



Preparing the AIC International Assembly 2023: Methodology

The three training reflections for September-October, November-December and January-February aim to prepare our AIC 2023 International Assembly, which will be held in Rome next March.

Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM, will be one of the speakers at this meeting; he offers us a **methodology** inspired by the synodal journey proposed by Pope Francis for the **preparation of the Synod on Synodality** that will take place in October 2023. Since the beginning of this process in November 2021 at the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America, the Holy Father has asked us to enter into attitudes of listening, dialogue, encounter, discernment, decision and ripple effect.

We have chosen three attitudes, as they correspond to the three phases of the AIC Assembly:

- The preparation of the Assembly: **Listening**
- The Assembly itself: **Discernment**
- The impact of the Assembly: evangelizing **Ripple Effect**.

Behind this terminology, there is a **biblical reinterpretation of the well-known See – Judge – Act method**:

- Listening, during the preparation of the Assembly, allows the voices of the Word to be perceived in reality (See);
- Discernment, over the course of the Assembly, facilitates decision-making to solve the problems that emerge in the Listening phase, in light of our worldview (Judge);
- The Ripple Effect of the Assembly energizes its missionary outreach, influencing the destiny of people living in poverty and of the Creation, and the renewal of volunteers and groups (Act).

We should keep in mind that these three phases and their corresponding attitudes are not exclusive, but interrelated, because in each of them there are elements of the others, which are interwoven so that each of the three is part of a process. This avoids the danger of creating separate compartments and one-off actions.

Hence, for example, the themes of the training reflections (Listening) will be dealt with again during the Assembly (Discernment), enriched by the contributions that will be gathered from personal and group reflections all over the world.

Let us now reflect on (“Listen to”) our first Assembly topic: sustainable development.



“All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.”

- Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*



TRAINING REFLECTION
September-October 2022

Sustainable Development: Protecting our Common Home

Introduction

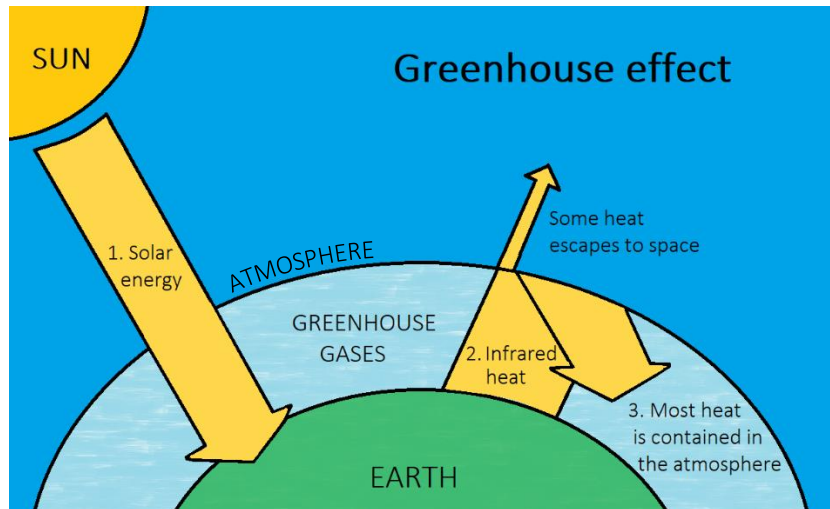
Our natural environment and living conditions are changing. In recent years, many countries in the AIC network have been affected by natural catastrophes: cyclones, floods, droughts, and heatwaves. It is important to understand that such phenomena are becoming more frequent because of the underlying process of climate change. So **why is our climate changing, and what can we do about it?** This is the topic of the present training reflection.

In the following pages, we will explain what **global warming** is, and what changes it causes in the global climate. We will look at how international institutions have reacted to these changes, and reflect on **sustainable development** and the United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goals**. Lastly, we will give some examples of what each of us can do in our daily lives or in the projects we create, in order to contribute to sustainable development and help fight climate change. When each of us does what we can, we all contribute to **protecting our Common Home**.

Climate change

In order to understand climate change, we must first explain what the **greenhouse effect** is. Let's take a look at the diagram on the following page. It shows our planet Earth, which is surrounded by an atmosphere made up of different gases. Some of these gases, called **greenhouse gases**, have the ability to trap heat.

When energy from the Sun travels through space and reaches the Earth's surface, it heats up the soil and oceans (1). This solar energy transforms into infrared heat that goes back into the Earth's atmosphere (2). In the atmosphere, the heat is trapped in greenhouse gases, which prevent most of it from going back to space (3). In itself, this is a very useful phenomenon: thanks to greenhouse gases, our planet is warmer and life has been able to develop on Earth.



Human beings, plants and animals, all living beings on Earth, need a certain temperature to be able to live. A problem arises if the temperature becomes too high. This is what has begun to happen since what we call the **Industrial Revolution**.

The Industrial Revolution is an important period of world history, which started during the second half of the 18th century when a period of rapid industrial development began in Britain, spreading across Europe, the United States and other countries. The steam engine was invented, burning coal to produce steam, which was used to generate a movement in a machine. This invention was used to power the first factories, trains and ships. It had a significant impact on people's lifestyles: they were able to mass produce goods more easily and international trade increased. In the early 20th century, other types of engines such as the internal combustion engine, which burns natural gas or petroleum, started to become more popular and to replace the steam engine.

How is this industrial development linked to the greenhouse effect? The issue is that **when engines burn coal, petroleum or natural gas (which are called "fossil fuels"), this produces greenhouses gases**. The main greenhouse gases are **carbon dioxide** (with the chemical formula CO_2), **methane** (CH_4) and **nitrous oxide** (N_2O). Increasing emissions of greenhouse gases mean that more and more heat is trapped in the Earth's atmosphere. This is called **global warming** or **global heating**: average temperatures all over the planet have been rising since the 18th century because of our increasing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Industrial development has spread across the planet over the last couple of centuries. Our industries and technology have evolved since the beginning of the industrial era, but we continue to burn fossil fuels and emit greenhouse gases. It is worth noting that industrial activity also damages the environment in many other ways: by using up natural resources without limits, by polluting air, water and soil, and creating waste through the products we consume then throw away to buy new ones.



Today, the largest emitters of greenhouse gases are the following sectors:

- Electricity and heat production
- Transport
- Manufacturing
- Agriculture, forestry and land use

What happens when we keep adding greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and raising the temperature of the planet? When this happens over a long period of time, and more quickly than ever before, it creates a **climate imbalance**:

- **Extreme weather events** are becoming more frequent and more intense:
 - Extreme heat (heatwaves), but also extreme cold
 - Floods and extreme precipitation
 - Droughts and wildfires
 - Cyclones
- **Plants and animals are affected** by these changes: some species will migrate to different parts of the world, and some will become extinct if their natural environment changes too much and no longer meets their needs. This is called a “**loss of biodiversity**”, meaning a decrease in the diversity of animals and plants in the nature around us
- As temperatures rise, some plant species will no longer be able to live in their natural environment. As a consequence, the **production areas of crops may change**. Extreme weather events can also destroy crops. This can have an impact on the amount of food available and the income farmers get from their production
- Oceans are becoming warmer and more acidic. Glaciers in the coldest areas of the globe are gradually melting and, as a result, **sea levels are rising**. This affects especially coastal cities and regions, as well as islands, which may gradually become flooded
- All of these changes can contribute to creating **conflicts and migrations**
- Climate impacts are uneven: **people living in poverty, who have the least resources to adapt to these changes, are those who will be the most affected**

Today, scientists agree that **the average temperature of the Earth should not increase by more than 2°C** compared to the temperatures of 1850-1900. If we are able to keep heating below a 2°C increase, this should avoid the worst impacts of climate imbalance and keep the Earth livable for human beings.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Did you already know what climate change is? Is this a topic that is often discussed in your community?
2. Have you noticed changes in the climate of your region in recent years? Has your community been affected by extreme weather events?



Sustainable Development Goals

What can we do to reduce global warming? How can we prevent climate change? These are questions scientists and politicians have been thinking about mainly since the 1960s, when there began to be more and more scientific evidence that the Earth was warming.

The concept of **sustainable development** was created in the 1980s. World leaders were beginning to consider that “development” is not only about supporting a country’s economy or addressing social issues. The environment also has an important role. This is what we call “sustainable” development: **it combines three key dimensions: economic, social, and environmental dimensions.**

Another way to define sustainable development is to say that “**it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**” (World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987, p. 16). The “future generations” are a new element here: development should not only meet *our own* needs, but the needs of people who will live *after* us, our children and grandchildren.

With the new concept of sustainable development, political institutions began to attach more importance to protecting the Earth and taking care of our natural environment. Today, one of the main tools we have to work towards sustainable development are the **17 Sustainable Development Goals**. These common goals, created by the **United Nations** in 2015, aim to help countries worldwide to reach sustainable development by 2030. This is what the goals look like:



As AIC volunteers, it is interesting to be aware that our projects at local level contribute to reaching these important global goals. Seven of them are directly linked to AIC's work:



Goal 1: Eradicating poverty

This has been the main goal of the AIC network for over 400 years.



Goal 3: Good health and well-being for all

Many AIC projects deal with the health of adults/children living in poverty, as part of their "holistic support".



Goal 4: Quality education

Since 2011, education on all levels has been part of AIC's Priority Lines of Action.



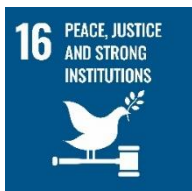
Goal 5: Gender equality

Discrimination and violence are still a global reality. For example, a significant increase in domestic violence was observed during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. AIC's Delva Prize supports projects addressing violence against women.



Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

Since 2017, AIC has been supporting and giving visibility to projects that aim to protect the planet, promote responsible consumption, recycling, etc., mainly through the Dominique Prize for Sustainable Development.



Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Some AIC projects aim to inform people living in poverty about their rights, while other projects promote peace. Condemning injustice through advocacy is also one of the missions of AIC.



Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals

Working within the AIC network promotes the exchange of experiences, synergies and twinnings between AIC groups. AIC also encourages partnerships and synergies with other external local bodies for tasks that AIC cannot perform by itself.



Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Which Sustainable Development Goals do you think your local projects contribute to?
2. In the framework of your project, would it be possible to contribute to another Goal?

Protecting our common home together

As we saw in the first section of this training reflection, industrial development has had many negative effects on the environment. We have come to think of the Earth as an abundance of resources, which are at our disposal and which we can use without limits. However, scientific evidence shows that we are changing the global climate and degrading our environment. In this situation, **we must change our behavior to make sure we do not degrade the Earth so much that humanity is no longer able to live on it.**

Earth Overshoot Day marks the date when humanity has used **all the biological resources that the Earth regenerates during one year.** This year, Earth Overshoot Day landed on July 28. It is as if we were living on our children's credit the rest of the year...

In his *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis notes that human beings all share a "**common home**": we all live on planet Earth and depend on its natural resources. He writes:

"Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life. [...] This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will." (§§ 1-2)

This situation needs to change and we must instead **protect and take care of the fragile creation God has given us:**

"The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change." (§ 13)

As we saw in the second section of this training reflection, the need to protect our environment has led world leaders to adopt the idea of sustainable development and to create the Sustainable Development Goals. These goals give a common direction to countries around the world, and our work as AIC volunteers contributes to achieving them.

We would now like to add some examples of what each of us can do to help protect our common home. Indeed, our lifestyles have a big impact on the environment, and **we can all make a difference by changing some of our habits, at both individual level and in our AIC projects.**



You will find below some ideas to draw inspiration from. They can help us to both lower our greenhouse gas emissions, and to use more sparingly our planet's limited natural resources. Since lifestyles depend on our income and social context, we have written separate advice for more vulnerable groups and for more privileged ones. Many of the tips can be applied to both groups, however, so it is up to you to see what is most relevant to your local context.

Advice for more vulnerable groups

Reducing waste

- Avoiding throwing waste into nature, as it can pollute the air, water and soil. Organic waste can be used to make compost. Paper, metal and plastic can be recycled (if this is possible in the local region), or reused for other purposes

Agriculture and land use

- Growing food on our own land or in community gardens
- Using organic agricultural methods and natural fertilizers, which preserve the fertility of the soil. Synthetic products such as pesticides increase productivity in the short term, but destroy soil life, which decreases soil fertility over time. Over long periods of time, soils become too poor to be cultivated
- Using traditional local plant species, since they are likely the best adapted to our local climate. Exchanging seeds in our community
- Growing several species of crops at the same time. Growing only one species makes it more vulnerable, e.g. a disease could easily destroy the entire crop. If there are several species, it is more likely that some will be resistant and that the whole crop will not be lost
- Preserving existing forests or planting new trees. Trees and other plants absorb CO₂ (a greenhouse gas), while cutting them down emits CO₂. Forests and other natural environments have rich biodiversity, meaning they are home to many plants and animals. They are also home to some indigenous peoples, who have not gone through a process of industrial development but, instead, use only their surrounding nature for food, medicine, building their homes, etc., living in harmony with nature and preserving the Earth's resources. If we protect their environment from harm, they will be able to continue to live in this way

Housing

- Creating latrines in places where there is no indoor plumbing. This way, human waste is all in one place and does not pollute. There is also less risk of transmitting diseases
- Using traditional building techniques and local materials. These are likely to be the best adapted to our environment, and do not have to be transported long distances, emitting CO₂
- Building housing that is more resistant to extreme weather events. This limits the damage caused by extreme weather, and as it becomes more frequent, houses do not need to be rebuilt after every event



Water use

- Collecting rainwater. Even if it isn't safe to drink, it can be used for washing and cleaning

Advice for more privileged groups

Consumption

- Buying local food and other products, rather than ones that have been transported from far away, emitting CO₂. For food, it can be useful to have a calendar of seasonal fruit and vegetables, so that we know what is in season in our country at any time
- Buying organic food in order to support organic agriculture, which preserves soil fertility
- Adopting a more plant-based diet:
 - plenty of vegetables (their production uses much less water than meat production)
 - less meat (its production emits methane, a greenhouse gas)
 - less fish (to reduce overfishing and depletion of the oceans)

Reducing waste

- Buying food in bulk using our own bags and boxes, instead of buying packaged products. This reduces waste, especially plastic (which is made from petroleum, one of the most polluting materials, taking up to 500 years to decompose)
- Using reusable plates, cups, utensils and a refillable water bottle instead of single-use ones
- Buying objects, clothes, furniture etc., which are of good quality and will last for many years. Handicrafts are usually longer lasting than mass-produced objects sold at a low price. Buying objects that last longer will reduce waste.
- Buying only what we need, so that nothing goes to waste
- Giving our unused clothes, electronic equipment, and other objects to second-hand stores rather than throwing them away. We can also buy objects second-hand
- Repairing objects, clothes, etc. rather than throwing them away
- Printing less. We can also reuse printed paper when printing draft copies of documents
- Sorting waste: separating organic waste and recycling paper, metal and plastic

Electricity and heating

- Turning lights off when leaving a room. Using LED lightbulbs, which use less electricity
- Turning off electrical equipment (television, computer, etc.) when we are not using it
- Keeping the heating on only in the rooms we are using
- Lowering the heating by a few degrees and wearing warmer clothing instead
- Using only the amount of water necessary when we heat water in a kettle
- Switching away from fossil fuels (coal, petroleum and natural gas) and using renewable energy instead (solar-, wind-, hydropower, bioenergy, geothermal energy). This reduces CO₂ emissions

Water use

- Having only a quick shower to clean ourselves, rather than a bath
- Washing dishes in a basin rather than under running water



Travel

- Traveling by foot or bicycle rather than motorized vehicles (car, train, boat, airplane)
- Using public transport. This usually means a motorized vehicle, but with more people in the same vehicle, which reduces the amount of CO₂ emissions per person

Awareness raising and advocacy

- Telling people around us about environmental issues to raise their awareness. If we change some of our daily habits, we can explain to others why we are doing so
- Engaging in advocacy work in our local community to tell local leaders what we need in order to better protect the environment: setting up recycling facilities, receiving funding to build more resistant housing in case of extreme weather, etc.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Do you think your lifestyle respects the environment? Which of your daily habits do you find respectful and which ones, on the contrary, would it be useful to change?
2. Has this training reflection given you ideas of new projects you would like to develop in your community?

Conclusion

This training reflection has given us an overview of the topic of sustainable development. In the methodology of Listening – Discernment – Ripple Effect introduced at the beginning of the reflection, we are at the first step of Listening. We can now use what we have just learned to think about both our lifestyle and our mission of service to people living in poverty. Father Naranjo suggests some questions we can reflect on:

Questions to discuss in your groups:

Let us put ourselves in an attitude of Listening. Let us listen to the voice of the Word in our families, our communities, our places of life and action, regarding Climate Change, the Sustainable Development Goals and Care for the Common Home. And let us be guided by these two questions:

1. What concrete calls do we hear from God in the current reality of climate change?
- Main challenges
2. What are the most pressing needs to which we must respond as human beings, as believers, and as repositories of the Vincentian charism?
- Main urgent needs



Here are a few AIC projects linked to the topic of sustainable development:

- **MADAGASCAR, Fianarantsoa: Reforestation through fruit trees**

AIC volunteers from Fianarantsoa decided to participate in the reforestation of the country by planting fruit trees (papaya, coffee, lemon, orange, moringa, etc.) in the garden of the “Second Chance School” where their project takes place.

The AIC volunteers provided seedlings and fertiliser, and the young beneficiaries of the project and their parents participated in the planting. The fruit will be eaten in the school canteen and any surplus will be sold to generate income for the project.



This project contributes to sustainable development in several ways: plants absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere, helping reduce global warming. Planting trees also brings more humidity to the soil and helps fight the droughts that often occur in Madagascar. Moreover, harvesting fruit from the local trees doesn't emit CO₂, while buying food transported from far away emits much more CO₂. This initiative can easily be replicated elsewhere in the world: why not plant fruit trees, berry bushes or other edible plants in your own neighbourhood?

- **ECUADOR, San Gabriel: Urban vegetable garden**

AIC volunteers are supporting isolated elderly people and Venezuelan migrants who arrive in the city of San Gabriel in northern Ecuador in large numbers. With the help of the staff of the “Pablo Muñoz Vega” educational unit, they have set up a dining hall to distribute meals on Saturdays to about 130 people.

To support this activity, the volunteers have created a community-managed vegetable garden with the collaboration of high school students. The crops are varied and plots are left fallow when necessary. Thanks to this initiative, the harvested crops are used as ingredients for the Saturday meal distributions and the surplus is sold to raise funds for the purchase of new seeds and/or tools.



The project contributes to sustainable development since the fruit and vegetables go directly from the fields to the dining hall's kitchen, so CO₂ is not emitted while transporting them. It is also a great idea to vary crops and leave land fallow, as this improves soil fertility and makes the crops less vulnerable to diseases.



- **PHILIPPINES, Naga City: Rebuilding homes damaged by typhoons**

Typhoons (tropical cyclones) are becoming more frequent and more intense as a result of climate change, and the Philippines are particularly vulnerable because of their geographic location. In the space of a few weeks, three successive typhoons hit the country in 2020, causing over 100 deaths and extensive damage to housing, infrastructure and crops.

In Naga City, hundreds of families were left homeless and AIC volunteers partnered with a local parish and the Famvin Homeless Alliance to repair and rebuild homes. Volunteers purchased building materials to repair the houses of 40 families. To replace the houses of 35 other families who had lost their houses completely, volunteers wanted to build concrete houses that would be more resistant to future typhoons. This was possible for 10 families who owned their own land, but not for the 25 families who did not.

Volunteers contacted the local government of Naga City, which found a relocation site where the 25 families could build permanent housing. Skilled workers worked together with the future residents to build the concrete two-story houses, under the supervision of a volunteer architect and the housing team of the local parish. The first houses were completed in March 2022.



This project contributes to sustainable development by addressing some of the consequences of climate change. As typhoons are becoming more frequent and more intense, it is a good idea to build housing that is more typhoon resistant. This way, houses will not need to be rebuilt after every typhoon, but will hopefully resist natural catastrophes better.

Here is a bibliography for learning more about these topics:

Climate Watch Data, 2022: [World Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2019 by Sector, End Use and Gases.](#)

Courrier international, 2021: *Atlas du réchauffement climatique.*

IPCC, 2014: [Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report.](#)

Pixabay, 2022: [Greenhouse effect.](#)

Pope Francis, 2015: [Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home.](#)

United Nations, 1992: [Conference on Environment and Development. Agenda 21.](#)

United Nations, 2019: [Sustainable Development Goals: Communications materials.](#)

World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: [Our Common Future.](#)

