

## People-centred development and globalization<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years a development concept is beginning to be advanced that attempts to incorporate the outlook of indigenous people's: In the Qhichwa language it is known as *Sumak kawsay*, *suma qamaña* in Aymara, *sumak ñandereco* in Guarani, *Laman Laka* in Miskitu, and Buen **Vivir** / **Vivir Bien** in Spanish,<sup>2</sup> pointing out that living well does not just refer to per capita income or economic growth has summed up the concept. In Ecuador and Bolivia<sup>3</sup> the concept was included in their respective constitutions. It presumes common cultural mores, and harmony between human beings and Mother Earth. **Buen Vivir, or Living Well**, stands on values that stand for culture for life, for living together, and for complementarity not just among people but also harmony between us and nature, for the protection of the commonweal and of life in benefit of communities and nations as a whole.

Those precepts coincide with those of indigenous peoples throughout the rest of the world<sup>4</sup>, in the sense that Indigenous peoples' approach to self-determined development is based on the fact that culture is a way of life. Items used to procure livelihood and relationship to land are part of the spiritual lives of indigenous peoples. Development with culture and identity is characterized by having a holistic non sectoral approach, seeking to build on collective rights, security, and greater control and self governance of lands, territories and resources. Our way towards development builds on tradition with respect for our ancestors, but we also look ahead.

The vision of living well, of **Buen Vivir**, or **yearning** and **searching** for well being, has to do with conditions of social life, perspectives, and indigenous people's life quality. The shared framework of this pursuit is the principles of reciprocity, complementarity, and redistribution in the distinct spaces for the people's social,

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<sup>1</sup> Mirna Cunningham. Abstract of presentation for Human Rights Council SOCIAL FORUM. 1 - 3 October 2012. Room XXI, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

<sup>2</sup> There is not really any English equivalent in the idiomatic sense. "Good living" does not have the same sense, partly because terms like it and the "good life" have all been tainted by the egoistic and consumerist culture of capitalist civilization, explained in the paper. There is a term from the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism // "commonweal." It is the source of the word Commonwealth, as in the British Commonwealth (Mancomunidad). But its original meaning was much similar to the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir*, that is living together and sharing the wealth, conceived not just as consuming things but enjoying social life in the community of associated producers and members. The Oxford entry for the term: *commonweal* /kɒmənweɪl/noun (the commonweal) archaic the welfare of the public. Oxford uses the term welfare in its sense of "well being", not charity or government handout.

<sup>3</sup> Arto. 8, Capitulo Segundo. Principios, valores y fines del Estado. Constitucion Politica del Estado. Republica de Bolivia. 2009. <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Bolivia/bolivia09.html>. Titulo VII. Regimen del buen vivir. Republica de Ecuador. Constitucion del 2008. <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/ecuador08.html#mozTocId153283>

<sup>4</sup> Tivoli meeting on indigenous peoples and self determined development. Tebbteba. 2008.

economic, cultural, and political life. The close relationship between indigenous peoples and Mother Nature stems from duality and wholeness or completeness, just as man and woman are complementary one to the other, like sun and moon, day and night, or male and female in animals, vegetables, and minerals. There prevails a complementary, both cooperate and form a social unity, the social and natural world, including even the symbolic universe, is re-established. This is the dialectic of complementary opposition, a dual opposition that is therefore required for reciprocity and the integral whole.

The principles for the construction and reconstruction of self-determined development - *Buen Vivir* - must be understood in the juridical framework of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>5</sup> regarding the exercise of the right to self determination:

**Article 3**

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

**Article 4**

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

**Article 32:**

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.
2. States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.
3. States shall provide effective mechanisms for just and fair redress for any such activities, and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact.

It is also important to return to the preamble of the Declaration on the Right to Development. It establishes the inalienable human rights to development, by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Declaration on the Right to Development <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/rtd.htm>

Another instrument which helps to understand *Buen Vivir* is Article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and related dispositions. They establish that each Signatory Party, to the extent possible and wherever appropriate, shall, in tandem with national legislation, respect, preserve, and maintain the knowledges, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities that entail traditional life styles pertinent to sustainable conservation and utilization of biological diversity, and shall promote their broader application through the approval and participation of those who hold those knowledges, innovations, and practices, and shall endeavor to assure sharing the benefits flowing from utilization of those knowledges, innovations, and practices.

Some characteristic elements of the concept of development from the perspective of indigenous people's that have been identified are the following:<sup>7</sup>

**a) The indigenous vision.** One of the first things that stands out in the *Buen Vivir* proposals is the fact that nature is a "living being" within which all its components establish multiple connections, with human beings being a part of the cosmic fabric. Some fundamental aspects of indigenous people's cosmogony thought are of community in relation to peoples, time, balance and harmony, consensus, dialog, respect, and a system of rights.<sup>8</sup> This element is expressed in the following arguments:<sup>9</sup>

**a.1 Giving priority to life.** The *Buen Vivir* proposal strives for the revitalization of the forms of life and living in the community, in which all members look out for all. In that context, the most important thing is not *only the human*, nor is it *money. It is life.*

**a.2 Living in equilibrium with nature, and in complementarity**  
It postulates that all beings living on the planet complement one another. Hence, searching for an equilibrium point among all beings is fundamental.

One consequence of this vision, for example, is that for indigenous people's natural resources such as land, water, minerals, and vegetable life are not marketable; or that the aim of production is life quality and not just profit, and that production is mainly destined for self consumption. In many communities, therefore, the surplus is ritualized, and is redistributed for the sake of balance and harmony, and not only for economic development.<sup>10</sup>

**a.3 The economic subject is collective.** For indigenous peoples, one basic difference between the indigenous development proposal and other development models is that the economic subject is collective. Although this characteristic has variants, especially given the massive

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<sup>7</sup> Luis Maldonado. Conference during the presentation of the Project for Development with Identity of the *Fondo Indigenam (Proyecto de Desarrollo con Identidad)*. Panama. 2009.

<sup>8</sup> CICA. 2008.

<sup>9</sup> They form part of the 25 characteristic elements of the *Buen Vivir*. Interview with David Choquehuanca. Minister for External Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Maldonado, L. (2009)

flow of indigenous persons to urban centers, it has particular cultural connotations not dependent on the geographic and special location of indigenous people's. This feature is reflected in the fact that natural and cultural property is collective and has the community as its reference point.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous people's, in this context, also argue<sup>12</sup> that we possess and have engendered our own knowledges derived from our conviviality with Mother Nature, the natural resources, culture, production, and ways of life. Therefore a necessary step in the process for defining a development model for, of, and by indigenous people will be to identify what knowledges stem from *our* cultural practices, and how the community protects, preserves, and recreates them.

**a.4 The role played by our own economic institutions.** Indigenous peoples, working within a territorial base and their relationship with nature, have engendered knowledge in the use and management of their resources. This accumulation of knowledges has enabled the establishment of systems of relations on political, economic, and social organization levels that allowed them at determined moments to attain stronger degrees of sustainability in food security and in the exchange of products.

A range of rituals or ceremonies are linked to productive activities such as harvesting and planting. The communities continue to honor Mother Nature through dancing and music, mainly in tandem with seasonal agricultural tasks. However, in the cities the original dances are treated as folklore.<sup>13</sup>

Another characteristic of community labor is reciprocity. It consists of doing work to reciprocate help offered by a family in agricultural, fishing, and construction tasks, etc.

These characteristic features are related to people's cultural revitalization and daily practices involving indigenous identity and culture, such as recuperating traditional foods, and holding fiestas as ways to socialize. Also involved is the role of spirituality in community life, to mention just a few traits.

**a.5 Intercultural Relations based on gender and inter-generational equality .** Another characteristic of indigenous people's development model is a search for forms of convivial cohabitation with other sectors, including governments and the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Maldonado, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Idem.

<sup>13</sup> Choquehuanca, 2010.

For that sake, one of the first steps consists of accepting differences and similarities between the diverse beings that populate the planet.

In summary, *Buen Vivir* or good living for indigenous peoples still presents historical challenges and tasks such as territorial recognition. Peoples cannot understand the right to *Buen Vivir* when our territories are constantly threatened and appropriated by national and international companies, and when quality of life conditions get progressively worse. When education continues to have a western focus; when our languages are on the road to becoming extinct, when we indigenous women continue to be relegated to the private sphere; and when so-called *intermediaries* very far removed from us don't recognize our rights to enjoy the ***Buen Vivir*** - we then have cause to conclude that there is still a long distance to go, and that we still have to travel against strong adverse currents.