



The Challenge of Poverty

Ethics in Action for Sustainable and Integral Development



Introduction

Achieving the three core goals of sustainable development—eliminating poverty, ending exclusion, and protecting creation—demands the application of universal ethical principles such as human dignity, social justice, the common good, and shared wellbeing. As *Laudato Si'* demonstrated, the major world religions can and must play a pivotal role in both articulating and achieving common goals for our “common home.” The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are remarkable in their testimony to the powerful convergence of values and aspirations resonant in so many disparate nations of the world.

This extraordinary and promising synergy among religious, social, and political leaders needs, for its full realization, a renewed orientation and re-commitment to the values and ethics that would inform and inspire any effective global response to eight global challenges:

- Global climate change and the destruction of the intricate web of life, caused by heedless economic activity;
- Poverty and deprivation of “work, shelter, land and energy,” in the midst of great plenty;
- Modern forms of slavery, human trafficking, forced labor, inhumane work conditions, the sale of organs, commercial sex work, and diverse forms of organized crime;
- Corporate power and structures of corporate abuse unmoored from public purpose and free from public oversight;
- Mass migration caused by regional violence and environmental degradation;

- Inter-communal violence exacerbated by failing states and rapidly widening economic inequalities;
- The dramatic shortfall of educational opportunities, with half of the world's children not receiving an adequate education or remaining outside of school entirely due to poverty, conflicts, environmental disasters, forced migration, modern slavery, or other abuses.
- Restraining corruption, impunity, and organized crime in the public and private sectors. We experience today a global epidemic of corruption, abuse and arrogance of power in all social strata that weaken the sovereign power of the people and participatory democracy, and the repeated failure of political leaders to relinquish power on constitutional timetables.

These challenges are pressing for each of the great religions, across all geographic regions. The new project on Ethics in Action (EIA) will bring together a select group of religious leaders, academics, business and labor leaders, development practitioners, and activists, to identify values and ethical approaches to the eight challenges outlined above and advance concrete actions.

EIA will not aim for technical or policy solutions to the eight great challenges. Rather, it will bring into heightened focus the underlying ethical principles and values which alone are capable of addressing the challenges in a manner consistent with human dignity, the common good, social justice, and shared wellbeing in true solidarity. Effective solutions to these challenges, we believe, must be informed by a shared moral vision of human flourishing. Therefore, the goal of this project is to advance sustainable and integral human development through an effective collaboration among world religions for the purpose of articulating universal values and ethical imperatives and indicating how such values and ethics might be applied in practice to address pressing global challenges.

Objectives

We seek to achieve this goal through three objectives:

1. Build and give expression to a multi-religious ethical consensus on the moral obligation to address the eight global challenges;
2. Develop strong global partnerships among multiple stakeholders in religious communities and throughout society who will collaborate to foster this consensus and set about its implementation;
3. Mobilize religious communities themselves for robust advocacy in pursuit of activating the consensus for local-to-global problem solving.