



CULTURE: A PILLAR FOR DEVELOPMENT AND GOOD LIVING

■ Myrna Cunningham

Former chair and current member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Introduction

Culture, through its various expressions and practices, especially language, represents, links, enriches, mixes, and consolidates the structure that sustains and puts into operation the socio-economic formation of a given society. Cultural values are needed to achieve development, preserve identity and guarantee Living Well. This way, life, coexistence and complementarity harmoniously blend for the benefit of communities and nations. Culture can transform the local context for a balanced economic, environmental and social change.

Culture is an active process whereby human groups meet their present collective needs. It involves language, values, behaviours, standards, institutions, human knowledge and capacities, and individual and collective memories that make sense of human existence and without which this existence is not possible. Consequently, the dimensions of culture reveal themselves in politics, economics and social life in general. Living Well cannot, therefore, be linked only with per capita income or economic growth; it should include values, standards, ideas and behaviours that provide for harmony between human beings and Mother Earth. Culture and language are the primary substrates for the current generations to feel encouraged by the present and renew their ancient legacy.

IN KEEPING WITH THE INDIGENOUS VISION OF THE WORLD, ANY FORM OF EXISTENCE IS CONSIDERED EQUAL, LIVES, AND MATTERS. THE FUNDAMENTAL BASIS FOR SUSTAINABILITY IS RESPECT FOR MOTHER NATURE

This text deals with two questions. The first one focuses on the concept and praxis of Good Living. The second one looks into the different dimensions of life and into community-based economy, involving indigenous women who make this concept real and possible. Indigenous and non-indigenous stakeholders are expected to make a contribution to the formulation of inclusive public policies that fully respond to and further develop their capacities, and strengthen standards and institutions of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and communities.¹

We indigenous peoples aim to achieve sustainable development by preserving our ethnic and cultural identity. According to the Western concept of development, which prevails in the global economy today, development is supported by three pillars: social, economic and environmental. It leaves out and ignores ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. From our perspective and view of the world, culture and language are the main vehicles to make sense, define, create, link, communicate, and provide coherence, sustainability and development opportunities, in short, to Live Well.

The idea of Good Living has to do with social conditions, prospects and quality of life of indigenous peoples. It is based on the principles of reciprocity, complementarity and redistribution on different walks of social, economic, cultural and political life. In keeping with the indigenous vision of the world, any form of existence is considered equal, lives, and matters. The fundamental basis for sustainability is respect for Mother Nature, as observed and guaranteed by indigenous peoples in their territories.

Within the framework of the right to self-determination, the concept of sustainable development based on cultural diversity will ensure livelihoods in a respectful, complementary relation with nature and living beings. A distinctive feature of development, as conceived of from the perspective of culture and identity, respecting tradition and spirituality with a vision for the future, is the promotion and consolidation of collective rights, self-government, and governance over lands, territories and resources indigenous people have traditionally owned.

What are the elements present in cultures that make it possible to achieve sustainable development, the Common Good and Living Well? First of all, the being; there is no culture that is not human. Culture is everything that we humans have learned and done on a daily basis, in everyday life.² Mother tongues, views of the world, knowledge, water, crops and wildlife are vital components for development and public policies. They provide tools for sustainable development and should include culture as a central element.

Learning experiences, the collective capacity for creation in line with cultural settings, and the human and intellectual capital of indigenous peoples make it possible to face the urgent challenges posed by climate change and to approach culture as an indispensable, abundant resource for sustainable development, dependant on creative and innovative capacities, and on the way new ideas and communication technologies are applied for knowledge sharing.

The idea is to expand the horizon and update experiences in the context of Good Living, taking into account that it is almost impossible to deal with the tension caused by economic analysis under systems whose sustainability approach ignores, underestimates or denies basic obligations and, in many instances, fails to comply with the United Nations Charter adopted in 1945, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001, the Convention 169 of ILO, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. These systems demand, however, that we comply with standards and measures.

As professionals, researchers, intellectuals, leaders and/or indigenous wise men and women of demonstrated political, academic or spiritual experience, we are participating in different forums and events, working to redress unequal, unsustainable relations. We devise ways of dealing with the lack of indicators relevant to indigenous peoples, such as the sense of community solidarity and coexistence, time recording, balance and harmony, consensus, dialogue, interpersonal respect, friendly and respectful use of nature and its resources

(especially wild flora and fauna), value and standard systems (indigenous community and customary law), women's contribution to social and cultural reproduction, and the new dynamics transmitted by women to the local and community economies.

It should be stressed that the cultural factors typical of every people are the main source for economic and social development. We see culture as a structure based on social production and the transmission of identities, memories, representations, meanings, knowledge, beliefs, values, aspirations, purposes and attitudes. The way of life and culture of a particular people involve customs, beliefs, codes of conduct, styles of dress, language, art, cookery, science, technology, religion, traditions and institutions.

The Declaration of the World Conference on Cultural Policies, convened by UNESCO in Mexico in 1982, indicated that culture constitutes a fundamental dimension of the development process and helps to strengthen independence, sovereignty and identity (...) It is vital to humanize development, the ultimate goal of which is the individual in his dignity as a human being and his responsibility to society (...) Man is the origin and the goal of development (...) Balanced development can only be ensured by making cultural factors an integral part of the strategies designed to achieve it; consequently, these strategies should always be devised in the light of the historical, social and cultural context of each society.

Decolonized ethics, identities and cultural heritage

Indigenous cultures are ethical systems that have their own moral code of justice based on customs and traditions, where beliefs, values and views of the world are honoured and deemed sacred and fundamental because they are founded on unique forms of being and living, respecting natural balances.

Relations with nature, the environment and Mother Earth lend a unique, diverse character to indigenous cultures and provide indigenous peoples with the material, social and spiritual strength necessary to exercise self-determination.

Colonizing thinking and divergent ethics prevail in unequal power social relations. This is critically important for relations between States which, by reproducing discriminatory practices, impede the exercise of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination. These unequal relations also prevent alternative local economic practices from developing. Most of them are based on ancient principles and practices that seek to fight economic poverty.

The building of equitable and supportive societies, which rest on ethical rationality, requires the adoption of values that are practiced by indigenous peoples on a daily basis: commitment, loyalty, sense of duty, coexistence, solidarity, and justice. These values are not closed, alien or exclusive concepts, have provided for the survival of cultures, and can help re-establish ecological, social and political harmony.

The capacity- and well-being-based approach, as advanced by Amartya Sen, has opened new avenues for ethical economic theories. Marta Pedrajas stated that a modern review of Sen's approach will make it possible to better substantiate the entire capacity-based approach: An autonomy that goes far beyond any agency because it is based on the inalienable dignity of every human being. This is not the means but the end, that is, to further strengthen a model of social justice in modern democratic societies where the actual living conditions of their citizens - real and concrete human beings - incorporate essential components such as ethnicity, phenotype, gender, memory, history, culture and the capacity to exercise the principle of self-determination in formulating development proposals.³

Good Living - Living Well: Concept and Paradigm

Our indigenous peoples have built our social capital from the perspective of ethnic identity and the common good. The saying of Miskitu and Mayangna peoples goes: together we have, together we do and together we share. It defines the frame of reference for development processes. This is a cultural practice, a philosophy of life, coexistence and survival. The 2005 Human Development Report entitled Nicaragua asume su diversidad contains the autonomous experience and good practices of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in the Self-governing Regions and provides extensive statistical data on their contribution to national well-being.



Traditional weaving of the Ecuadorian toquilla straw hat

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The Andean Cosmivision of the Kallawayas



Aymara Community



PICTURE FROM THE KIT OF THE 2008 CONVENTION UNESCO

BASED ON THE DIVERSITY OF PEOPLES, INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUALS BELIEVE THAT «GOOD LIVING-LIVING WELL» REFERS TO SPIRITUALITY, SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL BALANCE, AND JOIE DE VIVRE

The Common-Good paradigm practice in the Nicaraguan Caribbean is explained in the Report as follows: ⁴

“Together we have” an ancient heritage that consists of territories, natural resources, language, and knowledge. As community members, we have equal access to this heritage under the indigenous and customary law system of every people.

“Together we do” and united as a family we stand to reproduce livelihoods in the community, on the basis of reciprocity, collectivism, and sense of belonging.

“Together we share” existing goods and services, as well as the past and the social and collective memory to live today and think about the future in keeping with the values that identify us in the trilogy composed of territory, identity and Common Good.

Another paradigm is added to the Common Good praxis, that of, “Living Well” or “Good Living.”⁵ This ethics is based on the daily life of indigenous peoples, seeking to limit economic development to a rational, environmentally friendly level, as well as economic and social inequalities. It can therefore restructure power relations.⁶

Daily life is the main idea behind cultures and their forms of production and reproduction; it is in daily life for subsistence where indigenous ethics lies. This analysis should highlight the role played by indigenous women in their communities as well as their contributions and undertakings to transform the environment and focus on development, preserving cultural, social and spiritual balance.

Sustainable development with indigenous identity duly preserved implies Good Living/Living Well/Living Life to the Full, recognizing that other civilizations should adopt this “new” paradigm that ensures local, sustainable, environmentally friendly, and identity-related lifestyles and livelihoods.⁷

Based on the diversity of peoples, indigenous intellectuals believe that “Good Living/Living Well” refers to spirituality, spiritual and cultural balance, and joie de vivre. These are fundamental elements to review living conditions and quality of life in the light of the principles of reciprocity,

complementarity, and re-distribution on different walks of social, economic, cultural and political life. When local institutions and systems analyze the economic conditions that have to do with production and exchange, indigenous identity - which has made it possible for us to say who we are, where we come from and where we are heading - and social organization systems based on the relationship between peoples and traditional authorities - which perform a service function - should be linked with the profound spirituality that governs the relationship between peoples and Mother Nature.⁸

Ethical proposal of contemporary indigenous thinkers for sustainable human development with identity

Good Living/Living Well requires an equitable, non-exclusive society. This is a day-by-day agenda, proposal and project under which Living Well should be reconciled with views and knowledge that are all alive, operational, understood and practiced on a daily basis.

Solidarity, Reciprocity, Collectivism, Resilience, and Self-sustainability are daily, logical, social, real productive practices. These are some of the values, rationalities and philosophies proposed by contemporary indigenous thinkers at the current historical juncture, which is marked by a crisis of human-kind and nature, and needs to overcome devastating economic, political, cultural, discursive and ethical models.

For this purpose, we should re-learn to respect each other and relate in all areas as subjects rather than objects. Good Living, once free from the utilitarian-individualistic approach, should give way to socialized learning and knowledge.

For Good Living/Living Well with integrity, living in harmony with nature and humanity, no longer being a paradigm and forming part of daily life, indigenous peoples urge States to fully honour their commitments under international and national laws and standards, which guarantee the inherent, inalienable, collective and inter-generational rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the rights set forth in constructive arrangements, agreements and treaties, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Convention 169 of ILO.

Pressing demands of indigenous peoples

In his comparative analysis of Latin-American Political Constitutions, Alejandro Bonilla indicates that the recognition, acceptance and appropriation of the provisions of indigenous law, customary law and the principles of Good Governance,⁹ Community Justice,¹⁰ and Good Living help to harmonize human relations with nature and the environment. Indigenous research demands the incorporation of fundamental aspects into the debate over sustainable economic development:

- Giving priority to life
- Prioritizing cosmic rights
- Living in complementarity and balance with nature
- Guaranteeing territorial rights and comprehensive land management
- Building dynamic community economies
- Protecting natural and cultural diversity
- Participating fully in decision-making and seeking free, previous and informed consent (FPIC) on policies, programmes and projects
- Developing indigenous leadership capacities for comprehensive land management

Good-Living Praxis

Indigenous peoples participated in Rio+20 and conveyed the following key messages:

1. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should become international norms and standards and a frame of reference for sustainable development.
2. The culture and ethical/moral values necessary to nurture and protect Earth should be considered pillars for sustainable development.
3. The protection of and respect for the rights over lands, territories and national resources of indigenous peoples are pre-requisites for sustainable development.
4. The distinctive, crucial contribution of traditional knowledge and local economic diversity to the eradication of poverty and sustainable development should be recognized.
5. Sustainable development should be supported by a holistic framework and should incorporate approaches based on human rights, ecosystems and knowledge founded on the territory, interculturality and gender.

In this context, we indigenous peoples undertook to implement the following actions:

1. Setting and implementing our priorities for economic, social and cultural development and environmental protection on the basis of our cultures, knowledge and traditional practices, and exercising our inherent right to self-determination.
2. Revitalizing, strengthening and restoring our institutions and forms of transmission of knowledge and traditional practices, giving priority to the role played by wise men and women in passing them on to the new generations.
3. Re-establishing the exchange of knowledge and goods between peoples and communities, including seeds, guaranteeing the genetic integrity of our biodiversity.

Before establishing Good-Living parameters, there is a need to obtain ethnic- and gender-disaggregated information in indigenous peoples so as to identify:

- existent gaps, including those based on racial discrimination, social stratification, exclusion and gender considerations, and
- issues upon which there is a consensus to develop economic well-being indicators.

The urgent need for culturally relevant statistical indicators was raised by ECLAC in the socio-demographic information on policies and programmes in 2006: *there is a growing need for methodologically consistent and culturally relevant statistics and indicators to assess living conditions in indigenous peoples and, especially, access gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, and marginalization situations in education, health, housing, home and family.*¹¹

In reviewing the Good-Living locus, we first identify cross-cutting issues like gender and population patterns. Among the key elements of contemporary indigenous thinking, we can list the following:

- legal security of lands, territories and natural resources;
- integrity of the cultural heritage;
- respect for identity and non-discrimination;
- culturally appropriate education;
- intercultural health;



Taquile and its Textile Art

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- control over destiny;
- full, informed and effective participation;
- access to infrastructure and basic services;
- degree of external threats; and
- material well-being.

According to indigenous spirituality and view of the world, natural resources are far from being economic possessions. The territory provides the basis for the development of cultural life and for the legal, political, economic and social model or system in place.

Women in indigenous community-based economy

Breaking away from colonial approaches to measure well-being and development demands new perspectives. To indigenous community inhabitants, women provide the basis for social organization, as they transmit their cultural knowledge to sons and daughters. This knowledge is the material base for development because unequal power relations have forced indigenous women to master their settings, resources and raw materials. They are the ones who generate knowledge. Their efforts and struggles involve the need to supply food; that is why they know so much about conservation and do not deplete the resources that make sustainability possible.

Knowledge generation has changed. Local economies are being managed by women under appropriate production modalities to guarantee sustainable resource management. This is the case of agriculture, fisheries, seeds and medicinal plants.

Culture and traditions have historically influenced the main economic activities of indigenous peoples, including hunting, fishing and sowing. Indigenous women are language knowledge bearers. Language encompasses concepts, knowledge, strength, force, and empowerment so that the

community remains alive. This is why traditional knowledge should be related to the economy.

In devising the development model for each indigenous people, it is imperative to identify the knowledge that is inherent in their culture and the way(s) the community protects and preserves it, and recreates its coexistence with Mother Earth, natural resources, culture, production and way of life.

The economic indicators relevant to indigenous women need to measure the impact of community work. Efforts have so far been focused on labour statistics and unpaid domestic work assessment, as well as on the incorporation of unremunerated work into national accounts.¹²

There are, at least, three dimensions to consider when analyzing the indigenous community-based economy: economic diversity or pluralism, social and cultural reproduction of production practices, and territory and environment. Women's work in the light of these dimensions has a wide range of implications on individual and collective rights, as they are the knowledge bearers of their peoples.

Dimension 1: Economic diversity and pluralism

Indigenous women's contribution to diversified productive activities:

- Specific agricultural activities: sowing, harvesting, and care.
- Craft activities: textiles, kilns, etc.
- Crop-related activities: fruit collection, traditional seed care and protection.
- Productive activities: water use, small livestock, fisheries and collection.

Los indicadores que deben complementar esta primera dimensión son:

- Policies and budgets in support of traditional productive practices.
- Legal security of lands, territories and natural resources, specifically for women (including widows and those affected by inheritance disputes).

Dimension 2: Social and cultural reproduction of indigenous economic institutions

Indigenous women's role in the operation and maintenance of indigenous economic institutions.

Indigenous women's role in cultural activities and ceremonials typical of the community-based economy of each indigenous people, such as Pana Pana, Mano Vuelta, Biribiri and other celebrations like Inti Raymi and local festivals.

Women's role in cultural reproduction through the transmission of:

- language;
- bedding and planting modalities;
- traditional food names, preparation and conservation;
- fitting-out of fishing gear and types of fisheries;
- knowledge of ceremonial practices and domestic use; and
- values necessary to preserve, adjust and reproduce traditional lifestyles.

Complementary indicators:

- Reciprocity, complementarity and solidarity;
- Use of surpluses in the community, collective use of remittances, and other practices.

Dimension 3: Territory and environment

Indigenous women's contribution to collective environmental services in the community

TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY INHABITANTS, WOMEN PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, AS THEY TRANSMIT THEIR CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Indigenous women's role in defining standards related to land use and community resources (conservation areas, species reproduction, sacred sites, sowing areas, fisheries, etc.)

Women's contribution to traditional medicines and seed conservation.

Complementary indicators: monitoring, implementation and control.

Dissemination and socialization

The list of dissemination actions includes indigenous education initiatives and nascent intercultural communication networks. The former are mainly linked with the Intercultural Indigenous University (UII) - a regional initiative promoted by the Fund for the Development of Latin-American and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples (Indigenous Fund) - which seeks to train indigenous people so that they can become professionals and leaders. This capacity-building programme will help them apply an intercultural approach to coordination and decision-making activities and have a political, economic and social impact on their communities. In its initial stage, UII has been supported by over twenty Associated Academic Centres (CAAs) and several international cooperation agencies.

The UII Network is made up of public, private, intercultural, community-based and indigenous universities that have gained experience in developing curricula for indigenous peoples in close coordination with them. The design and implementation of training programmes call for interaction between indigenous organizations and university faculties, which share knowledge. The Network is mainly characterized by mutual cooperation, lifelong learning, knowledge sharing, and joint development.

For the purpose of promoting dialogue and knowledge sharing, UII has established an Itinerant Indigenous Chair (CII). The idea is to incorporate a space for information, analysis and conceptual and methodological contributions relative to indigenous knowledge, wisdom, ideology and view of the world into post-graduate courses. This makes it possible to review the impact of this knowledge on political, social, cultural and spiritual relations of indigenous peoples and to undertake intercultural dialogue processes.

The transformation of multiethnic, multicultural and plurinational States demands territorial reorganization and restructure. It is vital for this purpose to build indigenous leadership for the sustainable, successful management of territories and the effective performance of new responsibilities.

Good governance and probity to serve community interest are top priorities that should give indigenous leaders food for thought. There is a need to further ask States to show consistency between internationally assumed human-rights commitments and national policies. Internally, they should also be asked to restore values and an ethics for sustainable, comprehensive management of resources and territories, building upon the cultural and spiritual strength of our peoples **C&D**



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Notes

¹Nicaragua is leading the efforts being made for equal rights for native and Afro-descendant peoples. This is a struggle by Black organizations on the continent, which represent peoples or communities whose constitution, or under the concept in fashion: "ethnogenesis," is closely related to indigenous peoples, that is Miskitu, Garifuna, Rama/Creole, Saramaka (Suriname), the Black peoples/Kilombos of the Colombian Pacific, etc.

²The life experiences gained on a daily basis get transmitted and always convey some meaning. They become symbols with a certain strength, duration and significance (Davis et al.).

³See Amartya Sen. Sobre ética y economía. Marta Pedrajas. La transformación ética de la racionalidad económica en Amartya Sen. Una recuperación de Adam Smith Cuadernos de filosofía i ciencia, 36, 2006, pp. 105-117.

⁴Derived from the Common Good, there are principles and values that regulate the social order at the community level: totality, authority, solidarity, subsidiarity, mutual respect, harmony, consensus, and reciprocity. These values nurture and strengthen an incipient community social capital and make up an institutionalized standard-setting system that operates as a code of ethics duly sanctioned through reward and punishment. Respect and unity are cross-cutting elements under this system (UNDP, 2005).

⁵"Yamni iwanka laka" is the traditional Miskitu concept for Good Living. This concept is a system of intra-community relations made up of five basic pillars: freedom, self-subsistence capacity, reciprocity relations, respect, and social peace. Peace, a result of the interaction of all these factors, is the very core of the system. Wangky Miskitu community reports indicate that local crime and drug trafficking are extremely (freedom-) disturbing factors today. It is, therefore, very difficult to improve

living conditions in community-based economic activities (Davis et al.).

⁶This is Juan Pablo Neri summarized definition that refers to the concept that indigenous peoples use to pave the way for sustainable development in the future. <http://ferreco.blogspot.com/2011/03/etica-indigena-y-la-cotidianidad-de-un.html>. Sumak kawsay in Qhichwa; Suma Qamaña in Aymara; Sumak Ñandereco in Guarani; Laman Laka in Miskitu.

⁷Sumak kawsay in Qhichwa; Suma Qamaña in Aymara; Sumak Ñandereco in Guarani; Laman Laka in Miskitu.

⁸In Davis et al., see Cunningham (2009) and Choque Quispe (2010).

⁹Good Governance is understood as the coordination between different authority levels to promote joint sustainable development processes, guaranteeing the recognition of and respect for historical rights in the community (HDR, 2005:221).

¹⁰Indigenous justice is a set of elements inherent in the establishment and implementation of customary standards that seek to re-establish social order and peace. Indigenous, natural authorities are in charge of complying with and implementing community standards, values and principles, without the intervention of the State, its judges or bureaucratic agencies (Bonilla, A. 2012:-)

¹¹ECLAC, 2006 in Cunningham, 2010.

¹²Socio-economic indicators play a critical role: the community-based economy is being negatively affected by the lack of public safety due to drug trafficking and local crime. Young people are faced with a lack of educational and employment opportunities and drug-associated risks. The high cost of living and commodities prices are unprecedented.