



New Narratives and Metrics for Development

Exploring measures Integral Human Development with theological coherence, methodological rigour and practical usefulness



The Catholic social teachings of *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* emphasised the need to focus on integral human development, in harmony with the Creation and with a special emphasis on the poor and marginalised. Amartya Sen's writings on the capability approach has emphasised multidimensionality, substantive freedoms, and equity. These and other frameworks have rise to research and actions focused on operationalising a richer human objective than traditional 'development' – such as the EoF and *Laudato Si*' action initiatives as well as in the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and its initiatives and networks, and in many Universities.

The emphasis on poverty was recently reiterated by Pope Leo XIV in *Dilexi Te* (13): “Looking beyond the data—which is sometimes ‘interpreted’ to convince us that the situation of the poor is not so serious—the overall reality is quite evident: ‘Some economic rules have proved effective for growth, but not for integral human development. Wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that “new forms of poverty are emerging.” The claim that the modern world has reduced poverty is made by measuring poverty with criteria that do not correspond to present-day realities. This insight reinforces the need to look beyond aggregate economic progress and place human dignity and integral development at the centre of our metrics – as has been emphasised conceptually by Amartya Sen’s capability approach, which underlies policy-oriented human development paradigms.

In ways that resonate with integral human development, institutions working on the central measures of economics are searching for new metrics that encompass wider understanding of

human flourishing. This was evident in the 2009 Sen Stiglitz Fitoussi Commission's *Mismeasuring our Lives* that recommended measuring 'Quality of Life' across eight central dimensions of human well-being as well as providing a green GDP figure, and refining GDP itself, and the OECD has taken the commission's work forward subsequently. It was evident in the International Panel on Social Progress, which convened hundreds of academics to ponder measures and definitions of progress, issuing three volumes and with ongoing activities. It inspires the Human Development Report Office of UNDP, as well as other groups with various dashboards or composite measures of well-being such as Legatum Prosperity, Social Progress Index, Global Peace Index and the Global Flourishing Study.

Naturally, well-being conversations engage the longstanding example of Bhutan, which since the 1980s has pursued 'Gross National Happiness', regarding GNH to be more important than GNP. Since 2008 Bhutan has measured GNH rigorously across 9 domains.

The call for new metrics is now clearly articulated. The Pact for the Future (UN, 2024) reaffirmed that sustainable development, peace, and human rights are equally important, interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and called for the development of new measures of progress "to complement and go beyond GDP" (Action 53). In coherence with this vision, the *Compromiso de Sevilla* (2025) reaffirmed the call to consider measures Beyond GDP to reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions, in order to inform access to development finance and international cooperation.

These innovations are accruing amidst an unusually fertile season of data innovation – with innovations in survey-based and visual data, as well as unprecedented possibilities to merge these with satellite, administrative, and other 'big' data or analyse them using AI. Furthermore, there are structured initiatives in governments, international organizations, and fora that are aware of and preparing for new metrics (for example 'Measuring Prosperity' in G7, the 'Beyond GDP' Expert Group from the Pact of the Future, the 'Global Data Forum' the Global Alliance Beyond GDP, launched in FfD4 in Sevilla, and others).

In short, this is a dynamic period, with real potential for creativity in a short time period with regard to well-being metrics that could have a visible effect. The Laudato Si movements remind us that statistics are not just for the UN or professionals, but also for communities, faith communities and families to use in reflections on their own well-being (which is likely to go far beyond imperfect measures), and when considering how to contribute to the common good of their own and others' communities. The Beyond GDP Lab provides an avenue for youth engagement. Statistics of integral human development must be designed for diverse users.

This workshop will bring together leaders from these strands: scholars working on human fulfilment within a theological framework; those working on counting-based measures of well-being or human flourishing (with poverty in view also), and experts on policy and on other types of

metrics. The workshop will include presentations of trial counting-based well-being measures in the US, Indonesia, Pakistan, Morocco, Peru; in Africa, Latin America and Europe as well as globally, a keynote on Bhutan's GNH and one on theological approaches, and structured discussions of data, policy, comparability, and process.

The aim will be to have a high level structured and problem-oriented exchange, in which we ground an open collegial conversation in normative and theological approaches to integral human development as a coordinating concept, reflect on concrete empirical examples, and together think quite practically about the relevance of one or a small set of counting-based metrics of well-being, which could be used for personal and community reflection as well as for official statistics.