

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Reflection on United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11

Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary &
Congregation of Jesus

Introduction

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, to which our Heads of State and Governments committed themselves in September 2015 at the United Nations, provides a framework aimed at gathering our energies and resources to achieve a life of dignity for all. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) name specific areas of our life that need action in order to make this aspiration become a reality.

"Making cities safe and sustainable means ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, and upgrading slum settlements. It involves investment in basic services such as safe drinking water and sanitation, nutritious food, healthcare and family planning, education, culture and access to communication technologies. It also involves investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in a way that is both participatory and inclusive."

- United Nations

This document highlights the reflections of Sisters in the Congregation of Jesus (CJ) and Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) who have contributed to our deeper understanding of SDG 11. We wish to thank Una Coogan, IBVM; Theodora Hawskley, CJ; Rachel McLoughlin, IBVM; Sandra Perrett, IBVM and those in Sydney, Australia who contributed to the response; Eunice Njeri Ndabih, IBVM and Clemenciah Nyakambi, IBVM and all from Kenya and Ghana who contributed to the Eastern Africa response; Priyanka Topno, IBVM; and Ursula Witkowska, IBVM.

"In the planning and designing of new communities, housing projects, and urban renewal, the planners both private and public, need to give explicit consideration to the kind of world that is being created for the children who will be growing up in these settings"

- Urie Bronfenbrenner

The New Urban Agenda

In October 2016 world leaders adopted the New Urban Agenda. This Agenda sets a new global standard for sustainable urban development and will help us rethink how we plan, manage and live in cities. The New Urban Agenda is a roadmap for building cities that can serve as engines of prosperity and centres of cultural and social well-being while protecting the environment. The Agenda also provides guidance for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and provides the underpinning for actions to address climate change.



1. Provide basic services for all citizens
2. Ensure that all citizens have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination
3. Promote measures that support cleaner cities
4. Strengthen resilience in cities to reduce the risk and the impact of disasters
5. Take action to address climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions
6. Fully respect the rights of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons regardless of their migration status
7. Improve connectivity and support innovative and green initiatives
8. Promote safe, accessible and green public spaces

What is your experience of living in the city, in terms of safety, inclusivity, resilience and sustainability?

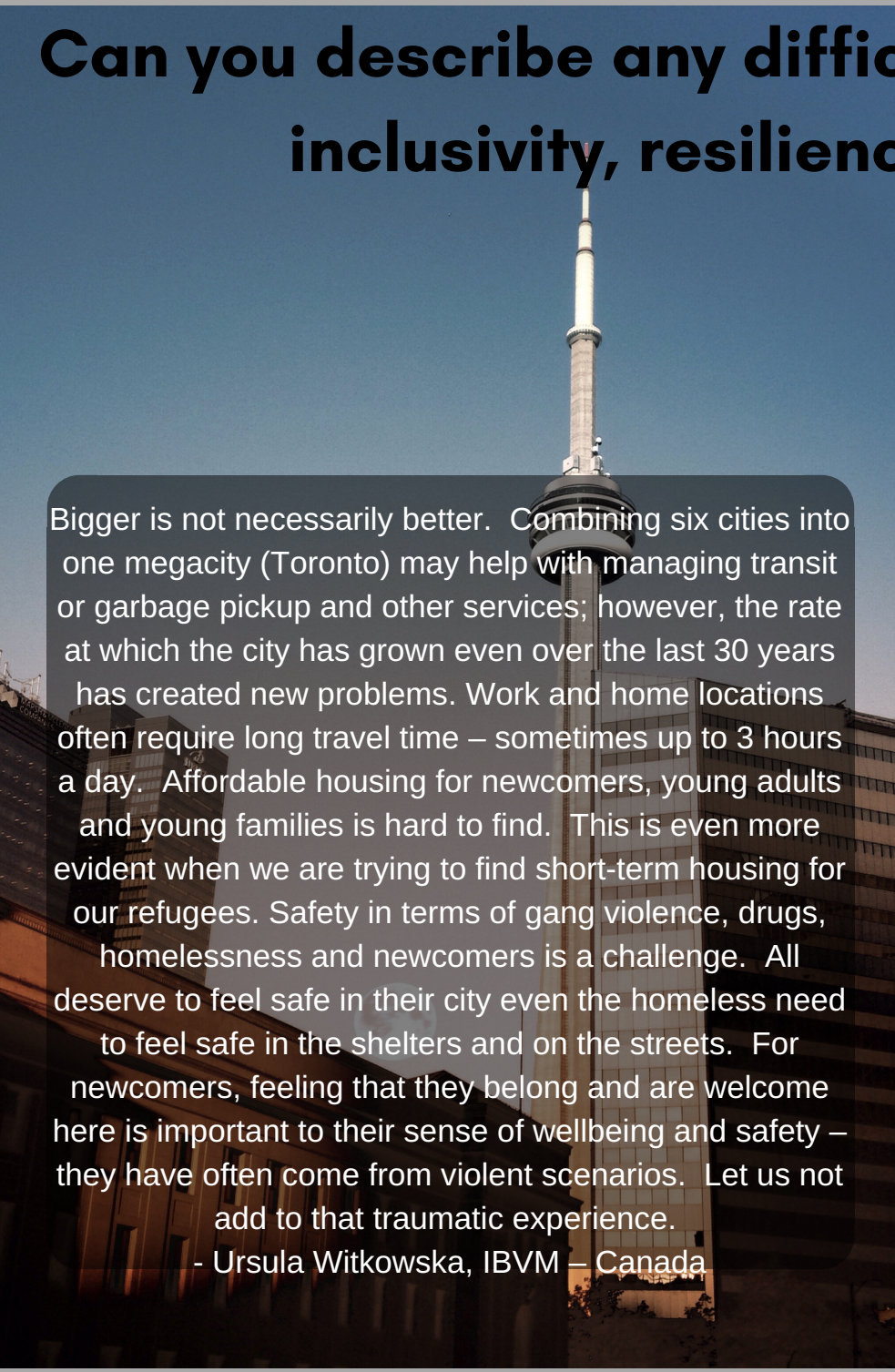
Nairobi's residential areas have been stratified according to the social economic status. There are leafy suburbs that enjoy services like safe piped drinking water, good sanitation and hygiene services, excellent health care and education opportunities with well equipped and staffed schools and hospitals and with insurance covers, access to communication technologies like WiFi connections well maintained public parks and good roads. The other group which is the majority live in semi urban and informal settlements which we would refer to as slums and these are the backbone of the economy through skilled and manual labour. These however lack these basic amenities as aforementioned and walk to work if not riding on overcrowded "Matatus" (the term referring to public service vehicles in Kenya).

- IBVM from Kenya and Ghana



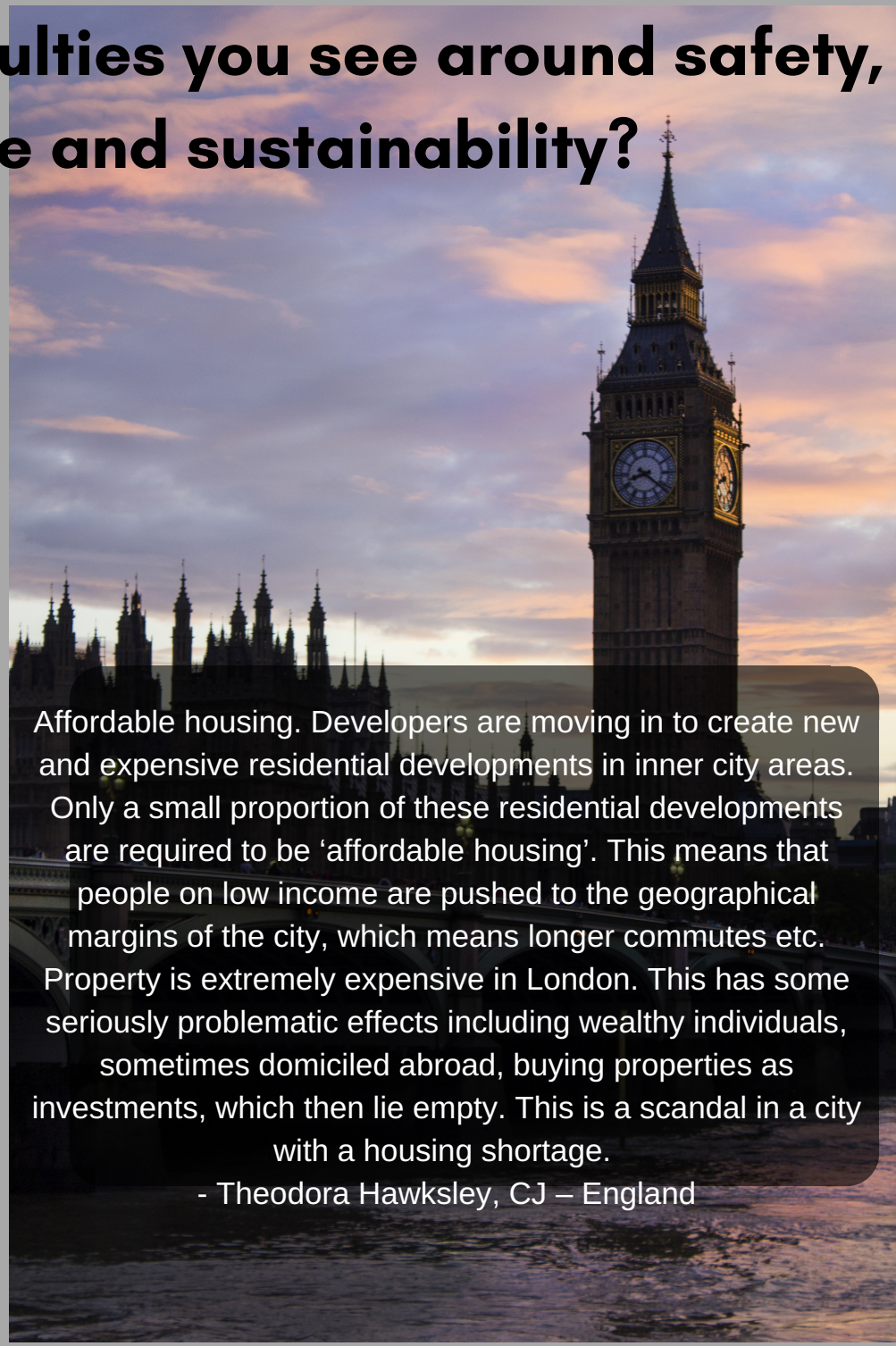
Initially I thought [this exercise] would be a chance to name what was wrong with my city however I quickly grew to realise how fortunate we are with access to affordable housing, basic services (excellent services such as water and sanitation, nutritious food, healthcare, education, culture and communication technology). With ample green spaces and excellent public transport we are celebrated as the most liveable city in the world. As I researched I learned that Melbourne supports training of urban scholars world wide. - Rachel McLoughlin, IBVM - Australia

Can you describe any difficulties you see around safety, inclusivity, resilience and sustainability?

A photograph of the CN Tower in Toronto, Canada, rising above a city skyline. The tower is a tall, white, cylindrical structure with a glass-enclosed observation deck. The background shows other city buildings and a clear blue sky.

Bigger is not necessarily better. Combining six cities into one megacity (Toronto) may help with managing transit or garbage pickup and other services; however, the rate at which the city has grown even over the last 30 years has created new problems. Work and home locations often require long travel time – sometimes up to 3 hours a day. Affordable housing for newcomers, young adults and young families is hard to find. This is even more evident when we are trying to find short-term housing for our refugees. Safety in terms of gang violence, drugs, homelessness and newcomers is a challenge. All deserve to feel safe in their city even the homeless need to feel safe in the shelters and on the streets. For newcomers, feeling that they belong and are welcome here is important to their sense of wellbeing and safety – they have often come from violent scenarios. Let us not add to that traumatic experience.

- Ursula Witkowska, IBVM – Canada

A photograph of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in London, England, at sunset. The clock tower is illuminated, and the sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple. The River Thames is visible in the foreground.

Affordable housing. Developers are moving in to create new and expensive residential developments in inner city areas. Only a small proportion of these residential developments are required to be 'affordable housing'. This means that people on low income are pushed to the geographical margins of the city, which means longer commutes etc. Property is extremely expensive in London. This has some seriously problematic effects including wealthy individuals, sometimes domiciled abroad, buying properties as investments, which then lie empty. This is a scandal in a city with a housing shortage.

- Theodora Hawksley, CJ – England

What are you aware of your country/locality doing to promote safety, inclusivity, resilience and sustainability?

Birmingham is trying to encourage greater use of public transport by making it easier for people to pay via an automatic card for payment. They are introducing more bus lanes which will enable the bus to travel quicker along the routes in order to encourage people to use the buses instead of cars. There is great promotion of security on public transport with more transport police available and easier ways promoted to contact them. There is a large investment in trying to promote cycling and trying to convert some of the roads for cycle paths that is protected from the car traffic.

- Una Coogan, IBVM – UK



Neighbourhood Watch is a local initiative across many suburbs where neighbours look out for neighbours by way of security in homes and gardens etc. Out in the western suburbs there is an app one can download onto a phone called "Safe Streets". If a person comes across something needing attention by the local council (rubbish, broken glass, exposed needles etc) one takes a photo, uploads it to the app and sends it through. The attention is fairly quick.

- Sandra Perrett, IBVM – Australia

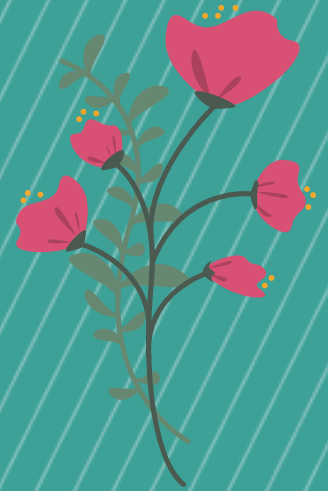
Today the people have grown in the knowledge of their right. Therefore practicing their democracy many groups (religious of the state is actively part of this cause) have taken initiative to make others aware of their rights. Since it concerns a great ratio of those who reside in the villages they are brought together and helped to learn about their rights. Out of one of the many examples I would like to share that a retired A.G officer: has taken the initiative to move to his native village and make the people aware of their rights. He also moves to different places sharing his knowledge with other in a wider manner, many such meetings and rallies are organized that has awaken the people to know their right regarding the land and its safety. And so keeping in mind the future and resources the people are working together to save it.

- Priyanka Topno, IBVM – India





Response to Laudato Si



I strongly stand with this point that we were to be friends of nature and not enemies, but the growing demands of each of us beyond our needs have given the name of destructions as 'DEVELOPMENT'. I feel this is the most important issue to deal with, as we have started... to continue and fulfill all the actions required to save the earth and learn to use the resources in a balanced way so that we sustain it for future or else we won't have the existence to do anything else. Let us live together the call to care for nature... for in return The Nature will care for us. - Priyanka Topno, IBVM – India



I agree so much with this statement. The mental health benefits of having sufficient green space is well known. Birmingham for a city that has a reputation of being industrialised and grey is surprising green. It has many public parks, and many trees have been planted throughout the city. Birmingham is a city of canals, apparently more canals than Venice and the city is making a good job of making and encouraging the canals and their towpaths to be used as a way of transport for boats, walking and cycling. - Una Coogan, IBVM - England

As Pope Francis has repeated many times in Laudato Si, we need an ecological conversion and an integral ecology. As IBVM, I believe we have inherited a way of enabling an ecological conversion in others. Particularly with our work in formation of leaders. Through sharing our formation skills of deep listening, spiritual conversation and discernment from a place of freedom, justice and peace we can create change. Care for our common home will happen only when we fall in love with it and each other. Reverencing creation, recognising Christ in the other and serving out of a place of deep love.

- Rachel McLoughlin, IBVM – Australia



What would you ask your government to do to improve your city?

Have a plan would be my first request. What is the driving force behind your decisions re: urban growth, greening the city, affordable housing in the city as well as in the outlying areas. What is your core value? How can we build neighbourhoods (again) and not just 'subdivisions'? What would happen if you applied Laudato Si to your urban plan?

- Ursula Witkowska, IBVM – Canada

Continuing to tackle inequality through: a rent cap, more affordable housing in central locations, dealing with 'absentee landlords' and discouraging the buying of property for non-residential purposes. Encouraging cycling through the development of dedicated off-road or segregated cycling routes. Keeping the travel cost cap and thinking further about how to reduce commuting costs for low-income service workers.

- Theodora Hawksley, CJ – England

Policies and strict measures to be put into place in order to move the slum dwellers into their new housing projects. The church could be used to coerce them to do so through the peace and justice unit. Make education compulsory and inclusive to all and also have equitable facilities, resources and staffing procedures that is non discriminatory to the poor.

- IBVM from Kenya and Ghana

Make the central areas of the city and many larger suburbs, traffic free. Improve public transport. Provide more green space. Keep the trucks off the streets! More social housing.

- Sandra Perrett, IBVM – Australia



**For more information on
Sustainable Development Goal 11,
please visit:**

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>