

THE MISSION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

MEETING OF ASSISTANCY COORDINATORS

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Social Justice Secretariat

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1. Strengthening social research in the Society of Jesus and more particularly within the Social Apostolate (sector, ministry) has become an important priority in responding appropriately to the needs of our times, which our mission calls upon us to do. All of us who have gathered here in Rome-- Coordinators of the Social Apostolate, and Jesuit as well as lay persons engaged in social research-- have reflected on the opportunities and the obstacles in the path of social research in various Assistancies all over the world. We have also discussed some successful case studies in detail and deepened our understanding of the range and depth of social research carried out in many social centres, social institutes and Jesuit Universities. The hope these have generated in us touches us deeply; it is a hope that overcomes by far the difficulties and challenges many research projects face today. We also strongly feel the need to re-organise our work, pull our forces together, and integrate the efforts made in the university and the social sector to respond to the challenges and opportunities of a globalised world. Though our specific circumstances and contexts vary, we all share the same vision, and we strongly feel we are part of an apostolic body at the service of Christ's mission: the service of faith doing justice (CG 34, D 2, n. 1).
2. We are aware we live in a complex, exciting and simultaneously dangerous world. More than ever, we need today the wisdom of Ignatian discernment and the help of solid analysis to ground our apostolic choices. In our contemporary culture, it is crucial to learn how to look at the world (Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 106) so as to understand the diversity of cultures and beliefs; the new social divisions and exclusions; the outstanding examples of solidarity; the scenes of war and the attempts at reconciliation; and finally, the tragedies and joys, the despair and consolations of women and men who are searching for meaning and relevance. Social research is an important instrument to help us discover the signs of the times in this complex web of structures that characterise our world today. Social research, with its scientific rigour, contributes significantly to diagnosing reality and offers alternative strategies that may guide our apostolic projects.
3. Fostering social research in the Society is imperative in a world in which the production of scientific knowledge and the formulation of public policies are subordinated to the often unknown interests funding and sponsoring research. We need to ensure that our social research is in line with our mission of a faith that does justice. We live in a time crisscrossed by contradictory forces and shaped by constant changes. A new information and communication society is spreading that may possibly make for more participative ways of deliberation and decision-making. At the same time, a prevailing dominant culture of pragmatism frequently leads to extremist positions of 'relativism' or 'fundamentalism'.
4. These changes affect all dimensions of our life: while we are led to discover new meanings in this global reality, new identities and subjectivities are being formed. Persons and institutions are urged to find their own identities and this encourages processes of self-reflection but also, in some cases, self-centredness. While social needs favour the creation of multiple networks, economic neo-liberalism produces numerous cases of exclusion that weakened and diminished public services fail to address. Civil society demands greater social participation and invites all to a great global solidarity. We live in a society facing greater risks both at the individual and community levels. While obstacles tend to divide us, new opportunities are multiplying rapidly.

5. Amidst this increasingly complex reality, social research ought to play the pivotal role of helping each apostolic sector or activity to become more aware of the situation in which it operates and the effects it generates. Current, fast-changing trends force us to review and change our policies regarding knowledge and the intellectual apostolate. Our reform will only succeed if it abandons old isolationist practices and adopts a cooperative and universal way of proceeding. Those institutions that remain isolated run the risk of falling prey to particular and narrow interests, and in some cases, to neo-liberal concerns. If Jesuit social research does not explicitly commit itself to the service of Faith and Justice it runs the risk of being subverted and, possibly, corrupted in certain cases.
6. Though social centres share the view that social research should be guided by our commitment to justice, they often encounter serious financial difficulties, and some may yield to the temptation of accepting funds from sources that compromise the direction and objectives of Jesuit social research. We also feel that we are responsible to ensure that the abundant resources for education and research that we Jesuits have flows into one integrated apostolic project.
7. We call on social centres to go beyond mere activism and “assistentialism” and base their social interventions on good research. Those social centres primarily involved in social action and those engaged mainly in social research need to develop clearly established ways of collaboration (Memorandum of Understanding, MOU) so as to contribute to the overall Jesuit social action ministry.
8. It is also crucial that trained Jesuits who can undertake direct action and social research and have an appreciation of the intellectual apostolate continue to be appointed to the Social Apostolate. We recognise that Jesuits and lay partners need to become aware of the importance of a rigorous (theoretical and practical) social formation.
9. The sharing of the last days has convinced us of the Society’s effort to carry out its commitment to social research and the intellectual apostolate in the various Assistancies. We have realised that there exists in Jesuit social centres and institutions a tradition of applied social research that supports transformative action, and is capable of maintaining a healthy autonomy, pursue an independent agenda and develop its own methodology in its commitment to justice issues. Attention to programmes of accompaniment and social insertion, establishment of linkages with social movements, insistence on scientific rigour and the defence of a critical approach, all these are traits characterising Jesuit institutions engaged in social research. They explain the high levels of credibility and public recognition that social institutions have attracted. Another positive sign has been the increasing participation of lay colleagues in research work committed to the mission of the Ignatian family.
10. We have also become aware that different Jesuit social research projects have consolidated a Jesuit model
 - combining research and action, quality and relevance;
 - generating a type of knowledge at the service of a Faith doing Justice;

- favouring a comprehensive look at reality including personal and structural components;
- searching participative models where researchers insert themselves in the social reality, and victims as well as popular groups are present in social research;
- living at the cross roads of history;
- fostering dialogue with other cultures, popular religious traditions and movements;
- accepting the need for a multi-disciplinary approach that includes philosophy, theology, theoretical and applied research; and
- searching for ways of improving communication and dissemination through journals and the web, and establishing linkages with centres for advocacy and lobbying.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. We strongly recommend that during their formation Jesuits and collaborators need to become familiar with social research, both theoretical and applied, so as to respond better to the Ignatian call to develop a “learned ministry” (GC 34, D 26, n. 18-20) and secondly to acknowledge “the distinctive importance of the intellectual quality of each of our apostolic ministries” (GC 34, D. 16, n. 1).

TO CONFERENCES/REGIONS

12. Given the complexity and interconnectedness of the social issues confronting us we believe that recommendations on the development of social research can be more fruitfully considered at the level of a Conference (or Region).
13. Under the authority of the Moderator/President, a (Five-year) **Strategic Plan** should be prepared **for strengthening and developing social research** in the region and in the provinces in a complementary and integrated manner so that it also becomes a tool for discernment and apostolic decision-making.
14. On the basis of the experience gained on some ongoing projects, we suggest that this strategic plan needs to consider the following areas/dimensions:
 - 14.1 Selecting **common priority themes/areas**, given the specific needs, challenges and strengths of each region; the themes chosen should integrate a theological, philosophical and ethical dimension.
 - 14.2 Setting up **team/s of researchers** composed of Jesuits and other partners, so that Jesuit Universities (Colleges), Social Institutes, Social Centres and Coordinators of the Social Apostolate can collaborate either institutionally or individually under an agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This may entail a re-organisation of the research activities of the social centres in the region.
 - 14.3 Encouraging the development and strengthening of a few specialised social research centres or institutions in the region, which, wherever appropriate, may be placed under the care of its Moderator/President. These centres

need to establish clearly defined linkages with all the social centres in the region or Conference.

- 14.4 Ensuring that, while Jesuits are encouraged to get involved individually in social research, such initiatives are integrated within the overall research plans and priorities of the Conference and the Provinces.
- 14.5 Exploring the feasibility of setting up **independent social institutions within a University**; we know from experience that this type of organisational arrangement keeps the centre faithful to the apostolic priorities of the Jesuit mission while maintaining, at the same time, rigorous research standards.
- 14.6 Promoting the establishment of a scientific advisory body or council for social centres and a social advisory body or council for academic institutions engaged in social research.
- 14.7 Starting a **regional (or Conference) pilot research project** under a protocol specifying objectives, time-frame, and the various responsibilities.
- 14.8 Fostering **close relationships between social researchers and the victims of injustice and exclusion**; this includes strengthening immersion programmes that already exist in many Jesuit institutions of higher learning.
- 14.9 Preparing a **planned programme for the formation** of Jesuits and other partners in social research; this would imply the appointment of Jesuits to do doctoral studies in social sciences, the provision of facilities to those engaged in social research to interact with other researchers in the region and outside, and facilitating the acquisition of language skills.
- 14.10 Establishing **independent sources of funding** for social research; one possible way is to encourage the development of a special “*corpus*” built with the contributions from the ‘apostolic funds (*arca*)’ of each province.

TO THE SOCIAL JUSTICE SECRETARIAT

- 15. Facilitate **the dissemination of information regarding the research plans developed by various Conferences** (regions) and, whenever appropriate, propose **overall policy guidelines** for strengthening and developing social research in the Society of Jesus. For implementing the above it seems necessary to
 - 15.1 **collaborate very closely with the Secretariat for Higher Education** (Intellectual Apostolate) in the elaboration of common plans and projects; collaboration with other Secretariats should also be encouraged;
 - 15.2 **foster communication and dialogue**, on a formal basis, with the (future) **Council of Presidents** (Moderators) on matters related to social research;
 - 15.3 explore and facilitate **linkages at international level** between Jesuits and partners engaged in grassroot social interventions, research centres (institutes) and advocacy;

- 15.4 contribute to the development of **fund-raising capacities at the Jesuit Curia** in Rome for social research projects; and
- 15.5 **strengthen the infrastructural facilities at the Secretariat for Social Justice**, including the development of a system of information and interaction (website) appropriate to the needs of social research.