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Twenty First Century Global Goal-Setting Addressing Global Inequality: An Interdisciplinary Ethical Analysis

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Abstract: This paper employs an interdisciplinary ethical analysis to evaluate how global inequality has been addressed by recent so-called “global goal-setting” initiatives. It seeks to contextualize these initiatives within theoretical paradigms of human rights and human development, and to utilize these paradigms in evaluating the successes and shortcomings of the goal-setting initiatives. It concludes that while these initiatives have achieved some success in addressing global inequality, much still remains to be done.

Keywords: human rights; human development; Catholic Social Teaching; sustainable development; global inequality; global poverty

1. Introduction

This paper will focus on how the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their successors, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have attempted to address global inequality, both within and between countries, and in a variety of overlapping arenas, from economic inequality to gender equality. Utilizing the joint ethical analysis of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and rights-based approaches to development, it contends that both of these “global goal-setting” initiatives fall short of adequately addressing the issue of inequality. It goes about this task by first articulating what is entailed in a joint vision of CST and a rights-based ethical perspective on development. Subsequently, it turns first to the MDGs and the ways in which they failed to adequately address inequality and then to the SDGs, addressing both their improvements and remaining short-comings. It concludes that while this latest global goal setting initiative contains significant advances in addressing inequality, several serious issues remain from a CST and right-based perspective regarding both the structure of the goals and the means to achieving them.

At the outset it can be said that the interdisciplinary perspective being utilized in this analysis entails, at base, the view that development properly understood goes beyond economic development to instead seek opportunities for realization of human aspirations and fundamental human capacities. In particular, the view from which we will operate suggests that development is to be understood, at least at minimum, as the participatory realization of the full and interrelated spectrum of human rights. In other words, development should be understood as fostering participation in all sectors of society, of securing human rights in the social, economic and political spheres of life. Further, development properly understood should take into account the process by which these fundamental requirements or rights—both social and economic and civil and political—must be fostered in ways sensitive to their interactions between one another, and in a manner that is necessarily participatory.

If this all sounds a bit abstract, we will further delineate this perspective in terms of our specific concerns, namely, global goal-setting and how these global projects interact with inequality. To be clear, though, we are working with an overarching vision of human development and human

rights—something that can be found in both Catholic and secular thought and policy in various arenas—and we are applying this perspective to these initiatives to see how they live up to or fall short in addressing inequality.

2. Catholic Social Teaching, Human Rights, Capabilities and Human Development

It is important to first delve further into these significantly overlapping visions of the ends and means of development. We begin this task with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Although not a monolithic body, CST has a certain organic unity based on an enduring commitment of the Church to certain basic values. The “official” or magisterial teaching (what we are calling CST) is that which emanates from the papacy, certain universal councils of bishops, or regional conferences of bishops. Regarding global poverty specifically, this teaching speaks in terms of “authentic” or “integral” human development, a concept which has evolved over the years and has now become codified in consistent magisterial teaching. In initial magisterial articulations on addressing global poverty through development, the focus was on economic development with little nuance, as with John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. However, with *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI gave a framework for the shape of genuine human development. This seminal 1967 document clearly delineates the “aspirations” of seeking to “do more, know more and have more in order to be more” and promulgates a vision of development “not limited to mere economic growth” but rather dedicated to the promotion of “every man and of the whole man” ([1], no. 6). This vision has been consistently reaffirmed at several levels of magisterial teaching, most recently in Benedict XVI’s 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. Therein the now Pontiff Emeritus explains that development has the goal of “rescuing people, first and foremost, from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases and illiteracy”, and further, fostering all peoples’ “active participation, on equal terms, in the international economic progress”, their “evolution into educated societies marked by solidarity”, and their enjoyment and participation in “democratic regimes capable of ensuring freedom and peace” ([2], no. 21). Thus the Catholic concept of authentic/integral human development has as its end the greater realization of human wellbeing and flourishing.

This aim is further articulated in CST through the closely related understanding of human rights. In his seminal 1963 social encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII systematically outlined a full range of human rights stemming from inherent human dignity and necessary for the protection of such dignity. In many ways echoing the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this range or spectrum includes both the civil and political rights to freedom of speech, worship, and assembly as well as social and economic rights to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and basic education and all other “necessary social services” [3]. More recently, the US Catholic bishops in their classic 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* enumerate the link between justice and human rights. The bishops reaffirm the full spectrum of rights named in *Pacem in Terris* and explain that CST “spells out the basic demands of justice in greater detail in the human rights of every person” [4]. These fundamental rights are “prerequisites for a dignified life in community”, are “bestowed on human beings by God and grounded in the nature and dignity of human persons” and are thus “not created by society”, though society does have “a duty to secure and protect them” ([4], no. 79). In sum, then, the bishops assert that “fundamental personal rights- civil and political as well as social and economic- state the minimum conditions for social institutions that respect human dignity, social solidarity, and justice” ([4], no. 80).

Achieving the task of securing the full range of human rights through authentic human development will, as the American bishops explain, “make demands on *all* members of society, on all private sector institutions, and on government” ([4], no. 83). Thus from the perspective of CST, the full spectrum of human rights are interconnected and indivisible, and the promotion and protection of all these rights is a prime goal of authentic human development and an essential task of the whole of society, necessarily including, though not limited to, the state. Indeed, the participation of people is both the end and a necessary means in achieving development. As John Paul II explains, development is “most appropriately accomplished in the dedication of each people to its

own development” ([5], no. 44). Moreover, this task will include both the dismantling of entrenched structural and institutional obstacles to development and the reordering of society in a way that guarantees all persons the ability to participate actively in the economic, political, and cultural life of society ([4], no. 78).

But this task does not fall solely on domestic society, as CST also insists upon responsibilities for both rich and poor nations and stresses the need to realize authentic human development through genuine cooperation among all peoples. Indeed, the documents of CST are replete with calls for cooperation and “mutual assistance” between the various actors engaged in development, from wealthy governments, developing governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Pope John Paul II clearly expounds the need for cooperation in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, declaring that collaboration for human development “is in fact a duty of *all towards all*, and it must be shared” by all parts of the world ([5], no. 32).

We can now turn to the relation of CST to the “capabilities” or human development approach as articulated by both economist/philosopher Amartya Sen and political and classical philosopher Martha Nussbaum, as well as to the public policy that has been heavily influenced by such thinking. Before delving into the comparison it is helpful to briefly outline this approach and to clarify its various articulations and instantiations in public policy.

In brief, the capabilities approach is a theoretical paradigm that starts with the question: “What are people actually able to be and to do?” It can be helpfully understood as a “necessary counter theory” to development economics approaches which focus on economic growth (measured in GDP), or utility (measured in satisfaction of preferences), or equality of resources (as exemplified by John Rawls and consisting of a sort of egalitarian version of the GDP approach). There are different versions and emphasizes of the capabilities approach (we will return to these briefly below), but as Martha Nussbaum points out, it may still be treated “as a single, relatively unified approach to a set of questions about both quality of life and basic justice” [6]. The end of development for this approach is enhancing “capabilities” or substantial freedoms to achieve certain “functionings”, and it is closely allied with the international human rights movement. Both movements recognize that all people have certain entitlements by virtue of their humanity and that it is a basic duty of society to respect and support these entitlements. Both Sen and Nussbaum acknowledge this common ground, as well as the common ground between the content of capabilities and the full spectrum of human rights found in the Universal Declaration—although Nussbaum is more explicit in enumerating certain capabilities and in making the link between them and Declaration rights.

The capabilities approach, combined with the more general paradigm of human development as propounded by thinkers such as Paul Streeten and Mahbub ul Haq, has had considerable influence on global policy making [7]. Indeed, the approach has become official policy of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Again, we must note that more nuance is involved than can be elucidated here; there are in fact several different ways of relating human rights to human development operative in the UNDP, the so-called “social justice” and “holistic approach” among them [8]. But although significant nuances exist, it is at the same time true that the similarities between the capabilities approach and other ways of speaking about human development are much more pronounced than any differences. Human rights as articulated in the various international declarations, covenants, etc., are not in competition with capabilities; there is, in fact, a strong link between them (as noted above), and they are both utilized in conjunction in development policy. Thus as the UNDP *Human Development Report* (HDR) explains, “human development shares a common vision with human rights” with the goal of both being “human freedom” and the two ideas “mutually reinforcing” [9]. Further, both of the global initiatives with which we are concerned in this paper, the MDGs and SDGs, are clearly shaped by both human development and human rights.

The similarities abound between the capabilities and human development approach—in both its theoretical and practical policy dimensions—and CST on human development and international justice. At base, both models of human development move far beyond a vision of economic development

alone to a vision of human welfare and flourishing as the goal of development. This flourishing is elucidated by both the secular and Catholic concepts—at least partially—in terms of human rights. And, importantly, it is the full spectrum of rights that is emphasized in both: the protection, fulfillment, and promotion of *all* human rights. Significantly absent, then, is any bifurcation and juxtaposition of social-economic and civil-political rights. Thus, in short, the overall aims are quite similar: enabling people to be and do more in all the diverse spheres of human existence.

Further, in the various policies that are influenced by the secular approach, one can also see the manifestation of Catholic ideas of solidarity and concern for the least well off. Indeed, policies such as the MDGs call for a mode of poverty reduction and human development which represents many of CST's calls to greater unity, cooperation, shared responsibility and solidarity among all peoples. The Millennium Declaration launching the MDGs also made clear that there was a “motivating concern for the poor” and a duty “to all the worlds people, especially the most vulnerable” [10]. This clearly fits with the Catholic conception of “the preferential option for the poor”. Thus, both CST and policies influenced by the capabilities/human development approach emphasize the values of equality, freedom, participation, nondiscrimination, and shared responsibility.

3. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)

It is important to explicate a bit more background on the global goal-setting initiatives themselves. The MDGs arose out of the milieu of late 20th century reevaluation of development economics and policy, particularly under the auspices of the United Nations. Systematic attempts to eliminate global poverty and underdevelopment go back many decades, but during the 1980s the early convergence of the human rights and development arenas became overshadowed as did the role for the United Nations in shaping development policy—in particular by the so-called Washington Consensus and the a neo-liberal model of growth entailing reduction in public expenditures and a decreased focus on poverty itself. The 1990s, however, saw the flowering of an era in which “human development” and capabilities began to guide significant elements of global development policy, particularly with the advent of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as well as the return of UN Summitry and UN prominence in setting the development agenda.

The immediate context of the MDGs was the 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, the largest ever gathering of heads of state seeking to define a common vision for the 21st Century development agenda. This summit produced the United Nations Millennium Declaration, wherein all countries of the world, both “rich and poor”, committed to doing all they could to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and rights, and achieve peace, democracy, and environmental sustainability ([10], p. 1). The MDGs were the concrete set of objectives meant to launch this commitment.

The goals were as follows: (1) Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty; (2) Achieve Universal Primary Education; (3) Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women; (4) Reduce Child Mortality; (5) Improve Maternal Health; (6) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases; (7) Ensure Environmental Sustainability; (8) Develop a Global Partnership for Development. These goals were further broken down into 18 targets and 52 indicators (and subsequent to a 2005 UN Summit, this was expanded to 21 targets and 60 indicators) ([11], p. 55).

The record of these goals from a rights-based and CST perspective is decidedly mixed. On one hand, as the Issues Brief from the United Nations inter-agency Technical Support Team (TST) summarizes, they have certainly had some success in highlighting “key development and human rights issues such as poverty and food, gender equality, health, education, water and sanitation, housing, and a global partnership for development” ([12], p. 1)¹. Further, as the UNDP 2003 HDR extolls, they did indeed go far beyond focusing on economic growth and instead placed “human well-being and

¹ The Issues Brief was drafted by OHCHR, UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, and UNEP with comments from the following agencies: UNESCO, UNAIDS, World Bank, EOSG Rule of Law Unit, PBSO, ILO, UN-DESA, UNFPA, and ISOAA.

poverty reduction at the center of global development” and were linked to the “economic, social, and cultural rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. They can therefore be said to be “building blocks of human development” and human rights and expressions of ideals with considerable moral force ([10], p. 28).

However, extensive evaluations undertaken by independent scholars, non-governmental organizations, and various UN bodies reveal much that is lacking from a human rights and CST perspective². Basically, progress on the goals was “uneven within and across countries” and gaps exist “in what the goals set out to achieve, as well as in the way progress has been measured”. Further, the overall focus of the MDGs on a “narrow and somewhat unbalanced set of goals failed to reflect the full ambition of the Millennium Declaration and its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” ([12], p. 1). Thus from a rights-based perspective there are deficiencies in both vision and execution.

We can focus on the problems in how the MDGs addressed inequality both within and between countries. In the view of a wide variety of consultations, the MDGs’ focus on “halfway” targets and on average progress has meant that—to quote the UN’s Technical Support Team’s amalgam analysis—“the poorest families, and most deprived and marginalized groups, including minorities, migrants, and indigenous peoples, have been left behind, even if the goals may be met in the aggregate at the national or global level” ([12], p. 4). This is true first of all regarding income and economic growth. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has indeed been halved at a global level, however, much of these gains have occurred in China and India where the gains were driven largely by “aggregate gains through economic growth policies” that were “based upon policies that pre-dated the MDGs”, and in many cases many people in those countries are not better off than they were 15 years ago [14]. In much of the rest of the world, as the Catholic Aid Agency, CAFOD, points out, the wellbeing of many poor people has deteriorated as a result of factors beyond their control, such as environmental degradation, economic crises, and rapid changes in crop prices [15]. And even though poverty has been reduced in many nations, inequality has continued to persist and widen in many more; indeed, inequality increased in the majority of countries [16].

This is a problem first of all because there are complex interactions between inequality, poverty and social stability, and the relationship between inequality, growth, and social stability was left largely unexamined by the MDG’s agenda. In short, growth must be shared and put to use in building institutions that foster participation and opportunity for all people in the nation. Social stability depends on this, and it is a vital moral imperative of development as human rights, besides. The failure to focus on employment is a major element of this lacuna. But, as Mac Darrow, American University law professor and UN human rights specialist argues, the larger issue is that the “actual economic and social policies through which states have purportedly pursued the MDGs still appear overwhelmingly to be circumscribed within a long discredited neo-liberal economic growth model” [14].

Now, to be sure, economic growth within a country is an important element for achieving poverty reduction, but examining the *quality of growth* is essential from a rights-based and CST perspective. Inclusive and equitable growth that creates decent work should be of utmost importance, as should ensuring the quality of work through labor standards, and social protection for the losers in the process of growth, economic expansion, and concomitant creative destruction³. Given the lack of focus on equitable and inclusive growth, we can see, for instance, that while Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced declining poverty rates, it is still extremely vulnerable to shocks that could rapidly erode even the small gains that were made [17]. The MDGs simply failed to capture the problem of the most vulnerable whose rights need to be protected in the process of growth within countries [18]. Moreover, inequality

² For an early and definitive statement on the deficiencies in both the development and human rights community with regard to the Goals see [13]. The paper was originally produced for the Millennium Project Task Force on Poverty and Economic Development and later revised for academic publication.

³ See Victor Tan Chen’s work on the psychological impacts of unemployment on laid-off autoworkers in the present volume.

and lack of participation have been shown to be directly related to increased social insecurity, unrest and violent conflict [19]. In short, then, again drawing on Mac Darrow, growth “cannot continue as the dominant policy objective as an end unto itself, without sufficient concern for its complex and contingent theoretical and empirical relationships with inequality” nor without sufficient appreciation of the “reverse causal relationship between social investments and growth” [14].

And in terms of fostering economic growth itself, Goal 8 on fostering a partnership, including improvements in aid, trade, and debt policies, failed to live up to the pledges made or the necessary improvements to achieve the goals. This is clearly a central failure, not in terms of the plan, but in terms of the action necessary to see it achieved. As we will see, there are reasons to fear whether this shortcoming will be remedied in the SDGs.

Beyond economic growth and inequality, there was also a failure in the MDGs to properly address inequalities regarding discrimination and gender. First of all, the issue of discriminatory practices, in particular regarding disability and social protection, failed to even make the list of goals and targets. The issue of gender equality did appear as Goal 3; however, progress here was tracked through only three indicators: education, employment, and political representation. Surely these are important elements of achieving gender equality, but as the TST Issues Brief argues, they leave out “crucial aspects of gender-specific discrimination such as violence against women, gender-based wage discrimination, women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women’s limited asset and property ownership, and unequal participation in decision-making at all levels” ([12], p. 2). Overall, then, as the United Nations Development Group’s (UNDG) Inequalities Consultation revealed, by “not devoting sufficient attention to inequalities, the MDGs may have exacerbated the relative neglect of marginalized groups and contributed to widening social and economic inequalities” ([12], p. 1).

The successors to the MDGs, the SDGs, came out of wide consultation during which time many of the above noted concerns of human rights were taken into account. They are far wider in scope than their predecessors, and include an impressive—perhaps even daunting—list of key elements of global basic social justice and care for the Earth. They are as follows:

(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 wellbeing 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.

It suffices to say that the SDGs continue and expand the scope of the social and economic end of the spectrum of human rights also covered by the MDGs, but also expand the focus to key civil and political rights—including targets to enact and enforce non-discriminatory laws and to foster transparent, participatory and representative government at various levels. They therefore get at the important element of the interdependency of rights.

More specifically for our focus in this paper, they also go far in responding to the call from both states and civil society to specifically address inequalities within and between countries. Two of the Goals explicitly address inequality: Goal 5 on gender and Goal 10 on economic inequality within and between countries and also on exclusion (social, economic and political) and discrimination. Other goals and targets include important language on equal and universal access to healthcare, education, energy, and housing, and on tackling gender disparities. These elements all reflect the key human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality [20]. They also address a key complaint against the MDGs as was seen above, namely that the aggregate process often came at the cost of neglecting the most hard-to reach groups. Therefore, the greater disaggregation of data between and within countries, along with a specific focus on the marginalized and poorest, are important advances from a rights based and human development perspective. Further, it is important to highlight that international inequality is also addressed in a more robust global partnership. This partnership includes very high targets for development assistance, and an integrated framework that looks to connect multiple areas of finance, trade, and public-private partnerships (we will return to this below).

Nevertheless, issues still remain regarding just how far the goals go in addressing inequality. First, although Goal 10 importantly targets inequality directly in several arenas and looks to disaggregation of data, there are problems in the way such disaggregation actually plays out across a variety of categories within various countries. As the HCHR (High Commissioner for Human Rights) argues, “combating discrimination and inequalities requires disaggregation of data across a range of categories” but in the SDGs agenda “disaggregation by these categories would be subject to a decision on whether such characteristics are deemed ‘*relevant in the national context*’” ([21], p. 4). Data on how various segments of the population are faring is essential from a rights based and RTD perspective, regardless of the country’s particular social norms or situations. Thus, as [profession]? Thomas Pogge and Mitu Sengupta argue, in addition to having its own goal, the “concern to avoid excessive inequality should also be integrated into the other goals” and “indicators used to monitor targets should be disaggregated by relevant categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and geographical area”. In short, “no target should be considered achieved until it has been met for all relevant segments of a population” [22] in each country, and this criterion should apply to every country on earth.

Regarding *income inequality* in particular, at both the national and international level, the SDGs do not address the problem of what can be called “regulatory capture” and structures that tilt growth toward the wealthy and ultimately harm, or at least fail to benefit, the poor. In particular, as several commentators have pointed out, the “distribution of future growth is heavily influenced by the design of national and economic rules and practices” and because this is well known, “such rules and practices are heavily contested by various interested parties, such as industry associations, corporations, banks, hedge funds, and unions, all of which expend substantial efforts on lobbying for rules favorable to themselves”. Even in “broadly democratic countries, the poorer segments of the population are often politically marginalized when their share of national household income is small,” and thus “the social rules tend to disfavor these segments, causing them to fall farther and farther behind in income, health education, and social acceptance” ([22], p. 582). This vicious cycle is yet another example of the importance of the interdependence of rights and the need for a focus on economic rules—both national and global—to keep inequality within certain bounds; the SDGs do not go far enough in propounding such rules, or in recognizing the challenge of inequality. Indeed, there is a lack of ambition in the primary target, 10.1, to “progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average”. As Pogge and Sengupta argue, in light of “how enormous inequality has become, globally and in most countries, at the very least the demand should be that the income share of the poorest 40 percent will be substantially higher at the end of the period than at its beginning”. Suitable measures for this would be necessary, for instance utilizing the Palma Ratio—the income share of a population’s richest 10 percent divided by that of its poorest 40 percent ([22], p. 583).

Finally, it is essential to say something about the issues of financing, accountability and follow-through on the Goals, which were all major problems in the MDGs and are potentially still so in the SDGs. These issues are all directly related to the prospect of adequately addressing inequality. As noted above, MDG 8 set out to form a robust global partnership, and as one prominent development analyst has argued, in so doing it is “arguably the most significant development since the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights because it takes the idea of international state obligations beyond a statement of principle to list specific policy areas of required action: trade, aid, debt relief, and technology transfer” [23]⁴. However, there has been a failure to actually establish a truly global partnership which necessarily must involve the overlapping and multifaceted arenas of aid, trade, debt, and global corporations. Part of the problem is that commitments in particular to official development assistance (ODA) that were made with the MDGs were not followed through upon, but other issues arise from a *lack of sufficient commitments being made in the first place*. Basically, there was insufficient attention to structural injustice in the current international and intergovernmental system and the concomitant need for reform and building-up of better global governance as well as to the role of private actors and international corporations in the global order. Ultimately, then, structural issues of global governance and true international and global accountability, partnership, and justice were not adequately addressed.

The SDGs contain significant improvements toward realizing international and national accountability and follow-through on the goals. First, they shift focus on accountability, declaring the ultimate accountability to be of states to their citizens, and as the HCHR points out, this represents an historic shift away from the ‘donor-beneficiary’ paradigm. The text also specifically identifies accountability as the purpose of the follow-up and review arrangements and highlights the important role of parliaments “in ensuring accountability for effective implementation” ([21], p. 5). Second, they are also still fully aware of the necessity of global solidarity and international accountability at various levels. As noted above, Goal 17—strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership—is certainly more comprehensive than was MDG 8, containing nineteen targets on issues such as finance, technology, trade, data monitoring, and accountability in all these arenas. Thus, SDG 17 has moved beyond MDG 8 and closer toward the more encompassing “Monterrey Consensus”⁵. The Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Adaba, Ethiopia in July 2015 also made important advances in promoting the global partnership for development [24]. Importantly, it recognized the complex and interweaving role of various players in achieving adequate financing, and the need for increased ODA, as well as new sources of aid was central. In particular, the private sector received greater focus, as did alternative sources of funding, and increased tax revenues from developing nations. The Conference also corrected a large omission in the Monterrey Consensus by looking to environmental issues and the impact of climate change on development.

⁴ The targets are as follows: (8.A) to “develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system”; (8.B) to “address the needs of the least developed countries,” through such measures as tariff-free and quota-free access of least developed countries’ exports, expanding debt relief and cancelling official bilateral debt, and “more generous Official Development Assistance (ODA) for countries committed to poverty reduction”; (8.C) addresses the “special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states”; (8.D) deals with debt sustainability; (8.E) seeks to ensure access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries; (8.F) deals with the availability of information and communications technology.

⁵ This emerged from the 2002 United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico between heads of state and top ministers from world governments, heads of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, and prominent leaders from the realms of business and civil society. The consensus became a major reference point for international development cooperation and a major milestone toward greater achievement of Goal 8. It covered six key policy priorities: (1.) Mobilizing domestic financial resources for development (including addressing issues of governance and corruption); (2.) Mobilizing private international resources, including foreign direct investment and other private flows; (3.) International trade as an engine for development; (4.) Increasing international financial and technical cooperation (in particular ODA); (5.) External Debt; (6.) Addressing systemic issues: enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial, and trading systems.

Despite these advances, however, the key defect of MDG 8 also mars SDG 17: international accountability to the pledges made and the making of necessary commitments to structural change are both severely lacking. Thomas Pogge and Mitu Sengupta summarize the deficiency forcefully: “The world’s most powerful agents—affluent states, international organizations, and multinational enterprises—will once again be shielded from any concrete responsibilities for achieving the development goals when, given their wealth and influence, they ought to be taking the lead in providing the needed resources and in implementing systemic institutional reforms addressing the root causes of poverty” [22]. Thus it remains to be seen whether commitments to multifaceted assistance and structural change in the global system will be followed through upon.

4. Conclusions

This paper has sought to give a portrait and interdisciplinary evaluation of how inequality has been addressed within the evolving framework of global goal-setting initiatives for achieving human rights and human development. It first detailed the overlapping ethical frameworks of human rights and development in CST and secular rights-based approaches to development. It then provided a background for global goal-setting initiatives before turning to the ways they can be evaluated in particular looking to the issue of inequality, both within and between countries. This analysis concluded that while it is true that the SDGs make significant improvements over the MDGs from a rights-based and CST perspective, there is much that could still be improved in the SDGs both in terms of their structure and in the accountability and follow through necessary to see them come to fruition.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

CST	Catholic Social Teaching
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RTD	Right to Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TST	United Nations Interagency Technical Support Team
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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