# BEYOND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## A FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*Peter Turkson*

IT IS A great honor, and indeed my personal pleasure, to be invited to contribute an essay for *Horizons* on human development, a subject whose pertinence is coterminous and co-extensive with the presence of human life on earth.

As long as human life exists, the question of its development, its wellbeing, and its flourishing, will be essential. Furthermore, since human life—according to Scriptures—is set by purpose and design within a garden planted by God, its quality and development are bound to be the result of the interaction between man and his environment, the garden. But this garden environment alone, which supports human life, cannot produce the desired effect without its inhabitant, the human person, created body and spirit.

This means that in the discourse about human development, and from the point of view of man and his garden, there are subjective and objective considerations; and from the point of view of man, the human person created body and soul, there are both tangible and intangible factors.

All of these distinctions must be considered if human development is to be integral and holistic, guaranteeing the dignity of the human person.

### READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The understanding of the development of peoples and nations is often limited, consciously or inadvertently, to economic growth, and described in simple financial terms—such as how many dollars a day one has to live on. However, in 2010 the UNDP Human Development Report introduced a wider notion of development by referring to access to basic services of life.

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*Cardinal Turkson and Pope Francis*

In this sense, the current landscape of development in the world is very uneven, to say the least. Besides the various prevalent forms of poverty, illiteracy, disease, and poor healthcare—as well as hunger and various forms of social insecurity (war, slavery, joblessness, and so on)—life in society is fraught with gross inequalities and different forms of inequity.

These radically challenge the characterization of the human family as a fraternity or brotherhood, as well as the attribution to it of any form of equality as contained, for instance, in the UN Charter.

Pope Francis has consistently denounced this scandal of inequality and inequity and pilloried the hoarding of wealth that lies at the heart of it. At the 2014 World Economic Forum, he acknowledged the steps taken by business to improve the welfare of people in the areas of healthcare, education, and communications; yet he still regretted that "the successes which have been achieved, even if they have reduced poverty for a great number of people, often have led to a widespread exclusion."

People still live in insecurity, with thousands continuing to die every day from hunger whilst food is wasted.

The arrival of migrants and refugees, seeking minimally dignified living conditions and sometimes dying in the process, has become a near-daily phenomenon of staggering proportions. During the 2015 World Economic Forum, Oxfam boldly presented studies showing that 1.1 percent of the world's population currently owns more than the remaining 98.9 percent; and that, in 2016, the wealth of one percent of the world's population will exceed the total wealth of 99 percent of the inhabitants of the earth. According to Oxfam, this explosion of inequality stymies the world's fight to eliminate poverty; over one billion people still live on less than $1.25 a day, and one in nine of such people do not have enough to eat. In May 2015, the OECD repeated Oxfam's assertions in a study of its own.

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Locally, the arrival of mining companies, industrial farmers, and foreign land-grabbers render populations landless, relegating them to slums and poverty in cities. Powerful multinational business groups, made mobile and pervasive by globalization and free-market conditions, do create new jobs and lift people out of poverty; yet they also destroy local industries, churning out ever more unemployed people. And yet, in the words of Pope Francis, business people who have demonstrated their aptitude for being innovative and improving the lives of many people by their ingenuity and professional expertise, can further contribute by putting their skills at the service of those who are still living in dire poverty.

Still locally, bad governance, corruption, and the absence of the "rule of law" grind human dignity underfoot, reducing citizens to beggarly poverty and leaving them with no recourse to justice. Then conflict and violence deprive people of the one indispensable environment for development, which is peace.

## Humanity's Distress Call

The distress call of humanity in need of development, dignity, human flourishing, and peace has been heard. Pope Benedict XVI heard it when he traveled to Africa to announce the holding of a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. He addressed it there and in the post-Synodal Exhortation *Africae Munus*.

The UN General Assembly has also heard this call of humanity. It addressed it with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and now takes it up further in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





The question to seek to answer is the following: what are the solutions to the development needs of the world proposed by these two world institutions, the Roman Catholic Church and the United Nations?

## The Catholic Church

Recognizing the connections between evangelization and human advancement as far back as Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nutriandi*, the Catholic Church has always sought to contribute to man's development in her own field. Speaking of "human conscience made more aware by the Gospel message," Pope Paul VI said in Kampala in 1969, that by "the light of that message, the dignity of a people is seen more clearly, and the demands arising from that dignity are recognized."

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This explains Pope Benedict XVI's passionate appeal to the Angolan Government during his 2009 visit to deliver the Synod's *Instrumentum Laboris*. He charged: "friends, armed with integrity, magnanimity, and compassion, you can transform this continent, freeing your people from the scourges of greed, violence, and unrest." He also called for "a determination born from the conversion of hearts to excise corruption once and for all."

The Pope followed this up in *Africae Munus* by conferring on the Catholic Church in Africa the task of ensuring that such conversions take place among Africa's leaders. He said that

> one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct.

Thus, like soldiers of old charging onto the field in pursuit of a just cause, the battle cry with which the African bishops returned to their countries from the Synod was "Africa, stand up and walk." This resounding phrase summed up the great optimism at the closing of the second Special Assembly for Africa. Its roots, however, are to be found in the ecclesial events and activities of Benedict XVI which led up to it.

First, when Pope Benedict XVI told the Angolans that the time had come for Africa to be the "Continent of Hope," he immediately spoke about the transformation of the continent with virtuous living: the virtuous life of its leaders. Indeed, he believed that if the leaders allowed themselves to be borne aloft by faith and reason, they would "easily recognize their neighbor as a brother or sister, born with the same fundamental human rights." As a result, the multitude of Angolans who lived below the threshold of absolute poverty would not be forgotten, and their expectations would not be disappointed. They would find hope in their improvement: they would find hope in their flourishing!

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The link which the Holy Father established between poverty and governance or leadership is very significant. While the Catholic Church does not offer technical solutions to improve governance, she does have a vocation and a mandate to accompany humanity in its walk through history, through her very many houses of study, institutions of education, and healthcare delivery facilities. Thus a key objective of the second Special Assembly for Africa and its post-Synodal Exhortation is the invitation to Africa to rediscover and promote a concept of the person and his relationship with reality that is the fruit of profound spiritual renewal—that is, a conversion of heart and a humanism whose true measure is Christ and which promotes the integral human development of the person.

It is such a conversion, and Christian humanism, which creates the godly (virtuous) lives that must engender Africa's hope for development—for "all upright human conduct," according to Benedict XVI, "is hope in action." Hope-in-action impels Africa to embrace her opportunities for growth and development, thus responding to the command to "*stand up and walk.*"

It would seem, then, that the primary cause of Africa's true development will be the promotion of conversions of heart coupled with education in a new humanistic synthesis that extols the dignity of the person.

It is evangelization in the sense of the proclamation of the Gospel for a change of life, thanks to an enlightened sense of the brotherhood of people; a new ethics and morality of political power whose true character is service; the discovery of the vocation to work as our means of being and wellbeing; a new market morality that enshrines justice and fairness; a morality that makes development and the pursuit of the common good the driving forces in the governance of under-developed people; a morality of the necessity and the right to education; and a theology of peace as the environment conducive to development.

The response of the Catholic Church to Africa's development deficit, thus, appears to be two-fold: on the one hand, the formation of partnerships and, on the other, the formation of its population in Christian virtues and service of the common good and public good.

Second, in the face of globalization—the enhanced mobility of capital and labor, and enhanced interconnectedness of nations and peoples due in particular to improved communication technologies—Benedict XVI talked about the development of partnerships as being necessary for Africa's emergence out of poverty and its flourishing. "Social and economic development in Africa," as the Holy Father observed before a gathering of political and civil authorities and diplomats in Luanda,

> bring into partnership national leadership together with regional initiatives and international resolve. Such partnerships require that African nations be seen not simply as the receivers of others' plans and solutions. African men and women themselves, working together for the good of their communities, should be the primary agents of their own development.

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## The General Assembly

In 2000, the UN held a Millennium Summit in response to the development needs of the developing world. At that Summit, the UN adopted the Millennium Declaration that included eight international development goals—the MDGs—which it committed itself to achieving by 2015.

As that end-date began to draw near, a post-2015 process and action plan began to be set in motion to carry on the development goals and objectives of the MDGs. At the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, the concluding *Future We Want* document called for the identification and formulation of SDGs as a continuation of the MDGs. This work was begun during the 67th session of the UN General Assembly under the presidency of Vuk Jeremić, and subsequently resulted in the formulation of 17 goals and 169 tar-

gets, covering a broad range of development issues, to be achieved by 2030.

## PROSPECTS AND ISSUES FOR AFRICA

Development has traditionally been understood as simple economic growth. Sustainable development has more than 100 definitions, but the most widely used comes from the UN World Commission on Environment and Development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

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The two main elements of this definition are meeting the needs of the poor and securing the future by not depleting natural resources. Viewed in this light, Africa faces two strategic challenges: the first is to achieve economic and human development, and the second is to make that development sustainable.

From the point of view of these African challenges, some see sustainable development mainly as a post-industrial phenomenon to address post-development issues and therefore consider that at least some developed countries may already be in that state. This may indicate that sustainable development ought to (or can only) follow 'full' economic development. Thus, the SDGs reflect, to a large extent, the characteristics of development in developed Western countries, which implies that certain conditions make sustainable development achievable and permanent.

Accordingly, the SDGs require Africa to rapidly reform and modernize its economy and industrial sector, among other goals. This demands complete economic and social reorganization, ensuring social and institutional inclusiveness, prioritizing the poor, and dignity and justice for all.

These are but a few of the SDGs—all of which may seem perfectly desirable—but the question arises: does Africa need to achieve all the SDGs, and to do so in the manner prescribed? And should they be made conditions of any partnership for assistance? Even well-developed countries may find a few SDGs difficult to achieve, such as having inclusive societies and ensuring justice for all.

Development evolves and anchors best when adequate local abilities and resources are in place. Owing to limited scientific management, infrastructure and services, Africa would be less able to implement, support, and monitor some of the SDGs, such as those on climate, environment, and natural resources. The SDGs are therefore likely to make development efforts in Africa overly complex, when what is needed now is to choose and achieve key initial development priorities while considering larger issues over time.

The key problems of development in Africa—which are also the main dimensions of its underdevelopment—are income poverty, hunger (or "food poverty"), "health poverty," and "educational poverty." Several reports of international bodies in recent years, including the UNDP's 2012 "Africa Human Development Report," addressed these issues, which are the focus of SDGs 1 through 4.

Believing that the SDGs reflect the development priorities of the Continent very well, and following four African Consultative Meetings that began in my native Ghana in 2011 and ended in Tunisia in 2013, 53 African countries signed on to the Common African Posi-

### *Proposed Sustainable Development Goals*

*1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere;*
*2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;*
*3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;*
*4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;*
*5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;*
*6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;*
*7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;*
*8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;*
*9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;*
*10) Reduce inequality within and among countries;*
*11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;*
*12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;*
*13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;**
*14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;*
*15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss;*
*16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;*
*17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.*

**Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change*

tion (CAP) on the SDGs in July 2013. The commitment was made by a cross-section of African society, including leaders of various countries and civil society, to express Africa's will to implement the SDGs.

The CAP consists of six pillars representing six major areas of development in Africa. These are stated below, with the corresponding proposed SDGs:

- Structural economic transformation, and economic growth (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 9, 11, 12);
- Science, technology and innovation (SDG 9);
- People-centered development (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 16);
- Peace and security (SDG16);
- Finance and partnership (SDG17);
- Environmental sustainability, natural resource management, and disaster management (SDGs 13, 14, 15).

As with CAP, six principles underpin sustainable development, namely, *people* (i.e., to ensure health, education, and the inclusion of women and children), *dignity* (i.e., to end poverty and fight inequality), *prosperity* (i.e., to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy), *justice* (i.e., to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions), *partnership* (i.e., to catalyze global solidarity for sustainable development), and *planet* (i.e., to protect ecosystems for all societies and their children).

The SDGs and the six sustainable development principles align very closely with CAP's six pillars. They highlight some relatively new social and environmental concerns, such as ecosystems, urban development, sanitation, justice, peace, and security. Moreover, they address essentially the same issues of socio-economic transformation that many African countries have struggled with for years, without great success—these include the provision of adequate income and its equitable distribution, full and decent employment, adequate health and education for all, rapid economic growth and transformation, balanced economic sectors, and gender inclusiveness and balance.

Addressing these concerns, the SDGs hope not only to promote the sustainable development of Africa and the rest of the world, but also, most significantly, to facilitate the attainment of human dignity.

## The SDGs as a "Human Dignity" Agenda

When, in December 2014, the UN Secretary-General presented his Synthesis Report to the General Assembly, it was considered as an advanced version of the case he would make for the SDGs at a specially convened Summit to be held in September 2015. The report called for coordinated action to usher in an era of sustainable development for all; and the SDGs were presented as a global agenda centered on people and the planet, underpinned by human rights.

This was about protecting human rights and the ecosystem of the planet. And, just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights inseparably relates human rights to the dignity of the person, so the SDGs were presented as "the road to dignity" by the UN Secretary-General: "[we] have an historic opportunity and duty to act, boldly, vigorously, and expeditiously: to turn reality into a life of dignity for all, leaving no one behind."

*Does Africa need to achieve all the SDGs, and to do so in the manner prescribed? And should they be made conditions of any partnership for assistance? Development evolves and anchors best when adequate local abilities and resources are in place.*

For Ban Ki-moon, the SDGs are a reaffirmation of the UN's faith in the dignity and worth of the human person, and will take the world forward to a sustainable future. The SDGs are, then, about making a life of dignity a reality for all: a compelling, and a principled, narrative based on human rights and dignity.

As we recall, *dignity* is one of the six principles underpinning Sustainable Development; but it refers, in the SDGs, to ending poverty, fighting inequality, ensuring prosperity, growing a strong, transformative and inclusive economy, and establishing partnerships to activate global solidarity for sustainable development and justice. The scope of *dignity*, like the SDGs which are meant to engender it, is predominantly social and economic; just as *development* in the SDGs is predominantly conceived in terms of economic growth and social transformation.

Even when the SDGs are influenced by the UNDP sense of development as access to basic services, the financial implications remain prominent—especially as the indispensable means for their implementation. Thus, the UN Secretary-General, in his 2014 Synthesis Report, stressed the need to provide a sound financial footing for the SDGs; and the upcoming July 2015 Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa is meant to facilitate sustainable development financing.

According to the UN, three elements are envisaged: first, national governments will raise domestic revenue to benefit the poorest and the most vulnerable members of society; second, official development

assistance (ODA) and international public funds—particularly for vulnerable countries—would also be vital to unlocking "the transformative power of trillions of dollars of private resources;" and, third, private investment would be particularly important on projects related to the transition to low-carbon economies, improving access to water, renewable energy, agriculture, industry, infrastructure, and transport.

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In recognition of this, and given that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a clearly human-centered document, the MDGs already moved away from a single-minded focus on economic resources and adopted a more multidimensional perspective on the challenges of human development, focusing especially on health and education as a sound basis for both personal and communal flourishing. At the same time, the MDGs focused narrowly on the challenges facing developing countries.

The SDGs recognize that sustainable development is a challenge for every person in every country—rich or poor, north or south. They widen, therefore, the scope of application of the development agenda. The SDGs also mark a shift away from an infatuation with GDP and a dogged zeal for material accumulation. They pursue the idea of the SDGs as a framework that links economic prosperity with both social inclusion and protection of the natural world.

Thus, the SDGs prioritize the following factors as pathways to participation and human flourishing: ending poverty and hunger; achieving food security; improving nutrition and sustainable agriculture; ensuring healthy lives and the wellbeing of all; ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all; achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls; ensuring access to affordable and sustainable energy for all; and improving management of water and sanitation.





In short, the SDGs place human beings *qua* human beings more towards the center of concerns for sustainable development.

The aforementioned are certainly core constituents of human development. But they do not quite give people the full means of integral self-fulfillment and development. They are not yet inspired by a complete vision and understanding of man. The SDGs are still a human development framework that ascribes human development to purely human schemes, in correspondence with an incomplete vision of the human person.

"The creation of institutions is not sufficient to guarantee the fulfillment of humanity's right to development," Pope Benedict XVI teaches in *Caritas in Veritate*, because "man does not develop through his own powers, nor can development simply be handed to him." Rather, "integral human development," he says, "is primarily a vocation." In this, he echoes Pope Paul VI's teaching in *Populorum Progressio* that

> authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension. Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing space. Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods—at the service of the great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity.

It is to this "breathing space" of development—the understanding of human development as a vocation in correspondence with its full anthropological character—to which we now turn our attention.

## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A VOCATION

When the Catholic Church speaks about development, it always starts from the premise of human dignity, which flows from the fact that every human being is made in the "image and likeness of God." If the creation of man in the image and likeness of God establishes the dignity of every man, the subsequent story of the brotherhood of Cain and Abel makes brotherhood or fraternity the basis of the human family and the vocation of its members. But brotherhood also expresses the common origin of brothers: being from the same womb, brothers and sisters share a common nature and dignity; they share the same nature and are equal in dignity. Brotherhood designates the common and equal dignity of all persons.

In this sense, the conception of development as the realization of human dignity must apply to all. True development must be universal: developing what every person possesses by nature. Having such a universal scope,

development is not real and falls short of its true scope when it applies only to some persons and not others.

There is no 'I' who can live in full human dignity so long as there is 'another' on the face of the earth who suffers degradation. The very existence of such 'others' living in hardship and oppression tells us that social conditions are flawed and development is not integral. Development must be seen as an affirmation of the great dignity and intrinsic worth of every person everywhere and in every generation; for *authentic* human development is *integral* human development—the development of the whole person and every person.

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Furthermore, the human person, endowed with dignity by reason of his creation in the image and likeness of God, and subsequently called to brotherhood in his coexistence with others of his type and kind, is placed in a garden "to till and to keep." Thus, the account of the beginnings of the human race establishes three levels or types of relationship for man (the human person). In his dignity, the human person is set in a relationship with God, the author of his dignity; with other persons, as brothers (and sisters); and with the garden, the world or earth in which man has to live, to till, and to keep.

These coordinates of human existence in the Genesis account of our very beginnings also account for the experience of sin and the fall; but our fallen state will be restored and renewed in the Last Adam, his "life-giving spirit," and his offer of salvation. Thus man, in his relationship with God, is called to a life of transcendence, which he or she lives as a life of grace. In response to this vocation to transcendence, man also lives the call to brotherhood (sisterhood) in the love of God, revealed in his Son, "the firstborn of many brothers;" and man also lives on the earth-garden "to till and to keep."

This, in a nutshell, is the Christian view of the human person, as well as his integral human development and his dignity; and it is with this understanding of the nature of man that the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church teaches that the development of man is his *vocation.*

Because it is the design of God that every man develops and fulfills himself, the reference to development as vocation means "on the one hand, that it derives from a transcendent call, and on the other hand that it is incapable, on its own, of supplying its ultimate meaning," as Benedict XVI has written. This is the critical contribution of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church to the discussion of human development—be it the MDGs or the SDGs. The Christian call to integral human development is both natural and supernatural.

*In the absence of a transcendental vision, human development can only be essentially a human enterprise—defined merely by technology, economics, and finance—and offering utopian and ideological visions of man that eclipse God.*

## Integral Human Development

Integral human development, therefore, encompasses the development of the whole person—personal, communal, economic, social, cultural, psychological, and religious. As St. Pope John Paul II put it, it is about "being" rather than "having." In other words, development is not just about technological or material progress. It is, rather, a vocation: a response to the created nature and character of man.

Human development, like human dignity, is not something that happens to a person. It is not something that someone else—be it a nation and its government, the United Nations or some world agency, or an NGO—brings or does to a person. It belongs to human nature and its created character to unfold and to flourish.

And it is the responsibility of the human person to respond to this created endowment of its nature. In this, both the vocation and its response have a transcendental character. That is why Pope Benedict XVI observes in *Caritas in Veritate* that a vocation requires a free and responsible answer; for "integral human development presupposes the responsible freedom of the individual and of peoples: no structure can guarantee this development over and above human responsibility." What structures, agencies, and entities outside the person can do is to facilitate, assist, and promote the exercise of the response of the person.

From what has been presented above, we may characterize human development as a vocation in the following terms: human development belongs to man's created nature by

divine design. Hence, as Benedict XVI writes in *Caritas in Veritate* "the idea of a world without development indicates a lack of trust in man and in God." At the same time, the *truth* about man's vocation to integral human development needs to be accepted.

Crucial, therefore, to human development is human responsibility.

Man, the subject of human development, is the "Adam of the fall, saved and called to grace in the Last and new Adam." Man's integral development applies then to the natural and the supernatural dimensions of his life. The eclipse or absence of the one leads to a distortion of the other.

*Integral human development, therefore, encompasses the development of the whole person—personal, communal, economic, social, cultural, psychological, and religious.*

Authentic human development is related to man's experience of salvation in Christ, and it is driven by Christian charity as the "principal force at the service of development:" the love of God revealed in Christ. It thus needs God and his grace.

Accordingly, authentic human development is about the whole person in all its dimensions and about all persons; and it is rooted in the biblical and Christian ideal of a "single family of peoples in solidarity and fraternity."

Reflecting the sense of man and his nature, illuminated by revelation, the Catholic Church's social tradition has generated a body of practical principles of action to guide all efforts at human development.The major principles are *human dignity, common good, solidarity and subsidiarity, universal destination of the goods of the earth*, and *justice.* The application of these principles has constituted the Catholic Church's pursuit of integral human development as a vocation and as an expression of her solidarity and respectful affection for the human family. The Catholic Church also proposes the application of these principles to the many efforts of the human family to promote human development, as a sign of her accompaniment of humanity in its walk through history.

Thus, for example: because the human person cannot find fulfilment in himself apart from the fact that he exists "with" others and "for" others—as the Church's Social Teaching clearly teaches—Saint Pope John Paul II promoted the understanding and application of the principle of *solidarity*. He described it as virtue, a "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."





Solidarity always prioritizes the poor: those whose rights are denied, who are excluded, who are unable to fulfill their God-given summons to development. Pope Francis echoes Pope Paul VI when he notes that the practice of solidarity "would allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny, since every person is called to self-fulfillment." Solidarity becomes even more important in an age of globalization—which, as Pope Benedict XVI noted, makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers.

Solidarity must always go together with its twin principle, *subsidiarity*. Subsidiarity is a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. This is an expression of both inalienable human freedom and innate human dignity. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups cannot accomplish something alone, but such help should not be given in a way that undermines the agency of the person. As Pope Benedict XVI put it, subsidiarity "respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others." It fosters freedom and participation through the assumption of responsibility.

*Human development belongs to man's created nature by divine design.*

In other words, *solidarity* and *subsidiarity* can never be separated. Subsidiarity without solidarity gives rise to individualism and social privatism—in effect, it says 'I grant you total freedom to take care of yourself but I opt to keep all my resources to myself.' On the other hand, solidarity without subsidiarity can smother individual initiative and demean those in need—in effect, it imposes help on others without trusting or engaging their own responsibility and gifts. Together, solidarity and subsidiarity are constantly oriented toward the common good.

The common good incorporates the conditions that form the basis of social life and the ability of every single person to pursue his or her vocation. It is not possible to separate the good of the part from the good of the whole. This is why Pope Francis condemns, over and over again, the throwaway culture, the economy of exclusion, and the globalization of indifference.

The same is true for the focus on reducing inequality, ensuring that economic growth is inclusive and that all have opportunities for decent work. The Catholic Church's social teaching is very clear on this point—the goods of the earth are destined for all, and it is unacceptable for the few to deprive the many. Hence the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional, and instead comes with

a social mortgage. As Pope Francis puts it: "the private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them."

Excess inequality destroys the networks of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity that are vital to a healthy society. It leads to exclusion rather than to encounter, and makes it harder to hear the cries of the poor.

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The Church also prioritizes employment and decent work. For Catholic social teaching, there is an innate dignity in the act of work itself. The human being can never be regarded as merely an instrument or a means of production. Rather, he or she shares in the work of the Creator through decent and rewarding work. It is the primary way that one's vocation is fulfilled in this world.

This is why the lack of decent work opportunities is so scandalous, and why Pope Francis cares so deeply about the plight of the unemployed—especially youth, who are part of the discarded and the throwaway culture.

## The Environment and Human Flourishing

The environmental dimension of the SDGs is also central to the Catholic Church's vision of integral human development. We must remember that human beings are part of nature. From conception to the moment of death, the life of every person is integrated with and sustained by the awesome panoply of natural processes. This calls for a reciprocal response on the part of humanity—to nourish and sustain the earth that in turn nourishes and sustains us.

Today, the ever-accelerating burning of fossil fuels that powers our economic engine is disrupting the earth's delicate ecological balance on a nearly unfathomable scale. If we carry on with 'business-as-usual,' the global mean temperature is likely to rise by four to six degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century.

This will prove catastrophic for the wellbeing and livelihood of peoples. And it will certainly be the poorest and most vulnerable who will pay the steepest price for global warming and climate change—the very brothers and sisters who bear the least responsibility for abusing nature. Furthermore, as conflict for scarce resources increases, it will turn brother against sister, city against countryside, and nation against neighboring nation.





When it comes to human flourishing, surely a healthy natural environment is foundational. There can neither be freedom and wellbeing, nor economic growth and further opportunities, if the environment is disregarded. In an age of sustainable development, solidarity must encompass the wellbeing of not only those alive today, giving priority to the poor, but also to those not yet born. So it is wholly appropriate that the SDGs focus on combating climate change; ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns; conserving and sustainably using our common marine resources; making cities safe, resilient, and sustainable; and sustainably managing forests, and combating desertification, land degradation, and biodiversity loss.

*Excess inequality destroys the networks of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity that are vital to a healthy society. It leads to exclusion rather than to encounter, and makes it harder to hear the cries of the poor.*

## Compass and Rudder

The SDGs certainly offer a solid framework to support the integral human development of each and every person, rooted in the common good of all humanity. The values of sustainable development cohere with the values of the Catholic Church's social teaching. All the same, the SDGs emanating from the United Nations bear the typical "blind spots" that Pope Benedict identifies with reason unguided by faith. In the absence of a transcendental vision, human development can only be essentially a human enterprise—defined merely by technology, economics, and finance—and offering utopian and ideological visions of man that eclipse God.

The Catholic Church's teaching is ultimately deeper, richer, and more encompassing. It calls for development on all dimensions, not just social and economic—and it orients humanity not only with this world, but with eternity. It calls not just for a fairer global economy, but for the poor to be loved and cherished. It calls not just for decent work, but for a sharing in the work of the Creator. It calls not just for lower carbon emissions, but for fundamental changes to habits and lifestyles.

Ultimately, sustainable development is about integral human development as a vocation: linked to and related with the God of human creation, who

loves and invites man to love in return. It is, thus, as much about moral conversion as about good policies and institutions.

Without relating human dignity to the source of that dignity—without restoring humanity redeemed and with a vocation to transcendence to the center stage of human development—even good regulations, policies, and targets are unlikely to prove effective. Without an ethical foundation, humanity will lack the courage and moral substance to carry out even the most sensible policy proposals.

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This moral obligation extends to all—political leaders, corporate leaders, civil society, and ordinary people too. And every single person of good will is summoned by an inner call to embrace the personal virtues that ground sustainable development. The most important of these is an enfolding charity that radiates outwards from the self to others, from those alive today to those not yet born.

At the end of the day, it is the sense of integral human development as a vocation that must give a compass and a rudder to the SDGs.