Development as Service

Development as Service:

Worldviews, Law and Sustainable Development Goals

By

Dorine E. van Norren

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THE COMPLEX ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, AND DIALOGUE BEYOND 2030

BY MACHARIA KAMAU

As ambassador to the United Nations for Kenya, I was witness to the complex proceedings of negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that formed the official adoption of the SDGs. This three-and-a-half-year journey of the negotiation of these goals was one of the most complex negotiations done within the United Nations system, touching upon virtually every topic and involving all agencies of the UN, alongside civil society, business, experts and, of course, governments. It was at times an exhausting exercise of which the outcome was unknown and success not assured with many opposing, seemingly irreconcilable views. To some it seemed impossible and even absurd to want to strive for such a comprehensive framework of both socio-economic development, sustainability and peace. Had we not worked efficiently alongside one another, safely within our own pillars of development, nature conservation and security, for decades and was this integrative effort not going to backfire? How the impossible was achieved, I have described in the book, *Transforming Multilateral Diplomacy, The inside story of the Sustainable Development Goals* (2018) together with Pamela Chasek and David O'Connor.

The current book that you are about to read takes this process one step further, trying to comprehend and integrate the value dimensions in the SDGs. How to harness the power of culture for sustainable development, the driving force of peoples and societies? I myself voiced strong support for including culture in the SDGs as a driving force for development. During the negotiations, it was treated as a cross-cutting issue, influencing all goals and targets. UNESCO recognized this as an important break-through, reaffirming culture's crucial contribution to development.

In (Southern) Africa, that connecting force is called Ubuntu (or similar expressions in different languages) of which South Africa is the most significant proponent. It signifies African brother(sister)hood, in which we

recognize the humanity in the other and the sacredness of all living things. The African Union (AU) recognized Ubuntu as an important African heritage in 2021, during South Africa's Presidency of the AU. During the negotiations other nations brought forward the concept of Mother Earth, especially Bolivia and Ecuador, which found its expression in the preamble of the SDGs and the phrasing Harmony with Nature in one of the sub-targets. Bhutan launched its Happiness movement together with many scholars and 'new' (wellbeing) economists and organized a large conference at UN headquarters around its Buddhist concept of Gross National Happiness in the run-up to the SDG negotiations. The world that is behind these expressions is explained in this book.

The book is on the one hand appreciative of the complex achievement of the SDGs and at the same time critical of dominant modernist economic narratives that at times may overshadow concepts of community and the intrinsic value of nature. It questions the domain of culture from all angles, both philosophical, legal and policy and how it plays out in the international dimension. The book is an impressive effort to bring these various wide-ranging worlds, spanning Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America together, and to expand the horizon of the human rights dialogue as well as the sustainability and development discourse in a positive way. It is a must read for all those that are interested in working in the multilateral domain or scholars that are involved in truly inclusive sustainable development. As an African, I hope that this dialogue of cultures will foster peace and the spirit of togetherness that is Ubuntu.

Nairobi, October 2024

PREFACE:
MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

My motivation for undertaking this research is rooted in my early adult life. Studying in South Africa, I opened my eyes for the first time to a 'non-Western' perspective[1]. Living in an almost entirely black student residence complex, I became acutely aware of my otherness, being labeled 'white'. Witnessing the transformation of South Africa to a multiparty democracy, in 1994, I realized being part of the end of an era: the last openly (semi) 'colonial' state surrendered to 'modern democracy'. Being part of a black community had its advantages: I learned to see the world through African eyes. Of all the conversations I had, the one that remained most vividly with me, was about 'Ubuntu'. It seemed to evoke an emotion in my interlocutors, during one of my visits into the townships, that was unparalleled. Everyone had something to say about it. After having posed the question 'what is Ubuntu?', I was encircled by a group of young people, all present at the house cum shop we had dropped by. Each person seemed to search to the bottom of their heart to explain to me at length this very important subject. Even the man with money in his sock, labeled by my friend as 'he's a crook', shared with me his soul-wisdom, briefly forgetting his criminal self. That afternoon on an empty field, outside a home in Guguletu, remains forever etched in my mind. The other image I was to take home with me was that of Nelson Mandela giving his inauguration speech as newly elected President of South Africa, and the inexplicable turn of fate that got me a seat on the front row, never having participated in any anti-apartheid activism. After the guests departed, I briefly sat on his chair contemplating what it would be like to be a world leader and what would be the message I would carry. After all, some of my black consciousness friends considered him a 'traitor' to the cause, wishing a less conciliatory approach. The experience created a debt for the future, one that I was to realize and fulfill only 20 years later.

The next step took me to Asia, now as a Foreign Service official posted to Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1998. Never losing face, the Sri Lankans pretended

[1] I use the word 'non-Western' between inverted commas as it signifies that the West is the standard against which everything else is measured, which is contentious, because it excludes others.

not to notice the black face of the partner accompanying me. Nevertheless a local staff confided in me that it had immediately changed their perspective of me on arrival, in a positive way. I was presumed to be more sympathetic to them, although some Asians did consider themselves superior to Africans. This contradictory logic did not seem to disturb them. Never having intended to study Buddhism - those spiritual realities were implicitly frowned upon in conservative diplomatic circles - I stumbled on a Tibetan teacher in a massage center. Much against my will - I wanted a career - I was spoon-fed Asian wisdom. This was complemented by lectures of the landscaper, weekly designing his intricate patterns in the feng-shui Japanese garden of my home, whilst talking to the plants, for which service I refused to pay my landlord, not understanding what that had to do with 'good living'.

The journey then took me to Iraq, in 2001, a country that we did not enjoy diplomatic relations with, and therefore I was posted in Ankara, Turkey. The Turks did not allow diplomats to cross the border to the semi-autonomous Kurdish area created by Western intervention, and therefore till today the country remains 'undiscovered territory' to me. A turn of history was to oust me from my file after two years, the American invasion in Iraq and subsequent official diplomatic relations with Bagdad. Turkey became my domain of work. The Turks received me with their proverbial hospitality. I became a 'daughter' of a Turkish, Islamic, family, that after I departed from Turkey, lamented at each visit: 'We are still hungry for you.'

For long I struggled with the 'sense' of diplomatic life, where one had to frequently discard the little wisdom one had acquired about the place where one lived, invariably being posted to another bewilderingly unknown continent. North America became my forte in 2006, although for once this did not involve studying the Americans, but mainly following their policies abroad. Who were we, as a small nation, to involve ourselves in domestic policy choices of our most important ally? With the exception of Guantanamo Bay and the death penalty, that was left to the Americans themselves. Involved in the preparations of the 400 year commemoration of the relations between The Netherlands and New York, I had my first encounter with native American wisdom during a documentary festival organized in Amsterdam. In my private time I made my first travel to shamanistic Peru.

Arriving at a think tank with all this wealth of knowledge and being infused by academic circles, finally my life mission started to take shape, in writing reports on development issues, as one of the secretaries to the independent

Advisory Council for International Affairs (AIV). Moreover, I was to communicate the 'non-Western' to my Western interlocutors engaged in development of 'underdeveloped' nations. This did not happen without a clash. Upon my enthusiastically naïve suggestion that we needed to include the indigenous perspective of the Africans, Asians and Indigenous Americans themselves in shaping a new international development agenda, I met with fierce rebuttal. Cultural relativism or even the risk thereof, had no place in human rights debates. For all our want of participation, non-discrimination and accountability, this was one bridge too far. Much to my dismay there was no space for my text on other worldviews in the Millennium Development Goals report I had to prepare for the AIV. I then concluded that I would make the Global South perspective on the MDGs the subject of *my* research.

'Why', I was asked upon my first publication on Ubuntu, in the *Development Studies Research Journal*, 'do you task yourself to communicate what Africans themselves should communicate?' That was a question to think about. For one, I riposted, having engaged in this research and expecting scholars analyzing Africa on my side, I was baffled to find out that they relegated 'Ubuntu' to the land of fairy tales (and anthropologists). For another, perhaps these truths were so self-evident to our Global South counterparts, that they long did not see the need to explicitly communicate this. 'What?!', did a South African official ask me, upset upon hearing about so much criticism to Ubuntu and apparently unaware that the main tenet of his government's foreign policy was cynically frowned upon by specialists on African politics, 'What, do they then think that 'Ubuntu' is?' I had to admit 'they' probably did not have many thoughts about it at all. He quickly recaptured himself in a diplomatic pose by saying: 'Well, thank you for admiring our culture'. Equally sad and in a similar exasperated fashion, my Ecuadorian academic interlocutor asked me: 'But why? Why are they against Buen Vivir?', while the Bhutanese in their friendly Asian demeanor would simply nod upon hearing my story and pride themselves that their Gross National Happiness is far ahead of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals.

After a short stint as sactions coordinator, I moved on to coordinate UNESCO, human rights and SDG affairs at the Ministry of Culture, Education and Science, in the hope to find more connection with the policy field of development and culture. Whilst moving back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a strategic advisor for the Western Hemisphere, 4 years later, I attempted to teach some of my knowledge to my coworkers and

compatriots. This book is based on my (updated) PhD research, which has been published in four different books.

DEDICATIONS

This research is dedicated to all whom I encountered during my travels, but especially my African friend Vuyisile (meaning 'the one that brings happiness to others' in Xhosa), my Tibetan teacher Tsering (meaning 'Long Life') and the people of the Himalaya and Andes mountains that welcomed me without knowing me and helped me discover their world, specifically Alberto Acosta.

Furthermore, I dedicated it to my academic teachers Willem van Genugten and Joyeeta Gupta (promotores), who believed in my project; to Arie de Ruijter, Rolph van der Hoeven and Liza van Paaschen (Advisory Council for International Affairs), working with me on what has now become Chapter 3, 4 and 5 of this book; to Rob Vos of UNDESA inspiring economic Chapter 5; to my colleague Anne Poorta who negotiated the SDGs for the Netherlands in New York; Selim Jahan of UNDP for believing in my idea of the wheel of values; Akif Atlı and the Turkish Atlı family and my parents Pien and Dirk for always supporting me.

I am also hugely indebted to my government for granting me the postings abroad that were my main teaching ground and, moreover, sponsoring my research, as possibly informative to foreign policy making.

As the Afrikaner song goes: *'Ek wil reis rond die wêreld. Om huistoe te gaan. Ek wil praat met 'n vreemde. Om myself te verstaan'* (I need to travel around the world, to go home. I need to talk to a stranger to understand myself - Stef Bos).

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For the Bhutan chapter I am indebted to the Bhutanese ambassador Sonam Tsong, Jigme Tenzin and other staff in Brussels for organizing my 5 week visa to their beautiful country. I also thank the representation of Bhutan in New York for receiving me. A twist of fate landed me in the midst of the 'Friends of Bhutan' during their 25 year anniversary in Middelburg, who gracefully accepted me, at the initiation of my Gross National Happiness study. I want to specially thank the Honorary Consul and his wife in The Hague, Cees and Namgay Klein, for their hospitality at their home, Henk de Jong and Erica Sluyters for sharing their movies, Italian Romolo Gandolfo for sharing his invaluable contacts and insights, and German Gregor Verhufen for sharing all his literature. I want to thank the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) and its staff for hosting me in Bhutan, while busy with the Gross National Happiness Conference in Paro, and the Bhutanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, especially Sonam Tobgay, and Mercury Travels Director Karma Namgyel, for making my in country trip possible and unforgettable. The owners of Jambayang Resort and Wangchuk Resort Taba gave me personal treatment and made my stay very agreeable. I appreciate the comments I got from Françoise Pommaret on the Happiness chapter. I thank Jit Tsering for answering my questions from abroad.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIV Advisory Council for International Affairs
ALBA Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
AU African Union
ASEAN Association for South East Asian Nations
BRICS Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBS Center of Bhutan Studies
CC Constitutional Court
CELAC Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CERD International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CEDAW International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFTA Continental Free Trade Area
CRC Convention on the Rights of the Child
EAC East African Community
ECOWAS Economic Community of Western African States,
FDI Foreign Direct Investment
FLACSO Latin America Faculty of Social Sciences
GDP Gross Domestic Product
GLOF glacial lake outburst flood
GNP Gross National Product
GNH Gross National Happiness
GNI Gross National Income
GPGs Global Public Goods
HIPC Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
HLP High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
HLPF High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
ICCPR International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IDA International Development Agency (of the World Bank)
IGN Intergovernmental Negotiations on the post-2015 Development Agenda.
IMF International Monetary Fund
IP Indigenous People
LAC Latin America and the Caribbean

LDCs Least Developed Countries
LICs Least Income Countries
MDG Millennium Development Goals
MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MICs Middle Income Countries
NEPAD New Partnership for Africa's Development
NIEO New International Economic Order
NGO Non-governmental organization
OAS (Organization of American States)
ODA Official Development Assistance
OECD Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
OECD/DAC Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
OWG Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals
5P's People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace, Partnership
PM Prime Minister
PPP purchasing power parity
PRSPs Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
R2P Responsibility to Protect
Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
RoN Rights of Nature
SA South Africa
SAARC South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC Southern Africa Development Community
SCA Supreme Court of Appeal (of South Africa)
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
SIDS Small Island Developing States
TWAIL Third World Approaches to International Law
UHC Universal Health Coverage
UN United Nations
UNASUR Union of South American Nations
UNCTAD United Nations Conference for Trade and Development
UNDESA United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNDRIP United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNECA United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA United Nations Populations Fund
UNSG United Nations Secretary General
UNWOMEN United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USA United States of America
USD US Dollar
USSR Union of Soviet Republics
VNR Voluntary National Review (on SDGs)
WCIP World Conference on Indigenous Peoples
WTO World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Pien ('Yahweh will increase') and Dirk ('gifted ruler')

This book investigates how three non-Western well-being theories – Happiness[2], Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir – can contribute to the (operationalization of) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the drafting of future development agendas.

Chapter 1 gives a brief introduction to the ***research question, approach and method***. 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 to contrast them with conventional theoretical approaches without framing them in any particular theory. This de- and reconstruction is derived from (the approaches developed within) ***Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) and post-colonial economics.***

The tools used in ***critical realism*** involve: (a) taking an interdisciplinary approach and accepting a layered reality; (b) looking at reality as a 'social construction' (by individuals and groups in permanent movement) rather than looking at reality as a self-evident, objective truth 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), embedded not only in politics, but also in socialization processes (conformity), psychology and 'ideological boundaries of participation' and which is interwoven with knowledge systems. These tools are applied to expose 'Other' realities beyond the consensual SDGs, negotiated by Northern and Southern countries. The study therefore contributes to bridging the

[2] When referring to 'Happiness' in this book (with capital H), I mean Gross National Happiness (GNH).