

Environmental protection and development

The protection of the environment, particularly in the face of climate change, is increasingly emerging as a major concern in general, and in particular in its interaction with human rights. It is both essential, because the survival of the planet and of humanity is at stake, and urgent, because time is running out and the situation is irreversible and out of control. The IPCC reports and the numerous sessions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are a sign of concerted awareness and commitment. However, the mixed results of the last Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP) show, to say the least, that there are hidden brakes behind agreements that were painfully reached and even more painfully implemented. Faced with the challenges of environmental protection, in 2012, the Human Rights Council established the mandate of the Independent Expert on human rights and the environment (resolution 19/10).

Furthermore, the right to development was the subject of a Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 4 December 1986: « The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized, and to benefit from such development » (art. 1). It emphasizes that economic growth is not an end in itself: development is a comprehensive process aimed at improving « the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and the equitable sharing » of the resulting benefits.

As Pope Francis showed in his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015) « everything is linked » and the future of the planet and of humanity is in solidarity with our life choices, towards which he advocates sobriety. Following the reflection of his predecessor Benedict XVI on the economic and financial crisis, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), he warns against the effects of consumerism and what could be called liberal « maximized development ». From this perspective, it seems that environmental protection should moderate the right to development.

Conversely, companies, especially multinationals, boast of their contribution to development and consequently to human rights. However, their violation of these same rights, particularly in environmental matters, is so proven that the Human Rights Council, in 2011, had to adopt guiding principles on business and human rights. Operational Principle 18 states, for example: « In assessing human rights risks, companies should identify and evaluate all actual or potential adverse impacts on human rights in which they may have a bearing either through their own activities or as a result of their commercial relationships. » Many States and companies justify the development of large-scale exploitation projects in the name of the right to development, arguing that when there is economic growth, there is a better standard of living and thus a better enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights for local populations. However, projects are often developed in an unsustainable manner and without consultation with affected communities. These projects often have significant impacts on the environment and on many civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, meeting in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992, produced the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, stressing the solidarity between environment and development: « To achieve sustainable development, environmental protection must be an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation » (principle 4). Nearly twenty years later, it seems that their concerns need to be given greater consideration.

So the question can be asked like this: How can we make development actors understand that development and environmental protection are interdependent and inseparable?

The following avenues could be explored:

1. Has the Catholic Church, also committed to the protection of the environment and integral human development, shown an awareness of the existential tension between the rights proclaimed as solidarity? Is it in a position to shed light on this subject?
2. How to avoid the reproaches of naivety and cynicism when, on the one hand, it is proclaimed that neither the environment should be sacrificed to development nor development to the environment and that supporting one presupposes supporting the other and when, on the other hand, so many concrete examples seem to be contrary.
3. Does the Dominican tradition have something specific to bring to this debate?
4. Environmental threats have led to the encouragement of a more sober lifestyle (Laudato Si). The relevance of this invitation seems eloquent for developed countries. Less perhaps for developing countries: how can we sacrifice or at least limit an already insufficient development? So how can we think of environmental equality in a situation of inequality in development?
5. What are the levers to be activated so that the leading role of companies in development does not harm the environment?