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# Gross National Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir and the Sustainable Development Goals

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## Introduction

Discussions on including culture in development goals or human rights often result in claims of universality versus cultural relativism; and undermining of human rights versus coloniality and dominance of the West with under-representation of the South. This dichotomy needs to be transcended. I agree with Sousa Santos [1] 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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can shed light on claims of universality [2]. A critical realist approach is taken to expose ‘Other’ realities beyond the consensual SDGs, negotiated by Northern and Southern countries in the United Nations, and to present described worldviews as neutrally as possible (tools: interdisciplinarity, reality as social construction, language and discourse analysis, power dynamics determining knowledge systems) [3]. This de- and reconstruction is derived from *Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL)* and post-colonial economics. To complement literature, interviews were used. This article is largely based on [2].

## 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). Set against criticism of the MDGs, the SDGs *score much better* than the MDGs, though not satisfying radical critics. 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, use (some) ‘rights’ language, and include many of the previously lacking themes. On the *negative* side are: Lack of prioritization (from 8 to 17 goals); lack of a clear message for communication to a larger audience; targets are not always measurable; insufficient process approach, actions and strategies; a weak link to Global Public Goods and responsible sovereignty; and vague/weak global governance. 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. Due to the consultative process, the SDGs claim universality, but is this really the case?

### Three Cosmovisions From the Global South

**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 [4]. The Bhutanese legal system contributes to deconstruction of conventional concepts of law while it goes against law rooted in objective rationality and strict secularism: The Constitution is based on people’s ethics of Happiness, derived primarily from Buddhism but also supported in Hinduism, focuses on harmony, is internalized by people and is thus easier to enforce, but at the same time guarantees separation of religion and state and includes a constitutional monarch bound by the ethics of Happiness (Bodhisatva leadership). However, the court system tends to follow more common law principles. There is little jurisprudence developing the principle of Happiness. Its *legal reconstructive principles* embrace enhanced concepts of (human) dignity (of all living beings, related to karma, compassion and codependent origination), of freedom (from desire, delusion and including reciprocity) related to constitutional rights and duties of sustainable development (which includes culture), and the understanding that future generations includes one’s reincarnated self, as well as restorative criminal and civil justice based on mediation, confession, swift and simple justice.

**Table 1. Arguments pro and con Buddhist inspired law (reconstruction of law)**

Western:	Buddhist:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law is and should be based on objective rationality; religion is subjective.</li> <li>• Western legal systems are rooted in reason (and in the economic reality of ‘self-interested man’), not religion, and therefore universally applicable.</li> <li>• Separation of religion and state (though exceptions exist in the West too).</li> <li>• Principle of non-discrimination (of non-Buddhist minorities).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Legal code expresses the people’s fundamental ethical principles’ (Baylis and Munro 2003).</li> <li>• Large majority of country is Buddhist; largest minority adheres to Hinduism which recognizes similar principles.</li> <li>• More adherence to the law because internalized.</li> </ul>

Western:	Buddhist:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of religion: Proselytization punishable by law (Art 7.4 of the Constitution; section 463A Penal Code) is against.</li> <li>• Human Rights and legal systems are universal.</li> <li>• Bhutan is a Buddhist theocratic constitutional state.</li> <li>• Traditional dual (religious-political) system of government still underlies the Constitution.</li> <li>• Gross National Happiness does not foster economic growth.</li> <li>• Happiness is subjective and cannot be measured, can therefore not be a goal of legal systems or policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• Proselytization is offensive to the religious feelings of the Buddhist and Hindus (National Assembly of Bhutan).</li> <li>• Western system also rooted in religion; avoiding Western colonization of law system.</li> <li>• Happiness is to be understood as ‘Dewa’ in Buddhism and not as hedonistic happiness or pleasure=ultimate goal in life.</li> <li>• Restorative rather than punitive justice.</li> <li>• More confessions (based on avoiding bad karma).</li> <li>• More settlements (based on mediation by community, senior citizen or judge).</li> <li>• Less court cases = <i>simple justice</i>.</li> <li>• Integrates respect for nature as duty of citizens.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Converges with</i> concepts of Modernity (material development of the individual and society) and (superior and inferior) stages of development.</li> <li>• Analogy with colonialism: Unlimited resources to be discovered, conquered and exploited; ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Converges with</i> indigenous beliefs in harmony and balance (within oneself, with community, with nature) and self-sufficient survival in precarious environment, self-development through spirituality.</li> <li>• Postcolonial law based on equality of different cultural traditions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consequences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dignity rooted in human reason.</li> <li>• Freedom centers around human freedom: of expression, of religion and from fear (civil political rights), from want (socio-economic rights) (Roosevelt 1941); or freedom to actualize ones (individual) rights and capabilities (Sen 1999).</li> <li>• Sustainable development often outside Constitution; environmental laws centred around human.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consequences: Reconstruction of law</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dignity</u> 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).</li> <li>• Freedom 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.</li> <li>• 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 <u>Buddha field of interdependence</u> makes indivisibility of rights, for all sentient beings, logic. The idea of <u>reincarnation</u> and ‘karma’ makes one automatically part of <u>future generations</u> (protected in art. 5 nature and art. 14.5 debt sustainability) (12.7.1).</li> <li>• <u>Sustainable development</u> is incorporated in Constitution.</li> </ul>

*Economic reconstructive principles* focus on: multidimensional GNH instead of GDP measurement, overcoming spiritual poverty, ‘simple life’, sharing, full employment, people’s sovereignty (not capital), selflessness, individual capabilities aiming at the collective, service to others and non-exploitation, poverty as lack of personal development, decentralized decision making, ecology over economy, culture as a way of life, equality but with acceptance of differences based on karma, inclusiveness as well as room for meditative seclusion, recognizing the essential value of rest and ‘being’ (right to leisure) and developing GNH business. While GNH is consistent with the SDG *goal-oriented approach* in that it is quantified and measurable, and covers many of the same domains, the recent quantified variant of GNH (and by extension the SDGs) is seen as reductionist by others. 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).

It 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. 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). It could inspire a more integrated understanding of *gender* (MDG 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, while overcoming duality is achieved through feminine (intuitive Wisdom combined with receptive awareness of emptiness) and masculine thinking (analytical Knowledge and compassionate action). 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, by being based on the non-subjugation of others, spiritual heritage, natural law and reclaiming the cultural value dimension of human rights, recognition of customary commons, collective responsibility (duties) and decision-making, and other legal reconstructive elements mentioned above. The recognition of *culture* (SDG 4.7 and 11.4) as central to identity, spiritual practices, society, economy, and sustainability; a culture which is future oriented instead of merely traditional, as well as a founding value of human rights. 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 beyond.

**Ubuntu.** The African philosophy of Ubuntu (or Batho) can be defined as the continuous motion

of the enfoldment of the universe, but more popularly as ‘I am because we are’ (a person is a person through other persons) [5]. It is a collective ontology which stresses the value of compassion or ‘life as mutual aid’. It is embodied in national Batho Pele (People First) policies related to government conduct. The interim South African Constitution mentioned Ubuntu, to enable the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and this legal history inspired activist judges into civil and criminal Ubuntu jurisprudence based on victim participation, forgiveness, reintegration of criminals in society, dialogue, relatedness, meaningful engagement, the value of apologies, mutual respect, extended family and hospitality with concrete results such as abolition of the death penalty and prevention of eviction from housing (less strict property rights). *Reconstructive legal principles* include emphasis on restorative justice, and less stress on punitive justice, replacing the idea of dignity merely rooted in reason by an expanded notion of dignity including relatedness, focus on human boundedness (apart from freedom); de facto juridical pluralism; recognizing rights of the ancestors; and a legal culture rooted in reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony, including nature and future generations as part of the ‘bantú’ (people) community.

**Table 2. Arguments pro and contra Ubuntu law (reconstruction of law)**

Contra Ubuntu	Pro Ubuntu
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ubuntu is not in the Constitution, only part of the interim Constitution to enable the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.</li> <li>• Only promoted by activist judges.</li> <li>• Death penalty could have been abolished without reverting to Ubuntu.</li> <li>• Invented tradition by African philosophers.</li> <li>• ‘Communist’ principles of Ubuntu do not sit well with modern economic principles and private law.</li> <li>• Ubuntu is not emancipatory (against communism).</li> <li>• Ubuntu is for Africans, not universal, cannot apply to non-Africans.</li> <li>• Ubuntu forgiveness denied justice, concealing conflict.</li> <li>• Objectivity of reason can establish universal truths.</li> <li>• No difference between Ubuntu and human dignity.</li> <li>• Cultural relativity (as consequence of recognizing other cultural systems) will undermine international law system and lead to instability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoring dignity to the victim (instead of impersonal punitive vengeance).</li> <li>• Victim participation.</li> <li>• Dialogue and compromise.</li> <li>• Recognizing relatedness and restoring it (‘we are not islands onto ourselves’; Port Elizabeth case, para 37),</li> <li>• Value of apology, promoting service to the community (in sentencing).</li> <li>• Achieving mutual respect.</li> <li>• The public interest in reducing prison population.</li> <li>• Welcoming people back into society as functioning members (Skelton 2010).</li> <li>• Reciprocity (giving the same respect as one receives) and mutual enjoyment of rights.</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul>

Contra Ubuntu	Pro Ubuntu
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <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.</li> <li>• Analogy with colonialism: ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior, already established Western based law systems are sufficient.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Converges with</i> African indigenous concepts of justice, bridges common and customary law, rainbow nation (cultural diversity including wholeness or ‘holo-culturality’).</li> <li>• Analogy with postcolonial law. Postcolonial law can enable postcolonial economics.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consequences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dignity</u>: rooted in human reason, individual not collective.</li> <li>• <u>Freedom</u>: rights prioritized over duties to community.</li> <li>• <u>Private/Property law</u>: individual, allowing for inequality, exclusion.</li> <li>• <u>Meritocracy</u>: based on talent/effort one advances oneself.</li> <li>• <u>Criminal justice</u>: punitive.</li> <li>• <u>Family law</u>: nuclear, not extended family.</li> <li>• <u>Environmental protection</u> centred around humans.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consequences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ubuntu/Humaneness/interconnectedness</u>: grandmother of law, above dignity, relational aspect of rights.</li> <li>• <u>Dignity</u>: ‘not rooted in reason because (...) this would deny dignity to too many human beings’ (Cornell 2012b); extends to those who are deceased (as part of bantu community).</li> <li>• <u>Freedom</u>: human boundedness (duties to the other) more important than human freedom.</li> <li>• <u>Legal culture</u> rooted in reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony; Ubuntu reciprocity also extends to respecting natural environment.</li> <li>• Development is not the central goal, human relations and mutual aid are.</li> <li>• <u>Property</u> (equal distribution), <u>criminal justice</u> (restorative), <u>medical</u> confidentiality (transparent to group members), <u>family</u> life (duty to wed and have children), and moral <u>education</u> (developing personhood).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interconnection with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Individual</u> rights.</li> <li>• <u>Historic generation</u> of rights (in theory indivisible, but in practice with priority of civil-political rights; socio-economic rights are deemed desirable but not feasible, idem for cultural rights).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Interconnection with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Collective</u> rights.</li> <li>• Could be connected to <u>rights of nature</u>, though bantu community is central (born, yet to be born, deceased).</li> <li>• <u>Protection of environment for future generations</u> in Constitution.</li> </ul>

*Reconstructive economic principles* include: Collective agency (‘what can we (including I) do, so that we live better’); employment for all based on ‘no-one is useless’ and ‘we work as one’ (col-labor-ate); living in time (rather than on time); sharing instead of profit; the intrinsic value of human life instead of ‘human capital’; the importance of (extended) family-centered thinking; ending dominance of capital; sovereignty of people over capital; extending the same respect to nature as to people; and supporting the global social floor. Written SDG models are often seen as an irrelevant discussion from the African mind, unless it directly addresses needs, involves *a constant dialogue*,

keeping the relationship going (as starting point of a relationship, not the end point), building trust to work together. Ubuntu doesn't know the word development but *stresses humaneness in relation (including nature)*.

Ubuntu can 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. Moral education of personhood 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. It embraces a **culture** dimension in respect for different value systems and diversity (rainbow nation). Despite contention, feminists may find inspiration as well for a **gender** goal. South Africa (and its 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. 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 (see above on reconstructive legal principles) and healing of trauma as well as the cluster on **institution building and rule of law** by its jurisprudence on public law and civility in conduct of government agents, however, preferring the words nation building, people empowering leadership and citizen participation. 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.

**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 [6]. Ecuador enshrines Buen Vivir principles in its Constitution and national and international policies. Rights of nature are central to Buen Vivir, as a form of restorative justice (between humans and nature) articulated in a modest jurisprudence enabling persons to protect nature without proving personal damage, however, not preventing large scale natural resource exploration. It deconstructs legal concepts centered around individual humans, the utility value of nature (defined as property), nature conservation, and 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. It reformulates dignity, freedom and development into collective dignity of all life (balancing the interests of all including the intercultural dialogue dimension), freedom as reciprocity setting one free, as well as the freedom of communities to live in permanent dialogue with nature, calling for sustainable life (well-being)

instead of development. Further reconstructive legal principles are: People's sovereignty (including migrants), not territorial sovereignty; union of the planet; identity based on one's birthplace and culture; plurinationality (plurality of nations within the horizontal non-patriarchal state); individual, communal and ecological citizenship; interculturality; juridical pluralism; collective rights and duties; free prior and informed consent; judges as instrumental in establishing law; recognizing rights of the spirits.

Table 3. Pro and cons against rights of nature

Opposition	Proponents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law aims at regulating <i>human relations</i></li> <li>• <u>Utility value</u> of nature, lesser value than humans</li> <li>• Giving agency to non-humans without moral sense and rational ability is not rational</li> <li>• An outright 'absurdity' or 'stupid'</li> <li>• Nature is not able to fulfill corresponding obligations</li> <li>• Inability to sue nature causing damage (eg Flooding destroying other life)</li> <li>• Scientific difficulties for establishing alteration to a natural cycle</li> <li>• Fear of <u>excessive litigation</u> and increased conflicts</li> <li>• Imprecise definitions of what nature (or natural) is, may impede implementation (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')</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigning <u>intrinsic value</u> to nature</li> <li>• As to <u>utility value</u> of nature:</li> <li>• Human governance systems are failing: Designed for exploitation and domination of Earth, leading to environmental degradation</li> <li>• Like liberation of slaves, liberation of nature is needed: Both subject to ownership of their masters</li> <li>• Human well-being is derived from earth well-being</li> <li>• Therefore, balance the interests of all (human and Earth) for the benefit of humans and non-humans</li> <li>• =Redefinition of economy-society-nature relationship</li> <li>• =Recognition of environment- culture interrelations</li> <li>• Law is central to human governance and therefore must recognize rights of non-human members to protect Earth and human survival</li> <li>• (Abstract) corporations have rights, so can (abstract) Nature</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Converges with</i> concepts of Modernity and (superior and inferior) stages of development</li> <li>• Analogy with colonialism: Unlimited resources to be discovered, conquered and exploited; ranking of human civilizations whereby indigenous is inferior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Converges with</i> indigenous logic: 'Of course, nature is our mother, she has rights'</li> <li>• Analogy: Postcolonialism, deep ecology and environmental justice</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consequences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dignity</u> concerns human dignity and rights</li> <li>• <u>Freedom</u> concerns human freedom and capabilities to actualize that freedom, using Earth and non-human members to their benefit (lack of reciprocity)</li> <li>• <u>Development</u> concerns human progress and may go at the cost of earth</li> <li>• <u>Sustainable</u> development with continued economic <u>growth</u>, but without recognizing rights of the earth, is possible and will solve environmental governance crisis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consequences:</b> Reconstructs the notion of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dignity</u> (wider circle of reciprocity: Rights/ duties)</li> <li>• <u>Freedom</u> 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)</li> <li>• '<u>Development</u> is not important, what is important is well-being or life. Sustainable life!' (E8). Not sustainable development</li> </ul>

Opposition	Proponents
<p><b>Interconnection with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Individual rights</u></li> <li>• <u>Civil, political rights; socio, economic and cultural rights</u> to protect and emancipate humans</li> <li>• <u>Culture and nature</u> are separate; culture concerns humans</li> <li>• <u>Property law</u>; humans own land, animals, earth systems for their benefit and private and collective use</li> <li>• <u>Conservation</u>: ‘The dissociation of human rights, social rights and nature rights’ (E8)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Interconnection with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Collective rights</u>: Nature is territory</li> <li>• <u>Free prior and informed consent</u> (tool)</li> <li>• <u>Culture and nature</u> 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)</li> <li>• Fundamentally reshapes <u>property law</u>, as the natural world has been seen as legal property thus far</li> <li>• <u>Integration</u> of human and nature in one balanced system</li> </ul>

**Reconstructive economic principles** are: A self-sustaining and life-nurturing economy without growth (accumulation of production and consumption), solidarity including with the earth; people jointly formulating their goals of good living (collective capability); human beings as central to economy and not capital or speculation; reciprocity (development/progress as service); ecology over economy; community including nature, as central to life and to happiness; 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; active popular participation in decisionmaking; emancipation of nature and labor (beyond socialism); community markets; promoting post-extractivist economies and markets based on use value; getting away from the claims of scientific progress as sole source of information. Buen Vivir is a *rethink of 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, but also for *plurinationality*, which is inseparable from Sumak Kawsay: 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 [7]. There is suspicion of the SDGs which are seen as important but at the same time as a traditional liberal UN concept supporting economic growth. Recognizing *partnership with the Earth* is the first principle. Furthermore, recognizing the value of community in partnership with nature, of interculturality and spirituality as basic pillar. Buen Vivir in its purest Sumak Kawsay form does not know a notion of development, but stresses reciprocity including with Mother Earth.

In the cluster for **education**: Unmasking the coloniality of knowledge (subordination of other knowledges) and making space for finding common ground for different views and for intercultural education. On the cluster for **gender**: Recognizing the abstract complementarity and conflict between two opposites (chacha-warimi) 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; getting away from the Western anthropocentric, androcentric patriarchal development paradigm, while recognizing that the feminine is closer to the Creator taking precedence over the masculine, deserving utmost respect as creator of new life. On the cluster for *health*: Recognizing the spiritual and the importance of emotions and the need for healing at different levels. On the cluster for *environment*: Redefining environment into ‘nature’ which is sacred (with zero-extractivism) and the foundation of ethics to preserve the cosmic order, recognizing its rights and equal standing; creation of ecological citizenship; right (respect) of mother earth as chief principle of law; natural limitation of people’s rights and property right (to earth); a wider concept of dignity including nature. 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; stressing autonomy and diversity (plurinationality as self-determination); and multiple forms of democracy (communitarian, participatory, representative, consensus seeking: ‘convivir’) and including above reconstructive legal principles. The cluster for *peace* can center 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. On the cluster for *global partnership*: Recognizing partnership with the Earth as first principle.

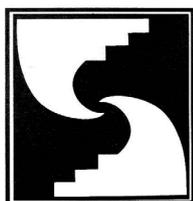
**Comparing Three Worldviews.** The three worldviews are similar in that they emphasize: Cosmic unity and harmony as the basis for justice; the creation of the world from our mind/heart, putting spiritual before material; altruism; deliberative democracy; decentralization and equality; expanded notions of dignity and freedom as overarching legal principles; restorative justice; economic-ecological principles; development (as in progress) as service; 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’. 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. Referring to Amartya Sen’s definition of progress (‘Development as Freedom’) [8], they redefine progress as ‘development as service’ [2].

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.

Figure 1 Meeting of opposing cosmic forces: Feminine (dark/ life force) – masculine (light/life patterns)



Yin-yang



Tinkuy



Ubuntu (author's design)

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 experiential world) and relational worldview (none is dominant over the other) contrasts with the objective worldview of the Western world.

### Conclusion: Towards 'Development as Service' or Human-Nature-Wellbeing Interrelationship?

The focus of the SDG goals is still on growth and use of resources, be it in a sustainable way and departs from an individual, not collective, point of view. The SDGs can therefore be said to still be underpinned by strong modernist notions of development: Sovereignty of humans over their environment, individualism, freedom (rights rather than duties), self-interest, belief in the market leading to collective welfare, private property, rewards based on merit, materialism, quantification of value, and instrumentalization of labor (for the market and productions process). The SDGs are also linear result-based and human right approach oriented.

All three worldviews of the Global South lead to the following conclusions compared to 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 inter-relationship. 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. Coalitions can be built within regions as well as bridges between Happiness, 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.

Regarding the SDGs as outcome of negotiations, some specific conclusions are (see table 4): (1) The drafters of the SDGs are universalist in outlook; while the Happiness adherents are upbeat (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), whereas Buen Vivir adherents (mainly the intellectual and Pachamamist schools) are polemic (against the SDGs, called 'mental masturbation', especially growth goals). (2) Values underlying the SDGs are 'Leave no one behind' (integrated, interrelated and indivisible goals). Happiness reformulates this positively and broadens this to 'Respect all sentient beings' (connected in the Buddha field; promoting the Middle Way, including an eight fold path of self development; and resting on four pillars of culture, nature, socio-economic development and good governance). Ubuntu postulates 'Life is mutual aid' (all connected in a metaphysical 'Seriti' field of interdependence including nature; promoting humaneness in motion, collective capability/human rights and People First, including past and future generations). Buen Vivir's slogan would rather be 'Let Mother Earth lead' (promoting Chakana interdependence based on the four principles of integrality, relationality, complementarity and reciprocity; and resting on the three pillars of (biocentric) Good Living, Plurinationality and Interculturality). (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. (4) In terms of preferred governance, 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 (SDGs leaving intact current global governance systems based on a patriarchal power system lead by G7/G8 and G20) combined with notions of servant-leadership (enabling others to perform better). Happiness promotes the enlightened (self-developed) Bodhisatva leader, shepherding (following behind) his people with wisdom and

compassion. Ubuntu leadership can be compared to ‘the boatman’ (going in front taking the others with): Leader and followers empower each other. Buen Vivir in its purist Sumak Kawsay form enables visionary collective leadership which takes into account the future of seven generations. (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); Happiness: Knowing is controlling the mind; Ubuntu: Knowing is feeling (balancing the mother mind and the warrior mind); Buen Vivir: Knowing is connecting to earth. (7) 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. (8) The focus of Happiness adherents is generally on climate change goal 13 and related nature goals as well as well-being goal 3; the focus of Ubuntu adherents is on the first five social goals, inclusiveness goal 16, partnership/means of implementation goal 17; and the focus on Buen Vivir adherents is on ‘no goals’ but nature rights (respect and legal rights for Nature/Mother Earth).

**Table 4. Comparison of SDG, Ubuntu, Happiness, Buen Vivir approach**

	<b>SDGs</b>	<b>Happiness</b>	<b>Ubuntu</b>	<b>Buen Vivir</b>
Perspec- tive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Universalist</u>: Accepted by all UN member states with consultations of civil society and business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Upbeat</u>: GNH is better, goes beyond and incorporates SDGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Pragmatist</u>: Please the global North while doing your own thing locally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Polemic</u>: SDGs are called mental masturbation</li> <li>• Intellectual and pachamamist Buen Vivir against SDGs</li> </ul>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Leave no one behind</u></li> <li>• Goals are integrated, interrelated, indivisible</li> <li>• Human rights based approach</li> <li>• 5P’s: (peace, prosperity, planet, people, partnership)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Respect all beings</u></li> <li>• ‘Buddha field’: inter-dependence includes metaphysical</li> <li>• Non-duality/ Middle path based on Buddhism</li> <li>• 8thfold path of self-development &amp; compassion</li> <li>• 4 pillars of GNH: 1<sup>st</sup> culture, identity &amp; spirituality, 2<sup>nd</sup> socio-economic policies, 3<sup>rd</sup> harmony with nature, 4<sup>th</sup> good governance and decentralization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Life is mutual aid</u></li> <li>• ‘Seriti’(field) - interdependence includes metaphysical</li> <li>• Humaneness in action/motion and collective human rights</li> <li>• People First (Batho Pele) where people includes past, present and future generations of communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Let mother earth lead</u></li> <li>• ‘Chakana’ - interdependence includes metaphysical=IRCR*</li> <li>• Biocentric rights of nature approach</li> <li>• Good living in harmony with nature, Plurinationality, Interculturality</li> <li>* <i>Integrity, relationality, complementarity, reciprocity</i></li> </ul>

	<b>SDGs</b>	<b>Happiness</b>	<b>Ubuntu</b>	<b>Buen Vivir</b>
Development	<u>Sustainable growth</u> =development/ progress	<u>Inner peace &amp; harmony with nature/ others</u> (incorporating sustainable development)	<u>Human relations</u> including with past/ future generations which are connected to earth/nature as part of community (I am because we are) (replacing sustainable development)	<u>Biocentric intersubjective relations</u> (good living) (alternative to and against sustainable development)
Goals vs Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Goal oriented result based management</u> (with elements of process thinking)</li> <li>• Vertical (upward linear progress) <u>Doing</u> what is good for yourself (and the other)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Goal + Process</u></li> <li>• Vertical (progress in developing self) /Horizontal (harmony)</li> <li>• <u>Contemplating</u> self and other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Process/reciprocal</u></li> <li>• Horizontal</li> <li>• <u>Feeling</u> engagement with the other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Process/Horizontal/ Reciprocal/Cyclical/ Spiral</u> (Sumak Kawsay)*</li> <li>• <u>Being</u> in harmony with universe *(<i>contradiction with government Buen Vivir goal setting</i>)</li> </ul>
Targets Indicators	<u>Knowing is Measuring &amp; Reasoning</u> (Simple, quantifiable, analytical)	<u>Knowing is controlling Mind</u> (Life is learning; overcome duality; Balance Yin (Feminine) and Yang (Masculine))	<u>Knowing is Feeling</u> (Empathic thinking from heart); Balance warrior mind (analytic) and mother mind (feeling)	<u>Knowing is connecting to Earth</u> (Feeling/ knowing earth); Complementarity of Feminine/Masculine
Priority Goals	All 17	Climate change (13), protection of nature (esp. 15) and peaceful mind/mental health/wellbeing (3) & <u>General balance</u> : 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) & <u>general focus</u> on socio-economic rights, people first and restorative justice (absent in goals) * <i>in contradiction to the official South African position</i>	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 & <u>General focus</u> on nature rights and socio economic rights
Missing (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	<u>King</u> : the one who achieves individual power first and then helps the people ( <i>Global Governance systems based on patriarchal power system lead by G7/ G8</i> ) combined with notions of <u>Servant-leadership</u> enabling others to perform better	<u>Boddhisatva leader shepherding</u> (following behind) his people with wisdom/compassion	<u>Boatman</u> : Leader and followers empower each other (going in front taking the others with)	<u>Seven generation leadership council</u> (collective leadership)

Moving towards cultural sustainable development goals would mean a reshaping of the agenda: The words *Human – Nature – Well-being Inter-Relationships* may capture the essence of above four perspectives. 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 ‘Well-being’ captures the Western reorientation towards broader than economic well-being, targeting concrete achievements (life is actualizing one’s rights and setting targets). The word ‘Interrelationships’ signifies a process approach, whereby it is aimed at creating a greater consciousness (awareness of interrelations, necessary for changing behavior), honoring the Bhutanese Buddhist spiritual evolution (life is learning, on inner and inter-relationships).

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