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Indigenous autonomy and indigenous community-based research

This essay assesses the relevance of the “development” concept in relation to Indigenous peoples, focusing on three global co-existing scenario-options: re-westernization, de-westernization¹ and Buen Vivir (also known as “Living Well”).

The two different concepts of state led development that are commonly used within globalization are ‘Rough Unsustainable’ and ‘Sustainable Development’. Both originated in Western cosmology² to benefit the state and a few corporate businesses, both are based on “growth”, presuppose an economy of “accumulation” and exploitation. They both lead to increasing inequality and assume that society is part of the economy rather than the economy being an aspect of socio-cultural organizations (Table 1).

The “Sustainable Development” option is not conducive to Indigenous peoples’ food production or ancestral vision.

The design and implementation of this kind of “development” (Sachs 2010) is based on a system of ideas, beliefs, emotions, and institutions that are distinctly different from Buen Vivir. At the foundation of Buen Vivir is Indigenous autonomy and Indigenous community-based research (ICBR) that nurtures life as a whole. This is a conceptual approach arising especially from Indigenous peoples emphasizing living in harmony with nature. Yet despite Indigenous food systems’ contribution to feeding the world, the IAASTD paid little attention to Indigenous autonomy and ICBR. Nevertheless, despite chronic research funding shortages, both have continued to grow and innovate on most continents, while enabling different types of Indigenous learning to boost Buen Vivir across multiple dimensions (Tebtebba 2010, 2012, 2008, PRATEC 1998).

In 2008, IAASTD proposed “equitable and sustainable development” as the goal for food systems, identifying agroecology as a pathway. But in spite of the IAASTD’s attention to equity, the “Sustainable Development” option is not actually conducive to Indigenous peoples’ food production or ancestral vision, mission, and strategy, which is necessary to achieve Buen Vivir – procuring balance and harmony for life as a whole (Table 1). The 2007 UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides a clear roadmap for achieving Buen Vivir. Yet to date, most countries that approved the IAASTD have continued to disregard UNDRIP (Tebtebba 2012, 2010; Gonzales 2015).

RE-WESTERNIZATION: IAASTD and Agroecology at a Crossroads		BUEN VIVIR, "Living in Harmony & Plenitude" (Sumak/Sumaq Kawsay, Suma Qamaña)
Coexisting Trajectories	Rough Unsustainable Development (RUD)	Sustainable Development (SD)
	Sustainable Economies (SE)	
Orbitons	Originated in Cosmology of Western Civilization for the benefit of the State and a few corporate interests	Originated in Indigenous Cosmologies (e.g. Andean-Amazonian) for the benefit of life as a whole
	Conventional Development is based on "growth", exploitation, & "accumulation"	Changes the <u>Contents</u> of the conversation
	Changes the <u>Terms</u> of the conversation	
	RUD Re-Westernization (State led) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society is part of the economy rather than the economy being an aspect of socio-cultural organizations. Imposes Western framings, theories, discourses and models via a transnational network of national and supranational institutions (e.g. UN, World Bank, IDB, IMF, aid treaties, regional research institutes, trade regimes, economic sanctions or rewards, corruption, education). Development; and rural & agricultural development state policy: neoliberal, corporate (agr)business oriented. Manipulative, restricted use of SD-agroecology. Human beings are disposable. Individuals are at the core of welfare/development. Nature & indigenous/local cultures are excluded from its economic equation. Lacks spiritual depth, self-centered. 	SD Re-Westernization (State led) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society is part of the economy rather than the economy being an aspect of socio-cultural organizations. Proposes a correction of RUD within Western cosmology. Maintains the concept of development. Ecology and agroecology are selectively incorporated by stakeholders within dominant conventional sustainable development. Developing states support private sector agroecological products for export and less so for healthy national mass consumption. Scant state reception to agroecological proposal from social movements / organizations (e.g. La Via Campesina). In theory may solve issues such as "Global Warming", but cannot and does not intend to solve issues such as global inequality. Individuals are at the core of welfare/development. Lacks Agro-Festive & Ritual Calendar(s).
	Buen Vivir – Living in Harmony & Plenitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delinking from the idea of development and state policy. Would lead to shifting our visions of living on the planet & reducing both RUD & SD down to size. Sustainable Economies are grounded in normativity of Indigenous Cosmologies & praxis of living ("Cosmo-con-vivencia"). Conviviality is part of the community. Development is not its goal. Reduces down to size any economic philosophy, concepts based on developmental principle. Sustainable Economies are a different & more effective option if the real goal is to eliminate poverty and inequality, ensure health & education for all, and reduce global warming. Goal is balance & harmony among humans & all living visible & invisible beings/organisms on the planet. With harmony, rather than development as the goal, inequality would be addressed before it happened. Community is at the core of wellbeing. Rich variety of sophisticated Agro-Festive & Ritual Calendars (based on local, spiritual, and cosmological knowledge & wisdom). 	

Table 1: Agroecology & Buen Vivir and state led global scenarios. Source: Elaborated by Tirso Gonzales. Based on Mignolo, 2016; Gonzales & Hussain, 2016; Sachs 2010

Sustainable development, indigenous autonomy and ICBR in the globalization scenarios

Although Sustainable Development has all the institutional support of the United Nations and is strongly positioned to mitigate the disastrous consequences of Rough Unsustainable Development, this cannot happen using the same mindset that created them. In the current political globalization scenarios, we have a tension between re- and de-westernization. While the USA, European Union and allies are trying to re-install Western dominance, other powers – such as the BRICS-countries – work towards an end of the Western or US-Dollar dominance.

Both, the Rough Unsustainable and the so-called Sustainable Development share the same definition of development that precludes the possibility of thinking of Indigenous Sustainable Economies and Buen Vivir. Similarly, the dispute between Rough and Sustainable Development permeates the tension between re- and de-westernization. The formation of BRICS countries de-link in many ways from Western designs, but does not question “development” (e.g. China) as the only possible horizon for a global economy.

The UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be understood in the context of the multipolar global order of today and tomorrow. The UN is an institution conceived, epistemically and politically, within the parameters of Western cosmology. When the UN launched the SDGs in 2015, de-westernization was very well advanced. In this multipolar world order, sustainable development was negotiated between the interests of re-westernizing the planet and the nega-

tion of the interests of de-westernization advocates. Consequently, the Sustainable Development proposal sought to mitigate the harms of Rough Unsustainable Development, but fell short of proposing a radically new vision for living.

Sustainable Economies

There is however a third approach-scenario, “Sustainable Economies”, which de-links economies from the SDGs and from re- and de-westernizing state-led projects alike. The Sustainable Economies Project follows neither one of the “Development” approaches nor the IAASTD, but is based on Indigenous cosmologies and praxes of living. After IAASTD, the challenge remains to embrace a new mindset that allows us to think of de-linked Sustainable Economies. For these to flourish, we must learn from, support and interact with Indigenous cosmologies and praxes. Sustainable Economies shall be created and managed by Indigenous leaders and communities (Tebtebba 2012, 2010; Mignolo 2020, Esteva 2015).

Support indigenous community-based research and Buen Vivir

Indigenous community-based research is embedded in and informed by the Indigenous cosmologies of Buen Vivir and has its own methods, indicators and validation systems. Dialogue and collaboration is imperative between Sustainable Development-agroecology stakeholders and Buen Vivir Indigenous practitioners. Foreign aid actors should learn from the small Euro-American funding institutions that support Indigenous autonomy and ICBR. This would upscale the co-production and cross-fertilization of agricultural knowledge and strengthening of Indigenous agricultures (Tengö 2017).

ICBR has been successfully tested and validated its methods with a variety of Indigenous Think-Tank institutions such as the Tebtebba Foundation, PRATEC; AGRUCO and the Universidad de la Tierra as well as with Indigenous NGOs, a cluster of European-funded individuals and institutions and the scholarly fields of Indigenous and Modernity/Coloniality Studies (Gonzales & Hussain 2016, Tebtebba 2012, 2010).

Indigenous autonomy has its own resolve (Esteva 2015) and has been imprinted in the expression Sumak Kawsay in Quichwa, Suma Qamaña in Aymara, and translated into Spanish as Buen Vivir and adopted by non-Indigenous “Latin” Americans. Buen Vivir encourages sustainable development and agroecology supporters to look forward at the same time that they look backward (Ñawpaman Puni, in Quechua) and “becoming Native to this Place” (Jackson 1994). By becoming native to the place, country and planet human beings make the Rough Unsustainable Development untenable.

The challenge re- and de-westernization face is to take seriously the paradigm of diverse and sustainable economies. The “development” concept is simply not relevant.

Endnotes

1 De-westernization's main characteristics are political and economic rather than geographic and refer to all countries that desire an end to international dependency based on the legacies of the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference and the US dollar's global dominance and that delink from economic decisions made by the WB, IMF, United States and the European Union.

2 Cosmology and cosmo-vision are two Western concepts, one underlining the logos and the other the eyes, shattering all other forms of expressing the experience of Pachamama, which is the Quechua-Aymara equivalent to the regional Greek cosmos and Latin universum. Aymara intellectuals talk about 'cosmo-con-vivencia', that is, the experience of the cosmos (vivencia) as well as living in harmony with the cosmos (convivencia, that is, con-vivality).

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