



DIALOGUE

TAKING CARE OF THE PLANET

The changing climate is alarming for CUAMM both as individuals and as an organization, especially given that the hardest hit are already so vulnerable. Africa faces dire risks. This puts CUAMM – committed, as always, to working alongside the neediest communities as effectively as possible – face to face with issues of an ethical and professional nature as well as in terms of our civic responsibility.

TEXT BY / DON DANTE CARRARO / DIRECTOR OF DOCTORS WITH AFRICA CUAMM

According to the World Bank, the average individual living in sub-Saharan Africa produces around 0.8 metric tons of CO₂ per year versus the approximately 6.4 of the average European and 16.5 of the average American. Yet according to reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is the African continent that will be hit hardest by the most severe consequences of climate change, with consequences including water shortages, falling agricultural and food productivity, the worsening of chronic malnutrition and infectious diseases such as malaria, and decreasing GDP. And in terms of the phenomenon's impact on public health, it is children who will be the worst affected, as pointed out in the 2019 report of *The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate*. **We at CUAMM are direct witnesses to these changes and with this edition of *Health and Development* our goal is to draw our readers' attention to the real-life impact of climate change – situations we experience firsthand, including drought in Angola, cyclones in Mozambique and the chronic nature of armed conflict in many of Africa's most fragile states.** The climate is changing and this is of great concern to CUAMM both as individuals and as an organization. It is a crisis that raises ethical issues, as **Pope Francis** underscored in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Indeed, in a recent address to the International Association of Penal Law, he spoke of veritable “**ecocides**” – situations involving “the massive contamination of air, land and water resources, the large-scale destruction of flora and fauna, and any action capable of producing an ecological disaster or destroying an ecosystem”, or, in more technical terms, “the loss, damage or destruction of the ecosystems of a given territory, so that its utilization by inhabitants has been or can be seen as severely compromised”. On the other side are those who deny the very existence of climate change, or at least dismiss its gravity. Yet it is incontrovertible that the situation we now find ourselves in is primarily due to the economic and political decisions and actions of human beings. We are now faced with a personal, collective and intergenerational responsibility to change this state of affairs, and in order to do so, we need to acknowledge the connections and interdependencies between our lives in the Italian and Western context and those on the African continent.

This “*awareness of interdependence and linkages*” is precisely “*the way to face up to our responsibilities in a constructive manner, allowing us – for better or worse – to weigh up each of our actions, including from a moral standpoint. From generation to generation, the attention or lack thereof given to the environment by individuals – managers and politicians, teachers and researchers, ordinary citizens and workers, activists and those working to change the status quo – will gradually add up, giving rise to a culture either of safeguarding or neglect and waste*”¹

It is critical, therefore, to work to promote a culture of environmental protection and solidarity. CUAMM will tackle the issue of climate change the same way we've always tackled issues: by keeping abreast of the matter, studying the data through a critical lens, stimulating dialogue and debate and – most importantly – carrying on with our work in and alongside communities in Africa where the need is greatest. We did so in 2019 in Mozambique during the terrible period of Cyclone Idai and in its aftermath, responding to the emergency on the ground as we continued to ensure the daily health services required by local communities (see p. 8). In drought-struck Angola (see p. 14) we continue our work on malnutrition treatment programs at Chiulo Hospital, with growing numbers of admissions. We also support the World Health Organization (WHO) in a nationwide emergency response program there, helping to supervise and train personnel and provide materials in five nutritional units (Chiulo, Xangongo, Curoca, Ondjiva and Nhamacunde) in Cunene Province. This is what CUAMM has always done and what we will continue to do, ever mindful of how indifference and inaction intensify already-existing problems of injustice and inequity.

SOURCES:

¹ <https://www.aggiornamentisociali.it/articoli/peccato-ecologico-un-appello-alla-responsabilita/>

² <https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change>

³ The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate

change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32596-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32596-6/fulltext)

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191115_diritto-penale.html