

## BUEN VIVIR: THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY INSPIRING MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

page  
1/2

*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.

## **BUEN VIVIR: THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY INSPIRING MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA**

page  
**2/2**

***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!)