Indigenous community enterprises in Chiapas: a vehicle for buen vivir?

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Abstract Buen vivir is an indigenous conception of well-being that has recently entered the Latin American debate on development. Overcoming the mainstream Western conception of development based mainly on economic growth, buen vivir emphasizes the importance of indigenous culture, the natural environment, and collective well-being. This article reports on an ethnographic study of self-managed grass-roots economic initiatives created by indigenous Mayan communities in the Mexican state of Chiapas. It focuses on identifying the enabling factors that have supported the emergence of these enterprises and the impact they have had on improving indigenous well-being. The main findings pinpoint the capacity of community enterprises to address a plurality of goals by self-organizing to meet indigenous peoples’ unsatisfied needs, which are not only social and economic but also political, cultural, and environmental.

Introduction

Buen vivir, translatable as ‘good living’, is an indigenous ethical paradigm that has entered the Latin American discourse on development at the civil society, institutional, and academic levels. Because of the polysemous and changing nature of the concept, this discourse has not yet arrived at a shared definition: buen vivir is indeed ‘an idea that is continually being created’ (Gudynas, 2011b).

Nevertheless, some common aspects can be identified: buen vivir is a communitarian view of well-being based on reciprocity and complementarity that valourizes indigenous identity and culture, and involves not only...
human beings but also the natural environment (Albó, 2009; Huanacuni, 2010).

In the economic sphere, *buen vivir* has been translated into indigenous local solutions that often take the form of grass-roots entrepreneurial initiatives, and aim to address a plurality of needs. These self-managed enterprises stress the importance of social context, culture, and local knowledge, and are in fact indigenous solutions for creating processes of change (Eversole, Barraket and Luke, 2014). These initiatives have demonstrated the capacity to provide local forms of endogenous development in a range of contexts (Anderson, Dana and Dana, 2006; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Peredo and McLean, 2010). The concept of endogenous development is compatible with *buen vivir*, as it implies the direct participation of local communities in the definition of development objectives and strategies.

Most exogenous developmental models, on the other hand, have not provided satisfactory results in indigenous settings. These models have a narrow conception of ‘need’ as essentially linked to income, and the resulting policies are based on the liberalization of investments, mining industries and territorial management – in other words, the foundations of neoliberal development thinking. Policies based on this paradigm have contributed to the expropriation of indigenous territories and to the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources (Gudynas, 2009).

The ‘extractivist’ logic of this approach has had serious environmental and social consequences: entire ecosystems have been destroyed because of high-impact projects such as hydroelectric dams and large-scale mining. These projects have caused the displacement of many rural indigenous communities and a generalized worsening of their living conditions. The expression ‘development aggression’ has been coined to describe the violation of indigenous individual and collective rights during development processes that have been imposed top-down rather than shared and implemented with the communities involved (Tauli-Corpuz, 2012).

In order to assess the viability and influence of *buen vivir*, an ethnographic study was conducted to investigate entrepreneurial initiatives created and managed by Mayan communities living in Chiapas. This Mexican state offers fertile ground for research as a result of collective actions and grass-roots initiatives that followed the 1994 Zapatista insurrection. The analysis of the history, organizational practices, and challenges faced by grass-roots enterprises focuses on the impact they have had on community well-being. This analysis allows for a comparison between the scholarly and policy discourses of *buen vivir* and the concrete practices of indigenous grass-roots enterprises in Chiapas.

Two research questions underpin the analysis. First, under what conditions have indigenous enterprises contributed to the pursuit of *buen vivir*? Second,
what enabling factors have facilitated the emergence and spread of these enterprises in the indigenous communities of Chiapas?

The analysis reveals some general characteristics of indigenous enterprises in this context: they are embedded in the indigenous community, they pursue explicit social goals rather than profit-maximization, they are collectively owned and managed through participatory governing bodies, and they have an entrepreneurial character, as they produce goods or services to sustain themselves and their members. These characteristics allow the indigenous economic initiatives investigated in this study to be considered as community enterprises. The findings show that the positive outcomes of these activities derive from the capacity of community enterprises to mobilize a plurality of local resources in order to achieve community objectives. These outcomes are not solely social and economic, but also cultural, political and environmental.

An alternative to development

Even though Buen vivir has entered the policy and academic discourse, the concept has its origins among the heterogeneous Latin American indigenous populations: they originally provided a range of conceptions that correspond to specific world-views (e.g. Sumak Kawsay, in Quechua language, Suma Qamaña, in Aymara). In Chiapas, there is also a debate around this concept, even though it is still confined to the levels of civil society and social movements. Unlike Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept of Buen vivir is still largely absent at the policy level. The main term employed in Chiapas to identify Buen vivir is lekil kuxlejal, in Tseltal language (see Paoli, 2003).

Building on pre-existing indigenous knowledge, indigenous and non-indigenous activists, practitioners, and scholars have elaborated and systematized the concept (Yampara, 2001; Albó, 2009; Huanacuni, 2010; Walsh, 2010). Some argue that Buen vivir has been the most important Latin American contribution to the debate on development in recent years (Gudynas, 2011a). At the institutional level, Buen vivir has officially inspired the public policies of Ecuador and Bolivia, where it has been incorporated into the national constitutions since 2008 and 2009, respectively.

Buen vivir has three innovative aspects: first, it is elaborated by peoples who have been historically marginalized, and belong to the ‘periphery of the world’ (Acosta, 2013); second, well-being is not conceived in its individualistic Western sense, but rather in the context of a community (Huanacuni, 2010); and third, the natural environment is a subject of rights (arts 71–74, Constitution of Ecuador).

As Gudynas (2011a) argues, the Buen vivir approach can be positioned within the stream of the post-development critique defined as ‘alternatives
to development’ and in opposition to ‘alternative development’. Among others, Escobar (1992) calls for deconstructing the mainstream Western idea of development by overcoming its colonial implications and its reliance on economic growth and commodification of natural resources.

The Western idea of progress is antithetic to buen vivir: some mainstream approaches to development, such as modernization theory, consider indigenous culture as an obstacle to progress and indigenous people as passive actors who should renounce their traditions in order to pursue development.

Far from being a nostalgic and static idea imbued with mysticism and rooted in a romantic past, buen vivir not only has philosophical and spiritual dimensions but also has a range of practical applications, and not solely for indigenous communities. An example is Ecuador’s National Plan for Buen Vivir 2009–2013 (Gobierno, 2009), which calls for the construction of a plurinational and intercultural state. This plan emphasizes that the economic system should be subordinated to human needs and the natural environment, and this can only occur through local systems that are based on reciprocity and cooperation and that safeguard natural and cultural resources.

In Chiapas, a bottom-up approach can be observed on the ground by examining the contribution of indigenous grass-roots enterprises to the concrete practices of buen vivir.

**Research context**

Chiapas is one of the richest states of Mexico in terms of natural resources, such as timber, hydropower, minerals, and oil, and it has a high degree of biodiversity. These elements have all attracted the economic interests of the government and multinational corporations. Moreover, Chiapas is an important tourist destination with natural as well as historical attractions. Nevertheless, Chiapas is the poorest state of Mexico and has a poverty rate of about 79 percent, and an extreme poverty rate of about 33 percent (INEGI, 2010).

In Chiapas, 27 percent of the population belongs to an indigenous group, according to the last national census conducted in 2010 (INEGI, 2010). However, some observers argue that these data are controversial and the proportion of indigenous peoples is much higher. This is important because the Mexican government seems to want to minimize the importance of indigenous peoples and the specific character of the issues they face.

As many international organizations have noted, indigenous peoples all over the world are characterized by some common features: the attachment to their ancestral lands and natural resources; their distinct social, economic, and political institutions; and their distinct cultural systems, which include native languages, traditions, and beliefs, often embodying a specific worldview (ILO, 1989; World Bank, 2005; UNPFII, 2007).
In Mexico, as well as in many other countries, indigenous peoples experience harsh living conditions and socioeconomic marginalization: illiteracy rates, malnutrition, and maternal and infant mortality rates are usually much higher than those relative to the non-indigenous population living in the same country. These trends reflect indigenous peoples’ low access to social and general interest services, such as health, drinking water, and education, and structural inequalities that date back to colonial conquest (UN, 2009).

The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) instigated the beginning of the Zapatista insurrection, which in 1994 focused the world’s attention on Chiapas. From an anti-capitalist radical position, the Zapatista indigenous movement called for the end to the socioeconomic marginalization of indigenous people and the recognition of their specific identities. Following twelve days of armed conflict, extended negotiations between the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the federal government resulted in the signing of the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture in February 1996. This treaty specified that the government would undertake to change the Mexican constitution to embody the Accords, but these provisions were completely ignored by President Zedillo, who instead increased the military presence in Chiapas. A so-called low-intensity conflict soon began and is ongoing.

These failed Accords, combined with a lack of public and private measures to improve the socioeconomic conditions of indigenous peoples, have resulted in a stand-off between the government and the Zapatistas. Indigenous peoples are divided between those who support the Zapatista movement and those who support legal political parties. The Mexican government, local business, and multinational corporations all seek to take advantage of these divisions in order to exploit the resources of Chiapas.

**Indigenous enterprises and community development**

Indigenous entrepreneurship has been investigated as an alternative agent of socioeconomic development. Some attempts have been made to analyse indigenous enterprises as small businesses by focusing on their profitability and success only in financial terms (Fuller, Buultjens and Cummings, 2005). However, this reductive approach neglects the importance of other factors such as culture and indigenous organizational practices that are often translated into participatory models of governance. Other studies have demonstrated that indigenous enterprises are often collective, and this aspect is considered as crucial to improving the well-being of their communities (Berkes and Adhikari, 2006; Dana and Anderson, 2007; Tapsell and Woods, 2010; Davidson-Hunt and Turner, 2012).
Even though indigenous enterprises are not necessarily collective (Peredo et al., 2004), nor do they necessarily have explicit social goals, *buen vivir* suggests that both these aspects are crucial for enterprises that aim to address the needs of communities suffering extreme deprivation. Consequently, identifying indigenous enterprises as community-run provides insights into the plurality of their goals, which are not solely economic, and the collective character of their governance. The social foundations of these enterprises lie in the indigenous communities in which they are embedded, and their activities contribute to the well-being not only of their members but also of the broader indigenous communities (Peredo and McLean, 2010; Somerville and McElwee, 2011).

Even though the organizations investigated in this study are better identified as community enterprises, they share some characteristics of social enterprises as theorized by researchers linked to the EMES European Research Network: they have a civic origin (Nyssens, 2006), they are characterized by the pursuit of an explicit social goal, they adopt participatory governance models, and they have an entrepreneurial dimension that involves the continuous production of goods or services (Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Defourny and Nyssens, 2012). However, in Latin America, there has been a certain resistance to employing the term *social enterprise* because of the ideological connotation based on the interpretation of the social entrepreneur as an extraordinary individual who triggers societal transformation and innovation (Dees, 1998; Roberts and Woods, 2005; Santos, 2012). This conception of social entrepreneurship, mainly promoted by business schools, is quite widespread in the North American context, and it tends to neglect the collective character that these socioeconomic activities assume in many contexts.

Some important insights for understanding the role of these enterprises in sustaining *buen vivir* derive from the Latin American conception of *social and solidarity economy*. Even though the terms social economy, solidarity economy, and popular economy are employed in Latin America in order to identify these experiences, the term *social and solidarity economy* seems to prevail and it provides a more elaborated conceptualization. This term identifies economic organizations created by people who freely join to develop economic activities and create jobs on the basis of solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperative relations (Gaiger, 1999). Following the idea that economic pluralism can lead to economic democratization, the social and solidarity economy in which community enterprises are situated is often seen as the driver of an alternative view of development leading to *buen vivir* (Coraggio, 2011; Acosta, 2013). This approach implies direct participation by civic society in decision-making that affects the common good in order to implement concrete economic alternatives. The primary aim of the social and solidarity economy is to build new social and labour relations that do not reproduce the existing in-
equalities; thus, they represent a concrete and viable alternative to the capitalist economic system and imply political change (Coraggio, 2011).

**Methodology**

In order to address the two research questions on the relation between indigenous enterprises and *buen vivir*, three months of ethnographic fieldwork were carried out to investigate thirteen indigenous community enterprises. Four criteria were used to select these community enterprises for investigation: social foundation in an indigenous community, an explicit social goal, an entrepreneurial character devoted to the production of goods or services, and collective ownership and management through participatory governance.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals or small groups of people, for a total of twenty-seven informants. These included not only directors, presidents, and members of the board of directors but also active members of the organizations, who in some cases held positions in sales or administration. In addition, two key informants were interviewed: the director of an organization that promotes the activities of coffee cooperatives and the president of an important local NGO that has been working on indigenous issues and the solidarity economy in Chiapas since the 1970s.

All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author in order to facilitate the analysis of the role played by indigenous enterprises in sustaining *buen vivir*. Data were compiled on the organizations’ origins, the activities they performed, how 1025 indigenous cultural features were incorporated into the organizations, and the characteristics and goals of these enterprises. Given the state of conflict in the region, it was important that the interviewer was introduced by mediators trusted by the organizations. Secondary sources included local newspapers and magazine articles, documentary films, government reports, and analyses conducted by social movements and local as well as international NGOs.

**Organizations’ activities**

Urban and rural organizations were included in the study and grouped according to their sectors of activity: handicrafts (seven organizations), agriculture (four), and ecotourism (two). In terms of membership, five of the handicrafts organizations were composed exclusively of women, while all the rest of the organizations had both men and women members. The organizations had a variety of legal forms: seven were cooperatives, one was a *unión de ejidos*, one a small private company, and two were Societies of Social Solidarity (SSS). The remaining two were informal organizations, which declared they
were ‘in resistance,’ that is to say they refused any aid or relationship with public authorities. Unión de ejidos and SSS are two legal forms provided by the Mexican law. The ejido is a form of communal land tenure, where each ejidatario receives a piece of land and all decisions regarding every piece of land are taken in the general assembly of ejidatarios. The Society of Social Solidarity is characterized by a collective fund of social solidarity to which part of the profits deriving from the entrepreneurial activity should be destined.

Five handicrafts organizations produced textiles based on traditional designs and one produced pottery with traditional methods. The remaining organization produced recycled paper and printed books that seek to recover and promote indigenous oral traditions. The main production of agricultural organizations was coffee. Ecotourism organizations operated facilities in the selva, where they provided services for tourists, including food and accommodation.

Most organizations also performed additional activities: handicrafts organizations offered workshops for their members on a variety of issues, such as women and human rights, leadership, cooperativism, and health. One organization also arranged activities for children living in the community, including those of non-members. All of the coffee organizations also produced other organic agricultural goods such as honey, edible mushrooms, or fresh vegetables, both for self-consumption and for trade on the local market. Moreover, two of them also ran coffee shops in town; one was about to open a comedor popular, a place to eat for locals; and another started a micro-banco campesino, where the organization’s members could deposit their savings and receive interest. This last activity is important because indigenous peasants usually do not have access to commercial banks.

Organizations varied in size: two handicraft organizations were small, with fifteen to twenty members, while the others had from 70 to 250 members. One recently established coffee organization had only seven members, while the others were much larger: two with around 500 members, and one had 900 members. One ecotourism organization had twenty members, while the other had twenty-five members.

A plurality of goals

In addition to the investigation of the organizations’ history and activities, interviewees were asked about the needs of their communities and the capacity of their organizations to address them. Owing to the semi-structured character of the interviews, unexpected discourses and needs emerged. The findings were organized according to five main goals pursued by the organizations in this context.
Social goals
The collective orientation of indigenous culture is expressed by the propensity towards participatory governance models of community enterprises that reinforce participation of community members and strengthen social cohesion. In a context, that social cohesion is constantly threatened by religious and political divisions and by tourist flows that foster competition within communities, this ability is crucial for enhancing social trust. Indeed, these collective organizational practices are directed to the well-being both of the organizations’ members and of communities at large.

All the interviewees underlined that their organizations enjoyed a good reputation in their communities, and one noted: ‘the fact that we are an exclusively indigenous organization is very important: we share problems and necessities and there is cohesion among us beyond religions and political parties’.

This collective aspect has contributed to a bottom-up process in the creation of these organizations: most of them were established by small dedicated groups of indigenous people, in a few cases together with non-indigenous participants. One organization was initially supported by a political party and in two others, foreign activists were also involved. Public authorities were directly involved only in the two ecotourism projects, even though these projects were implemented by organizations that already existed at the community level.

In some cases, interviewees pointed out that their organizations were founded to obtain fair prices for coffee or handicrafts. One member of a coffee organization said: ‘we chose to establish a cooperative because in this way we have more advantages and we can defend ourselves from coyotes. We can sell coffee at a higher price and gain more.’ Another interviewee explained: ‘coyotes are mestizos, they cheat with the scale, and they take advantage of the ignorance of people. In the cooperative we are all indigenous, we all speak the same language and we trust each other.’ These claims must be interpreted in a context in which large corporations hire local intermediaries to obtain raw coffee at the lowest possible price. Thus, an important social goal is to operate collectively in order to defend the rights and interests of indigenous peoples.

Cultural goals
The contribution of reciprocity and non-monetary exchanges that derive from indigenous culture are crucial for building community enterprises: indeed, some authors have argued that the cultural aspects of certain communities can provide a competitive advantage to community enterprises embedded in such societal groups (Lindsay, 2005; Berkes and Adhikari, 2006; Peredo and McLean, 2010).
All of the interviewees emphasized the importance of indigenous culture in developing entrepreneurial activities. One interviewee recalled: ‘the main reason for founding the organization was to recover oral tradition, a culture that was about to disappear’. Another observed ‘that it was crucial to understand and recover the meaning of every symbol of our traditional textiles, so we started to work together with elderly women who still have this knowledge’.

Thus, the cultural aspect is evident in the products delivered, such as traditional handicrafts, and in the organizational practices, such as the utilization of traditional knowledge in agriculture. Nevertheless, there is an awareness that solutions cannot be found solely in tradition: ‘we are not against external technical knowledge, but we have to blend it with traditional knowledge, to make them influence each other.’

*Economic goals*

The entrepreneurial character of these organizations addresses the needs of income generation and employment creation. Entrepreneurial viability is crucial for maintaining economic independence and sustaining the organizations. Economic independence can be considered as a means for sustaining self-determination, which Foley (2003) argues is the ultimate goal of indigenous entrepreneurial activity. This independence, however, usually follows a long and gradual process of development, since initially these organizations are not necessarily capable of fully sustaining their members, but rather their activities supplement other sources of income.

In some cases, external actors, such as fair trade networks or international NGOs, provided useful support in sustaining the organizations’ economic activity and in identifying and creating new markets. However, this support had some downsides, such as the risk of creating economic dependence on institutions that are not under the control of the members, the high costs that organizations undergo to obtain fair trade labels or organic certifications, and the imposition of organizational models and practices that do not take into account the needs of local organizations.

As one interviewee observed, ‘all economic activities have their own strong interests. Fair trade looks for justice for consumers. But what about producers? They never ask us what we need!’

Even though interviewees were, in some cases, complaining about the imposition of external practices, they also recognized that the relationship with fair trade was useful to have a more direct relationship with buyers and to reinforce some practices that already exist—they don’t create practices of transparency and democracy, we already had them! The pre-funding they offer us is very
useful, sixty percent, in some cases even seventy percent, and some don’t ask for interest.

While the viability of their activities was crucial for sustaining these organizations, interviewees were reluctant to disclose precise financial information, mainly because they were fearful of state intervention. However, they provided some indication of their economic performance that was generally guaranteeing the sustainability of the organizations.

**Political goals**
The political objectives derive from the linkage between community enterprises and social movements, and impact on community enterprises’ capacity to mobilize local resources. Most of the organizations investigated were established after the 1994 Zapatista insurrection, which was a landmark in Chiapas for indigenous peoples’ assertion of their rights and their struggle to initiate change.

The need for participation in the public sphere was advocated especially by women, who found in their organizations an opportunity to slowly change their lives by becoming active outside their homes. One woman interviewed simply said, ‘even if we don’t sell a lot we stay in the cooperative because we learn many things’.

The Zapatista insurrection had a revitalising impact also on the few organizations that were founded before 1994. One of them, for instance, sought to foster women’s participation, as one interviewee belonging to a coffee organization observed: ‘Since 1996, some members’ spouses and daughters, being freshly influenced by the Zapatista movement, started to develop the cultivation of organic fruits and vegetables. This activity was formalized into a specific section of our cooperative named organization and participation of women’.

Self-management also supports processes of autonomy, which is one of the most pressing demands made by indigenous societies in Chiapas. Indigenous people are generally frustrated by a conflictive relationship with public authorities, in which they see an enemy rather than a potential ally or, at least, a counterpart with whom a dialogue can be established. As one interviewee put it, ‘we don’t expect anything from the government, it’s only the people who have to pull through this situation’. The lack of support by the government is considered to be an obstacle to the growth of the sector and to the betterment of their living conditions.

**Environmental goals**
Ecotourism organizations emphasized environmental protection not only in terms of their organizations, but also for the community as a whole. This goal was also mentioned by others, and many references were made to the spirit-
ual relationship indigenous peoples have with the earth. For example, one interviewee of a coffee organization observed that ‘we respect our roots and mother-earth, we ask her forgiveness and we warn her when we start working in the fields’, and another said, ‘we don’t use chemicals, we shouldn’t hurt the earth, we have to respect her’, and a third observed that ‘there is a strong relation with the earth. When the harvest starts the cooperative organizes a ceremony to provide thanks for the harvest’.

One handicraft organization sponsored workshops specifically dedicated to ecological issues, such as waste separation, reforestation, and construction of low-consumption wood cookers.

Although with varying intensities, all of the interviewees suggested that the activities of their organizations had to be compatible with a sustainable use of natural resources and territory.

Community enterprises and *buen vivir*

The analysis conducted so far draws a parallel between the aims of indigenous community enterprises and those of *buen vivir*. Table 1 summarizes *buen vivir* in terms of its pillars as extracted from the literature and community needs as they emerged from the interviews. The table describes indigenous

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community enterprises in terms of their goals (again from the interviews), and their impacts on the communities as emerged from observation and the interpretation of the data. These organizations address community needs that can be understood in the framework of *buen vivir*, and aim to achieve a plurality of goals that have positive impacts on the communities.

For example, in the second row, in order to promote community well-being, it is essential that fair prices are obtained for goods produced by the organizations embedded in the communities. This is an important social goal for indigenous community enterprises, as it reinforces social cohesion and increases opportunities for women.

**Conclusions**

This study has analysed the relations between *buen vivir* and community enterprises in the indigenous communities of Chiapas. In this context, community enterprises are an instrument for self-determination and self-managed development of indigenous peoples, even though there are many challenges and obstacles.

The main findings demonstrate these enterprises’ contributions to *buen vivir*, which derive from their embeddedness in the indigenous communities and their pursuit of a plurality of goals (Somerville and McElwee, 2011). In addition to income generation and job creation, these goals include the affirmation of indigenous identity and safeguarding of indigenous culture, the reinforcement of processes of autonomy through self-management, the broadening of participation in the public sphere, and the protection and sustainable utilization of natural resources.

In Chiapas, the main enabling factor for the emergence of community enterprises is their relationship with social movements, where alternative modes of collective action can be discussed and translated into political practices. Thanks to this relationship, the mainstream conception of needs must be rethought and adapted to the real necessities of communities (Escobar, 1992). These needs are evident with regard to women: in traditionally male-oriented societies, community enterprises promote genuine forms of participation that increase women’s control over their everyday lives at both the social and political levels.

In opposition to the neoliberal discourse of assimilation of indigenous people, where traditions and culture are seen as obstacles to development, indigenous social movements assert their right to remain autonomous. These movements follow a ‘strategy of localization’ that is directed to the defence of their territory and culture (Escobar, 2001). With firm roots in local communities, these grass-roots enterprises have become instruments for reinforcing the protection of indigenous cultures and territories.
In Mexico, there has been some recognition by the public authorities of the importance of community enterprises and other solidarity associations, as demonstrated by the adoption of the General Law on Social and Solidarity Economy in 2012. However, this legislative intervention is unlikely to have much effect on the ground, given that trust in public authorities is almost non-existent, particularly by indigenous peoples.

Consequently, it is important to begin thinking about how indigenous community enterprises can be supported in this context. One way to reinforce these community enterprises is through the promotion of processes of exchange and reciprocal knowledge with analogous enterprises, located both in Mexico and in other countries. A fruitful horizontal exchange based on solidarity and in conjunction with close participatory consultation with local organizations would be a good starting point. Some interviewees noted that their organizations have invited external volunteers to implement marketing strategies or create new designs for textiles, while others underlined that they have learned best practices from a successful coffee cooperative in the neighbouring state of Oaxaca. Further opportunities for supporting these organizations could focus on management and accounting practices as long as they acknowledge the preferences and needs of the members and communities involved. The realization of these initiatives could strengthen indigenous community enterprises and contribute to the realization of buen vivir in Chiapas.

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