Neoliberal Economic Theory and the Pursuit of a Holistic Human Development

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Abstract: One of the greatest influences of the contemporary world is the idea of economic growth. Nowadays, every nation strives to grow economically lest it be labelled as a poor nation. This presumes that the only measurement of development is the economic growth. That is why contemporary capitalists are more or less free to do whatever they want as long as they promise to achieve economic growth. However, does economic growth generated by capitalists enable individuals and societies to equally flourish? It does not. Instead of ensuring individuals’ wellbeing, contemporary economic system exploit them, taking them as means rather than ends in themselves. Moved by such a spirit, contemporary capitalists cannot generate a sustainable development for every person and society. Rather, they deceive people by exposing them to attractive choices in the production and distribution of goods and services towards mere ephemeral advantages. They disguise people with some freedom to interact with them, which experiences and researches detect as a mere opium. Yet, they need people for them to engender economic growth from consumption-production cycle, without which their transactions would be less effective if not ineffective. Consequently, they enforce the establishment of private spaces for their projects to succeed at a maximum level. Contemporary capitalists even go further to institute theories, which support their behaviors in attempt to freely pursue the greatest interest. One of their theories is the Neoliberal Economic Theory, which currently influences the whole economic enterprise. However, this theory already misrepresents people and their capabilities. How can people be rescued from this misleading relationship between capitalists and people or societies so as to attain a sustainable inclusive development. In fact, sustainable development requires more than utility maximization and economic growth. It requires true freedom to do what one finds worth doing in order to enjoy the outcome of one’s labor. Thus, people need freedom to be and do what they have reason to value so as to generate holistic human development. For Sen, the real freedom is determined by social opportunities and rights. Hence, one needs capabilities to undertake what produces his/her wellbeing, and functionings to become what he/she wants out of participation in public endeavors. Still, Sen’s capability approach seeks to pursue individual freedom towards concrete holistic individual development. One can still wonder if individual privileges can be viable to the detriment of social privileges, given that every person is a social being. Individual freedoms need to be extended to social freedoms so that both individuals and society can grow equally. Thus, Ubuntu philosophy should be embraced alongside capability approach in addressing this triple challenge of individual, economic and social development. In fact, Ubuntu philosophy promotes holistic individual and societal development. Therefore, this paper argues that the integration of capability approach and Ubuntu philosophy can provide the best responses to the challenges of Neoliberal Economic Theory and prompt holistic human and social development.

Keywords: Neoliberal Economic Theory, Capability Approach, Ubuntu Philosophy, Holistic Human Development.
1. Introduction

Many people, both theorists and practitioners, think that human development emanates from feasible economic systems. The Neoliberal Economic Theory seems to promote this line of thinking. This current dominant economic theory encompasses three dimensions, namely, people’s selfishness, consumption factors and production dynamics, which appear to be the current ingredients of economic growth that is significantly influencing the world in one way or another. The Neoliberal Economic Theory holds that individuals should be left alone, for they know what they do; and governments should opt for free markets and privatisation. If this is the case, then the collapse of economy will imply the collapse of the whole viable social life, which is partly embedded in moral values, or vice-versa. In this sense, if humanity is currently undergoing moral issues, then people should question the nature of the present apparent economic advancement. Obviously, moral values are now being undermined by this superficial economic development. In fact, economic development does not necessarily entail holistic social and/or human development. In this line, Amartya Sen argues that human development does not result from mere economic freedom or growth, but rather from individual freedom to do or to be what one has reason to value. However, it seems that even his capability approach is not so effective in that matter, since it only focuses on the theoretical foundation of human development. If this is true, then the mere capability approach cannot effectively generate holistic human development. Ubuntu philosophy turns out to be the best support of Sen’s capability approach to tackle the Neoliberal Economic Philosophy, and thus prompt holistic human development. This paper unpacks the Neoliberal Economic Theory and discusses its challenges. Then, the paper will evaluate the relevance of the Capability Approach on the one hand and Ubuntu philosophy on the other, in addressing the Neoliberal Economic Theory towards generating holistic human development. Finally, it will demonstrate how, if fused, the Capability Approach and Ubuntu philosophy can ease the implementation of holistic human development at the expense of superficial economic growth targeted by the Neoliberal Economic Theory.

2. Defining Key Terms

The Neoliberal Economic Theory is the current dominant economic theory, which encompasses three dimensions, namely, people’s selfishness, consumption factors and production dynamics. The capability approach refers to a real opportunity or freedom to choose what one has reason to value, to be, or to do, which is also called potential functioning—what one actually manages to achieve or do—and the list of functionings is endless (Marovah). For Alkire, the capability approach is the moral framework, which proposes that social arrangements should primarily be evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value (6). Ubuntu is a traditionally African philosophy, which is based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, solidarity and related values, which are expressed through individuals’ relationship with others in the community (Kuhumba 137). Holistic human development stands for mental growth, physical, emotional and social development, which involves all the parts of a person (Hussain), and by extension, all the members of the community.

3. Examination of the Neoliberal Economic Theory and Its Challenges

Neoliberal Economic Theory pays much attention to the determination of goods, productivities and income distribution in markets through supply and demand models. Such a determination of goods, products and income distribution is generally ensured with two hypotheses. First, it is seen through a hypothesised maximisation of utility via income tamed by individuals. Second, it is perceived in the implicit maximisation of profit by firms in fixing the costs of production (Yanis 116-130). In this sense, Neoliberal Economic Theory seems to focus on the principle of individual inviolability and the idea of entitlement both pointed out by Robert Nozick. For him, people are naturally born with basic individual rights, such as rights to their lives, liberty, and the fruits of their labour. These rights are of the greatest importance and thus, there is no need for a system to achieve moral equilibrium. He goes further to suggest that individuals should act so that they treat humanity, whether in their own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only (Nozick 31-33). Thus far, contemporary capitalists believe that they generate morality in commerce by using the available information on consumption and exchange factors in accordance with people’s rational choice principle.
According to Neoliberal economists, the focus on economics has been shifted from production to consumption and exchange (Chang 127). In order to have a well-shaped market for transactions, Neoliberal Economic Theory reflects three major characteristics. First, there is a demand that aims at explaining the behaviour of the consumer. Second, there is a supply model that assesses the factors of production. Third, there is a firm model that studies the behaviour of firm owners. Its three major hypotheses particularly concern consumers. Firstly, contemporary capitalists assume that people have rational preferences between the outcomes of their choices associated with their values. Secondly, they assume that individuals always act for utility maximisation, while firms act profit maximisation. Thirdly, they assume that people act independently with full and relevant information about their needs. Behind all these characteristics and hypotheses, a neoliberal economic argument is that people are selfish, consumers and not workers. They all strive for utilities and profits maximisation in order to improve their lives. Thus, there is a utilitarian argument that lies behind the logic of the Neoliberal Economic Theory.

Neoliberal economists argue that if individuals are left alone, then they make use of rational choice principle in making economic decision. Rational choice principle sets factors for consumption-production cycle. Therefore, freedom is the basis of consumption and production factors. This argument implies that consumers are the ones to shape the market and economic progress. In other words, individuals are guided by rational choices and selfishness in seeking to increase their happiness while making economic decisions. Such rational choices entail consumption and production factors. Yanis states that “instrumental rationality demands that our choices are consistent with our preferences. Thus, the same preferences must produce the same actions given the same information” (55). In contrast, Sen argues, “there has been some confusion because of the misreading of the tradition of consumption theory of taking utility to be simply the numerical representation of a given person’s choice. That is a useful way to define utility for the analysis of consumption behaviour of each person taken separately, but it does not, on its own, offer any procedure whatever for substantive interpersonal comparison” (79). For Sen, it is not necessary, in any case, to make use of the interpersonal comparisons of utility while describing exchange.

Neoliberal economists maintain that if there is no consumption, then there is no need for production. Thus, consumption is the core instrument of production. More production brings about economic growth. Therefore, consumption is the engine of economic growth. The core idea of this argument is that people’s happiness is equated to commodities for consumption. People need to get information on what is available for consumption. Still, the information they get can be relevant or irrelevant to their expectations. It is the nature of their information that guides them whenever they are to decide on what they desire. For instance, “shopping is equally central to understanding how economists think. Modern economics is built on theories of ‘rational choice’, which is supposed to be the kind of choice made by consumers when they shop” (Aldred 11). We agree with Aldred because we admit that individuals know what they want while shopping; and more choices are far better than less not only for them, but also for the firms.

Moreover, contemporary capitalists take consumers as being sovereign due to the assumption that they make use of rationality in choosing one product over another. However, their rational choice can only be effective if they are fully informed about what is offered to them. Yet, consumers can make rational choices without ever having full and sufficient information about production (Yanis 96). Again, consumers, whether taken as sovereign or not, do not intervene in fixing prices of the commodities. Capitalists think they are promoting morality in taking rational choice as a major factor of the consumption-production cycle. However, not everyone would agree with them on such a view. For example, Aldred argues that “many economists are profoundly cynical about human behaviour and the motivation that underlies it. Morality, they seem to suggest, is for losers: real people are almost always selfish” (11). The more assumptions are considered, the more markets for further transactions are created. However, such an attitude of economists can inconvenience them because consumers can sometimes change their mind-set. They are not always consistent in making choices, given the circumstances and what they encounter on the market ground. Hence, some economic policies can be irrelevant to the cultural dimension they are applied to.

In Neoliberal Economic terms, economic growth makes individuals’ lives go best. Happiness is a prerequisite of individuals’ well-being. Therefore, economic growth is a measurement of individuals’
well-being. This argument implies that economic growth buys people’s well-being. For instance, the more production declines, the more demand increases. Yet, higher consumption seems to imply, at the same time, higher production. In other words, when there is little supply, the demand grows, while as the demand increases, supply grows and focuses more and more on the demand. Consumers play an important role in shaping the market; and, for this reason, they are even taken as sovereigns. Aldred points out what the sovereign consumers do in economics. He states that “the sovereign consumer is the actor, a person who is fully informed, knows what they want, and never makes mistakes in getting it. In economics, the sovereign consumer is very much in control of their life” (12). It follows that if the supply in the market is not well-balanced with the demand, automatically prices will go either high or low depending on the demand level.

Accordingly, people will be better off, just because of the balance between consumption and production. However, one may want to know whether this will always be the case for all commodities. Aldred answers this question saying that “some early investigators of relative position assumed that only relative consumption levels matter for some goods while only absolute consumption matters for others” (57). For instance, a sick person does not have full information about medical care. He has to wait for the doctor’s prescription in order to get what he needs for his health care. If the doctor makes a mistake, the consequences will fall on the sick person whereas the latter has already paid all the medical services. In this sense, consumers are not in control of their lives and never fully informed. Consumption is just perceived in a very relativistic manner by contemporary capitalists. It is ineffective and cannot be generalized in sectors like education and medicine. These two sectors need more attention in order to make sure that they are benefiting everybody within the society.

Neoliberal economists hold that the consumers’ intention is to buy a certain quantity of products at the lowest possible price. In contrast, the intention of producers is to sell a certain quantity of products at the maximum price. Neither side is interested in generating a middle ground where supply and demand will be coordinated fairly (Yanis 17). For example, when there is more supply of commodities in the market, and yet the demand is not balanced with the supply, prices will go low for the sake of utility maximization. Instead, if there is less supply, prices will go high for the sake of profit maximization. The satisfaction of consumers and that of producers will not be equally appreciated. In this case, utility becomes actually the major factor of consumption and production cycle. The quality of life seems to remain the same, because there is no accurate cooperation when both consumers and producers act for their own sake. Individuals do not get their happiness in maximizing utilities or profits; maybe they get it because of some other behaviors. There must be something more than utility and profit maximization for the people to be happy. Hence, the idea that the utility and profit maximization in economics makes people happier is a deceiving position to hold, because happiness cannot be quantifiable in terms of utilities and profits only.

In fact, Aldred states that “firms will always try to subvert competition by colluding or establishing monopolies. Free markets, left alone, hardly ever stay free” (84). From this firms’ behavior, two questions arise. First, without any given standard on quality production, one may want to know how much to produce for the least costs. Second, without any given standard on quantity production, one may want to know how much to produce for profit maximization. In this case, the assumption that people act independently of the basis of having full and relevant information about the producers cannot hold. In fact, whatever happens in the market is what goes on in the mind of firms. Firms are the only ones in control of whatever happens in the market given the quality of their services. Consumers cannot do anything in fixing lower or higher costs of commodities. They are somehow manipulated. Thus, consumption sovereignty is just an internal and confidential game among firms and its story is, in this case, a deceiving one.

4. The Capability Approach’s Response to the Neoliberal Economic Theory

Sen’s Capability Approach does not constraint freedom in people’s doings but in people’s beings in terms of functionings and capabilities. However, he states that “In modern use of ‘utility’ in contemporary choice theory, its identification with pleasure or desire-fulfillment has been largely abandoned in favor of seeing utility simply as the numerical representation of a person’s choice” (Sen 67). Sen’s Capability Approach challenges utilitarianism on the basis of a primary information for evaluating individuals’ well-being and capabilities with the aim of individual and social advantages. He
argues that “Utilitarianism values only pleasure, without taking any direct interest in freedom, rights, creativity or actual living conditions. Preference fulfillment may have some obvious attraction in dealing with one person’s individual needs, but it does little, on its own, for interpersonal comparisons, central to any social evaluation” (77). While neoliberal economists advocates for independence of economics, Sen realizes that there is a problem with the independence of economics. He contends that there is need for unity between ethics and economics. For Sen, economic growth and individual income should aim at focusing on ends and not merely on means. Thus, he advocates for ends of freedom rather than means of freedom.

In fact, not all people freely use ‘rational choice’ in deciding what they want to achieve. For instance, in the education sector, individuals, taken as consumers, pay fees for degrees hoping to gain much money and a better life in the long run. Some individuals do not even have access to the best schools. Again, not everyone is fully informed about his or her future and the potential relevance of the education he or she desires to get. This is where Sen sees the problem that would result from the freedom advocated by neoliberal economists. For him, privatization of education sector, for instance, would benefit those who have enough resources. According to Sen, social arrangements should aim at expanding people’s capabilities and freedoms to promote, pursue and achieve what they have reasonably valued to do and to be. In The Idea of Justice, Sen emphasizes the role of public education arguing that “the spread of school education and improvements in its quality can make us more environmentally conscious; better communication and a more active and better informed media can make us more aware of the need for environment-oriented thinking” (249). For him, the real freedom is determined by the social opportunities and rights. Social unfreedom can undermine an inclusive development for all individuals within the society. His Capability Approach advocates for an informed choice when there is enough information for a good choice. It focuses more on the ends of a free choice than on its means. Thus, the rational choice principle should, Sen claims, be understood in the overall freedoms of individuals that lead the kind of lives they have reasonably chosen to value. In fact, the end of his Capability Approach Theory is to generate the freedom that a person actually has to do or to be what he or she reasonably values (Sen, Idea of Justice 231-2).

Sen’s Capability Approach refutes the economists’ assumptions. He disagrees with some economists who assume that individuals are not at all influenced by values. According to Sen, it is simply a “question of having a balance in our behavioural assumptions. We must not fall for the ‘high-minded sentimentality’ of presuming that everyone is intensely moral and value-driven. Nor must we replace that unreal assumption by the equally unreal opposite assumption, what can be called low-minded sentimentality” (280). Sen realises a lack of objectivity in the assumptions of contemporary economists who rely on their assumptions about consumers while shaping the market.

While neoliberal economics concentrate on individual’s economic betterment, Sen’s Capability Approach is concerned with holistic human development. It advocates for social equilibrium in all dimensions of people’s lives. David Crocker seems to have challenged the ethical approaches to development in Sen’s and Nussbaum’s perspectives. He contended that “a fundamental and often underemphasized or completely neglected distinction in Sen’s ethic is that between agency, which includes both agency freedom and agency achievement, and wellbeing, which includes both capability and functionings, there is no empirical concept of human motivation to an ethical ideal of autonomy and action” (150). However, Sen’s concern is to know how best someone can do business successfully and remain ethical, achieve success in terms of wealth without violating any ethical values. In fact, Sen’s Capability Approach seeks to address the imbalance between economics and ethical values in relation to social equilibrium.

Neoliberal Economic Theory presupposes that a rational producer always acts with a goal of maximization under constraint. Based on the nature of the market, firms inspect the factors of production and use them to produce in order to sell. Yet, in Sen’s perspective, it is important to note that an argument of the capability approach over the resource-centred concentration on income and wealth is the basis of a greater importance while evaluating the logic of Neoliberal Economic Theory. According to Sen:

Since the idea of capability is linked with substantive freedom, it gives a central role to a person’s actual ability to do the different things that she values doing. The capability approach focuses on human lives, and not just on the resources people have, in the form of owning – or having use of –
objects of convenience that a person may possess. Income and wealth are often taken to be the main criteria of human success. By proposing a fundamental shift in the focus of attention from the means of living to the actual opportunities a person has, the capability approach aims at a fairly radical change in the standard evaluative approaches widely used in economics and social studies (253).

Amartya Sen goes on to challenge the notion of rational choice that seems to be the hard-core foundation of neoliberal economics. He views people’s rational choice just as an opportunity. He argues that “what is at issue is not the possibility of rational social choice, but the use of an adequate informational base for social judgments and decisions. That is an important understanding, but it is not a pessimistic one [...] The main lesson is not the futility of rational assessment of social options, but the need to anticipate the unintended but predictable consequences” (279).

Besides, Sen’s Capability Approach goes beyond production and allocation of goods and services, as well as market transactions. It promotes heterogeneity, agency and public deliberation towards expanding democratic space to accommodate individual differences, and foster individual or collective potential agency and citizenry desires (Marovah). It admits the relation between human well-being and economic, cultural, social, political, and environmental factors (Kuhumba 127). Now, according to the Neoliberal Economic Theory, economic growth guarantees people’s happiness and thereby people’s wellbeing. In other words, one can deduce that economic growth represents human development. One may wonder: what kind of human development can people attain out of the mere maximization of wealth? Obviously, it is not the holistic human development which Sen has advocated for. For Sen, “Human development is the expansion of people’s freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and the drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups” (qtd. in Alkire 30). That is why Sen argues that human development does not lie in the growth of GDP, rise of income, or increased level of industrialization and technological development. For him, income, utilities, resources and wealth are the means towards an end for human development, not ends in themselves. In fact, “the usefulness of wealth lies in the things that it allows us to do” (Sen, Development as Freedom, 14).

Sen views human development as the enhancement of the life one leads and the freedom one enjoys, that is, the removal of major hindrances from one’s freedom. In this regard, the expansion of freedom becomes a primary end and principal means for development. For example, human development should mean the ability to “eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality by two-thirds; reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; develop a global partnership for development” (Alkire 40). Further, human development entails the expansion of individual substantive freedoms or capabilities depending on the improvement of institutional structures like markets, public services, judiciary systems, political parties, mass media, and public debates. Hence, institutions and social systems are crucial in promoting individual freedoms as they enable people to invest in social sectors and public infrastructures aiming at improving their health, education and social capabilities (Kuhumba 129).

For Sen, human development includes both the capabilities and functionings. Generally, “a capability” is identified by different lifestyles an individual can choose, namely, “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or to reach valuable states of being” (Sen, Capability and Well-Being, 28). Capabilities entail a person’s abilities to do certain basic things necessary for one to survive or avoid poverty (Sen, Inequality Reexamined, 40). On the other hand, “a functioning is an achievement of people, that is, what they manage or succeed to be or to do” (39), namely, a person’s achievement towards doing something or being someone. Functionings are physical or mental states (beings) and activities (doings) that enable people to take part in their society’s life. Functionings include being well-nourished, healthy, well-clothed and sheltered; avoiding morbidity and premature mortality; being literate; being happy; participating in the life of the community; having self-respect or being able to appear in public without shame; participating in social and political life (110). Functionings are somehow related to living conditions whereas capabilities entail real opportunities one has regarding the life one may lead. For instance, both the fasting and starving persons have similar level of functionings (nutritional deficiency). Yet, the fasting person has the capability to be well-nourished or eat well if he/she chooses so, while the starving one does not have such a capability (Sen, Development as Freedom, 75).
To assess the extent of a person’s real freedom, Sen considers their ‘well-being’ and ‘agency’. Well-being refers to an individual’s own advantage expressed through valuable states of being, such as being well-nourished, healthy, and educated (189), whereby a person becomes a ‘patient’ or ‘beneficiary.’ Agency refers to various ways in which people act and can choose to achieve valuable states of being like achieving goals and fulfilling promises and obligations whose results may not benefit the agents themselves. Agency echoes self-determination, reliable self-direction and personal autonomy towards responsibility for others. It involves what people can undertake to achieve public requirements through individual, collective, political and social action, namely, development institutions rather than the state and market (Kuhumba 133).

Nevertheless, Sen’s capability approach has some limitations. We agree with Robeyns that it ignores the fact that the current economic enterprise overlooks group membership and people’s abilities to be rational and resist social and moral forces arising from groups (Robeyns 109). Sen’s focus on individual’s freedom should then be oriented towards the community charter. Instead of increasing only individual’s freedoms, social freedoms should equally be increased so as to generate prosperity for both individuals and community (Daka 235). By arguing that the evaluation of well-being is solely based on individual properties, Sen ignores that an individual has properties that belong to society or institutions. Hence, his capability approach becomes weak in gauging social justice, inequalities, and human well-being, especially in multicultural societies (Gore 114).

Communitarian philosophers have set up some directives towards expanding the community freedoms. For them, each person is implanted in a social environment, which helps him/her to fully realize his/her life. Sandel argues, “We can know a good in common that we cannot know alone…we cannot regard ourselves as independent [from society]…[we must understand] ourselves as the particular persons we are—as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic” (183, 354). However, there must be compatibility between individual and community capabilities. Hollenbach defines a community as “a place where people are genuinely interdependent on each other through participation in discussions concerning the decision-making about their common purposes. To be a person is to be in relation to other persons” (42, 131). Thus, individuals find a meaning in their communities where they can develop their capabilities in mutual cooperation with other members of the community (Kuhumba 135). This expansion of community capabilities enables people to achieve holistic development. In this sense, we argue that Ubuntu philosophy becomes another relevant response to the Neoliberal Economic Theory, in the effort to pursue holistic human development.

5. Ubuntu Philosophy’s Response to the Neoliberal Economic Theory

According to Letseka, Ubuntu is an ethical and moral theory, which contains a philosophy of life in many parts of Africa. It includes a foundation for public policy, normative value for education and business ethics, basis for African approach to conflict resolution and peace building, guiding principle for citizenship education, and framework for a theology of religious ontology. Letseka adds that Ubuntu fosters logical basis for constitutional democracy and a culture of responsible citizenship, thereby creating mutual reciprocity of trust between state and individuals, and among private entities and individuals. It articulates social interdependence and a deep community-based interactive ethics where humanity is shaped by human interactions (57). For example, the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa served to promote national unity and reconciliation to soothe the apartheid effects. Besides, Ubuntu creates a space where individual interest and happiness are subordinate to those of the community, African core values are revealed through respect for humans, human dignity, humility, interdependence and communalism, and social solidarity. Most importantly, “Ubuntu recognizes that it is impossible to build a healthy community at peace with itself unless every member of the community has their human dignity respected and protected” (Rapatsa 5).

As for Nussbaum, Ubuntu is a social value upon which humanitarianism derives its primary strength. Ubuntu, as an ethical value, enhances the priority to provide humanitarian needs towards guaranteeing human well-being and ‘freedom from strife and conflict’. The ideals of Ubuntu promote humanitarian action by forging the world consciousness. That is to say, Ubuntu sees the provision of basic needs for the human survival as an inflexible urgency. Thus, it promotes the expression of compassion, caring, and love, and an environment where people are empowered to exercise basic
capabilities and genuinely achieve functionings (Nussbaum 21). The end of humanitarian action is, according the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ‘the desire to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may occur… to secure life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being’ (IFRC). This suggests that human life and dignity are essentially valuable and should be protected regardless of gender, race, tribe, religious or political affiliation. However, modern humanitarian action appears to be a post-disaster intervention mechanism—an act of intervening when human life is threatened or is in depression due to human-induced disasters or natural phenomena such as floods, earthquakes, tornado, thunders, and so forth. What about the regions where social strife, poverty, inequalities, lack of opportunities and low literacy levels are common phenomena? In our view, humanity should not be better served only in times of human or natural disasters; rather, more efforts should be invested even in normal conditions to help people realize quality life and happiness by preventing conflicts that may occasion humanitarian crises and eventually suffering or death. It is not enough to just keep humans alive; rather, it is urgent to always urge people to achieve high quality of life, regardless of whatever conditions. That is why the principles of ‘humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality’ lead to undertake various political, security and physical challenges so as to reach people in need of help and protection. More efforts should, above all, be invested to prioritize and protect human respect and dignity, both in normal and challenging moments (Rapatsa 2-3).

In Nussbaum’s opinion, Ubuntu reflects universal values of human worth and dignity, fosters social cohesion urging humans to value the importance of achieving substantive social justice and equality. It urges all people to be ethical human beings that protect one another. The logical and ultimate expression of Ubuntu is to secure freedom and respect for all humanity, in order to achieve stable humanitarian conditions for all (Nussbaum 24). It protects interests and rights of humans as individuals and communities; and it expresses humanitarian goals in totality. In this sense, Ubuntu joins essential, moral and philosophical basis of the capability approach, which are imbedded in its worth towards humanitarianism and how it can guide humanitarian agencies. This reflects Sen’s claim of human well-being out of individual freedom, which gives humans the ability to decide what they want to do or to be (Rapatsa 5).


From the above discussions, we come to argue that the integration of Ubuntu philosophy and capability approach becomes relevant to responding to the challenges raised by the Neoliberal Economic Theory towards implementing holistic human development. This is justified by the principle of humanity, which comprises commonalities with moral strengths rooted in Ubuntu and capability approach theories. These theories offer more or less reliable rules to establish regulated systems to improve effectiveness and accountability in humanitarian interventions. In fact, Ubuntu urges communities and individuals to always collaborate, be compassionate and avoid conflicts for the common good of society. It proves that ‘prevention is better than cure’ and shows how human-based crises can be avoided. Likewise, Sen’s capability approach promotes the creation of an environment where people are free to choose what activities to partake in so as to enhance their well-being (Rapatsa 7, 8). Most importantly, both theories embrace cultural values imbedded in various societies so as to value the people as real agents and ends of development systems. To strengthen Sen’s human development, Ubuntu develops individual capabilities into ‘integrity, sense of equity, fairness and harmony’, and nurtures ‘virtues of cooperation and solidarity’ in individual beings within community (Kuhumba 137). Thus, the individuality which Sen’s development theory promotes can be integrated with Ubuntu theory whereby individual freedom is seen in the well-being of the community. In turn, the capability approach involves communal aspects as the community becomes a source of individuals’ empowerment and dignity, and allows them to claim and exercise their ‘obligations and duties’ while striving for the communal well-being (Daka 202).

Accordingly, Ubuntu theory of ethical living in modern African philosophy can arrange communal relations in a way that enables people to express themselves with the greatest freedom. Thus, Ubuntu turns to enforce the freedom of expression, which, together with social capital, increases individuals’ capabilities to ‘build and sustain strong communities’. This view can reinforce Sen’s capability approach such that human development is assessed through individual’s well-being vis-a-vis...
the well-being of others in society. Then, developing policies can consider people’s participation and collective role in solving socio-economic problems in order to attain decent standards of living (Kuhumba 138). The community becomes a means to safeguard humanity in individuality while individuals constantly seek to safeguard humanity in the community, that is, “to be a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others” (Ramose 42). For example, in Burundi, most villages’ farmers have decided to work together in cooperatives, which, if empowered, may result in improving the well-being of both the associations and individual members who share benefits. Beyond benefits, this practice reflects a special solidarity among the people, which assures individuals that they are in the ‘community of other human beings’. This affirms Mbiti’s idea of symbiotic relation between the individual and the community, which he formulates as: “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am” (110). In fact, in such a community, everyone can experience the value of being human and then achieve the holistic human development out of individual and collective capabilities.

Furthermore, Ubuntu philosophy involves radical communitarianism and moderate communitarianism. Radical communitarianism considers a human person in terms of community rather than an isolated and static human entity, that is, his/her “personhood” is acquired from his/her relationship with the community. Thus, the belongingness of people to a community is not optional as they do not choose voluntarily to enter a human community but are born into the community (Menkiti 31). Moderate communitarianism admits that each person has some autonomy, the capacity for their own individual judgments despite their being social beings in the community. Thus, Kwame Gyekye argues that personhood can only be partly, but never fully, defined by one’s membership in the community. The individual is not absorbed by the communal or cultural systems but should distance him/herself from it so as to be able to take a critical look at it. The communal structure gives room for individual self-assertion to exercise their freedom to determine one’s own goals, to pursue them, and to control one’s destiny in the community (Gyekye 327). Hence, Gyekye agrees with Sen’s understanding of human development whereby individuals are given freedom to choose the kind of life they have reason to value. Gyekye and Sen want individuals to be able to question and make critical evaluation of the community development policies. For example, in Burundi, people are committed to undertake communal projects like water community, schools and health facilities, which they normally do every Saturday. This has increased the number of schools and hospitals in the country. Thus, this solidarity leads members of the community to realize themselves by partaking fully in the developmental activities. Actually, this shows a special friendship behind solidarity such that, as members of the community journey together in the projects, they come to collaborate in terms of what each one can be for others (Kuhumba 139).

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the logic of Neoliberal Economic Theory and its challenges. The paper has identified characteristic assumptions and failures of the Neoliberal Economic Theory to meet the best for the people’s lives. The paper has also evaluated Sen’s capability approach as an advocate for the move from commodities to functionings mediated by people’s capabilities. In fact, it was shown that capability approach aims at promoting both human and economic development through people’s capabilities and participation. Thus, the paper has considered the core concepts of the Capability Approach Theory, namely, capabilities, functionings, agency and well-being, and the relevance of all these in human development. On the other hand, the paper has discussed Ubuntu philosophy by identifying and explaining some of its core values, such as the special sense of humanity (humanitarianism), solidarity, interdependence between individual persons and communities (radical and moderate communitarianism), and their relevance in holistic human development. All these led us to argue and prove that the fusion of Ubuntu philosophy and Sen’s capability approach helps overcome the wiles of Neoliberal Economic Theory and thus implement a holistic human development. In fact, this will promote individual persons’ special freedom to pursue their personal interests and, at the same time, duties to work for the common interest of the whole community. Hence, the fusion of Ubuntu philosophy and Sen’s capability approach will ease the implementation of a holistic human development at the expense of the biases of the Neoliberal Economic Theory.
8. References


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