Good Living, a new model of development

Building an harmonious relationship with nature

Principles of Good Living, or Living Well, are highlighted in the entire region.

LATIN AMERICA
Ana Lilia Esquivel Ayala in Mexico City

The recovery of ancestral practices, knowledge, and wisdom of the indigenous peoples, focused on the common well-being and the reunion between human beings and nature, has been injected in the debate over development, and in the name of Good Living, or Living Well, they are established as alternatives. Emanating from the Andean cosmovision, these concepts are based on principles of complementarity and reciprocity, where respect for life and Mother Earth is fundamental to maintain an equilibrium and establish harmony between human beings and nature.

In Bolivia it is termed Good Living, a concept derived from suma qamaña in Aymara. For Bolivian Chancellor David Choquehuanca, this life style “signifies complementing each other and not competing, sharing and not taking advantage [of others], living in harmony among people and with nature”.

Under this notion, the idea of exploiter and exploited is abandoned and instead, work is seen as happiness and a medium of learning. Likewise, the idea of individualism is substituted for community, where cooperation and mutual support are indispensable, and the laws of nature are what regulate everyone’s actions. These and
other principles were consolidated in the new Bolivian Constitution in 2009, in which that related to Good Living is on the same level and hierarchy as classical principles, such as unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, social and gender equality, common well-being, and social justice, among others.

**Sumak kawsay and suma qamaña**

In Ecuador the notion of Good Living, or *sumak kawsay* in Kichwa — in articulating ancestral visions and practices with modern reality — supports the creation of alternatives with the principle of establishing an harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.

In that regard, Alberto Acosta, Former Minister of Energy and Mining, explained at the Latin American meeting of the World Forum for Alternatives held in Quito in 2008 that “Good Living is born from the collective life experience of indigenous peoples and ethnicities. It searches for a harmonious life between human beings and with nature (...), a fundamental element to conceive a different society, a society that [can] rescue the popular wisdoms and technologies, the supportive way of organizing, of giving proper answers”.

The growing indigenous prominence, along with various citizen movements, allowed the proposals of Good Living to become concrete in the new Ecuadorian Constitution, approved in 2008.

However, unlike the Bolivian Constitution, all the principles derived from *sumak kawsay* appear as “rights of good living”, within which others are included, such as rights to food, health, education, a healthy environment, among others. Thus, Good Living is recognized as a constitutional right.

In both cases Living Well and Good Living are directly linked with traditional indigenous wisdoms and practices. However, there are important differences between them. In Bolivia, *suma qamaña* is considered an ethico-moral basis, while in Ecuador *sumak kawsay* appears within the body of rights.

Another difference is that Ecuador recognizes nature, or Pachamama, as subject to rights, which are focused on the integral respect for its existence, structure, and all of the vital and evolutionary processes. Furthermore, the integral restructuring of nature is also a right.

Hence, the Ecuadorian Good Living is founded on human rights and rights of nature. However, an explicit recognition of the rights of nature does not exist in the Bolivian Constitution, even though within the Living Well philosophy it is primordial to recover the harmony and mutual respect with Mother Nature.

**Communality and collective labor**

Proposals that are similar and complementary to those of Good Living and Living Well exist in all of Latin America, and in a similar manner, come from the cosmovision of the original peoples. In Mexico, “communality”, or communal way of living, and “rule by obeying”, derived from Zapatista practices, have implied processes of resistance and struggle, and at the same time have as guiding principles the respect for nature and complementarity among all, as well as the recognition and recovery of ancestral practices, such as barter.

Collective labor is part of the good living of Guatemalan indigenous communities, which recognize the importance of preserving and safeguarding natural goods as well as the
Reciprocity
Everything is alive and connected. This is a universal principle of justice; the reciprocity in interpersonal relationships is conceived as social duty related to mutual help (barter or mutual provision of services), but is not limited to just that; it also has to do with cosmic, religious and economic relations.

Complementarity
A state where every being and occurrence is “complete”, because it contains both of its constituent parts, the one of simply being and the other that complements it. Everyone and everything has a complement, we complete each other because we are brothers and sisters of Mother Earth. No one is superior to another. Complementarity impedes competition; it is mutual and permanent help within the community.

Harmony
There is no possible equality, there is always diversity. Good Living is being in permanent harmony with everything. Good Living is an ethical concept, it is living in harmony with the cycles of life, knowing that everything is interconnected, interrelated and interdependent; it is knowing that the deterioration of one species means the deterioration of the whole.

Duality
Everything works in pairs (masculine and feminine; big and small; tall and short; sun and moon; sky and earth); one cannot exist without the other.

Relationality
Everything is connected with everything and there are no completely separate entities; there is interdependence between everything and everyone.

Cyclicality
Space and time are one and are repetitive. Time is not linear, it is cyclic, that is to say that it is not conceived through a beginning and an end, but it is in a continuous state of flux. There is no logic to a progressive linear process. There is no notion of an underdeveloped state to be overcome or a developed state to be achieved.

Connection
Different aspects, regions or fields of reality correspond with each other in a harmonious way.
The art of good living
Indigenous communities struggle to preserve the importance of collective life

Good living, or buena vivir in Spanish — the way of living in harmony with oneself, other members of the community, nature and one's surroundings — is central to indigenous life.

“Each indigenous community has its own way of interpreting the concept of buena vivir,” says Cecilia Ramírez, a representative of the International Indigenous Women’s Forum and member of the Mixtec community in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. “In my community we talk about banjá, which means ‘being well’ (in the Mixtec language). For us it means continuing with our traditional crops, looking after the land, safeguarding our language.”

It is also about collective rather than individual welfare. “In my community everyone cooperates and works together when a road or a primary school needs to be repaired,” she explains. “If one uses a service, one has to contribute to its maintenance. We call communal collective work tekia.”

—Mayan lawyer Odilia Chavajay
Another aspect of this collective sense of self, according to Ramírez, is in how families help each other. “When there’s a religious celebration or a funeral, everyone contributes to the expense. That’s called guesa (in Mixtec) or vuelta de mano (in Spanish).”

“Buen vivir is the integral development of indigenous people, it stems from our daily life and includes a series of social and cultural elements,” says Mayan lawyer Odilia Chavajay, from the municipality of Santa María Visitación, in the department of Sololá, Guatemala.

“It’s a way of life where we all look after our collective wellbeing rather than the wellbeing of a single person,” she adds, noting however that, “nowadays, only the remotest communities that live far from state paternalism practice this way of life”.

**Group effort**

Like the Mixtec in Ramírez’s community, the Mayan people of Santa María Visitación also practice collective work. “When someone doesn’t have a home, the entire community gets involved and a house can be built in one day,” says Chavajay.

She also cites traditional Mayan gastronomy and its emphasis on organic, home-grown products as another example of good living. “Nowadays, there are many products available that are bad for people’s health. However, in isolated communities, people don’t eat canned food,” she says.

As well as living in harmony with oneself, neighbors and the community, good living also means being in harmony with nature. “The indigenous way of life is based on sustainable development, not on the relentless exploitation of natural resources,” says Gerardo Jumí Tapies, who heads the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations, or CAOI. “Indigenous people have lived in the forest and by the rivers without killing those resources. Those resources are now running out due to the actions of multinational corporations.”

Pedro Calderón, of Bolivia’s Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia, explains that for South America’s indigenous people, trade is viewed in terms of solidarity and exchange rather than profit, with tropical communities trading oranges and bananas with highland communities for corn, potatoes, okra and other products.

**Achievements and setbacks**

During the 10th Indigenous Fund Assembly, held in Guatemala City Nov. 29-30, indigenous representatives reflected on the meaning of buen vivir and unveiled the results of the “System for Monitoring the Protection of Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples’ Buen Vivir,” which was created during the 2006 summit.

That year, the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, known as “The Indigenous Fund,” a Bolivia-based multilateral aid agency promoting indigenous rights and development, met in Guatemala and agreed to create indicators to measure progress in rights and development among the region’s indigenous people.

Researchers from Mexico’s Center for Investigation and Superior Studies in Social Anthropology, or CIESAS, compiled information from Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico on how governments have complied with international treaties and conventions on indigenous rights, to establish whether legal rights became concrete improvements in the wellbeing of indigenous peoples. Six major areas were assessed: diversity, land rights, self-determination, wellbeing, indigenous development and participation.

Diversity, for example, was divided into two areas: culture and citizenship, each of which was assessed according to variables relating to rights, such as the state’s recognition of multiculturalism, the protection of indigenous culture, the prohibition of racial and cultural discrimination and the legal recognition of collective rights, and variables relating to buen vivir, like the official use of indigenous languages, intercultural education, the expression of traditional cultural practices and the establishment of collective indigenous entities.

The report noted that Bolivia and Ecuador stand out in terms of legal recognition for indigenous rights, with the approval of new constitutions that incorporate multiculturalism and buen vivir, also known by its Quechua name of sumak kawsay in other indigenous South American communities.

However, in the four countries studied, legal and constitutional rights continue to exist on paper but not in practice. “With regard to the application of indigenous people’s rights,” the document concluded, “a lack of coherence between discourse and practice has been observed.”

“Indigenous people continue to face huge disadvantages in comparison with the rest of the population,” says Luis Contento, vice-president of the Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador, or ECUARUNARI. “Indigenous communities have the least access to services and are not allowed to exercise basic rights such as the right to prior consultation.”

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Sumak Kawsay as a way of life
Indigenous concept of “good living” can be adapted to Western culture.

ECUADOR
Luis Ángel Saavedra in Quito

Understanding the indigenous worldview involves questioning how we are traditionally taught to face life. For example, knowing how to differentiate between “living better,” the basis of Western development, and “good living,” or what is called “sumac kawsay” in kichwa.

“Living better” is a Western paradigm that implies progress and the accumulation of wealth. This concept varies with a group’s social-economic status. For the poor, it will mean access to better quality of life, a legitimate goal. However, for the elite, living better means obtaining more goods and power, while the middle class strives to attain the elite’s standard of living.

On the other hand, good living [Sumak Kawsay, or Sumaq Qamaña in Aymara] in the indigenous world “implies a way of living that is ethical, restrained, [that] takes from nature only what is necessary for life, without endangering [nature’s] rights since nature is considered a living Mother,” said Gerónimo Yantalema, an indigenous member of Ecuador’s National Assembly.

Indeed, while the harmony between the laws of nature and collective rights can satisfy individual rights, the fulfillment of individual rights, with their particularities in size and depth, do not always guarantee the existence of collective rights, nor the laws of nature.

An economy of solidarity
There are several examples of good living practices implemented for decades in Ecuador, like in Salinas, a town in the desert of Bolivar province, in Ecuador’s central highlands.

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—Assemblyman Gerónimo Yantalema
In the 1970s, it was only one of hundreds of indigenous communities buried in extreme poverty. Four decades later, Salinas is full of community businesses run under a common brand: “El Salinerito.”

It started with small-scale dairy production in the rectory and a booth at the market in the country’s capital of Quito. The idea was to produce communally, linking the factory with small indigenous and campesino milk producers. While early on there was support from international cooperation organizations, today there are 22 partners in a cheese production cooperative.

“El Salinerito” is not only a true business consortium that produces milk, pizza, wild mushrooms, chocolates, candies, textiles and handicrafts. It also has a small sugar mill as well as fish farming activities. It also markets other agricultural products and has established a network of solidarity economy encouraging new projects, training other communities and participating in financial consortiums and marketing networks.

Revenues are reinvested in new social projects that benefit the entire community.

“The whole town of El Salinerito, we are all part of the production, marketing, and benefits. We started this before the concept of good living was out there and we can say that we are practicing good living,” said one of the founders and current administrator, Alonso Vargas.

In the central province of Cotopaxi sits another village, Tigua, that like Salinas encourages community production, but based on indigenous art and culture.

“My father, my grandfather, and my great-grandparents painted on sheepskin, as our ancestors did. They painted the history and traditions of the communities of Tigua, and when it began to sell, all of the communities began to sell as well, and now our art is known worldwide,” says Siza Toaquiza, a young painter and popular singer who belongs to the third generation of so-called “Tigua painters”.

Tigua is another example of communal production and closeness to mother earth. And the international success of the art has not changed its traditions. On the contrary, it has made new generations of indigenous people no longer think of migrating, and highlights the opportunities community living provides.

“My father, Alfredo Toaquiza, is known internationally as an indigenous painter and is president of the Society of Artists of Tigua, but he still lives in the town because he also works in agriculture, since we ourselves produce our food, both for the family and the community, because that’s good living: taking advantage of everything the land gives us, but not letting that change who we are,” said Siza Toaquiza, who at age 19 is a leader in indigenous popular music.

**Prioritize the collective**

Applying this indigenous worldview in the Western world would give primacy to the collective and solve some problems that are a result of Western development model, such as transportation.

Prioritizing public transportation and limiting the production of private cars would reduce pollution levels, save natural resources, and lead to a redefinition of the automotive industry and a reconfiguration of road plans; it would help level the balance of payments between wealthy countries and developing ones, freeing up funds for investments more consistent with good living life, such as health and education. It would also reduce noise, making cities more inviting.

Similarly, the communal structure that has allowed the survival of indigenous peoples can be applied in the design of community neighborhoods.

According to Javier Alvarado, head of the National Confederation of Ecuadorian Neighborhoods, or CONBADE, “government programs should look at the neighborhoods’ ability to provide goods, like food and clothing for nearby schools, to delegate management of resources such as water, and to implement community market systems.”

CONBADE has a national proposal for the creation of community governments in urban slums, which would encourage investment in social programs through coordination between local officials and neighborhood representatives.

In terms of technological development, by linking it to benefit the human being, this will prevent the accumulation of power and capital that is based on knowledge appropriation and hijacking.

“Knowledge is collective and access to it is free. The idea of patent registration is alien to the indigenous world, particularly since it involves the appropriation of something that belongs to the group,” said Assemblyman Yantalema.

These and other practical applications to life in our society involve a shift in mindset, because Sumak Kauwsay — rather than an economic model — is a proposed cultural transformation. It means rethinking the ways of survival and once again embracing the communal model as a life principle.
Community education part of the Good Living concept

Ethical-moral principles of “ama qhilla, ama llulla and ama suwa” are rescued by the education system.

The Suma Qamaña concept — Living Well, or Good Living in the Aymara language — is the paradigm of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The Bolivian Constitution establishes the State based “on the respect and equality among all, with the principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementarity, solidarity, harmony and equity in the distribution and redistribution of social products; with a predominating search of Good Living; with a respect for economic, social, legal, political and cultural plurality of the inhabitants of this land; in collective coexistence with access to water, work, education, health and housing for all.”

In Article Eight, the Constitution indicates that the State “assumes and promotes as ethical-moral principles of the plural society: ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa (do not be lazy, do not be a liar and do not be a thief), suma qamaña (living well), ñandereko (harmonious living), teko kavi (good life), ivi maraei (land without evil) y qhapaj ñan (noble path or life); and “it grounds itself on the values of unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, complementarity, harmony, transparency, balance, equality of opportunity, gender equality of participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice, and distribution and redistribution of the social products and goods for the Good Living.”

Likewise, education is defined according to those ethical-moral principles and by its communal nature.

The Education Law “Avelino Siñani–Elizardo Pérez”, in force since Dec. 20, 2010, establishes that “education is unitary, public, universal, democratic, participatory, communal, decolonizing, and of good quality,” considering as communal the participation of all the people in their development, and conceiving nature and culture through a harmonious, complementary, and reciprocal relationship.

This way, the law hopes to rescue the wisdom, knowledge, and practices of the original cultures.

“For the original indigenous communities, education is an essential part of the social organization, where the formation of knowledge is communal; in other words, a hierarchical social division linked to education would not be conceivable because there is not a particular place or a time to learn, for ‘education’ is part of life in the mountains, the rivers, the jungle, the community, and the home, and it is not limited to a period of teaching and learning because, simply, we learn and increase our knowledge in the cyclical span of life,” states the Base Curriculum of the Plurinational Educational System.

The Bolivian lawyer Ruth Tapia Espinoza, columnist for the Oruro newspaper La Patria, explains that “since ancestral times, the original indigenous communities that inhabited Abya Yala (what today we call America) practiced communal education taught through oral tradition; this practice has required the responsibility of each member of the community to assume an agreement of coexistence with nature.”

The Education Law rescues this principle by promoting “the recognition, reassessment and development of the original culture and the urban-popular communities through the study and application of the wisdom, knowledge, and individual values in the practical and spiritual life, contributing to the affirmation and strengthening of the cultural identity of the original indigenous communities and of the entire cultural framework of the country,” says Tapia.

For Tapia, it is a priority that the teacher assumes a new role as counselor and guide during the learning process so that the student learns to live in the community and can be a citizen who is learned in his or her reality.

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“Science, technology, and production; life, earth, and territory; the cosmos and thought; community and society are all ideas that must be tackled in school for a harmonious shaping of the student so he or she can live well in the community.”

—Ruth Tapia Espinoza
Teachers develop proposals for intercultural curriculum.

“Sometimes we say that the children come [to school] without knowing anything... Of course, they have no Western knowledge, but they have a deep understanding of their area,” said rural teacher Miriam Vitorio Apolinario.

Vitorio Apolinario works at the private Chaupin school, in the hamlet of Baños de la Merced in Peru’s central department of Ancash. The school is known as a “Center of Andean Knowledge,” and was created eight years ago by the Asociación Hijos Sanadores de la Tierra Madre, or HISATIMA, which translates to the Association of Mother Earth’s Children-Healers. Its founders — Mariela Javier Caldua, Wenceslao Rosario Solano, Giovana Vitorio Apolinario and Miriam Vitorio Apolinario — are teachers dedicated to Andean culture, aiming to reestablish its value and concretize its identity as an ancient but living culture.

HISATIMA proposes free schooling from first through sixth grades in a multi-grade classroom to provide an education more relevant for children in the Andean highlands that values local expertise and culture, integrating Western and Andean knowledge. It’s
financed by cooperating institutions, and funds are raised months ahead of the coming school year.

“For four years I have had the opportunity to work with children in the field,” says Vitorio Apolinario.

“It’s very nice, we make sure their knowledge is embodied, respected, starting with language, their way of being, of living, and this is brought to the curriculum, where every month we integrate in every subject the most important farming and cultural activities of the community calendar,” said Vitorio Apolinario.

“Here what we do is work on the children's knowledge and the teachers’ knowledge; thus we acquire new knowledge to improve teaching and learning for the children,” she added.

**Affirmation of Andean culture for the Good Living**

Teacher Pablo Díaz Tarazona, who heads early education at the school for 3- and 4-year olds, explained he starts by teaching them what is tangible and what is abstract.

The children learn by touching, feeling, and using their senses; then later, they are taught how to think more abstractly.

The school has a small farm where Andean culture is lived out, a way to relate as a large family to nature, deities, and other humans, and live in harmony, which is the foundation of the Good Living.

This experience is an emotional relationship, through mutual care for the regeneration of life. If the children sow their little farm, it will repay them with diverse foods for the Good Living.

The children learn to respect Mother Earth throughout the entire crop cycle; they practice traditional values like reciprocity, respect, caring, ritual, and collective and communal work.

Rural teachers at this school support Andean culture by incorporating practices, ancestral knowledge, and community activities so that the children are proud of it. This increases their self-esteem, reaffirms their cultural identity, and values the Andean cosmovision.

The fifth and sixth grade students speak fluent Quechua, share their knowledge, relate what they learned about the human body using illustrations on science and environment, and simulate a market to buy and sell goods to put their math skills into action.

To speak about local knowledge, they move to the school's farm because everything has its place and time.

In previous years, they planted tubers like potato, oca and olluco, as well as pumpkin and native corn. This year they have planted various medicinal herbs.

Edika Berrospi Torres, a sixth grader, explained how “when we have a stomach ache, we boil mint and anise, we drink it, and it alleviates the pain.”

They also grow vegetables like beets, lettuce, and green onions, and when they harvest the crop, they each take some home and the remainder is used for breakfast at school.

They know the geographic boundaries of Baños de la Merced, and its neighboring towns and communities.

**Andean signs**

The community believes that the hill that protects them is grandfather Qotupachan, and so students make offerings in ceremonies dedicated to him, asking him to watch over their crops and help them in school.

The students know the Andean signs, known as bio-indicators; for example, pigeons flying high overhead is a harbinger of heavy rain, or planting crops at the new moon must be avoided to yield a better harvest.

They also learn values. Karin Cornelio Llanque, a fifth grader, said, “When we see an animal in our farm, we alert its owner to remove it, when we see a grandmother picking alfalfa, we should help her, and at meal time we share our snack with everyone.”

Every activity carried out on the school's farm is according to Andean culture; the diversity, ritual, equality, inclusion and regeneration of life are demonstrated through the care for plants, the earth, water, the environment, and animals. Back in the classroom, those life experiences are translated into texts.
For Mayan communities, good living or Buen Vivir means safeguarding natural resources.

The forest, its wildlife, its trees and rivers have a sacred value for Mayan K’iché inhabitants of Totonicapán, a department located in Guatemala’s western highlands.

Timber logging in a 2-kilometer (3-mile) radius from water sources is strictly forbidden and if a family needs to fell a tree to obtain firewood, it must seek prior consent from indigenous community leaders and only the oldest trees can be felled.

The penalty for infringing these rules depends on the size of the tree that was felled and ranges from planting five trees to paying fines ranging from 500-800 quetzales, about US$64-102.

In order to ensure forest regeneration, in May, every year, leaders distribute tree seedlings from a community greenhouse so that every member of the community can plant five trees in an area of their choice.

The community also observes strict rules regarding...
the use of water from six sources, located in the midst of the forest, which feed the Motagua and Salamá rivers. If a family wishes to build a house it must seek permission from the local water committee and wasting water on what is regarded as superfluous, such as washing cars and motorbikes, is forbidden. Added to this, one of the six water sources must be left intact to ensure that local wildlife can obtain drinking water.

**Zero deforestation**

It is thus small wonder that Totonicapán has the lowest deforestation rate in the entire country. According to research conducted by the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, between 2006 and 2010, Guatemala’s average deforestation rate was 1 percent, compared to 0.04 percent in the department of Totonicapán.

“The people of Totonicapán don’t exploit the forest; we look after it. This is the legacy we inherited from our ancestors,” explained José Santos, president of Totonicapán’s 48 cantons.

Totonicapán’s unique form of community organization dates back to 1820, when Mayan leader Atanasio Tzul led a revolt against excessive tributes imposed by the colonial authorities, bought the Totonicapán forest from the Spanish crown and obtained communal land title deeds. To this day, the historic title deeds are kept in a chest located in Totonicapán’s community hall, under the watchful eye of two indigenous guards.

Since Tzul’s landmark revolt, Totonicapán has been divided into 48 self-governed cantones or alcaldías indígenas. The people of each canton elect committees in charge of various issues such as water, forest resources, public security, the maintenance of the local cemetery and family matters.

The cantons are coordinated by a junta directiva or “board of directors” with a president who is elected on a yearly basis by the cantonal mayors. This president acts as a mediator in all sorts of conflicts ranging from domestic disputes to criminal cases and disputes between indigenous communities and utility companies.

Public service is not remunerated, it is compulsory, and everyone must take part in a committee at least three times during his or her lifetime. This form of self-government coexists side by side with the official political system, although tensions sometimes arise when mayors elected through the party system question the legitimacy of indigenous representatives.

**The Mayan people and Buen Vivir**

Mayan academic Pascual Pérez, of Kayb’alan Center, said that Totonicapán’s model of self-governance and its emphasis on environmental conservation is an example of how Guatemala’s indigenous people practice Buen Vivir or “good living,” which essentially means living in harmony with oneself, other members of the community, nature and one’s surroundings.

Pérez also cites traditional Mayan farming, which is 100 percent organic, as another example of good living. “Chemical fertilizer and pesticides were introduced around 60 years ago but we’ve realized that these substances impoverish the soil and lead to a loss of nutrients, resulting in poor harvests as more and more chemicals are needed,” he explained.

According to Pérez, Mayan farming uses compost and fertilizer made from organic material such as chopped reeds, and crops are balanced in terms of the nutrients that they require. For instance, beans and a pumpkin variety known as ayote are planted around corn crops, or milpas, as legumes fix nitrate in the soil and pumpkin plants generate shade and humidity. Indigenous farmers also reject monocultures and genetically modified crops.

Traditional Mayan agriculture is practiced in farms such as Ijat’z, located in the municipality of San Lucas Tolimán, in the department of Sololá, which produces organic coffee, runs a greenhouse with native plant varieties and specializes in vermiculture and other techniques for the production of organic fertilizer.

Many Mayan producers, said Pérez, have gone beyond subsistence farming and are exporting coffee and other products. Indigenous people, he explained, are not against the use of technology or the export-driven model per se as long as farming is organic and sustainable. “A solidarity economic model is based on agroecology and prioritizes protection of the community’s quality of life and farmers’ livelihood,” he said.

The Mayan belief in environmental sustainability underpins the Integral Rural Development Bill, which aims to improve food security by democratizing access to land. It was put forward in 2009 but remains stalled in Congress as large landowners, who own 70 percent of the country’s arable land, fear that it could lead to the transformation of the country’s semi-feudal land ownership model.

“We have scattered examples [of Buen Vivir], but we lack national strategies put forward as public policy. The problem is that public officials always act on behalf of large multinational corporations,” said Pérez.
Cities and Good Living

Government promotes project that seeks to recover and protect heritage cities.

People have the right to fully enjoy the city and its public spaces — under the principles of sustainability, social justice, respect of different urban cultures, and equilibrium between the urban and rural. Exercising the right to the city is based on democratic governance of the city, on the social and environmental function of the property and the city, and the full exercise of citizenship,” says Article 30 of the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008.

The right to a secure and healthy environment is part of the concept of Good Living, or Sumak Kawsay, which is included in the Constitution along with other basic rights, such as the right to have access to water, food, a healthy environment, to education, and health, among others.

To promote this right, the Ministry for the Coordination of National Heritage launched on Jan. 10 the Cities of Good Living project, aimed to protect, conserve, and promote the enjoyment of the cultural patrimony as well as to develop planning, investigation, and protection mechanisms related to city management.

The Minister of National Heritage, María Belén Moncayo, specified that the initiative, which will cost US$933 million and will proceed until 2017, hopes to “create a just and inclusive country,” which will rescue the identity of the population and improve its quality of living.

In a radio interview, Moncayo declared that "it is about reclaiming the city as a right and also considering that identity is part of this right that we have to guarantee."

In the cities where the project will be implemented, there will be work alongside local authorities to improve public spaces, promoting bicycle routes, pedestrian streets, tree-planting, and recovering of civic values. There will also be a promotion of cultural, gastronomic, and conscious tourism entrepreneurship.

These features are stated in the National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013, which establishes the public policies, programs, and projects, and defines Good Living as "a complex, living, non-linear, and historically defined concept that is thus constantly re-defined."

Good Living “is the meeting of needs, the attainment of a quality life and dignified death, love and being loved, the healthy growth of everyone in peace and harmony with nature, and the indefinite prolongation of human cultures.

Good Living assumes having free time to contemplation and emancipation, and that the true liberties, opportunities, capabilities, and potentials of individuals will expand and grow in a way that allows for the simultaneous achievement of whatever the society, territories, the diverse collective identities, and each individual — seen both as a universal yet a particular human being — value as a desirable life goal (both material and subjective, and without creating any type of dominance over others).

Our concept of Good Living obligates us to rebuild what is public in order to identify and understand ourselves and value each other — as different but equals — to ensure that reciprocity and mutual recognition thrive, and with that allow self-realization and creation of a shared social future,” says the document. — Latinamerica Press.

Good Living , “a complex, living, non-linear, and historically defined concept that is thus constantly re-defined.”

—National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013
Environmental organizations welcomed on Feb. 2 — World Wetlands Day — the Bolivian government’s decision to bring under protection the Moxos Plains, an area of 6.9 million hectares (17 million acres) that is considered the largest wetland in the world.

“The Political Constitution of the Plurinational Bolivian State recognizes the importance of wetlands and establishes as a basic principle for ‘Living Well’ [or Good Living] the respect for the Rights of the Mother Earth. Consistent with these principles and recognizing the importance of wetlands in protecting Mother Earth and the international relevancy

that the declaration of the ‘Moxos Plains’ as a wetland represents, the Plurinational Bolivian State, in coordination with social actors, assumes the commitment of conserving the wetlands, to secure the integral development of all of its inhabitants in a harmonic relation with Mother Earth and the life systems that compose them,” said Juan Pablo Cardozo Arnez, vice minister of the Environment.

In a statement, the World Wide Fund for Nature, or WWF, congratulated the Bolivian government “for taking measures to protect these vital ecosystems.”

“These wetlands are especially valued for their rich natural diversity: up to date there 131 mammal species, 508 bird species, 102 reptile species, 62 amphibian species, 625 fish species, and at least 1,000 plant species have been identified. Numerous species, among them the giant otter and the Amazon River dolphin, have been classified as vulnerable species, either endangered or critically endangered,” said the WWF.

The Moxos Plains are located near the Brazil and Peru border and are formed by tropical savannas with drought and flood cycles, indicated the WWF.

Additionally, the region has three rivers: Beni, Itené or Guaporé, and Mamoré, that meet to form the Madeira River, one of the main tributaries of the Amazon River. The region also houses seven indigenous territories and eight protected areas.

With this declaration, the Moxos Plains were included in the wetlands list of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, signed in 1971 by 160 countries with conservation and rational use of wetlands as its objectives.

Eight other Bolivian wetlands are in the Ramsar Convention. Bolivia began adhering to the Ramsar Convention in 1990 and ratified it in 2002.

Luis Pabón, director of WWF Bolivia, highlighted that “designating the Moxos Plains is paramount for wetlands conservation in the Amazon region, for its healthy condition will positively impact the water cycles of the Amazon basin; this will help conserve ecosystems and landscapes, guarantee the balanced provision of goods and services for Amazonian inhabitants, and ensure the conservation of this area.”

“But most important is the challenge that the Bolivian government and civil society are undertaking, committing themselves to protect the Moxos Plains in the long run,” added Pabón. “This declaration is a clear sign of how here, in Latin America and especially in Bolivia, the government processes and policies that support conservation can result in important achievements.”

—Latinamerica Press.
Indigenous population practices barter as a self-sustainability and food sovereignty mechanism. (Photo: Association of Cabildos Genaro Sánchez of the Central Zone Archive)

COLOMBIA
Susan Abad in Bogotá

“Through barter the friendship ties between reserves are strengthened, knowledge, ways of working, and organization are shared and most importantly, it rescues our own cosmovision and all our ancestral legacy.”
— Ricardo Manzano, from the Kokonuco people

I can remember when my parents were here, when people went up from the [temperate areas], who we called calentanos, and they brought brown sugar, plantains, we exchanged with potato, cabbage, with cheese, in the path of Ecuaré,” recalls for Latinamerica Press Luciana Caldón, who along with her husband and two of her seven children live in the Puracé indigenous reserve, and at 66 years of age is one of the most enthusiastic participants of the barter fair that every two months the Association of Cabildos Genaro Sánchez of the Central Zone organizes in the southwestern department of Cauca.

The practice of barter — qualified by Arhuaco investigative lawyer Belkis Izquierdo as “an economic strategy and action based on the collective exercise that becomes a mechanism of self-sustainability and food sovereignty” — was reinitiated through the initiative of the communities of that southern area of Colombia in 2003 and was strengthened in 2009 thanks to the guidance of the Association of Cabildos Genaro Sánchez of the Central Zone and the help of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO, through its
project “Integration of Ecosystems and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Colombian Massif,” developed between 2008 and 2010.

“Our structure is made up of about 22,000 inhabitants of 10 indigenous cabildos that are dispersed in the municipalities of Popayán, Puracé, and El Tambo. We have the Puracé, Kokonuco and Paletará, Quintana, Poblazón, Julumito, Chapas, Alto del Rey, and Guarapamba reserves,” explained to Latinamerica Press Ricardo Manzano, from the Kokonuco people and barter coordinator in Kokonuco, some 30 km (20 miles) southeast of Popayán, the capital of the department of Cauca.

As Manzano indicates, while at first only 150 people exchanged products, today between 600 and 1,500 indigenous people get together every two months to barter.

Better organization
The increase in participation has improved organization, beginning with an estimate of how many people will attend the event and the number of products that must be brought “so there is an equilibrium and so the food can be redistributed and so no one is lacking or has an abundance of a product,” explained Caldón, also from the Kokonuco people.

“This is how the participants from the temperate climates bring brown sugar, green and ripe plantain, yuca, oranges, peach palm fruit and pineapple, products that are highly valued by people of colder climates, who exchange them for potato, onion, milk, cheese, and strawberries.

Aside from recapturing an ancestral tradition, barter also allows the indigenous to have a better quality of life, to maintain their traditional structures, advance their own economic models, as well as consuming foods that in many cases—and increasingly—are organically cultivated, resulting in better health.

With agroecological and organic production, the communities continue with environmentally friendly farming practices, “respecting Mother Earth, who provides us with food, as a concept of all indigenous people,” affirms Manzano.

“We are protecting water sources. Water comes out — not as much — but at least it has not dried out as in other places,” says Caldón.

Aside from being a political-administrative process, barter also signifies an increase in production for these communities. The implementation of a harvest calendar allows the participants to have concrete information about the crops that each reserve cultivates and what are the periods or months of highest production. This facilitates the creation of a cultivation schedule and the selection of dates to barter.

The improved organization and increased production are important contributions to the food security and sovereignty of these communities. Manzano explains that, aside from “the quality, variety of products, and the healthiness and freshness,” the contribution of women through the exchange of ways of cooking the products and the participation of children in the events are important also, strengthening from the family [base] the recovery of the diet, customs, cultural traditions and their own knowledge.

Caring for the seeds
Within its own dynamic, barter has also allowed for the recovery of traditional seeds and their adaptation to diverse climates. “Before, there was good potato, good olluco and that was during a time that ended, but now we are producing seeds without poison, organic seeds, and that I also take and exchange,” tells to Latinamerica Press Mercedes Yace, from the Kokonuco reserve. In her role of seed and breeding stock guardian, Yace uses methods of conservation, dissemination, and distribution of seeds, from which not only will food sprout, but “plants with which [we] can apply all the knowledge of our traditional medicine,” she ensures.

The exchange of seeds allows people to obtain foods from different areas and enables reforestation with native species, becoming another positive experience for the environment and a way to face climate change.

On Feb. 28 barter number 46 took place. For Manzano, the process has continued these years “because it has engendered results at the political and social levels, at food sovereignty and health levels and a strengthening of the [local] economic model and an answer to the globalized food models.”

He adds that there are future plans such as “stepped greenhouse cultivation, making barriers with trees and isolating the natural springs.” Likewise, he hopes that barter will be used in other communities, by farmers, Afro-Colombians, and even in impoverished urban sectors.

“Barter enroots us, unites us, organizes us, strengthens us. It propels us to produce, to recover traditional gardens, to fight for what belongs to us. Through barter the friendship ties between reserves are strengthened, knowledge, ways of working, and organization are shared and most importantly, it rescues our own cosmovision and all our ancestral legacy,” Manzano affirms.
Communality as a way of life and resistance

The Indigenous Zapotec cultural system of living in harmony with nature coincides with the Andean concept of Good Living.

For Zapotec indigenous people, territory is the basis for the development of communality. (Photo: Ecotourism Committee of Santa Catarina Lachatao)

MEXICO
Ana Lilia Esquivel Ayala in Oaxaca

In Sierra Juárez, state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, people live the experience of communality, explains Zapotec indigenous thinker Jaime Martínez Luna in his 2010 book *Eso que llaman Comunalidad* (What They Call Communality): “We are communality, the opposite of individuality, we are communal territory, not private property; we are cooperating, not competing; we are polytheism, not monotheism. We are exchange, not business; diversity, not equality, although in the name of equality we are oppressed. We are interdependent, not free. We have authorities, not monarchs. Just as imperial powers have been based on the law and violence to subjugate us, in law and harmony we are based to replicate, to announce what we want and what we wish to be.”

 Territory is the physical space where the community stands. The relationship with nature is special, magical, spiritual, for it is known that life depends on that harmony between human beings and nature. It is made up of natural goods and sacred goods; it is the basis of physical and social reproduction; it is the principal site for the proper development of the communal culture.

The social and political organization has been established in such a way that it involves the participation of all members of the community in decision-making. They gather in the General Citizens Assembly — considered to be the space that represents maximum authority within the community — where men and women freely express their opinions to reach consensus to the benefit of the community.

The council of elders or select body (group designated by the General Assembly that is made up of citizens who were outstanding in carrying out the duties of various positions within the community) becomes a space of consult and opinion, where experience and knowledge guide and orient the path to follow. The positions of the community are decided and assigned in the General Assembly; this way, communal authorities, commissions, and committees made up of inhabitants of the community are designated. The election of authorities is based on prestige and, consequently, on the work done.

Communality is “living knowledge that allows everyone to coexist and collaborate collectively for the service of all.”

—Jaime Martínez Luna, Zapotec indigenous thinker
Exercising public offices does not entail an economic reward, but brings prestige and trust that increases in accordance with the hierarchy of the position.

The resistance of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Juárez has allowed for the conservation of values and principles of complementarity and reciprocity within a harmonious environment that have been undermined and destroyed by capitalist practices characterized by the control and depredation of natural resources as well as violence towards the communities of the region. Said resistance, motivated by the history of each community, has led these peoples to have more possibilities to reach and/or maintain their wellbeing, happiness, and that which they call communality (or communal life) which coincides with the idea of Good Living stemming from Andean thought.

**Identifying with Mother Earth**

Santa Catarina Lachatao, a Zapatec community located in the Sierra Juárez, represents a clear example of the reunion between human beings and nature. In past times, its people decided to exploit its natural resources. Tree logging came to be one of the main economic activities in the region. Today, however, they thread a different path. Juan Santiago Hernández, former municipal president and now the communal representative, explains to *Latinamerica Press* that the relationship that exists with nature is now a harmonious one. To him, Mother Earth is part of his identity.

“If we have land and we take care of it, we will continue to exist,” he says. “A harmony with the soil, the water, the air is all. Nature is the most important thing for us; it is life.”

These feelings toward nature within communal living are being transmitted to the children. Verónica Hernández Cruz, an assistant to the Ecotourism Committee of the community, points out: “Now we are doing some activities with the children, taking them to the forest because they must feel it, live it in such a way that they begin realizing the consequences of not taking care of and respecting nature. We teach them what flora and fauna are. Also by doing workshops we want to transmit to them the desire to continue preserving what nature gives us.”

While it brought important economic benefits for a short period, logging has left a great irreversible void in the natural landscape of the community. Through rescuing its own history, Santa Catarina Lachatao has been constructing and working with alternatives that lead to the wellbeing and happiness of the community while always maintaining a balance with nature. Activities such as agriculture — growing corn, beans, chickpeas, wheat, fava bean, and pumpkin — and ecotourism are generating income, while not clouding the concepts of conservation and good management of natural resources.

Ecotourism offers visitors a true coexistence with nature. Hernández Cruz comments that the activities carried out for the project to function satisfactorily range from residual water treatment to waste recycling and capturing rainwater. Likewise, materials such as adobe and tiles are utilized to build cabins to ensure minimal impact on nature.

**Preserving the forest**

For his part, Santiago Hernández remembers: “Grandparents talked to us about the harmony with nature; they told us that before there was a lot of water, before one went to the forest and heard birds and other animals. Now we go and the forest is dryer, we no longer find birds or the animals that they used to see. Because of this we know that, yes, there must be respect for nature. We also think of future generations, for they would tell us that we had the opportunity to conserve the forest and to put a halt to its exploitation. And perhaps they will think that it is for money that we continue to exploit and kill nature. Instead, we want them to say that we put a stop to it, that we tried to initiate that fight.”

To understand communal life, elements such as trust, complementarity, reciprocity, brotherhood, and party must be taken into consideration. For the Zapotec communities of this region, teamwork and supporting each other in a communal activity named tequío brings them wellbeing. *Tequío* is an organized way to work towards a collective benefit, where all the citizens volunteer their time and labor to build and maintain community facilities, such as schools, water supply systems or road cleaning. This way of living is not new; it is an intrinsic part of how the indigenous peoples view the world, something inherited from their ancestors. However, the influence of the western world and the constant attacks from privatization, in addition to the penetration of communication media that is based on market principles, have distorted this world view, which is why communities such as Santa Catarina Lachatao seek to recover their tainted values and rescue the harmonious equilibrium between human beings and nature.

Paraphrasing thinker Martínez Luna, communality is the ideology, thinking, and action that has allowed communities to face and resolve challenges and problems that history has brought them. For him, communality is “living knowledge that allows everyone to coexist and collaborate collectively for the service of all.”

The importance of understanding and preserving this lifestyle, says Martínez Luna, “lies in the fact that in the future, the survival and transcendence of the ancient peoples, with respect to the actions of the world that surrounds them, will rest on maintaining the resistance-adaptation of this communal way of being (…) for it is known that the fundamental values of western society are based on individualism.”
Three years after the creation of the National Organization of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women of Peru, or ONAMIAP, 150 women leaders from around the country met at their second congress Dec. 6-7, 2012.

Under the theme “Indigenous women building el Buen Vivir,” the indigenous concept translated as “good living,” the conference was meant to be a “space for meeting, exchange, analysis, debate, and the creation of proposals that strengthen the individual and collective rights of women and indigenous peoples in Peru to guarantee Buen Vivir in our communities.”

Topics discussed included indigenous institutional structures, prior consultation and consent, as well as a plan for gender equality and food security and sovereignty. Finally, the 2012-2014 executive committee was named.

Luz Gladis Vila Pihue, an indigenous Quechua from the central department of Huancavelica was reelected ONAMIAP president.

“We want our problems and needs to be heard, we want our proposals incorporated in public policy,” said Vila Pihue.

The participants strongly criticized social programs promoted by the government of President Ollanta Humala, supposedly aimed at reducing poverty and achieving “social inclusion.” They noted that they are being used for political reasons, and observed that in some cases the program requirements exclude the intended beneficiaries.

The Juntos program, which provides financial compensation to people in extreme poverty, “requires individual electric and water bills, and in some communities there is often only a communal bill. This requirement hurts the most needy, as they cannot be part of the program,” they said at the plenary session.

They also questioned a program combating malnutrition because it encourages the consumption of transgenic products and does not promote food security. Regarding the law on the prior consultation with indigenous and native peoples, which took effect in April, the group stated that the government has not respected the proposals or observations of the statute made by indigenous organizations.

The Indigenous Women’s National Agenda, which was approved during the meeting, included eight issues: land and territory, climate change, food sovereignty and security, political participation of indigenous women, indigenous health, indigenous and intercultural education, the fight against violence against indigenous women, and an economy of solidarity and sustainability.

“We want our problems and needs to be heard, we want our proposals incorporated in public policy.”

— Luz Gladis Vila Pihue, indigenous Quechua
Indigenous peoples in the city

Bogotá is home to 87 indigenous communities who fight to maintain their ancestral customs that are based on Good Living.

About 20,000 indigenous people live in Bogotá, the Colombian capital of 7.4 million people. Muiska, Kichwa, Ambika Pijao and Inga people are organized in five cabildos — semiautonomous administrative units recognized by the city government. However, there are also indigenous communities or parcialidades made up of Yanacara, Pasto, Tubú, Kankuamo, Íká, Wayuu, Huitoto, Munane, Páez Nasa, Emberá Katio, Waunaan, Kamsá, and Curripaco people, among others.

The Muïsa, or Chibcha, people make up 38 percent of the indigenous population that lives in Bogotá and are concentrated in the Suba and Bosa cabildos. The other three indigenous cabildos are the Kichwa, Ambika Pijao, and Inga, all of which are grouped in the Association of Indigenous Cabildos of Bogotá, or ASCAI.

According to information from the Principal Mayor’s Office of Bogotá, the indigenous cabildos are special public entities “whose members belong to an indigenous community, are elected and recognized by that community, with a traditional socio-political organization whose role is to legally represent the community, exercise authority and carry out the activities assigned by law, its habits, customs, and the internal regulations of each community.”

The indigenous community or parcialidad, for its part, is the group of families “who are identity-conscious and share values, characteristics, habits or customs of their culture as well as forms of government, administration, social control or [their] own legal systems that distinguish them from other communities, whether [they] may or may not have property titles or titles they cannot legally accredit, or whose reserves were dissolved, divided, or declared vacant,” states the web page of the Principal Mayor’s Office of Bogotá.

To ensure that the language, identity, and customs of these peoples are not lost, in 2007 the capital’s municipal government, in coordination with the national government, launched the Initial Education Project for the Indigenous Peoples, through which five kindergartens were implemented for half a thousand indigenous boys and girls between the ages of 14 months and 5 years.

The indigenous kindergartens Wawita Kunapa Wasi (Children’s Home) of the Inga people, in the locality of Candelaria, Uba Rhua (Spirit of the Seed) of the Muïsa people of Bosa, Makade Tinikana (To Walk Walking) of the Huitoto people in the locality of Santa Fe, Semillas Ambika Pijao of the Pijao people, in the locality of Usme, and Gue Atyqib (House of Thought) of the Muïsa people of Suba, offer an integral and differential attention service to boys and girls, with educational processes that create a dialogue between ancestral and western knowledge.

Additionally, the habits, customs, and ways of thinking of the indigenous peoples are present at these schools through the teachings of agriculture, knitting, ceramics, metal work, music, dance, traditional medicine and language, among other customs and arts. Only about 700 Muïsa families survive in what used to be their territory, what Bogotá occupies today.

—Latinamerica Press.