While the word “development” usually has positive connotations, there have been many critiques of the concept and its application. One of the most prominent of such critiques is advanced by post-development thinkers who argue that the ideas and practices associated with development wrongly assume the universal validity and viability of Western values and ways of organizing economic and political life.

Post-development thinkers believe that the so-called “developing” world ought to draw on non-Western concepts and practices to build “alternatives to development”. In so doing, concepts like buen vivir and sumak kawsay (both meaning something like “living well”) coming from the South American context have been attracting interest. In relation to Africa, some commentators suggest that the concept ubuntu (referring to something like a feeling of common humanity) could be a useful concept upon which to base alternatives to development in Africa. This presentation critically explores the viability of the idea of alternatives to development, with particular reference to ubuntu in the South African context.