

The answer lies within: Inner Development Goals!

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I had never heard of it: the Inner Development Goals (IDGs). Although this initiative should have started in every respectable university in the world, I assumed it would be another 10 years before we focused on our own human selves instead of continuing to hope against our better judgment for external technological solutions to tackle the big problems. But the initiative is there, and it's already linked up with universities like Harvard and Oxford. I think it's a really great initiative! What is it?

In addition to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs: no more poverty, good education for all, etc.) formulated by the UN in 2015 to achieve a sustainable world by 2030, IDGs were created in Sweden from 2019 as a necessary addition to the 17 SDGs. The idea behind this initiative is that in the past centuries the (dominant) western approach has been to solve the great challenges with technology, and that this direction of solution has now itself become the biggest challenge of all. We have reached the limit of how without looking at our own behaviour, so externally (technocratically) we can tackle and survive our climate and diversity problems. In the film it is stated that “we are the problem at the core, the way that we're acting in the world, and the way that we are solving problems is the problem” (Erik Fernholm, founder and CEO of the Swedish 29k).

Selfishness, greed and apathy are mentioned as the real problems. Problems we have with ourselves, with our own humanity. Due to our fixation on external solutions (technocracy), we have come to ignore our inner capacities to tackle the (global) problems. We are also increasingly looking at external solutions such as new technologies for wellbeing and mental health, but these mainly take us further from our Inner Development Goals. The group behind IDG, in collaboration with an international team, has developed a framework that can advance work on the UN's SDGs. It consists of 5 categories – 1. Being (relation to yourself/being good about yourself), 2. Thinking (cognitive skills), 3. Relating (caring for others as well as the world), 4. Collaborating (social skills) and 5. Practice (courage, creativity, optimism and perseverance) – with a total of 23 skills and qualities in which people can develop.

Technology complicates everything

In my opinion, this is a very important initiative, because the UN SDGs can still be seen as an invitation to further technology development, without necessarily looking at our own behaviour. In recent years I have become convinced that that is precisely the problem: we act like very hungry caterpillars in a world of infinite resources and assume that science and technology labs will come up with new technological solutions to make the harmful consequences of that behaviour manageable. But, as my colleague prof. Attila Németh aptly puts it, when you have a flood, that's a problem. With a dike you solve the problem and you build your life safely behind that dike. If there is a dike breach, you have two problems, one with the dike (the technology) and one with your built up life. Better technology, or a better dike, is a solution. If this dike also breaks, you will have a big problem. A technology race has complicated everything.

For real solutions we must not only look outside ourselves, but above all within ourselves. Far too little attention is paid to this, and precisely because most research must be primarily externally funded and must be focused on the challenges facing business, we are by nature certainly not focused on our own behaviour, on the IDs. Psychology faculties should focus on how to understand and heal our blindness to the destruction of our own living environment, by providing insight and knowledge about behavioural change. Because we don't have to face the future as either prophets (it goes wrong!) or wizards (we'll find a technological solution). Therein lies again that dualism, true-false, news-fake news. The truth and our opportunities lie in integration, and the IDGs are a good start!