

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Update
A periodic report on our work, one issue at a time
May 2006

In response to poverty

Why an MOGC focus on poverty?

No matter where they live and work, Maryknoll missionaries witness and respond to the devastation of poverty. The Gospel and Catholic Social teaching clearly call us to a “preferential option for the poor.” The eradication of poverty, then, is one of the central goals of the [Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns](#) (MOGC). We are deeply committed to working “for social justice with an emphasis on the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of impoverished people, rooting it in the experience and concerns of Maryknoll missionaries and of the communities where they live and work” (from the 2006 MOGC Plan). Our job, we believe, is to look for and address the systemic and structural causes of poverty.

What are we trying to accomplish and how?

1. Educate and raise awareness about the level of poverty in our world and especially about the consequences of poverty for people and the earth
2. Identify and address the root causes of poverty, working specifically for debt cancellation; just arrangements for international trade; policy space and economic sovereignty for poor countries; and viable alternatives to neoliberal free market capitalism.

Education/consciousness-raising

Through writing, public speaking and especially through our newly developing “[Voices from the South](#)” project, we have been trying to raise awareness about globalization and the impact of globalization in its current form on impoverished communities. For example, we speak about the impact on poor communities of trade agreements; the debt crisis, including illegitimate debt; macroeconomic policy reforms; and corruption. And we try to identify alternative practice and policies that promote human dignity and the integrity of creation.

Identifying and addressing root causes

Many roots of poverty are systemic. They are imbedded in the very way the global economic system functions.

Some of those systemic roots are historical – the economies of many of the world’s now-wealthy countries were built on slave labor or colonial riches; or they prospered because the shape of the global economy designed after World War II served their interests. Those roots we try to make more visible and even pull them out. So, for example, we support the right of poorer countries to a more just share in the power at the [World Bank](#) and [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF), where voting power is proportional to capital invested.

Other systemic roots are contemporary. Our long-time work for cancellation of illegitimate and overwhelming debt recognizes that debt is often unjust (contracted, for example, at exorbitant interest rates so impoverished countries pay the principal back many times over) or completely illegitimate (lent, for example, to corrupt leaders or for badly engineered projects or for projects that actually harm local communities or the environment). Our work for debt cancellation also understands debt as the handle by which creditors control the economies of poor countries that then continue to serve the interests of the rich minority. So, we oppose most conditions attached to new loans or debt cancellation – especially

structural adjustment/economic policy reform programs imposed by international donors and creditors. We support the right of countries and communities to determine their own development strategies/economic model through transparent and participative processes. (See [the MOGC update on debt.](#))

Many roots of poverty are being nourished by unjust trade and investment agreements. Our work in this area is based on the Maryknoll leadership statement, [Trading in Justice](#). We have been deeply engaged over the years in efforts to reshape or stop the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and other regional or bilateral agreements. We also have participated actively in advocacy toward decisions being made at the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#).

The IMF and World Bank play an important role in shaping the global economy. Their policies and projects can have a significant impact on poverty, for better or for worse. With many others, MOGC has been fully engaged with these institutions, primarily at a policy level, trying to move them to change policies that have a negative impact on poor people and their communities. We have followed particularly the evolution of structural adjustment programs and conditionalities attached to debt cancellation, advocating most often for their elimination.

In their [Millennium Declaration \(September 2000\)](#), the governments of the world identified [eight millennium development goals \(MDGs\)](#) to be achieved universally by the year 2015. If accomplished, the MDGs would go a long way toward reducing significantly extreme poverty and some of its worst consequences. Thus we have supported efforts, especially at the [United Nations](#), to implement them. We submitted substantial comments to the NGO process leading up to the [2005 World Summit](#) in New York when progress toward the MDGs was evaluated.

Another venue that we think offers opportunities for work against poverty is the Financing for Development process at the United Nations. It is the one place where governments, UN agencies involved in development work, the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, private corporations, and civil society come together to discuss ways to advance development and reduce poverty around the world. MOGC has thus facilitated the active involvement of Maryknollers in this process – as participants in high level round table discussions and in side events during major meetings.

We also collaborate regularly with those responsible in Maryknoll for corporate responsibility activities.

With whom does MOGC collaborate in doing this work to eradicate poverty?

Our principal partners in this work against poverty and for global economic justice are

- Maryknoll missionaries working with impoverished communities. As always, Maryknoll experience is our most valued resource and guide.
- [Religious Working Group on the World Bank/IMF](#)
- [Jubilee USA Network](#)
- [Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment](#)
- [50 Years Is Enough Network](#)
- [NGO Committee for Financing for Development](#) (Word document)
- [New Rules for Global Finance Coalition](#)
- [Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty](#)
- [Millennium Campaign](#) (part of [Global Call to Action Against Poverty](#))