



CARITAS CELEBRATES WOMEN

A report on the month-long *Caritas Celebrates Women* initiative held in March 2022

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The photographs in this report were part of an exhibition for the first event in this series, which was held as both an in person event and an online webinar. The exhibition highlighted examples from around the Confederation of how women act as builders of dialogue, hope, solidarity and future. These images evidence the resilience, dynamic leadership and vital contributions women of all ages and backgrounds make to society.

Visit the *Caritas Celebrates Women* webpage here: <https://www.caritas.org/caritaswomen/>

All webinars are available to watch via the Caritas Internationalis YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/IAmCaritas>

Texts of speeches and presentations are available on Baobab, the Caritas Internationalis intranet platform (for registered persons only): <https://community.caritas.org/knowledgebase/#category/21>

I. Introduction

Caritas Celebrates Women was a month-long initiative held during March 2022 to raise the visibility and voices of women across the Confederation, the Church and society. The purpose of the initiative was to raise awareness about the key role which women play in building peaceful, stable and resilient societies, despite the multiple vulnerabilities which they simultaneously experience, and to build dialogue on the promotion of equal opportunities for women to participate in leadership and decision-making at all levels.

A series of four webinars was held on the role of women as “builders” of a new humanity. Testimonies were given from women and men of the Caritas Confederation, the Church and civil society, and through witness, the series aimed to animate and mobilise all people to work towards a culture of equality, encounter and renewal, in which the experiences, leadership and participation of women are valued and promoted.



Volunteers working to provide meals for schoolchildren during the Zimbabwe food crisis. (29 July 2016. © Isabel Corthier/Caritas)

The webinars were titled:

1. *Church and Society: Women as builders of dialogue – in collaboration with the British Embassy to the Holy See (An online and in-person event)*
2. *Women as builders of hope: Welcoming and accompanying migrants*
3. *Women as builders of solidarity: Caring for the poor and for our common home*
4. *Women as builders of future: Walking together for Equality, Encounter and Renewal*

Additionally, during each week of the initiative, short videos were published on YouTube and other Caritas social media channels of members of the Caritas Women’s Leadership, Equality and Participation (LEP) Committee speaking on the meaning of women’s leadership, and the contributions which women make to Caritas’s mission.

The Caritas women's month was an expression of the Confederation's commitment to the promotion of women's leadership in order that all people can work in communion and solidarity for the integral development of humanity, especially the poor, marginalised and vulnerable. The initiative was promoted at the global level by the CI General Secretariat in cooperation with the Committee for Women's LEP Committee, and involved all seven regions.

Structure of the Report

The report will give an overview of the webinar series with summaries of the interventions, key messages and conclusions. This is followed by an analysis of the key themes and a final conclusion including key recommendations for future actions and next steps to animate and mobilise the Confederation, the Church and society in the promotion of women's leadership.

Background

In March 2021, Caritas Internationalis hosted a series of four webinars on the theme Women and COVID-19 - A reflection on the role of women in the (post) COVID-19 world. The webinars explored the impact and ongoing effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, with input from over twenty members across the Caritas Confederation and other key stakeholders. The themes covered included the challenges and aspirations from experiences across the Confederation, the actions of women in leadership and at the frontline response to the pandemic, and the role of women as levers of development as we look towards a post-COVID world.

In continuity with the successful initiative organized in 2021, the 2022 *Caritas Celebrates Women* month intended to highlight the significant presence and contribution of women to the Caritas Confederation and in society, to identify key needs, and mobilise the Confederation in a process of walking together to witness, dialogue and take action to promote and work towards the participation of women at all levels. The purpose was to show how women are important and active agents as we look towards building a post-COVID world.

At the beginning of this initiative, the war in Ukraine had just begun. This difficult situation increased the visibility of the role which women play in the protection and care of families and communities, despite also emphasising their increased vulnerability and suffering during conflict.

The four webinars focused on the central themes of dialogue, hope, solidarity, and the future. As well as focusing on the war in Ukraine, the *Caritas Celebrates Women* month addressed a range of additional contemporary contexts and topics, including poverty, hunger, climate change, water crises, migration and refugee situations, health, hygiene and wellbeing.

Purpose

The purpose of the initiative was to increase awareness in the Confederation, the Church and society about the experience, capabilities and work of women in Caritas and in communities, to promote the importance of women's leadership and participation in decision-making, and to give women greater voice and visibility at all levels of the Confederation.

Specific Objectives

Through this initiative, Caritas aimed to:

1. Raise the voices of the women who are and who have been significantly present in the Confederation and its communities around the world, by proposing testimonies and experiences of the role of women as builders of dialogue, solidarity and hope.

2. Raise awareness and acknowledgement of their contributions to the Confederation and communities, challenges and barriers they need to address and resilience they showed in different contexts.
3. Call the Confederation and other stakeholders to action to promote the participation, equality and leadership of women.

II. Summary of webinars

Ila. Webinar 1: “Women as builders of dialogue: Church and society”.

This event was co-organized with the British Embassy to the Holy See and was held both online and in presence. The main focus of this webinar was on the importance of women’s equal participation in decision-making for effective integral human development, building peaceful and stable societies, and achieving fraternal cooperation.



Speaking with beneficiaries of Caritas’ free medical healthcare service to people in the central Gaza Strip. (7 February 2019. © Asmaa El Khaldi/Caritas)

Summary of interventions

Moderator: **Inés San Martín**, Rome Bureau Chief, Crux

His Excellency Ambassador Christopher J. Trott, British Ambassador to the Holy See

It is essential that women have a leading role in Church and Society in which we all together face a global change. The disproportionate effect on women and girls of COVID-19, climate change, natural disasters, conflict and other forms of violence exacerbates existing inequalities and barriers, including to accessing services and support. The UK has a strong global reputation in standing up for the rights of women and girls

around the world, aiming to transform lives and build long term prosperity and stability. Ambassador Trott identified three focal points for the UK's diplomatic and development efforts: *Educating girls, empowering woman and ending violence.*

The United Kingdom has pledged to stand up for the right of every girl to 12 years of quality education and is seeking to accelerate the pace of a global education recovery and ensure education and skills for girls are more relevant to future labour market needs. As a leading global voice on Women, Peace and Security, the UK continues to push for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all peace efforts. In 2022, the UK will play a leading role in building a new international consensus to end violence against women and girls, including generating momentum towards a new global agreement and international conference to condemn the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict as a 'red line'.

Aloysius John, Secretary General Caritas Internationalis

Promoting women's leadership is something natural to human coexistence. In Caritas, the equality between women and men is not a question of equality in number but a liberating process where women can be enabled to contribute to building societies based on justice, equality and sharing. Reflecting on the situation in Ukraine, Mr. John highlighted how women are trying everything to save and protect children, the elderly, and other vulnerable people. Commenting on his recent visit to Bangladesh, he described how women are playing a similarly significant role in constructing dialogue. Caritas is committed to enhancing women's leadership within the Member Organisations, in governance, and in communities.

Maria Immonen, Director of the Department for World Service of the Lutheran World Federation.

The heart of dialogue is active listening, learning together, not changing who we are or what we are but recognizing each other as companions in our efforts to work for life and dignity for all, and ultimately find areas for collaboration. The Lutheran World Federation and its members have taken significant strides in working towards women's engagement and participation through the dialogue which arises when parties agree to come together, to meet with open minds and listen to each other with the aim to understand.

Tetiana Stawnychy, President of Caritas Ukraine

Caritas Ukraine made a decision in the early days of the war to stay in the country and assist those most in need. The leaders and members of Caritas addressed this strenuous situation by throwing themselves directly into the work and mission of restoring human dignity, through of a process of mutual giving and receiving.

Before the war, women were already playing an important role in peacebuilding at the community level in Ukraine. For example, she shared the story of Hanna, who for many years, has been dedicating herself to creating groups for peacebuilding in which people could share their experiences. Hannah is continuing her work today by helping people to express themselves and process what is happening. Other women, such as Ksenya, are serving Caritas and the Ukrainian communities through simple but essential actions. Such work was described as the "genius of women" who are able to see needs and respond immediately in a heartfelt way. Women have also been playing a key role across the borders, going to train stations to welcome refugees, giving psychological support, ensuring they can live in a more peaceful environment.

Rita Rhayem, Health & HIV Advisor, Caritas Internationalis

During humanitarian crises women and children are always depicted as the ones who need to be saved, and when we talk more generally about vulnerable groups we talk about women. However, during the revolution in Lebanon women took on a leading role, particularly in their pursuit of a peaceful revolution. Peace itself is not a "female" attribute, it is a choice. Women had observed that when dialogue ends, war begins, and therefore worked to build dialogue and change systems which justified war.

During the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, programmes were developed to decrease tension between host communities and those arriving in the country. The programmes which included women were the most successful in addressing these issues.

Empowering women must be more than just a slogan; it should be translated into reality by leaders who are aware of the value of women's leadership and participation in decision making. Equality should be part of our system and our work, but there is still unconscious blindness when it comes to equality in leadership positions. Now, more than ever, we need men and women who work for equality at all levels.

Susana Raffalli, Nutritionist, Advisor, Caritas Venezuela

The recent inclusion of women in the process of negotiations in the Venezuelan crisis has been important and has yielded positive results. Women in the Venezuelan peacebuilding process are not only at the negotiating table, but continue being a central partner in all comprehensive processes within the society – which means to be there in the day to day, in the family and inter-community mediation. This is bringing to light the value of inclusiveness and how women's participation in negotiation makes the process more diverse, and therefore mirrors society more comprehensively. Women's participation in dialogue raises the political significance of the peacebuilding processes, in making broader the social acceptance of any consensus and also making the commitment stronger and more sustainable. In order to have a sustainable peace outcome, the process needs to be inclusive. Additionally, in Venezuela, the main organisations that are supporting victims and working towards reparations and justice are led by women, by the mothers and wives of political prisoners and of people that have been killed or have survived violence. Caritas has been playing a protagonist role by setting the social issues on the table as a perfect platform for dialogue. This has been done not only at the strategic level, but also at the local level. Women's participation in peacebuilding processes means that we are there not only for women's issues, but for all humanitarian issues, keeping the people at the centre of dialogue.

Sr Nathalie Becquart xmcj, Under-Secretary for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops

The synodal process is one of listening, especially to those who are on the peripheries and who are marginalized, of whom women are often the first who suffer. So, if we want to listen to the poorest, we need to listen to women. Caritas, working on the front lines and in communities, is a first point for such listening. In this way, Caritas as part of the Church is a kind of school of leadership, responsibility and synodality for the whole Church to learn to listen to those who do not have a voice.

The promotion of women's participation and leadership it is not only for Caritas, it is for the whole Church and society. One of the main fruits of the two most recent synods was to strongly state the need for women's participation within the Church, including in leadership and decision making.

The vision for the synodal Church is of collaboration, reciprocity and interdependence for men and women. It is an inclusive and relational Church. Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz said that "the secret of hope is secret of fraternity." In this tragic situation of war in Ukraine, it is only through fraternity, solidarity and mutual support that we can find traces of hope.

Women as builders of dialogue: Key messages and conclusions

- 1. At the heart of dialogue is active listening and mutual learning.***
Witness, dialogue and diversity of decision-makers have been identified as key components to ensure that the experiences and needs of all people are represented, heard and valued at decision-making levels.
- 2. Women and girls are not just passive victims.***
Women bring a unique perspective to dialogue, and their inclusion in processes of dialogue and

decision-making is important for the building of genuine and sustainable peace, resilience and stability. Women's experiences, voices and knowledge must be valued in order for communities to authentically live in justice, equality and reciprocity.

- 3. Caritas can be a model of synodality and leadership for the Church and for society.** *The promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation is a central element of the integral development of individuals and communities. The creation of opportunities for women's education and empowerment must go hand in hand with active work to change structures and policies which enforce existing barriers to women's participation in leadership and decision-making in Caritas, in the Church and in society.*

IIb. Webinar 2: Women as builders of hope: Welcoming and accompanying migrants

This webinar placed a particular focus on the experiences of those fleeing the current conflict in Ukraine, and what previous experiences of migrant and refugee emergency situations can teach us about the hope-building role which women can play during such a crisis.



Caritas working with Cameroonians being hosted in Nigeria. (13 April 2018. © Sam Phelps/Caritas Internationalis)

Summary of interventions

Moderator: **Jean Beil**

Introduction: **Patricia Adèle Félicité**, Co-Chair Women's Committee, Secretary General Caritas Ile Maurice

Pope Francis's message for International Women's Day 2015 was used to set the tone for this webinar focusing on hope, welcome and accompaniment.

"Today, 8 March, I greet all women! All women who seek every day to build a more human and welcoming society. And a fraternal thank-you also to those who bear witness to the Gospel in a thousand ways and work in the Church. For us, this is an occasion to underline the importance and need for their presence in our lives. A world where women are marginalized is a barren world because women not only give life but they also transmit the ability to see beyond, to see beyond themselves. They transmit the ability to see the world with different eyes, to feel things with a more creative, patient and tender heart." (*Pope Francis, Angelus, 8 March 2015*).

Maria Nyman, Secretary General, Caritas Europa

Women and children are often the worst affected by conflict and face particular risks and vulnerability, and this will also be the case with the war in Ukraine. At the same time, we know that women's participation and perspectives are integral to the pursuit of peace, in which they play essential roles in building more resilient communities, and we are seeing that women are at the forefront of welcoming and supporting the many people arriving from Ukraine. It is more important than ever to ensure that the voices of women are brought in at all levels in the process of peace building.

Adriana Mardare, Coordinator of the "Home Care Services" Program, Caritas Iași Diocesan Center Association, Romania

Words are often too poor to describe the suffering and pain which people are going through, as well as the bravery of many women who are doing near-impossible things to protect their children's lives. At the Caritas transit Centre in Siret, on the borders of Ukraine, there is an outpouring of empathy, solidarity, emotions, tears, and concrete gestures of help. Refugees are given a warm place to stay, bathrooms, food, and help with purchasing tickets and arranging their onward travel. Volunteers take care of children and offer advice and safety.

Dominika Chylewska, Head of Communications, Caritas Poland

Women are heroes within the tragic story of Ukraine. On the Polish border with Ukraine, many women are helping refugees to recover after long journeys. There is a heart-warming atmosphere in the shelters where female volunteers are bringing joy and cheerfulness along with warm meals shared together. The female face of the Ukraine crisis is strong and active, and women are ready to do everything they can to survive and to protect their loved ones. The Ukrainian women have a lot of hope in their hearts which they share with the Caritas volunteers, also giving them the motivation to continue to work together in this mission.

Fr Vyacheslav Grynevych, Executive Director, Caritas SPES Ukraine

In the Ukrainian language, the expression "a woman in hope" is used to in reference to pregnant women, but today this has become a strong message of how hope can overcome fear. During this war, women are becoming builders of peace on all fronts. Women are serving in the national guard and armed forces, as doctors and nurses, as leaders in welcoming and accepting refugees, and more. Now the "woman in hope" is a symbol of all those who are waiting for the end of terrible war and to unite once more.

Shiba Mary D'Rozario, Communications Manager, Caritas Bangladesh

Since August 2017, Caritas Bangladesh has been responding to the refugee crisis resulting from the persecution of Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority of Myanmar. According to the UNHCR, there are nearly one million Rohingya people in camps in Bangladesh, about 52% of whom are women. When they first arrived, these women were traumatized by the conflict, gender based violence, and scarcity of resources. During

these years, they have received psychological, emotional and cognitive help, and many are now taking part in income-generating activities, meaning that they are also able to contribute to the wellbeing of the community. The importance of the work of women in families has been truly recognised by the community.

Kat Kelley MSW, Senior Director of Migration and Refugee Resettlement Services, Catholic Charities USA

There are five Catholic Charities USA member organisations which are dedicated to working on the refugee crisis at the US–Mexico border. The conditions are rough, and many people seeking asylum are stopped or held in detention at the entrance to US, where conditions are often inadequate, and children are separated temporarily from their parents. The respite centres of Catholic Charities are a stepping stone between leaving detention and the onward journey. Those who stop there are given food and drink, washing facilities, and clothing.

Due to COVID-19, the centres were no longer able to offer these resources and services, and has also resulted in a shortage of volunteers now that the centres are reopening. Catholic Charities USA has been working in partnership with 101 congregations of religious women to respond to this shortage of volunteers, and has so far engaged over 250 women religious volunteers to provide services on the US-Mexico border during the pandemic. Due to the prioritisation of the elderly in the vaccination drive, it was the more elderly religious sisters who were the first to be ready to step up and volunteer to bring the respite centres back into being operational. It is thanks to these women that Catholic Charities USA was able to keep a humanitarian capacity at the US border.

Fr Fabio Baggio Under-Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human development – Migrants and Refugee section

Women play a special role in the mission of service to the poorest, often offering a different and empathetic perspective on challenging situations. The Holy Father accentuates how such empathy is the most important value in service. One cannot serve without empathy and recognition of others as our brothers and sisters. This is the central point of the “culture of encounter” on which the Holy Father insists.

Women as builders of hope: Key messages and conclusions

- 1. *Despite their vulnerabilities, women are clearly shown to be pillars in communities as witnesses of solidarity and builders of hope. Making the experiences known of female migrants and those who work to welcome, accompany and support them challenges us to recognise women’s role in building hope and healing in situations of conflict, persecution and disaster.***
- 2. *Hope is a central element of integral human development. In complex contexts, women have shown how hope and solidarity have enabled them to overcome barriers and serve the poorest and most vulnerable. Hope is not a mere desire or wish, it is an intentional show of solidarity which fuels mission and action.***
- 3. *Building hope builds dignity; building dignity builds hope. There is reciprocity between hope and human dignity. We must learn from the children who laugh and play in Ukrainian refugee camps, from the Rohingya women who arrived weary and abused, and who are now contributing to community wellbeing, and from the elderly religious sisters who welcome migrants at the US borders. When all life is treated as sacred and of equal worth, discrimination ends, dignity begins and hope is built.***

Held on World Water Day, this webinar highlighted the “significant presence”, participation and leadership of women across the Confederation in care for the poor and care for our common home.



Distributing service vouchers to the homeless in Bordeaux during the coronavirus crisis. (7 April 2020. © Sebastien Le Clezio)

Summary of interventions

Moderator: **Kirsty Robertson**, CEO, Caritas Australia, and Member of the CI Women’s Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee

Introduction – **Musamba Mubanga**, Senior Advocacy Officer, Caritas Internationalis

Climate change has worsened gender inequality in most parts of the world. One of today’s main concerns is water insecurity. When there are water shortages, women have to walk long distances and stand in long queues to find water for domestic use, as well as for drinking water. Additionally, the trauma resulting from chronic food insecurity creates barriers on a physical, mental and social level, and again women are often worse affected. This was seen, for example, during the 2020 drought in Zambia. Women had to go into the forests to look for alternative sources of food, resulting in less time spent at home which took a toll on other responsibilities often also held by women, such as cooking and taking care of children.

However, women are also showing remarkable resilience by applying indigenous knowledge in response to the ecological crisis. They are also leading climate action movements, championing clean sources of energy, and building alternative models of community focused on sustainability and cooperation. Equipping women with further knowledge empowers them, opens opportunities for participation in decision making, enables better access to technology, and increases revenue streams.

Her Excellency Ambassador Chiara Porro, Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See

Research has reported that women are 14 times more likely than men to die in climate disasters. This was seen in 2014 when 95% of the deaths from flash flooding in the Solomon Islands were women. However, women should not just be seen as passive victims. They have important knowledge and are on the front lines working as effective leaders and change makers.

There are three aspects which are critical to supporting women: Change attitudes, build skills, and create networks for information-sharing. In the Pacific, there are several initiatives in place which are working to achieve this.

Marta Pedrajas, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

The role of women in the Church and in society is based on the catechesis of faith, charity, hope, human dignity, the preferential option of the poor, the universal destination of goods and solidarity.

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development's strategy for post-COVID-19 recovery is grounded in listening, connecting and inspiring all people to work together to rebuild values in society. This is based on the central message of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* of fraternal cooperation. Specific focus areas include the human right to work, especially looking at women's access to work. In the area of Faith and Development, work is being undertaken in the field of social exclusion, extreme multi-dimensional poverty and inequality. The inclusion of women in leadership and decision making is crucial to achieve complementarity in leadership, and to ensure that all voices and needs are heard at all levels.

Abbé Constantin Sere, Secretary General, OCADES Caritas Burkina Faso

The key role of women is evident in the water sector. Above all, we must note the evolution of the role of women. In the various communities of the Sahel, water points (large-diameter wells or boreholes) are being set up with the involvement of women. There have been profound changes in the approach following a clear realisation that they are not only the primary users of these infrastructures, but that they ensure their sustainability by guaranteeing hygiene around the water points. Statistics from OCADES Caritas Burkina show that women are in the majority in the water sector.

Today, thanks to the Savings and Internal Credit Communities (CECI), which are modern tontine systems, women are leading the way in mobilisation to resolve essential issues in the community. The CECIs foster solidarity, and enable access to a local financial system (which belongs to them) to save and have access to credit for work. In addition, the social investment component of these funds enables the women of several village communities to make repairs to waterworks, thus avoiding water shortages in the villages.

Finau Leveni, Head of International Programmes, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand; Member of the CI Humanitarian Committee, Oceania Region

This presentation highlighted the work of female-led Caritas organisations and projects in the Oceania region.

In January 2022, Tonga was devastated by a volcanic eruption and tsunami, and was then covered in a thick blanket of ash for several days. The all-female core team at Caritas Tonga, led by Suliana Falemaka, showed courageous leadership through their ability to be able to mobilise on the ground almost immediately, providing relief to communities through the distribution of supplies, provision of psycho-social support, and cleaning contaminated water tanks. This was all achieved despite the fact that there was no communication with the outside world, even with nearby countries.

Caritas Papua New Guinea has been working with the Lujan home for girls for eleven years. This home provides a family environment for at risk-girls who come from very difficult backgrounds, such as forced marriages, abuse and serious health problems. The mission is to provide a well-balanced education, including

human, intellectual and spiritual formation, as well as to provide vocational skills like cooking, sewing textiles, sports and more in order to create a holistic service which offers girls the possibility of an independent future.

In Timor Est, Manodosha Kisi is the Director of Hafoti, an organisation which provides economic opportunities to women in rural areas and empowers women to participate in the public sphere. These centres also provide a safe meeting space, and thus in addition to the economic empowerment work. These centres have also facilitated extensive community outreach, inclusion of non-members, community meetings and discussions, especially focusing on gender-related challenges and household economics of living in remote rural Timor Est state, as well as providing space to operate multiple local-led initiatives.

Jeanie Curiano, Humanitarian Programme Lead, Caritas Philippines

Caritas Philippines' response to emergency situations includes capacity building initiatives which work to empower women, particularly in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL). This extends beyond the emergency phase and is also integrated in long-term development work. This is an effective strategy in strengthening the capacity of the poor, especially women who are deprived of choices, rights and opportunities, and who often experience discrimination, disparity and displacement.

This work increases resilience at the community level, and these women are able to contribute in a key way to ensuring that community, local government units and the Church are work in a cohesive and complementary way, especially in situations of emergency response.

Women as builders of solidarity: Key messages and conclusions

- 1. Supporting the integral development of women supports the integral development of all people.**
Demonstrating women's natural capacity for leadership in the context of care for our common home will assist the Confederation to work more effectively for the integral development of the poor, marginalised and vulnerable.

- 2. Changing attitudes towards women facilitates care for the poorest, for our common home, and for future generations**
It is important to recognise the importance, authority and relevance of women's indigenous knowledge and the paradigm of care as central elements in the strategy to care for the poor and care for our common home. Women, as builders of solidarity, are able to bring communities together, create safe spaces, and mutually empower other women and vulnerable people.

- 3. Build networks and share information to facilitate mutual support**
Raising the visibility of the work being achieved by women in caring for the poor and for our common home at local, regional and global levels will facilitate mutual learning, empowerment and support, generate evidence for advocacy, and foster solidarity.

Ild. Webinar 4: "Women as builders of future: Walking together for Equality, Encounter and Renewal"

Inspired by the scriptural and social teachings of the Catholic Church, this webinar explored women's leadership through a range of perspectives, particularly looking at how to build a culture of equality, encounter and renewal through witness and dialogue with all people.



Learning new skills as part of recovery from the humanitarian crisis in Geddo, Somalia. (27 May 2017. © Enigma Images / Amunga Eshuchi / Trocaire)

Summary of interventions

Moderator: **Moira Monacelli**, Director of Operations, Caritas Internationalis

Sr. Raffaella Petrini, Secretary General, Governorate, Vatican City State

Feminine leadership within the Church can be addressed through the perspective of *Fratelli tutti* (2020), which reiterates how at the very core of Catholic social teaching lies the concept of fraternity, deriving its fundamental essence from the common origin of each human being, created in the image and likeness of the Creator. Men and women both participate, contribute and share in this universal fraternity.

Care is a prevalently feminine attitude in so far as women are naturally “structured” to care for life in its earliest stages, called to nurture it and bring it to full development within their own bodies. Women, therefore, are called in a particular way to respond to this call through action, whether in the family or in any other organization, including the Church. From a feminine perspective, caring relations contribute to building relationships of trust and reciprocity which are naturally open to dialogue. This paradigm of care, although is not exclusive to women, is an alternative way of thinking that complements the traditionally masculine orientation towards justice.

The concept of “care” can take various shapes within an organization: care for the most fragile and vulnerable members, but also care for the institution – care for the Church, the environment and material things, maintaining a spirit of collaboration, and care for the mission shared within the organization.

Sr. Regina Ignatia Aflah, Caritas Ghana

The female perspective brings complementarity and collaboration to organisations and teams. Despite the efforts being made by Caritas Internationalis to promote women's participation in leadership positions, the call is yet to be fully realized in Africa. In all probability, this absence is not due to lack of qualified and competent women, but of society's inability to recognise and reward the full potential of women. It is not simply a question of social class distinction, but of culture and tradition.

There have been some affirmative modifications in the state of women as compared to the past. Some women have acquired higher and professional education. Women are visible in and are doing better than men in some institutions considered male mainstays, such as the security field.

We need to encourage more women to acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills to change our environment, as well as intensifying the process of networking from the local to global level, in order to contribute to building solidarity. Simultaneously, specific interventions need to be implemented directed to the participation of women in the Church and its structures.

Marina Osmonalieva, Regional Director of Caritas Kyrgyzstan

In Central Asia, there still exists a rather patriarchal society with strict rules and gender bias which strongly affect women. However, despite these barriers, women show their potential and strength of spirit in the struggle for the freedom.

It is crucial that those who do have power and decision-making responsibilities in the Church and in our organizations are not afraid to give women more responsibility, to entrust them with important tasks and roles, to give them opportunities to grow in their careers, and to realize their full potential. It is also important that women are encouraged to take an active role and not to be afraid to take responsibility, declare their capabilities, to have authority and to use it wisely.

Martha Skretteberg, Secretary General, Caritas Norway; Co-Chair CI Women's Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee

Three key themes arise in this reflection on women as builders of a new humanity: equality, encounter and renewal. These themes symbolise the journey as we work to promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. Equality between men and women is the foundation for building a future in which development can be achieved for all people. Leadership and participation in decision-making should reflect this natural equality.

It is crucial that men in Caritas also participate in this work. The Women's Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee is witnessing the fruits of diversity in leadership and decision making. Our members include men and women, lay people, clergy and religious.

Presentation of Caritas survey results – **Stephanie MacGillivray**, Officer Promoting Women's Leadership, Caritas Internationalis

A brief presentation was given of the preliminary results of two surveys carried out across the Caritas Confederation in early 2022: *Women in the Caritas Confederation* and *Leadership, Equality and Participation in the Caritas Confederation*.

Following the 2021 webinar series on women and COVID-10, a need was identified to research, gather and analyse concrete evidence of the current situation of women's leadership across the Confederation in order to identify the root causes behind the lack of access to equal opportunities and animate and mobilise the Confederation to break down these barriers. Therefore, in order to gather qualitative and quantitative data, two surveys were issued to the Confederation, and data was gathered over the period end January to end April 2022.

The first survey, *Women in the Caritas Confederation*, gathered quantitative data on the numbers of men and women working at different levels within Member Organisations, Regional Secretariats, and the General Secretariat. The second survey, *Leadership, Equality and Participation in the Caritas Confederation*, gathered qualitative data on experiences of leadership, equality and participation in organisations.

The first survey received responses from 111 out of 162 Member Organisations. This data gives important insights into the global, regional and national state of women's leadership and participation in decision-making in Member Organisations. A major highlight was the result that across the Confederation as a whole, just 28% and 29% of Directors and Board Members are female. On the other hand, at the levels of Senior Management (47% women), Program/Project Officers (53% women) and Staff (53% women), the gap in the number of men and women present was significantly smaller, with just a 6% margin at each of these levels.

The results of the second survey focused on individual and organisational experiences of leadership, equality and participation across the Confederation's seven regions. There were 221 individual responses to the second survey. Though this is a small proportion of the number of Caritas employees globally, these results provide valuable qualitative data and insights into women's and men's perspectives and experiences of leadership, equality and participation across the Confederation.

Among several highlights from the results of this survey, it emerged that gender is not the sole factor around which inequality manifests. Rather, inequality and barriers to leadership and participation are multifaceted. In addition to the fact of being a man or a woman, other dimensions include age, lay or clerical status, and structure and size of organisations. Addressing inequality in participation in leadership and decision-making in Caritas Member Organisations therefore requires an approach which takes into account these various faces of inequality, and builds discrimination-free organisational cultures through implementing practices which actively work to ensure equal opportunities.

A full separate report will be published to share the results of both surveys and make recommendations with the purpose of animating and mobilising regions and Member Organisations to promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making, and to increase diversity and inclusion.

Women as builders of future: Key messages and conclusions

- 1. The pursuit of fraternal cooperation requires a culture of equality.***
The full participation of all of the people of God is crucial to build a future based on equality between men and women. This can be facilitated by simultaneously encouraging and empowering women to acquire the skills to participate in leadership and decision-making, while also working with local Caritas, Church and community leadership to affirm and promote equality between women and men at all levels of society.
- 2. Genuine encounter is an ongoing process of listening, dialogue and learning.***
Men and women are invited to reflect on and actively search for new ways to implement Pope Francis' exhortation: to speak to one another more, to listen to one another more, to get to know one another better, to love one another more, within and outside of the Church.
- 3. Renewal means striving for the removal of barriers, the creation of opportunities, and the promotion of equality between men and women in leadership and participation.***
By reading the "signs of the times", the Confederation is called to embark upon the "path of renewal" (Laudato Si') to promote the recognition, acknowledgement, and participation of women at all levels in order to remove barriers and encourage women to aspire to leadership and decision-making.

III. Learnings and recommendations

This section will explore the learnings and recommendations from the month-long initiative in relation to the five key areas of work in the Caritas Internationalis Women's Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee's strategic action plan.

1. Founding values and principles
2. Analysis of the current situation
3. Promoting equal opportunities and removing barriers
4. Capacity strengthening
5. Visibility and communication

Identifying overarching themes, learnings and recommendations is a way of interpreting of the Synodal "see-judge-act" method, particularly keeping in mind the three pillars of the 2021-23 Synod: Communion, participation and mission.



Participating in the Caritas Internationalis General Assembly 2019. (25 May 2019. © Louise Norton/Caritas Internationalis)

Founding values and principles

Caritas Celebrates Women demonstrated that the promotion of women's leadership and participation need to begin from the founding premise of equality between men and women.

Men and women are created equally in the image of God. Therefore, as the people of God has both a male and female face, thus these faces also need to be evident in its leadership. The scriptural and social teaching of the Catholic Church leadership are supportive of the leadership and participation of women in the Church and society. Within the context of Catholic teaching, for Caritas this means creating opportunities and structures in which lay women and religious have equal access to opportunities to lead and participate in

decision-making in a spirit of fraternal cooperation and always in pursuit of the integral development of the poorest.

Supporting and recognising the gifts of women’s leadership in a Catholic context

Sr Raffaella Petrini, Secretary General Governorate, Vatican City State

Catholic social teaching has always reiterated that men and women share the same – equal – dignity, which descends from their common transcendent origin. Therefore, they equally assume “a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity”. This paradigm of care, although is not exclusive to women, is an alternative way of thinking that complements the traditionally masculine orientation towards justice. ... Women, therefore, are called in a particular way to respond to this call through action, whether in the family or in any other organization, including the Church. ... Therefore, the concept of “care” can take various shapes within an organization: certainly, care for the most fragile and vulnerable members, but also care for the institution – care for the Church, care for the environment and material things, care for maintaining a spirit of collaboration, care for promoting the “subjective” dimension of work according to *Laborem Exercens* (1981), care for the mission shared within the organization.

Recommendations:

- a. *Promote resource(s) and tools for the Confederation which show how the Church’s scriptural and social teachings support women’s leadership and participation.*
- b. *Identify and share good practices where Caritas and the local Church are working to enhance women’s leadership and participation.*
- c. *Promote joint working with Caritas and Church leadership to promote women’s leadership and participation in the current context.*



Taking part in a child protection workshop in Myanmar. (23 November 2017. © Patrick Nicholson/Caritas)

Analysis of the current situation

Caritas Celebrates Women showed that generating, gathering and sharing data and evidence (through surveys, research, webinars etc.) is one of the most effective ways to raise awareness of good practice, identify key needs and barriers, and assist with enabling effective local, regional and global advocacy to take place. Caritas, with a presence in over 200 countries and connections at grassroots, regional and global levels, is ideally positioned for such a task.

Additionally, in order to move beyond principles and toward action, it is crucial to read the signs of the times, analyse the current situation, and identify key needs and priorities. Regular research and data-gathering would also facilitate longer-term learning and monitoring of progress at local, regional and global levels.

Identifying good practices and providing evidence for effective advocacy and policy action – examples from the Oceania Region

H.E. Ambassador Chiara Porro, Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See

The *Pacific Women* programme is focused on enhancing women’s agency in ending violence, providing economic empowerment and other opportunities for leadership and decision making. This programme has successfully connected 190 partners and over 180 initiatives across 14 countries in the Pacific, effectively becoming one of the largest global commitments to gender equality in the world. The *Water for Women* initiative has been running for the past five years, and is focused on involving all people in water sanitation and hygiene projects. At the more systemic level, another initiative, organised in collaboration with UN women, is “the woman’s resilience to disasters” programme, which has been focused on disaster preparedness and early warning systems, developing more resilient livelihoods and businesses for women, and ensuring appropriate response services and products are developed. Connected to this is the “women’s resilience knowledge hub”, aimed at consolidating resources, best practices and critical tools, and providing a platform to amplify women’s voices.

Recommendations:

- a. *Share survey data and reports with all MOs, Regional Secretariats, and other external stakeholders, for example episcopal conferences and relevant Holy See structures. Suggest further sharing with local Church leadership. Share separate regional reports with Regional Secretariats in order to identify specific areas for targeted action.*
- b. *Encourage the establishment of further listening and dialogue at the regional level, in order to better understand local and regional contexts; for example, through the creation of regional women’s committees or commissions with zonal focal points.*
- c. *Gather disaggregated data in other Caritas strategic priority areas – e.g. migration, climate change, etc. – in order to show the impact on women, integrate women’s perspectives into other Caritas priority areas, and enable cross-cutting IDCS and advocacy work to take place.*



Ebola in Congo. (20 November 2019. © Tommy Trenchard/Caritas)

Promoting equal opportunities and removing barriers

There is growing recognition within Caritas, the Church and society about the meaning and necessity for women's leadership, the need to promote equal opportunities, and remove barriers to leadership and participation. *Caritas Celebrates Women* raised awareness of the fact that the integral development of women facilitates the integral development of all. The testimonies given during the initiative demonstrated that the creation and promotion of equal opportunities for women and girls resulted in more effective responses to emergencies as well as to the long-term integral human development of all people.

Facilitating girls' access to education and improving long-term opportunities

Marina Osmonalieva, Caritas Kyrgyzstan

Education in public schools in Kyrgyzstan is often of a low quality, meaning that if they want to go to university, students will have to attend extra classes with private tutors for a fee. Considering the high levels of poverty in Kyrgyzstan, parents of girls prefer their daughters to get married straight after finishing school, and not to spend money on their education. In response to this problem, Caritas Kyrgyzstan has been carrying out an educational project for the last five years which allows students from public schools to prepare for university entrance free of charge, in order to be able to enter the labour market. When there is no need to pay, and recognising the benefit of education and work, parents usually allow and choose for their daughters to go to university.

Recommendations:

- a. *Create spaces for dialogue and learning within and between Caritas, the Church and society, in order to identify barriers to women's leadership and participation. Consult women and men across these fields and at all levels to propose and implement solutions.*

- b. *Encourage and ensure that acts of symbolic recognition are paired and matched with concrete actions to facilitate sustainable change.*
- c. *Gather and share good practices and gender-inclusive policies, and work to assist and accompany MOs and Regional Secretariats to implement policies where they do not already exist.*



Caring for children in an informal settlement in Lebanon. (17 December 2013. © Sam Tarling)

Capacity strengthening

Listening to testimonies, conducting research and gathering data through the *Caritas Celebrates Women* month has indicated that while there is already good work being done to promote women’s leadership in the Confederation, there are also gaps and barriers which indicate a need for capacity strengthening. The initiative demonstrated the interconnectedness between poverty and policies which more negatively impact women. Capacity strengthening in the context of women’s leadership and participation therefore means strengthening the capacities of women to be able to develop into leaders at all levels in Caritas and communities, but also capacity strengthening in the Confederation more generally in order to promote gender equality, encourage listening, dialogue and learning, and create a culture in which men and women participate equally in leadership and decision-making.

Strengthening capacities and supporting the integral development of women supports the integral develop of all

Abbé Constantin Sere, OCADES/Caritas Burkina

In Burkina Faso, OCADES has helped thousands of villages to gain access to drinking water and to better manage their environment through the demarcation of village forests. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of producers are supported to practice ecological agriculture through various approaches such as Water and Soil Conservation and Soil Defence and Restoration. In activities undertaken in 2020, of the 51,091 producers supported in environmental activities, 32,113 were women. Women thus made up more than 60% of the people supported in the field of the environment. In the field of agriculture, which is essentially

oriented towards agro-ecology today, of the 46,972 people supported in 2020, 28,023 were women, i.e. almost 60%. The Consolidated Annual Report of activities at the level of OCADES 2020 indicates that out of the 34,433 people supported in the productive water sector, 18,296 are women, which is more than 50%.

Recommendations:

- a. *Creation of training, mentorship, peer-to-peer support, exchange and/or other capacity strengthening programmes and schemes. Document and report work at all levels to increase visibility and raise awareness.*
- b. *Ensure women are invited and included in national and global meetings, and strengthen the voices of women in decision-making processes, while ensuring that men are also included, present and active in dialogue, research, committees, and other initiatives working to promote women’s leadership.*
- c. *Encourage and facilitate coordination of capacity strengthening initiatives in order to identify common goals and objectives, provide mutual support, and develop understanding of needs across different contexts.*



Children in class in Bangladesh. (8 September 2017. © Caritas Internationalis)

Visibility and Communication

One of the central purposes of *Caritas Celebrates Women* was to facilitate a month-long encounter with women working across the Confederation a builders of a new humanity. The weekly “gathering” in the webinar series fostered a sense of community among the Confederation’s members. Additionally, it enabled access to information and opportunities to share, learn and inspire creative future action.

The inclusion and participation of external Holy See and society actors was also important to ensuring the Confederation’s work is made visible beyond internal Caritas structures.

It is important to continue this momentum of ongoing sharing and visibility through improving communication, building networks, and creating mechanisms to share information and raise awareness.

Making the work and leadership of women visible to inspire others

Sister Gaudiose Nyiraneza, Caritas Rwanda

At Caritas Rwanda we have practical experience of women who are promoters, courageous: when they receive capital from Caritas Rwanda they engage in income generating projects. They are able to promote and support their families as well as the poor.

Recommendations:

- a. *Create a mechanism whereby there is a central point for internal information sharing on Caritas projects, policies, good practices, updates and stories about the promotion of women's leadership, equality and participation across the Confederation.*
- b. *Create and cultivate internal and external networks to ensure that women's perspectives are communicated in a range of contexts.*
- c. *Improve and increase use of digital platforms to raise the voices and visibility of women, particularly in order to reduce stereotype and portray women as agents, leaders, builders and pillars – not always only as victims. Ensure that there is even coverage of all regions in communications.*



Spending time with local women and children at a Caritas Jerusalem medical services centre in eastern Gaza city. (19 February 2019. © Asmaa Khaldi/Caritas)

IV. Conclusion and next steps

***Caritas Celebrates Women* was a moment of encounter and dialogue to inspire a new model of walking and working together – women and men – for a better world, as per the invitation of Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*.**

Throughout this month of collaboration with Member Organisations, Regions, the Holy See and civil society organisations, it has become clear that **women’s leadership and participation in decision-making is a crucial element to the cultivation of fraternity and cooperation among all people.**

One of the key needs in order to successfully change the culture around women’s leadership and participation in Caritas, the Church and society more widely is the **active listening, dialogue and collaboration** between men and women in Caritas, the local Church and other leaders in governments, civil society, and communities.

This month-long initiative modelled a response to this need, and the recommendations in this report signal a road-map for how to continue upon this path of equality, encounter and renewal.

The energy and momentum which this initiative brought to the Confederation must now be sustained with **a specific plan of actions and interventions which must be implemented directed to the participation of women in leadership and decision-making.**

This action plan will also be informed by the results, analysis and recommendations in the report on the two surveys on women’s leadership, equality and participation in the Confederation, which were carried out in early 2022.

Looking ahead to the Caritas General Assembly due to take place in May 2023, the *Caritas Celebrates Women* initiative, the surveys’ results and recommendations, and the work to be undertaken in the next months will be important in assisting the process of forming the next CI Strategic Framework.

The key **next steps** in implementing the recommendations will be:

1. CI Women’s Leadership, Equality and Participation Committee, in collaboration with regional focal points, to form detailed action plan for May 2022-May 2023;
2. Share report on surveys with MOs and Regional Secretariats, and establish a mechanism for dialogue and mutual feedback;
3. Promote CI resource on Catholic Social Teaching and Women’s Leadership as a tool to assist and accompany the Confederation’s work on equality;
4. Create dedicated space on Baobab intranet platform as a central hub for information-sharing and dialogue on the promotion of women’s leadership;
5. Establish mechanism for regular communication with the Confederation on women’s leadership;
6. Continue to build networks between Caritas and Church and civil society actors;
7. CI Women’s LEP Committee to identify further research focus, and conduct research with the aim of valuing the work of Caritas in this area and analyse current trends;
8. Promote further and broader reflections on women’s leadership, and in this regard organize a global Conference in late 2022, in cooperation with the Regions, Holy See and International Organizations, International NGOs and CSOs.



Working with vulnerable families in Syria. (31 August 2018. © Caritas Internationalis)