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# El Buen vivir; an Alternative for the Town's Development

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## The Latin American Context

The neoliberal restructuring of the eighties of the last century had intensive social and political repercussions for the Latin American and Caribbean States. In all the States that assumed neoliberal policies, the social conditions were worsened by the massive layoffs of workers, the cuts in social spending, the deindustrialization and the subordination of farmers to agroindustrial monopolies. The capital and private investments were favored, that gave as a consequence the aggravation of the working and social conditions, what originated intense time and cycles of popular protest. The popular protest, in confluence with other factors, was decisive for the changes that have occurred in different political regimes in Latin America.

In States like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the parties that held the hegemonic for several decades were displaced from power and they were replaced by new parties and organizations, which felt more empathy for the poorest sectors of society. During these last fifteen years, the political map of the region was redrawn almost entirely. This region is forced to face, new and complex global challenges since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

A new era has begun characterized by excessive centralization and concentration of hegemonic, technological, computer and military power in the hands of a small group of countries. These trace the guidelines to the most of the nations, as well as the rearrangement and restructuring of international relations in the new economic and political blocs. It is essential to keep in mind that this is a tangled period, influenced by the strong fluctuations in the international system. Very early in the decade, the terrorist attacks of 9-11, drastically modified the global priorities and strategies of the hegemonic power, which had immediate effects on the entire system.

At the end of 2008, there was a new shake up in the global panorama, this time of an economic nature, when the explosion of the housing bubble and the crisis of risk assets in the United States unleashed an economic recession of planetary dimension. These two events were equivalent to a genuine systemic shocks that influenced the definition and configuration of the foreign policy of all Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In the first decade of the 21st century emerged a new development model, which some even call a new paradigm. This would mean that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the main laboratory for the implementation of the neoliberal reforms of the Washington Consensus, would also be one of the regions that actively seek new models to transcend it.

In the wake of the global economic crisis, the central theses of "market fundamentalism" have been discredited, even in industrialized countries, and in Latin America it has served as a catalyst for new paradigms, more autochthonous, in terms of development. In the social field, the 2000s show positive indicators in terms of reducing inequality, but it is still the most unequal region in the world and the challenges it faces are very important. Many analysts agree that for the export boom of raw materials that has been favoring the region in recent years can be translated into a new development platform, it is essential to invest in education and technology. In the international area, new dynamics have been configured. In the past, Latin American States used to attach greater importance to relations with developed countries than their neighbors.

In the first quinquennium of the 21st century, intraregional relations became a priority for many countries: the most important Argentina's bilateral relationship is with Brazil, while countries such as Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua privilege their relationship with Venezuela. Facing the US withdrawal and the favorable evolution of its macroeconomic indicators, the Latin American States have been able to increase their international presence and the scope of their diplomatic initiatives.

Actually the outlook it's more complicated, after the Macri's triumph in Argentina came a conservative offensive that won wide political margin in the region, like a clear example the destabilization in Venezuela and Nicaragua, and the change of orientation of the policy of Lenin Moreno in Ecuador. While it is true that the landscape for progressivism improved considerably after the triumph of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, months later the conservatives return with the victory in the first round of Bolsonaro in Brazil.

These two characters represent models of opposite development, on the one hand, in Mexico, the arrival of a politician who considers the neoliberal model exhausted and, therefore, the need to recover the role of the State to promote development and growth of the country and thereby rebuild the social fabric. On the other hand, in Brazil, the arrival of a very controversial character for his statements in favor of the dictatorship, authoritarianism, homophobia and, economically, a liberal at all costs, who would try to reduce the role of the State to the minimum

### **A new worldview is born in Latin America; el buen vivir**

In this context at the beginning of the 21st century, in the Andean region, a new way of understanding the world is being debated, after historically the indigenous peoples did not participate in the political life of the Latin American countries, they went from the resistance to

the proposal and action<sup>1</sup>, and beginning this century, thanks to a combination of their struggles and resistance, and the inclusion of progressive governments in the region to the political life of the countries, a worldview called *buen vivir* is made known.

The preceding decades left us like a conclusion that the Latin American States that were constituted looking for the welfare of the citizenship, looking for a better life, did not achieve the welfare of the societies. In addition, it is easy to perceive signs of a civilizatory crisis that has led to the destruction of nature, to imbalance and has generated a huge social debt in the region.

Dominant paradigms of life conceptualize the individual as the only subject of rights and obligations, establishing it as the only reference of life. Therefore, the legal, educational, political, economic and social systems were adapted to these paradigms and respond to the rights and obligations of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

The vision of capital as a fundamental value of Western thought, generated enormous inequality between rich and poor. These referents of life have led to space of disagreements and have increasingly deepened the abysses between peoples, leading humanity to a high degree of desensitization.

The promise of the development of modernity<sup>3</sup>, progress and its postulates, tries to sell us the idea that the population can accumulate wealth despite structural conditions, both at the personal level and at the level of States and that natural resources were a condition key to achieve it. In addition, they have tried to give the image of the State as a bad administrator and that therefore private capital should intervene in the administration of our resources to achieve true profitability. However, in Latin American countries it has been proven that this vision of development has only brought about greater inequality.

At the environmental level, the vast majority of current conservation efforts are based on third-generation rights, where environmental protection is associated with ensuring quality of life. This approach, undoubtedly, has ended bounded in perspectives that privilege the human being and leave nature in the background. They protect species that are beautiful and striking, or resources that have or may have economic utility. However, the imperative of nature conservation must be applied to all life forms, including those species that are ugly or useless.

Thereby, what is meant by wealth, its quantification, it could mean what is measured and what is not measured, has a basic instrument with which the entire economic sphere is evaluated: macroeconomic indexes. These don't measure the productive capacity of life and omit destructive processes, which often appears as accumulation of wealth what is actually a systematic process of

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1. The original indigenous peoples of the continent are contributing to the process of change and proposing a new institutional design for new States, which recognizes cultural diversity and promotes harmonious coexistence among all beings of nature.
  2. Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, *Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir: Filosofía, políticas, estrategias y experiencias regionales*, Ministerio de las Culturas, Bolivia, 2009, p.34
  3. Among many concepts that are used daily, one of the most deceptive is "development", this is generally understood as synonymous with "improvement". However, it is enough to observe reality to conclude that, in most cases, this type of "development" results in social and environmental destruction, which benefits a few.

collective impoverishment, because they are destroying the conditions that make possible what we call riches.

As a result of neoliberal policies, the number of poor people increased, the gap between the rich and the poor grew in parallel, to the point that in the same country, some live in opulence and ostentation just like in the first world countries, and the others try to survive on the street begging for what is indispensable to survive.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis that Latin American countries are going through is the process of a developmentalist, individualistic, predatory, materialist, anthropocentric, model. It is not an economic crisis, neither political nor environmental, it is a sum of all of them, a civilizing crisis. The paradigm that brought humanity to the State that is, considers that the earth is a reserve of resources that can be used for the "welfare" of the human being. A worldview that did not consider the different forms of life, when all deserve respect because they live and have a certain role for the balance of life.

This also occurs in a context in which a very high percentage of the population of the planet does not have drinking water or access to food that covers the minimum daily calories. We are facing a situation where calculations show that several decades ago we have moved into a zero-sum game: if we are using beyond what is available, the rich necessarily become richer, reducing resources for the poorest.

In the face of this crisis, many are the intentions to reformulate the dominant system and try to find solutions. These intentions are expressed in countless summits, workshops, international meetings, publications, etc. they must contemplate the need for a change of paradigm of life based on the philosophy of Buen Vivir.<sup>5</sup>

Buen Vivir calls into question the term development and all that it implies, because for the peoples and communities "development" has meant the deterioration of nature and the destruction of their communities. The term "development" is linked to exploitation, marginalization, depredation and dependence, inasmuch as from the western logic, the development implies gaining at the expense of another.

The development is associated with the countries of the "first world", which have caused the deterioration of life, altering the cycles of nature, among other factors, by the emission of gases into the atmosphere producing excessive pollution and by the policies promoted. from transnational initiatives, which far from benefiting life or meeting the needs of society, cause large and irreversible environmental impacts.<sup>6</sup>

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4. At this point the problem is not only the neoclassical economy, it is not only the neoliberal model of the economy, the notion of wealth, the notion of what is quantified, what is measured. That construction, what is now understood as richness, can only lead us to the disappearance of life on the planet.

5. In the search for an alternative model that replaces the one named as "social market economy", the social and solidarity economy has appeared with these paradigmatic scopes, not just as a sector and as a set of associative experiences.

6. Cesar Fabián Vega Cevallos, La responsabilidad social de la IES: vinculación universidad-comunidad a través del plan nacional del buen vivir, 3Ciencias, España, 2017, p.56

In the indigenous' worldview, there is no concept of development understood as the conception of a linear process that establishes an earlier or later state. There is no vision of a state of underdevelopment to be overcome. And neither a state of development to be achieved by forcing the destruction of social relations and harmony with Nature. There is not, as in the Western vision, this dichotomy that explains and differentiates a large part of the ongoing processes. For indigenous towns there is also no traditional conception of poverty associated with the lack of material goods or wealth linked to their abundance. From the indigenous worldview, social improvement is a category in permanent construction and reproduction.<sup>7</sup>

Material goods are not the only determinants, there are other values at play: knowledge, social and cultural recognition, codes of ethical and even spiritual behavior in relation to society and nature, human values, the vision of the future, etc.

This does not mean denying the possibility to promote the modernization of society, particularly with the incorporation into the logic of Buen Vivir of many and valuable technological advances. Neither can valuable contributions be marginalized from the thinking of humanity that are in tune with the construction of a harmonious world as derived from the philosophy of Buen Vivir. For this reason, one of the fundamental tasks lies in the permanent and constructive dialogue of knowledge and ancestral knowledge as the most advanced of universal thought, in a process of continuous decolonization of society.

Without a doubt, an unavoidable change to leave behind neoliberalism has to do with the ways of doing economics and defining it. Today it is not just a question of shifting the control or decisions of one hegemonic group to another, or even just of "de-privatizing" those decisions, but of facing fundamental transformations that lead from an economy focused on the accumulation and tyranny of the market, towards an orientation to the sustainability of life, justice and democracy. This implies changes in the productive matrix, in the visions and policies about who and how they do economics, what and how to produce, what and how to consume, how, ultimately, to reproduce life.

The Buen Vivir helps us to provoke epistemological ruptures as regards thinking and rethinking development, seeks to establish an intercivizational dialogue, to break the dichotomy between human beings and nature, because another relationship with Mother Earth which established where everyone is a part of of the Pachamama, and where social relations or quality of life are no longer seen from a purely economic point of view.<sup>8</sup>

For the ancient worldview of our native peoples, nature is not a thing, or an object. It is "a living space". Therefore, it is not possible to combine that vision with a concept of development that reifies nature, because its values differ.

The Buen Vivir is the result of a model that goes beyond the economic<sup>9</sup>, therefore to reach the

7. Alberto Acosta, *El Buen Vivir en el camino del postdesarrollo*, FES-ILDIS, Ecuador, octubre, 2010, p. 11

8. Katu Arkonada, *Transiciones hacia el Vivir Bien*, Ministerio de Culturas, Bolivia, 2010, p. 184

9. One of the recurring questions has to do, for example is with the application of complementarity. So, you can see how they can be complementary. That is a market reading, which focuses attention only on products, no more dimensions of the economy and geopolitics.

horizon of Buen Vivir, not only must rethink the structure and economic model, but reconstitute the worldview of the culture of life.

### Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia; Cradle of Buen Vivir

The Ecuadorian and Bolivian indigenous movement has been the key to placing Buen Vivir in the regional debate. For its part, Bolivia is experiencing a historic process, for the first time since the founding of that country in 1825, they have an indigenous president, getting the power without resorting to violence and within the democratic rules themselves.

Some outstanding values on which the New Constitution of the Bolivian State is based today are unity, equality, dignity, freedom, reciprocity, respect, complementarity, harmony, transparency, balance, equal opportunities, responsibility, distribution and redistribution of riches and social goods.

Constitutionally established, that are "essential" purposes of the State to establish a fair and harmonious society, based on decolonization, without discrimination or exploitation, with full social justice, to consolidate plurinational identities. Guarantee also the protection and dignity of nationals, peoples and communities, and foster mutual respect and intercultural dialogue.

For its part, the Political Constitution of Ecuador, promulgated in 2008, in the preamble recognizes "the millenary roots, forged by women and men of different peoples, celebrating nature, the *Pacha Mama*, of which we are part and which is vital for our existence. " Appeals to ancestral wisdom as a legal principle. Then it continues declaring that it is constituted in "a new form of citizen coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature, to achieve buen vivir, *sumak kawsay*".

In a clear and forceful way, the Constitution projects the horizon of buen vivir, declaring "a society that respects, in all its dimensions, the dignity of people, and collectivities." It also declares the public interest and the preservation of the environment, the conservation of ecosystems, biodiversity and the integrity of the country's genetic heritage, the prevention of environmental damage and the recovery of degraded natural spaces.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in Venezuela the rise of Hugo R. Chávez to the presidency of Venezuela in 1999 was the beginning of a new era for both Venezuela and the Latin American region. It was the beginning of the implementation of the Bolivarian Revolution Project, which has permanently sought to change the policy of its country and in the region through a substantial program establishing a participatory democracy and granting to the most disadvantaged sectors better conditions of life, in addition to considering itself as an alternative to the prevailing economic system.

After calling a Constituent Assembly the Constitution of 1999 is created. The new Constitution changes the rules of the political game and puts obstacles to neoliberalism, posing against the privatization of the Venezuelan oil company and the large estate; in favor of small fishermen to the detriment of transnational fishing companies; for the propagation of cooperative enterprises and

10. To understand what Buen Vivir implies, which can not simply be associated with "Western wellbeing", we must begin by recovering the worldview of indigenous peoples and nationalities.

microcredit; against the privatization of education and free education; against the privatization of social security. This constitution also advocates the rights of indigenous peoples, of children, for the right to free information and demands a participatory model, in which citizens play a leading role.

The reconstruction of the political practices of the Bolivarian project shows a transformation that, anchored in the democratic ideal and of social justice, is not free of contradictions, problems and paradoxes. It has materialized a Constitution that legitimizes and encourages popular participation but, in trying to propitiate it, unleashes patronage and cooptation. It has influenced the reordering of the party system based on the polarization generated by the project and its leader. It has improved the living conditions of those who have less, while it has encouraged welfare. But it has also proven its ability to reinvent itself and coexist with the conflict, and a limitless perseverance to deploy its proposals, be it called "Bolivarianismo" or "Socialismo del siglo XXI".

In Venezuela, the appeal to the social and solidarity economy is a way of recognizing to make visible the diverse existing economy, with its multiple relationships, logics, tensions and protagonists. It allows to see the forms of production and work that are organized for subsistence and reproduction, some of the long journey such as the community or artisan workshop, others more recent such as cooperatives, others only recently seen as an economic entity, such is the case of the homes.

## Final Reflections

Latin America is at the moment of reconstruction of concepts, of new paradigms, indigenous peoples have not arrived alines, they come with proposals that they intend to make visible and propose.

The disciplines in which we are trained, in particular, the economy, with Eurocentric, colonial; it divides life into pieces and arbitrarily assign one or the other as it object. The economy is reduced to a very particular vision, which has to do with an inheritance of the construction of the market society of the liberal tradition, unfortunately assumed in a relatively uncritical firm also by the socialist Marxist tradition in several ways.

A collective consciousness emerges to give meaning from the local to a call of the times. This occurs at a historic moment in which technological advances, broad mobility of goods and high virtual connectivity converge on a global scale with a deep multidimensional crisis characterized by social inequality, environmental destruction, financial debacle, armed conflict and the contradictory political leadership.

This scenario at a global level is the context in which a region like ours awakens to its reality of dependence, discrimination, instability, corruption and degradation; while looking inward and beginning to appreciate its richness as a sovereign, unitary, plurinational, intercultural and megadiverse country; with Buen Vivir understood as a new social pact in harmony with nature.

The principles of sovereignty, solidarity, cooperation, reciprocity, complementarity are invoked

more and more frequently. They are the cornerstone of the alternative economy, and have become the foundation of new or alternative proposals for regional integration, among others.

These are principles that are not only in a past or an ideal future; to varying degrees, they accompany and explain practices and relationships of the present, which speaks of their viability as fundamentals of transformation, as their utopian dimension is often alluded to.

This awakening is the result of the dreams and social struggles of popular, labor, indigenous, ecological, feminist, intellectual, young and many others movements; that for a long time they waited for a response from the political to change their reality and that now they enter the political arena to transform it from the decision-making spaces, the participation, the proposal and the guarantee of rights in a comprehensive manner for the people, social movements and nature.

In this way, the Andean region awakens and transmits to the region a great hope for Buen Vivir. The challenge is to move from the social pact in harmony with nature, approved by the majority of its population in its constitutions, to the profound transformation that means giving life to buen vivir with the new social and solidarity development regime that supports and guarantees the full exercise of rights with intergenerational justice.

The process of change that emerges in Latin America and the Caribbean affects the global environment, promoting a paradigm: the community paradigm of the culture of life for Living Well, based on a way of living embodied in the daily practice of respect, of the harmonic relationship and balance with everything that exists, understanding that in life everything is interconnected, interdependent and interrelated.

Despite this, the theories of development prevailing in Latin America, even in the 21st century, continue to depend on the appropriation of natural resources to maintain economic growth. Exports are still based on nature. Likewise, it is committed to attract foreign investment, where social and environmental demands are reduced as a way to increase that attractiveness. It reinforces a pattern of subordinated international insertion, based on primary products, where our countries are price takers.

Experience in recent decades shows that the new progressive governments have made progress in some areas, especially the social one, but show enormous difficulties in generating new styles of development, and in particular in achieving another appropriation of natural resources and reducing the degree of environmental deterioration. Conventional styles are maintained, especially in the use of natural resources to boost economies through increased exports.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many Latin American States and populations have been exploring greater autonomy in their domestic and foreign politics, and have been building coalitions and launching initiatives based on alternative visions of development and regional integration. Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia have been key players in this process.

The new political circumstances have led to a return of the State to take a leading role in the use and exploitation of natural resources. This is an important point, but it is also extremely important to pay attention to the rules and conditions under which economic processes manage natural resources.

This generation has the great opportunity to welcome these emerging views of ancient cultures as a point of entry to change the course of the crisis towards a harmonious worldview where human beings must act in accordance with nature. These changes begin to be observed with a growing awareness scattered in various parts of the world where the integral perspective of life marks decisions at home and at work.

The change of the development regime is oriented to a social and solidary proposal that thinks about the country without privileges, with equality and action for the priority attention groups. This premise seeks to recover the sense of community where families and urban and rural social networks play a fundamental role in returning to look at the other as one, understanding their links and without the market being the end of social relations.

One of the key issues to face is the accumulation of capital, which is not simply a set of material goods but a social relationship mediated by power. So, it is necessary to achieve a redistribution of power and create new spaces of relationship and incidence in decision-making. In such a way that the new development regime creates a value matrix based on work, distribution, conservation with present and long-term responsibility.

Buen Vivir appears as a category in the philosophy of life of ancestral indigenous societies, but has lost ground due to the practices of Western modernity, as well as the effect of the colonality of power. Their contribution, however, without in any way leading to a mistaken idealization of the indigenous way of life, invites us to assume other knowledge and other practices, in this case of traditionally marginalized peoples and nationalities.

The Andean vision is not the only source of inspiration to promote Good Living. Even from the circles of Western culture, many voices that could be in some way in tune with this indigenous vision and vice versa have been raised and have been around for some time. The concept of Good Living not only has a historical anchorage in the indigenous world, it is also based on some universal philosophical principles; Aristotelians, Marxists, ecologists, feminists, cooperativists, humanists, etc.