CHAPTER 6

Practice Norm 6
Foster Just and Sustainable Economic Development

Definition

Just and sustainable development can be understood as processes of change in people's relationships to their environment that result in a positive improvement in their standard of living or quality of life. Just and sustainable development is not only about material prosperity, but also involves the cultivation and growth of the individual person. Just Peace cannot truly be said to exist without a resultant state of human flourishing. Local culture and ancient ways must be balanced against the aims of development and can be vital sources of human growth and satisfaction in the development process. Sustainable development also requires defense of the human rights and economic and property rights of the poor—those least able to resist the oppression of economically powerful persons and institutions—and is therefore inseparable from legal and political development.

Introduction

The world has made some progress on reducing poverty. Two hundred million people have been brought above the poverty line of $2.50 per day since 1999. However, these gains are rapidly disappearing because of recent crises. The food crisis has already pushed between 73 and 105 million people back into poverty. The World Bank estimates that if the current financial crisis persists, as many as 53 million additional people will fall below the poverty line. There are crucial gender-specific impacts of the crisis, “such as the expected drop in women’s income and girls’ school enrolment and the rise in mortality rates among infant girls.” An estimated 200,000 to 400,000 more infants will die each year, the
majority of whom will be girls. Furthermore, these negative impacts will not only increase poverty, they will jeopardize future development.¹

Christian, Jewish, and Islamic teachings are clear that taking care of the poor is a profound religious responsibility, as well as a way to peace. The Babylonian Talmud keeps these two themes together: “The world will not be at peace before God until people are generous and provide food for the poor” (Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 86a).

An example of this practice norm of just and sustainable economic development is found in Egypt being applied today and can be seen in the work of Misr el-Kheir (MEK), a development nongovernmental organization under the direction of Shaykh Goma’a. MEK has enjoyed astounding success in just a few years, bringing Egyptian Muslims and Christians together to fight poverty, illness, and illiteracy in Egypt based on a holistic approach to development informed by religious values. A sample of MEK projects, all of which are offered to both Muslims and Christians, includes helping establish small-scale livestock, fishing, kiosk, sewing, field vehicle, and other projects to raise the incomes of the poor; rebuilding demolished houses in Aswan and home improvement projects in other states; seasonal nutrition programs; feeding the elderly year round; rescuing the poor and illiterate from debt and predatory lending practices that have landed thousands in jail; expanding medical centers that help the blind recover their sight through simple operations; training people in upper Egypt for primary medical treatment in villages where no medical services are available; funding stem-cell research to treat diabetes, an enormous problem in Egypt; constructing schools and training social workers to assist in them; and providing specialized training to help children with special needs.

Christian Reflection

*Pamela K. Brubaker*

The literature on poverty and terrorism shows that “there is a correlation between conditions of extreme poverty, injustice, hopelessness, marginalization, and political oppression and the likelihood that people may use violence, including terrorism, to protest their fate.”² These conditions are also expressions of structural violence, which cause unnecessary suffering and death. Thus they are a matter of concern for Just Peacemaking, addressed in part by this practice.

*The Great Command: Love of God and Neighbor*

Scripture calls us to address these injustices as a crucial aspect of our Christian faith and life. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest of the commandments,