

Why SHOULD
WE CARE ABOUT THE
*Sustainable
Development?*
Goals?

REFLECTIONS ON THE SPIRITUAL AND
ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE 2030
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Why should we care about the Sustainable Development Goals? Are they just words on paper drawn up by some wealthy diplomats at the United Nations? Will they achieve anything? Actually the Millennium Development Goals did achieve significant change in some key countries, but so much more remains to be done. Any cynical dismissal of these very courageous goals hammered out by people of all faiths and none would be a monumental failure of our global citizenship.

If we look at the reports from our sisters and colleagues working in development in India, Africa, South America, Europe, North America, Australia and South East Asia, we can immediately see that so many projects and efforts are, in fact, aligned with these goals. Indeed, if we, as Mary Ward women, sat down to write global goals for a peace that flows from justice, we might hardly change anything of these broad ideals.

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

Wherever we live, these goals focus our attention on the ways people are marginalised, and on strategies to develop alternative possibilities. The emphases here show the increased concern about our planet since the MDGs, as well as recognising the connections between the poor and the fragility of our earth.

It can help to dig into our own tradition and add the extra weight of our deepest beliefs to give us a greater push to be involved, in whatever small way in achieving these goals. They echo God's mission in our world: "I am sent to bring good news to the poor..." Jesus' parable in Matthew's gospel, which tells us that whatever we do to others we are doing to him, puts an urgency into our concern. This is especially so if we live in countries which have benefitted from the historical exploitation of others or benefit today in some degree through unequal trade and financial agreements.

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The year of Mercy, initiated by Pope Francis, calls for a conversion to active not notional compassion, embedding the works of mercy in our lives: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead (if you live in a poor country, that final one is more important than one might otherwise imagine). To the extent that we as citizens reach out in these ways, the climate in our civil society will hopefully change, as governments see there is support for more humane global policies. The outreach by many German families to welcome new arrivals from Syria into their own homes speaks volumes about the potency of this work of mercy. Laudato Si spoke to governments as well as all people of good will and called for care for earth as our mother, our common home, recognising that the poor are the ones most affected now and into the future by our reckless substitution of a blind lust for "progress" in place of concern for the quality of life of planet and peoples. While many of us find domestic ways to care for our earth, each one of us can apply our own pressure on governments via campaigns to keep them honest to their undertakings in Paris in December 2015 and to the reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

If we look to our own charism, Mary Ward's value on felicity can be read as a shorthand for the full flourishing of the human person. It is that deep feeling of right-

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ness that comes from individual gifts and talents being valued and being used for the greater good. This is dependent on peace and might encourage us to have peace building as a core value. Through her prayer Mary glimpsed the wonder of a way of

life where a person had freedom to recognise and live out of right relationships with God, with other people and with the material world, creating a passion for justice via

“all good works that needed to be done”. Mary’s fascination in her retreat notes with the myth of our First Parents walking in the garden as friends of God, at one with all creation, is perhaps an insight we can recapture and explore. Could this deepen our engagement in care for our world and all God’s friends in it? As educators we know that sincerity or integrity grows as a people are helped to know themselves and their world and are given the confidence to name the reality of their situation. Empowering women and girls takes different forms in various cultures, but the imperative for us is emphasised by Mary Ward’s insistence that “there is no such difference...”

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Using these priorities we have developed schools, clinics, development centres. We have helped people in their spiritual journeys. We have encouraged women from all walks of life to stand tall in their full human dignity. If we look at what we do and what we could do, we can see so many ways our ministries and initiatives fit with the Sustainable Development goals of the UN. We are a global organisation. We are for women, for education, for the full flourishing of each human person. These goals have been developed by men and women from all faiths, all ethnic backgrounds. How can we use our particular strength to carry these forward in partnership with so many others?

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