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Bioethics beyond borders: rethinking development for a shared future

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Van Potter in his book "Bridge to the future" presented bioethics as a new science of life that requires a multidisciplinary approach, including ecology for the supervene of life on Earth in a context of technological predominance. Since the 18th century, technology has been promoted as the core driver of economic development: first through industrial development, then commercial development, financial globalization, and artificial intelligence (20th-21st centuries). This vision has permitted a better life for only a portion of humanity, as many people still live in poverty, affecting their access to education, health services, and quality of life. Other negative impacts of profit-driven technology include climate change, food insecurity, wars, and migration.

The Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (UDBHR) was adopted by UNESCO (2005) for research involving humans. After reaffirming the values of the Nuremberg Code (1948) and the Helsinki Declaration (1964), the UDBHR introduced values of cultural diversity (Art. 12), solidarity and cooperation (Art. 13), social responsibility (Art.14), and protection of future generations, the biosphere and biodiversity (Art. 16 and 17). These principles are essential for global bioethics centered on human development. Twenty years after its adoption, the UDBHR remains necessary for discussing ethical alternatives that respect human rights and biosphere; in Latin America, the Redbioética-UNESCO actively works toward this goal.

Current changes of commercial relations between countries, multiple warnings from scientists about climate changes and its impact on life, as well as the experience of isolation during COVID-19 pandemic that fostered solidarity among neighbors, offer opportunities to reinvent development for human fulfillment and the common good. Do we need to support excessive consumption that deepens disparities and increases pollution? The failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (2000) obligated the UN to propose the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, and it is doubtful that the SDGs will be reached in the next five years if development continues to be viewed primarily as technological and economic.

How can we secure food for everyone and prohibit the weaponization of hunger? Is it possible to use technology for better quality of life and peace? This requires a radical change in thinking about development with a focus on nutritional security, and on research on agricultural adaptation to climate change and recuperation of ancestral knowledge. Alimentation security is a core ethical issue as it is essential for life. Water is another issue for life: new migrations are the result of droughts, inundations and war. Researchers must focus on conservation of existing sources and production/distribution of new water and food sources securing access for all.

But, what are the benefits and risks of "green energy" (from mineral extraction involving exploitation of adults and children in poor countries to contamination of air, rivers, and groundwater)? How can we transform the automobile industry to promote public transportation while considering the interests of all stakeholders: reducing air pollution, decreasing oil or energy consumption, minimizing traffic congestion, and improving quality of life, while simultaneously ensuring worker retraining that respects the rights to employment and self-development? Research about changes on transportation and energy technology, as well as sustainable options for plastic, one of oil's derivate with more environmental impact, is a priority. This research should be based on values of social responsibility, beneficence/no maleficence and justice.

The resolution of clinical bioethics problems is constructed through analysis of reality (clinical evidence and ethical problems), consideration of the social conditions and cultural behaviors of patients and their families, institutional norms and national laws, and ethical values. In the context of health attention, most of bioethics problems rise from a for-profit vision of medicine and the technological development and its impact on life. From the Hippocratic values of beneficence/no maleficence, and the respect of human rights, it is necessary that the developers of synthetic biology, cloning and artificial intelligence consider human dignity and protection of animals and vegetables as a core bioethics value for their research and innovation. Proposed alternatives emerge from dialogue among all stakeholders: patients and their families, medical staff and nurses, institutional representatives, and bioethics committees.

It is necessary to reproduce this democratic form of coexistence in public debates. Intergenerational bioethics allows the meeting of youth enthusiasm for new scientific perspectives and prudence of old based on their experiences for a balanced analysis of risks and benefits for the majority, including vulnerable populations. Survival on Earth requires reflection on public relations, both national and international. There are legitimate claims against inequalities, exploitation of vulnerable groups, corruption, and the lack of solutions that take their interests into account.

Bioethics is ethics for life, and it involves personal ethics. To contribute to human development and the common good, we need to consider the UDBHR articles mentioned above. There is no room for individual solutions because the damages are too significant. However, individuals and organized society must embrace social responsibility and must guide decision-makers in the right direction, as bioethics also encompasses transparency and accountability. If we are responsible to present and future generations, we must listen to scientists and reconsider our current development model. Bioethics

can contribute its core values and methodology in the search for solutions.[1–10]

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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