Historical reconstruction and cultural identity building as a local pathway to “living well”

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“Living well, is life in plenitude. Knowing to live in harmony and equilibrium; in harmony with the cycles of mother earth, the cosmos, life and history, and equilibrium with all life forms in permanent respect”.

(Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2010). Buen Vivir / Vivir Bien Filosofía, políticas, estrategias y experiencias regionales andinas)
COMPONENTS OF ECUADOR’S NATIONAL PLAN FOR “GOOD LIVING” (2009-2013):

- Satisfaction of human needs.
- Quality of life
- Dignified death.
- To love and be loved
- Healthy development of all in harmony with nature.
- Indefinite prolongation of cultures.
- Free time for contemplation.
- The emancipation and widening of liberties, capabilities and potentialities.

In other words it implies “creating the conditions for the emergence and affirmation of new plural subjects” (Irene Leon, 2010).
“That persons, communities, Peoples and Nationalities can effectively exercise their rights and responsibilities in the context of interculturality, respect of diversities and a harmonious coexistence with nature". (Asamblea Constituyente (2008). Constitucion del Ecuador)
Very poor and inequitable conditions for intercultural dialogue between indigenous peoples and other actors about development pathways due to process of cultural change and shifting local identities.
Canaima National Park

- 3 million hectares
- Ancestral Pemon indigenous homelands
- Population: approximately 20,000 Pemon
- Since 1994 UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site
- Forest-savannah mosaic
CANAIMA NATIONAL PARK
FEATURES OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL IMPORTANCE

Table Mountains, Tepuis
(Matawi Töpö)

Water Falls
(Angel Falls)

Mauritia Swamps
(Moricahales)
IT’S PEOPLE
CURRENT PEMON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Estado Bolívar

Puerto Ordaz

Arekuna

Kamarakoto

Taurepan

Arawakos

Akawaio

Makushi
CONFLICTS

Manaus, Brazil
Guri Dam
Puerto Ordaz
Bolivar State
Canaima National Park
Manaos, Brazil
KUMARAKAPAY, 1999
CONCERNS

• Feeling of identity loss

• Lack of clarity of who the Pemon are and want to be in the future

• Loss of self-esteem

• Strong tensions between young Pemon and elders over current ways of life

• Concern over loss of Pemon knowledge and traditions.

• Strong interest and need to reflect about process of changes.

• Need to discuss a desired future.

JUVENCIO GOMEZ (1999), COMMUNITY HEAD OF KUMARAKAPAY
THE PEMON “LIFE PLAN” (PLAN DE VIDA): AN IMPORTANT LOCAL AGENDA

• More than a development plan- emphasis on historical and cultural reconstruction.

• Seeks to help visualise a desired future.

“The “plan de vida” is a plan made by indigenous organizations and communities in an effort to survive and to maintain traditions, customs, and the hope of having a society with its own identity based on the traditional knowledge of its people. It is a means of guaranteeing better conditions and a better quality of life for indigenous communities. However, it is also a document to be used in negotiations with both the regional and national government, as action must be taken at both of these levels. It includes the issues of health, education, territory, the environment, natural resources, the economy and production, government, justice, youth, and women’s and gender issues.

(Claudino Pérez, Representante Indígena de Corpoamazanas, Colombia, citado en Action Colombia, Colombia Support Network, Spring 2009).
COMMUNITY PROCESS OF SELF REFLECTION ABOUT ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
1999-2000: TOPICS DISCUSSED

1. Where do we come from? Historical settlement areas
2. Community history
3. How has our community and territory changed over time?
4. Things that we need to solve to improve our living conditions and environment.
5. Views of development.
6. Good and bad things of the past and of the present.
7. What type of society do we desire for the future?
COMMUNITY AUTHORED BOOK
THE HISTORY OF THE PEMOM OF KUMARAKAPAY, 2010
OPENING UP SPACES FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

- COMMUNITY REFLECTION PROCESS
- TERRITORIAL DEMARCATION PROJECT
- STUDY OF LOCAL USES OF FIRE
- STUDY OF CONFLICTS
- FIRE MANAGEMENT PROJECT
- RISK PROJECT
- PALEOECOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT
- CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECT

PARTICIPATORY HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION AND LOCAL IDENTITY BUILDING
THE PEMON LIFE PLAN

PEMON COMMUNITIES

Deliberate
Negotiate

Government agencies

PEMON LIFE PLAN

• History
• Geography
• Territory
• Productive activities
• Land use
• Fire Management
• Wildlife use
• Culture
• Changes and problems
• Future

Assess
Facilitate
Joint research
Deliberate

Scientific community
DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

PATHWAY ACCORDING TO ACADEMIC CIRCLES

PEMON PATHWAY

SPACE FOR JOINT REFLECTION
DELIBERATION/REFLEXION

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

LIFE PLAN
“It is not a matter solely of acknowledging, discovering or tolerating the other or cultural difference. It is neither about making identities static. It is about actively promoting processes of exchange that allow to build spaces of encounter among different beings, knowledge, logics and practices” (Walsh 2005)
BUILDING INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS IMPLIES:

• Rethinking the what, why, and what for of knowledge production (local relevance)
• Confronting the production of western knowledge with that of indigenous people.
• Revitalizing indigenous knowledge
• Reconstructing collective memory
• Negotiating and exchanging western and indigenous knowledge.
• Who initiated the processes of reflection?
• How was it established as a legitimate process in the community?
• How have different views been taken into account, e.g. by age/generation or gender?
• How have differences - if any – been resolved?
• How have patterns of leadership and participation changed, if at all, through the process?
MANY THANKS....

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