

Scaling up Buen Vivir: Globalizing Local Environmental Governance from Ecuador

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How does the population of a small Ecuadorian province influence the development strategies pursued nationally and consequently push the global conversation toward an alternative model of sustainable development? This article explores watershed management reform in Tungurahua, Ecuador, to analyze how local communities challenged the dominant international model of sustainable development and drew on indigenous norms to offer an alternative. These communities resisted proposals by a transnational network advocating watershed management reforms that coupled conservation with markets for ecosystem services. Community members, however, did not reject the idea of reforming watershed management, and they negotiated with transnational advocates to create an alternative program rooted in indigenous norms. Tungurahua's indigenous communities labeled their effort *Mushuk Yuyay* (Quichua for "new ideas") to emphasize their departure from the development approach favored internationally. Their approach sought to realize the Quichua concept *sumak kawsay* (*buen vivir* in Spanish or wellbeing in English), which refers to living in harmony with nature, rather than dominating nature or removing human presence through conservation. In this study of Tungurahua's watershed management reform, we show how the emerging ideal of *sumak kawsay* was institutionalized and put into practice.

The Tungurahua case demonstrates the significance of historically marginalized indigenous communities in political processes and the influence of indigenous norms on the global discourse regarding how to organize society around practices that harmonize human relationships with nature.¹ This article explains how the Tungurahuan peoples' operationalization and institutionalization of the indigenous concepts *mushuk yuyay* and *sumak kawsay* through Tungurahua's "new governance model" for sustainable watershed management provided a model for Ecuador's National Plan for Wellbeing. This plan guides Ecuador's development strategy, which has become part of a greater international campaign for the rights of nature and alternative paths of sustainable development—a global movement for *buen vivir*. It has influenced the global

1. <http://harmonywithnatureun.org>, accessed January 15, 2013.

discourse on sustainable development by providing a concrete example of an alternative to the dominant approach pursued through the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Consequently, the Tungurahua case illuminates how local populations working with competing interpretations from international agendas construct environmental governance regimes, and how the scaling up of these regimes carry local norms of environmental management to the global level to challenge dominant international norms.

We primarily use process tracing to analyze the bargaining process that incorporated indigenous norms into Tungurahua's innovative watershed management regime, the subsequent institutionalization of these norms in Ecuador's constitution and national development plan, and the influence on global discourse surrounding sustainable development. Evidence comes from primary documents, personal observation, and seventy-eight in-depth interviews collected during two years of fieldwork between 2009 and 2011. Interviewees were selected using social maps of the watershed's stakeholders produced by local NGOs and snowball sampling to identify less-obvious relationships. Interviewees included representatives of municipal, provincial and national governments, local and international NGOs, donor agencies, private companies, indigenous and farmers associations, and community organizations. Comparing interviews of this diverse range of stakeholders with primary documents and direct observation allowed us to triangulate the data, increasing the credibility and validity of results.

Buen Vivir: Overcoming the Western Sustainable Development Dilemma

The ancient indigenous concept of *buen vivir* recognizes the indelible human link to the Earth. It contains a set of norms regarding humans' need to live within their natural environment through a balanced, or sustainable, process. In recent years, these norms have become prominent throughout the Andes, including through the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions and the declarations of indigenous rights movements.² Ecuador's 2008 constitution preamble states, "We decide to construct a new form of civil society, in diversity and harmony with nature to achieve *el buen vivir*, *el sumak kawsay*."³ According to Alberto Acosta, the president of Ecuador's Constitutional Assembly, the significance of incorporating *buen vivir* into the constitution lies in its reorientation of the country's development model.⁴ *Buen vivir* breaks with the internationally dominant notion of development as accumulation through economic growth. Proponents see it as an alternative to conventional development that overcomes a false dilemma posed by Western ideals.⁵

2. Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature 2010; Republic of Bolivia 2009.

3. Republic of Ecuador 2008, 3.

4. Acosta 2010.

5. Fatheurer 2011; Gudynas 2012.

The dominant international concept of development derives from the Western ideals of individualism, progress as the linear unfolding of history, and the separation of humankind from nature. Western thought has long presented individuals as lords or lawmakers of nature, while viewing development as increasing consumption and production.⁶ This leads to nature being framed as a quantity of natural resources to be manipulated by individuals to pursue development. In the 1980s, concern with the environmental consequences of rapid development gave rise to the dominant concept of sustainable development, which seeks both ecological sustainability and economic growth.⁷ Despite disagreement over the best strategy, most approaches to sustainable development start from the premise that human intervention in nature is problematic. Particularly before the 1990s, most international environmental organizations viewed economic growth as the cause of environmental problems, such as incursion of pristine areas by extractive processes. They advocated a pure conservation approach of delineating natural areas to be conserved and protected from human intervention, for example through the creation of national parks.⁸ Since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, it has been widely accepted that poverty spurs environmental degradation and economic growth is the solution. Despite this shift, international discourse has remained centered on the dilemma of how to protect the environment given humanity's right to exploit nature for economic growth.

To reconcile the problems of poverty and conservation, many Northern NGOs and donor agencies promote integrated conservation and development projects in low-income countries. These projects combine macroeconomic poverty eradication measures with protecting fragile ecosystems from encroachment by poor people.⁹ The poverty-reduction component typically focuses on integrating local production into export markets. On the conservation side, market mechanisms are advocated to give local communities incentives to engage in conservation. Markets for ecosystem services are created by valuing ecosystems and the benefits they provide to humans, like access to clean water. Those who benefit from ecosystem services (e.g., water users) pay to help ensure those services continue. Assuming local actors will conserve and restore designated natural areas if adequately compensated, markets for ecosystem services are promoted as a way to change the incentives of local actors to engage in less ecologically destructive behaviors.¹⁰

Rooted in indigenous worldviews, *buen vivir* rejects conventional notions of development based on Western ideals of individualism, a dualism between humankind and nature, and a linear notion of progress rooted in material growth. According to theorist Eduardo Gudynas:

6. Fatheurer 2011.

7. Brundtland 1987.

8. Zimmerer 2011.

9. Hughes and Flintan 2001.

10. Pagiola 2006; Wunder 2005.

[T]he underlying principle of *buen vivir* is that wellbeing can only occur in a community, which is social but also encompasses nature . . . man is part of and not contrary to nature. *Buen vivir* thus goes beyond Western dualism where nature opposes society, and the individual opposes the community.¹¹

Buen vivir sidesteps the Western sustainable development dilemma by seeking neither to dominate nature nor to conserve and protect it from human intervention. Rather than a linear progression of accumulation, development is understood as the attainment and reproduction of the equilibrium state of *buen vivir*, which refers to living in harmony with nature.

Buen vivir is difficult to define because it is not meant to be a pre-formulated route to sustainable development. Fundamental to the concept is the recognition of rights of a diversity of peoples, deliberation, and respect for many ideas. It involves a dialogue within and among communities to determine the best pathways of sustainable development. Therefore, *buen vivir* will manifest itself differently in various social and environmental contexts. Tungurahua's watershed management regime provides one concrete example.

Ecuadorian principles of *buen vivir* are discernable from its institutionalization in the 2008 constitution and the government's five-year development plan, called the National Plan for *Buen Vivir*. Ecuador's constitution presents *buen vivir* as a set of rights.¹² Articles 12 and 13 recognize the principle of food sovereignty and establish Ecuadorians' right to water and "sufficient nutritional food, preferably produced locally and in keeping with [communities'] various identities and cultural traditions." Article 14 recognizes "the right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and good living (*sumak kawsay*)," achieved through "the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity and the integrity of the country's genetic assets, the prevention of environmental damage, and the recovery of degraded natural spaces."¹³ Additional rights include intercultural and inclusive access to communication, education, housing, and health.

Buen vivir is not simply third-generation human rights. The constitution treats nature as a subject, not an object, and grants it formal rights, including "the right to be restored" and retain its integrity as an ecosystem (Article 73). Integrating human rights and the rights of nature, *buen vivir* "requires that individuals, communities, peoples and nations . . . exercise their responsibilities in the context of interculturalism, respect for diversity and of harmonious coexistence with nature" (Article 275). Title 7 stipulates that *buen vivir* must be the foundation of a new development model "that is environmentally balanced and respectful of cultural diversity, conserves biodiversity and the natural regeneration capacity of ecosystems."¹⁴ To this end, in 2009, Ecuador's Ministry of

11. Gudynas 2012, 1.

12. Republic of Ecuador 2008.

13. Republic of Ecuador 2008.

14. Republic of Ecuador 2008.

Planning and Development released its national development plan for realizing buen vivir.¹⁵

Ecuador's constitution and national plan for buen vivir provide one of the clearest articulations of a new development model based on buen vivir. By putting the principles into practice, Ecuadorians are demonstrating the viability of buen vivir as an alternative to conventional development. This is altering the terms of debate internationally. In June 2012, Ecuadorian delegates effectively placed buen vivir within the agreed upon outcomes of the Rio +20 conference by insisting on the inclusion of Article 39 in the final document. This article states, "We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature."¹⁶ Ecuador also presented a plan for buen vivir within the Community of Andean Countries and the Organization of Amazonian Cooperation.¹⁷ In this way, local indigenous norms are being scaled up to the global level to challenge dominant norms and incorporate a new understanding of nature into international development policy.

Bargaining and Learning in Normative Development

Research on norm diffusion reveals a complex network of pathways that combines top-down and bottom-up processes. In top-down "norm cascades," international norm entrepreneurs make norm adoption a requirement for conferring international legitimacy.¹⁸ States may adopt a norm to build their reputation and esteem, even when there is no domestic pressure. Over time, the norm becomes internalized through practice. At the same time, local actors can shape global discourse by bringing local issues to the global level through a bottom-up process that Tarrow calls "externalization."¹⁹ Transnational ties between local and international actors, facilitated by "rooted cosmopolitans," are used to build international support for local claims. This occurs through the transmission of information and use of international institutions, typically by framing local issues in terms of international norms.²⁰

Each of these processes has been present in the evolution of environmental governance in Ecuador. The proliferation of national parks is one example of how globalization and the growth of transnational networks during the 1990s and 2000s resulted in a top-down diffusion of international norms.²¹ Another example is the international pressure to create the administrative and legal infrastructure for environmental management. In Ecuador, the state hastily cre-

15. Available at <http://plan.senplades.gob.ec>.

16. UN General Assembly 2012.

17. Author's interview with Director of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quito, December 13, 2012.

18. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Gellert 2010; Sikkink 2011.

19. Tarrow 2005.

20. Bob 2005; Tarrow 2005.

21. Zimmerer 2011.

ated an environment ministry as a sign of state modernization. The ministry adopted programs based on international norms of decentralized, participatory, environmental management, coupled with markets for ecosystem services, which were championed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.²² Funding and technical support came from international organizations like Germany's GTZ (now GIZ) and the Inter-American Development Bank.²³

Simultaneously, local Ecuadorians expanded their participation and leadership in transnational environmental networks. They learned from their interactions with global colleagues, but also shared their ideas and values. Over time, many international environmental organizations incorporated into their discourse and programs the socio-environmental norms of their local civil society partners, most significantly of Ecuador's well-organized indigenous movement.²⁴ This created a synergistic network of learning through various transnational campaigns, most notably the Yasuní-ITT Initiative to leave oil underground in the Amazon, but also including the 1993-to-present lawsuit by citizens of the Northern Amazon against Chevron-Texaco, indigenous and environmental opposition to the Oleoducto de Crudos Pesados (OCP) oil pipeline from the Amazon to the Pacific coast of Ecuador, and the ouster of Occidental Oil Company.²⁵

At the intersection of these top-down and bottom-up processes lie local political struggles and learning processes that are rarely analyzed, but which fuel a dynamic process of normative development at both the local and global levels. This is exemplified by Tungurahua's watershed management reform process, where bargaining and social learning led to the weaving of indigenous norms of *buen vivir* into environmental policies at the local level, which were scaled up to the national and global levels. When a transnational coalition of local and international actors promoted a market-based mechanism for conserving a fragile watershed ecosystem, local farmers and indigenous groups rejected what they viewed as the commodification and privatization of natural resources. Rather than rejecting the proposal entirely, they, however, engaged in bargaining that adapted the program to local values. The program's perceived success prompted national bureaucrats to use it as a model for their national plan for *buen vivir*. This institutionalization of *buen vivir* presented opponents of the dominant international approach to sustainable development with a viable alternative, strengthening their ability to challenge the dominant approach in international policy circles, which supports Schossberg and Caruthers's findings in indigenous communities as well.²⁶ In this way, Tungurahua's experience

22. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005.

23. In January 2011, GTZ merged with German development organizations DED and Inwent to form GIZ. We refer to GTZ throughout this article as that was the name of the organization during that time period.

24. Brysk 2000; Martin and Wilmer 2008; Selverston-Scher 2001.

25. Kimerling 1991; Martin and Wilmer 2008; Martin 2011.

26. Schlosberg and Caruthers 2010.

aligns with Checkel's analysis of the dynamic process of normative development that combines the rational bargaining for maximized utility with a serious emphasis on social interaction and learning on domestic and international levels.²⁷

Watershed Management Reform in Tungurahua

In the 1980s, international and Ecuadorian NGOs began working with local communities to improve agricultural production in the upper Ambato River watershed, the principle water source for Tungurahua's capital city, Ambato. They focused on this area because of Tungurahua's population density, high poverty rates, and importance for the country's food production.²⁸ NGO activists were particularly concerned with soil erosion caused by subsistence farmers' expansion of the agricultural frontier into the *páramos* (high moorlands serving as the watershed's catchment area).²⁹ Destruction of the *páramos* reduced the quality and quantity of water available to downstream users, including wealthier farmers employing irrigation, urban consumers in Ambato, and hydroelectric companies. The province's 800 million-cubic-meters-per-year water deficit and unequal distribution produced severe water conflicts with ethnic undertones.³⁰ Historically, wealthier mestizos (people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry) living in lower areas controlled the water councils and canals channeling water for irrigation and consumption, while poorer indigenous farmers living in the watershed's upper zone were marginalized from decision-making.

By the 1990s, a variety of organizations sought to address the water shortages and conflicts. International development agencies like GTZ supported projects by local development NGOs like Central Ecuatoriana de Servicios Agrícolas (CESA) and Instituto de Ecología y Desarrollo de las Comunidades Andinas (IEDECA). Both had long worked with indigenous communities and water councils to improve agricultural production and water delivery systems. The regional branch of Ecuador's National Council for Water Resources (CNRH) was also involved through its authority to issue water concessions and resolve water conflicts. At first, these organizations worked independently with little coordination. This changed in 1998 when GTZ launched its watershed management project (GTZ-PROMACH, an acronym for the Spanish PROgrama de MAnejo de Cuencas Hidrograficas; hereafter referred to as GTZ), to unite these various efforts and create a more integrated system for managing the Ambato watershed.

Beginning in 1999, GTZ, CESA, IEDECA, and CNRH met informally to discuss strategies for moving forward. Efforts to involve the provincial government proved fruitless until 2000, when Fernando Naranjo was elected prefect. Naranjo held public assemblies to allow community groups to identify their de-

27. Checkel 2001.

28. Biederbick 1999.

29. *Páramo* vegetation acts like a sponge, absorbing moisture from the air and glacier melt.

30. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2009, 6.

velopment needs. The institutional strengthening of water councils—facilitated by CESA, IEDECA, and GTZ in the 1990s—allowed these councils to pressure political leaders, ensuring water was listed a top priority. This propelled the provincial government's focus on watershed management in the early 2000s, and Prefect Naranjo asked GTZ to be his strategic advisor.³¹ Responding to popular demands for a formal commitment, the provincial government signed a contract with CESA, IEDECA, GTZ, and CNRH to coordinate resources and strategies with the purpose of creating a new system for integrated, sustainable, watershed management. These efforts were coordinated by GTZ through PROMACH.

In line with dominant international norms, GTZ advocated a market for ecosystem services to shape water resource users' incentives and finance catchment areas' conservation and canal improvements. With provincial government support, in 2001 GTZ hired a Costa Rican team to design a payment for ecosystem services program based on the experience in Heredia, Costa Rica.³² The general idea was to tax water consumption and use this money to pay landowners to conserve and restore priority areas. Naranjo declared his intention to create a watershed management fund financed by a payment for ecosystem services scheme at a January 2002 public forum.³³ Carlos Sánchez, the government's director of water resources, announced the government would make an initial investment but that the fund would subsequently be financed through a fee on water use. The provincial government and GTZ were confident the proposal would receive widespread social support. Noting people's increased understanding of watershed management issues, Sánchez asserted, "many [people] are prepared to cooperate and pay the [Provincial] Council taxes to be reinvested. If the Provincial Council makes an investment of around \$100,000 over the next two or three months, they will be willing to invest with their taxes for at least thirty years."³⁴

The Costa Rican team's plan was unveiled at a public assembly in February 2002. It called for a tax of two cents per cubic meter of water to finance conservation, restoration, and development efforts. Based on usage rates, the tax was estimated to generate \$21 million annually.³⁵ Given previous social support for watershed management reform, GTZ and the provincial government were shocked when the proposal met with fierce resistance. Members of farmer associations and irrigation councils complained the plan would finance the program on the backs of poor farmers least able to afford it.³⁶ They noted that 70 percent of the funds would come from the agricultural sector, while hydroelectric companies would provide 25 percent, and domestic, commercial, and

31. Author's interview with Carlos Sánchez, Tungurahua's Director of Water Resources, Ambato, October 12, 2009.

32. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2002; Pagiola 2006.

33. Foro Provincial de los Recursos Hídricos en Tungurahua 2002.

34. Foro Provincial de los Recursos Hídricos en Tungurahua 2002, 19.

35. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2002, 34.

36. Author's interview with Mauricio Realpe, IEDECA Director, Ambato, December 1, 2009.

industrial consumption combined would account for only 5 percent. Indigenous groups shared this concern, but also rejected the idea of markets for ecosystem services, particularly individual payments, on moral grounds. They feared these would lead to the privatization and commodification of nature, which violated indigenous principles.³⁷ The severity of the backlash startled the provincial government, and Prefect Naranjo later declared he would never accept a payment for ecosystem services system.³⁸ The phrase “payment for ecosystem services” became toxic, and subsequently no organization (including GTZ and the provincial government) publicly supported such a program.

Such rejection could easily have ended the reform campaign, but advocates continued organizing stakeholders, rebuilding relationships, and constructing watershed management institutions through a more participatory process. After the debacle surrounding payment for ecosystem services, Naranjo reportedly went to Alfredo Cruz—one of GTZ’s lead technicians for PROMACH—and said, “You got me into this, now how do I get out of it?”³⁹ Cruz advocated a more participatory approach, which resonated with Naranjo’s own desire to create a more participatory development planning process.⁴⁰ Naranjo was impressed with the participatory watershed management institutions GTZ helped create in the neighboring Pachanlica watershed and asked GTZ to facilitate a similar process at the provincial level. This was to become Tungurahua’s “New Governance Model,” a unique, participatory approach to development within Ecuador.⁴¹ During 2002 the provincial government and GTZ sponsored community-level workshops to identify communities’ needs and priorities.⁴² After compiling this information, on April 14–15, 2003, 355 representatives of various public and private organizations attended a provincial assembly to agree on a development agenda and strategy for moving forward. The participants proposed constructing a “new Tungurahuan provincial government” that would be “participatory and in which all actors would combine forces to achieve development in the province [and] improve the population’s living conditions.”⁴³

The new Tungurahuan provincial government was constituted one year later through the creation of three participatory institutions related to the three issue areas identified as pillars of development: water, people, and work. These three “spaces,” later constituted as “parliaments,” allowed any actor to participate in working groups tasked with discussing and developing policy proposals related to each issue area. The Water Parliament was comprised of four working

37. Author’s interview with Carlos Moreta, ex-President, Indigenous Movement of Tungurahua, Ambato, November 18, 2009; author’s interview with Carlos Sánchez, Ambato, October 12, 2009.

38. Author’s interview with Fernando Naranjo, Ambato, January 6, 2010.

39. Author’s interview with Alfredo Cruz, Ambato, October 21, 2009.

40. Author’s interview with Carlos Sánchez, Ambato, October 12, 2009.

41. Author’s interview with Alfredo Cruz, Ambato, October 21, 2009; Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2009.

42. Honorable Consejo Provincial de Tungurahua 2002.

43. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2009, 7–8.

groups dealing with the páramos, irrigation, potable water, and sanitation. Civil society organizations soon demanded these spaces be given legal and institutional powers on par with the provincial council. With this, Tungurahua's New Governance Model was born.⁴⁴

Representatives of 187 public and private organizations participated in creating the Water Parliament (Parlamento de Agua in Spanish).⁴⁵ However, the province's three powerful indigenous movements—the Indigenous Movement of Tungurahua (MIT), Indigenous Movement of Tungurahua-Atocha (MITA), and Association of Evangelical Indigenous of Tungurahua (AIET)—were noticeably absent. After its failed 2002 proposal, GTZ realized gaining indigenous support would be crucial and actively promoted indigenous participation in the New Governance Model. In early 2003, GTZ technician, Waldemar Wirsig, convened a meeting of the province's indigenous movements to explain the governance changes and appeal for indigenous participation.

Wirsig had long worked with Tungurahua's indigenous movements and knew they were highly divided by religious and political differences.⁴⁶ While all represented Quichua peoples, they affiliated with different national indigenous movements, competed as rivals in elections, and often differed on policy. Each represented a different set of Quichua communities and secondary organizations in the watershed, creating an obstacle to collective action. Wirsig proposed the movements unify to strengthen their influence in the new participatory institutions. Indigenous leaders were skeptical, but Wirsig continued to press, noting that their absence could isolate them from decisions on issues important to them, including páramo and water management. Wirsig offered to provide the training and resources to create a unified entity that would represent the three movements.⁴⁷

A few members of MITA and AIET were sympathetic to Wirsig's argument and attended meetings of the Water Parliament. Seeing that real decisions were being made without their input, they lobbied movement leaders to join. MIT refused, accusing them of "selling the páramos" and privatizing water.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, MITA and AIET decided to participate in the New Governance Model. GTZ trained two representatives as technical experts to oversee indigenous participation. After AIET and MITA took concrete actions, MIT asked to join, and GTZ trained one of their members to join the indigenous technical team. On February 15, 2004, the three indigenous movements signed a contract with GTZ to provide "institutional strengthening" and facilitate collaboration on natural resource management.⁴⁹

GTZ held workshops, but participation was initially low. To raise aware-

44. For details, see Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2006.

45. Honorable Consejo Provincial de Tungurahua 2006, 2.

46. MIT broke off from MITA soon after its founding in the 1970s amid leadership struggles. AIET formed separately to advocate for evangelical indigenous communities.

47. Author's interview with Francisco Musabalím, indigenous leader, Ambato, November 18, 2009; Author's interview with Carlos Moreta, Ambato, November 18, 2009.

48. Author's interview with Francisco Musabalím, Ambato, November 18, 2009.

49. Moreta et al. 2004.

ness and participation, the three indigenous experts conducted an education campaign in all indigenous communities, facilitated by work teams formed in each of the twenty-two indigenous secondary organizations. This process was difficult, but the technical team was persistent. According to one indigenous promoter, Francisco Musabalím,

The people were amazed and saw that this was the only process that united the three [indigenous] movements. Some saw this as good, but others saw it as bad because they saw their own political interests at risk . . . We continued struggling in this process, and I think people gradually accepted our view, the idea of participation. They were looking to see if the business organizations and universities were participating . . . we also wanted to be kept in mind.⁵⁰

A turning point came when GTZ changed strategies and convened meetings to develop an action plan on a specific issue, agro-ecological production, recognizing communities' emphasis on poverty reduction and wellbeing.⁵¹ Indigenous promoters held community-level workshops to develop action plans for improving production, which attracted greater interest. As the process gained support, community members identified other development priorities and agreed they should pursue these within the New Governance Model. By 2005, the indigenous movements, with the support of their communities, agreed to form a common front to pursue five action items: páramo management, agricultural production, health, education, and organizational strengthening.⁵²

Indigenous leaders chose to name their common front *Mushuk Yuyay* ("new ideas") to contrast their approach to governance and development with that traditionally taken by the Ecuadorian state, international NGOs, and donor agencies.⁵³ Rather than a focus on individualism, economic growth, and protecting nature from human intervention, *Mushuk Yuyay's* agenda reflected norms associated with *buen vivir*. It advocated a governance process based on dialogue and "interculturality" (respect for diverse ideas and cultural traditions) to "improve the quality of life" through a development strategy based on "economic solidarity," "communal interest," "collective rights," the "sustainable management of resources, education and health."⁵⁴ *Mushuk Yuyay* understood sustainable development as achieving and maintaining wellbeing through a strategy that integrated the restoration of páramo ecosystems, food security, and education to create healthy communities.

A central objective of *Mushuk Yuyay* was restoring and caring for the páramo ecosystem, which is not only an important water source, but also is a

50. Author's interview with Francisco Musabalím, Ambato, November 18, 2009.

51. Author's interview, Washington Chapalbay, indigenous promoter, Ambato, October 26, 2009.

52. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2006, 32.

53. *Mushuk Yuyay* is the formal name given to this association of indigenous movements to advance their common agenda.

54. Gobierno Provincial de Tungurahua 2008, 26–27.

cultural and religious symbol for Ecuador's Andean indigenous groups. Tungurahua's indigenous movements equate the páramo with Pachamama, a sacred deity revered by many Andean peoples, but it also represents their historic struggle for access to land and water. In accordance with *buen vivir*, their restoration strategy sought to improve the wellbeing of the páramo ecosystem by helping communities living within it to improve their wellbeing while maintaining a balance with nature. Community plant nurseries were created to support the reforestation of degraded areas with native species, including those with medicinal qualities. Consequently, reforestation was integrated into a new health program that combined Western and indigenous knowledge. Mushuk Yuyay also combined páramo restoration with agricultural programs to promote food security and reduce poverty. They created the Association of Agroecological Producers of Tungurahua (PACAT) to train farmers in ecological practices that produce healthier foods (ecologically and nutritionally). Rather than monoculture for export markets, PACAT emphasized a return to traditional crops that were ecologically friendly and provided a healthier diet. PACAT also facilitated collective projects to expand local markets in Ambato and increase the efficiency of water canals and agricultural output. Cattle and pigs, whose cloven hooves destroy páramo vegetation, were removed from water catchment areas and replaced with native species, including guinea pigs and alpaca, whose padded feet do not damage páramo vegetation. New species compatible with restoration (e.g., trout farms) were introduced to provide additional protein. The organization Wuaylla Ñan (Green Path) was created to collect and process waste and supply organic fertilizer to PACAT. To build human capacity and maintain indigenous culture, Mushuk Yuyay launched a literacy campaign that promoted bilingual education, considered the fourth pillar of development.

The fifth pillar was strengthening organizations' ability to better press their agenda within the New Governance Model. In 2007, the three indigenous movements formalized their association through an organization called Unity and Development of the Indigenous Movements and Farmers of Tungurahua. Organizational strengthening allowed the indigenous movements to dominate the Water Parliament and other governance institutions. By 2007 they comprised 65 percent of participants in the three parliaments and held 50 percent of leadership positions.⁵⁵

The mobilization around páramo management throughout the 2000s (initially by GTZ, CESA, IEDECA, and later Mushuk Yuyay) produced a steady increase in the number of indigenous communities adopting voluntary agreements to collectively limit the agricultural frontier and create páramo management plans. Interestingly, while indigenous communities opposed a payment for ecosystem services program, which they equated with privatization, they embraced the idea that downstream water users benefiting from restored catch-

55. Author's interview with Luís Cuji, Water Parliament Coordinator, Ambato, October 20, 2009; Author's interview with Washington Chapalby, Quito, October 26, 2009.

ment areas should compensate indigenous communities collectively for providing the public service of watershed restoration. Specifically, they demanded resources to enhance agricultural production in less-fragile areas to improve the quality of life of poor communities living in the páramo. In 2006, the Water Parliament became a forum for discussing the idea of different water users contributing to a common fund to finance restoration and economic development initiatives at the community level. Watershed management advocates seized this opportunity to renew their efforts to create a local financing mechanism.

Indigenous leaders agreed to negotiate with GTZ and others on creating a financing mechanism, but rejected the previous approach of combining markets with pure conservation. According to Carlos Moreta, coordinator of the united indigenous movements at the time,

I said to GTZ, CESA and IEDECA . . . you can't just go to people and tell them they can't produce any more because this is páramo, because these people need to support their families. So this is when I proposed that we find a new way of thinking about the problem—this is part of *Mushuk Yuyay* . . . So I proposed the creation of a fund that would permit us to invest in the local economic initiatives of the people living in the páramo. This would be more effective than an ordinance that simply says you can't produce above this line, or to simply tell people to plant trees to protect water. Instead of saying this, we should say, here we have a budget—and so that we don't continue to destroy the páramo with new pasture and crops, let's promote alternative production and provide support so people can have more efficient production and don't need to use a lot of land. So that if you raise livestock, provide support to improve pastures so you can produce more milk with fewer cows, and supplement this with raising small animals like guinea pigs . . . These are the kinds of things the people will like, and they will work more than putting prohibitions on people.⁵⁶

GTZ agreed, and in 2006 it worked with The Nature Conservancy-Ecuador to develop a proposal modeled on Fondo Para La Protección del Agua (FONAG), Quito's pioneering water trust fund, created by The Nature Conservancy to finance the protection of Ecuador's Condor Bioserve. When indigenous leaders refused to sign this proposal, GTZ asked them to develop their own proposal, and offered technical support. As negotiations continued, GTZ recruited Pablo Lloret and Marta Echavarría (leading experts on FONAG) to promote the water trust fund model and raise awareness and support among various water users.⁵⁷ In the end, GTZ, The Nature Conservancy, and their allies gained the support of the watershed's two hydroelectric companies, Ambato's municipal water company, the provincial government, and the three indigenous movements.

On June 4, 2008, the Tungurahuan Fund for Páramo Management and Fight Against Poverty was created. The fund “pursues financing for activities re-

56. Author's interview with Carlos Moreta, Ambato, November 18, 2009.

57. Pablo Lloret is the Technical Secretary of FONAG. Marta Echavarría is an expert on financing watershed conservation who helped design FONAG.

lated to the protection of páramo ecosystems, concurrent with the improvement of living standards for the inhabitants of the upper zones, through the execution of economic and productive projects.”⁵⁸ The indigenous movements proposed the fund’s final design, which was structured to fit with indigenous priorities regarding community wellbeing and their concerns about the commodification and privatization of natural resources. Unlike a strict payment for ecosystem services scheme, Tungurahua’s fund does not directly compensate individual landowners. Rather, it finances a range of activities at the watershed and/or community level designed to benefit the whole ecosystem, including the communities living within. As the name implies, sustainable páramo management is seen as a strategy for reducing poverty. Instead of a water tax, the fund is capitalized with voluntary contributions from its seven partners. These distinctions (voluntary contributions and no payments to individuals) were critical for gaining indigenous support because they emphasize the public nature of natural resources and a community approach to promoting wellbeing.

Since 2008, the voluntary contributions have totaled \$460,000 annually. Working groups in the Water Parliament submit project proposals to the fund’s technical secretary, which approves and prioritizes the projects for funding. To date, the fund has prioritized financing the community páramo management plans coordinated by the three indigenous movements under the name *Mushuk Yuyay*. These pursue the sustainable development strategy described above. By 2012, ten plans, addressing páramo controlled by ten different communities, received funding.⁵⁹ Accordingly, local stakeholders characterize the fund and related institutions of Tungurahua’s new governance model as tools for realizing *buen vivir*.⁶⁰

Scaling Up Buen Vivir

By 2007, the watershed management system created through Tungurahua’s New Governance Model gained national attention as a successful example of participatory governance based on the principles of *buen vivir*—a model for ecologically sustainable development with an emphasis on interculturality and human wellbeing. This was partly due to the publicity provided by donor agencies and NGOs working in Tungurahua. But Tungurahua’s experience also diffused up through the corporatist structure of Ecuador’s national indigenous movements, which had long advocated *buen vivir* as an alternative to neoliberal development strategies. Communities in several other Andean provinces (e.g., Chimborazo, Cañar, Azuay) also had mobilized under the banner *Mushuk Yuyay* to express the concept of new ideas for development.⁶¹ But Tungurahua went fur-

58. Rojas 2009, 3–4.

59. Author’s interview with Oscar Rojas, Technical Secretary for Tungurahua’s Páramo Management Fund, Ambato, July 4, 2012.

60. E.g., Rojas 2011.

61. See <http://www.redindigena.net/ci/wamanway/art1.html> and <http://mushukyuyay.blogspot.com>, accessed September 17, 2013.

thet in institutionalizing a development strategy reflecting principles of *sumak kawsay*. It showed what an alternative to neoliberalism might look like in practice.

Importantly, Tungurahua's New Governance Model was maturing just as Ecuador began a process of state restructuring. In April 2007, Ecuadorians overwhelmingly approved a referendum to convene an assembly charged with writing a new constitution. Indigenous groups viewed the referendum as a rejection of the neoliberal economic model, which they argued undermined the well-being of the majority of Ecuadorians by shifting the country's wealth to elite corporate interests. This, along with neoliberalism's embrace of development through increased consumerism, led indigenous groups to frame *buen vivir* in opposition to neoliberalism. They viewed the constituent assembly as a long-awaited political opening to pursue an alternative development path based on indigenous goals and values.⁶² Believing they would be most influential by working within the government of newly elected President Correa, many indigenous activists joined Correa's movement, contributing to Correa's majority in the assembly.⁶³ These included representatives of Ecuador's national indigenous movements (e.g., Mónica Chuji of the National Confederation of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (CONAIE) and Pedro de la Cruz of the National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations (FENOCIN), but also Vicente Masaquiza, a representative of Tungurahua's united indigenous movements. These indigenous leaders ensured *buen vivir* had a central place in the new constitution.

The new constitution approved in 2008 stipulated *buen vivir* as the foundation of a new development model. The Ministry of Planning and Development was then charged with creating a five-year development plan for realizing *buen vivir*. According to Diego Martínez, Ecuador's undersecretary for planning and development, Tungurahua's experience provided an important model for technocrats designing the plan.⁶⁴ This influence is reflected in the similarities between Tungurahua's institutions and approach and those of Ecuador's national government, as seen in the constitution and national development plan. Since 2007, Correa's government has sought to create a "New Governance Model" based on citizen participation as a foundation for a more democratic, deliberative, and intercultural approach to development. Explicitly rejecting neoliberalism, Ecuador's constitution and development plan envision a form of development rooted in respect for local wisdom, cultural values and practices, equitable access to natural resources like land and water, agricultural production for local markets to achieve food security, education, health, and environmental rights.

Implementation of Ecuador's new governance model for achieving *buen*

62. Cholango 2007, 3, 6.

63. Becker 2011, 49.

64. Author's interview, Quito, May 20, 2011.

vivir is far from perfect. Critics accuse the Correa government of manipulating the institutions of citizen participation to circumvent his opposition while promoting large-scale resource extraction in violation of the tenets of buen vivir. Nevertheless, the codification of buen vivir in the constitution and state development plan has had important effects at both the national and global levels. Within Ecuador it guides government planning and decision-making, and empowers advocates of buen vivir to hold the government accountable.

Internationally, Ecuador's experience is altering the global debate over how to conceptualize sustainable development. In 2010, NGO activists and indigenous organizations from around the world met in Ecuador to found the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature. Seeking to build on the momentum provided by Ecuador's adoption of the "rights of nature" in its constitution, the network mobilized at the June 2012 Rio +20 Summit to advocate the global application of buen vivir. The framing of the right to live within a healthy environment as a human right led the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to fund a project to develop a manual for replicating internationally Ecuador's plan for buen vivir as a model alternative development path.⁶⁵ In addition, the UN established a website dedicated to "harmony with nature," which includes an annual report by the secretary general and an interactive conference by the UN General Assembly.⁶⁶ Each year since 2009 Ecuador's delegation has presented their national plan for buen vivir as a roadmap for participants.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The case of Tungurahua's watershed management reform illuminates how complex interactions at the local level can impact the implementation of, and discourse surrounding, global policies. Tungurahua's local actors did not blindly accept international policies for watershed management. Neither did they reject them in their entirety. Rather, local government and citizen leaders pushed international partners to redesign their programs to better suit local norms regarding human wellbeing, which implied new strategies for sustainable development. Through a process of bargaining and learning, a coalition of international and local NGOs, donor agencies, local government officials, businesses, and civil society organizations formulated and institutionalized a new development strategy that better reflected local norms of buen vivir. This process involved intense negotiation and struggles among stakeholders at all levels. It also required a great deal of network construction, including the training of local brokers, such as the indigenous promoters who had the credibility and capacity to connect and mediate between grassroots communities, rival indigenous groups, local government, and international partners. This network construction process

65. UN High Commissioner on Human Rights 2010.

66. <http://harmonywithnatureun.org>, accessed January 15, 2013.

67. Ecuadorian Permanent Mission to the UN 2012.

produced a new vision of development and a related movement, *Mushuk Yuyay*, as well as new governance mechanisms for realizing this vision.

The Tungurahua case reveals how local citizens and government officials tap into networks spanning multiple scales to shape policy and discourse at local, national, and international levels. Tungurahua's watershed management reform provided a concrete example of what *buen vivir* might look like in practice. The institutionalization of *buen vivir* through Tungurahua's New Governance Model resonated with other communities and organizations, particularly Ecuador's highly organized indigenous movements. They mobilized to make *buen vivir* the cornerstone of Ecuador's new constitution and national development plan. Ecuador's codification and institutionalization of *buen vivir* has had a global impact by presenting opponents of the dominant international approach to sustainable development with a viable alternative, strengthening their ability to challenge the dominant approach in international policy circles. It shows that it is possible to pursue a form of socioeconomic development that is not rooted in Western ideals of individualism, a dualism between humankind and nature, and a linear notion of progress rooted in material growth.

Proponents do not advocate replicating Ecuador's institutional design, but its approach. *Buen vivir* is not a specific policy outcome, but a concept that refers to humans' constantly changing relationship with nature and a set of norms regarding the need for dialog within and among communities to determine the best way to live within their natural environment in a balanced way. Because *buen vivir* refers to a process, advocates say it can, and should, be applied globally. Ecuador's government has made this case in various international fora. Tungurahua provides an example of what this process might look like.

In this way, Tungurahua's experience shows how local populations working with competing interpretations from international agendas construct new environmental governance regimes, and how the scaling up of these regimes carry local norms of environmental management and development to the global level to challenge dominant international norms. It illuminates the local political struggles and learning processes that lie at the intersection of top-down and bottom-up norm diffusion processes, and that fuel a dynamic process of normative development at both the local and global levels.

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