Education

Ethics in Action for Sustainable and Integral Development

In September 2000, eight major Millennium Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations that included cutting extreme poverty and illiteracy by 50%, achieving gender parity in primary schools, combatting HIV/AIDS, and improving environmental sustainability—all by 2015. Results from this 15-year initiative were significant: global poverty decreased, major improvements were made in maternal health and lowering infant mortality, and school enrollments increased. Nevertheless, according to the Final Recommendations of the PAS workshop on Children and Sustainable Development: A Challenge for Education, held in November 2015, 50% of the world's children are currently with insufficient schooling, or out of school.

Hence, the UN body of nations came together again in September 2015 and agreed on a new and expanded set of goals—the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030. These 2030 UN goals—the 17 SDGs—broadened the range of targets for international development and included the important concept of sustainability as it relates to the increasingly perilous ramifications of climate change, mass migration, modern slavery, youth unemployment, and globalization of economies. Emphasizing the critical importance of education, the new SDGs included the need to "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning." Included are specific educational targets that aim to assure: access to quality early childhood development for all, especially including children living in slums; primary and secondary education with effective learning outcomes; and an increase in the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills. In short, the focus now turns to the creation and strengthening of lifelong learning opportunities for all, an important global policy shift toward sustainable human development.

Through the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations directs world attention to improving access to and quality of education for all children, families, and communities across the globe. Yet, creating a shared moral vision will require an exploration of the values, science and practice required to meet this goal. For example, one question we might ask is how we can apply the moral principles of human dignity, freedom, social justice, peace, the common good, and shared well-being in determining educational priorities, especially for the neediest populations. In the coming years, many stakeholders—religious institutions and communities, international agencies, national and local governments, the private and non-profit sectors, foundations, academic institutions and others—will need to come together to create a moral vision and consensus that leads to greater educational equity, in the light of truth, good and beauty.