The Sustainable Development Goals viewed through Gross National Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a normative (non-binding) global international environmental agreement (IEA)—claim to be universal as they were multilaterally negotiated between UN member states. However, is giving the Global South a seat at the table truly inclusive development? This article looks at a cross-cultural comparison of the African philosophy of Ubuntu (specifically in South Africa), the Buddhist Gross National Happiness (Bhutan) and the native American idea of Buen Vivir (e.g. Ecuador) and how they view the SDGs, how they view ‘development’, ‘sustainability’, goals and indicators, the implicit value underpinnings of the SDGs, prioritization of goals, and missing links, and leadership. Viewed through the lens of the three cosmovisions of the Global, the SDGs do not effectively address the human–nature–well-being interrelationship. Other cosmovisions have an inherent biocentric value orientation that is often ignored in academic and diplomatic circles. These claim to be more promising than continuing green development approaches, based in modernism. On the positive side, the SDGs contain language of all three worldviews. However, the SDGs are not biocentric aiming to respect nature for nature’s sake, enabling reciprocity with nature. They embody linear growth/results thinking which requires unlimited resource exploitation, and not cyclical thinking replacing growth with well-being (of all beings). They represent individualism and exclude private sector responsibility. They do not represent collective agency and sharing, implying that there is a need for ‘development as service’, to one another and to the Earth. Including these perspectives may lead to abolishing the word ‘development’ within the SDGs, replacing it by inter-relationship; replacing end-result-oriented ‘goals’ with process thinking; and thinking in cyclical nature, and earth governance, instead of static ‘sustainability’. The glass can be viewed as half full or half empty, but the analysis shows that Western ‘modernism’ is still a strong underpinning of the SDGs. Bridges can be built between Happiness, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir in re-interpreting goal frameworks, global governance and the globalization process. This article is largely based on Van Norren 2017 (Development as service, a Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir interdisciplinary view of the Sustainable Development Goals. Doctoral dissertation, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 2017). Interview findings are numbered with A (Africa); B (Bhutan); E (Ecuador); S (SDGs).

Keywords Bhutanese Buddhist Gross National Happiness · (South) African Ubuntu · Ecuadorian indigenous (native American) Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay · Rights of Nature/earth law and governance/Mother Earth Pachamama · Inclusive economic development/(de)growth · Sustainable Development Goals/international environmental agreement

Abbreviations

IEA	International Environmental Agreements
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNP	Gross National Product
MDG	Millennium development goals
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TWAIL	Third World Approaches to International Law
UNDESA	United Nations Directorate for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

1 Introduction: the SDGs

The SDGs were a follow-up of the millennium development goals that ended in 2015. Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs are new in (a) content (mainstreaming sustainability), (b) scope (adding new goals covering economic growth, infrastructure, industry, cities, inequality, energy, oceans and seas, consumption and production, climate change, peace and security, access to justice, etc. and adding means of implementation and partnerships) and (c) process in which they were established (multilateral, consultative) (S1). Set against criticism of the MDGs, the SDGs *score much better* than the MDGs, though not satisfying radical critics [like Pogge (2010), Antrobus (2005), Saith (2006), Eyden and Clemens in Hulme (2009), Easterly (2009), but in line with optimists like Jeffrey Sachs of the Millennium Villages Project, Pronk (2005), Vandemoortele (2009), Fukuda-Parr (2014), Jolly (2003)]. They were consultative in process, apply to all countries, put sustainability at the heart, make cross-references (interlinking different goals), refer to broader declarations (e.g. regarding gender the Beijing Platform for Action), pay attention to (re)distribution, name target groups (such as people with disabilities; Elwan 1999), use (some) 'rights' language (S5, S4, S14), and include many of the previously lacking themes (Van Norren 2017). On the *negative* side are: lack of prioritization (from 8 to 17 goals) (S5); lack of a clear message for communication to a larger audience (S4, S6, S8); targets are not always measurable (S3, S14); indicator approach and thus insufficient process approach (actions and strategies); a weak link to Global Public Goods (S6, S1) and responsible sovereignty; and vague/weak global governance. They also lack certain themes such as culture and values (S5, S7, S8, S13). Indicators chosen by the UN may influence interpretation of the goals; it may limit the scope of the SDGs and is hampered by capacity as well as costs of statistics and availability of data (S3). They do not address structural factors perpetuating poverty (Bello 2013), power relations, and ecological inclusive development (Gupta and Vegelin 2016). Due to the consultative process, the SDGs claim universality, but is this really the case? Are the SDGs truly transformative or are there underlying modernist

economic and legal mechanisms (individualist, market, property, meritocratic, capitalist, extractive, (human) right based orientations)? If so, how do 'Other' economic and legal systems (derived from other worldviews) differ?

This study contributes to bridging the information and communication gap between multiple worldviews and grappling with divergences and convergences between 'development' and human rights, and non-Western traditions. The methods for this study consisted of (a) a literature review; (b) content analysis of policy/legal documents and judgments; (c) case studies with interviews; (d) comparative analysis; (e) synthesis of the data.

1.1 Literature and interviews

Starting from literature analysis on the MDG-SDG transition at the time of the MDG review in 2010 and after, interviews were then carried out with the main UN implementing organizations (UNDP, UNFPA, UNDESA, UNICEF and UNESCO), the World Bank and one Western foreign ministry (The Netherlands), involved in the SDG negotiations. In total, 15 interviews with 20 people were undertaken on the MDGs and SDGs (interviews S), of which the majority of UN organizations closely involved with the MDG-SDG transition. The opinion of UNESCO was sought to highlight the issue of culture and development. The World Bank was added because of its report *Mind, Society and Behavior* (2014). The Dutch MFA was taken as an example of a Western donor.

The study on Gross National Happiness was based on an international and Bhutanese literature study and on 55 interviews of which one consists of 10 mini-interviews with 'ordinary people', three lectures by Bhutan experts (in total 68 persons; interviews B) and builds on earlier literature review (Schroeder 2014).

The study on Ubuntu was based on international and South African literature and on 17 interviews with (South) Africans (total 21 persons; with one group interview, interviews A); and builds on a literature review in Ntibagiriwa (2012), debates in the South African Journal of Philosophy and my own understanding of Ubuntu, developed during my stays in South Africa, including in townships (Guguletu, Langa, Khayelitsha) in 1994–1997. These grassroots conversations have, however, not been explicitly included, but this perspective is represented in earlier research (Gade 2012).

The study on Buen Vivir was based on (mainly English) literature and an earlier Spanish literature review mapping different schools of Buen Vivir: purist 'Pachamamist' (Mother Earth centred), ecological postmodernist activism, and state driven bio-socialist neo-Marxism (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014). It draws on 44 interviews in Ecuador (with 60 persons; interviews E). The mestizo (Spanish-indigenous) were chosen on the basis of their knowledge of Buen Vivir or government affiliation. The indigenous include Quechua from the Central, North, South and Amazon, as well as Achuar, Sapparra and Sekoya (Amazon). For balance one Montubio (Coastal peasants) and one Afro-Ecuadorian were included.

2 Worldviews and development goals

Discussions on including culture in development goals or human rights often result in claims of universality versus cultural relativism. It also results in claims of undermining of human rights versus coloniality of knowledge, and dominance of the West with underrepresentation of the South. This dichotomy needs to be transcended. I agree with de Sousa

Santos (2008) proposing to transcend universalism by ‘cross-cultural dialogues’. A dialogue between three cosmovisions of Happiness in Buddhism, Ubuntu in Africa and Buen Vivir in indigenous America with the underlying values of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can shed light on claims of universality of the SDGs and the sustainability discourse (Van Norren 2017). This can also reveal differing views on concepts of well-being, nature and human relations and its interrelationship.

Applying a Western academic lens to non-Western worldviews is problematic as this still traps the worldviews in a logical positivist perspective. It presupposes that one is able to place oneself outside reality and not partake in it. Therefore a critical realist approach is taken to present described worldviews as neutrally as possible and offset them against conventional theoretical approaches without framing them in any particular theory. This approach also serves to reveal implicit power relations in knowledge. This de- and reconstruction is derived from Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) and post-colonial economics (opposing modernist economics).

3 Critical realist approach

A critical realist approach exposes ‘Other’ realities beyond the consensual SDGs, negotiated by Northern and Southern countries in the United Nations. It reveals implicit power relations and cultural values underlying knowledge systems. For this it distinguishes between the empirical (observable experiences recognized as reality by the positivists), the actual (actual social events triggered by mechanisms; reality as social construction), and the real (the mechanisms including power relations), through which it questions causality in science (Bhaskar 1975, 1993, 1998). It considers economics as social science, needing a social sciences method that reveals the mechanisms that produce events (and not ‘factual’ natural sciences methods such as indicators in the SDGs). Tools used in critical realism are: (a) taking an interdisciplinary approach and accepting a layered reality; (b) instead of looking at reality as a self-evident, objective truth, looking at it as a ‘social construction’ (by individuals and groups in permanent movement) and accepting ‘openness’ instead of ‘closure’ (defined boundaries) in a celebration of subjectivity; (c) accepting language as a constitutive factor for any worldview as well as discourse (hence the importance of oral traditions and the use of proverbs in non-Western worldviews); (d) being aware of power as explicitly or implicitly determining actions of others, and which can go beyond institutions or individuals (so beyond structure and agency). Power is embedded not only in politics, but also in socialization processes (conformity), psychology and ‘ideological boundaries of participation’ and is interwoven with knowledge systems.

4 Three cosmovisions from the global south

4.1 Gross National Happiness (GNH or ‘Happiness’)

Buddhist GNH (Bhutan) can be defined as calling for material and spiritual development that mutually reinforce one another, which aims at harmony between ‘inner skills’ and ‘outer circumstances’, respect for nature, compassion, and balance and moderation and interdependence of all things. (Ura et al. 2012; Phuntsho 2013; Tideman 2004; B3, B4, B8, B9, B19, B40, B41). The Bhutanese policies of Gross National Happiness go against

conventional economic thinking rooted in GNP (Gross National Product) (B2; Ura et al. 2012; Ura 2004), as it is based on concepts of broader well-being, embodied in a GNH index. It is based on four pillars: culture as a basis for all development, socio-economic development, care for the environment and good governance. It includes nine dimensions: psychological well-being, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, education, health, good governance, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards (Ura et al. 2012; Fig. 1).

4.1.1 Deconstruction of (modernist) economic theory

Multidimensional GNH instead of GDP measurement (Ura et al. 2012) contributes to a new economic thinking. It focuses on overcoming spiritual poverty (B25), defining poverty as lack of personal development (B20, B25, B31). Balance is achieved through ‘Walking the Middle path’ through a ‘simple life’ (B14, B39, B44), sharing (B26, B40), selflessness (B15, B16, B19, B23, B46a), service to others and non-exploitation (of others and nature) (B6, B7, B9, B18, B20, B21). This means developing individual capabilities aiming at the

Fig. 1 Nine domains and indicators—GNH Index (reprinted from Ura et al. 2012, p. 13)

collective (what can *I* do so that *we* live better), while respecting (spiritual) culture as a way of life (B4, B5, B8, B12, B14, B15, B16, B18, B20, B24, B30, B39), and putting ecology over economy (B20, B26, B30, B46c).

It strives for people's (not capital's) sovereignty, full employment, decentralized decision making (Hewavitharana 2004), equality but with acceptance of differences based on karma (B18, B23), inclusiveness as well as room for meditative seclusion (B18, B21, B25, B31), recognizing the essential value of rest and 'being' (right to leisure) (Ura et al. 2012; Tobgay 2015) and developing GNH business (Zangmo et al. 2018).

4.1.2 Deconstruction of legal theory

The Bhutanese legal system contributes to deconstruction of conventional concepts of law while it goes against law rooted in objective rationality and strict secularism (B6, B10, B19, B23). The Constitution is based on people's ethics of Happiness (B10; Tobgye 2015), focusing on harmony, derived primarily from Buddhism but also supported in Hinduism (B31). However, at the same time guarantees separation of religion and state (art. 3.3; 4b, 15.3 constitution). It is internalized by people and thus easier to enforce (B10). It includes a constitutional monarch bound by the ethics of Happiness (Boddhisatva leadership; Tide-man 2016).

However, the court system tends to follow more common law principles (B10). There is little jurisprudence developing the principle of Happiness (B10; Van Norren 2017). Its legal reconstructive principles embrace enhanced concepts of (human) dignity: Of all living beings, related to karma, compassion and codependent origination (Shiotsu 2001; Matsuoka 2005), with the understanding that future generations includes one's reincarnated self. It includes 'Other', GNH-concepts of freedom: From desire, delusion and including reciprocity (Tobgye 2015; Ura 2004).

These are enshrined in constitutional rights and duties of sustainable development (which includes culture), as well as in restorative criminal and civil justice based on mediation, confession, swift and 'simple justice' (Baylis and Munro 2003). For arguments pro and against this reconstruction of law, see Table 1.

4.1.3 Consequences for the SDGs

While GNH (as an index) is consistent with the SDG *goal-oriented approach* in that it is quantified and measureable, and covers many of the same domains, the recent quantified variant of GNH (and by extension the SDGs) is seen as reductionist and over-intellectualized by others (B5, B7, B36, B37). The GNH approach could imply that the SDGs should promote *Happiness in the Buddhist sense* of taming one's mindset (towards enlightenment), reorienting society towards service, compassion and cooperation as trainable qualities instead of competition and a race to the bottom (MDG1; SDG 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10). (RGoB 2012, 58). GNH could inspire a more radical understanding of *education* (MDG 2; SDG 4) aiming at a deeper understanding of life and seeing reality as it is and life as an educational journey rather than producing knowledge to live a productive life (Palden 2011 quoting Thurman). It could inspire a more holistic understanding of *health* (MDG 4, 5, 6; SDG 3) where the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the universe are in harmony (going beyond mental and emotional health, with an integrated vision on physical, emotional and spiritual health) (Tshenpo, 2003, 18-25; art. 9.21 Constitution). It could inspire a more integrated understanding of *gender* (MDG

Table 1 Arguments pro and con Buddhist inspired law (Van Norren 2017, 2019)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Buddhist law)
Law is and should be based on objective rationality; religion is subjective	'Legal code expresses the people's fundamental ethical principles' (Baylis and Munro 2003)
Western legal systems are rooted in reason (and in the economic reality of 'self-interested man'), not religion, and therefore universally applicable	Large majority of country is Buddhist; largest minority adheres to Hinduism which recognizes similar principles; more adherence to the law because internalized
Separation of religion and state (though exceptions exist in the West too)	Separation of religion and state still guaranteed; unlike in the West, political parties are not allowed to have religious affiliations (art. 4.b Constitution), nor use religion for political gain (art. 15.3 Constitution), duty on the religious leaders, not the state, to ensure that religion remains separate from politics (art. 3.3 Constitution); religious persons are not allowed to vote (electoral laws)
Principle of non-discrimination (of non-Buddhist minorities); and of Freedom of religion: Proselytization punishable by law (Art 7.4 of the Constitution; section 463A Penal Code) is against this	Proselytization is offensive to the religious feelings of the Buddhist and Hindus (National Assembly of Bhutan)
Human Rights and legal systems are universal	Western system also rooted in religion; avoiding Western colonization of law system
Happiness is subjective and cannot be measured, can therefore not be a goal of legal systems or policies; Bhutan is a Buddhist theocratic constitutional state; traditional dual (religious-political) system of government still underlies the Constitution	Happiness is to be understood as 'Dewa' (peace in Dzongkha language) in Buddhism and not as hedonistic happiness or pleasure=ultimate goal in life
Gross National Happiness does not foster economic growth	Restorative rather than punitive justice More confessions (based on avoiding bad karma) More settlements (based on mediation by community, senior citizen or judge) Less court cases = <i>simple justice</i> Integrates respect for nature as duty of citizens
<i>Converges with</i>	<i>Converges with</i>
Concepts of Modernity (material development of the individual and society) and (superior and inferior) stages of development	Indigenous beliefs in harmony and balance (within oneself, with community, with nature) and self-sufficient survival in precarious environment, self-development through spirituality
Analogy with colonialism: Unlimited resources to be discovered, conquered and exploited; ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior	Postcolonial law based on equality of different cultural traditions
<i>Consequences:</i>	<i>Consequences: Reconstruction of law</i>
<i>Dignity</i> rooted in human reason	<i>Dignity</i> is combining the mind (reason) and the heart (compassion) and needs to be viewed from the aspects of (a) karma (several lives) (b) dependent origination (no self, interrelation of all that is open to change) (c) compassion with Buddhahood in all living beings (d) the path of self-development (awakening and actualizing our dignity) (e) being able to contribute to manifesting the world (through the mind) (Shiotsu 2001; Matsuoka 2005)

Table 1 (continued)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Buddhist law)
<i>Freedom</i> centers around human freedom: of expression, of religion and from fear (civil political rights), from want (socio-economic rights) (launched by President Roosevelt in 1941); or freedom to actualize ones (individual) rights and capabilities (Sen 1999)	<i>Freedom</i> is associated with freedom of the mind, from delusion (detachment from belief in the self) (Kinga 2009; Tobgye 2015), but does not translate in significant difference on fundamental freedoms in the Constitution; it is limited by duties (concept of service) (art. 8), mainly related to sovereignty, culture, nature, non-killing and reciprocity
<i>Sustainable development</i> often outside Constitution; environmental laws centred around human	<i>Sustainable development</i> is incorporated in Constitution
Interconnection with:	Interconnection with:
<i>Historic generation</i> of rights (in theory indivisible, but in practice with priority of civil-political rights; socioeconomic rights are deemed desirable but not feasible, idem for cultural rights)	The Constitution puts the generation of rights on equal footing (Tobgye 2015), but without enforceable collective rights (limited to secondary law); the understanding of the <i>Buddha field of interdependence</i> makes indivisibility of rights, for all sentient beings, logic. The idea of <i>reincarnation</i> and 'karma' makes one automatically part of <i>future generations</i> (protected in art. 5 nature and art. 14.5 debt sustainability)

3; SDG 5) where the masculine and feminine are complementary abstract principles, present in all phenomena, beyond personal identity, including in nature and each human being. Overcoming duality is achieved through feminine (intuitive Wisdom combined with receptive awareness of emptiness) and masculine thinking (analytical Knowledge and compassionate action) (Crins 2008). It suggests that *environmental sustainability* (MDG 7; all SDGs but specifically 6, 12, 13, 14, 15) can be broadened with respect for all sentient beings and their intrinsic value, constituting a biocentric form of restorative justice. This would imply that *global partnership* (MDG 8; SDG 17) aims to support the interdependence of all life and that *peace* (SDG 16) should start with one's own inner contentment and include restorative justice (traditional 'simple justice' including mediation). The notion of *good governance* (SDG 16) could be enhanced by enhancing (collective) autonomy, self-sufficiency and decentralization. GNH promotes the non-subjugation of others, safeguarding spiritual heritage, natural law and reclaiming the cultural value dimension of human rights. It recommends recognition of customary commons, collective responsibility (duties) and decision-making, and other legal reconstructive elements mentioned above. GNH recognizes *culture* (SDG 4.7 and 11.4) as central to identity, spiritual practices, society, economy, and sustainability. It promotes a culture which is future oriented instead of merely traditional, as well as a founding value of human rights (Johnson 2004, 468 quoting Apadurai). GNH insists on including a notion of *community* vitality, right to a compassionate society and family bonds. GNH proponents claim that it embodies the SDGs but goes far beyond that.

4.2 Ubuntu

The African philosophy of Ubuntu (or Batho) can be defined as the continuous motion of the enfoldment of the universe (Ramose 1999/2005): Abstract Ubu, brought to life by the

life force Ntu (see Fig. 2). More popularly it is described as ‘I am because we are’ (a person is a person through other persons) (Ramose 1999/2005; Gade 2012; Eze 2010; Metz and Gaie 2010; all interviews A, except A4). It is a collective ontology which stresses the value of compassion and relatedness, and ‘life as mutual aid’ (A13; Mbiti 1990). It is embodied in national Batho Pele (People First) policies related to government conduct (GoSA 2007). Ubuntu does not know the word development but stresses humaneness (as verb) in relations (including nature) (A8, A9; Ntibatirirwa 2012; Ramose 1999/2005; Metz 2007).

4.2.1 Deconstruction of (modernist) economic theory

Ubuntu economy stresses the intrinsic value of human life instead of ‘human capital’ (Ramose 1999/2005); ending dominance of capital; sovereignty of people over capital (Ramose 1999/2005); and supporting the global social floor. It extends the same respect to nature as to people (A9, A15, A16; Mawere 2014).

Ubuntu strives at collective agency (‘what can *we* (including I) do, so that *we* live better’) (Ntibatirirwa 2012), highlighting the importance of (extended) family-centered thinking (A8, A9; Ntibatirirwa 2012).

Reconstructive economic principles include: employment for all based on ‘no-one is useless’ (inclusiveness) and ‘we work as one’ (col-labor-ate; ‘shosholoza’; also South Africa’s ‘second’ national anthem) (Louw 1998); living in time (rather than on time) (Mbiti 1990) and sharing instead of profit.

Fig. 2 Abstract Being (Bu) and Life Force Being (Ntu): u-Bu-Ntu underlying all things. Ki-Ntu/Bi-Ntu (nature), Ha-Ntu (time&space), Ku-Ntu (quality), Mu-Ntu/Ba-Ntu (people) (Van Norren 2016, 2017). ©Dorine van Norren (inspired by: Ntibatirirwa 2012, p. 79 and 86, figure 3-1 and figure 3-2)

Written models are often seen as an irrelevant discussion from the African mind (A2, A9), unless it directly addresses needs, and involves *a constant dialogue*. It is about keeping the relationship going: The (SDG) contract as starting point of a relationship, not the end point, while building trust to work together (A8, A9).

4.2.2 Deconstruction of legal theory

The interim South African Constitution mentioned Ubuntu, to enable the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This legal history inspired activist judges into civil and criminal Ubuntu jurisprudence (A14) based on victim participation, forgiveness, reintegration of criminals in society, dialogue, relatedness, meaningful engagement, the value of apologies, mutual respect, extended family and hospitality (for migrants). Concrete results are, i.e. the abolition of the death penalty and prevention of eviction from housing (less strict property rights) (Cornell and Muvangua 2012).

Reconstructive legal principles include emphasis on restorative justice, and less stress on punitive justice; and de facto juridical pluralism (section 211(3) Constitution of South Africa 1996).

It replaces the idea of dignity merely rooted in reason by an expanded notion of dignity including relatedness (A8, A13; Bennett 2011; Cornell and Muvangua 2012). It focuses on human boundedness (apart from freedom) (A8; Cornell and Muvangua 2012).

It strives for a legal culture rooted in reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony, (Skelton 2013) as well as including nature and future generations as part of the ‘bantu’ (people) community (A9, A16; Mawere 2014). It recognizes rights of the ancestors (Keep and Midgley 2007, p. 39). For arguments pro and against Ubuntu-based law, see Table 2.

4.2.3 Consequences for the SDGs

To reduce a philosophy as expansive as Ubuntu to targets and indicators is somewhat contrary to what it tries to achieve: Namely to infuse humans with a consciousness of wholeness and interdependence, on each other and their natural surroundings, including a spiritual level of being. Ubuntu can, however, inspire clusters on *health* by its principles of reading meaning into illness and the ill or demented; the healer as a mediator between the supra-natural source (of illness) and the person; keeping mentally afflicted within the community out of mutual care; and (significant) payment of the healer only if the patient improves (Ramose 1999/2005; Edwards et al. 2004; Wilson and Williams 2013 (mental health); Himonga 2013 (right to health); Manda 2010 (HIV-AIDS and women); Swartz and Colvin 2015 (care culture of community health workers). Moral education of personhood comes first in *education*, entailing being able to listen and articulate logical arguments; moral maturity promoting justice, courage and truthfulness; an ability to engage in consensual dialogue, allowing the other to offer his point of view regardless how ill-informed (Nafukho 2006; Le Roux 2000; Waghid 2004; South African Journal of Higher Education 18 (3) 2004: Issue on Indigenous African Knowledge Systems and Higher Education; and Horsthemke 2009 for a contrary view; and Okeja 2012 on the underprivileged status of African philosophy teaching in African universities). It embraces a *cultural* dimension in its respect for different value systems and diversity (‘rainbow nation’). Despite contention (Roberts 2010; Keevy 2008; Marx 2002), feminists may find inspiration as well for a *gender* goal. South Africa (and its

Table 2 Arguments pro and contra Ubuntu law (Van Norren 2017, 2019)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Ubuntu)
Ubuntu is not in the Constitution, only part of the interim Constitution to enable the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; only promoted by activist judges; Death penalty could have been abolished without reverting to Ubuntu; Invented tradition by African philosophers	Constitutional order is infused with Ubuntu; Ubuntu was part of draft constitution and is therefore part of legal history
Ubuntu forgiveness denied justice, concealing conflict	Nation building through reconciliation, even in smaller disputes, 'as part of maintaining peace and stability in a diverse country with a difficult history' (Skelton 2013, 142)
Ubuntu is for Africans, not universal, cannot apply to non-Africans	Ubuntu is universal
Punitive justice is necessary; not victim participation	Restoring dignity to the victim (instead of impersonal punitive vengeance); victim participation; welcoming people back into society as functioning members (Skelton 2010); public interest in reducing prison population; value of apology, promoting service to the community in sentencing
No difference between Ubuntu and human dignity 'Communist' principles of Ubuntu do not sit well with modern economic principles and private law	Ubuntu gives dignity to all life Achieving mutual respect; Dialogue and compromise; Reciprocity (giving the same respect as one receives) and mutual enjoyment of rights
Ubuntu is not emancipatory (against communist class struggle)	Recognizing relatedness and restoring it ('we are not islands onto ourselves'; Port Elizabeth case, para 37)
Objectivity of reason can establish universal truths	Truth and reconciliation: Analysis and Feeling need to go together in delivering justice
Cultural relativity (as consequence of recognizing other cultural systems) will undermine international law system and lead to instability	Recognizes cultural diversity and juridical pluralism
<i>Converges with:</i> Concepts of Modernity and (superior and inferior) stages of development. Kantian social contract theory, namely individuals while maximizing their own capabilities agreeing to do some things together; Utilitarian moral theory	<i>Converges with:</i> African indigenous concepts of justice, bridging common and customary law, rainbow nation (cultural diversity including wholeness or 'holo-culturality')
Analogy with colonialism: ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior, already established Western based law systems are sufficient	Analogy with postcolonial law. Postcolonial law can enable postcolonial economics
<i>Consequences:</i> <i>Human dignity</i> is overarching principle	<i>Consequences:</i> <i>Ubuntu/Humaneness/interconnectedness:</i> grand-mother of law, above dignity, relational aspect of rights
<i>Dignity:</i> rooted in human reason, individual not collective	<i>Dignity:</i> 'not rooted in reason because (...) this would deny dignity to too many human beings' (Cornell 2012); extends to those who are deceased (as part of bantu community)
<i>Freedom:</i> rights prioritized over duties to community.	<i>Freedom:</i> human boundedness (duties to the other) more important than human freedom

Table 2 (continued)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Ubuntu)
<i>Private/Property law</i> : individual, allowing for inequality, exclusion	<i>Property</i> : (equal distribution), <i>criminal justice</i> (restorative), <i>medical confidentiality</i> (transparent to group members), <i>family life</i> (duty to wed and have children), and moral <i>education</i> (developing personhood)
<i>Criminal justice</i> : punitive	<i>Legal culture</i> rooted in reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony
<i>Family law</i> : nuclear family	<i>Family law</i> : restorative; extended family recognised
<i>Environmental protection</i> : centred around humans	<i>Nature</i> : Ubuntu reciprocity also extends to respecting natural environment
<i>Development & meritocracy</i> : based on talent/effort; one advances oneself	<i>Development</i> is not the central goal, <i>human relations</i> and mutual aid are
Interconnection with:	Interconnection with:
<i>Individual rights</i>	<i>Collective rights</i>
<i>Historic generation</i> of rights (in theory indivisible, but in practice with priority of civil-political rights; socioeconomic rights are deemed desirable but not feasible, idem for cultural rights)	<i>Preferred order of rights</i> : Solidarity rights; socioeconomic rights, civil-political rights
<i>Anthropocentric environmental law</i>	<i>Protection of environment for future generations</i> in Constitution. Could be connected to <i>rights of nature</i> , though bantu community is central (born, yet to be born, deceased)

Constitution) has a very progressive stance on gender. Inserting an Ubuntu dimension means stressing the importance for the family and society of gender equality, girls' education and reproductive health. It also embraces the marriage of the abstract feminine Mother Mind and the masculine Warrior Mind. Ubuntu also embodies accepting people as they are without hierarchies (e.g. gay, transgender), as long as the importance of family and procreation are also preserved (A9; Bandawe and Meerkotter 2015). Ubuntu has a distinctive view of **environmental protection** by considering nature and man as a whole. Ubuntu can inspire the cluster on **peace and security** with its emphasis on restorative justice in public and criminal law and healing of trauma (see above on reconstructive legal principles). It inspires the cluster on **institution building and rule of law** by its jurisprudence on public law and civility in conduct of government agents. However, Ubuntu prefers the words nation building, people empowering leadership and citizen participation.

4.3 Buen Vivir

Ecuadorian Buen Vivir is derived from the Quecha Sumak Kawsay, Good Living based on living in harmony with (and not at the cost of) others or nature and in balance between spiritual and material wealth (Acosta 2015; Akchurin 2015; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014; Gudynas 2011; GoE 2013; all interviews E except E41).

Its wisdom is contained in the Andean cross Chakana (Fig. 3): balancing the inner, current and upper world, corresponding with emphatic care (heart), work (hands) and wisdom

Fig. 3 Chakana (Van Norren 2017). ©Dorine van Norren (derived from E28, E42, E43; Caminos de Wayra 2012)

(head) (integrality); departing from families within communities and regions, which pray to (and respect) nature, sun and moon, and Great Spirit (relationality), while balancing the masculine and feminine in all life forms as complementary and living in reciprocity.

In Sumak Kawsay recognizing *partnership with the Earth* is the first principle on which all governance and economic systems should be based, furthermore recognizing the value of community in partnership with nature (E8; Villalba 2013) and of interculturality and spirituality as basic pillar (E1, E10, E14, E26, E32; de Sousa Santos 2008). Buen Vivir in its purest Sumak Kawsay form does not know a notion of development (E1; E6; E8, E10, E25; Acosta 2015; Thomson 2011), but stresses reciprocity including with Mother Earth (Villalba 2013; Acosta 2015; all interviews except E41).

4.3.1 Deconstruction of (modernist) economic theory

A self-sustaining and life-nurturing economy without growth (accumulation of production and consumption), is the goal, with human beings as central to economy and not capital or speculation (Acosta 2015). It strives at living in solidarity including with the earth, and people jointly formulating their goals of good living (collective capability) (Deneulin 2012), in reciprocity (development/progress as service) (Van Norren 2017).

Ecology takes precedent over economy; community includes nature, as central to life and to happiness (E15, E32). Further reconstructive economic principles are: including leisure and creativity; recognizing domestic and reproductive work; measuring the economy in terms of full employment; redistribution of wealth and income; decentralization of production; energy and food sovereignty (Acosta 2015).

Democracy demands active popular participation in decision making (E1, E15; Acosta 2015); emancipation of nature and labor (beyond socialism) (giving agency to nature) (Fitz-Henry 2012); community markets (Acosta 2015; Belotti 2014); promoting

post-extractivist economies and markets based on use value (Acosta 2015; Dávalos 2008; Waldmüller 2014).

It aims at getting away from the claims of scientific progress as sole source of information (Oviedo-Freire 2011; E42).

4.3.2 Deconstruction of legal theory

Ecuador enshrines Buen Vivir principles in its Constitution and national and international policies. New concepts of law emerge in Rights of Nature, central to Buen Vivir, as a form of restorative justice (between humans and nature) (Fitz-Henry 2012; E1, E6, E7, E8, E10, E13, E31, E18, E20, E27). This is articulated in a modest jurisprudence enabling persons to protect nature without proving personal damage (E39), which did, however, not prevent large-scale natural resource exploration (E1, E4, E24, E32, E34). Judges are seen as instrumental in establishing law (Montaña 2011).

It recognizes collective rights and duties (Friant and Langmore 2015); and free prior and informed consent (E14, E21 E35; UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). It calls for plurinationality: plurality of nations within the horizontal non-patriarchal state (E26), dialoguing in interculturality (E7, de Sousa Santos 2008) and juridical pluralism (E7, E20, E21, E25, E28, E32; Walsh 2009). It includes individual, communal and ecological citizenship (Deneulin 2012). The constitution implicitly recognizes rights of the spirits in its Pacha Mama concept (E15, E31; Villalba 2013).

Buen Vivir deconstructs legal concepts centered around individual humans, the utility value of nature (defined as property), and nature conservation. It reconstructs them based on the earth as central system (mother), collective rights, the redefinition of economy-society-nature-relationship and the intertwinement of culture and nature (Fitz-Henry 2012; E25, E32).

It reformulates dignity, freedom and development into collective dignity of all life: balancing the interests of all including the intercultural dialogue dimension (Gianolla 2013). It defines freedom as reciprocity setting one free, as well as the freedom of communities to live in permanent dialogue with nature (E8), calling for sustainable life (well-being) instead of development (Acosta 2015).

Further reconstructive legal principles are: People's sovereignty (including migrants), not territorial sovereignty (E1, E5); union of the planet, with identity based on one's birthplace and culture (E5). For arguments pro and against rights of nature, see Table 3.

4.3.3 Consequences for the SDGs

(Ancient) Buen Vivir *rethinks future SDG policy* all together. It pleads mostly for recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, the common biocentric good and leaving a goal structure all together. It prioritises *plurinationality* politically, which is inseparable from Sumak Kawsay (E26): (1) the protection of indigenous territory; (2) indigenous self-government; (3) the self-development of indigenous communities on the basis of balance, Buen Vivir and harmony; (4) free, prior and informed consent as a condition for developments on indigenous land; and (5) the 'institutional redesign' of the state in its relations with indigenous peoples (UNDP Colombia 2013). There is suspicion of the SDGs which are seen as important, but at the same time as a traditional (neo)liberal UN concept supporting economic growth (E17, E10, E26, E28, E30, E33).

Table 3 Arguments pro and against Rights of Nature (Van Norren 2017, 2019)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Rights of Nature)
Law aims at regulating <i>human</i> relations	Assigning <i>intrinsic value</i> to nature
<i>Utility value</i> of nature, lesser value than humans	As to <i>utility value</i> of nature: Human governance systems are failing: Designed for exploitation and domination of Earth, leading to environmental degradation
Giving agency to non-humans without moral sense and rational ability is not rational; an outright 'absurdity' or 'stupid'	Like liberation of slaves, liberation of nature is needed: Both subject to ownership of their masters; people can act on behalf of Nature
Fear of <i>excessive litigation</i> and increased conflicts	(Abstract) corporations have rights, so can (abstract) Nature; Law is central to human governance and therefore must recognize rights of non-human members to protect Earth and human survival
Nature is not able to fulfill corresponding obligations; Inability to sue nature causing damage (eg flooding destroying other life)	Human well-being is derived from earth well-being; Therefore, balance the interests of all (human and Earth) for the benefit of humans and non-humans =Redefinition of economy-society-nature relationship =Recognition of environment- culture interrelations
Imprecise definitions of what nature (or natural) is, may impede implementation; scientific difficulties for establishing alteration to a natural cycle	The Constitution gives a positive definition 'where life is reproduced and occurs', art. 71, while a negative definition would be 'that which is not human-made'
Converges with:	Converges with:
Concepts of Modernity and (superior and inferior) stages of development	Indigenous logic: 'Of course, nature is our mother, she has rights'
Analogy with colonialism: Unlimited resources to be discovered, conquered and exploited; ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior	Analogy: Postcolonialism, deep ecology and environmental justice
Consequences:	Consequences: Reconstructs the notion of:
<i>Dignity</i> concerns human dignity and rights	<i>Dignity</i> (wider circle of reciprocity: Rights/duties)
<i>Freedom</i> concerns human freedom and capabilities to actualize that freedom, using Earth and non-human members to their benefit (lack of reciprocity)	<i>Freedom</i> is '1) the right of existence of different communities as part of nature.. 2) keeping the vital cycles of nature and 3) of animals' (E8) (=reciprocity sets one free)
<i>Development</i> concerns human progress and may go at the cost of earth; <i>Sustainable</i> development with continued economic <i>growth</i> , but without recognizing rights of the earth, is possible and will solve environmental governance crisis	' <i>Development</i> is not important, what is important is well-being or life. Sustainable life!'(E8). Not sustainable development
Interconnection with:	Interconnection with:
<i>Individual rights</i>	<i>Collective rights</i> : Nature is territory <i>Free prior and informed consent</i> (tool)
<i>Civil, political rights; socio, economic and cultural rights</i> to protect and emancipate humans	<i>Earth and Nature rights</i> precede human rights
<i>Culture and nature</i> are separate; culture concerns humans	<i>Culture and nature</i> are intertwined: 'Community with nature .. are in permanent dialogue; it means to be part of, secondly interdependence, thirdly complementarity, which means both depend on each other, and there is reciprocity'(E8)
<i>Property law</i> : humans own land, animals, earth systems for their benefit and private and collective	<i>Property law</i> is fundamentally reshaped, as the natural world has been seen as legal property thus far

Table 3 (continued)

Opposition (Western system)	Proponents (Rights of Nature)
<i>Conservation</i> : ‘The dissociation of human rights, social rights and nature rights’ (E8)	<i>Integration</i> of human and nature in one balanced system

Buen Vivir promotes intercultural **education**: The unmasking the coloniality of knowledge (the subordination of other knowledges), making space for finding common ground for different views and for intercultural dialogue (Walsh 2011). With regard to **gender** it promotes: Recognizing the abstract complementarity (qhari-warmi) and conflict between two opposites (chacha-warmi), including in natural phenomena, as instrumental in understanding life. Pachamama is the life-giving feminine principle and exists only with its polar opposite male principle, which creates harmony. Leadership positions require ‘qhari-warmi’: A man and woman together in one position. This means getting away from the Western anthropocentric, androcentric, patriarchal development paradigm. It recognizes that the feminine is closer to the Creator taking precedence over the masculine, deserving utmost respect as creator of new life (Vega-Ugalde 2014; Cortez and Wagner 2010; Clarkson et al. 1992; Oviedo 2008). With regard to **health**: Recognizing the spiritual and the importance of emotions in health, and the need for healing at different levels (Villalba 2013). On the cluster for **environment**: Redefining environment into ‘Nature’ which is sacred and the foundation of ethics (with zero-extractivism). This is necessary to preserve the cosmic order. It demands respecting Mother Earth (who has rights) as chief principle of law; recognizing Nature’s rights and equal standing. It accepts a natural limitation of people’s rights and property right (to Earth). It embraces a wider concept of dignity including nature. It promotes ecological citizenship (Lalander 2014; Cortez and Wagner 2010). The cluster for **democracy/rule of law** can be inspired by the idea that: Democracy is thought of from the feminine (horizontal) principle of reciprocity and collectivity. This means participatory democratic co-existence devoid of patriarchal domination by exploitation of others, nature, women and ethnicity. Buen Vivir stresses autonomy and diversity (plurinationality as self-determination); multiple forms of democracy (communitarian, participatory, representative, consensus seeking: ‘convivir’, living together) and including above reconstructive legal principles (Cortez and Wagner 2010). The cluster for **peace** can centre on: Restoring harmony in the community taking primacy over punitive justice; recognizing both the victim and victimizer perspective; and viewing the individual’s problem as the community’s problem; including the community as judges; oral justice; healing through purification, public apologies and community service as reparation (Yupangui 2015; Ávila-Santamaría 2012). In terms of **global partnership**: Recognizing partnership with the Earth as first principle.

Buen Vivir considers itself above reductionist schemes like the SDGs, favouring dialogue and diversity; some proponents therefore oppose the SDGs.

5 Comparing three worldviews: development as service

The three worldviews are similar in that they emphasize: Cosmic unity and harmony as the basis for justice; the creation of the world from our mind/heart, putting spiritual before material; and altruism.

Fig. 4 Meeting of opposing cosmic forces: Feminine (dark/life force) – Masculine (light/life patterns) (Van Norren 2017)

Cosmic unity has implications for notions of peace and justice, that should restore harmony. The forces of yin (feminine) and yang (masculine), ntu (life force) and ubu (abstract patterns), awca (positive force) and sami (opposing force) feature in all three traditions. They meet, respectively, in Yin-Yang, Ubu-ntu and Tinkuy (See Fig. 4).

All three philosophies derive from this cosmic unity a sense of an expanded community (that reaches into ancestral and future lives and includes nature) and absence of the hierarchy of living beings. From this is also derived a notion of equality. The subjective worldview (one creates one's own material and experimental world) and relational worldview (none is dominant over the other) contrasts with the objective worldview of the Western world.

Furthermore, these cosmovisions stress deliberative democracy; decentralization and equality. They include expanded notions of dignity and freedom as overarching legal principles of restorative justice. They balance economic and ecological principles, while striving for a simple life, the value of being (leisure), different notions of poverty and circular concepts of time (with the future being behind you and the past in front of you); and putting cultural beliefs at the heart of 'development' (relations).

Referring to Amartya Sen's definition of progress ('Development as Freedom') (Sen 1999), they redefine progress as 'development as service' as they all stress the element of reciprocity (Van Norren 2017).

There are also certain differences and nuances in inter alia the degree of individual and collective agency and the degree of formalization in policies and indexes, constitutional embedding and jurisprudence.

6 Three cosmovisions' views on the SDGs

Regarding the SDGs as outcome of negotiations, the three cosmovisions show the following (see Table 4).

Table 4 Comparison of Happiness, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir, and their views on the SDGs (Van Norren 2017)

Perspective on	SDGs: Underlying (Western) values and approach	Happiness (GNH)	Ubuntu	Buen Vivir
Values	DEFINITIONS			
	<i>Leave no one behind</i> = hierarchical (who's ahead?)	<i>Respect all beings</i>	<i>Life is mutual aid</i>	<i>Let Mother Earth lead</i>
	Goals are integrated, interrelated, indivisible Human rights based approach	'Buddha field': interdependence includes metaphysical Non-duality/Middle path based on Buddhism 8thfold path of self-development & compassion	'Seriti' (field) - interdependence includes metaphysical Humaneness in action/motion and collective human rights	'Chakana' - interdependence includes metaphysical Biocentric rights of nature approach
Development	5P's: peace, prosperity, planet, people, partnership	4 pillars of GNH: 1 st culture, identity & spirituality, 2 nd socio-economic policies, 3 rd harmony with nature, 4 th good governance and decentralization	People First (Batho Pele) where people includes past, present and future generations of communities	3 pillars: 1 st Good living in harmony with nature, 2 nd Plurinationality, 3 rd Interculturality IRCR: Integrality, relationality, complementarity, reciprocity
	<i>Sustainable growth</i>	<i>Inner peace & harmony with nature/others</i>	<i>Human relations including with past/future generations which are connected to earth/nature as part of community</i>	<i>Biocentric intersubjective relations</i> (good living)
	Development/progress with modernist economic underpinnings	Incorporating sustainable development	I am because we are, replacing sustainable development	Alternative to and against sustainable development
Sustainability	<i>Balance the economic, social and environmental</i>	<i>Respecting sacred nature</i> that arises with us simultaneously	<i>Sharing with one another and (sacred) nature</i> , binding our ancestors and children	<i>Harmony with nature, which is our mother</i>
	That which environs and sustains humans	Through 'Walking the Middle Path' with culture (spirit) at its core, in the cycle of reincarnation	While respecting 'taboos' set by the elders/ancestors	Living as part of the permanent cycle of growth and decay, nothing is sustainable

Table 4 (continued)

Perspective on	SDGs: Underlying (Western) values and approach	Happiness (GNH)	Ubuntu	Buen Vivir
Cardinal verb	<i>Doing what is good for your-self (and the other)</i>	<i>Contemplating self and other</i>	<i>Feeling engagement with the other</i>	<i>Being in harmony with universe</i>
Goals versus Process	Model <i>Goal oriented result based management (with elements of process thinking)</i> Vertical (upward linear progress)	<i>Goal + Process</i> Vertical (progress in developing self) + Horizontal (harmony)	<i>Process/reciprocal</i> Horizontal	<i>Process/Horizontal</i> *contradiction with government Buen Vivir goal setting Reciprocal/Cyclical/Spiral (Sumak Kawsay) <i>Knowing is connecting to Earth</i>
Knowledge system:	<i>Knowing is Measuring & Reasoning</i> Simple, quantifiable, analytical	<i>Life is learning; overcome duality</i> Balance Yin (Feminine) and Yang (Masculine) Yes-No	<i>Knowing is Feeling</i> Empathic thinking from heart	<i>Knowing is connecting to Earth</i> Feeling/knowing earth Complementarity of Feminine/Masculine No
Targets/Indicators? Applicability & Attitude Towards SDGs	Yes <i>Universalist</i> : Accepted by all UN member states with consultations of civil society and business	<i>Upbeat</i> : GNH is better, goes beyond and incorporates SDGs	No <i>Pragmatist</i> : Please the global North while doing your own thing locally	<i>Polemic</i> : SDGs are called 'mental masturbation' (Intellectual and pachamamist Buen Vivir against SDGs)
Priority Goals	All 17	Climate change (13), protection of nature (esp. 15) and peaceful mind/mental health/wellbeing (3) & General balance: of socio-economic rights, good governance, culture, nature (4 pillars of GNH)	First 5 social goals and inclusive societies (16)* and partnership/means of implementation (17) & general focus on socio-economic rights, people first and restorative justice (absent in goals) *in contradiction to the official South African position	No goal especially not goal 8 (growth) as system is not biocentric; support goals as intermediary step to prioritize nature as our mother/father on which we depend & General focus on nature rights and socio-economic rights

Table 4 (continued)

Perspective on	SDGs: Underlying (Western) values and approach	Happiness (GNH)	Ubuntu	Buen Vivir
Missing in SDGs (inter alia)	Many goals did not make it to the final shortlist because of the efforts to come to a consensus	Community vitality; Culture/heritage/identity; Spirituality/nature of reality; Interdependence	Community/collective values; diversity; wholeness	Community including nature; Plurinationality; Interculturality; Identity in nature/earth; Spiritual nature-culture
Leadership style	<p>Governance</p> <p><i>King</i>: the one who achieves individual power first and then helps the people</p> <p><i>Global Governance systems based on patriarchal power system lead by G7/G8</i> combined with notions of Servant leadership: enabling others to perform better</p>	<p><i>Boddhisatva leader</i> shepherding (following behind) his people with wisdom/compassion</p> <p>-</p>	<p><i>Boatman</i>: Leader and followers empower each other (going in front taking the others with)</p> <p>-</p>	<p><i>Seven generation</i> leadership council (collective leadership)</p> <p>Qhariwarmi (manwoman) complementarity in each position</p>
Assumption of state form	Individuals relating to a hierarchical patriarchal state & largely self-regulating market	Individuals, bound in communities and a vertical state & free markets	Communities bound in vertical state & community markets	Communities (plural 'nations') loosely bound in horizontal state & use value community market

6.1 Differing values and definitions: of well-being, development/relations, sustainability/nature

(1) Values underlying the SDGs of 'Leave no one behind', represent an implicit hierarchical thinking (who's is ahead? who's developed?). While claiming to be integrated, inter-related and indivisible goals, they fall short of a true understanding of interdependence and have an individualistic, anthropocentric 'human' rights orientation (where is the community and who is part of it?), leaving out how to reach 'sustainability' and what role culture can play.

A system based on Happiness can reformulate this positively and broaden this to 'Respect all sentient beings', connecting humans and nature in the Buddha field of co-dependent origination. It actualizes sustainability in promoting the Middle Way ('simple life'), including an eight fold path of moderation and self development (as opposed to development of nations, measured in economic growth). It rests on four interrelated pillars of culture, nature, socio-economic development and good governance).

Ubuntu postulates 'Life is mutual aid', positing 'People First' (relationships). It includes past and future generations in its 'people' concept. All are connected in a metaphysical 'Seriti' field of interdependence including nature, emphasizing the community with reciprocal relations including the Earth. It promotes reaching sustainability through sharing, humaneness in motion (rather than abstract systems), collective capability and collective human rights.

Buen Vivir's slogan would rather be 'Let Mother Earth Lead', in the 'community of life' of which humans are only a tiny part. It promotes Chakana interdependence based on the four principles of integrality, relationality, complementarity and reciprocity. It rests on the three pillars of (biocentric) Good Living, Plurinationality and Interculturality (representing non-hierarchical, diverse, horizontal states).

(2+3) 'Development' or progress in the perspective of the SDGs is sustainable growth. In the eyes of Happiness progress is foremost reached by inner peace and harmony. In Ubuntu progress is respectful human relations, including past and future generations that are related to the earth. In Buen Vivir, no progress is required, life constitutes of maintaining reciprocal, biocentric, intersubjective relations. Here the most vehement opposition against 'sustainable development' is found.

6.2 Differing methods of knowledge, assumptions on (universal) applicability, priorities and missing dimensions of SDGs

(4+5) In terms of approach, the SDGs are (vertical) linear goal-oriented (focusing on 'doing', what is good for yourself and the other). Happiness is semi-linear (focused on 'contemplating', meaning self-development leading to compassion). Ubuntu is horizontal reciprocal process-oriented (focused on 'feeling' engagement with the other). And Buen Vivir is spiral reciprocal process-oriented, focused on 'being' in harmony with the universe (upward or downward circular movement).

(6) Respective methods can be summed up as: SDGs: Knowing is measuring and reasoning (analytical), hence the targets and indicators. Happiness: Knowing is controlling the mind; and learning, leaving room for indicators. Ubuntu: Knowing is feeling (balancing the mother mind and the warrior mind); hence the acceptance of models for the sake of the relationship. Buen Vivir: Knowing is connecting to earth, rendering models obsolete.

(7) The drafters of the SDGs claim universalism. The Happiness adherents validate this in an upbeat attitude (we are ahead and GNH incorporates the SDGs). The perspective of Ubuntu adherents is pragmatist (please the global North—with models—while doing your own thing locally—as long as we keep the relationship going). Buen Vivir adherents (mainly the intellectual and Pachamamist schools) are polemic (opposed to the SDGs, called ‘mental masturbation’, especially growth goals).

(8) The focus of Happiness adherents is generally on well-being goal 3 (inner harmony) as well as climate change goal 13 and related nature goals. The focus of Ubuntu adherents is on the first five social goals, inclusiveness goal 16, partnership/means of implementation (process) goal 17. The focus on Buen Vivir adherents is on ‘no goals’ but nature rights (respect and legal rights for Nature/Mother Earth), while respecting that all goals are important as intermediate phase.

(9) Though many goals did not make it into the SDGs for reason of compromise most outstanding lacking dimensions (apart from certain target groups) are: Notions of community, collective, culture/identity, interculturality, plurinationality, and spirituality.

6.3 Differing (implicit) assumptions of governance (underlying international environmental agreements)

(10) In terms of preferred governance, the SDGs leave intact current global governance systems based on a patriarchal power system lead by the G7/G8 and G20, combined with notions of servant-leadership (enabling others to perform better), represented by international aid; depending on governments that generally have a horizon of 4 years due to elections. The SDGs depend on a leadership system that could be called the ‘king’ style: The one who achieves individual power first and then helps the people. (Hence: leave no-one behind; who is ahead?). Happiness promotes the enlightened (self-developed) Boddhisatva leader, shepherding(following behind) his people with wisdom and compassion (Hence: compassion with all beings). Ubuntu leadership can be compared to ‘the boatman’ (going in front taking the others with): Leader and followers empower each other (in mutual aid) (Tshering 2005). Buen Vivir in its purist Sumak Kawsay form enables visionary collective leadership which takes into account the future of seven generations (and consulting seven generations of ancestors) in reverence of Mother Earth (Clarkson et al. 1992), adhering to male–female complementarity. A perspective of 1000 (500 plus 500) years (instead of 4 years, or in the case of the SDGs: 15 years).

(11) Assumption of state forms, implementing well-being (SDGs and IEA), range from (the dominant Western system of) individuals bound in a vertical patriarchal state with ‘free’ (capitalist and speculative) markets, to on the other end (Buen Vivir’s plurinational system of) community nations bound in a horizontal state with use value, community markets.

All three worldviews of the Global South lead to the following **general conclusions on the SDGs**.

Firstly, the SDGs depart from an anthropocentric sustainable development point of view aiming at the sustainable use of resources. They are not biocentric aiming to respect nature for nature’s sake and enabling reciprocity with nature, present to varying degrees in Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir. A biocentric view would require replacing ‘sustainable use of environment’ by living in *harmony with nature*.

Secondly, the SDGs embody the need for linear growth which requires resource exploitation, posing a problem given that resources are limited. Cyclical thinking is necessary, following the regenerative cycles of nature. This means modelling the economy and law around the earth system (and not the other way round). Cyclical thinking would replace GNP growth with *well-being (of all beings)*.

Thirdly, the SDGs do not address the private sector and individualism. More attention to limiting one's own intake to what is necessary and sharing with the other is needed, which means limitation of profit-making, of speculation for one's own financial gain, and of non-payment of taxes and focusing on delivery of basic goods (housing, food, etc.) for its own sake, not for speculation or profit. This means adhering to the cycle of reciprocity between humans and modelling the law and economy around the principle of serving the other and the collective good. Hence, sharing would imply that there is need for 'development as service' to one another and to the Earth, which should not be interpreted as service delivery by the state. Ultimately this may lead to abolishing the word 'development' replacing it by *interrelationship*.

Fourthly, the SDGs embody reductionist result-based management thinking, in splitting goals into targets, measured through indicators. The other philosophies emphasize open-ended, flexible, verb-based process thinking and not closed, fixed, noun-based linear thinking to enable Goal achievement. This includes room for spirituality, culture and rights of nature, all omitted from the SDG system. This may lead to replacing the word goal by *value*.

Lastly, in the SDG negotiations cross-cultural philosophical bridges were largely absent (Van Norren 2017). Coalitions can be built within regions as well as bridges between Hapiness, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir, so that small localized value processes leading towards well-being ('good living') join forces in re-interpreting and adjusting the globalization process.

7 Conclusion: towards human - nature - well-being interrelationship?

This article shows that the SDGs have a human right approach and are oriented to linear result-based management and modernist 'development', with indicators (a natural science derived method) representing 'reality', and not a social science power-oriented discourse of the economic and legal systems hampering sustainable well-being. The focus of the SDG goals is still on growth and use of resources, be it in a sustainable way (a static balancing scale, rather than cyclical concept) and departs from an individual, not collective, point of view. The SDGs are underpinned by strong (Western) modernist notions of development: Sovereignty of humans over their environment (anthropocentrism), individualism, competition, freedom (rights rather than duties), self-interest, belief in the market leading to collective welfare, private property (protected by legal systems), rewards based on merit, materialism, quantification of value, and instrumentalization of labor (for the market and productions process).

Implicit dominant (Western) knowledge systems have been revealed through the critical realist approach, crowding out 'Other' cultural realities. These systems of thought are based on collective interest, biocentrism, cyclical processes, cooperation, duty towards the community (from which one derives collective rights), markets based on use value (not speculative value) of goods (food, housing, financial products), spirit transcending the material, work as life-fulfilling, earth governance and law, and restorative justice.

Moving towards cultural Sustainable Development Goals would mean a reshaping of the agenda: The words *Human – Nature – Wellbeing Interrelationships* may capture the essence of above three cosmovisions and the Western one that implicitly underlies the SDGs. The word ‘Human’ replaces the word development from the Ubuntu relational perspective (life is mutual aid). ‘Nature’ replaces anthropocentric sustainability, using the Buen Vivir perspective (Mother Earth is the life giver). And ‘Wellbeing’ captures the Western reorientation towards broader than economic wellbeing, targeting concrete achievements (life is actualizing one’s rights and setting targets), as embodied in the SDGs. The word ‘Interrelationships’ signifies a process approach, whereby it is aimed at creating a greater consciousness (awareness of interrelations, necessary for changing behaviour), honouring the Bhutanese Buddhist spiritual evolvement (life is learning, on inner and inter-relationships), as well as the Ubuntu and Buen Vivir approach. In this way, the sustainability discourse going towards and after 2030 can be made truly inclusive.

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