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Does the 2030 agenda generate happiness? A longitudinal approach to the SDGs vs. the well-being of the world

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the relationship between the SDGs and the happiness of people in 40 developed and 114 developing countries since the 2030 Agenda initiative was implemented back in 2015. No literature measures such an impact and it is essential to start the debate on the matter. This study determined that the relationship between the SDGs and the world's happiness among the time horizons analyzed (2015-2021) is negligible through a set of panel data and multiple linear regressions. There is much greater structural happiness that comes from sources other than the 2030 agenda. However, although most of these relationships are negative, the classification of the statistically significant SDGs into Maslow's pyramid offers a novel view that allows prioritizing taking actions first on those SDGs associated with the most basic needs of people. This study offers opportunities for future research into why an initiative such as the 2030 Agenda which seeks to generate well-being has the opposite effect and proposes that the initiatives associated with the 2030 Agenda be first linked to the SDGs at the bottom of Maslow's pyramid and that they progressively ascend as positive correlations are achieved between the SDGs and people's well-being.

Contribution/Originality: The main contribution of this study is that for the first time the relationship between the progress of the SDGs and the advancement of happiness around the world is documented in addition to present the results in terms of Maslow's pyramid.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eight years have passed since the United Nation General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 (United Nations, 2023). 17 goals were proposed aiming at different developmental fronts worldwide, encouraging several private, government and non-profit institutions to align their initiatives with the 2030 SDG agenda (Rosati & Faria, 2019). Some organizations have proceeded in this manner but the fundamental question remains: can the SDGs help the world have a far more equitable and sustainable environment by 2030?

1.1. Literature Review

The previous question is not only a concern but also the reason for the 2030 agenda. The objectives were raised so that the world could represent a fairer and more sustainable ecosystem for all living beings. In other words, the United Nations initiative is not restricted to people but transcends the environment and everything that comprises it (Mishra et al., 2023). However, humans are still the main concern in trying to guarantee a better quality of life as

a species and in the future for all of us, embodied in what the United Nations indicates as "leaving no one behind" (Weber, 2017). This has led governments to question their role in the 2030 agenda since they need to incorporate a greater focus on sustainability in their public management for all their citizens (Acevedo & Martínez, 2023; Kostetckaia & Hametner, 2022). Nevertheless, the initiatives associated with the 2030 Agenda are not restricted to governments or other institutions naturally associated with SDGs such as business schools (Kolb, Frohlich, & Schmidpeter, 2017) or non-profit organizations (Olumekor, 2022). Companies have also tried to take advantage of this initiative to improve their own operations particularly private ones. From the improvement in the company's human resources (Campos-García, Alonso-Muñoz, González-Sánchez, & Medina-Salgado, 2023), the enhancement of increasingly greener production processes (Ramzan, Ullah, Raza, & Nadeem, 2023), the transformation of global supply chains (Trotter et al., 2023), circular economy projects (González-Sánchez, Alonso-Muñoz, & Medina-Salgado, 2023) or reaching financial initiatives for responsible financing related to carbon dioxide emissions (Wang, Zhao, Jiang, & Li, 2022), it is undeniable that the 2030 agenda has raised great concern throughout the world about the sustainability of the planet (Sianes, Vega-Muñoz, Tirado-Valencia, & Ariza-Montes, 2022). However, this concern sometimes referred to as "greenwashing" (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015) or SDG-washing (Heras-Saizarbitoria, Urbieta, & Boiral, 2022) is not always genuine; it appears to support initiatives that are not in line with the 2030 agenda . Consumers still mainly base their decisions on economic factors despite increasing pressure from many stakeholders for corporations to implement efforts aligned with the 2030 agenda (Freeman & Reed, 1983; García-Sánchez, Rodríguez-Ariza, Aibar-Guzmán, & Aibar-Guzmán, 2020). They do not care about global warming (Busato, Chiarini, Cisco, & Ferrara, 2022) despite the fact that the evidence of global warming over the centuries is overwhelming and leads the planet to an unsustainable situation (Ripple, Wolf, van Vuuren, Gregg, & Lenzen, 2024).

The implementation of the 2030 agenda has marked a before and after in terms of the types of initiatives implemented by different organizations. Questions continue to arise regarding whether the 2030 agenda in fact generated some type of impact on the lives of people (Biglari, Beiglary, & Arthanari, 2022). This has led to the wrong attempt to evaluate the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in different ways, since the method of measuring them alone determines whether the SDGs have had an impact on people (Costanza et al., 2016; Pizzi, Rosati, & Venturelli, 2020). Today, the United Nations is in charge of this measurement and both the information and the method are also public (United Nations, 2023). All of the above suggests that the literature's efforts are focused on finding new ways to measure the SDGs or finding out whether the initiatives being carried out by different groups are in line with the 2030 agenda or not. Instead, the idea of "leaving no one behind" (Weber, 2017) should be the primary focus of the research's discussion of the 2030 agenda's overall impact on people's well-being because there is a significant research gap in this area. Therefore, the primary research challenge is the lack of literature that demonstrates the relationship between the 2030 agenda's advancement and the global population's well-being.

The fact that the world is becoming more sustainable should be practically reflected somewhere. Nevertheless, there is literature regarding how the 2030 agenda may not achieve its objectives (Leal Filho et al., 2023) which at the same time is ambiguous since there is also no literature regarding what it means to meet an SDG. Furthermore, the literature suggests that by 2030, there will have been very little progress worldwide regarding the improvement in the SDG scores (Moyer & Hedden, 2020). Even if there was an indicator that demonstrated compliance with the minimum level required for the SDGs, it would most likely confirm the limited progress.

The United Nations points out that it proposed the 2030 agenda "as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity" (United Nations, 2023). This statement mainly has three elements: poverty, planet and people. However, poverty is suffered by human beings (Karahasan & Bilgel, 2021) so within the framework of stakeholder theory (Freeman & Reed, 1983) without a doubt the main stakeholder of the 2030 agenda is humanity. A natural consequence of gaining a more equal and

sustainable world or a higher inclusive development (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016) should be humanity's well-being reflected in its happiness (Greve, 2017). Although defining happiness has remained a challenge in the specialized literature (Krasko, Intelisano, & Luhmann, 2022) since 2015, the World Happiness Report (WHR) offers the quantitative results of happiness for countries worldwide through their 0 to 10 score (Fisher, 2010). It is based on six specific dimensions related to gross domestic product per capita (GDP per capita), social, health, freedom, generosity and corruption (World Happiness Report, 2023).

1.2. Aim and Relevance

Since the implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the global population has noticed an increase in happiness. It is essential to understand not only the evolution of the SDGs' global implementation but also its correlation with the world population's increasing level of happiness as its main stakeholder. Furthermore, this understanding must include whether the implementation causes differences in national well-being or not. The main reason to associate happiness with the SDGs lies in the fact that there is no agreement on how to define happiness (Krasko et al., 2022). All of the different definitions of happiness are related to well-being (Fisher, 2010) and the SDGs seek to improve human lives (United Nations, 2023) besides protecting the environment. Once again, humanity is its main stakeholder (Freeman & Reed, 1983). Sustainable development involves meeting basic human needs (Klarin, 2018) and between 2015 and 2030, the world will have made little progress towards accomplishing the challenges associated with the SDGs (Moyer & Hedden, 2020). Furthermore, developed countries would be expected to respond better than developing countries to the challenges posed by sustainability based on their better capabilities and budgets towards them (Allen, Metternicht, & Wiedmann, 2018).

It is essential to determine the relationship between the evolution of the SDGs and the evolution of happiness which serves as the study's objective based on the aforementioned study. This study is significant for four reasons. First, this emphasizes the issue of not measuring the effects of the SDGs' evolution on individuals especially their perceived level of pleasure. The lack of research in this area raises questions regarding the potential impact of the 2030 agenda on people worldwide. . Second, results are revealing in terms of the inefficiency of the 2030 agenda to generate a positive impact on people. The SDGs fail to promote people's well-being in addition to the fact that the objectives would not be met. Third, it calls for action at all levels to ensure that the 2030 agenda ultimately has a positive impact on people's well-being. Fourth, it offers opportunities for future research regarding the effectiveness of the 2030 agenda. Finally, this paper is organized into five sections: (a) introduction, (b) methods and data, (c) results, (d) discussion and (e) concluding remarks.

2. METHODS AND DATA

2.1. Objective, Research Question and Hypothesis

The research objective is to determine the relationship between the behavior of happiness and the 17 SDGs for the 40 developed and the 114 developing countries included in this research based mainly on the relation between the well-being associated with happiness (Fisher, 2010) and the SDGs' effort to improve human lives (United Nations, 2023). The research question and hypothesis are as follows:

Research question: To what extent is the evolution of the SDGs correlated with the evolution of happiness?

Hypothesis: The relationship between the evolution of the SDGs and people's happiness is low (Fisher, 2010; Klarin, 2018; Moyer & Hedden, 2020).

According to Klarin (2018), Fisher (2010) and Moyer and Hedden (2020), there is an inadequate relationship between happiness and the SDGs' progress. On the one hand, the SDGs are the numerical reflection of the world's sustainable development. According to Klarin (2018), sustainable development necessarily focuses on achieving the basic minimum needs of human beings. On the other hand, according to Fisher (2010), achieving a higher level of sustainable development should be reflected in a higher level of well-being which is associated with happiness.

Finally, people should be considered the main stakeholder of the 2030 agenda (Freeman & Reed, 1983; Moyer & Hedden, 2020) . It is suggested that by 2030 very little will have been achieved regarding the world's sustainable development. Therefore, it is logical to expect that the evolution of the SDGs will have very little impact on the happiness of people in the world despite people being the focus of the initiative.

2.2. Design, Technique and Data

This study had a quantitative approach and a correlational scope through a panel data multiple linear regression of the dependent variable (happiness measured through the WHR) and the 17 independent variables (the United Nations' SDGs). Three regressions were run: the first one for the whole database, the second one for developed countries and the third one for developing countries. Equation 1 shows the basic structure of the mathematical expression used for the three previously mentioned regressions where WHR_{ij} corresponds to the score received from 1 to 10 by country i in year j and each of the $SDG\#_{ij}$ corresponds to the score from 1 to 100 received for SDG# (# stands for 1 to 17) by country i in year j.

$$WHR_{ij} = \beta_{ij}SDG1_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG2_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG3_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG4_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG5_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG6_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG7_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG8_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG9_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG10_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG11_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG12_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG13_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG14_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG15_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG16_{ij} + \beta_{ij}SDG17_{ij} \quad (1)$$

The time horizons considered were from 2015 to 2021 (seven years) for 154 countries although achieving the 1,078 observations (154 countries times seven years) was not possible because of the lack of data for certain years inside the WHR. The analysis ended in 2021 for the same reason. 1,034 observations were effectively processed (91.92% of the expected data), 279 for developed countries and 755 for developing countries. The SDG database contained 163 countries but the lack of information inside the WHR limited the analysis to the resulting 154 countries. The year 2015 conveniently coincides with both SDGs and the WHR starting that same year. The validity of the study is mainly supported by a short but very rich literature review that aimed to build the theoretical framework necessary to conduct the study and obtain the results that will be shown below. Reliability is supported by three main indicators. First, the strength of the regressions was tested through the adjusted R^2sin all cases where over 0.60. Second, the p-values associated with each coefficient yielded statistically significant results at 95% and 99% confidence levels. Third, none of the correlation matrices between the variables are greater than 0.85 in any of them (Hair, Babin, Anderson, & Black, 2019).

3. RESULTS

The regression conducted for the whole database (WD), developed (D) and developing (D) countries will be addressed as their abbreviations. All regressions were statistically significant at a 95% confidence level with adjusted R^2s of 0.7754, 0.7750 and 0.6348 respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Regression WD presented 11 statistically significant SDGs, six directly correlated (SDGs 3, 7, 8, 11, 14 and 17) and five inversely correlated to happiness (SDGs 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16). Regression D presented 10 statistically significant SDGs, five directly correlated (SDGs 3, 8, 9, 10 and 14) and five inversely correlated to happiness (SDGs 2, 4, 12, 15 and 16). Regression E presented 11 statistically significant SDGs, five directly correlated (SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8 and 17) and six inversely correlated to happiness (SDGs 9, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16). In all cases, intercepts were statistically significant with considerably high coefficients compared to those of the statistically significant SDGs. These findings highlight the immense difference that exists between the coefficients achieved by the intercepts and the coefficients achieved by each of the SDGs which can be interpreted as that the happiness of the countries studied is structural and does not primarily depend on the evolution of the SDGs. It is possible not to reject the hypothesis proposed that the relationship between the evolution of the SDGs and people's happiness is low together with the fact that the p-values yield solid results at confidence levels of 95% (*) and 99% (**).

Table 1 presents the results for regressions WD, D and E.

Table 1. Results for regressions WD, D and E.

Results	Regression WD		Regression D		Regression E	
Adjusted R^2	0.7754		0.7750		0.6348	
Observations	1034		279		755	
	Coeff.	p-value	Coeff.	p-value	Coeff.	p-value
Intercept	6.208	0.000**	7.597	0.000**	5.813	0.000**
SDG 1						
SDG 2			-0.033	0.000**		
SDG 3	0.011	0.000**	0.020	0.008**	0.013	0.000**
SDG 4			-0.016	0.014*		
SDG 5						
SDG 6					0.008	0.006**
SDG 7	0.014	0.000**			0.014	0.000**
SDG 8	0.017	0.000**	0.021	0.000**	0.015	0.000**
SDG 9			0.023	0.000**	-0.006	0.006**
SDG 10	-0.002	0.006**	0.011	0.000**	-0.005	0.000**
SDG 11	0.005	0.002**				
SDG 12	-0.029	0.000**	-0.029	0.000**	-0.018	0.000**
SDG 13	-0.011	0.000**			-0.014	0.000**
SDG 14	0.005	0.006**	0.018	0.000**		
SDG 15	-0.008	0.000**	-0.014	0.000**	-0.010	0.000**
SDG 16	-0.012	0.000**	-0.021	0.000**	-0.010	0.000**
SDG 17	0.006	0.000**			0.009	0.000**

Note: **Statistically significant at a 99% confidence level. *Statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for regression WD.

Table 2. Correlation matrix for regression WD.

WD	WHR	SDG 3	SDG 7	SDG 8	SDG 10	SDG 11	SDG 12	SDG 13	SDG 14	SDG 15	SDG 16	SDG 17
WHR	1.00											
SDG 3	0.81	1.00										
SDG 7	0.66	0.76	1.00									
SDG 8	0.69	0.71	0.50	1.00								
SDG 10	0.32	0.45	0.22	0.37	1.00							
SDG 11	0.70	0.81	0.72	0.65	0.26	1.00						
SDG 12	-0.78	-0.76	-0.47	-0.69	-0.46	-0.61	1.00					
SDG 13	-0.69	-0.66	-0.36	-0.56	-0.45	-0.43	0.81	1.00				
SDG 14	-0.11	-0.21	-0.14	-0.06	-0.21	-0.13	0.16	0.07	1.00			
SDG 15	0.07	0.10	0.05	0.25	0.19	0.15	-0.24	-0.13	0.27	1.00		
SDG 16	0.69	0.83	0.60	0.69	0.54	0.72	-0.78	-0.67	-0.15	0.25	1.00	
SDG 17	0.41	0.43	0.39	0.31	0.13	0.47	-0.36	-0.21	0.02	0.18	0.44	1.00

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for regression D.

Table 3. Correlation matrix for regression D

D	WHR	SDG 2	SDG 3	SDG 4	SDG 8	SDG 9	SDG 10	SDG 12	SDG 14	SDG 15	SDG 16
WHR	1.00										
SDG 2	-0.12	1.00									
SDG 3	0.68	0.13	1.00								
SDG 4	0.46	0.09	0.71	1.00							
SDG 8	0.41	0.26	0.52	0.40	1.00						
SDG 9	0.70	0.19	0.63	0.49	0.37	1.00					
SDG 10	0.39	0.15	0.67	0.44	0.53	0.16	1.00				
SDG 12	-0.72	0.16	-0.65	-0.57	-0.34	-0.53	-0.36	1.00			
SDG 14	0.02	-0.06	-0.22	-0.17	0.14	-0.19	0.09	0.07	1.00		
SDG 15	-0.20	-0.02	-0.08	0.03	0.38	-0.35	0.42	0.15	0.53	1.00	
SDG 16	0.60	-0.06	0.72	0.50	0.54	0.42	0.62	-0.73	0.10	0.10	1.00

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix for regression E.

Table 4. Correlation matrix for regression E

E	WHR	SDG 3	SDG 6	SDG 7	SDG 8	SDG 9	SDG 10	SDG 12	SDG 13	SDG 15	SDG 16	SDG 17
WHR	1.00											
SDG 3	0.71	1.00										
SDG 6	0.65	0.79	1.00									
SDG 7	0.65	0.76	0.68	1.00								
SDG 8	0.48	0.53	0.51	0.37	1.00							
SDG 9	0.55	0.75	0.66	0.55	0.46	1.00						
SDG 10	-0.03	0.21	0.07	0.03	0.01	0.11	1.00					
SDG 12	-0.57	-0.63	-0.52	-0.39	-0.34	-0.63	-0.12	1.00				
SDG 13	-0.47	-0.51	-0.33	-0.25	-0.28	-0.53	-0.26	0.71	1.00			
SDG 15	-0.22	-0.20	-0.11	-0.15	-0.13	-0.13	-0.10	0.07	0.08	1.00		
SDG 16	0.44	0.71	0.54	0.52	0.41	0.63	0.30	-0.50	-0.44	-0.03	1.00	
SDG 17	0.38	0.47	0.51	0.35	0.24	0.46	0.05	-0.39	-0.19	0.20	0.49	1.00

4. DISCUSSION

The study's results are very useful as they show that the SDGs' evolution has little impact on the perceived level of happiness in the countries studied. The countries' happiness is influenced by factors other than the 2030 Agenda. This supports the hypothesis that very little will have been completed as a result of this initiative by 2030 (Leal Filho et al., 2023; Moyer & Hedden, 2020). However, the graphical distribution of the results draws powerful attention, both at the level of developed and developing countries (Allen et al., 2018). Negative coefficients should not exist indicating an inverse relationship based on the notion that each of the SDGs that comprise the 2030 agenda is a component of an initiative that should only promote improved well-being.

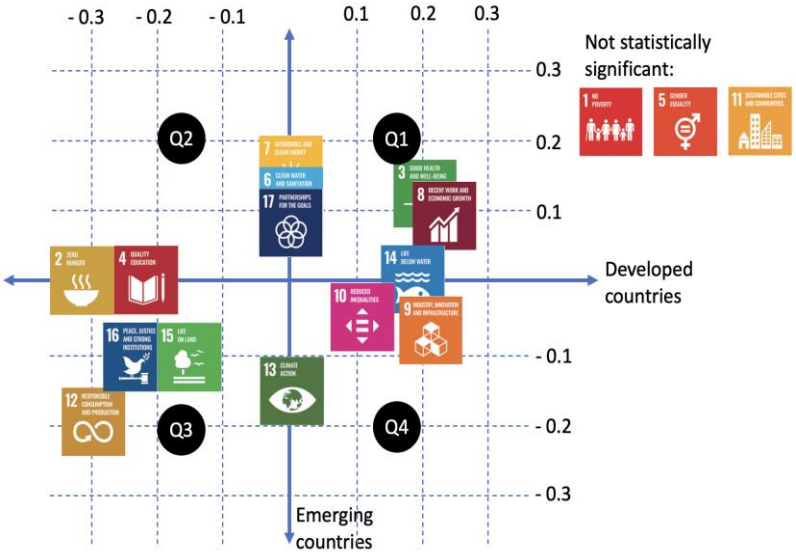

Figure 1. Cartesian plane of the coefficients of regressions D and E

The 14 statistically significant SDGs are graphically located in four separate quadrants in Figure 1 with each country shown. Q1 shows those SDGs that are directly correlated with happiness in both in developed and developing countries. Q2 shows those SDGs that are directly correlated with happiness in developing countries and inversely correlated with happiness in developed countries. Q3 shows that the SDGs are inversely correlated with happiness both developed and developing countries. Q4 shows that the SDGs are directly correlated with happiness in developed countries and inversely correlated with happiness in developing countries. Although it is not the objective of this research to determine the causes of why an SDG is directly or inversely correlated with the happiness of the countries studied, it is not consistent with the intention of the 2030 agenda that there are results occupying quadrants Q2, Q3 and Q4. On the other hand, the effect seems to be more serious for developing countries presenting a greater bias of SDGs negatively correlated with the happiness presented in said countries versus the same phenomenon for developed countries (Allen et al., 2018). In addition to the above, the fact that SDGs 1 and 5 have not yielded statistically significant results in any of the three regressions is very worrying since it does not reflect the immense efforts implemented worldwide to combat two scourges: poverty and gender inequality (Bernini, Emili, & Ferrante, 2023; Karahasan & Bilgel, 2021). Moreover, the results shown in Figure 1 could be related to existing initiatives aligned to the 2030 agenda due to the concern generated around the world (Sianes et al., 2022) but misdirected towards initiatives without impact that only aim to meet stakeholders without further background (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

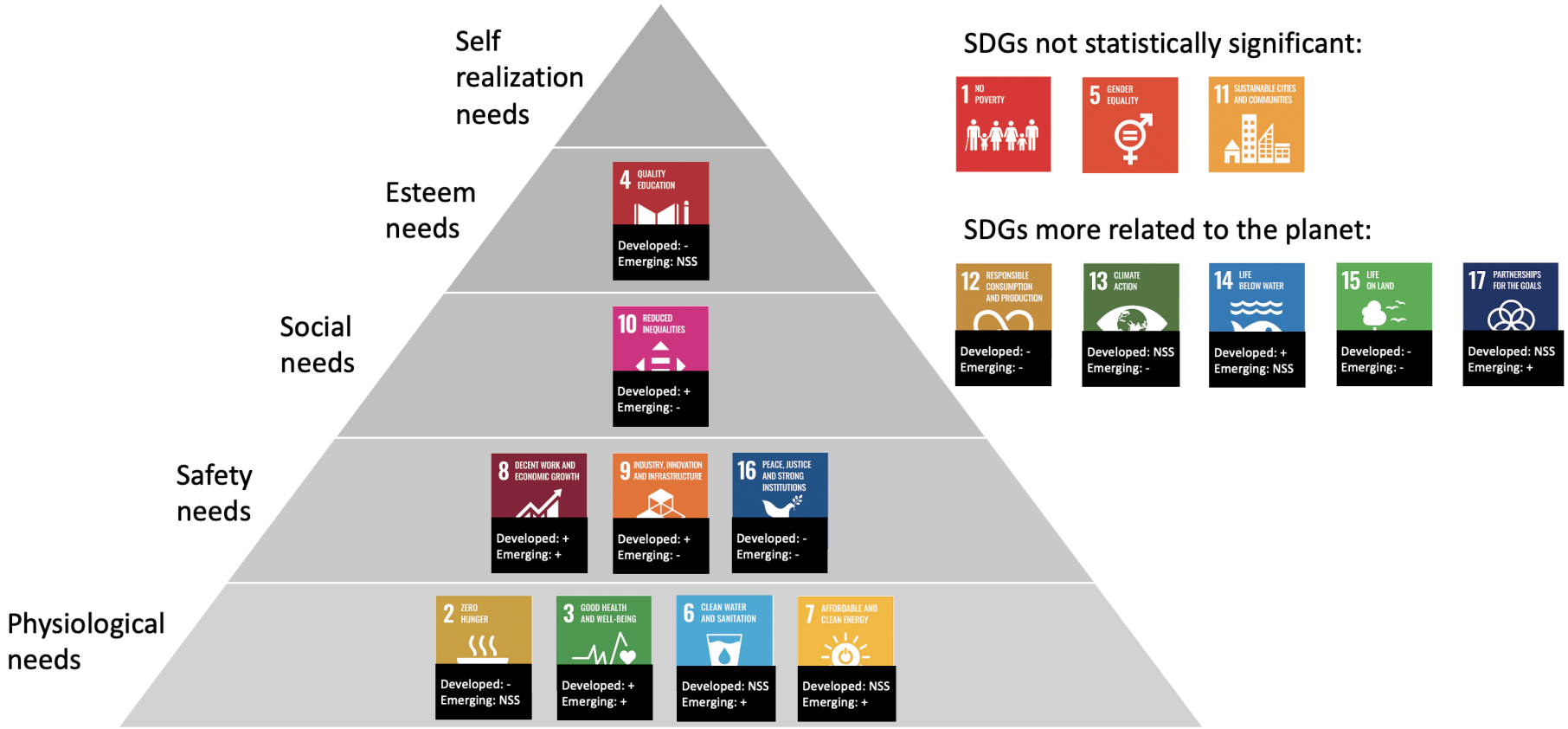

Figure 2. Classification of the SDGs in Maslow's pyramid

Note: (+): Directly correlated; (-): Inversely correlated; NSS: Not statistically significant.

This study presents an alternative interpretation of the 2030 agenda emphasizing the needs of individuals linked to their happiness despite the previously described situations. This is because previous research has failed to consider whether the 2030 Agenda is affecting people's well-being and has not indicated where to begin addressing this problem. Figure 2 shows a rearranged view of the results obtained from the perspective of Maslow's pyramid (Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019). According to the targets and indicators presented on the United Nations website, SDGs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 16 were considered to be directly associated with people's needs while SDGs 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 were considered to be directly associated with the needs of the planet (United Nations, 2023). The classification was made in line with the fact that both people and the environment are different stakeholders (Freeman & Reed, 1983). The theoretical framework that created the concept related to humanity should be given priority (Greve, 2017; Gupta & Vegelin, 2016; Karahasan & Bilgel, 2021). Therefore, these SDGs associated with the planet were not categorized within Maslow's pyramid. SDGs 1, 5 and 11 are not an active part of the analysis since they did not yield statistically significant results. SDGs 2, 3, 6 and 7 were classified as physiological needs because of their close relationship with the most basic needs of the human body and because of the fundamental access to electricity. SDGs 8, 9 and 16 were classified as safety needs because a good economic situation can provide security as well as adequate infrastructure and a peaceful environment. SDG 10 was classified as social needs since inequalities are primarily social. SDG 4 was classified as esteem needs due to its relationship with personal esteem associated with personal growth although it could also eventually be classified as self-realization needs. Based on Figure 2, it is proposed that not only initiatives aligned with the SDGs be worked on within the framework of the 2030 agenda but the base of the pyramid be prioritized as a starting point. In this way, positive relationships are achieved between the SDGs and the happiness of people at each level. The initiatives progressively should ascend along the pyramid, attacking new SDGs and therefore generating more impact (Biglari et al., 2022; Bridgman et al., 2019). Additionally, it is striking that none of the SDGs are related to the top of the pyramid.

The base of the pyramid shows positive results regarding the impact of the four SDGs associated with physiological needs regarding the emerging countries studied. SDG 2 is the only one that does not offer statistically significant results and SDGs 3, 6 and 7 show a positive relationship with happiness in these countries. Therefore, most of the basic human needs would be positively related to happiness in developing countries (Klarin, 2018). SDG 8 shows a positive relationship but SDGs 9 and 16 show negative relationships regarding safety needs. So it will be necessary to develop initiatives that allow these SDGs to show positive relationships. The same happens with SDG 10 associated with social needs. Finally, SDG 4 offers an opportunity to direct its impact towards better education since it does not yield statistically significant results.

With respect to developed countries, the results associated with the SDGs at the base of the pyramid generally show inconclusive results. However, according to this interpretation, physiological demands in these countries are either satisfied with such efficiency or are fundamental that they are not related to happiness considering their high response powers and appropriate budgets (Allen et al., 2018). At the level of safety needs, developed countries see their happiness positively affected by SDGs 8 and 9 and negatively affected by SDG 16 which offers an opportunity to work on initiatives that allow this relationship to change. SDG 10 shows a positive correlation with happiness at the level of social needs and SDG 4 shows a negative correlation with happiness at the level of esteem needs. This undoubtedly offers an opportunity to work on initiatives that manage to change this relationship.

The causes behind the results shown may be diverse and it is not an objective of this research to determine the causes of why an SDG is directly or inversely correlated with the happiness of the countries studied. According to Plepytė-Davidavičienė (2020), a low level of happiness not only depends on the economic conditions of the country or the psychological conditions of the person but also on the sociocultural environment of the country. However, Bernini et al. (2023) made the opposite perception focusing primarily on the economic conditions of the country

that being impoverished would significantly lower one's feeling of well-being. However, the discussion does not revolve around whether the economy affects well-being or not. Rather, it revolves around whether it affects it to a large or small extent. This explains to a certain point the findings shown in Figure 1 since the effects of the SDGs on developing countries are more pronounced than on developed countries (Allen et al., 2018). On the other hand, happiness is still a subjective phenomenon (Chai, 2023). However, it should not be selfish or hedonistic either but rather a more generous happiness that does not seek to make people happy at the expense of the happiness of future generations who will not be able to enjoy the same things as the current ones (Petrovič & Murgaš, 2020). This refers to sustainable happiness (O'Brien, 2008; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1. Conclusion

The existing literature fails to provide an assessment of the potential influence of the 2030 agenda on the well-being of people. This study aimed to fill this gap. Structurally, the world is 6.2/10 happy, developed countries are 7.6/10 happy and developing countries are 5.8/10 happy. The happiness of the countries studied does not depend primarily on the 2030 agenda but rather on other factors that in turn offer a great opportunity for future studies despite the statistically significant results obtained. Although the SDGs obtain coefficients other than zero, they are not large enough to justify a relevant contribution to the happiness perceived by humanity.

However, the location of the statistically significant SDGs in Maslow's pyramid offers a starting point to prioritize initiatives associated with those SDGs located at the base of it where the most basic needs of human beings are found. In this way, the implemented initiatives linked to the 2030 agenda will prioritize the achievement of positive correlations between the SDGs and people's well-being according to the criticality of the need. As the SDGs categorized at the base of the pyramid achieve positive and relevant correlations, it would be appropriate to ascend through the pyramid to work on the rest of the levels. First of all, sustainable initiatives should include SDGs 2, 3, 6 and 7 associated with physiological needs. Once covered, secondly, SDGs 8, 9 and 16 associated with safety needs should be considered. Thirdly, SDG 10 should be incorporated into sustainability initiatives and fourthly, SDG 4 should be incorporated.

5.2. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This study mainly presented three limitations. The first involves the research objective since it aims to determine the relationship that exists between the SDGs and people's happiness but not identify the causes of said findings. However, this is also presented later as an opportunity for improvement. The second has to do with the uncertain meaning of meeting an SDG. The 2030 agenda presents a gap in the literature since it does not specify the scores that must be met in a given year for the agenda to be considered fulfilled. The third is associated with the data from the WHR and the SDG database since although they are official data supported by documented methodologies, the application of a direct survey to voluntary participants could yield better results.

Five relevant ones were identified regarding opportunities for future research. First, it is necessary to understand why the 2030 agenda does not have a significant impact on the well-being of humanity. Second, it is necessary to understand the positive relationship that some SDGs have with happiness so that we can continue on this path. Third, it is necessary to understand why other SDGs are inversely correlated with people's happiness, so that this trend can be reversed. Fourth, it is essential to understand what it means to achieve an SDG. Fifth, the world needs to know what is needed to comply with the 2030 agenda as it is formulated or at least get as close as possible to the world it proposes for 2030.

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