

Response to the Call for submissions: Thematic report to the UN Human Rights Council "Eradicating poverty in a post-growth context: preparing for the next Development Goals"

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1) Government's measures of social progress complementing GDP

A range of alternative measurements have been set up to follow more balanced policy objectives that consider improving wider human wellbeing and ecological outcomes at least as equally important as economic growth. Several governments use wellbeing, quality of life or living standard frameworks that complement GDP, among others the "Wellbeing Economy Governments" (supported by the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#)) of [New Zealand](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Canada](#) as well as "doughnut economic" cities which use evaluation and planning tools based on Kate Raworth's (2017) doughnut framework and a range of other, often local initiatives (Barlow, Regen, Cadiou and al., 2022; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2023). The concept of Buen Vivir (BV) is one of the most notable proposals in recent decades regarding alternative perspectives on well-being. It was institutionalized through 99 articles (23 on Buen Vivir rights and 76 on the Buen Vivir regime) within the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador. The constitutional BV combines the principles of sustainability (demanded by ecologists), identity (demanded by Indigenous Peoples) and equity (demanded by the less-favored classes) (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2016).

Jurisdictions with alternative indicator frameworks regularly report trends associated with the indicators (in line with data availability). Some governments have used alternative indicators frameworks to set targets and objectives against which performance can be measured, for instance [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#). Some of these frameworks account for unpaid work, reproductive and household work. For instance, New Zealand's framework includes an indicator on the number of hours per day spent on "unpaid work". The Canadian framework includes an indicator on "time use" which could measure unpaid care, reproductive and household work.

In Ecuador the National Institute of Statistics and Census operationalized the measurement of the Buen-Vivir well-being paradigm. In this framework, the idea of harmony is the distinctive element that challenges the traditional welfare indicators associated with GDP. Thus, based on various academic contributions (Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2014), three theoretical dimensions were proposed: harmony with oneself, harmony with others and harmony with nature. This led to the definition of some of the novel indicators such as: life expectancy of nature, natural life time per inhabitant, index of well-lived healthy life adjusted by schooling and inequality, and time dedicated to producing relational goods (León, 2015).

2) Measures to ensure that growth primarily benefits the bottom 40 per cent of the population

Presenting economic growth as the sole factor for reducing inequalities is a debatable issue that overlooks structural factors related to the functioning of the capitalist system and power relations within nations. In fact, neoliberal economics tends to argue that the pursuit of economic growth lies in conflict with the reduction of inequality and poverty. Since neoliberal economics has become a dominant framework globally from the 1990s onwards, policy makers therefore often cut social spending, social services and redistributive measures with the goal to accelerate economic growth (Avlijaš, Hassel and Palier, 2020). As a consequence, inequality has increased in many OECD countries over the last few decades (Piketty and Saez, 2014), and recent data from the United Nations shows that global [poverty](#) and [hunger](#) have increased substantially over the past few years. Recent research also shows that GDP growth does not translate into equal increases of wider human welfare which takes levels of inequality into account (Van der Slycken and Bleys, 2024).

Rather than focusing on the needs of the bottom 40 per cent of the population, the global economy maintains the colonial patterns of extraction which benefits the global North and the global elite. Unequal exchange patterns in the global economy thus provide one explanation why economic growth does not benefit the bottom 40 per cent. As recently demonstrated, a large part (around 25%) of the Northern consumption relies on resources appropriated from the South. The drain from the South is seen in the unequal exchange of raw material, embodied land, energy, and labour. In 2015, the net appropriation "totalled 12 billion tons of raw materials, 822 million hectares of land, 21 exajoules of energy (equivalent to 3.4 billion barrels of oil), and 188 million person-years equivalents of labour (equivalent to 392 billion hours of work)" (Hickel et al. 2023, 5). These resources could thus not be used to tackle extreme poverty and provide need satisfaction for people living in the South.

In emerging economies, particularly those in the Global South, there remains a desire for economic growth and a reduction of inequalities. However, in recent decades, the reduction of inequalities has been dependent on economic boom/bust cycles and the government's efficiency in redistributing revenues, mainly from the sale of commodities and taxes to their populations (Sánchez-Ancochea, 2021). Despite progress, Latin America remains one of the most unequal regions on the planet. This may be due to the short-sighted redistributive approach of the current governments' public policies (Clifton et al., 2020), the fragility and dependence of primary-based economies, the power of the elites, and the growing problem of government corruption (Keneck-Massil et al., 2021).

To reduce inequalities, it is not sufficient to rely solely on economic growth. Government transfers and social protection schemes are also needed to reduce poverty and inequalities. It is also necessary to ensure that governments function robustly and reliably, and to gradually transform the international trade system away from the colonial logic of the world-system.

Various other measures than economic growth can be used to measure and track inequality and poverty. All of the indicator frameworks mentioned in response to the first question include indicators that monitor inequality and poverty, e.g. with indicators on pay gaps, relative and persistent poverty, children's material deprivation, income and wealth inequality and food insecurity in the Scottish framework; child poverty, food insecurity and financial wellbeing (lack of resources to meet everyday needs) in the New Zealand framework; and housing poverty, protection from income shocks and food security in the Canadian framework.

3) Obstacles for alternative development pathways

First research insights on alternative economic initiatives such as Wellbeing Economy Governments and “doughnut economic” cities demonstrate barriers to fully implement alternative frameworks and that the pursuit of growth often continues to dominate policy-making (e.g. Hayden and Dasilva, 2022; Mason and Büchs, 2023; McCartney, Hensher and Trebeck, 2023). These findings have been explained with power imbalances within governments and ministries, the continued influence of vested interests which push for austerity measures and the pursuit of growth on policy-making, a lack of alternative economics training among policy-makers and related entrenched ways of short-termist and siloed ways of policy-making.

From the Global South, Buen Vivir inspired by the cosmovisions of the indigenous peoples of the Andes and the Amazon (Cuestas-Caza, 2021) can be considered as an example of political innovation for its post-capitalist and post-eurocentric orientation aligned to the search for other ways of and beyond development. Nonetheless, in the years that followed, the distance between theory and practice became apparent, weakening the unifying and transformative potential of the concept. In practice, the Ecuadorian government reoriented its agenda towards strategic sectors such as: hydrocarbons, mining, and agribusiness, which would eventually conflict with ethnic rights and the rights of nature recognized in the constitution and related to Buen Vivir (Cuestas-Caza et al., 2020). In short, the achievement of well-being, in theory, was guided by a disruptive and well-intentioned idea of Buen Vivir, while in practice it continued to depend on political commitments and revenues derived from extractivist industries. Metaphorically, this contradiction has been interpreted as a straitjacket for the Ecuadorian government's actions (Lalander, 2014). An example of an unprecedented global governance initiative can be found in the Yasuní ITT initiative. The initiative proposed the radical idea of not exploiting the oil found in this Amazonian territory. Instead, the international community was invited to pay to keep the oil in the ground in the form of a payment for environmental services (Fierro, 2016). In 2016, the exploitation of the Yasuní ITT oil block began after the initiative failed to obtain the expected funds, resulting in significant social, environmental, and political impacts (Cisneros & Barriga, 2018). Lessons from this case have shown the importance of examining the mechanisms that generate commitment and trust in international cooperation (Martin & Scholz, 2014). Additionally, it is necessary to reconsider global welfare from the perspective of ecological debt (Falconí & Oleas, 2023).

4) Overcoming growth dependencies

In postgrowth welfare systems, human rights could be safeguarded through strengthening the availability of collectively organized basic services. Universal basic services seek to ensure that everyone has access to essentials such as health care, education, housing, public transport, and childcare. Water, electricity and telecommunications can also be considered as publicly provided basic services. Protecting the existing universal basic services in current welfare states and expanding the provisioning of services to poorer countries is important for sustainable wellbeing. Universalism is an important principle not only for meeting essential needs but also for human rights as the principle of universalism helps to keep everyone on board in a changing society (Anttonen et al. 2012).

Universal basic services are envisioned to stabilise society by reducing vulnerabilities and increasing resilience. At their best, universal services can strengthen communities and reduce dependence on the labour market. They have been suggested to curtail unnecessary production and consumption by removing the incentive to earn more than necessary. Local basic services and food systems can reduce people's dependence on a vulnerable global economy and long production chains, and thereby increase stability in

everyday life. Basic services also play a key role in crises. When people can rely on access to essential services, they can overcome crises more quickly and adapt to new circumstances.

It is necessary to overcome growth dependencies by reforming macroeconomics and public finances so that states and local governments can afford to provide services essential for well-being. Fiscal rules such as an EU stability and growth pact are meaningless, if they prevent the welfare provisioning that is regarded necessary from the human rights perspective. Fiscal rules should be democratically deliberated and they should better foster social and environmental convergence.

The reorientation of economic growth-based models requires a reconsideration of the narrative of the international development agenda to include the voices of historically excluded peoples from all over the world. In this sense, pluriverses, or transformative alternatives that reevaluate different knowledge systems of the Global South and Global North (Demaria & Kothari, 2017), should be considered in the current discussion on well-being.

From a human rights perspective, it is important to revive the discussion on third-generation rights in the current scenario. Specifically, the rights of indigenous peoples, based on the principle of self-determination, could guide future discussions on overcoming economic growth and on future post-2030 agendas (García-Arias & Cuestas-Caza, in press). Additionally, it is important to consider the rights of nature. This requires rethinking the relationship between humans and non-human entities. The rights of nature represent a paradigm shift in environmental ethics and law. They question nature as an exploitable property and advocate intrinsic value and rights of the natural world (Tanasescu, 2022). The concept of rights of nature reflects the preservation and respect of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations and a harmonious and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world. Natural rights support alternatives that change social relations. Ultimately, natural rights change the relationship between humans and natural world.

Based on the available evidence and knowledge around globe, securing human rights requires a new eco-social contract to renew relationships and principles establishing societies (UNRISD, 2022).

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