

Fully and Gloriously Alive: Virtuous Human Development

*The Millennium Summit in September 2000 made history. Not only was it the largest ever gathering of world leaders. It was also the first time a global partnership was launched to tackle human development using measurable time-bound targets. Grouped together in eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the deadline to meet these targets was the end of 2015. As that deadline approaches, **Peter Heslam and Eric Wood** consider some of the progress that has been made.*

The first MDG target is arguably the most crucial – to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than US\$1.25 per day. Although mainstream media tends to avoid good news, the truth is that this target was met five years early. Equally unmentionable is the chief reason for this remarkable outcome. It wasn't charity, nor international aid, nor debt relief, but economic growth, especially in the 'BRIC' countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) but also in some countries in Africa, long considered a lost continent. The rise of the emerging world has been a development success story.

That said, hitting related targets such as the achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all, and to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, have proven problematic. While UN data indicates the hunger target may be met on time, the impeding of global economic growth from 2008-13 largely accounts for the fact that the employment target will be missed.

But goals left unscored are not an argument against having goals. Indeed, it is a cause for hope, rather than cynicism, that a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet to be defined, are due for adoption by the UN in September 2015.

Hope seems rarely in short supply with the former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates. He argues that the world is a better place than it has ever been, and that by 2035 there'll be virtually no more poor countries. Whether or not his prediction proves true, he is surely right to insist that nothing is so damaging to the eradicating of disease and poverty than the myth that we can't do anything to combat it.

One business leader to have joined this fight is Wyden King, based in Manila. Having become one of the wealthiest men in the Philippines, his way of doing business took a radical turn when he came to faith in Christ. Putting God's love for people, rather than his own love of riches, at the centre, he built the Armadillo group of companies to serve the welfare of its 2000 employees and their communities.

This meant turning his back on the pervasive corruption and tax evasion in the hospitality-related industries in which Wyden's businesses operate. He now trains his managers to be honest and transparent in their dealings with officials, refusing bribes even when this loses business. Success, he insists, is a question of how many lives have been transformed in the process of doing business.

In pursuit of this vision of success, Wyden has transferred the ownership of one of his businesses to its employees. Kalinisan Laundry, which can process two tons of linen per hour, is the largest laundry service in the Philippines. Its unskilled workers enjoy job security and employment benefits that include free counselling, and advice on domestic budgeting and savings.

Armadillo is also involved in social housing schemes, ecotourism projects, and initiatives to stimulate small enterprise development as a route out of poverty. It deliberately uses its technical competence, especially in hotels and tourism, to



Kalinisan Laundry - employee owned

influence the formation of values in the communities in which it works, not least regarding the management of natural resources.

For Wyden, values-led business of this sort is simply a reflection of what it means to live an integrated Christian life:

Our faith must translate to our relationships. It should not be dichotomized. We should not be one person when we are in business and another person when we are in church. We should be the same person before God as before our customers.


These words could have been spoken anywhere. But they have added poignancy coming from a developing economy, where poverty is often created by institutions so manipulated by a corrupt elite that they block the incentives and opportunities of people in poverty to make things better for themselves, their communities, and their environments.

This situation provides fertile soil not only for fatalism but for the dualistic religious mindset Wyden's words highlight, which is endemic in global Christianity. Wyden seeks to move his companies along an opposite trajectory, insisting that holistic faith is key to wholeness of life.

The MDGs are couched in secular terms, and the same is likely to be true of the SDGs. But Wyden's story suggests that no one should underestimate the positive potential of human virtues, especially when combined with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, in reaching development goals. As Wyden trains his managers - whatever their faith (or non-faith) background - to reflect the values and virtues he derives from his faith, his companies are having positive impact from the grassroots up.

A strength of the MDGs is that they have helped shift the focus in

development from input onto outcomes. They have increased the empowerment of people in poverty by giving them standards to which they can hold their governments accountable, and they have stimulated greater interest in solutions-based research and advocacy - something organisations like the Gates Foundation can build on.

But the top-down international development effort the MDGs represent has repeatedly proved disappointing. This is because human development is, and always has been, a bottom-up affair. At its heart is not a set of goals, but the human person, full of complexity and awesome potential. 'The glory of God', Irenaeus taught, 'is the human person fully alive'. That is what Wyden, and so many other leaders of virtuous business, see in the lives of those touched by their businesses. It serves as a reminder of the true purpose of business. 



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