Opinion
EarthBeat



A man displays a sign in Portuguese that reads, "Climate education now," on Nov. 17, 2022, at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. (AP/Peter Dejong)



by John Leo Algo

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Climate finance is set to be the main focus of the upcoming United Nations climate negotiations, COP29, Nov. 11-22 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Given the failures with attaining the previous target of $100 billion to support climate action in developing countries, many will closely observe the discussions for setting a new collective quantified goal.

As it stands, there are many options in consideration regarding the goal's elements, from its structure and time frame to its actual amount. One of the calls that must be included under this goal is the creation of a finance mechanism for implementing Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) — a work stream of global climate action with six key elements: education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation.

ACE is reflected in both the U.N. Framework Convention for Climate Change text and the Paris Agreement, stressing how important these themes are for accelerating other facets of climate action, such as adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage.

Despite its long-established significance, ACE has been given neither enough attention nor enough support at the negotiating table. This is evidenced by a lack of mention of this work stream in the technical report on the Global Stocktake issued last September and the lack of national ACE strategies across the majority of countries as of last November.

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The Holy See is in a unique position to call for the establishment of an ACE fund, as this work stream is directly relevant to the Vatican's framework for ecological education, specifically as one of the goals under the Laudato Si' Action Platform, a seven-year initiative led by the Vatican to encourage responses to Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

Both the ACE work stream and the Vatican's ecological education framework share the goal of empowering society to meaningfully implement solutions in aid of climate action and sustainable development, recognizing the interconnectedness of economic, environmental, social and cultural factors at play. Also, they both address intergenerational justice, with close ties to the education and capacity-building of children and youth.

Whether under the U.N. or the Catholic Church, sustainable development cannot be isolated from intergenerational solidarity. The U.N.'s sustainable development goals are based on a definition of sustainable development that stipulates it must not compromise "the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."



Children from St. Dominic Savio Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya, are seen July 15, 2019, during an environmental conference on the grounds of the United Nations in Nairobi. The conference marked the fifth anniversary of the Catholic Youth Network on Environment and Sustainability in Africa and the fourth anniversary of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si*'. (CNS/Fredrick Nzwili)

Laudato Si' claims, "The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity."

A funding mechanism for ACE would help accelerate the strengthening of ecological education at different scales and across different regions, with benefits for climate- and sustainability-related goals. It would also serve as a guaranteed source of financial support for projects led by the youth, learning institutions and other stakeholders on education, public participation and other ACE elements.

An ACE fund could also complement existing efforts on ecological education. For instance, scaling up projects on awareness-raising and public participation within the global Catholic community could enable more stakeholders to submit their ongoing programs and activities to the Laudato Si' Action Platform. This is essential for building a stronger, evidence-based approach for influencing global climate policymaking.

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At recent COPs, the Holy See has identified ecological education as one of its priority issues. However, there has been an observed lack of delegation capacity by some civil society groups to meaningfully engage in the ACE negotiations. This is why it is vital for the Holy See's leaders to include Catholic actors with expertise in ACE in future COP delegations to formulate its positions and enable them to have a stronger role in these talks.

As the representative of more than 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide, the Holy See is also uniquely positioned to readily derive its positions from a constituency of varying backgrounds, experiences and contexts. This could also enable it to influence more faith-based actors in different countries to lobby their respective governments regarding positions to carry in COPs.

The Holy See should maximize opportunities to lobby for an ACE fund, starting at the upcoming ACE dialogues in Bonn, Germany, June 3-13. These sessions will focus on tools and support, one of the four priority areas stated in the action plan under the

Glasgow work program. The other priorities include policy coherence, coordinated action, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

The Holy See can also use this platform to coordinate with other party delegations, faith leaders, educators and youth organizations on strategic engagements related to calls for an ACE financing mechanism.



A child holds a placard at a "Fridays for Future" march Nov. 5, 2021, during the COP26 U.N. Climate Summit in Glasgow, Scotland. (CNS/Reuters/Dylan Martinez)

A potential ACE fund must be grants-based. This aligns with the work stream's innate link to intergenerational justice, which is recognized in Laudato Si', the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and other multilateral frameworks. Transparency and accountability must also be ensured not just in the mode of delivery of potential financing, but also in all operations of this funding mechanism.

Known shortcomings of the U.N. Framework Convention for Climate Change's financial mechanisms should be considered in establishing an ACE fund. For

instance, the Holy See should highlight the need for a governing body where the most vulnerable sectors and groups, especially young people, are properly represented throughout the decision-making process.

The unique nature of the work stream relative to other major negotiation issues could allow for an easier mobilization of funds, including from sources like philanthropic organizations. It could also encourage more innovative projects to directly tackle themes not as often emphasized under the negotiations, such as Catholic-led projects and activities on ecological education.

The establishment of an ACE Fund would be instrumental to properly respond to the cries of the Earth and the poor for decades to come. The Holy See can serve as a voice to which others would listen to make this a reality.

This story appears in the **COP29 Azerbaijan** feature series. View the full series.