and their legally binding frameworks. We therefore use these as a tool towards realising a more just world.

Although being based in Europe and despite bringing together European organisations in the first instance, EU-CORD is challenging itself not to be Eurocentric in its advocacy work. Countries and societies have their positive and negative aspects. Thus we want to challenge ourselves and our partners around the world to strive together for global justice.

EU-CORD will therefore work with its partners globally and take a holistic approach to addressing global justice issues which includes advocating for the space given to global civil society to have a real voice. We want to emphasise the important and positive role of Christian and other faith-based organisations supporting partners in their advocacy work.

EU-CORD is about collaboration. It is the Members of EU-CORD that take the lead on and set the priorities for collective advocacy activities as a network. With the support of the secretariat, task groups are formed to tackle the issues we believe are most relevant and where our involvement has the most added value. While we have a number of long-term advocacy priorities, we will also respond to urgent and emerging advocacy needs around human rights and justice issues as they fit with our goals and priorities and as they affect the work of several of our Members.
Justice Applications

1. Justice emanates from the very nature of God.

2. To know God is to do justice.

3. The proclamation of the Reign of God was central to the message of Jesus.

4. The proclamation of the Reign of God has concrete social and political implications.

5. Justice includes solidarity with the vulnerable and the weak.

6. Justice affirms the dignity of the human person.

7. Justice seeks the common good of all members of the human family.

8. It seeks to make right what has been broken, to reconcile relationships and to make peace.

9. Right relationships include relationships with the environment and the entire created order.

10. We discern prayerfully those actions for justice to which God directs us.

11. Advocacy addresses injustices in the public sphere and seeks to transform unjust structures which oppress the vulnerable and the weak.

12. Doing justice is an expression of hope.