

BEYOND THE PYRAMID: A REAPPRAISAL OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO HUMAN MOTIVATION, WELLBEING AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, first articulated in 1943, remains among the most widely taught and cited frameworks for explaining human motivation. Presented conventionally as a five-tier pyramid rising from physiological needs through safety, love and belonging, and esteem, to self-actualisation, the model continues to shape practice in education, healthcare, human resource management and social development programming. Yet its enduring popularity has increasingly diverged from its empirical standing. This paper offered a reappraisal of the theory, examining its relevance to human motivation, psychological wellbeing and social development through a structured review of literature and empirical evidence published largely within the last five years. Employing a document-based analytical methodology grounded in secondary data, the paper traced the theory's conceptual foundations, interrogates the historical origin of its now-iconic pyramidal representation, and evaluates its performance against three specific objectives: its explanatory power for workplace and everyday motivation, its capacity to predict subjective wellbeing, and its applicability to non-Western, collectivist and developmental contexts. Drawing on cross-national survey evidence, organisational studies and African Ubuntu-informed critiques, the paper found that while Maslow's identification of universal human needs retains descriptive value, the strict sequential and hierarchical architecture is empirically unsupported and culturally parochial. The paper concluded that Maslow's framework is best retained as a heuristic rather than a predictive scientific theory, and recommended its integration with more empirically robust and culturally sensitive models, including self-determination theory and Ubuntu-based communal frameworks, for contemporary motivation, wellbeing and development practice.

Keywords: Maslow, Hierarchy of Needs, Motivation, wellbeing, self-actualisation, social development, self-determination theory, Ubuntu

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Few frameworks in the social sciences have penetrated popular consciousness as thoroughly as Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Originally set out in his seminal paper, "A Theory of Human

Motivation" (Maslow, 1943), and later elaborated in *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow, 1954), the theory proposes that human beings are driven by a layered structure of needs, beginning with physiological survival requirements and culminating in the pursuit of self-actualisation, understood as the realisation of one's fullest potential. For over eight decades, this model has been reproduced in psychology textbooks, management training manuals, nursing curricula, social work practice guides and development policy documents across the world.

The theory's appeal lies substantially in its intuitive, visual simplicity. Generations of students have encountered it as a pyramid, its five bands stacked from base to apex, suggesting an orderly progression of human striving. It is this very simplicity, however, that has attracted sustained academic scepticism. Historical research has since established that Maslow himself never drew, described or authorised a pyramid to represent his theory; the now-canonical image was constructed by management consultants in the late 1950s and 1960s, long after the theory's original publication, to render it more marketable to business audiences (Bridgman et al., 2019). That the most recognisable symbol associated with Maslow's name was never his own is emblematic of a wider pattern in which the theory's popular representation has drifted from its intellectual substance and empirical testing.

This drift matters because the hierarchy of needs is not merely an academic curiosity; it continues to inform real decisions in real institutions. Human resource departments design incentive structures around it, educators use it to explain why hungry or unsafe children struggle to learn, and international development agencies have historically structured poverty-reduction interventions around the presumed primacy of "basic needs" (Rojas et al., 2023).

It is therefore timely and necessary to subject the theory to a rigorous, evidence-based reappraisal, situating it within the broader landscape of motivation science, reviewing recent literature organised around three specific objectives, and critically discussing its strengths and limitations with reference to concrete illustrations drawn from organisational, clinical, educational and developmental settings.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite being one of the most extensively taught theories in psychology and management, Maslow's hierarchy of needs suffers from a persistent gap between its institutional authority and its empirical foundation. Maslow derived the theory largely from biographical and clinical observation of a small, non-representative sample of individuals he considered exemplary, rather than from systematic testing (King-Hill, 2015).

Subsequent large-scale reviews found little consistent support for either the existence of five discrete need categories or the claim that lower-order needs must be substantially satisfied before higher-order needs become motivationally salient (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), a verdict reaffirmed rather than overturned by contemporary meta-theoretical analysis, which continues to characterise the theory as suffering from limited empirical support, conceptual vagueness and unexamined cultural assumptions (Schulz & Cornejo, 2026).

The practical consequences of this gap are considerable. In education, teachers are routinely trained to assume that a hungry or unsafe child cannot meaningfully pursue esteem or academic achievement; yet children from food-insecure or unstable homes regularly demonstrate strong achievement motivation and friendship-seeking, difficult to reconcile with a strictly sequential model. In the

humanitarian sector, Maslow's model has historically justified a "basic needs first" sequencing, in which food, water and shelter are prioritised while social cohesion and self-worth are treated as luxuries to be addressed only afterwards (Rojas et al., 2023), even though impoverished communities frequently sustain rich systems of mutual support and status well before material sufficiency is achieved.

In the workplace, managers continue to assume that employees must first be satisfied with pay and job security before recognition or purpose-driven work can motivate them, an assumption embedded in human resource practice built upon a pyramid its author never sanctioned (Bridgman et al., 2019). Yet everyday behaviour repeatedly contradicts this premise: athletes and soldiers sacrifice comfort and safety for mastery and honour; political prisoners undertake hunger strikes, forgoing physiological needs, in pursuit of dignity and justice; and artists across history have produced celebrated work amid material deprivation, patterns a rigid, stepwise model struggles to accommodate.

A further dimension of the problem concerns cultural universality. Maslow's model was constructed within a mid-twentieth-century American, individualist intellectual tradition that privileges autonomous self-realisation as the pinnacle of human development. Critics working from African, Ubuntu-informed perspectives argue that this apex is poorly suited to societies in which communal belonging, rather than individual self-actualisation, constitutes the primary motivational and moral horizon (Mawere et al., 2016; Zishiri & Mugadza, 2024). The problem, in sum, is that a theory built on limited, culturally specific observation continues to function, uncritically, as a near-universal template across radically different populations and policy domains. This paper interrogates that problem directly.

3.0 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The aim of this paper was to reappraise Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and to evaluate its continuing relevance to human motivation, wellbeing and social development in the contemporary era. In pursuit of this aim, the paper was guided by three specific objectives:

- i. To examine the relevance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to the understanding of human motivation.
- ii. To assess the relevance and empirical validity of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to human wellbeing.
- iii. To evaluate the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to social development across diverse cultural contexts.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a document-based analytical methodology, structured as a narrative and critical literature review. As a conceptual and theoretical appraisal rather than a primary empirical study, the paper does not generate new field data; instead, it identifies, synthesises and critically evaluates existing peer-reviewed literature on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and its theoretical alternatives.

Sources were located through targeted searches of academic databases, including Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals, Google Scholar, and publishers' platforms such as Elsevier ScienceDirect, SAGE, Emerald Insight and Springer, using keyword combinations including

"Maslow", "hierarchy of needs", "human motivation", "self-actualisation", "psychological wellbeing", "self-determination theory", "Ubuntu" and "social development".

Inclusion criteria required that sources be peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly book chapters, or academic monographs published in English, with priority given to publications from the last five years, while foundational works, including Maslow's original texts and Wahba and Bridwell's (1976) critique, were retained to establish the theoretical baseline. Newspaper articles, blog commentary and promotional web content were excluded. Sources were thematically coded according to the paper's three specific objectives and organised into literature review, empirical review, theoretical framework and discussion sections.

5.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

5.1 Motivation, Needs and Hierarchy

Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct and sustain goal-oriented behaviour. Maslow (1943) conceived of motivation as arising from the pursuit of unmet needs, a condition whose absence produces psychological or physiological deficit. He distinguished deficiency needs (D-needs), namely physiological, safety, belonging and esteem needs, which motivate behaviour aimed at restoring equilibrium, from growth needs (B-needs), associated with self-actualisation, which motivate expansion and the realisation of potential rather than the correction of deficit (Maslow, 1954).

A hierarchy implies that elements at one level take precedence over another; in Maslow's original, more qualified formulation, a need's prepotency diminishes once it is largely, though never completely, met, a claim distinct from the rigid, all-or-nothing staircase popularly attributed to the theory. This differs from later process-oriented accounts, such as self-determination theory, which distinguish the quality rather than the sequence of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

5.2 Self-Actualisation, Theory Z and Wellbeing

Self-actualisation refers to the ongoing process of realising one's inherent potential, talents and values. In his later writings, Maslow extended the hierarchy to Theory Z, encompassing self-transcendence, in which motivation is oriented beyond the self towards the welfare of others (Yu, 2022), an elaboration frequently omitted from popular renderings of the pyramid. Wellbeing is understood here as a multidimensional construct encompassing subjective life evaluation, the balance of positive over negative affect, and eudaimonic flourishing, or the sense of meaning and self-realisation in one's life (Tay & Diener, 2011), broader than the mere absence of distress.

5.3 Social Development

Social development refers to the process by which societies improve the collective wellbeing, capabilities and dignity of their members, encompassing poverty reduction, social cohesion and cultural self-determination. Unlike individual psychological development, social development is inherently relational and communal, raising the question of whether an individually oriented motivational theory such as Maslow's can adequately inform collective development practice (Mawere et al., 2016).

6.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the relevant and related literature relevant to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, organised according to the paper's three specific objectives: human motivation, wellbeing, and social development.

6.1 Relevance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory to the understanding of Human Motivation.

The foundational literature begins with Maslow's own account, which conceived of human beings as perpetually wanting creatures whose motivational focus shifts as successive layers of need are addressed (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Early empirical engagement was largely critical: Wahba and Bridwell's (1976) influential review concluded that the theory received little clear support, that the five need categories could not be reliably distinguished in factor-analytic studies, and that its core sequential hypotheses were essentially untestable as stated, a verdict that continues to anchor contemporary critical literature.

More recent research has extended this critique historically. Bridgman, Cummings and Ballard (2019) traced the origin of the pyramidal representation, showing that it was not created by Maslow but was popularised by management consultants and business writers from the late 1950s onward, most notably Charles McDermid's 1960 article for a business audience. The authors argue that this substitution of a simplified commercial symbol for Maslow's more qualified original text has entrenched a misleadingly rigid understanding of motivation within management education.

Within organisational motivation literature specifically, recent empirical work has both applied and interrogated the theory. McConnell and Metz (2024) examined need fulfilment among traditional, remote and hybrid-setting employees, finding that hybrid workers reported significantly higher satisfaction across all five Maslow-derived need levels than employees working exclusively on-site or remotely, suggesting that modern work design can address multiple need categories simultaneously rather than in strict sequence. A related follow-up study by Metz and McConnell (2025) used structural equation modelling to test whether the predictive relationships between need levels differed by work setting, finding no statistically significant differences in path coefficients across settings, a finding that complicates any simple narrative of contextual need reordering.

The comparison between Maslow's theory and self-determination theory (SDT) forms a further important strand of the literature. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that whereas Maslow proposed a graded hierarchy in which higher needs become salient only as lower needs are met, SDT proposes three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness, held to be universally essential and simultaneously operative. Because SDT's needs have been the subject of extensive, cross-culturally validated testing (Chen et al., 2015), the theory is increasingly regarded as a more empirically defensible alternative to Maslow's hierarchical architecture.

6.2 The Relevance and Empirical Validity of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory to Human Wellbeing

The relationship between need fulfilment and subjective wellbeing constitutes the most rigorously tested dimension of Maslow's theoretical legacy. The landmark study remains Tay and Diener's (2011) analysis of Gallup World Poll data spanning more than sixty thousand respondents across 123 countries, which examined the association between six need categories, closely modelled on

Maslow's original scheme, and indicators of subjective wellbeing including life evaluation and affect. This large-scale, cross-cultural evidence base has since become the principal empirical touchstone against which wellbeing-related claims about Maslow's theory are evaluated.

More recent development-economics research has extended this empirical tradition. Rojas, Méndez and Watkins-Fassler (2023), publishing in *World Development*, directly tested Maslow's sequential-satisfaction assumption using large cross-national datasets and rejected it. Their analysis found that income significantly predicted physiological need satisfaction but bore little relationship to safety, belonging, esteem or self-actualisation, and that love, belonging and esteem needs contributed more strongly to overall wellbeing than physiological satisfaction alone, a finding with direct implications for wellbeing-oriented policy.

A further contribution is Schulz and Cornejo's (2026) metatheoretical critique, which evaluates Maslow's hierarchy from four complementary perspectives, anthropological-cultural, philosophical, theological and epistemological, concluding that the model, while intuitively appealing, suffers from conceptual and empirical limitations that compromise its use as a scientific account of wellbeing, reflecting Western individualistic assumptions that do not adequately capture alternative, communally oriented conceptions of flourishing, a theme developed further under the third objective below.

6.3 The Applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory to Social Development across Diverse Cultural Contexts.

The applicability of Maslow's theory to social development, and to non-Western cultural contexts more broadly, has attracted sustained critical attention. Hofstede's (1980) foundational cross-cultural research identified individualism-collectivism as a principal dimension along which national cultures vary, and subsequent commentators have drawn on this framework to argue that Maslow's apex of individual self-actualisation reflects a culturally specific, individualist value system rather than a universal aspiration.

This critique has been developed in considerable depth within African academic literature. Mawere, Mubaya, van Reisen and van Stam (2016) offer a sustained critical appraisal of Maslow's applicability in Southern African contexts, arguing that the theory's individualistic premise is poorly matched to societies organised around collectivism, in which behaviour is motivated by relationships, community strengthening and sharing rather than individual advancement up a personal need's hierarchy. Their fieldwork-based analysis concludes that Maslow's theory, as conventionally applied, is not straightforwardly applicable to many African settings.

This critique has been extended more recently by Zishiri and Mugadza (2024), whose qualitative study of self-actualisation in Zimbabwean higher education, informed by Ubuntu philosophy, found that participants experienced Maslow's self-actualisation construct as reflecting Western individualistic ideals at odds with the collectivist orientation of their societies. The study also notes that Maslow's own list of self-actualised historical figures contains no African representation, a Eurocentric gap the authors argue for correcting through an Ubuntu-grounded reconceptualisation of self-actualisation in higher-education policy. Rojas et al., (2023) connect this cultural critique to policy practice, showing that Maslow's sequential logic historically encouraged development organisations to prioritise material provision while marginalising belonging, esteem and dignity, needs their data show to be at least as strongly associated with life satisfaction as material sufficiency itself.

7.0 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

This section reviews the empirical studies most directly relevant to each objective in greater methodological detail, focusing on research design, sample and principal findings.

7.1 Empirical Evidence on Motivation

Wahba and Bridwell's (1976) synthesis of factor-analytic and correlational studies found weak, inconsistent evidence for five separable need clusters and no support for the claim that satisfying lower needs predicts striving for higher ones. McConnell and Metz's (2024) employee survey found hybrid workers reporting the highest need satisfaction across all five categories, while Metz and McConnell's (2025) structural-equation-modelling follow-up found no significant differences in predictive path coefficients between needs across work settings.

7.2 Empirical Evidence on Wellbeing

Tay and Diener's (2011) analysis of Gallup World Poll data from over sixty thousand respondents across 123 countries found need fulfilment universally associated with wellbeing, but the order of satisfaction bore little relation to life evaluation or affect. Rojas, Méndez and Watkins-Fassler's (2023) econometric analysis of cross-national survey data corroborates this, finding that income predicts only physiological satisfaction while love, belonging and esteem needs contribute more strongly to wellbeing than physiological satisfaction itself.

7.3 Empirical Evidence on Social Development and Cultural Applicability

Zishiri and Mugadza's (2024) interviews and observation with thirty participants across five Zimbabwean higher-education institutions found self-actualisation consistently reframed in communal rather than individualistic terms. Mawere, Mubaya, van Reisen and van Stam's (2016) decade-long action research in Southern Africa similarly identified relationship-building, community strengthening and mutual sharing as primary motivational drivers that map only imperfectly onto Maslow's individually oriented need structure.

8.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ABRAHAM MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS THEORY

This paper was anchored on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, first advanced in "A Theory of Human Motivation" (Maslow, 1943) and elaborated in *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow, 1954). Maslow, a leading figure in the humanistic psychology movement, developed the theory partly in reaction against behaviourist accounts that reduced motivation to conditioned response, and Freudian accounts that emphasised pathology over growth, proposing instead a positively oriented account of motivation centred on the human capacity for growth, meaning and self-realisation.

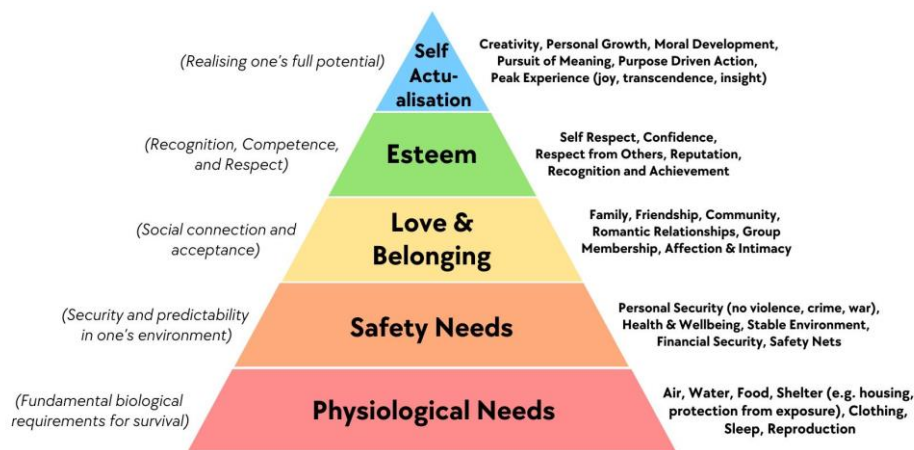
In its original five-level formulation, the theory identifies physiological needs, such as food, water, warmth and rest, as the most prepotent needs, followed in ascending order by safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and, at the apex, self-actualisation, the ongoing realisation of one's unique potential, creativity and values. Maslow proposed that as each lower-level need is substantially, though never completely, satisfied, its motivational salience diminishes and the next level becomes increasingly prominent.

A frequently overlooked feature of Maslow's original theory is his distinction between deficiency needs (D-needs) and being needs (B-needs). The first four levels are deficiency needs, motivated by lack and oriented towards restoring equilibrium; self-actualisation, by contrast, is a being need, motivated by the intrinsic pleasure of growth rather than deficit (Yu, 2022). In his later work, Maslow extended the theory further to self-transcendence, or Theory Z, in which the individual's highest motivational orientation moves beyond the self towards service and the welfare of others (Yu, 2022), an extension almost entirely absent from the popular five-tier pyramid.

As established in the literature review, the pyramidal representation was not created by Maslow but was developed by management writers, notably Keith Davis in 1957 and Charles McDermid in 1960, to popularise the theory for business audiences (Bridgman, Cummings & Ballard, 2019). This matters

theoretically because the pyramid conveys a rigidity considerably stronger than Maslow's own more qualified language, which explicitly acknowledged exceptions and simultaneity. In response, Kaufman (2020) reimagines the hierarchy as a sailboat, in which security needs, safety, connection and self-esteem, form the stable hull, while growth needs, exploration, love and purpose, form the sail that propels the individual forward, with hull and sail operating together dynamically rather than in fixed sequence (Yu, 2022).

For the purposes of this paper, Maslow's theory is treated as the primary framework, understood not as a rigid, empirically settled staircase but as a historically significant, humanistically grounded account of universal needs whose descriptive content retains value even where its hierarchical claims require substantial qualification, a framing that allows the discussion below to assess where its insights hold and where they must be revised. The pyramid is as follows:



9.0 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the literature and empirical reviews in relation to each of the paper's three specific objectives, offering a critical appraisal illustrated with practical examples.

The evidence suggests Maslow's theory retains genuine, if qualified, explanatory value for motivation, while its popularly taught rigid form does not withstand scrutiny. Its central insight, that motivation extends beyond material survival to safety, connection, recognition and growth, remains a valuable corrective to narrowly economic accounts of behaviour, illustrated by findings that hybrid work arrangements, which simultaneously address security, connection and autonomy, produce higher need satisfaction than fully remote or fully on-site arrangements (McConnell & Metz, 2024).

However, the claim that lower needs must be substantially satisfied before higher needs become active is not well supported (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Schulz & Cornejo, 2026). Everyday examples illustrate the point: hunger strikers deliberately forgo physiological sustenance in pursuit of political dignity, an esteem-level need; frontline healthcare workers forgo rest and safety in pursuit of professional purpose, resonating more closely with Maslow's own later concept of self-transcendence than with the pyramid's self-interested progression. Such cases recur across cultures, suggesting motivation is better characterised as a dynamic interplay of needs than a fixed staircase.

The comparison with self-determination theory sharpens this critique. Where Maslow proposes graded prepotency, Deci and Ryan (2000) propose that autonomy, competence and relatedness are simultaneously essential, each able to support or thwart motivation regardless of whether "lower" needs are met. Because SDT has accumulated substantially more cross-cultural support (Chen et al., 2015), organisational psychology increasingly treats Maslow's model as a useful heuristic rather than a validated causal theory, an irony sharpened by the fact that the pyramid most responsible for its authority in management practice was never Maslow's own creation (Bridgman, Cummings & Ballard, 2019).

With respect to wellbeing, the evidence offers a more favourable, though still qualified, appraisal. Tay and Diener's (2011) cross-national study substantiate Maslow's central claim that a plurality of universal needs, rather than material sufficiency alone, is associated with subjective wellbeing across virtually all world regions, a meaningful vindication of the theory's humanistic insight.

Yet the same study falsifies the strict sequential premise: the order in which needs were met bore little relationship to wellbeing, and individuals could report strong positive affect and social fulfilment even while basic material needs remained unmet. Diener's characterisation of needs as functioning like "vitamins", each independently beneficial rather than sequentially unlocked, captures this finding well.

This pattern is reinforced by Rojas et al. (2023) analysis, which found that income predicts only physiological need satisfaction, while love, belonging and esteem needs contribute more strongly to wellbeing than physiological satisfaction itself. This has practical implications: individuals in materially hard conditions, for example informal settlements, frequently report high relational wellbeing despite persisting deprivation, while materially comfortable but socially isolated individuals frequently report significant distress.

A rigid reading of Maslow's hierarchy struggles to accommodate either pattern. Schulz and Cornejo's (2026) metatheoretical critique adds that Maslow's implicit definition of wellbeing as the culmination of a linear process towards autonomous self-actualisation reflects a historically situated conception of flourishing that does not straightforwardly generalise, connecting directly to the cultural critique developed under the third objective below.

The discussion of social development is where Maslow's theory faces its most fundamental challenge, one concerning not merely the ordering of needs but the theory's basic anthropological premise. Maslow's model, culminating in individual self-actualisation, presumes that the terminal goal of human development is the fullest expression of an autonomous, bounded self. Hofstede's (1980) foundational cross-cultural research, together with the African academic literature reviewed above, suggests this premise reflects the individualist orientation of the mid-twentieth-century American context in which Maslow worked, rather than a culturally universal aspiration.

The Ubuntu-informed critique developed by Mawere et al. (2016) and empirically substantiated by Zishiri and Mugadza (2024) offers a compelling illustration. In many Southern African communities, the maxim that "it takes a village to raise a child" encapsulates a worldview in which even basic physiological needs are understood as collectively secured, and personal achievement is meaningful primarily insofar as it contributes to communal wellbeing. Zishiri and Mugadza's (2024) finding that higher-education participants consistently reframed self-actualisation in communal terms supports

this, as does their observation that Maslow's own list of exemplary self-actualised individuals contains no African representation.

This cultural critique carries serious implications for development policy. Rojas, Méndez and Watkins-Fassler (2023) show that programming influenced by Maslow's sequential logic has tended to prioritise material provision while marginalising belonging, esteem and dignity, domains their own data show to be at least as strongly associated with life satisfaction as material sufficiency. A practical illustration is resettlement housing that provides adequate shelter while failing to preserve existing kinship networks; such interventions may be judged successful against a hierarchy treating shelter as prerequisite to belonging, even as they produce measurable declines in social cohesion.

Collectively, the discussion across all three objectives converges on a consistent conclusion: Maslow's identification of a plurality of universal human needs remains a valuable contribution to the social sciences, but the theory's popularly taught architecture, a strict, individualistic, sequential hierarchy visually represented as a pyramid Maslow never drew, is not empirically supported, is culturally parochial, and risks producing policy and practice failures of the kind illustrated above when applied uncritically.

10.0 CONCLUSION

This paper reappraised Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and to assess its continuing relevance to human motivation, wellbeing and social development. The reappraisal demonstrates that the theory occupies a paradoxical position: it is simultaneously one of the most widely taught frameworks in the social sciences and one of the most consistently critiqued on empirical grounds. With respect to motivation, human beings are indeed driven by a plurality of universal needs, as Maslow proposed, but the strict, sequential prepotency he described, popularly conveyed through a pyramid he never drew, is not well supported. With respect to wellbeing, cross-national evidence strongly supports the universality of Maslow's need categories while refuting the claim that they must be satisfied in fixed order. With respect to social development, the theory's individualistic conception of self-actualisation sits uneasily with collectivist, Ubuntu-informed worldviews, in which individual flourishing is inseparable from communal wellbeing.

On balance, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is best understood not as a scientifically validated, predictive theory, but as an enduring heuristic, a useful checklist of the broad domains of human concern that any adequate account of motivation, wellbeing or development must address. Its continuing institutional authority owes as much to the accessibility of its unauthorised pyramidal image as to the rigour of its empirical foundation. A genuinely critical engagement with the theory need not discard Maslow's contribution altogether; rather, it should relocate that contribution to its proper place, a valuable starting point to be substantially supplemented, and where necessary corrected, by more empirically robust and culturally attentive frameworks.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the foregoing reappraisal, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educators and textbook authors should discontinue the uncritical presentation of the pyramidal image as Maslow's own creation, presenting the theory alongside its historical

origins and empirical limitations so that students understand it as a heuristic rather than a settled scientific law.

2. Human resource practitioners should design motivation and reward systems around the concurrent, rather than sequential, satisfaction of employee needs, drawing on evidence, such as findings on hybrid work arrangements, that multiple need categories can be addressed simultaneously.
3. Wellbeing practitioners should integrate Maslow's descriptive taxonomy of needs with more empirically validated frameworks, particularly self-determination theory, recognising that belonging and esteem may be as significant as physiological security regardless of the latter's status.
4. Development agencies should abandon strictly sequenced "basic needs first" programming and instead design interventions that address material provision, social cohesion and dignity concurrently, informed by the finding that relational needs contribute at least as strongly to wellbeing as material sufficiency.

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