

Africa Interfaith Initiative on SDGs

AN OPEN LETTER

Accelerated Action towards Agenda 2030: A call to “Build Back Better’ with African Faith Actors

To

Africa Heads of Governments

Faith Actors, and

All People of Goodwill.

Excellences, distinguished men and women,

Five years have passed since the global community through the United Nations adopted 2030 Agenda 2030 for sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents the closest the global community has come to a consensus to end extreme poverty, combat inequality and redress the causes of unmitigated negative change in climate.

African Faith Leaders engaged the process leading to the Sustainable Development Goals and endorsed the outcome as a blueprint to a fairer, more equitable world where men, women, boys and girls, regardless of creed or origin can experience life free from the adversities of deeply running poverty, injustice, and threats to the environment.

We write to you at a critical moment in the global effort to implement and achieve Sustainable Development Goals. We have not lost faith in this possibility and commitment even in the current challenging crisis brought upon us by the global spread of the Corona virus. By the grace of God, we restate our commitment to help achieve the outcomes of sustainable development for our communities across our region and the world.

As faith leaders from the communities perhaps most affected by the ills of deprivation and calamity, we write to recognize and encourage gallant efforts made at local, national and global levels, while noting that we are far behind in our achievements, and time is short.

We write to urge a rejuvenated purpose, encourage greater responsibility, shared ownership of processes and outcomes and joined up action in the efforts to achieve the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Growing Resilience and Emerging Stronger from the COVID-19 Epidemic

COVID-19 has swung a wrecking ball for economies and communities with devastating impacts on millions of men and women, families, and children. Forecasts by the United Nations, the World Bank and others warn that the COVID-19 pandemic will have profound and negative impacts on efforts, and gains made, on Sustainable Development Goals. It is important that governments and the global community identify and forestall the threats posed by the epidemic.

COVID-19 presents an opportunity to invest in SDGs: At the risk of running counter to the predominant view however, we suggest that the crisis caused by COVID-19 is a clear reminder of the importance of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, its mechanisms and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. We are persuaded that beyond the expectations of its architects and promoters, the 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals, present a critical rallying mechanism in the global and local response to the medium- and longer-term impacts of this crisis. It is likely that countries that embraced the SDGs and made the policy and investments needed to achieve them are better placed to be resilient and rebound from the crisis. We urge therefore that far from presenting us with an unsurmountable challenge, the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to review critical pathways to achieve the targets for sustainable development.

Arresting State Decline: Unfortunately, historical neglect and failure to invest in the public and social sectors has meant that we are all the worse for our exposure to COVID-19. Despite the considerable economic progress of the past decades, and even given the individual government commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, Africa and much of the world, has neglected to invest in critical sectors of the social and public service. The core of public and social capital stock does not meet the requirements of a modern society, economy and effective state. As a result, many governments and societies have found that they lack the institutional capacity and scope to ramp up appropriate measures in the wake of a raging public health epidemic.

Investing in a thriving public and social economy: Given the multiple crises wrought by COVID-19, and in the face of other systemic challenges such as a rapidly changing demographic base and the climate emergency, we urge that African states and the global community urgently reconsider long held biases against increasing state capacity to invest in, and intervene, as a first resort for the wellbeing of its citizens. Accordingly, we urge states to embrace and enable a thriving public and social economy. States should, without equivocation, take stock of the deficits in public and private investment required to update and shore up public and social capital. Of critical importance are investments in core human capital - child care, family security, public and primary health care, education, and appropriate financial intermediation.

Sustainable Agriculture and access to affordable food: It is also important that states and governments pay increased emphasis and investment in sustainable agriculture, especially for women and young people in rural African communities. Such investments must provide redress for the critical shortage of farm inputs such as fertilizers, healthy seeds and veterinary medicines as well as the dearth of critical knowledge, technologies and skills. This renewed emphasis must also redress the obstacles placed on the path to affordable and quality food and farm produce for the majority of Africa's non-food producers.

A COVID-19 Cure or Vaccine Must be a global public good: Ultimately, a cure or effective vaccine is necessary for a comprehensive denting and recovery from COVID-19 and its threats for economies and society. We note and commend the unprecedented speed and efficaciousness with which governments and private drug manufacturer organizations have expediated efforts to find a cure or vaccine for COVID-19. We are concerned, however, that despite the unprecedented public investment and subsidies availed to the private organizations, and given the truly global and community scale of the epidemic, a right to private privilege by patent holders, and the imperative for profit, may deny millions of people in Africa access to such cure and vaccine once they are found.

We therefore urge for guarantees that no life shall be lost because of the profit motif of the drug manufacturing industry. Specifically, we urge the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the global community to assert the right to access to medication and care for illness, disease or conditions for which a cure or effective management is available. To achieve this, we urge, among others, reform of discriminatory and unjust patenting and manufacturing regimes, mandate universal access and declare such cures and vaccines a global public good.

Greater Sharing/Ownership and Strategic Partnering: It is a commonly held truism that faith actors are second only to the state in the provision of critical services in health, education, affordable financial intermediation and support for sustainable livelihoods. Arguably, faith actors are the foremost agencies and institutions in the provision of human services including support for family and vulnerable children. This is so despite the absence of a deliberate and proactive policy and institutional regime to support asset development and operational capital of institutions in the social sectors.

Responding to COVID-19 and meeting the sustainable development goals are responsibilities and challenges we all share, not just for governments, but also faith actors, businesses and the broader independent social sector. We see an urgent need to explore more ways of working together and joining up efforts for rapid reach. To build back better we urge that states take a proactive policy stance in favour of growing the institutional and asset infrastructures of faith actors and others in the social economy.

Our Commitment

A call to lead: Sustainable development Goals go to the heart of who we are, and what we aspire for our children (both boys and girls), faithful (both men and women), our communities, nations and the planet. In the same breath, while we are yet to comprehend the full impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, we can see it's disrupting power and potential for devastation and the dimming of life as promised in our Sacred texts.

We recognize that the overriding challenge of sustainable development five years on is to translate the grand ambition and promise of the goals, into the concrete lived out realities of our people. With a decade out, it is time to mass leadership on a global scale and at national and local levels and across all sectors of society. We commit to and offer to lead in this effort.

Faith Acts: African faith actors and institutions remain committed to deploy their assets and infrastructure for purposes of achieving sustainable development. We also continue to offer hope and solace, especially in times of difficulty such as these, through concrete actions, including humanitarian support to the most vulnerable and through seeking God's help through prayers, theological reflections, encouraging messages of hope, listening to voices of children and young people. In addition, we are committed to building knowledge and capacity of faith actors on the Agenda 2030, especially children and youths. We will engage and empower children and young people by - teaching them about SDGs; listening to and documenting their perspectives, and mainstreaming their issues and participation in various SDG processes.

Greater synergy and coherence in the efforts to deliver to sustainable development: To be effective however, and given the limited time available to 2030, seeing also that there may be other crises in the horizon relating to climate, public health and the economy, and further seeing as there are not sufficient resources to go round, we urge governments and other actors to seek greater synergy and coherence in the efforts to deliver to the sustainable development. Specifically, we urge the establishment of mechanisms to eliminate systemic and large gaps in a joined-up delivery for the goals. We urge that there be a coming together in the making of plans, assessment of challenges, setting out of priorities and execution of actions.

Picking up speed: We recognize that this is a single moment in a generation and urge all to embrace a whole of society, whole of economy and whole of government view to achieving sustainable development. As the Africa Faith Leaders Initiative (AFLI) on SDGs, we are committed to working together with all people of goodwill to build back better. Let us realize and seize the uniqueness of the moment, let us work to acquire and accelerate the necessary momentum

We believe; therefore, we act!

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Endorsed by:

1. ACT Alliance
2. All Africa Council of Churches (AACC)
3. Arigatou International – End Child Poverty/Global Network of Religions for Children
4. Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution (CSCR)
5. Fellowship of Christian Councils & Churches in the Great Lakes & the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA)
6. Hekima Institute for Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR)
7. International Movement for Catholic Students (IMCS) Africa
8. International Young Catholic Students (IYCS) Africa
9. Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE)
10. Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)
11. Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA)
12. Organization of Africa Instituted Churches (OAIC)

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