

THREE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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Human Rights

The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), on the basis of hundreds of cases throughout the world, has established **strong correlations between the failure to respect economic, social, and cultural rights, and violence, including torture**. It observed that *most victims* of torture, arbitrary detentions, summary executions, enforced disappearances, and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment *come from the underprivileged sectors of society*. These treatments are imposed on poor people who protest because they have been deprived from their land or their homes because of the construction of dams for the production of electricity, apartments for middle and upper classes, or the development of large 'industrial' agricultural farms. While these economic measures of both private and public actors may be economically rational, their consequences for individuals are dramatic.

This established fact, confirmed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights in Extreme Poverty, *provides a strong argument in favour of dialogue and cooperation between economists and specialists of human rights as well as between development NGOs and human rights NGOs*. Such a dialogue would be mutually beneficial to economic development and the fulfilment of human rights. Human rights bring values and objectives to economics. The values of *duty* and *responsibility* could balance the absolute virtue that liberal economists give to the free exercise of individual preferences. It is thus a challenge to find out **how development NGOs and human rights NGOs can work in close cooperation to prevent violence against the poor**.

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Development Goals

Because of globalisation, the consumption pattern of most developed countries has become the model, consciously or not, admittedly or not, for a large part of the world population. This creates frustrations and tensions and, moreover, is unsustainable – as three worlds would be necessary if each of the human beings alive today were to enjoy the consumption level of the average Western European citizen.

The model has therefore to be changed, first of all in the developed countries. Technical progress can certainly help, and is necessary, to reduce the environmental damage. *But, in the end, it will not be sufficient and it will not address the inequities that characterise our world*. It is even likely that it will maintain them, as not everyone will have access to environmentally safe technologies. **It is the concept of development itself that has to be revisited**.

In practice, development has been equated to growth by most governments and media for the last decades and, as a result, the economy works to satisfy the desires it has created, not to meet the needs of all. The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* reminds us that growth is necessary to permit each one to satisfy his/her basic needs, but it warns that growth can be directed “to increase the wealth and power of the rich, while entrenching the needy in their poverty and adding to the woes of the oppressed”. It also sets relevant goals to development (cf. above, pp.304 & 311). **These are thus two crucial challenges for development:** 1) *Is it utopian to attempt to build collectively an alternative model of consumption?* 2) *What are the key steps towards “the development of each man and of the whole man”?*

Hunger

The number of those suffering hunger has remained basically stable over the last 40 years. From one point of view, this is an achievement as during the same period the world population has doubled. From another, it is a scandal as, according to FAO, the global agricultural production is sufficient to meet the needs of all human beings (2,600 calories per head per day).

About 75% of those who suffer hunger live in rural areas: poor peasants, peasants expelled from their land, under-paid agricultural workers, etc. *The issues are access to land, seeds and water, but also the importation of low price agricultural products.* The first set of issues depends on national policies that in most countries neglect small producers. Low price imports come either from countries that enjoy particularly good natural conditions (like New Zealand for milk or Argentina for meat) or from rich countries that have the means to subsidise exports. *The result is that the income of the great majority of peasants declines, and that they cannot feed their family and pay for shelter, education, health, and taxes.*

In future, the situation is likely to worsen: the population will have increased by three billion in 2050 and part of the land risks being used for the production of 'green-oil'. The competition for land and the necessity to increase yields could lead to the extension of industrial agriculture in very large farms and the elimination of small farmers.

Today in Europe, NGOs like CFSI sensitise public opinion to the causes of hunger and lobby governments to stop subsidised exports; others like Food First International Action Network (FIAN) focus on the implementation of the right to food and denounce cases of violation. In India, Brazil, Columbia and other countries grassroots associations rally to defend peasants deprived from their land. *In the future, closer cooperation will have to be developed between the associations of the North and South that militate for small farming. How? This is a tremendous challenge.*