



## Goal 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES

The fact that some people are poor and some are rich is something that children spontaneously perceive as unfair and wrong. As adults, do we learn to be more accepting of this fact? The goal of reducing inequalities was not part of the Millennium Development Goals. It has been incorporated into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both because inequality is seen as a problem in itself and because reduced inequalities is a tool for fighting poverty.

When the gap between rich and poor becomes too great in a society, it can undermine the trust between people and people's trust in those who govern. In this way, great inequality can also have a negative impact on democracy. Uncertainty and xenophobia can also increase due to inequalities, conflict levels can increase, and extreme poverty can lead to environmental exploitation.

An important measure to reduce inequalities is to have a tax policy that helps equalise society, where those with large wealth and high incomes pay the most tax. Good and fair welfare schemes such as pensions, welfare rights and health and education systems are also crucial. In poor countries, economic growth is important, but this growth must be inclusive, by giving employees a living wage, for example. At the global level, we need financial transparency that makes it possible to tax the wealthiest people and large multinational companies.

We have a lot of knowledge about what it takes to reduce inequalities, but there must be major changes at several levels to make it happen. Perhaps the most important question is whether politicians and people in general have will to change?

## Biblical reflection

The prophet Amos was active in Israel around years 750 before Christ. This was a time when the country, also called the northern kingdom, experienced relative peace and prosperity thanks to both military and economic success. The wealth, however, was not accessible for all; the powerful elite increased their wealth at the cost of the poor. This is how Amos describes the life of the rich: "Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall" (Amos 6:4). The fact is that their wealth is based on injustice and abuse of power; they "oppress the poor" and "crush the needy" (Amos 4:1). They conduct dishonest trade and force the poor into economic slavery (Amos 8:4-6).

Experience shows that economic growth often brings with it increasing inequalities, among individuals and groups. Economic inequalities lead to corresponding social differences, evaluating people according to what they possess and consume. In Amos' view, a welfare based on inequality and abuse of power is not sustainable, and it is subject to God's judgment and doomed to fail.

There is, however, an alternative: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live!" Amos announces. And he adds: "Establish justice in the gate!" (Amos 5:14-15). Equality presupposes goodness and equal relations; sustainability in addition demands justice and peace, not at least in economy and politics.

## Questions

- What problems does rising inequality create in relation to sustainable development?
- The Old Testament prophets criticised the elite of that time for building their wealth on injustices and abuse of power. Is that a relevant issue in our time?

## Challenge

Which actors in your local community help to reduce the economic inequalities between citizens? Can you do anything to strengthen this work?

Is there anything you can do to put inequality (locally, nationally or internationally) on the political agenda?

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, you do not discriminate between people,  
Make us more like you.  
Grant us wisdom and the will to share.  
Let greed be lost to justice,  
And give us the courage to accept one another  
across our divides.*

*We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord. Amen.*