

## The visit of Pope Benedict XVI and international development

### A Progressio briefing

In preparation for the state visit of Pope Benedict XVI, Progressio, a British development agency with Catholic roots, has put together this briefing to highlight some key issues on his agenda. This is a rare and timely opportunity to go beyond day to day issues and reflect on values and principles in the tradition of the social teaching of the church. Global poverty will be a key issue, particularly in reference to the Millennium Development Goals. Progressio hopes that the Pope will take this opportunity to reinforce actions in support of the vulnerable of our world, and challenge behaviour or policy which is self-interested and harmful to the common good.

**“Achieving the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by the year 2015 is one of the most important tasks in today’s world ... such an objective is indissolubly linked to world peace and security”**

Pope Benedict XVI

### Global Interdependence

**Global interdependence can be used for the global common good. Decisions taken in the UK affect poor people thousands of miles away – for good or ill. Every policy decision should be tested against the question: “what will this do for – or to – the poorest people in our shared world”.**

Powerful nations have a moral responsibility to prioritise the poor and vulnerable, and to act with fairness and justice in their decision making. Decisions made in areas such as trade, on finance, in the financial markets, on food and agriculture policy and on the environment have far reaching consequences on poor people for which we are responsible.

**“The market is not, and must not become, the place where the strong subdue the weak...in commercial relationships the principle of ... fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity”**

Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 2009, paragraph 36

The environment is a shared resource that underpins human existence. Unsustainable patterns of global production and consumption are having a devastating affect on many poor and marginalised communities. Environmental sustainability must be placed as a central consideration in tackling global poverty. Failure to make a united global commitment to address environmental sustainability will undermine and reverse progress made so far.

**“The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”**

Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 2009, paragraph 48

### Millennium Development Goals

**Addressing the MDGs is an urgent moral responsibility for the UK and other countries with the ability to make a difference. The coalition government is to be congratulated for maintaining commitments to overseas aid, including the pledge to meet and sustain 0.7% of GNI on aid by 2013.**

The MDGs are the most significant effort ever made by the international community to fight global poverty. Progress has been made, demonstrating what can be achieved when commitment is there. However progress has now stalled. Failure by the global community to meet the MDGs by the target date of 2015 would demonstrate a scandalous failure of compassion and political will.

**“In the search for solution to the current economic crisis, development aid for poor countries must be considered a valid means of creating wealth for all.”**

Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, paragraph 60

The EU position ahead of the MDG summit appears weak with only 0.42% of GNI committed to aid. Currently the EU will almost certainly miss its intermediate target of 0.56% of GNI in 2010.

**“We mustn’t balance the books on the backs of the world’s poorest and break this vital promise – doing so will mean more people will die from famine or lack of clean water. We have a moral duty to continue this work despite our own financial problems.”**

Secretary of State for DFID Andrew Mitchell MP

**“More economically developed nations should do all they can to allocate larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid, thus respecting the obligations that the international community has undertaken in this regard”**

Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 2009, paragraph 60

Immediately following the Papal visit, the MDG summit in New York has the opportunity to reinvigorate concerted global action to end poverty. The UK government must play its part, and follow through on its early statements of intent to meet its responsibilities to tackle global poverty.

The key role of the environment in development needs to be embedded in the MDG review and summit, since well managed natural resources are essential for agriculture, health, and much more. Recognising and embedding the fundamental principle of gender equality across all MDGs is also essential. Investment in opportunities for women and girls has strong multiplier effects for all MDGs and is critical in achieving these goals.

The MDG review summit must not be a moment for warm words, smoke and mirrors. It must lead to a genuine recommitment, with verifiable commitments and plans. Member states must make concrete commitments which are action oriented and have monitoring mechanisms in place.

## **Climate Change**

**The failure to reach agreement on a fair, ambitious, and binding climate change deal at COP15 in Copenhagen is a serious and dangerous setback, and world leaders have a responsibility to act now and act fast to agree emissions cuts and financing and support for by poorer countries.**

There is a clear responsibility on richer countries to help poorer countries to adapt their economies for a low carbon and sustainable future. Richer countries have higher levels of carbon emissions and a moral obligation to bear the bigger load in mitigation and adaptation funding.

**“The natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a ‘grammar’ which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation.”**

Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, paragraph 48

The voices of the poor and those who are most vulnerable to climate variations are rarely heard in the global debates. Listening to these voices, and responding with generosity of spirit, is essential to a living out of the global common good.

## **Increasing poor people’s participation in decision making**

**Whether at local, national or international levels, the voices of those who are poor and marginalised should be able to inform and influence the political process and the choices made.**

**“Aid programmes must increasingly acquire the characteristics of participation and completion from the grass roots.”**

Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, paragraph 58

At local and national level, good governance and the participation of those who are poor and excluded are central to the functioning of an effective state. Therefore working with civil society to ensure the views of poor and marginalised people are represented in decision-making processes is essential. Women in particular are systematically under-represented in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives at all levels. Increasing women’s representation in decision-making bodies is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that key development priorities are met for societies as a whole. International aid and development programmes must support mechanisms where participation and accountability are meaningful and effective

This principle of accountability and participation also applies at an international level. Important fora such as the G8 and G20 are self-selecting, and the poorest countries have no right to attend unless specially invited. At the same time, inclusive structures such as the United Nations are at risk of marginalisation. It is essential that poorer nations take up a stronger and more effective voice in global decision-making.

Although strategies vary, as a society we agree that we cannot accept the existence of poverty, or ongoing damage to the natural environment, and must work to address it. We all seek a world where each person is free from poverty, where the voices of the poorest are heard and acted upon, and where our natural environment is managed responsibly and sustainably, in the interests of all.

[www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

**Progressio is an international charity that enables poor communities to solve their own problems through support from skilled workers. And we lobby decision-makers to change policies that keep people poor. We were formerly the Catholic Institute for International Relations.**

**Progressio, Unit 3, 190a New North Road, London, N1 7BJ. Tel 020 7354 0883. Fax 020 7359 0017  
Registered in the UK as a charity (no. 294329) and a company (no. 2002500)**