

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC POWER

Buen Vivir:
An introduction from a
women's rights perspective in Bolivia



by Martha Lanza,
Fundación Colectivo
Cabildeo Bolivia

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Association For Women's Rights in Development

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The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

As many women's rights and feminist groups have noted, we continue in a context of converging global crises. Economic and financial crises cannot be seen in isolation from the food, energy, water, environment/climate, human rights, and care crises. These interlocking crises are part of a failed development model: a model which, at its core, is largely gender blind, patriarchal, and indifferent to human rights, including women's rights.

Women have extensive experience in survival and resistance strategies to failed development models and the recurring crises these have caused. In the lead-up to the 12th AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, we are producing this series to share contributions, by feminist and other social movements, towards transforming economic power. Over the past three years, AWID has been examining the impact of and responses to the systemic crisis from a feminist and women's rights perspective. This series builds on that work to explore diverse alternative development visions—indeed alternative ways to organize economies.

This series does not presume to offer a comprehensive or a complete alternative model to the mainstream economic system. The aim of the series is to share and promote critical analysis on a range of alternative visions and practices that progressive social movements and feminist groups are implementing across the world. We have reached out to key groups, pioneers, and in some cases the

very creators of the concepts covered in this series, to share their visions and practices. These groups continue to work with, and nuance and adapt the concepts in alliance with others. Their contributions aim to: share experiences from the ground and testimonies from diverse groups of women; provide analysis; and build knowledge on alternative visions and practices of development, with a vision of transformation.

As we engage with these alternatives from a critical feminist perspective, we aim to raise awareness and foster debate with women's groups as well as mixed civil society groups on the gendered aspects of alternative paradigms. This work on feminist perspectives towards transforming economic power contributes to the dialogue, the debate, and action on the crisis of the dominant development and economic model as well as sustainable ways forward that work for all people—women and men—and the planet.

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ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

Below the surface of a progressive political environment across Latin America—stimulated by a general realization that the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s have failed the people—fundamental changes are taking place, particularly in the Andean countries of Bolivia and Ecuador.

Indigenous peoples represent a large proportion of the population in these countries, in the case of Bolivia they are the majority. In an effort to overcome the colonial past that has marked South America's history, indigenous movements are pushing for new guiding principles. Both Bolivia and Ecuador have recently adopted new constitutions that enshrine the concept of *Sumak Kawsay*—the Quechua expression that can be translated into Spanish as *Buen Vivir*, and in English means Living Well. This perspective recognizes plurinational states and regards nature as a legal entity that has rights.

Buen Vivir, as a concept under construction, aims to shift the mindset of production and consumption against growth-based development. It is a response to years of colonial and neo-colonial rule based on the exploitation of natural resources in detriment of the planet and the indigenous communities living in areas rich in oil, gas, minerals, and biodiversity.

This article introduces the concept of Buen Vivir both in its ideological construction and in its implementation in public policies in Bolivia. Specifically, the author examines the notion that Buen Vivir is gender neutral. In fact, one of the

major challenges identified is dismantling patriarchal power structures that are restricting women's participation in decision making and invisibilizing gender inequalities within indigenous communities.

The author, Martha Eugenia Lanza Meneses, is a gender research fellow at Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Bolivia working with diverse ethnic groups of women in the country.

For the perspective from Ecuador, the article by Magdalena León on the experiences of Buen Vivir in Ecuador from a feminist economic perspective is included at the end of this article.

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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF BUEN VIVIR IN BOLIVIA

In Bolivia, **Buen Vivir** is not only a concept, but a **political alternative** that is taking shape by recovering the memory, the **cosmovision**, and the structures of the **original native authorities**.

Sociologist María Eugenia Choque—who has been analyzing the concept of Buen Vivir since the 1980s in the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA, Andean Oral History Workshop) and within the Julián Apaza University Movement from the perspective of **Indianist ideology**—understands Buen Vivir as part of “a framework to reconstruct indigenous authorities through research based on oral history. What we did was work the issue of Buen Vivir as a process of political, economic, social and cultural well being, from an approach of recovering self-esteem and identity” (Choque, 2010).

At the same time (in the 1980s and 1990s), organizational processes of indigenous peoples such as the **CONAMAQ**, took place.

“For us in CONAMAQ, we are the promoters and creators of Buen Vivir. ... We have set it out in accordance with the wisdom of our *achachilas*, our forefathers. Since they lived in harmony with nature, they did not need wealth, minerals, or technology; now, this does not mean that we should not use technology if we have it. For us in CONAMAQ, technology and ancestral wisdom has to be combined in connection with respect for mother earth. Buen Vivir relates to self-government, this is the great struggle of

Buen Vivir translates as Living Well.

The concept of **political alternative** is used for all proposals to change the economic, cultural and social basis of a given system, such as socialism presented as a political alternative to capitalism.

A **cosmovision or world view** is the set of knowledge and acknowledgements a person, time, or culture has about how it sees the world, an image based on the interpretation of ones own nature and of everything that surrounds him/her. A cosmovision defines shared notions applied to all fields of life, from politics, the economy or science, even religion, morality or philosophy.

Original native authority refers to the political system of the indigenous communities that choose their authorities in accordance with their cosmovision, use, and custom. Maintaining this type of authority has been and still is a cultural resistance of the communities against subjugation under authorities promoted by the modern state, which correspond to the general notion of democracy (senators, deputies, president, etc.), but which are not acquainted with the indigenous traditions of choosing authorities.

Indianist ideology (*ideología indianista*) is the name given to an ideology that values indigenous cultures over and against the values of Western culture. This ideology believes that human society should go back to the indigenous ways of economy, organization, health, etc. as a way to live in harmony with nature.

CONAMAQ, The National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu is an indigenous organization that sees itself as part of a general process to reconstitute Bolivian indigenous cultures, including its territorial reconstitution, above all in the Andean area of Bolivia. Its organizational form corresponds to the ancestral communitary structure of the *ayllus* (grass roots communities) and *markas* (groups of ayllus). The strength and mobilization capacity of this organization has made it one of the cornerstones of the current process of change in Bolivia.

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the original indigenous peoples. We want to achieve autonomy, for us to be able to determine what to do with our resources” (Benito and Curasavi, 2010).

Parallel to this, during the articulation processes of the indigenous peoples of the *tierras bajas* (lowlands), similar visions to Buen Vivir were being constructed, including the Harmonious Life, the Good Life, the Land without Evil, and the Noble Path of Life. According to sociologist Emilio Hurtado, in all the cultures of eastern Bolivia “giving” is fundamental to guaranteeing the reproduction of individual lives and the strength of society,

“The most important thing was to have a different wealth; instead of accumulating it for myself, I have to give. And that which I am giving is not someone else’s, I am giving a part of my life, because this is what I have produced with my own effort and work, like corn, for example” (Hurtado, 2010).

Over the last few years Buen Vivir, which arose as part of an internal reflection process in the development of indigenous thinking and organization, has become a central issue in Bolivian reform.

The indigenous reflection process has its roots in the profound political and economic crisis of neo-liberalism, which, along with the questioning of the dominant economic model based on the concept of development (free market, private initiative and downsizing of the government), has unleashed urban uprisings (like the Water War¹ in 2000, or the Gas War² of 2003). The mobilization

of indigenous peoples in multitudinous marches across the country demanded the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly to redefine the vision of the country and the role of the State.

These uprisings coincided with what was called the *Agenda de Octubre* (October Agenda), an anti-neoliberal and anti-colonial agenda. It demanded a profound and complete transformation of the economic, political and social framework of the Bolivian State and society.

The people of Bolivia are going through a process of construction that is questioning the development model in the Andean region and at a continental level. That is why Buen Vivir is a concept under construction; it is being debated, not only within indigenous organizations, but also within the Bolivian State itself and throughout the region. In this process, new viewpoints and new actors (both men and women) are being incorporated.

For example, Article 8, Paragraph I of the new Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia establishes that the state postulates and promotes the “...ethical-moral principles of a plural society, ...the *suma qamaña* (Buen Vivir),

1. In 2000, the people of Cochabamba, Bolivia rose up against the privatization of their water, forcing out US based corporations like Bechtel, while Bolivia’s neo-liberal government had to back down.

2. The gas war in Bolivia in 2003, saw mass protests rejecting the government’s economic policies concerning natural gas exports. The conflict came to a head in October 2003, leading to the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada.

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ñandereko (harmonious life), *teko kavi* (good life), *ivi maraei* (land without evil) and the *qhapaj ñan* (noble path of life)” (Constitution of Bolivia).

The current challenge is the interpretation and implementation of these principles in new legislation, public policies, and everyday life.

Buen Vivir is rooted in communitarian thinking and the key principles are:

- a. A criticism of the consumer and individualistic society.
- b. A proposal for ecological awareness that emphasizes the need to build a harmonious relationship with nature.

Currently in Bolivia, Fernando Huanacuni, an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca are recognized as two important thinkers linked to Buen Vivir. For Huanacuni,

“Buen Vivir implies complementing each other and sharing without competing; living in harmony among people and with nature. It is the basis for defending nature, life itself and humanity as a whole. Buen Vivir is not the same as living better; living better is at the expense of the other. Living better is egotistical, lacking interest for others, individualism, thinking only of profit; living better than our fellow beings leads to a need to exploit. Extreme competition is produced, wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few ... In our communities we do not want to live better, since living better accepts that some can be better off at the expense of others” (Huanacuni 38).

The key principles of Buen Vivir are a criticism of the consumer and individualistic society and a proposal for ecological awareness that emphasizes the need to build a harmonious relationship with nature.

Along those lines, Minister Choquehuanca says that Buen Vivir is not only becoming an alternative in relation to capitalism but also to socialism,

“We find that capitalism does not care about life, the most important thing is money, the production of surplus value, [On the other hand] socialism seeks to satisfy the ever greater needs, material as well as spiritual, of human beings. ...For us, the center are neither human beings nor money, the most important thing is Life. ...The struggle of the *aymaras* goes beyond socialism” (Choquehuanca, 2010).

Buen Vivir is also the reconstruction of indigenous identity, recovering their values or the “return to our own path,” as Choquehuanca explains. This debate also reflects on the relationship between Buen Vivir and Development; whether, for example, it is possible to relate these concepts or whether they are contradictory. In this regard, a document from the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Plurinational State of Bolivia states:

“...for the construction of Buen Vivir, talking about development is not useful as the latter is related to living better; we need to

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create the material and spiritual conditions to construct and maintain Buen Vivir, in the sense of a harmonious life under ongoing construction. ...The introduction of development slowly annihilates Buen Vivir, because it fragments the communal and cultural life of our communities by doing away with the basis for subsistence as well as our capabilities and knowledge to be able to satisfy our own needs as well as those of Mother Nature” (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ministry of Foreign Relations 190).

So, it is believed that development —understood here as capitalistic market economy growth—is grounded in a vision in which indigenous people access modernity through integration into the market, renouncing their self-determination and becoming increasingly dependent on the state. For this reason, the alternative to a market economy would be to make the community the nucleus of economic organization, where the industrial community would only be complementary. If the economy is organized in this way, then the political would be “the direct exercise of sovereignty based on the *Ayllu*, based on private possession and common property, where everything is led by the rotation of authorities which eliminates “the powers in power” thus preventing the establishment of groups of elite that usurp communal power by representing it” (Ministry of Foreign Relations 169).

In the Buen Vivir paradigm the alternative to a market economy would be to make the community the nucleus of economic organization, where the industrial community would only be complementary.

The government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia sets out ten key elements for Buen Vivir as part of Saving Planet Earth to Save Humanity:

1. Eradicate the capitalist model.
2. Denounce and end wars.
3. Develop relations of coexistence, not subjection, among countries. A world without imperialism or colonialism.
4. Water is a human right and its privatization must be prevented, since water is life.
5. Development of environmentally friendly energy, to end the squandering of energy.
6. Respect for Mother Earth.
7. Basic services, such as water, education, health, communication, and collective transportation should be borne in mind as human rights, they cannot be a private business, but rather a public service.
8. Consume what is necessary, prioritize what we produce and consume what is produced locally. Put an end to consumerism, waste and luxury
9. Promote diversity of cultures and economies.
10. Live well in harmony with Mother Earth, which means not living better at the expense of another.

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According to the Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Native Women of Bolivia, Buen Vivir embraces not only the collective view but also relations between men and women. “The development proposals arise out of respect for our Mother Earth, Pachamama, and respecting ourselves as the owners of these territories. As women, our emancipation is part of the construction of Buen Vivir in the exercise of and participation with gender equity in all political, union, social, public spaces...” (Strategic Plan 2008-2013).

For women grassroots leaders, Buen Vivir is expressed in different ways, but always closely linked to their experiences under colonization.

“They have denied us the right to property and land. In other words, women had no right to property or land. Not only have those from the outside exploited us, we have also been exploited by employers, by political parties, and business people. Our mindset has to change and this is also part of decolonization, of Buen Vivir. We, as indigenous peoples are very hopeful; we are seeing that the government was never here for us before, but now we do have that strength; we are also, because of that, seeing how we can support, how we can build this society. So, from here onwards, we have to make very clear public policies in order to consolidate Hope” (Huanto and Mamani).

Out of this emerges their vision of Buen Vivir:

“...we have to salvage our customs, the culture of our forebears; only this way will we stop being a colony, only this way will we decolonize, only by salvaging the culture from before, in order to get back to what was before. But we also need to look at what is new [the products of modernity that we associate with western society] such as advances in technology and new laws” (Huanto and Mamani).

“Buen Vivir has to do with prioritizing health and education, for everyone to live in dignity, ...having the state closer to us, listening to us, and state policies that respond to the needs of the people. [This is a completely different relationship than the one grounded in dependency]. This must be fostered and not dragged down by old ways of doing things” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

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DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY AND DECOLONIZATION

In Bolivia, Buen Vivir is acknowledged as a contribution stemming from indigenous thought and is, therefore, related to the struggles of indigenous peoples. Contributions from women indigenous leaders, however, have had little visibility. The link between Buen Vivir and women's rights is often missing. The struggles of women for their rights and gender equality are not central concerns of those who have formulated the concept of Buen Vivir.

It is only just now in this process of political and social change in Bolivia that patriarchy is beginning to be questioned but the concept *Chacha-Warmi* (complementarity between men and women) has yet to be put into practice as a basic principle.

Amazonian indigenous leaders have offered interesting historical data, such as the role of Catholicism in making gender relations patriarchal. Before the arrival of the Jesuit Missions of the Chiquitos in the 17th and 18th century "... among my Guaraní people, there was no division of man vs. woman like in modern societies. [But after colonization], the indigenous man no longer sees the woman as an equal, but [he] is being trained by Catholicism to see her as an object of exploitation" (Hurtado). However, the vision of gender relations within traditional indigenous

communities should not be idealized. Hurtado argues that in terms of exercising authority, the chief leader, or *muruvicha guasu*, can be a woman or a man. Both have to meet the requirements that are approved collectively. However, the gender inequalities in participation and decision-making tend to be invisible, plus the fact that the conditions required by the western, capitalist system for political participation actually prevent the inclusion and presence of women in public affairs and positions of power.

Another tension between the concept of Buen Vivir and gender equality is the interpretation or translation of a woman's words about her situation in the community by the intellectuals. This is related to what can be called the colonization of knowledge: when an indigenous woman says something the intellectuals interpret the woman's message in their own way, reflecting a different sense of her words than she intended. This occurrence does not, of course, do away with the idea that women also idealize their own gender relations in the community:

"...for example, the intellectuals listen to you, but they always interpret things in their own way, for example they say that the indigenous woman is subordinate to the man, ...but in our lives, in our communities, there is this complementary relationship between men and women, this is what we feel" (Huanto).

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The dominant discourse among indigenous women is closer to the cosmogonic conception of gender, and this is how they establish their role in Buen Vivir. To date, no radically different proposals are known to have come from indigenous women, although, from a feminist perspective, there are interesting efforts to relate the cosmogonic perspective of indigenous women to the framework of women's human rights. This effort will be discussed in the next section on analyzing public policies on gender from the point of view of Buen Vivir.

In the Buen Vivir model, the concept of *Chacha-Warmi* offers women a space for struggle against gender inequality, since it seeks complementarity between men and women, appealing to the reconstitution of balance and harmony that are said to have existed in gender relations before colonization. Thus, *Chacha-Warmi* is posited as the path to rebuild what was destroyed by colonization, specifically in relation to social relations, in general, and gender relations in particular. Along these lines, reference is made to a kind of pair essence in all elements of nature combining the feminine and the masculine in a harmonious fashion. It talks about reconstituting the indigenous woman's strength of bringing forth life. With regard to this, Choquehuanca states:

"The role of the native indigenous woman is becoming more and more indispensable.

When no longer treated as victims, dependents, minors, the wisdom of women and their strength to give life and create life constitutes an invaluable alternative for future generations" (2010 b).

In Buen Vivir, the concept of *Chacha-Warmi* seeks complementarity between men and women, appealing to the reconstitution of balance and harmony that are said to have existed in gender relations before colonization.

There are those, in another line of thinking, who believe that inequalities between men and women do exist, but not in all spheres of community life. María Eugenia Choque states that, in farming, the gender

relationship might be more balanced, as the functions and division of labor are shared:

"...in general, it is the man who opens the rows for sowing. In these activities, the participation of men and women is really part of the concept of Buen Vivir. From the time she is born, she is educated in the framework of Buen Vivir, you have to place the seed well, you place it, there is no conflict" (Choque).

The problems arise at the level of political participation because it is here that the productive participation of women on equal terms with men, and active participation in social change is not reflected, but rather made invisible.

This gender inequality in political participation might arise from the issue of power and its distribution within the community. The role of women,

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the distribution of power within the community, as well as the role of modern politics in shaping political life in the community must be examined.

Similarly, theoretical tendencies of an essentialist interpretation of the community—through a particular understanding of indigenous history—can result in denying the existence of contradictions, including real gender inequalities. In some cases, this can result in attributing gender inequality solely to the results of western thinking.

These debates show how the issue of gender, within the concepts of Buen Vivir and within the community itself, pose challenges. The idealization of gender relations in Chacha-Warmi does not explain, for example, why the women of indigenous communities found themselves needing to establish women's groups within their parent organizations or to establish their own autonomous organizations. It is also unclear what role the state, feminism, the church, or NGOs have had in the establishment of these autonomous women's organizations.

Problematizing and nuancing Buen Vivir is not about trying to fit community reality within a feminist frame; rather it is about highlighting potential gender inequality within this model and the struggle of women to create conditions for political participation within their unions and associations, under conditions—in some cases—of subordination to their peers and domestic

violence in the most extreme cases. Grassroots leadership is developing a discourse that makes this visible:

“...for example, when my husband can't attend the community meeting, I go to represent him. When they call roll, they say my husband's name and I raise my hand and say, Here! But that does not count! They say, well, that does not count because it is only his wife. That is what happens in

our community, this is the way it always is in the 36 communities, it's the same; a woman is not valued. I also work for daily wages and I also do the household chores: now, when there are meetings in

the community, we women, are left aside, but the men, among their friends, they talk after the meeting, they go somewhere else and we women go home to see our children, we are not given our due (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

It is important to note that these struggles are not exclusive to indigenous women; they are present in many spheres of power and are a reality for a great majority of women who enter into politics.

Examining Buen Vivir is not about trying to fit community reality into a feminist frame; rather it is about highlighting gender inequality within the Buen Vivir model and encouraging the struggle of women to create conditions for equal political participation.

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BUEN VIVIR IN PUBLIC POLICIES

The National Development Plan, and the New Economic and Social Development Plan for 2010–2015

An analysis of the National Development Plan (PND), an important document of the Bolivian State, shows how the concept of Buen Vivir has been inserted into public policies in Bolivia.

“Buen Vivir is postulated from a cosmocentric vision and fundamentally means the horizontal meeting of and relationship among peoples and communities, respecting diversity and cultural identities. The sum of this coexistence takes place in harmony with nature. Buen Vivir is understood as the satisfaction of all human needs beyond just material and financial well-being. It is about humanizing development in which a collective process of action and decision takes place. It consists of a practice related to values such as dignity, independence, singularity; and with aspects such as native languages. Along these lines, the long-term transformation of the country has been established on four pillars: a Bolivia that is Dignified, Sovereign, Productive and Democratic and adopts a participatory, representative and communitarian democracy as its form of government. In terms of general policies, the proposal is to eradicate poverty and all

forms of exclusion, marginalization and social, political, cultural, and economic exploitation, which will be carried out by establishing comprehensive national development policies” (Plurinational State of Bolivia, PND, 2006).

In the new proposal for the PND, Buen Vivir aims for a humanization of development, and also stipulates a new cultural base, a base with a vision and framework of public policies. The principles that form the foundation of this model are called Principles of Plenitude and refer to:

- a. Social solidarity;
- b. Production as a result of the interaction of working together;
- c. Reproduction of labor forces and family care as a family, collective and public responsibility;
- d. Complementarity that enriches interaction and is the basis for shared learning;
- e. Production, including work itself, in a framework of respect and harmony with nature;
- f. Production management that is a responsibility of family and collective reproduction, which implies political administration and public responsibility;
- g. The sacred character of nature, and that the renewal of pacts with [nature] take place through ritualism (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Plan 2010–2015: 21).

These principles are to be made operational in three achievements, with the concept of Buen Vivir the Bolivian State should attain by 2015:

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- a. Productive Vision, oriented towards a productive model that is, environmentally speaking, respectful towards Mother Earth and socially inclusive and equitable.
- b. Vision of the Territory: considers both the need for greater autonomy and integration into the nation state.
- c. Vision of the Plurinational State: public administration with social authority that gives power to the communities to decide and define the most viable alternatives for generating local and national development oriented toward Buen Vivir, while the state centrally plans those aspects essential for the reproduction of society in the framework of redistribution. (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Plan 27- 30).

These government proposals are producing a debate on the interpretation of the concept of Buen Vivir and its practical application, including its implications in defining a new political and economic model.³ The current break with neo-liberal discourse is clear, and this is a historical moment in which possibilities open up for

3. To construct the 2010 Economic and Social Development Plan, indigenous urban and rural women's organizations, feminists, unionists, professionals, and members of associations and mining groups, convened to analyze and discuss the practical applications of Buen Vivir in public policies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture and the Vice Ministries of Decolonization and Equal Opportunities, have worked on Buen Vivir with a gender vision. From the side of civil society, many interpretations and visions arise about Buen Vivir, with the analysis in many cases not going beyond generalities, above all in the urban areas.

changing beliefs and introducing new concepts, such as Buen Vivir, into the public debate.

In the mindset of indigenous women leaders, this is a process under construction; a process in which women and their organizations have been part of and therefore requires their continuing commitment and active participation to ensure their visions are incorporated.

“The President himself says we are going to deconstruct, but the regulations, institutions, knowledge, regulatory administration and everything is based on capitalism and making a new political system is a bit difficult. Sometimes they think that there is a recipe ...that's not the way it is, our duty as social actors, as citizens, is to construct this collective project for which we have fought for and even shed blood for; this struggle must not be in vain, we must continue working” (Huanca, 2010).

Nonetheless, the concept of Buen Vivir is not necessarily accompanied by a well-developed, or distinctly alternative economic and social proposal. So a plurality of meanings and interpretations of Buen Vivir exists which enrich the debate, but also prevent movement towards a more detailed level of implementation. The Buen Vivir paradigm tends to be reflected in the ethical order of things, while the definition of the government's economic policy, and more importantly the structure of the development model, remain unchanged and both are still influenced by the dominant conservative neoliberal pattern of development.

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Along these lines, one of the most clearly identified opinions among the people interviewed is a contradiction between the concept of Buen Vivir and its application in public policies. So, as a criticism, they point out that Buen Vivir is serving as a legitimizing discourse for new development visions that are as predatory in nature as those they seek to overcome.

Another thinker, Luis Tapia, points out:

“The government talks about Buen Vivir, but a broader depredatory model of exploiting natural resources still exists, without taking into consideration that this can destroy the way of life of several towns and communities. Along these lines, I think Buen Vivir is being used more as a legitimizing discourse, taking ethical elements that come from other cultures, in a context that recognizes cultural diversity but which, at least in the government plan, you cannot see any transfer of the elements that form or would form part of the social-cultural matrix from which the idea of Buen Vivir stems” (Tapia, 2010).

In response to this, there are other opinions indicating that the contradiction posed between the meaning and the practice of Buen Vivir are not, in fact, contradictions. Rather, in some of the analyses of Buen Vivir, this issue is the dichotomy within western visions that divide theory from practice. Others do not completely deny the existence of some contradictions, but attributes them to the dynamics of the process of change. Some

state authorities indicate there is no contradiction between a developmental vision and the Buen Vivir model within the government itself, but rather that these are complementary visions.

Buen Vivir as an alternative to capitalism, socialism, and modern society

Buen Vivir is understood as a third path with regard to socialism and capitalism. Intellectual and journalist Jorge Viaña warns in an interview with the author about a latent political risk, in the sense that if Buen Vivir continues without taking a clear anti-capitalist stand, there can be a type of neutrality or “covering up a type of developmentalism in which the principles that are supposed to lead to another side of things, end up leading us to the same side.” Because of this he poses the need to overcome this kind of decent position, neither capitalist nor socialist, that is a kind of neutrality and take a political position in which Buen Vivir has to become an anti-capitalist discourse.

In this debate, there are those who also believe that proponents of Buen Vivir must confront more explicitly the fundamental problems of the country and the potential contradictions, for example, the manner in which Bolivia creates and distributes wealth. Linked to this challenge is how to apply a proposal born out of communal practice and organization to a more modern and urban model.

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“...for me, decolonization refers to having a position of power and equity on the international stage and the ability to not depend on the international prices of raw materials... I find the concept of Buen Vivir to be a concept that recovers the ideals of equity, the ideals of an economic growth that is respectful of the environment, of nature, and this would imply that we overcome that extractive base of our growth model which is a reality (50% of the resources of the State come from hydrocarbons). Hydrocarbons are the basis for our growth ...there is a deficiency in the first view in that it does not confront this reality of how to really surmount the extractivist model, which implies precisely denying all the legitimate ideals of Buen Vivir” (Wanderley and Salazar).

“...I understand the school or schools of Buen Vivir allege they address matters of real life, the concrete and material existence on earth ...therefore, its manifestos should be supported by specific examples and not by philosophical arguments on attitude or cosmovision with no anchor in practical procedures” (Spedding 5).

Another concern is the possibility to articulate the struggles of indigenous peoples with other forms of emancipatory thinking. In this sense, for some authors, Buen Vivir is not enough to provide answers for all the problems of modern society, which is why it is fundamental to articulate this

thinking with other forms of struggle. Luis Tapia points out that:

“...probably for many Aymara and Quechua women, Buen Vivir can be an approach by which they not only reconstitute their community forms, but also criticize the internal inequalities of their cultures [nevertheless, he points out that for the case of women who live and have been educated in modern contexts and spaces, the term should at least take on meaning and] in any case the struggles of women from different cultures have to be articulated” (Tapia).

Cecilia Salazar states that Bolivian society actually is developing predominantly within the frameworks of a modern society whose institutional form is a state, and that the community as well as the subjects that comprise it find themselves in a process of deconstruction. Indigenous people, Salazar says, are also constituted under the principles of market oriented organization because of their sense of land ownership. Therefore, the state, and not the community, dominate the configuration of nature and identity of the country:

“The communitarian space is not the one that predominates in the country; we are already installed in a new form of institutional organization, which is the state. The community is in a process of historical deconstruction, has been for centuries now, and with greater emphasis after the

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agrarian revolution in 1953. And I think this historical aspect that conditions the agrarian reform has not been visualized in terms of its magnitude and that is, the fact that an indigenous person in Bolivia is already a landowner, even though of just a row of land. But this feeling of ownership varies substantially from this indigenous person to that pre-agrarian reform indigenous person, since it is an element that catapults a series of aspirations, which in sociological terms account for another type of subject, different from the one that lived before the agrarian reform” (Wanderley and Salazar).

Salazar therefore believes that the issue of community must be treated from its historical reality, and not just from how it is understood mythically or conceptually. This would prevent the idealization, reduction, or essentialization of the community, which would depoliticize the discussion. Salazar believes in “emancipatory modernity,” that is, a proposal for an alternative society, which cannot be constructed without drawing from the emancipatory elements developed in modern society, such as the right to an individual life. Therefore, not all of modernity can be reduced to the exploitation of capital; rather, modernity must be nuanced and its various pieces laid bare—some of which can be taken up to create another form of society.

The process of change currently happening in Bolivia is oriented to overcoming all types of discrimination and dominance, an inclusive vision recognizing people, their culture, and dignity.

For other interviewees, the proposal for a new society must be shaped by a conceptual and practical elaboration of an indigenous-centered project. Since the modern-capitalist model has been shown to not be viable, it would then be up to indigenous peoples to propose their thinking and way of life as a new model for society without comparing or equating it to a Western model. This is important,

as precisely one of the characteristics of colonialism is for one culture to dominate another, to present itself as a legitimate, universal center, and the only desirable form of civilization, to which the other cultures must submit. In this vein,

one must ask if whether what is sought within the indigenous vision is, in fact, the construction of a power to dominate or the power to share.

From the vision of women, gathered in several arenas analyzing the issue, the process of change currently happening in Bolivia is oriented to overcoming all types of discrimination and dominance, that is, it is oriented toward an inclusive vision recognizing peoples and their culture and dignity.

“We want a united country, without discrimination, with social justice for all; one that generates the same conditions and opportunities for all men and women” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2017).

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“Like our forefathers, we want all cultures to be respected with their usage and customs, and the establishment of women’s participation in all actions of the state, under equal conditions, half and half...” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

Buen Vivir and women’s rights in public policies

To draw the connection between Buen Vivir and women’s rights at the level of public policy, it is important to begin by pointing out that the new State Political Constitution (CPE) establishes, in the introduction, that with a new constitutional instrument the following will be left behind

“...the Colonial, republican and neoliberal state [as the basis for taking up] the historical challenge of collectively building a Social Unitary State of Communitarian Plurinational Law.”

Nevertheless, no reference is made to overcoming the patriarchal nature of the state as part of the political transformations. While the struggles of women within Buen Vivir have been incorporated in the new constitutional text, through 25 articles that guarantee specific rights for women, the text does not touch upon the structure of patriarchal domination itself.

In the post-constitutional assembly, in which the main challenge has been the application of the CPE in laws and public policies, some have

proposed the need to have a deeper discussion on women’s rights. For example, while women’s rights are present in the constitution, there is a need to examine how rights can be used as a way to dismantle patriarchy. This has been primarily expressed in the idea that there is a need not only to talk about the decolonization of the state and social relations, but also about the removal of patriarchy within these institutions.

This concept is well expressed in the proposal for the Economic and Social Development Plan for 2010–2015. It explicitly sets out the task of dismantling patriarchy and defines this as the task of ...transforming the system of domination, subordination, and of oppression based on the unequal distribution of power between men and women, where men control the most important aspects of society (the economy, politics, public affairs, and work, etc.). It also refers to the need to start “creating institutionalism founded on equality, decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy in the State and in society” (Ministerio de Planificación 2010 Propuesta de Plan de Desarrollo p16).

The Plurinational State objective is “...to attain an egalitarian democracy with gender equity through decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy to construct a just and harmonious society, without discrimination or exclusion, and with greater participation”(Ministerio de Planificación 2010 Propuesta de Plan de Desarrollo p16).

The elements mentioned above can be an opportunity to move from the liberal logic of recognizing rights to the deconstruction of patriarchal

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relations in public policies. Nevertheless, as Raúl Prada points out the issue of dismantling patriarchy is incorporated as a general idea, but its practical application is still one of the elements missing from the document and considers that the task should be

“...an initiative of the government, [and that the definition] of the meaning of dismantling and the relationship between decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy will depend a lot on the initiatives of the women’s movements.

He adds that,

“I do not think it will be that easy, but the fight should be waged ...and even if there is no clear understanding of the issue, ... the participation of the people is up to the government, because the government has gone as far as it can go” (Prada).

In this framework, one of the most important documents (already approved by a Supreme Decree, though finding many difficulties in terms of practical application due to the lack of political will) is the National Plan for Equal Opportunities (PNIO). In this plan:

“...the idea of recovering the concept of gender, decolonizing it, is strongly formulated here. Essentially, it means recovering the historical memory of women’s struggles against a patriarchy installed before colonial invasion, as well as denouncing its arbitrary

use as a descriptive category in a homogenizing and universal perspective of gender relations. It is an approach that proposes ending the socialization of women in the feminine gender and the socialization of men in the masculine gender. Along these lines, another idea that reinforces the previous one is the recovery of the concept of the complementary pair chacha-warmi as a horizontal relation, and presenting it anew as an inverse female-male complementarity (warmi-chacha) that implies its recovery arising out of women, from the current position and reality” (Prada).

The difficulties for implementing this plan have to do with the patriarchal structures within the state itself. Fortunata Escobar, Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit, points out:

“...patriarchy is still quite marked; this cannot be so easily broken, even in the sphere of the Executive Branch. ...there is the obligation to implement [this plan], and in some places there still aren’t any spaces to work on this. Along these lines, limitations still exist, but efforts are being made to enable its implementation” (Escobar).

One of the main innovations at the level of the state is the recent creation of the Unit for the Dismantling of Patriarchy as part of the Vice Ministry of Decolonization:

The general objective of this unit is to “complement the decolonization processes begun by the

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Plurinational State.” Its specific objectives are:

- a Making visible the social relations of domination that respond to the patriarchal order;
- b Destabilize and put this patriarchal domination order in crisis mode; and
- c Transform the social relations of domination in order to constitute a just and harmonious society.

Despite the fact that the creation of this unit is presented as a key instrument to for decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy at the level of public policies, the real possibilities for implementation will depend on the capacity for struggle by the women themselves:

“...say to all the sisters that we have to be very united, have to ensure our rights, that what the CPE says prevails. Because if we do not enforce them, who is going to do it? Because this is the challenge, for men as well as women, to build a society on the foundations of decolonization as well as a dismantled patriarchy in order to achieve Buen Vivir” (Huanca).

BUEN VIVIR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN: Systematization of the proposals

Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva convened a series of meetings during 2010 with indigenous women’s groups to explore the implications of Buen Vivir from a gender perspective. What follows is a systematization of the inputs provided in these consultations.

Two main challenges to the implementation of Buen Vivir have emerged:

The first one is related to the implementation of public state policies. This has to do with the transformation of the educational and health systems. Since colonialism has imposed itself on everything the suggestion is to counter this situation by changing the logic, content, and practice of education. For example, implementing a system that promotes the contribution of indigenous cultures, including traditional knowledge of alternative medicine practiced by indigenous peoples, and traditional ways of giving birth.

The second main challenge is to work in the sphere of everyday life, dealing with matters and social barriers that prevent closer ties and egalitarian interaction among people across diversities in terms of class, culture, and gender.

The women who participated in Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo’s various processes to explore

4. These proposals have been extracted from the systematization matrix produced by Elizabeth Andia.

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implications of Buen Vivir highlighted five key themes for public policies⁴:

1. Discrimination and Violence
2. Education
3. Health and Basic Services
4. Economy
5. Political Participation

Within each of the themes, women had different proposals for how to implement Buen Vivir.

1. Buen Vivir has been proposed as a means to eradicate both discrimination and violence, particularly in social and collective arenas, through the development of strategies for citizen safety and the rights of youth (boys and girls). In the family environment, the well-being of the family and the elimination of violence should be fostered, seeking “dialogue, trust and the responsibility of all family members” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva , 2010).

In terms of decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy, the proposal is to recover indigenous knowledge and practices such as chacha warmi.

Another proposal is to work on strengthening self-esteem, building skills, and giving value to reproductive work, along with the elimination of different types of discrimination that indigenous women face (because of their clothing, level of education or their financial situation).

2. Buen Vivir calls for improving the Education System (infrastructure, technology, and pedagogy) and treating it as a collective right. Education should be inclusive, free, and should “affect the education of specific social groups, such as children and youth, individuals with special needs, as well as specialization for producers of different items” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva , 2010).

The dismantling of patriarchy has to do with making the social rights of women effective; and decolonization implies the inclusion of “recovery and education in ancestral knowledge.” The proposal is for women from different cultural and social conditions to meet and promote an intercultural dialogue and education.

3. Buen Vivir is related to Health and Basic Services. A strong health care system that is free, has the appropriate infrastructure, high quality of care, qualified staff, and quality control of medications. To this end, women proposed information and training for the population on preventive health care, first aid, and nutrition, as well as access to good nutrition and to the practice of sports.

They also talk about other basic services. To this end, women proposed information and trainingland grants, free housing, furnishings, rural electrification, transportation means, roads, and day care centers. Along these lines, decolonization implies

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respectful treatment, without discrimination, of indigenous women, and salvaging ancestral medicinal practices and traditions combined with modern medicine. With the patient having the right to choose modern medicine and naturist medicine at the health centers.

In the case of women, women must be able to decide on her birthing methods and pregnancy interruption methods.

Another suggestion is the introduction of bilingual health care. Linked with this, the dismantling of patriarchy implies the right of women to have information about their sexuality and to know about and care for their body, as well as have access to medicine and medical insurance.

4. With regard to the Economic theme, Buen Vivir means the creation of a production model that encourages “the creation of a productive matrix that includes: diversification of products, creation of productive projects, consumption of one’s own products and purchase by the state, expansion of export capacity, certification of quality exports, and the creation of systems that regulate production. With regard to collective rights, the right to a guaranteed and decent job was underscored—and was linked to enabling access to other rights (such as medical insurance, job security and a fair salary). In this vein, dismantling patriarchy and decolonization means that,

for women, the work space will be a place of equality and gender equity, as well as a place that recognizes and “values the productive work of women.” They also propose training women to undertake economic activities and the skills required (knowing how to manage, negotiate and access microcredit). Additionally, they propose “giving renewed value to and caring for the environment and natural resources” which would imply thinking about a new way to administer natural resources, one that focuses more on redistribution than on exporting and reconsiders “valuing and recovery of land and territory” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

5. On Political Participation, Buen Vivir is seen on three levels:
 - a. The proposal of “the right to vote at the age of 16, and the right to be elected to public office at 18 years of age.”
 - b. Political participation within organizations themselves, with social controls on the activities of the state, and open and direct relations between the government and social organizations,. They also propose expanding state presence through the participation of social organizations in the election of public authorities, who then would come to the communities. Along these lines, the dismantling of patriarchy is promoting “the right to participation and election within organizations and in the

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political processes that are deliberative in nature, as well as the redistribution of the spheres of power and representation, all of which should take place under equality and gender equity” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010). Nevertheless, to this end there is a need to have a process of organizing women that creates the conditions for real implementation of egalitarian participation at different levels and spheres of power (parity and a rotation between women and men), and that among other things, seeks leadership training, in the design of proposals and “political strategies arising from women for further reproduction with the grassroots” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

- c. The proposal to include men in building awareness on women’s political rights. Additionally, decolonization assumes thinking of a manner of political participation that includes the cultural diversity of women, incorporating intervention in other languages in addition to Spanish (multilingual participation), and the incorporation of chacha-warmi and community justice. In an attempt to expand the idea of decolonization, they also suggest in the framework of autonomous rights, including “declaring those cities with a majority of indigenous population as indigenous cities.” (source?) In general, citizenship is one of the core points of the political struggles of women, as it assumes “recognition

by the government of the women of different indigenous peoples and departmental labor sectors, and finally, the declaration and drafting of new laws from the vision of complementarity” (Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Boliva, 2010).

The elements proposed above are contributions toward concrete ways to apply the specific rights of women recognized in the new constitutional text, but there is a need to move forward on a broader debate. This debate must recognize rights as well as advance the political task of articulating decolonization and the dismantling of patriarchy. Questioning all forms of domination is needed in order to produce structural changes in social and cultural relations,

The reflections produced by the group, *Sanka Sawuri-Tejedoras de Sueños* (Women Dream Weavers), call for the reversal of the tendency to see gender inequality as is just a women’s issue rather than a structural problem within society. The fundamental political challenge is to advance the proposals that approach gender inequality as a structural problem.

Decolonization would also require that work focused on gender equality is not reduced to a technical exercise but should focus on political activism that deepens the inter-cultural dialogue on gender inequality and its ties to other forms of oppression.

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FURTHER READING

ECONOMIC REDEFINITIONS TOWARDS BUEN VIVIR IN ECUADOR: A FEMINIST APPROACH by Magdalena León

Background

The incorporation of the concept of *Suymak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamana* (both meaning Buen Vivir) in the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia took place in the context of the neoliberal crisis in Latin America and the global crisis of capitalism. These crises have introduced, in the global agenda, the need to search for and build new civilizing alternatives, previously considered urgent by critical thinking and social movements agendas.

This process has been a breakthrough after decades of a vision of development¹ that has probably been the most successful in its homogenizing effects on the projects and visions of humanity as a whole. This dominant form of development has been reinforced and combined with that of globalization². At present, there is a sense of exhaustion with this concept of development due to its inability to give an answer to problems and challenges that, as never before, have to do with the continuity of life itself on the planet.

This moment of breakthrough undoubtedly summarizes multiple processes and projects, but it is characterized by two main facts:

- a. the acknowledgment of the global warming phenomenon as the expression of a civilizing

pattern that destroys the basic elements of life; and

- b. the projects of change that advance in Latin America, where new visions are taking shape, displacing not only the centrality of the market but also the centrality of human beings, to give way to the acknowledgment of life in an integral sense.

In a relatively short period, we have gone from total neoliberal hegemony to a radically different perspective, adopting Buen Vivir as the ordering principle. In real terms, this means a direct questioning of the logic of expanded capital accumulation and reproduction, as well as the reaffirmation of a logic of sustainability and expanded reproduction of life. This goal establishes an immediate connection between Buen Vivir and feminist economics—one of the theoretical and political foundations to define Buen Vivir as an economic alternative in the making.

Magdalena León is the coordinator and national link of the Latin American Network Women Transforming the Economy, in Quito, Ecuador.

1. During decades of presence in the international agenda, the concept of development has undergone several levels of criticism, resistance and reformulations. An expression of this has been the numerous names and multiple combinations that have been formulated: development with a human face, development with equity, human development, sustainable development, etc. From a more rupturist perspective, the visions of maldevelopment, postdevelopment and degrowth stand out.

2. In both cases, much has been elaborated on the intersections of development, globalization, and gender.

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The formulation of Buen Vivir presents itself also as an alternative, or a step forward, in regards to classical socialist models. The limits of these models can be seen in the tentative new names for undergoing proposals and experiences such as socialism of the 21st century, third millennium socialism, and even biosocialism. In this sense an unprecedented reassessment of feminism has taken place, in some cases called feminist socialism.

The adoption of the concept of Buen Vivir in the constitution of Ecuador opens possibilities as well as challenges at several levels: as a new horizon of structural change; as a new model to be built in the mid- and long-term; and as an immediate agenda implying a transition approach in terms of public policy, because it is about leaving neoliberalism behind with the vision of also 'leaving' capitalism—while in previous experiences this only happened through radical revolutions involving the 'abolition' of the classes.

Under this frame of conceptualizations, on the following lines we intend to outline some aspects of the economic reformulation towards Buen Vivir from a feminist perspective. Even though the coincidence between sustainability and life reproduction provides criteria to recover formulations originated in feminist economics, the conceptual and political elaboration of Buen Vivir economics represents a challenge of unprecedented proportions that should be taken into account by all currents of critical and alternative economics.

The Immediate Economic Utility of Buen Vivir

Buen Vivir is described as the collective achievement of a full life or a life in fulfillment, based on harmonic and balanced relations among human beings and all living beings, in reciprocity and complementarity. It involves the acknowledgment that human beings are a part of nature, that we depend on it and that we are inter-dependent among ourselves. This perspective signals a break with the centrality of the individual, as well as the superiority of human beings and the notions of progress, development and "well-being" in the capitalist sense.

The definition of Buen Vivir takes into account the cosmovision of ancient peoples (in this case the peoples of the Andes)³ and merges with advancements in feminist economics, ecological economics, and solidarity economics. All of them convey life and labour as an essential role and give preference to the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, complementarity, and cooperation over those of egoism and competence typical of capitalism.

Inherent to Buen Vivir is the feminist vision that integrates production and reproduction as inseparable processes of the economy, of wealth production and of material and immaterial life conditions. Also relevant is the broadened

3. Almost all native peoples of the American continent have concepts similar to Living Well, and these concepts are part of the heritage and the practices of peoples all over the world.

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feminist vision that enables to register and recover the group of relations and resources mobilized in production and reproduction, wealth and life creation which favors other balances—other than market equilibrium—to guarantee continuity and changes in those cycles as long as they are compatible with economic justice and life sustainability.

In this enlarged vision, feminist economics has intended to overcome the approaches that reduce the economy to the sphere and the codes of the capitalist market, where non-market or self-sustenance economic relations and processes are neglected and left aside, therefore making invisible their contributions for life sustenance. These approaches also hide the flows and subsidies originated in non-market processes, which in good part are the very basis of capital accumulation.

The feminist perspective assumes considering and acting upon work relations and spaces where women and other economic agents are actors, as well as upon patterns of economic injustices that have been created and recreated as part of this system. It also implies moving from an emphasis on the deficiencies of those actors to an emphasis on the contributions they make, even when they take place in situations of inequity and disadvantage. Therefore, it is essential to reassess the value of strategic knowledge and expertise for life and the sociotechnical dynamics that produce them and sustain them, in which women play an outstanding, or in some cases central, role.

These conceptualizations, combined with the vision of Buen Vivir, involve a reinterpretation of reality starting from the corroboration that a really

existing economy entails a diversity of forms of organizing production, reproduction, labor, and exchange. It is this diversity and its empowerment, overcoming inequalities and asymmetries, that makes possible structural changes to redefine crucial issues such as the productive pattern (what and how to produce), the forms of work and remuneration, and the energetic matrix, among others.

Therefore, an immediate application of the Buen Vivir approach takes place at the level of the acknowledgment of facts, relations, and actors of the economy, which has interesting consequences for the visibility of women and their work.

In this sense, the case of indigenous women is revealing. Indigenous women have been systematically referred to in negative terms and on the assumption of deficiencies and submission, both from a perspective of denouncement as from implicit capitalist values and principles. The Buen Vivir approach and the emphasis on contributions transform this notion, adding visibility and acknowledgment.

Revaluing indigenous women for Buen Vivir

Deficiency approach

Indigenous women are:

- the poorest
- the most exploited
- the most discriminated against
- the most socially excluded
- the most illiterate

Contribution and potentialities approach

Indigenous women are::

- Preservers of expertise and ancient practices for Buen Vivir
- Agents of economies for life

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In broader terms, work or labor is the key field for economic acknowledgment, visibility and revaluation. Under the light of Buen Vivir, the Ecuadorian Constitution approved in 2008 and subsequent public policies such as the 2009-2013 National Plan for Buen Vivir have included substantial redefinitions that represent a historical milestone on this matter.

This is how the very concept of work and its reach has been revised, recovering it as the axis of the economy, giving visibility to its various existing forms, whether in a dependency or autonomous relation, and including self-subsistence and human care activities. This is essential in a country whose employment and labor structure is very diverse and requires new mechanisms to strengthen the sectors and initiatives that have been overlooked or even stigmatized, such as peasant work and independent work in general (formerly considered informal), family unpaid work, among others. **(see table on next page)**

This acknowledgment and reinterpretation of reality can be translated into public policy measures at different levels. For instance, there was a change not only in the magnitude⁴ but also in the meaning of the Human Development Bonus—a conditioned allowance delivered to people in extreme poverty (mothers and elderly), that has been distributed approximately for a decade. At present in the case of mothers it is no longer given

4. It jumped from 15.00 to 35.00 USD, and coverage from 1.1 to 1.8 million people.

as a subsidy, but as a partial retribution to unpaid domestic work.

At the national level, planning became a key tool that was reoriented since 2008 according to the Constitutional guidelines of Buen Vivir. As an example, the box below summarizes a few re-definitions that show the usefulness of the approach to overcome neoliberal inertias and to open transition pathways to deeper changes.

Ecuador: Some guidelines for re-orienting planning in the Buen Vivir Approach

2007-2009 National Development Plan

Private leadership, as private enterprise, as the driving force of economic growth.

The market as a means and access prerequisite for the satisfaction of basic needs.

Competence fostering to display the virtues of the market economy.

Poverty as a hindrance on aggregate demand that inhibits market deepening and expansion.

2009-2013 National Plan for Buen Vivir

Acknowledgment and promotion of the potentialities of various production organizing forms.

Acknowledgment and strengthening of other methods of basic needs satisfaction.

Democratization of the factors of production and promotion of work as the cornerstone of the economy.

The poor (women and men) are producers at disadvantage; they are providing economic actors; they need economic justice.

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Work and Buen Vivir: Redefinitions in Ecuador

2007-2009 National Development Plan

Social rights

Work = jobs
Formal and informal sectors
Modern sector

Actors:
employer and employee;
private and public enterprise;
labor laws, salaries,
working conditions,
and labor rights

Decent work

Stability
(within a dependency relation)

Professional capacity building

Precariousness (not in formal, but in informal)

Salary

2008 Constitution and others

Social and economic rights;
foundation of the economy. Special acknowledgments to women, the young and indigenous communities.

Work includes different forms of dependency and autonomous relations, self-subsistence and care activities.

Workers, women and men, are productive actors. Acknowledgment of various work forms.

Not exclusively linked to dependency relations.

Not tied to enterprises and formality, but to more general conditions as endogenous development, sustainable production, regulations.

Capacity building for working with a more integral perspective, acknowledging other practices and expertises.

Phenomena that cuts across the various work forms; variety of characteristics.

Remunerations; basic mandatory salary: retributions; the right to Social Security; adequate working conditions (including diversity)

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Care as an economic category of new outcomes

Care economics has gone beyond its previous limits—circumscribed to material and immaterial relations and dynamics linked to the reproduction of human life—to project itself into the reproduction of life as whole. This means replacing care as an economic category and as an essential process for the existence of all forms of life and for the sustainability of the economy.

Care economics has been built within feminist economics as a broad field, related to material and non-material indispensable conditions for life-cycle reproduction of all human beings, given that in various degrees along our life cycle we need care, including access to goods, services and attention, all inseparable from the material flows. These needs require priority treatment not only in homes, but also by the state and society: they are a shared responsibility.

This is the economic field whose functioning principle par excellence is solidarity, within situations of injustice and inequality that demand the exercise of reciprocity. It is also a reality that brings to light the principle of interdependence of human beings, as opposed to the neoclassic economic approach that proclaims free competition in the labour market of totally independent and autonomous individuals.

Following this logic, the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution acknowledged the care economy when referring to organization forms of family and home production, as well as

self-consumption labor and human care as productive activities.

But the Buen Vivir approach opens new pathways for the economic dimension of care. A harmonious and balanced relationship with nature is a condition for life, since human life depends on other forms of life. These are life forms and systems that not only must stop being predated, but need restoration, protection and sustainable management—all requiring human work and resource mobilization processes. In the same way that feminist economics gave visibility to the economic processes linked to human life reproduction, it is necessary to integrally acknowledge and strengthen life reproduction processes as well as the care work they include.

Therefore, care can be seen as a key economic category, as a flow of material (and immaterial) actions with essential material results for life in an integral sense.

Rethinking Productivity

In a mid-term perspective, transition towards Buen Vivir requires the redefinition of key concepts such as productivity. Conventional ideas of productivity, centered on the goal of maximizing efficiency to maximize profits (systemic productivity), are to be redefined in terms of maximizing economic sustainability and diversity with a human and environmental balance.

This means acknowledging the interrelation between the productive and the reproductive; going beyond efficiency as the achievement of

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“more with less and always” referring it to the optimal use of resources in given circumstances and tying this optimum to protection and justice; and overcoming the ideals of expansion and growth to relativize them taking into account the achievement of life equilibriums—which in concrete situations and contexts may mean contraction and de-growth.

The key challenge is to leave money-centered economics—as an end and as a means—that superimposes on the subsistence economy, subjugating and choking it. It is also to overcome production, trade and consumption patterns that predate and destroy the basic elements of life. Money and investments have been overvalued, they have taken the place of the economy as a whole. In contrast, work has been systematically undervalued, materially and symbolically.

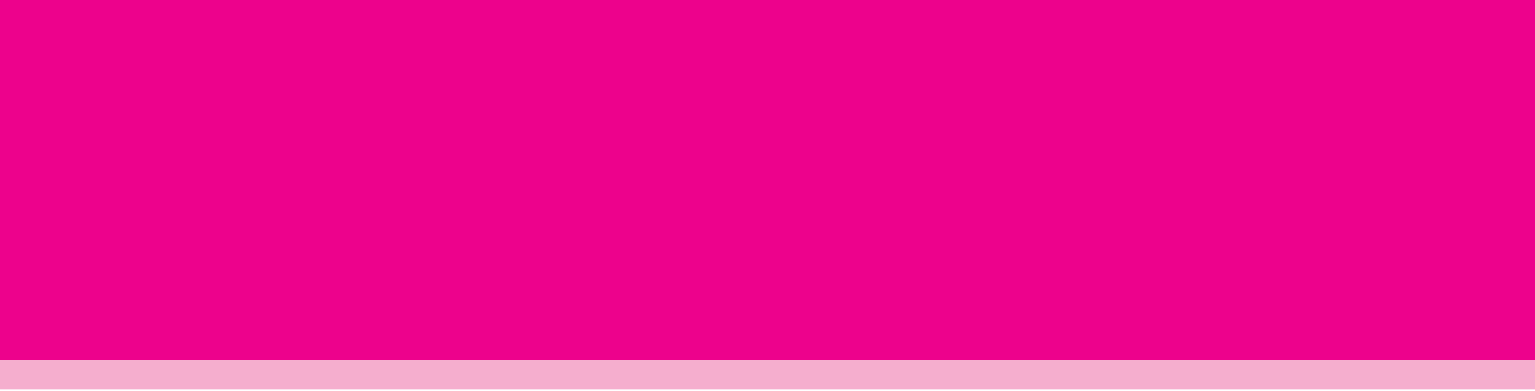
Neo-Keynesian and neo-Schumpeterian concepts, reinforced as patterns to follow in anti-crisis policies, keep their accent on the centrality of the market, the virtuosity of investment, and the increase of productivity. This stresses the need to move forward into a formulation that specifies the principles as well as the tools of this alternative economic vision, a vision that has a peculiar field of implementation in the present circumstances.

Final notes

The feminist agenda of economic redefinitions towards the building of Buen Vivir is outlined on the basis of the cumulative theoretical and practical

knowledge advanced by women for centuries all over the world. Yet, at the same time, it requires taking a certain distance from biases installed in neoliberal times, in some cases considered a natural part of the economic agenda for women. We need to take a distance from:

- The sectorial perspective of gender and economics, and its vision of relations limited or restricted to income, assets, etc., without questioning the system they belong to.
- The cosmetic vision of gender that uncritically added gender to issues, without taking into account compatibilities or coherences. Neoliberalism did not neglect women, it developed a vision and practices assigning us poverty, microcredit, with discourses that tried to make us promoters of entrepreneurial visions to have us pave the way to building the market society inherent to capitalism.
- The vision limited to the economic rights of women without relevant connections to criticism, a redefinition of the model or a re-reading of the economy as it is; all tasks to be part of the changes to come.
- The notion of inertial incidence that places us outside change processes, considering them external. It is necessary to act in co-participation, finding the differences and differentiations with those opposing or not taking part in the construction of change, as well as finding the coincidences and unprecedented alliances that today represent an opportunity to share transforming activities.



The Feminist Perspectives Towards Transforming Economic Power series shares information, experiences from the ground, testimonies from diverse groups of women, provides analysis, and builds knowledge on alternative visions and practices of development, with a vision of transformation.

This article introduces Buen Vivir both as a concept and in its implementation in public policies in Bolivia. The notion that Buen Vivir is gender neutral is examined in light of the fact that the main challenges are dismantling patriarchal power structures, the restriction of women's participation in decision making, and recognizing the gender inequalities within indigenous communities.