Can Buen Vivir Principles Co-Exist with Development Processes? Preliminary Findings from Bolivia

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Background

Over the past decade, countries throughout Latin America have been radically re-thinking new approaches to economic development that are based upon indigenous values and ideas rather than Eurocentric, extractive, and neoliberal models. One of these ideas is *buen vivir*, an informal Quechua and Aymara philosophy that encapsulates a manner and balance of well-being and connectedness for the community and nature. Many development projects incorporate elements of *buen vivir* without directly attributing to the indigenous ideology.

Research Questions

- Does the *buen vivir* philosophy fit within sustainable development models?
- Can/should *buen vivir* be operationalized?
- Can *buen vivir* be implemented at a local and national level?

Data Collection

The research is derived from 32 semi-structured interviews with development professionals based in La Paz and Cochabamba. They were recruited in part based on their knowledge of development ideologies and were questioned in order to better understand local perceptions of successful development frameworks.

Study sample: employment agency and professional role of study participants

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Data Analysis

- Text from the original transcripts were initially selected from segments pre-coded as discussing "*buen vivir*" or "well-being", "decolonization", "success" and "measures."
- Within these segments I used content analysis to inductively code common themes of success
- The identified themes were then examined alongside literature on *buen vivir* & Bolivian development

Analysis: Five Core Themes

Theme 1: The community must envision the project trajectory and initiate it from the onset.

Theme 2: A second key element for the success of these projects is that the work should be done based on the organization that the community already has. If the organization is ayllu, fine, that is your organization. If it is a farmers’ syndicate, then a farmers’ syndicate. If it is an association of irrigators, association of irrigators. What a project should not do is to impose parallel forms of organization: associations of producers, a co-op, I don’t know what else. I think that this is a second element of successful projects.

Theme 3: Projects must leverage majority local labor and resources and minimize outside influence.

Theme 4: Projects, including M&E, must be carried out by the community over longer periods for sustainable impact.

Theme 5: Holistic Dev. - projects must utilize local models and measures outside neoliberal economic frameworks.

Exemplar Quotes

Theme 1: "I think that when the beneficiaries get involved, you know, because they are the ones who are going to tell you what the real needs are. I firmly believe in the development coming directly from the people themselves."

First of all, they should be projects that emerge from the community’s own initiative. There should be some excitement to do this. From the designing of these projects, there should be a participatory component as a key element."

Theme 2: "A second key element for the success of these projects is that the work should be done based on the organization that the community already has. If the organization is ayllu, fine, that is your organization. If it is a farmers’ syndicate, then a farmers’ syndicate. If it is an association of irrigators, association of irrigators. What a project should not do is to impose parallel forms of organization: associations of producers, a co-op, I don’t know what else. I think that this is a second element of successful projects."

Theme 3: "...it should be based on a context of working with local resources and a process of implementation since the project will be strongly based on collaboration. I don’t think the possibility of entering the market is a factor for success or failure based on how successful you actually are on the market."

What the project was about was about promoting improvements in the way the ranchers raise their cattle but based on the local resources available. The criteria for this project was to create this improvements in a participative format. Essentially that was the main goal, using local resources to help in the raising of cattle."

Theme 4: "Of course, when it is about working in an area of intervention, I do not think it is about been there just for a couple of years. I think that we need to think about this in long-term. There are no rules for how long, everything depends on the conditions and the needs of the initiatives. There are some that manage the projects in a serious way, they talk about nine or ten years, but others argue for more time. I think that time is relative, but I think that if we are working with topics dealing with intervention, in two or three years you are not to accomplish much, this should be a longer process."

Theme 5: "On the other hand, the logic of the community where we are currently, Miscayopaga, they have a different logic on how to manage the land, the water. It isn’t capitalist. They have a different rationality. So the way changes are created depend on the project, and on each organization. It depends on the meaning that each one wants to get out of it, on whatever they want. They work that they want is a family, community effort. It isn’t individualistic."

"I think that one of the best strategies is to recognize that we do not have pre-established models, so I do not think that we should be applying models mechanically. Many times we have made the mistake that since a project worked in another country we can apply it here in Bolivia or vice versa...The second point is that the community should really be involved...They need to feel that the project is part of them and not an imposition or that it is just a benefit because the project is going to give them money or build them a new center, etc., this is not sustainable."

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Works Cited


