

BUEN VIVIR: THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY INSPIRING MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Facilitator's note: If time permits, have the participants read the following text from Eduardo Gudynas's interview with the Guardian and reflect on the questions individually before having small or larger group discussions.

Ecuador is building on its Indigenous past by incorporating the concept of *sumak kawsay* into its approach to development. Rooted in the cosmovision (or worldview) of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, *sumak kawsay* – or *buen vivir*, to give it its Spanish name – describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive. A far cry from the market-is-king model of capitalism, it inspired the recently revised Ecuadorian constitution, which now reads: “We ... hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living.”

In English, *buen vivir* loosely translates as “good living” or “well living,” although neither term sits well with Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on the subject. Both are too close to Western notions of wellbeing or welfare, he says: “These are not equivalents at all. With *buen vivir*, the subject of wellbeing is not [about the] individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environmental situation.” ...

Gudynas is at pains to point out that *buen vivir* owes as much to political philosophy as it does to Indigenous worldviews. “It is equally influenced by western critiques [of capitalism] over the last 30 years, especially from the field of feminist thought and Environmentalism.” ...

A defining characteristic of *buen vivir* is harmony, he says, harmony between human beings, and also between human beings and nature. A related theme is a sense of the collective. Capitalism is a great promoter of individual rights: the right to own, to sell, to keep, to have. But this alternative paradigm from South America subjugates the rights of the individual to those of peoples, communities and nature.

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***Buen vivir* is an unfolding philosophy . . . It describes a way of life and a form of development that sees social, cultural, environmental and economic issues working together and in balance, not separately and hierarchically as at present. Rather than see *buen vivir* as a strict blueprint for change, Gudynas suggests that it is better to view it as a launch pad for fresh thinking and new perspectives: "It helps us see the limits of current development models and it allows us to dream of alternatives that until now have been difficult to fulfil."**

Balch, Oliver. (February, 2013). "Buen vivir: the social philosophy inspiring movements in South America." (Interview with Eduardo Gudynas.) *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas>.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are your reactions to the concept of *Buen Vivir*, as described above? What thoughts or images come to mind?
- What might you do concretely to incorporate the principles of *Buen Vivir* into your life? Are there any aspects that are already a part of your life?
- Can you think of examples where you believe that the rights of the "collective" or communities should be put ahead of individual rights? (see paragraph 4)
- What kind of world would we live in if more countries committed to adopting *Buen Vivir*? (Dream Big!)