

## 발전의 환영(幻影)에서 부엔 비비르(안락한 삶) 까지: 유토피아 건설

### From the ghost of development to Buen Vivir (living well): building utopias

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공동체의 조화로운 기반을 가장 상위에 위치한다는 기초적 사항을 참고한 초점을 통해 형성된 거대하고 다양한 경험적 대안을 구성할 수 있는 잠재성을 지니고 있다. 이 과제는 불필요한 낭만주의, 혹은 저속하고 불가능한 복제의 덧, 또는 대안에 대한 토의나 건설을 차단하는 독단적 입장으로 빠지지 않는 지속가능한 대화와 교류를 요구한다.

따라서 부엔 비비르는 그 원형적 기원과 공동체적 잠재성을 망각하지 않으면서도 기존 세계에서의 기후 변화, 소외성 및 사회적 폭력의 증가가 불러오는 파괴적 영향력에 대하여 토의하고, 동조하며, 반응하는 기반으로 작용할 수 있다. 이는 현재 지구를 강타하고 있는 사회적, 경제적, 생태적, 정치적 위기를 포괄하는 문명의 다면적 위기에서 발생한다. 인류는 자연과 더불어 어떻게 조화로운 공동체로 살지 배우고 그것을 오랜 기간 축적해 온 인간 집단으로부터 배울 수 있으며, 또 배워야만 한다. 그러나 우리는 무엇보다 먼저 왜 우리 스스로 발전의 이상을 기각하는 것이 필요한지에 대해부터 물어야 한다.

## 국문요약

부엔 비비르(말 그대로 잘 사는 것, 그러나 조화로운 공존을 의미하기도 한다)는 자연과의 조화와 개인과 공동체 사이의 조화를 전제로 하는 대안적 생활 비전이다. 이 글에서는 먼저 해당 개념의 한계를 지적하면서도, 이 개념이 가진 최근의 출처, 의미, 전망 및 동원적 잠재력에 대한 개략적 내용을 제공하고자 한다.

지구 다양한 곳의 비전과 생활 형태인 부엔 비비르는 자본주의 문명의 전형적 구조, 사회 경험 및 지배적 정치는 물론, 제품과 서비스의 생산, 이동, 유통 및 소비의 논리를 재고하게 하는 다양한 선택지를 제시한다.

부엔 비비르는 에콰도르의 철학자 볼리바르 에체베리아가 단언하는 생명과 모든 것을 질식시키는 문명에 대한 의문에서 비롯한다. 부엔 비비르는 그 무엇보다도 자연과 공

## Abstract

With its postulation of harmony with Nature and harmony among individuals and communities, as a proposal laden with experiences – and

as long as it is unobstructed by prejudice and assumed to be always under construction – Buen Vivir (literally living well, but also meaning good coexistence) allows alternative visions of life to be formulated.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we will start by laying bare the limitations of the concept of development.

Then we will provide a quick read on the recent origins, meaning, scope and mobilizing potential of Buen Vivir.

Let us begin, therefore, with an appetizer. Buen Vivir, in the form of visions and living practices in diverse corners of the planet, offers multiple options to reconsider the logic of production, movement, distribution and consumption of goods and services, as well as the structures, social experiences and dominant politics that are typical of capitalist civilization.

By questioning such civilization – which suffocates life and everything to do with it, as the Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría (2010) affirmed – Buen Vivir acquires the potential to construct alternatives from an enormous multiplicity of experiences, taking those focal points that constitute its fundamental basis as reference points: above all harmonious relations with Nature and community. This task will require opening up all possible dialogues and exchanges, without falling into the trap of useless romanticism or vulgar and impossible copies, nor into dogmatic positions that block the discussion and construction of alternatives.

Thus, not forgetting or manipulating its ancestral origins and its community potentiality, Buen Vivir can act as a platform to discuss, agree and even respond to the devastating effects of climate change and the increasing marginalization and social violence in the world. This opportunity arises in the midst of a multifaceted crisis – social, economic, ecological, political, and even a crisis of civilization – that is battering the planet. Humanity can, and must, learn from those human groups which have learnt how to live in harmonious communities and alongside Nature, those which have accumulated a long-life memory. But we must first ask ourselves why it is necessary to definitively dismiss the idea of development.

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## INTRODUCTION

With its postulation of harmony with Nature and harmony among individuals and communities, as a proposal laden with experiences – and as long as it is unobstructed by prejudice and assumed to be always under construction – Buen Vivir (literally living well, but also meaning good coexistence) allows alternative visions of life to be formulated.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we will start by laying bare the limitations of the concept of development. Then we will provide a quick read on the recent origins, meaning, scope and mobilizing potential of Buen Vivir. Let us begin, therefore, with an appetizer. Buen Vivir, in the form of visions and living practices in diverse corners of the planet, offers multiple options to reconsider the logic of production, movement, distribution and consumption of goods and services, as well as the structures, social experiences and dominant politics that are typical of capitalist civilization. By questioning such civilization – which suffocates life and everything to do with it, as the Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría (2010) affirmed – Buen Vivir acquires the potential to construct alternatives from an enormous multiplicity of experiences, taking those focal points that constitute its fundamental basis as reference points: above all harmonious relations with Nature and community. This task will require opening up all possible dialogues and exchanges, without falling into the trap of useless romanticism or vulgar and impossible copies, nor into dogmatic positions that block the discussion and construction of alternatives. Thus, not forgetting or manipulating its ancestral origins and its community potentiality, Buen Vivir can act as a platform to discuss, agree and even respond to the devastating effects of climate change and the increasing marginalization and social violence in the world. This opportunity arises in the midst of a multifaceted crisis – social, economic,

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ecological, political, and even a crisis of civilization – that is battering the planet. Humanity can, and must, learn from those human groups which have learnt how to live in harmonious communities and alongside Nature, those which have accumulated a long-life memory. But we must first ask ourselves why it is necessary to definitively dismiss the idea of development.

## DEVELOPMENT, AN UNATTAINABLE GHOST

Let us cast our minds back. Since the mid-twentieth century a ghost has traversed the world . . . that ghost is development. And even though most people certainly don't believe in ghosts, they have, at least at some time, believed in 'development', they have been influenced by 'development', they have pursued 'development', they have worked for 'development', they have lived off 'development' . . . and it is most likely that they continue to do so today. Without denying the validity of a long-standing process by which human beings have attempted to satisfy their needs in the best way, which could be understood as the search for development, we argue that the global mandate for development was institutionalized on 20 January 1949. The then President of the United States, Harry Truman, in the inaugural speech of his second term of office before Congress, defined the greater part of the world as 'underdeveloped areas'. In 'point four' of his address he affirmed that:

. . . we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people. (Truman, 1949)

In a few words, Truman set down a powerful ideological mandate:

Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens. It must be a worldwide effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom. With the cooperation of business, private capital, agriculture, and labor in this country, this program can greatly increase the industrial activity in other nations and can raise substantially their standards of living.

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The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-deal-

ing. (Truman, 1949)

In conclusion, the head of state of the world's most powerful country – conscious that especially the United States and other industrialized nations were ‘at the top of the evolutionary social ladder’ (Sachs, [1992] 1996) – announced that all societies would have to walk the same path (which would serve as the basis for Walt Whitman Rostow’s Stages theory) and aspire to a single goal, ‘development’. And, incidentally, set down the conceptual bases for another form of imperialism, ‘development’. The metaphor of development, appropriated from the natural world, acquired a rare vigour. It transformed into a goal to be achieved by all humanity. It became, and this is fundamental, a global mandate that involved the spread of the North American model of society, heir to many European values. Although Truman was assuredly not fully aware of what he was talking about, or of its transcendence, this would, to say the least, be an historic proposal. To better understand why this conclusion has been reached, it is worth remembering, as does Koldo Unceta (2014, p. 411), that:

... when Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, the debate on development that is today ongoing was in some way ‘inaugurated’. Prior to that, other thinkers – from Kautilya in ancient India, to Aristotle in Classical Greece, or Saint Augustine in medieval Europe – had theorized about the chances, or lack thereof, of certain actions or decisions when it came to achieving greater prosperity for citizens, countries, and kingdoms, and for their inhabitants. However, it would not be until the eighteenth century when, at the hands of enlightened thinking, a rational and universal perspective on these issues would begin to clear a path. With it, a development of knowledge would prevail that was increasingly emancipated from religion, as would a global understanding that was capable of going beyond the particular views influenced by local beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, after the Second World War, when the Cold War was getting under way, and during the rise of the nuclear threat and terror, the debate on ‘development’ established (and consolidated!) a structure of dichotomous domination: developed-underdeveloped, rich-poor, advanced-backward, civilized-savage. Even from critical positions that duality was accepted as indisputable, central-peripheral. From this visualization, the world was arranged in order to attain ‘development’. Plans, programmes, projects, theories, development manuals and methodologies flourished, as did specialist banks to finance

development, development aid, development training and education, communication for development and so on.

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Revolving around ‘development’, at the height of the Cold War, was the confrontation between capitalism and communism. The ‘Third World’ was invented and its members were used as pawns in the chess of international geopolitics. Both sides, the left and the right, establishing diverse specificities and differences, took on the challenge of achieving ‘development’. Across the length and breadth of the planet, communities and societies were – and continue to be – reordered to conform to ‘development’. This became the common fate of humanity, a non-negotiable obligation. At no point, in the name of ‘development’, did the central or developed countries, the benchmarks for the underdeveloped countries, renounce the various interventions and operations that interfered in the internal affairs of the peripheral or poor countries. Those same development aid policies were a sort of continuance of the previous policies applied to their former colonies. Thus, for example, in recent times we have noted recurring economic interventions by the IMF and the World Bank, and even military actions to drive the ‘development’ of backward countries, thereby protecting them from the influence of any of the rival powers. There has been no lack of interventions that have supposedly sought to safeguard or introduce democracy, as a political basis for the longed-for development. Meanwhile, the poor countries, in an act of generalized subordination and submission, accepted this state of affairs as long as they were considered to be developing countries or on course for development. In the exclusive circles of diplomacy and international institutions it is not common to speak of underdeveloped countries, and less common to accept that they are poor or peripheral countries, even in the quest for ‘development’. We know very well that it often considered a process of ‘development of underdevelopment’, as was noted with extreme lucidity by André Gunder Frank (1970, 1979), the German economist and sociologist and one of the greatest thinkers on dependency theory. In this way, and almost without need of an inventory, the countries that were deemed backward accepted the application of a set of policies, instruments and indicators in order to break out of their ‘backwardness’ and achieve that desired condition of ‘development’. That’s how things have been over the course of recent de-

cares, where almost all the countries in the world considered to be undeveloped have tried to follow the path mapped out. How many have achieved it? Very few, and that is if we even accept that what was achieved was, indeed, 'development'. On the way, when problems began to undermine our faith in 'development' and the grand theory of development began to leak on all sides, we sought alternatives to development. We affixed descriptions or adjectives to development to differentiate it from what made us uncomfortable, but we continued on the development trail: economic development, social

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development, local development, global development, rural development, sustainable development, eco-development, ethno-development, development on a human scale, endogenous development, development with gender equality, co-development, transformative development . . . at the end of the day, development. 'Development', like any belief that was never questioned, was simply redefined by its most high profile characteristics. It is worth pointing out that Latin America played an important role in generating controversial revisions to conventional development, such as structuralism or the different emphasis of the dependency theory, before arriving at other more recent positions. Its critiques were convincing; however, its proposals did not prosper. These unorthodox positions and critiques have great importance, but also suffer from several limitations. On the one hand, the proposals did not seriously question the conceptual centre of the idea of conventional development – understood as a linear progression – and in particular expressed in terms of economic growth. And when they did question it they failed in shaking off the bonds of anthropocentrism (Acosta, 2016). On the other hand, each of these questionings generated a wave of disconnected revisions. In some cases, they generated a peak in the critiques and even in the proposals, but, soon after, these efforts languished and the conventional ideas reclaimed centre stage. Later, and this is what interests us most in this chapter, it was realized that the issue is not simply accepting one or other path towards development. The paths towards development are not the big problem. The difficulty stems from the concept itself. Development, as a global and unifying proposal is utterly unaware, or in denial, of the dreams and struggles of the peoples deemed to be underdeveloped. This denial – which on some occa-

sions was even brutal – was often a product of direct or indirect action by the nations considered to be developed; let us remember, by way of example, the destructive activities of colonization or those of the IMF policies themselves. We now know that development, insofar as it means reproducing the lifestyles of the central countries, turns out to be unrepeatable on a global scale. Moreover, that consumerist and predatory way of life is putting the global ecological balance at risk and increasingly marginalizes masses of human beings from the (supposed) advantages of the much sought-after development. Despite undeniable technological advances, not even hunger has been eradicated from the planet. Note that this is not a matter of lack of food production. Food exists. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in a world where obesity and hunger live side by side, each year more than 1.3 billion tonnes of perfectly edible food, that could feed 3 billion people, are wasted: 670 million in the 438 Handbook on development and social change

Global North and 630 million in the Global South, including the poorest countries on the planet.<sup>3</sup> Seventy per cent of cereals traded in the world are determined by speculative logic. Food for cars is produced, whether it be called agrofuel or biofuel. The orientation towards profit and a lack of infrastructure, a result of bad public policy, means that in India a third of food goes bad before it reaches the consumer. An increasing amount of land mass is dedicated to an agriculture that is based on monoculture, which leads to a rapid loss of biodiversity. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and their technologies do their own thing. Since the beginning of the twentieth century this combination of activities has led to the loss of 75 per cent of the genetic diversity of plants. Currently, according to data from the German Ministry of Agriculture, 30 per cent of seeds are in danger of extinction. While 75 per cent of the world's food comes from 12 species of plants and five species of animals, just three species – rice, corn and wheat – contribute about 60 per cent of the calories and proteins obtained by humans from plants. Barely 4 per cent of the 250,000 or 300,000 species of known plants is used by human beings. According to Maristella Svampa (Brand, 2016), in Argentina 22 million of the 33 million hectares available for agriculture were converted into transgenic soybean crops. And in this scenario, when hunger assails more than a billion people in the world, we see how the large transnational food conglomerates such as Monsanto – now merged with

Bayer – continue to concentrate their power through control of seeds. Water is another resource at risk, presenting enormous inequality in its distribution and its increasingly unjustifiable use. In this context, it has been established that the world is undergoing generalized ‘bad development’, and that includes those countries considered developed. José María Tortosa (2011) points out that:

The functioning of the contemporary world system is ‘bad development’ (. . .) The reason is easy to understand: it is a system based on an efficiency that tries to maximize results, reduce costs and achieve an incessant accumulation of capital . . . If ‘anything goes’, the problem is not who is playing or why, the problem is the rules of the game itself. In other words, the world system has been badly developed as a result of its own logic and it is to this logic that we must look.

Now, as multiple simultaneous crises swamp the planet, we discover that the development ghost has provoked and continues to provoke disastrous consequences. It is possible for development to have no content, but it can justify the means and even the failures. We have accepted the rules of ‘anything goes’.<sup>4</sup> All is tolerated in the name of eschewing underdevelopment and in the name of progress. All is sanctified in the name of such a lofty and promising goal: we have to at least look like our superiors and to achieve this, ‘any sacrifice goes’.

Therefore, we accept environmental and social devastation in exchange for achieving ‘development’. In the name of development, to give an example, the grievous social and ecological destruction caused by mega-mining is accepted, even though it strengthens the system of extractivist accumulation, inherited from colonial days. And it is one of the direct causes of underdevelopment. We even reject our historical and cultural roots to modernize ourselves by emulating advanced – that is to say modern – countries. By doing this we reject the search for what could be taken to be self-modernization. The economy, seen from the point of view of capital accumulation, dominates the scene. Imported science and technology lay down the rules for the organization of societies. Along one path lies commercialization at any cost; we accept that everything is up for grabs. Therefore, the rich have determined that for the poor to escape from poverty (that is, for the poor to be like the rich) the poor must now pay to imitate them: buying their knowledge, and marginalizing and rejecting their own knowl-

edge and ancestral practices. In summary, the path followed since the post-war years and up to the present day has been complex. The results have not been satisfactory. In terms of global impact, as the great Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano (2000, p. 89) noted, ‘development’ became:

. . . a term of random biography . . . Since the Second World War it has changed identity and name many times, a tug of war between a constant economic reductionism and the insistent calls of all the other dimensions of social existence. That is, between very different power interests. And it has been greeted very unevenly from one time to another in our changing history. At the beginning it was without doubt one of the most mobilizing propositions of the second half of the century that is now approaching its end. Its promises swept along all sectors of society and somehow ignited one of the most bemusing and vibrant debates in history, but they slipped out of sight over an increasingly elusive horizon and their standard bearers and followers were caged by disillusionment.

Wolfgang Sachs, in 1996, was already conclusive in that respect:

The last forty years can be called the development era. That era is reaching its end. The time has come to write its obituary. Like a majestic lighthouse that guides the sailors towards the coast, ‘development’ was the idea that guided the emerging nations on their journey through post-war history. Independently of whether they were democracies or dictatorships, having been liberated from their colonial subjugation, the Southern countries declared development to be their primary aspiration. Four decades

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later, governments and citizens still have their eyes fixed on that light, twinkling now as far away as ever: every effort and every sacrifice is justified to achieve that goal, but the light continues to fade into the darkness. . . . the idea of development rises like a ruin in the intellectual landscape . . . deception and disillusionment, failures and crimes have been permanent companions of development and all tell the same tale: it didn’t work. Moreover, the historical conditions that catapulted the idea to prominence have disappeared: development has become antiquated. But above all, the hopes and desires that gave wings to the idea are now spent: development has come to be obsolete. ([1992] 1996, p. 1) When the futility of continuing to chase the development ghost is evident,

the search for alternatives to development emerges forcefully. That is to say, ways of organizing life outside of development, getting beyond development. This compels us to reject the conceptual kernel of the idea of conventional development – understood to be the realization of the concept of progress that was imposed several centuries ago. To go beyond capitalism and its logic of social and environmental devastation is an indispensable step. In this way, we probe the complex terrain of post-development and post-capitalism. Let us accept that for the majority of inhabitants of the planet, capitalism does not represent a promise or a dream to be fulfilled, it is a nightmare made reality. As Wolfgang Sachs himself indicated, it has taken time to begin to bid ‘farewell to the defunct idea in order to clear our minds for new discoveries’. In any event, even when ‘the idea of development is already a ruin in our intellectual landscape . . . its shadow . . . still obscures our vision . . .’ ([1992] 1996, p. 101). Despite the failure of the fundamental ideas of development, there are still those who believe that it is possible to ‘return to development’ through a critical revision of what development means as a proposition with colonial origins. If indeed the idea of development is in crisis in our intellectual landscape, we must necessarily also question the concept of progress that emerged forcefully 500 years ago in Europe. The fundamental elements of the dominant view imposed by development are nourished by the values imposed by the progress of civilization in Europe. It was, and is, an extremely expansionist and influential process that is also destructive.<sup>5</sup> Simply put, even though we know that development is outmoded, its influence will weigh upon us for quite some time. Let us accept, and this is no consolation, that we may escape development (and capitalism) while dragging many of its imperfections with us and that this will be a long and tortuous journey, with advances and setbacks, the duration and robustness of which will depend on the political clarity and action to take on the challenge. And we know that within the model of capitalism itself

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alternatives are emerging to overcome it. Besides, at its core there are indeed many experiences and practices of Buen Vivir that could transform into the germ of another civilization. The question that arises forcefully is whether it will be possible to escape from the grim embrace of the ghost of development and from that Leviathan par excellence we call progress?

## **BUEN VIVIR, UTOPIA MADE REALITY**

To appreciate the contributions of Buen Vivir, one must understand that it reflects diverse ways of life present in various communities in various parts of the planet, as well as those practices of resistance to the alienation and marginalization provoked by capitalist modernity and its consequences. These visions emerge from ancestral cultures, or more clearly from ‘indigenity’, in the terms of Aníbal Quijano (2014b). It is not a utopia yet to be built. Its values, experiences and civilizing practices as alternatives to capitalism make Buen Vivir an attainable and attained utopia. And insofar as it can be converted into a tool that expands the criticism of current civilization and offers concrete proposals for action, it could contribute to ‘a great transformation’, in the terms proposed by Karl Polanyi (1992). It is true that these life lessons exist largely in communities that have not been totally absorbed by capitalist modernity or that have stayed on the periphery. However, even in indigenous communities that have ‘succumbed’ to modernity, there are distinctive elements that could be recognized as Buen Vivir. Even in other spaces, not directly linked to the indigenous world, harmonious community life options are built between their members and Nature. Gradually, because of the debates that are taking place, useful bridges are being built for a joint reflection on what, for example, degrowth in the Global North and post-development in the Global South would represent, of which Buen Vivir is one of the most proactive exponents. Let us consider that Buen Vivir, or good coexistence, does not encapsulate any fully formed or indisputable proposal, does not stem from academic reflections or from partisan proposals. Nor does it attempt to become a single global mandate as happened with the concept of ‘development’ in the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, when speaking about Buen Vivir we think in plural terms, that is of good coexistence (Albó, 2009), and not of a single Buen Vivir, homogenous and impossible to construct. This good coexistence (or Buen Vivir, as it will be presented in the remainder of the text, but always thinking in plural terms) can open the door to pathways that, on the one hand, must be imagined in order to be built, but that, on the other hand, are already a reality. This is the great potential of these visions and experiences. From the start, we need to be aware that broadly speaking the indige-

nous worlds have been victims of colonial conquest as a process of exploitation and repression, something that has carried forward to the present day. The colonial and capitalist influence is present in these worlds under multiple guises, impeding any romantic approximation to its realities. Growing segments of the indigenous population have been absorbed by the capitalist logic and many indigenous people are even primary actors in the processes of capitalist accumulation. Equally there are indigenous groups, in extremely precarious situations, trapped in the mythical dream of development and progress which – objectively speaking – they will never attain. Moreover, as the migration processes from the countryside to the city intensify, so does the uprooting of the urban indigenous peoples, people who gradually become distanced from their traditional extended communities, but who even so, in certain cases, are somehow bearers of elements of *Buen Vivir*. *Buen Vivir* is therefore a task of (re)construction that depends on dismantling the universal goal of all societies: progress and its offshoot, development, as well as its multiple synonyms. But it does not only dismantle them; *Buen Vivir* – in a plural sense – proposes different visions, richer in content and, incidentally, more complex. Therefore, *Buen Vivir* presents an opportunity to build new ways of life as a community and to imagine other worlds, without being the sum total of either isolated practices nor of the good wishes of those who wish to interpret *Buen Vivir* in their own way. It is worth noting that in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador this proposal gained strength, in the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador in 2008 and the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009. Regrettably, in practice, the governments of these countries took their inspiration from the logic of economic development, very distant from that of *Buen Vivir*. Not just that but in these countries *Buen Vivir*, drained of its conceptual content, was transformed into a power mechanism to consolidate authoritarian regimes. Their expressions refer us back to *Buen Vivir* (Ecuador) or *Vivir Bien* (Bolivia),<sup>6</sup> originating from indigenous languages of South America, traditionally marginalized, but not vanished, such as *sumak kawsay* (in kichwa), *suma qamaña* (in aymara), *ñande reko* or *tekó porã* (in guaraní), *pénker pujústin* (shuar), *shiir waras* (ashuar) inter alia. There are similar notions in other indigenous peoples, for example among the Mapuche of Chile: *kyme mogen*, the Kuna of Panama: *balu wala*, the Miskito in

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Nicaragua: *laman laka*, and also in the Mayan tradition of Guatemala and in the Chiapa of Mexico. It is worth highlighting that such standpoints and proposals – similar in many regards, but not necessarily in all regards – are also present in various other areas, with different names and characteristics. They concern values, experiences and, above all, practices that existed in different periods and in different regions of Mother Earth. It is worth highlighting the *ubuntu* (sense of community: a person is a person only through other people and other living beings) in Africa<sup>7</sup> or *Swaraj* (radical ecological democracy) in India.<sup>8</sup> These proposals gained exceptional political momentum at the beginning of this millennium, when they entered the national debate – particularly in Bolivia and Ecuador – at a time of general crisis in the Nation-State, which was oligarchic and had colonial roots. In these two countries, there was a time of intense revolt during the era of neoliberalism, thanks especially to the growing organizational strength of the indigenous movements, in an alliance with other popular forces. This emergence of the indigenous movements is noteworthy, as vigorous political standard bearers of their own *Weltanschauung*. It explains the emergence and positioning of the paradigmatic ideas of *Buen Vivir*, typical of an indigenous world that had not managed to erase the processes of conquest and colonization, still present during the Republican era. In this context, the questioning and the ecological alternatives also began to be consolidated, many of them attuned to the vision of harmony with Nature that characterize *Buen Vivir*. In one way or another, all these anti-establishment visions have deep roots and are of great contemporary interest. This *Buen Vivir* proposal is based on a principle of historical continuity that needs the past and the present of the indigenous peoples and nationalities. It is nourished by the knowledge and experiences of the indigenous communities, and from their diverse ways of producing knowledge. It is fostered by their distinct ways of seeing life and by their relationship with *Pacha Mama*, Mother Earth. It accepts as a cohesive central concept the relationality and complementarity between all living beings (human or otherwise). It is forged from the principles of interculturality. It exists through socially responsible and reciprocal economic practices. Above all, as it is immersed in the search for, and construction of, alternatives by the popular and marginalized sectors, it will have to be re(constructed) from the bottom up and with Mother Earth, on a base of a democratic and community logic. What is most notable and profound about

these alternative ideas is that they emerge from traditionally marginalized groups, excluded, exploited

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and even decimated. They are proposals that have been invisible for a long time, that now invite us to uproot various concepts that were accepted as indisputable. In summary, they constitute post-development visions that go beyond the formerly valuable contributions of the unorthodox and dependentista Latin American trends that focused on ‘alternative development’. It is now increasingly necessary to generate ‘alternatives to development’. This is what Buen Vivir is about.

## **BUEN VIVIR: ITS CENTRAL CONCEPTS**

The concept of ‘development’ does not exist in any indigenous wisdoms and it is often rejected. That concept of a linear life-process that establishes a previous and subsequent state: underdevelopment and development, a dichotomy by which people and countries should act to attain well-being, as it is usually interpreted in the Western world. Neither do concepts of wealth and poverty exist as determined by the accumulation or lack of material goods. That is, dignified life for the community has to be assured today and is not a promise for tomorrow. There is no need for growth for all members of the community to live with dignity, as long as – as a starting point – an adequate distribution of income and redistribution of wealth is assured for all members of a community. Buen Vivir must be accepted as something dynamic, under permanent construction and reproduction. It is not a static or backward-looking concept. As a holistic proposal, one must understand the multiple elements that condition the human actions that promote Buen Vivir: knowledge, ethical and spiritual codes of conduct in relation to the environment, human values, a vision of the future, inter alia. Buen Vivir ultimately, constitutes a central category of what could be understood to be the life philosophy of indigenous societies.<sup>9</sup> From that perspective, conventional development (even progress) has been seen as a cultural imposition inherited from Western, hence colonial, knowledge. That is why many reactions against colonialism involve a distancing from developmentalism.

Therefore, Buen Vivir requires a process of decolonization (this should even be ‘depa-triarchalization’<sup>10</sup>). A process of intellectual, political, social, economic and above all cultural decolonization is necessary to achieve this. One of the key challenges is encapsulated in how we take control of knowledge and technology. Machines must be prevented from controlling human beings, as Ivan Illich recommended.<sup>11</sup> Technologies, especially those that save work and physical effort, should generate conditions that liberate human beings from capital-accumulating work. This has to be

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encouraged, liberating scientific knowledge<sup>12</sup> and motivating a respectful dialogue with ancestral wisdom, while the structures of production and consumption are transformed, as part of establishing other types of socie- ties that exclude exploitation of human beings and nature. As it has emerged from non-capitalist community roots, Buen Vivir is proposing a worldview different from that of the West. It also breaks with the anthropocentric logic of capitalism that is so dominant in Western civilization. In fact, it also questions the diverse socialisms that have existed to date. Let us not forget that capitalists and ‘socialists’ of every hue dispute which system best ensures development and progress, with economic growth among its principal tools. From this reading, Buen Vivir proposes a transformation with a civilizing effect, as it is not an anthropocentric proposal. To achieve it one would have to move towards a biocentric view, although in reality this would mean a system of harmo- nious relations with no central core. This points us towards community practices, not just individualistic ones; proposals based on plurality and diversity, not one-dimensional or monocultural. This does not mean that we first leave capitalism behind to then imme- diately press ahead with Buen Vivir. In fact, many life lessons of Buen Vivir have survived from colonial times until today. What is interesting to acknowledge is that now, as part of a profound emancipatory process, these proposals have emerged to construct elements that allow us to over- come, from within, capitalist civilization itself. Within the body of that ‘old society’, the forces that will overcome it are being incubated. Buen Vivir is a proposal that will have an impact in the present; it is not extending a simple invitation to go back in time and re-encounter an idyllic world, inexistent for others. Nor can it transform itself into a sort of religion with a catechism, manuals, ministries or even political commissars. Buen Vivir does not

deny the existence of conflicts, but it does not exacerbate them by promoting an organized society based on the permanent and inequitable accumulation of material goods, driven by an interminable competition between people who, en route, destructively expropriate from nature. Human beings cannot be seen as a threat or as subjects to be beaten and defeated. And Nature cannot be accepted as only a mass of objects to be exploited. Starting from this double verification, one must launch the search for answers in diverse spheres of strategic action. In summary, Buen Vivir is a civilizing proposal that reconfigures the prospect of a move beyond capitalism, the dominant civilization. However, it is necessary to accept that the indigenous vision is not the only inspiration that motivates Buen Vivir. Reflections on this (re)construction of civilizing alternatives can also be based on other philosophical 446 Handbook on development and social change principles that could change with the times, as long as these approaches overcome the dominant anthropocentric visions and accept that a dignified life is for all living beings or for none.

## **ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER BUEN VIVIR IN A BROADER CONTEXT**

To begin with, let us acknowledge the global unviability of the dominant lifestyle, based on premises of anthropocentric exclusion and exploitation. On a global scale the idea of growth, based on inexhaustible natural resources and a market that absorbs everything produced, has not led, nor will it lead, to achieving dignified living standards for all inhabitants of the planet. Quite the opposite. We know very well that economic growth does not guarantee ‘development’ and nor does it ensure happiness. We also know that the ‘developed’ countries are showing increasing signs of what is, in reality, maldevelopment. Apart from being mainly responsible for the acute environmental problems – such as those stemming from climate change, among other critical issues – the rifts that separate the rich from the poor in these countries are getting ever wider. Even when there is growth, this ends up widening the cracks in society: the wealth of the few is almost always based on the exploitation of the majority (a process that is ever-accelerating). Sometimes, even when poverty levels fall – laudable without a doubt – it does

not affect the structures of capitalist accumulation. The concentration of wealth grows and the levels of inequality increase. The complex and painful consequences of this reality – both nationally and internationally – are plain to see; for example, the increasing migration from the Southern countries to the United States and Europe, caused by multiple factors. Let us not fool ourselves: inequity, inequality and injustice, provoked by the increasing and boundless demands of capitalism, trigger more and more violence that ends up expelling populations from their territories – because of mega-mining, for example. The demands of accumulation, which require a growing economy, are based on the exploitation of labour, oligopolistic and monopolistic practices to control markets, increased financing of the economy, and, especially, the destruction of Nature. It is enough to see the brutal destruction – to varying degrees – caused by the expansion of activities typical of capitalist modernity: industrialization, urbanization and extractivism<sup>13</sup> which rapidly go beyond natural limits. The gauntlet has been thrown down. The maelstrom of economic growth

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must be stopped in its tracks, and even pushed back, especially in the Global North.<sup>14</sup> A finite world cannot tolerate permanent economic growth. To follow this path would lead us to an ever more unsustainable environmental situation, a socially more explosive situation. This sort of religion of economic growth, especially in the Global North, will have to be overcome at the hands of post-extractivism in the Global South.<sup>15</sup> Degrowth, in short, does not just involve physically slowing the ‘economic metabolism’: the economy must be subordinated to the mandates of the Earth and the demands of humanity, which is Nature itself. This requires a socio-environmental rationality that deconstructs the current logic of production, distribution, circulation and consumption. One has to uncouple from the perversity of global capitalism and, above all, speculation.<sup>16</sup> We must abandon the search for profits obtained by exploiting human beings and Nature. We require life options other than the utilitarianism and anthropocentrism of modernity. This alternative ethical perspective accepts intrinsic values in the environment: all beings have the same ontological value, even when they have no human use. Therefore, a larger question arises: how to build an economic structure that is independent from use and exchange value? And, above all, to do this without excluding useful human

values, so we can put together policies that move us beyond anthropocentrism. In summary, to achieve this we need to overcome the fetish for economic growth, decommercialize Nature and common goods, introduce inter-related and community criteria to value goods and services, decentralize and deconcentrate production, change the patterns of consumption, and especially redistribute wealth and power. These are some bases on which to collectively build another civilization. The need now arises to consolidate transdisciplinarity, advancing beyond interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary. The range of the various readings of reality need to be widened. We must aspire to the most complete and global knowledge possible, maintaining a dialogue with diverse human wisdom, considering the world both as a question and an aspiration. Above all, we require a post-economy that goes beyond the current 'economic science', as well as social sciences willing to learn from each other and to research together, accepting and studying the world as a diverse unit. It will mean a post-economy that must be subordinated to human demands and those of Nature, assuming a subordinate position among the social sciences, from which it can be nourished and which it must support, not dominate, as occurs frequently today. It does not mean 'living better' (better than others, in an indefinite and unsustainable way), it means building alternatives to Mal Vivir (literally 448 Handbook on development and social change

bad living, but also meaning poor coexistence) that, although it exists across the entire planet, does not affect all equally. With the globalization of capital and its multiple forms of accumulation, most of the world's population is anything but materially comfortable and they observe how this evolution is affecting their safety, freedom and identity more and more. As in the Middle Ages, today most of the population is structurally marginalized from progress. Very many people do not participate in the profits of technology, they are either excluded or merely receive the scraps. In many cases they do not even have the 'privilege' of being exploited while they dream of reaching standards of living that are unrepeatable on a global scale. This is a complex question: the spread of certain patterns of consumption, in a pirouette of absolute perversity, seeps into the collective imagination, even into broad groups without the financial wherewithal to access this consumption, keeping them as prisoners of the permanent desire to attain it. Remember that the media – private and even public and state – promote con-

sumerism and individualism, in a maelstrom of information where everything dissolves into a programmed banality. And similar to medieval inquisitorial practices the media marginalize what they should not, based on the logic of power, by denying space for its diffusion.<sup>17</sup> In this context, not only do institutions appear which control information but they convert the individuals themselves (simple consumers) into the authors of their own alienation. Very many people produce while thinking about consuming, but at the same time they live with the permanent lack of satisfaction of their needs, exacerbated by the demands of accumulation. Therefore, production and consumption create a vicious circle without a future, irrationally exhausting natural resources, contaminating the countryside and the cities, straining social inequities. In addition, several technological advances have accelerated this perverse circle of increasing production and unsatisfied appetites. Without denying the importance of many technological advances, not all of humanity benefits from such achievements. The technique moreover is not neutral. Frequently it is developed according to the demands of capital accumulation. We human beings have seen ourselves become simple tools for machines, when the relationship should be inverse. From this perspective, to create another type of technique one has to transform the conditions of social production. The search for these new ways of life involves revitalizing the political discussion, which has been obfuscated by the economic vision of available means and ends. When the economy is deified, and in particular the market, many non-economic instruments are abandoned, instruments that would be indispensable for improving living conditions. For example,

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believing that the global environmental problems will be resolved by market measures is a mistake that could cost us dearly; it has been demonstrated that standards and regulations (still insufficient) are more effective than the 'laws' of the capitalist economy of supply and demand. But that is not all. We cannot continue commercializing Nature, a process that promotes its unchecked exploitation; quite the opposite, it has to be de-commercialized; we have to re-engage with it, ensuring its capacity for regeneration, based on respect, responsibility and reciprocity.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the resolution of these problems demands a multidisciplinary approach as we live in a situation of multiple complexities that cannot be explained by mono-causal accounts. When these proposals are

considered from the Buen Vivir perspective, as long as they are actively accepted by the societies especially at the community level, they can be forcefully transmitted in debates held in diverse regions of the world and could even be a trigger for using proposals to confront the increasing alignment of a great majority of the planet's inhabitants. In other words, the discussion on Buen Vivir should go beyond the Andean and Amazonian realities, and taken to those constituencies in diverse parts of the planet where similar options are experienced or constructed. If indeed it is extremely difficult to take on the challenge of constructing Buen Vivir in societies that are immersed in the maelstrom of capitalism – above all in the big cities – we are convinced that there are many options to begin construction of this utopia in other parts of the planet, and even in industrialized countries and the cities themselves. The starting point is not in the states, in the governments and less still in the market, for as long as it is an all-embracing body. The state has to be profoundly rethought, perhaps going down the road of plurinationality, as indigenous movements would argue.<sup>19</sup> An authentic democratization of power requires the social control and participation of the bases of rural and urban society, of the neighbourhoods and the communities. The social movements and new political parties play a central role, profoundly attuned to, and rooted in, the respective society. That society, founded on a flat power structure, demands democracy and direct action as well as self-management – not new forms of top-down leadership, and still less individual leaders, autocrats and visionaries. Resolution of day-to-day problems and demands form favourable ground for transformative grass-roots political action. But in this collective search for multiple alternatives, above all in the community spaces, the current global challenges cannot be ignored. For example, one would have to tackle the current international economic situation – intolerable in social, ecological and even economic terms.

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Without going into this subject in too much depth, due to lack of space, it is broadly accepted that the speculative structure of the international financial market has to be dismantled, where ill-gotten capital absconds to tax havens, as do monies linked to wars and terrorism. Equally questionable is the existence of diverse financial institutions which serve as tools of political pressure, so that a large state or an authority controlled by a few powerful states can impose conditions (typically unsustainable) on

weaker countries; that has happened and still happens with external debt, which has been transformed into a tool of political domination.<sup>20</sup> It is equally necessary to encourage routes to world peace. That involves promoting massive disarmament, using these resources to meet the most pressing needs of humanity and thereby deactivating many violent processes. But one has to go further. If humans do not re-establish peace with Mother Earth, there will be no peace for humans on Earth: therefore, a harmonious re-engagement with Nature is required, as proposed by the essential logic of Buen Vivir. The door to this approach will open if the rights of Nature are crystallized.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Buen Vivir calls for the construction of a life of self-sufficiency and self-management among human beings living in community, ensuring the self-regenerating power of Nature. That is certainly a great challenge for humanity. This will promote what is local and autochthonous, renewed local spaces, national and regional decision-making, and from there global democratic spaces will be constructed, creating new territorial and conceptual maps.

## **BUEN VIVIR AND THE RECOVERY OF UTOPIAS**

To try to solve this riddle will not be easy. For a start, we must reencounter the 'utopian dimension', as the Peruvian, Alberto Flores Galindo, proposed in the 1980s. This involves strengthening those conceptual approaches and assessments of community life, such as relationality and reciprocity. Equally the basic values of democracy will have to be consolidated: liberty, equality, solidarity and equity, as well as political, religious, sexual and cultural tolerance. And this, as was noted earlier, involves a political-cultural re-engagement with Nature. In summary, Buen Vivir opens the way to building an emancipatory project. A project that, by taking many stories of struggle, of resistance and proposals for change, by taking nourishment from experiences that are, above all, local and adding them to those contributions springing forth from different latitudes, it positions itself as a starting point for

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democratically constructing sustainable societies in all spheres. Thus, subjects such

as the construction of a new economy or the rights of Nature or making human rights a full and valid reality, are outlined also as questions that interest humanity and as such must be discussed and tackled. There is no simple recipe for constructing a different society. However, not having a predetermined path is not a problem. Quite the opposite. It frees us from dogmatic views, although it does demand greater clarity from us in terms of the destination we wish to reach, accepting the transition towards another civilization as a part of Buen Vivir itself. Not only does the destination count, but also the path or paths to achieve human life with dignity, guaranteeing a present and a future for all human beings and non-humans, thereby ensuring the survival of humanity on the planet. Calling again on the thoughts of Flores Galindo: construct a different society, ‘there is no recipe. There is no trail blazed, no alternative defined. It has to be constructed’ (1993).

## NOTES

1. The list of texts dealing with this subject is ever increasing. We mention, among many other contributions, the texts of the author of these lines. It is worth noting therefore that a large part of the reflections of this article form part of a process of permanent learning and criticism that the author has carried out over many years.
2. To track the origins of this debate on development one has to go back to the works of Adam Smith, Karl Marx or especially Friedrich List (1789–1846), who, with his book *Das nationale System der Politischen Ökonomie* (1841), can be considered a pioneer in this field of development. More recently we have the contribution of Joseph Schumpeter (1912), with his book *The Theory of Economic Development*; he maintained, let us remember, that development is an economic fact, rather than a social one. The list of authors who tackled this topic after 1949 is long and diverse in focus and contributions: Arthur Lewis, Gunnar Myrdal ([1957] 1959), Walt Whitman Rostow, Nicholas Kaldor, among many others. Of course, one would also have to include dependentistas and structuralists, highlighting Raúl Prebisch, Celso Furtado, Aníbal Quijano, Ruy Mauro Marini, Agustín Cueva, André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Theotonio dos Santos, among others, to complete a long list of people who have participated in one of the richest and most intense debates in the history of humanity. A recommended book on this subject is that by Jürgen Schuldt (2012).
3. Cited by Jürgen Schuldt (2013). This Peruvian economist is another of the most prominent researchers on the subject of development and its criticism.
4. In the form of combat known as ‘Anything Goes’ the fighters may use any martial art or contact sport, as the rules allow any technique and type of fighting.
5. From 1492, when Spain invaded Abya Yala (America) with a strategy of domination for exploitation, Europe imposed its imagination to legitimize the superiority of the European, the ‘civilized’, and the inferiority of the

other, the 'primitive'. At this point the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of the being emerged. These colonialities remain valid until today. And it has in the idea of race, consolidated then, the most effective instrument of social domination in the last 500 years. It is not a memento of the past. Coloniality explains the current organization of 452 Handbook on development and social change the world in its entirety, in that fundamental point in the agenda of modernity. Among the critics of coloniality we highlight Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, José de Souza Santos, Enrique Dussel, Edgardo Lander, Enrique Leff, Alejandro Moreano, inter alia. Above all we recommend from among these various authors the contributions of Aníbal Quijano, whose most outstanding works are mostly contained in *Cuestiones y Horizontes – Antología Esencial – De la dependencia histórica-estructural a la colonialidad/ decolonialidad del poder*, Buenos Aires: CLACSO (2014a).

6. The list of texts that tackle this subject is ever longer. It is worth noting the contributions of Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2010), Atawallpa Oviedo Freire (2011), Josef Estermann (2014), Omar Felipe Giraldo (2014), Eduardo Gudynas, Pablo Solón (2016), inter alia; one could even retrieve the approaches to the common good of humanity by Francois Houtart (2011).
7. A brief approximation to the subject is available in the book by Giacomo D'Alisa et al. (2015).
8. Can be consulted in Ashish Kothari et al. (2015).
9. Normally in the indigenous world there are few written texts. As they are oral cultures this is understandable. A text that contributed, in Ecuador, to spreading these ideas was that by Carlos Viteri Gualinga (2000), 'Visión indígena del desarrollo en la Amazonía', Quito (mimeo). Someone who has worked on the origin of Buen Vivir, above all in Ecuador, is David Cortéz.
10. It must be recognized that in many indigenous communities, patriarchal and machista characteristics are deeply rooted.
11. See the compilation of the main texts by Ivan Illich (2015). This author is regaining renewed strength in the framework of the debates on degrowth and in the search for profoundly transformative alternatives. 12. On this subject one may consult, for example, the book by several authors, *Varios autores (2015) Flok Society – Buen Conocer, Modelos sostenibles y políticas públicas para una economía del conocimiento común y abierto en Ecuador*, Quito: Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales.
13. A recommended study on extractive activities is offered by Eduardo Gudynas (2015).
14. Texts on this issue are increasingly numerous. It is interesting to note the contribution by various authors in the book by D'Alisa et al. (2015).
15. Alberto Acosta and Ulrich Brand (2017).
16. See the proposals summarized by Alberto Acosta and John Cajas-Guijarro (2015).
17. It should be pointed out that despite the existing limitations, via social networks other forms of freer communication are beginning to emerge.
18. Here it is worth highlighting the valuable reflections of Vandana Shiva (1996) in this respect in the *Diccionario del desarrollo – Una guía del conocimiento como poder*, edited by Wolfgang Sachs in the 1990s (see 1996 edition, Peru: PRATEC).
19. Discussions on plurinationality and the contributions of the indigenous world in this sense are extremely broad in Bolivia and to a lesser degree in Ecuador. From a very long list, one can recommend German texts

by Isabella Radhuber (2013) and Philipp Altmann, as well as contributions by Boaventura de Souza Santos, Aníbal Quijano and Raúl Prada Alcoreza (2010, 2014), inter alia.

20. The proposal to form an International Tribunal for Arbitration of Sovereign Debt by Oscar Ugarteche and Alberto Acosta (2007). The convincing elements of this initiative have already been debated and approved in the core of the United Nations, although with the expected rejection by the great powers that benefit from these inequitable structures in the international financial sector.
21. An important contribution to this discussion is the book by Eduardo Gudynas, *Los Derechos de la Naturaleza – Respuestas y aportes desde la ecología política* (2016). From the ghost of development to Buen Vivir 453

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