

# CRS' JUSTICE LENS

## Introduction

Catholic Relief Services' mission statement calls the Agency to promote the alleviation of human suffering, advance full human development, and foster charity and justice in the world. In an attempt to more fully live out the mandate of our mission statement, the Agency is attempting to build a culture of justice and peace through the promotion of just and right relationships. The adoption of a Justice Lens will help CRS to embrace new approaches to these goals and enable the agency to more effectively fulfill its mission to promote justice. As a faith-based organization, Catholic Relief Services accepts this call to promote a more just world.

## What is Justice?

Justice is the establishment and maintenance of **right relationships** between all members of the human family. Justice also includes the right ordering of relationships between individuals and God, and among persons, groups, communities, institutions, nations/states, and the wider human community. As a faith-based organization, Catholic Relief Services' understanding and experience of justice has a biblical basis and is also supported by a long tradition of Catholic Church teachings.

## 1. Biblical Understanding Of Justice

The biblical understanding of justice as right relationships finds its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, where God is described as a God of justice – a God who loves justice and delights in it. The Hebrew Prophets announced God's special love for the poor and vulnerable and called God's peoples to a covenant of love and justice. The Prophet Micah calls out to God's people to "...to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah). Central to the biblical presentation of justice is that the justness of a community is measured by its treatment of the powerless in society – most often described as the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger.

Justice is also found in the New Testament in the life and words of Jesus Christ. Numerous times Jesus himself identified with the poor, the hungry, and the stranger, and taught his disciples that to be truly united with God they should do the same. Jesus calls out to God's people to reach out and to build relationships of love and justice.

It is important to realize that the scriptural foundation of justice has many nuances. Overall it suggests a sense of what is right or of what should happen. Rather than providing an absolute definition of what is right or wrong, the biblical understanding of justice focuses on the rightness of one's relationship with God and with society.

## 2. Catholic Social Teaching Understanding of Justice

The Catholic Church's understanding of justice is based on the biblical tradition of justice. Over time, the Catholic Church developed a large body of work known as Catholic Social Teaching, which attempts to apply the biblical understanding of justice as right relationships to modern society. Catholic Social Teaching tries to answer questions such as these: "If justice is about one being in a right relationship, what

would that look like in a community setting or between groups of people – or between a government and its people?” And although answers are rarely given, one way that Catholic Social Teaching attempts to help us better understand the full scope and meaning of justice by developing three broad categories for the analysis of justice. These categories help us to think about justice and state the minimum levels of mutual care and respect that all persons owe to each other in an imperfect world. They are commutative justice, distributive justice, and social justice.

### *Commutative Justice*

Commutative justice calls for fundamental fairness in all agreements and exchanges between individuals or private social groups. It demands respect for the equal dignity of all persons in economic transaction, contracts or promises. It also defines the rights and responsibilities in terms of contracts between individuals.

Based on the intrinsic human dignity of each individual, commutative justice calls for fundamental fairness in all agreements and exchanges between individuals or private groups. Commutative justice also governs other aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as wage agreements or property transactions, by a standard of strict equality.

### *Distributive justice*

Often there are goods and values that are necessary for the realization of full human dignity that cannot be provided by private interaction and contracts. They are therefore not governed by commutative justice. For example, by having access to and participating in the public life of society individuals can realize their rights to political self-determination, participation in the economic productivity of a society, and cultural and religious heritage. Culture and political and economic systems are not created privately. Rather, these are “public goods”, and individuals are enabled or permitted to share in these goods -- which are also essential for full human dignity-- by political, economic and cultural structures in society.

Distributive justice ensures that these rights to public goods are guaranteed for all. This requires that the allocation of income, wealth and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material needs are unmet. “The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one’s family belongs to everyone” (Second Vatican Council).

Distributive justice demands “...equality of opportunity for entry into the social, economic, cultural and political relationships which constitute the common good” (Hollenbach, 149). The allocation of income, wealth and power in society meets the economic, political, social, and cultural needs of all persons. Fair allocation must be present at all levels and between various actors -- individuals, groups, communities, institutions, nations/states, and the wider human community.

Catholic Social Teaching understands there to be a minimum level of basic rights and material resources that are an absolute necessity for human life in a just society. Anything below this level is unacceptable in terms of human dignity, and progressing beyond this minimum level is a responsibility that each person owes to one another.

It is important to note here that it is difficult to determine what is “fair” beyond the minimum level of basic need. What is fair varies from context to context and should be determined by participation in defining the common good in a each given situation.

Distributive justice also at times requires that the rights of some be limited in favor of those who are less privileged. The rights and the needs of the poor and minorities to reach minimum levels of economic and political activity may, at times, require the limitation of the rights of the wealthy and of majorities of a society for a time.

Distributive justice also includes the rights and responsibilities of individuals to participate in the systems and structures of society that permit or enable access to public goods. Access to public goods and participation in social, political, economic and cultural systems and structures are rights in and of themselves based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Issues like taxation, social welfare and social policy on health, education, housing, etc. are covered by this concept. A number of actors within society bear responsibility for distributive justice. One examples includes a state's responsibility to provide education for all.

### **Social justice**

Social justice is also concerned with public life but is concerned more with the structures of society as principal sources of justice and injustice. Justice requires the transformation of systems and structures which do not protect the rights of all or which do not ensure full participation in social, economic, political and cultural life.

These systems and structures include formal institutions such as international organizations, international and national financial institutions, governments, and religious institutions. They also include those systems and structures which are less formal, such as social stratification, traditional community councils, and cultural traditions and beliefs. Injustices in these structures limit access to resources and power based on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way. It stresses the duty of all who are able to help create the goods, services, and other nonmaterial or spiritual values necessary for the welfare of the whole community. *When institutions and structures block people's active participation in society, social justice demands their transformation.*

## **3. Working Definition of Justice for CRS and the Justice Lens**

Catholic Relief Services takes its definition of justice from the above Hebrew and New Testament scripture, as well as Catholic Social Teaching. Justice is about the establishment and promotion of right relationships between all members of the human family, as well as the transformation of society's unjust structures and institutions. Justice includes the fair balancing of one's rights and responsibilities in the relationships in which one participates. It also asks us to analyze situations using the

three levels of justice - commutative, distributive, and social justice, and has been expanded to include the use of CRS' tool - the Justice Lens.

➔ Justice as the focus for CRS' work requires an in-depth understanding of the wide variety of relationships that can exist at various levels. The questioning of determining if and to what degree these relationships are **right relationships** is a difficult one and requires a great deal of sensitivity. One place to begin would be to evaluate them in light of the Catholic Social Teaching, which helps define the content of justice and how it is promoted. These teachings include: dignity and equality of the human person, rights and responsibilities, social nature, the common good, solidarity, the option for the poor, subsidiary, and stewardship.

Also, another aspect in determining right relationships might be a fair balance between the fulfillment of one's rights and one's responsibilities. **Rights and responsibilities** are two of the central elements of justice. Catholic Social Teaching sets a minimum level of fulfillment of basic rights required for a just society and anything below this level goes against human dignity.

➔ In addition to the teachings mentioned above, the Church's teaching on **solidarity** is integral for CRS' understanding of justice. Because justice goes beyond the claim on rights and includes the fulfillment of responsibilities, *solidarity* -- the sense of duty to others within the human community -- is an important pre-condition to CRS' work of justice. This profound commitment to others requires that we reflect on relationships within society, including the structures and systems of which we are a part or from which we benefit. Living in solidarity with others requires that we pursue justice and stand on the side of those who do not share fairly in the rewards of these systems and structures or who are oppressed by them. Genuine solidarity requires us to work to remove barriers to participation and inclusion and to create instead an environment in which right relationships flourish.

➔ This profound commitment to others requires that we reflect on the relationship between structures and persons – including structures by which we benefit or are a part – and elect to stand on the side of those who do not share equally in its rewards or who are oppressed by those same structures. Living in solidarity with others obliges us to work to remove barriers to participation and inclusion, and establish in their place an environment where right relationships flourish. By virtue of our membership in the human family, we have a responsibility to work alongside our brothers and sisters so that all may share equally in life's goodness and participate in the institutions that shape our world.

➔ The concept of **peace** is directly related to the promotion of justice and is also extremely important in the context of CRS' work. True peace is not simply the absence of war or violence. Rather, it is the fruit of just and right relationships. It can be achieved only through the establishment of right relationships among members of the human family and through the transformation of society and unjust structures. "[A] world marked by true respect for the life, dignity, and rights of the human person will be a world at peace" (*Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 1994). As CRS strives towards its goal of integrating justice into its work, the ultimate goal of peace will also someday be achieved.

➔ In response to the call to work toward justice through the promotion of right relationships, CRS has adopted a "**Justice Lens**" through which it views and examines all of its work and relationships. The idea behind the Agency adopting a Justice Lens is to have a **tool** to help view the situations and events around it differently – with a new eye and a new focus on justice to help CRS analyze the world around it. The Justice Lens helps CRS set priorities, sharpen responses to injustice, and apply consistent values internally and externally in all of its decisions.

It is important to realize that the Justice Lens does not provide staff with easy answers though. Instead, it helps frame the analysis of the situation so that the most informed decision possible can be made. With the Justice Lens, the Agency will **examine, plan** and **implement** all of its work in a new and thoughtful way, focusing on the underlying justice issues behind the complex situations. Many times people look for easy answers to difficult situations; Unfortunately, the Justice Lens will not provide many answers such as these. Rather than offering an easy answer to diverse and complex issues, the Justice Lens is instead a **tool** to raise questions and stimulate thinking so that the Agency continues to place justice at the forefront of its responses and actions.

➔ There are also **other resources and tools for justice analysis** that are companions to the Justice Lens Document to assist staff with the integration of justice into their daily work. These resources include the following:

- **Applying the Justice Lens to Programming**

This document is a valuable resource that provides examples and frameworks from CRS and other agencies of promoting justice in the various areas of CRS' work.

- **CRS Summary of Catholic Social Teaching**

A resource paper that provides a very brief overview of Catholic Social Teaching and focuses on eight of the principles that most directly effects the work of the Agency.

- **The Framework for Analyzing Relationships (the Matrix)**

The Framework is an attempt to capture the many levels and combinations of relationships which are important in analyzing and addressing the root causes of injustices.

All of these elements used together are designed to facilitate coherent and consistent understanding of justice throughout the Agency, as well as provide guidance in the examination, analysis, and implementation of our responses to the contexts in which we work. All are available from the Justice Strategy Team.

## **Why is justice a central focus for CRS?**

In recent years, there have been significant changes in Catholic Relief Services' operating environment which have caused the Agency to re-examine the world in which we work and serve. At the same time, there has been a reaffirmation of the Agency's foundation in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), both of which have compelled CRS to adopt the Justice Lens through which to examine, plan, and implement all of its work.

As a response to the need to rebuild war-torn Europe in the aftermath of World War II, CRS emerged in 1943 principally as an emergency relief organization. Its strong commitment to the alleviation of human suffering has continued for more than 50 years.

During the 1970s and 1980s, CRS broadened the application of its mission to address the challenge of worldwide poverty. This was done in a more sustained way through

an expansion of its support for self-help projects. Throughout this period, agency programming decisions were viewed through a relief and development "lens". High value was placed not only on addressing the manifestations of poverty through relief activities but on eliminating the immediate causes of poverty through development programs. In comparison, the promotion of justice -- in terms of systematic reform of social systems -- received relatively little attention within the organization although some staff had begun to see the need for such a focus.

As part of CRS' strategic planning process in 1996, CRS reassessed its program focus in view of the changes in the world situation during the past decade. The findings pointed to increased violence within states and between ethnic or national groups. Both had resulted in significant loss of life and undermined or destroyed development efforts in many places around the globe, including numerous countries where CRS has had a long presence. Structural or systemic inequalities in more peaceful societies were also noted. Such inequalities created a level of social, political or cultural strife and which diminished human dignity and undermined right relationships in those societies.

Many staff again noted the need to focus on structural change and felt that our response needed to shift -- that it needed to begin to focus on the systemic, structural and personal. It was not enough to engage in a commendable service that did not challenge massive social structures that continued to oppress and impoverish people. Instead, CRS was challenged to deal with social, economic, cultural, and political structures as well.

Thus, the Justice Strategy was approved as part of the Strategic Plan and the Justice Lens was developed as a tool to help frame the Agency's thinking and analysis on issues of justice.

## What does the Justice Lens mean for CRS today?

There are many manifestations of the Justice Lens throughout the Agency today, and the future possibilities for implementation of the Justice Lens are limitless. CRS is strongly committed to integrating justice into the work and culture of the Agency, and is openly encouraging staff to think creatively and dream of a more just world, and a more just work place. These are but a few examples of how the Justice Lens is beginning to be integrated into life of the Agency today.

➔ Numerous staff and directors have started to apply the Justice Lens to the work in their own departments and programs, and are starting to experiment with what it means to promote justice through their work.

➔ The commitment to justice has also lead the Agency to a re-examination of CRS' relationships to domestic constituencies in the United States. This is encouraging a new look at how to promote solidarity with others in the wider human community, and the role of our own country and citizenry in the allocation of income, resources, and power among peoples and nations.

➔ CRS also recognizes that genuine pursuit of justice in its work in the world requires the same pursuit of justice for us as individuals and as an organization internally. As a result, it will be essential to apply the Justice Lens to our own internal systems and structures as we work toward the promotion of a just work place.

➔ In the past, CRS has mainly focused its attention on issues distributive justice. We are now beginning to focus more on issues of social justice and addressing the systemic causes of injustice. We are gaining capacity in areas such as advocacy and public

policy, and continuing to examine ways in which the Agency can be an agent of change in such a large and daunting task. As the author Donald Dorr stated:

“Defining justice as right relationships naturally encompasses the idea of personal relationships and transactions as well as the importance of rights and responsibilities within those relationships. There is another, more structural side to justice that is important to remember also. Justice also focuses primarily on economic, social, and political structures. Justice manifests itself in the ways in which societies have patterned themselves in institutions power arrangements, systems of finance and marketing, relationships, between classes, ownership of goods and technology, and the distribution of costs and benefits among groups of persons. Justice is about those arrangements, patterns, systems, and “the ways we do things here.” (Dorr, FaithJustice,165)

➔ As a final example of what the Justice Lens might mean for CRS, for many staff throughout the CRS world, there is the hope that the understanding of justice as right relationships will affect staffs’ attitudes and feelings towards each other, towards the Agency, and towards the work that they do and the commitment that they have towards promoting justice and peace in the world.

As stated above, the teachings found within Catholic Social Teaching mandate the Agency to work toward the establishment of justice and peace, and also provide basic values and principles that assist in this work. The Agency also recognizes that many staff, partners, and program participants represent numerous faith traditions and beliefs, and in order to develop a common language in this pursuit of justice, the Agency must ensure that CRS values and principles incorporate this diversity to the greatest extent possible without compromising the principles outlined in Catholic Social Teaching.

One Indian Bishop recently stated, “We as Christians, Hindus .... and peoples of different faiths, each on our own respective spiritual paths, can work together to give increased hope to humanity. Working together with respect and love for one another will render us more credible as a clear sign of hope for the human family.” Simply stated, a culture of justice and peace is a direct consequence of the degree to which we as a society live in harmony with our own basic values and principles, regardless of our cultural or religious backgrounds. Thus, to the degree to which CRS as an Agency can promote justice and peace through our programs will be a consequence of our ability to find practical and consistent expressions of these same principles.