

People in Conservation

Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security



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Special Issue on the Good Life

Opening word

Across time and space the one question that has haunted humanity is the question of good life.

What is the good life?

There is of course no one answer to this. Obviously there are too many different ways in which the question about good life has been sought to be answered including by those who believe that the consumerist society that capitalism engenders (despite it being based on the principle of privatization of profits, socialization of losses and depredation of nature) is the best of the possible worlds. But these claims have largely de-legitimized themselves morally, socially, politically, and ecologically by the fact that capitalism has spawned poverty, exploitation, genocidal wars, avoidable suffering and climate crises that threatens a civilizational collapse.

Philosophers like Socrates spoke about a life lived in contemplation and within a republic ruled by the philosopher king which allows the greatest opportunity to live in accordance with the dictates of reason. The Buddha spoke about the middle path, while Lao Tzu spoke about living in harmony with the Tao. Closer to our times Karl Marx spoke about classless communism where free and full development of each is the condition for free and full development of all, and, where each contributes to the society according to her capacity while is given back by society according to their needs. Gandhi ji spoke about living in a Swaraj (or Ramrajya) based on the idea of sustainable village republics in accordance with the understanding that the earth has enough for everyone's needs and not greed.

There are also world views, more indigenous in origin, such as Ubuntu of African origin that speaks about considering our shared and common humanity as the starting point or Buen Vivir which is about living a good life together, among humans and non-human entities. As one essay in this issue says, it "is about the rights of people to health, education and shelter, and promotes a new/ancient way for improving the quality of life including greater happiness but not through the possession of material goods as the capitalist way of society is promoting."

There are ideas behind words and phrases – old and new – such as development, economic growth, degrowth, sustainability, post-development, globalization, localization, glocalization, etc. There are varying ideas of justice too; redistributive, restorative, retributive, fairness. Perhaps behind all this there is a Utopian dream and promise humanity made to itself. But meanwhile we are living in an age of implicit or explicit despair, what with the climate crisis, food shortages, migration, floods, droughts, wars, and violence. And there is every likelihood that all these may further deteriorate in the future. While some are worried and unnerved, others prefer to bury their heads in the sand, like ostriches, and pretend that nothing is the matter.

In this context both the general community and social activists must evolve 'enabling romantic-utopias' which will help them to creatively and joyfully work for a better future.

These Utopias will not be an escape but be grounded in reality. There will be an element of romance in it just as there was romance in Marx's idea of 'Classless society' and Gandhi's notion of 'Ramrajya'.

This grounded and romantic utopia will help people to be positive and joyful as they work to create a better society and environment. Naturally, this Utopia will also be enriched by music, dance, literature and spirituality. This Utopia will go beyond narrow religious boundaries and emphasize our common humanity.

Milind (Kalpavriksh, Pune)

Siddhartha (Pipal Tree, Bangalore)

1. In News

FAZILKA ECOCAB: Changing the face of cycle Rickshaw

By Nishant



Fazilka Ecocab: In front of Historical Clock Tower Fazilka

Rapid motorization and privatization of urban mobility has posed serious health hazards and created great divide in terms of access to opportunities. In response to these trends, a group of enthusiastic people in Fazilka conceptualized and developed a plan for reviving non-motorized shared transport in the form of Ecocab.

Fazilka is a municipal council in Punjab near the India Pakistan border and it has total population of roughly 80 thousand. Being a small town, people have to travel very short distances in their everyday life. Though this makes the cycle rickshaw a suitable mode of transport for people in Fazilka, its usage was in sharp decline because of proliferation of automobiles. Automobiles not only captured the road space but also created severe traffic risks for cycle rickshaw- both of which demotivated people to use cycle rickshaw.

Written specially for Vikalp Sangam website
For more see <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/fazilka-ecocab-changing-the-face-of-cycle-rickshaw/>

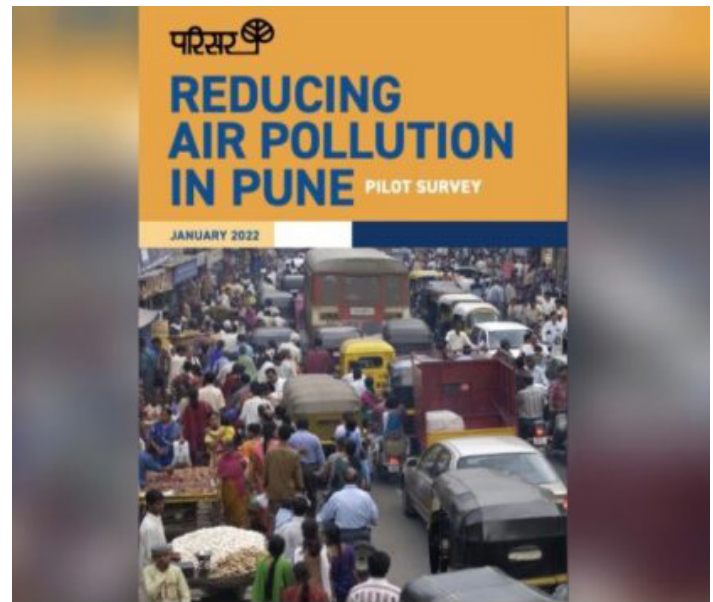
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Pollution free and sustainable mobility



Punekars are ready to sweat it out by opting to walk, cycle and even hop on to buses to ensure the healthy air quality in the city – provided the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) improves the existing amenities and infrastructure.

These findings are from a pilot survey carried out by a Pune based civil society organization Parisar that collected submissions from 701 respondents (all residents of Pune) through suggestion cards during the month of January. The suggestion cards were filled out by citizens who visited the Lungs billboard initiative taken up by Parisar on JM Road recently.

The survey questioned Pune residents about the most essential effort that PMC should do to make the city's air cleaner. According to the results, 39% of respondents believe that enhancing public transportation in the form of reliable, comfortable and affordable bus service in Pune will help decrease air pollution, while 30% believe that safe and better walking and cycling facilities would help improve air quality, taking the tally to 69%.

First published by **Punekar News** on 7 Feb. 2022

For more see <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/punekars-are-keen-on-reducing-air-pollution-in-the-city-through-sustainable-mobility/>



2. Perspectives



Thinking outside the Grid

Steven Gorelick

Thirty years ago, a friend of mine published a book called *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save The Earth*. It described the huge environmental benefits that would result if everyone made some simple adjustments to their way of life. Six hundred thousand gallons of gas could be saved every day, for example, if every commuter car carried just one more passenger; over 500,000 trees could be saved weekly if we all recycled our Sunday newspaper; and so on. The book was immensely popular at the time, at least partly because it was comforting to know we could “save the Earth” so easily.

Simple or Simplistic?

Unfortunately, the projected benefits of these simple steps were actually insignificant compared to the scale of the problems they addressed. Saving 600,000 gallons of gasoline sounds impressive, but it’s only about 0.15% of the amount of fuel consumed in this country daily. Half a million trees every week sounds like a lot too, but the sad fact is that globally, about 35 acres of forest are being lost every minute despite all the newspapers that are now routinely recycled.

50 Simple Things is no longer in print, but the idea that our most urgent environmental problems can be solved by tinkering around the edges of modern life just won’t go away. In 2006, for example, Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* DVD included an insert with ten “Things To Do Now” to fight climate change:

recycle more, inflate tires to the proper pressure, use less hot water, and other equally “simple things”. There are still dozens of websites offering similar tips: 50WaysToHelp.com, for example, has the usual fluff (“don’t waste napkins”) as well as some suggestions the 1990 book couldn’t foresee (“recycle your cell phone”, “use e-tickets”).

Technology is not a Panacea

If there’s been much of a change in mainstream attitudes to our environmental crises, it’s that today’s “solutions” rely much more heavily on technology: electric cars and LED light bulbs, clean coal and genetically-engineered bio-fuels. What this means is that while individuals are still directed towards those same small steps, Big Business will be relied upon for the huge leaps. That’s the premise of IBM’s “Smarter Planet” initiative (a corporate campaign implying that our naturally dimwitted planet needs corporate help to avoid embarrassing gaffes like environmental breakdown). Thanks to digital technologies, IBM sees the Earth “becoming more intelligent before our eyes – from smarter power grids, to smarter food systems, smarter water, and smarter healthcare and smarter traffic systems.”

The “Smarter Planet” initiative is another way of saying that solutions to the environmental crisis could only emerge from the corporate world.

At first glance, *50 Simple Things* and the Smarter Planet initiative are very different, but they share a core assumption, which is that solving our myriad problems won’t require systemic change. Instead, it is assumed that modern industrial life can continue its upward and outward expansion forever – smart phones, superhighways, robotic vacuums and all – so long as the public focuses on “simple things” while allowing industry to do whatever might keep us one step ahead of resource depletion and ecological collapse.

This is a dubious strategy at best. Aside from what it means for climate chaos, it ensures that cultural and biological diversity will continue their downward spiral; that the gap between rich and poor will grow even wider; that the wealth and power of transnational corporations will continue to expand.

(Needless to say, corporations won't do anything to save the earth if it doesn't add to their bottom line: making the planet more intelligent, for example, is "the overarching framework for IBM's growth strategy.")

Systemic Change and Local Solutions

In other words, what mainstream environmentalists like Al Gore and corporations like IBM are proposing is just more of the same. For many people this is actually comforting, because *systemic change* sounds frightening: they are accustomed to their way of life, and fundamental change can seem like stepping off a cliff. But done right, systemic change is something to look forward to, rather than fear. This has already been made abundantly clear by the local food movement, which aims at fundamentally changing the food system. Almost everywhere that local food initiatives have taken root, the result has been more vibrant communities, stronger local economies, better food and a healthier environment. Systemic change via localization simply extends the logic of local food to other basic needs.

Like electric power. Just as we can't know what went into that industrially-grown tomato from Florida or apple from Chile, our continent-wide electric grid prevents us from really knowing the social and environmental costs of flipping on a light switch, using a hair dryer, or making toast in the morning. Did the power come from a nuclear power plant, a huge hydro project in Canada, or a coal-fired plant in the Midwest? Even if we are aware of the costs of these sources of power, few of those costs affect us immediately or directly.

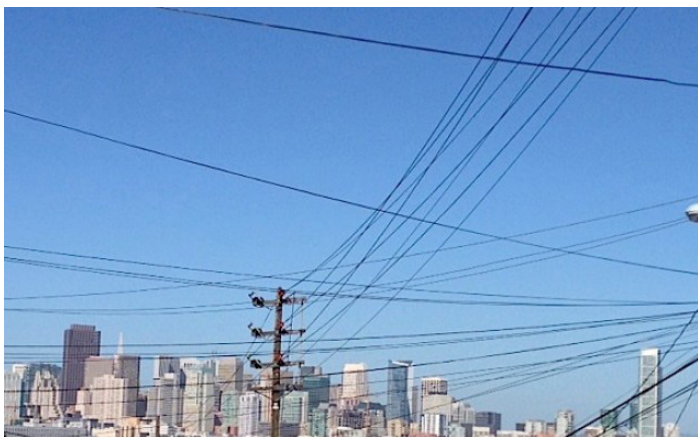
If our electric needs were sourced locally or regionally, on the other hand, we'd have to balance our desire for power with costs that we and our neighbors largely bear ourselves. One can imagine lively debates in communities everywhere about what mix of local power sources – small-scale hydro, wind, biomass, solar – should be employed. Each of these has trade-offs that might be difficult to balance, but most of the costs and benefits would accrue to the same community. If the economic, ecological, and aesthetic costs were too high,

many communities would find ways to limit their use of energy – for example by rejecting building permit applications for "McMansions" that use a disproportionate share of the common, limited energy supply.

Ultimately, a greater reliance on local power would eliminate one of the most destructive side-effects of the grid: the misperception that energy is limitless. Grid-connected life leaves us expecting that we should have as much power as we're willing to pay for, 24/7, year in and year out. The angry reaction to PG&E's power outages in California – intended to lower the risk of wildfires – shows how deeply this expectation has become embedded in the public's consciousness. **Changing our attitude towards Energy Production and Consumption**

Does California's experience mean that people will never accept the limitations of decentralized renewable energy? I believe that such a shift would be far easier than many imagine, based on my own family's experience of living off-the-grid for the past 20 years. (Off-grid life does not make us environmental heroes: I'm well aware that the PV system we rely on for power also has environmental costs, some quite heavy.) The point is only that our attitude towards energy now includes a healthy sense of limits, and that we have quite naturally adjusted our behavior as a result. If the sun hasn't been out for a few days we probably can't run the vacuum cleaner, and we'll have to use a broom instead. If the sun hasn't been out for a week, we'll have to turn off the pump on our deep well, and use the gravity-fed spring instead – which means there won't be enough pressure for showers. In the best of times we don't use electricity to toast bread (anything that turns electricity into heat uses a lot of power); instead we only make toast in the winter, when it can be made on the top of our cook stove.

These and many other adjustments don't feel like sacrifices: they're simple and logical responses to the fact that our source of power is limited and variable. The fuels that power the grid are limited too (as resource depletion and global warming should make clear) but there's no direct link between that fact and the day-to-day experience of grid-connected life.



Power wires over a US city skyline. Photo – Victoria Clarke

As the planet heats up and critical resources run low, people will need to adapt in a number of ways. For those of us in the industrialized, over-developed world, one of the most important will be to replace our sense of entitlement with a sense of limits. Our high-consumption lifestyles will be difficult to disengage from – not because they are inescapable products of human nature, but because they are essential to the “growth strategies” of powerful big businesses. The irony is that scaled-down localized alternatives to the media- and advertising-saturated consumer culture would allow the majority to live fuller, richer, more meaningful lives. Nothing to fear, and much to gain.

Systemic change is on no one’s list of “simple things”: it will require hard work, creativity, and a willingness to stand up to powerful interests. The alternative is to assume that the best we can do is inflate our tires properly and screw in a new light bulb, while allowing the corporate world to continue its quest for limitless power and endless growth, all while destroying the only planet we have.

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Localization: Bringing about Buen Vivir to address climate fluctuations and globalization

Christian Stalberg

Today, there exists what in my estimation is an unprecedented moment for altering the course of human history. The hopes and dreams for a more equitable, peaceful, just and livable world now have an opening for their realization as never before, which has come about due to the impacts on society from accelerating climate fluctuations and how people will have to respond in order to survive. In this article, first I will discuss how the impacts of a rapidly changing climate are adverse upon modern civilization. Second, I will talk about how localization is the best most cogent response to rectify those adverse impacts. Third, I will show how Buen Vivir – “living well” or “well-being” – is synonymous with localization, containing the crucial elements needed for societal redesign, which is mandatory if we are to survive. I will end the article with some examples of Buen Vivir from the Andean region.

The vulnerability of centralized systems

While human civilization has enjoyed a long period of relatively stable climate, we are now experiencing accelerating climate fluctuations, worldwide. Extreme temperatures, floods and fires are resulting in crop and biodiversity losses, damaged and destroyed infrastructure, and loss of housing and people’s livelihoods. Almost all of our lifeline services – food, water, power, sanitation, transportation – are provided by highly centralized systems that are vulnerable to disruption or failure from these accelerating climate fluctuations. For example, industrial agriculture will be unable to pivot quickly enough to continue to provide food stocks in the face of accelerating climate fluctuations. As transnational supply chains are disrupted and monocultural export crops fail, entire populations will be left to fend for themselves to secure alternate food sources. If we are to avoid malnutrition if not outright starvation, appropriate

technology-enabled, human scale, locally acclimatized, food production systems will have to fill in the gaps created by failing industrial import agriculture.

Let's talk about the private sector for a moment. Naomi Klein, in her description of disaster capitalism, affirms that the capitalist ruling elites view 'climate change' as the biggest business opportunity of all time. Only war comes close in its profit-making potential. The problem, however, is that the systems that undergird our civilization have been designed over time under conditions of relatively stable, predictable climate. Now with wildly fluctuating climatic conditions, there is just simply too much risk for things to go badly wrong, especially for transnational corporations making decisions from afar. The costs for ensuring that all the possible contingencies are covered in an environment of increasingly unstable climate are simply too great. This is beyond the capacity for actuarial science to deal with.



As climate disasters become more frequent and intense, the human capacity to respond to them needs to be established at the community level. Pic. Ashish Kothari

Now, moving on to the public sector, the scope and scale of adverse impacts due to accelerating climate fluctuations are such that the state is already and will increasingly be overwhelmed. Disaster readiness, mitigation to eliminate or reduce the hazard, adaptation to better withstand the impacts of climate extremes, all these will become the responsibility of each community, at the local level. As accelerating climate fluctuations are an ongoing

hazard that can strike any locality at any time, causing a disaster, local communities could consider following two guiding principles in preparing for the disaster. The first principle is building robustness to better withstand climate impacts, and the second is building resilience to recover more quickly following disruption due to climate impacts.

The critical need for subsidiarity and devolution

In modern times locals impacted by disasters largely rely upon the state for response and recovery. Given the increased frequency and widening scope of adverse climate impacts, however, relying upon a centralized and oftentimes distant resource to provide timely disaster response and recovery is naïve at best and disastrous at worst. The solution is to build local capacity so that communities can be as self-reliant as possible as climate extremes become the new norm. This includes mutual aid so that when local authorities are overwhelmed by a disaster, a well-equipped and trained citizenry can mobilize to help one another. The capacity to deal with accelerating climate fluctuations must become established in the local community that is being affected. This includes decision-making and governance, otherwise known as subsidiarity and devolution. These are key elements of localization, which I will discuss later in the article, but first let's try to define subsidiarity and devolution, as these are not terms in common use today. Subsidiarity is when all decisions should be made at the lowest level of government authority competent to deal with them. Devolution is the statutory delegation of powers from the central government of a sovereign state to a sub-national level, such as a state or municipality.

A fundamental principle, I believe, we are all fighting for is that decisions should be made closest to the people most affected by them. This is crucially important when addressing contemporary civilizational crises. While climate-related disasters are now discussed frequently in the media, the power elite largely ignores globalization, the other exigency threatening the planet. Lives are lived locally, yet are increasingly controlled by remote states and multilateral treaties, which increasingly

do not share local people's interests or concerns. The state, in its bargain with capital, has decimated local economies that once predominated towns and villages, exporting industries and economic livelihoods to cheaper labor markets, oftentimes overseas – the vicious result of globalization. Food security has been replaced by a multiplicity of distant, increasingly industrialized, ecologically destructive, crop monocultures of questionable nutritional value, shipped across great distances.



Localization fosters the capacity for self reliance while creating a relationship with people's immediate natural surroundings.

Under globalization, precarity increases, with life's essentials including food, water, energy, employment, and housing, all becoming less assured, undermining peoples' psychological and material welfare, destroying their well-being. Democratic systems and institutions become corrupt, with electoral politics and representative forms of government serving as a ruse for having a voice and equity. Protected areas by law are meaningless as land is invaded and exploited through ecologically destructive practices encouraged by greedy transnationals, and confidence in government is eroded as laws and regulations lack enforcement. Remote governance undermines local autonomy with decisions imposed from afar, and burdensome taxation can be imposed for things that local communities have no interest in.

Combating globalization through localization

What is the solution to the disaster of globalization? Localization! Localization is a social movement

emerging in recent years as a reaction to globalization and neoliberalism. It advocates for a return to a sustainable way of living, determined by the people who live in a place, not by some transnational half a world away. Localization combats the impersonality and harms caused by capitalism, and it fosters self-reliance and self-sufficiency through use of appropriate technology, circular economies, local currency, mutual aid, local food, people's assemblies, and so forth. Rooted in the ecology of the place, localization fosters the use of local sources thus requiring less energy compared to transporting goods or services from outside the locality, department, country, region, or continent.

In order to bring about localization, villages, towns and municipalities need to be given greater authority and autonomy. Locals are in the best position to address their own immediate and changing conditions, be they social, economic or climatic. Whether it is the ability to stabilize their local economy, buffering the adverse impacts of 'free' markets and 'lower (monetary) costs' imposed from afar, or planning and performing adaptation measures to ensure continuity of their water and sanitation systems during floods or droughts. Localization can be stimulated and strengthened by the state granting greater autonomy to municipalities for self-determination, i.e., local decision-making. Indigenous peoples have been practicing local decision-making through people's assemblies within communal settings for millennia. Many of the practices required to bring about localization can be found in the 'old' ways of ancestors, before aggregation of power through statism and capitalist exploitation swept the globe. Many of the measures communities need to take to become disaster-ready are the same as those to bring about localization. Actions taken by local communities to become robust, resilient, self-reliant and self-sufficient will be through rebuilding local economies, culture, democracy, and food sources. The twin disasters of accelerating climate fluctuations and globalization wreaking havoc today upon communities can be addressed in a single concerted effort.

Localization and Buen Vivir

Now where does Buen Vivir fit into this discussion? In the twenty-first century, human habitat including our relations with one another, and between ourselves and nature, have been shaped by materialism, manifested through a multiplicity of forces including, but not limited to, globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism, to name but a few. These forces have fostered isolation, individualism, competition, greed, inequity, classism, consumerism, materialism, uniformity, inequality, injustice, and exclusion, all of which are the antithesis of Buen Vivir.

Found in both Andean and Amazonian societies, Buen Vivir is about good living together, among humans and non-human entities. It is about the rights of people to health, education and shelter, and promotes a new/ancient way for improving the quality of life including greater happiness but not through the possession of material goods as the capitalist way of society is promoting. While improving the relations between people and also with nature, Buen Vivir does not aspire to be a unique society; instead it aims to create a pluralist society with respect for different cultures, welcoming their equal participation. It promotes the ideals of living in harmony with nature, being conscious of the capacity of ecosystems so as to avoid their destruction, and creating a society of equity, participation, and sustainability. Ultimately, Buen Vivir fosters love, caring, social justice, equality and good community relations.



Buen Vivir, while being an ancient system of healthy coexistence between people and their ecologies, is also an increasingly effective response to modern challenges like climate change. Pic. Ashish Kothari

Many of our transactions today require little to no contact. They can be done from a distance via telecommunications, and because of the distancing there is no proximity and real contact between people. Civilization today suffers from an interminable loss of trust between people. What Buen Vivir tells us is that healthy relationships, which build on trust, require personal proximity and contact. Healthy relationships, between persons, and between people and their local ecological surroundings, are essential to restoring the world to a condition of health and balance.

Does Buen Vivir exist anywhere today or is it simply a romantic dream from the past? Elements of Buen Vivir do indeed exist and are being rediscovered, adapted to local conditions and placed into practice. Ancestral communal practices that date from Incan times today are found in Andean countries. Land is still farmed collectively by Quechua and Aymara family clans called “ayllus”, which is the basic socioeconomic unit passed down from the Incan civilization. Not only is land communally owned, collective labor/work called “minka” is done for purposes of social utility and community infrastructure projects. Both “ayllus” and “minka” are nested in “ayni”, which is the reciprocity or mutualism that is the bedrock of community. Needless to say, these practices exist without markets or a monetary system. A specific example of a village manifesting elements of Buen Vivir



can be seen in the small town of Samaipata in eastern Bolivia. A Transition Town that emphasizes local food and goods and whose social organizing adheres to traditional methods of direct democracy, Samaipata has been studied by researchers. Findings showed high levels of happiness and reduced ecological footprint.

Conclusion

To conclude, I believe that going forward people must foster localization to survive accelerating climate fluctuations, and to also address the problems caused by globalization. In the process, the quality of life, of Buen Vivir, can be rediscovered and reinstituted into our lives and communities. This is the time for bold experiments by people and governments. We're all in this together and we haven't a moment to lose.

*With a background in agroecology, emergency management, green buildings, renewable energy, telecomputing, cooperatives, and ecovillages, **Christian Stalberg** recently completed an almost year long consulting engagement with the UNDP in Bolivia analyzing the central government and UNDP's approach to social and economic development in the context of climate change. In 2017, as a Fullbright specialist, he taught a course on 'Ecological Human Habitat Design' at Universidad de San Simon, Bolivia. **Stalberg** has a BA in Environmental Studies and Planning from California State University at Sonoma with an emphasis in Energy Management and Design, and an MS in Biomimicry from Arizona State University. He has taught courses in building energy modeling, renewable energy generation, ecovillages and disaster readiness for utility companies, architect and engineering companies and associations, NGOs, colleges and universities. **Stalberg** is currently a PhD student at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California.*

Sourced from: <https://radicalecologicaldemocracy.org/localization-bringing-about-buen-vivir-to-address-climate-fluctuations-and-globalization%ef%bf%bc/>



3. Signs of hope

Strengthening local food systems through kitchen gardening in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary -An exploratory study on women's knowledge and knowledge sharing practices

Background

In the villages nested in and around the surrounding areas of the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS), located 130 km from the city of Pune, Adivasi women play a vital role in subsistence farming and forest food gathering practices, and are crucial both in seed conservation and the consumption of forest products. In this context, Kalpavriksh Environmental Group has supported the promotion of wild vegetable festivals and the informal dissemination of information about the nutritional and medicinal benefits of wild vegetables and local agriculture seed varieties. Furthermore, 10 years of work with Women Self-Help Groups have proved successful in ensuring women have a safe space within their communities to gather, share and mobilize on different issues. Yet, local food varieties use and consumption remains a challenge, along with household food self-sufficiency.

In BWS, gender has been widely used to understand the differences in agricultural households, from male and female unequal access to rural livelihoods to disparities over the management, allocation, and ownership of forest resources. Nevertheless, the boundary between the so-called productive and subsistence tasks are permeable for smallholder farming communities. In this context, little attention has been put to gendered knowledge, that is, to the specific experience and practice Adivasi women hold to ensure household production of culturally and environmentally appropriate food. Although ongoing programs are gender sensitive, the ways in which research and strategies learn about Adivasi women's knowledge and notions on subsistence farming and conservation is not always approached through a gendered lens. In other words, the way we learn about what women know and how they share their practices often neglect the position they hold within their household and their community.

In an effort to contrast theory and practice, and provide an analytical foundation to the importance of recognizing gendered knowledge in BWS Adivasi communities', the following considerations were taken in this exploratory study.

On gendered knowledge

Dominant notions of smallholder farming as a predominantly male-based activity (Deere, 1995) contribute to women being displaced from controlling and having access to natural resources and agricultural opportunities. Resources in smallholder farming systems are typically allocated based on power and status within the household, which is commonly male (Beuchelt, 2016), and power imbalances within households shape the way a farmer is defined, as well as how women's contributions to agricultural production schemes are regarded.

Access to knowledge creation and sharing opportunities is inextricably linked to status and power within smallholder farmer communities. Little attention has gone to women's uneven ability to access the same agricultural resources and opportunities as men or for agriculture education strategies to cater to women's distinct needs. A production-oriented definition of a farmer excludes subsistence agriculture or production intended for household consumption—here referred to as kitchen gardening—, which women are commonly responsible for (Barbercheck, 2020). Therefore, a gendered understanding of knowledge and a careful analysis of women's ability to access, create and disseminate their agricultural values and expertise are needed for equitable farming practices.

The gendered division of knowledge must be considered to be able to go beyond incorporating women but placing them at the forefront of farming practices and opportunities. The overarching objective of this approach is to understand and analyze the role of women as holders of kitchen gardening knowledge and practice, and therefore as crucial for the social and physical reproduction of Adivasi communities.

On knowledge and sharing as catalyzers for food sovereignty

Knowledge is a key signifier of power, and it shapes women's agricultural experience and practice. However, can we think of knowledge as a necessary means for the construction of food sovereignty? While the 'knowledge is power' analogy offers inspiration, it does not reflect Adivasi women's efforts to have access to knowledge, or their ability to absorb and retain it without it being replaced or co-opted by other knowledge systems.

The possibility of egalitarian farming systems is directly related to women's access to knowledge creation and sharing opportunities. Therefore, understanding the relationship between local agricultural knowledge, sharing practices and knowledge generation is necessary for community engagement in the use and participation of locally and environmentally relevant subsistence farming practices.

Horizontal knowledge-sharing methods provide an opportunity to leverage women's agricultural experience, best practices, and values. Drawing from cultural frameworks that are shared among women within the same community, this strategy is founded on a praxis-based model. Based on the notion that most household food-related issues have common and local solutions, this approach is inherently linked to the creation of sustainable food systems, where knowledge is generated, shared, and transferred simultaneously. In other words, women use their own empirical experience and combine it with sharing practices. The transformative potential of this approach lies in its ability to meet the needs of specific contexts, farming systems, and farming conditions (Holt-Gimenez, 2006). Leveraging women's knowledge and expertise in agriculture is necessary to provide women and men with equally accessible and safe environments to learn and share.

Methodology

Women's narratives are oftentimes not recorded nor accounted for and traditional survey-based research methods and structured interviews are not able to capture gender-based differences nor involve

women in the co-creation of qualitative data. The methodology used for this knowledge mapping exercise sought to ensure that while women were collectively sharing their current knowledge and knowledge-sharing practices, they were simultaneously able to reevaluate them.

This knowledge mapping exercise is part of a collective envisioning of food alternatives that seriously recognize women's specific knowledge of subsistence farming and food production activities. Women's knowledge re-vindication and revaluation –on natural farming techniques, kitchen gardening, and the value of forest/native fruits and vegetables– is key for maintaining culturally and environmentally sound local food systems. The intersectional approach to knowledge –practical, experiential, cultural, and gendered– aims to ensure a comprehensive understanding of women's knowledge and skills related to subsistence farming, and leverage its revaluation for the creation of independent knowledge-sharing networks. This study remains a work in progress and in the long term, it seeks to leverage women's organizing capacity and cater to gender-specific ways of disseminating local knowledge and experience.

Main Insights

The kitchen garden appears as the main go-to place for women to have readily available fruits and vegetables. When the yield is good from the kitchen garden, women do not need to travel long distances to the local market and spend money on production. Seed availability determines what is grown in the kitchen garden and informal seed exchanges are practices between women, relatives, and neighbors. While decisions on what is grown in the agricultural field are most commonly taken by men, decisions on what is grown in the kitchen garden are taken solely by women. However, and although men are rarely involved in any kitchen garden activities, women heavily support agricultural field work. This is particularly important to emphasize given kitchen gardening and rice transplanting activities overlap during the monsoon season. Additionally, and worth highlighting, is that women are responsible for activities such as fetching water, cooking,

cleaning, and other household labor that often goes unacknowledged.

The kitchen garden appears as a space for women to make their own decisions and put into practice their knowledge of vegetables and fruits for household consumption. Knowledge-sharing practices also seem to be strictly female-led, as women mention learning about kitchen gardens from their mothers, grandmothers, and mothers-in-law or other women from their village. Knowledge and best kitchen gardening practices appear to be commonly exchanged in informal ways, either by visits or by word of mouth. It is worth highlighting that women appear to highly value seeing and experimenting with their own hands as a method for learning. For instance, the chula –traditional wood fire stove– and bhanus –traditional kitchen spaces where spices and salt are kept– came up as areas where knowledge is transferred, alongside mentions of cooking and recipes as ways of learning about wild vegetables.

Without romanticizing women's socio-ecological practices, it is important to recognize that nutritional, culinary, and food-related knowledge in BWS is articulated through gender. In small plots of land within families' household boundaries, on slopes, and even on the fringes of their terrain, the Adivasi women have found resilient ways to grow their food. Their knowledge of kitchen gardening has been transferred from generation to generation of women, and the parallels of what and how they grew in their childhood and what they grow in their adulthood lead to think of their kitchen gardening practices as an intrinsically female tradition. This 'tradition' is also the pillar for a household's food self-sufficiency, –even if to varying degrees–and the reason why Adivasi communities can grow and consume the local fruit and vegetable varieties they know and like the most. As they said: "Amhala pahije tenva amhi parasbaget jato ani lagel te gheun yeto." which in Marathi translates to "We go to the kitchen garden to collect whatever and whenever we want".

However, the tension between what is seen as productive agricultural practices and knowledge and 'old' or local knowledge primarily affects women. When women's kitchen gardening experience and

know-how are seen as merely an extension of their domestic chores, their agricultural practices are downgraded, which simultaneously leads to them lacking access to the resources and possibilities for sharing them. This exploratory study worked under the assumption that participatory and visual research methods can be used as tools for local knowledge revaluation. The methodology rejects the distinction between formal and informal knowledge and emphasizes the value of observation, flexibility, and adaptability in knowledge sharing and revaluation, and seeks to allow women to gain confidence and recognition of their expertise. Focus groups, beyond disclosing any particular information about kitchen gardening practices, were used as a tool for women to be aware of the value of food security and food sovereignty.

Women's social position influences the way knowledge is developed and determines whether their experiences can be readily transmitted and adapted by others. In the face of climate uncertainty and food availability, horizontal and locally-led exchange methods are necessary to enhance trust and build social networks. Moreover, practical and participatory knowledge-sharing practices are necessary to strengthen women-led spaces, and for communities to revalue and recognize the work women are already doing in the construction of food sovereignty.

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4. Case Study

The Goba of Ladakh - Current Relevance of a Traditional Governance System



Kalpavriksh, Snow Leopard Conservancy – India Trust, Nature Conservation Foundation, Local Futures and Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation

Summary

Background

Indigenous and other local communities across India have had traditional systems of local governance as unwritten or sometimes written codes of conduct and decision making. Many such systems are still being followed in parallel with the *panchayat* systems, or getting re-invented by combining the modern forms of governance with the traditional ones, especially in the case of communities still practicing traditional occupations and ways of life (forest-based, pastoral, fishing, and/or farming). There are, however, very few studies of these systems interacting with modern state institutions, their current or continuing relevance, and their role in achieving goals of justice, well-being, and ecological sustainability.

The study: why and what

This study focuses on documenting the present status of the traditional governance system of Ladakhi villages, with a focus on the *goba* (or *lambardar/nambardar*), and understanding the

current relevance of the system in the context of socio-cultural, economic, ecological and political transformations taking place in the region. For this, the study also looked at the interface between the local/traditional and new/modern governance systems, viz. the *goba* with the *panchayat*, Ladakh Hill Council and UT Administration.

The study was carried out in four parts of Leh district: the Sham region, the Gya-Rumtse area, Leh town and surrounds, and Changthang. Changthang region was especially chosen as an ecologically, culturally unique landscape (due to its predominantly nomadic pastoral nature) within Ladakh, where local governance has its unique features. We highlight key learnings from the above, for governance, democracy and autonomy specifically in Ladakh. Crucially, we ask: if the *goba* system continues to have relevance, what can be done to sustain it, clarify its role and strengthen its functioning?

This study is a collaborative effort between Kalpavriksh and local partner organizations Snow Leopard Conservancy – India Trust (SLC-IT), Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO), and Local Futures. Over the course of two years, the authors conducted semi-structured one-to-one or group interviews or open conversations with *gobas* (current and former), *membars* (a specific role assisting the *goba*), *sarpanches*, *panches*, councillors, bureaucrats of relevant departments and senior officials of the UT Administration, researchers, academics, and activists, head of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, and the Lt. Governor of Ladakh.

Findings

While its origins are not clear, the *goba* appears to be an old system that was recognized formally under the Jammu and Kashmir' Lambardari Act, in 1972 (with rules promulgated in 1980) which mandated elections of *nambardars* (a term used more than *lambardar*, in Ladakh) along with a 5-year tenure, and provided for their remuneration. The *goba* came under the revenue department, and the *goba* and *patwari* (revenue officer) worked

very closely together authenticating the village level information on land, population, livestock and other matters. The *goba* is a village headman who acts as a representative of the village with social and cultural-ritual responsibilities. Being an important authority in the village, traditionally, a well-respected person with a good comprehension of local history, communication skills and good relationships with people was usually considered for selection to the post of the *goba*. In some places it was a hereditary position.

Along with the *goba*, *membar* (*goba's* assistant), *kutwal* (*goba's* messenger) are also selected by the village. Importantly, the *goba* has not been an authority unto himself, but rather in consultation with the village assembly (the *yulpa*), though the extent and kind of consultation is likely to have varied considerably across Ladakh.

Some of the key functions of the *goba* (currently carried out in varying degrees and combinations in different villages and regions within Ladakh):

1. Calls for all village level meetings and coordinates various cultural, ritual and other social gatherings
2. Plays a significant role in conflict resolution within the *yulpa*, along with ensuring the internal flow of information and communication.
3. Maintains the general demographic details like number of houses, females, males, animals, deaths and births. He also issues death, birth, and character certificates.
4. Keeps records of government schemes and maintains liaison with the administration on matters not covered by the *panchayat* and/or the council.
5. Presides over the harvesting and cultivation timings in the village, and the cycles and distribution of irrigation water; keeps a check on the rotation cycle for hosting the ceremonial feast as well as ensuring that all the families get water for irrigation (at times in association with a *churpon*, specially designated for this purpose); and ensures upkeep and maintenance of irrigation canals.

6. Maintains, in Changthang, the list of pasture lands, number of livestock with individual families and boundaries to be adhered to by herders, conducts meetings to decide on migration timings, vests the power to allocate or withdraw access to pasture lands, and resolves conflicts between two herder communities regarding such access.
7. Ensures compliance with customary norms, *thims*.

Analysis

1. Strengths of *goba* system as it was and is:

- a. Almost universally at our study sites, people recognize it as a crucial and continuing part of their 'way of life' or 'being', and stress that its continuity is essential even where *panchayats* are active.
- b. The *goba* system displays some elements of 'direct democracy', in that it enables the village (with high degree of household participation) to take crucial decisions regarding natural resources, livelihoods, and socio-cultural aspects. This is especially so in many 'interior' villages (far from Leh town) where traditional livelihoods are still practiced, appear to have been and still remain relatively autonomous, for many crucial aspects of life.
- c. It is a place-based process of decision making that is often (though not necessarily) cognizant of the importance and limits of local ecological contexts, including pastures and water bodies.
- d. A relatively apolitical (i.e., independent of political parties) position, seen as more neutral than the *sarpanch*.

2. Weaknesses of *goba* system as it was and is

- a. One of the major limitations of the *goba* system is its gender one-sidedness, with almost no examples of women *gobas* (and where examples exist, it is because of non-availability of men in households designated to take on the *goba* role in a particular year).

- b. Other inequalities related to traditional structures and relations, like class, caste, age, also limit participation.
 - c. Lack of incentive to become a *goba* due to several changes in modern times.
3. *Goba and other (new) institutions* - Given that *goba's* societal functions and importance do not have adequate acknowledgement in the Lambardari Act, and no mention in the J&K Panchayati Raj Act 1980 and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils Act, 1997, there is confusion about their inter-relationship. In many areas, there are considerable overlaps in key functions between the *goba* and the *sarpanch/panchayat*, or the Councillor. Hence, in case of overlapping functions such as agriculture, water management, livestock maintenance, management of rituals and festivals, there is no clarity whose jurisdiction counts, or whether there needs to be mutual consultation and joint decision-making in some or all these issues.
 4. *Party politics and the goba* - the *goba's* role is assumed to be devoid of any individual and political interests, hence is said to be a more trustworthy representative of people's voice. However, increasingly over the last decade or so the presence of political parties has really intensified in Ladakhi society, and several people reported conflicts in case the *goba* had leanings for a particular political party (though he would not have been chosen because of this), while the *sarpanch* and/or the Councillor of the constituency were more aligned with a contending party.
 5. *Relevance and role: decline or continued importance?* *Gobas* still seen by many as not only a cultural but also an administrative and political head of the village, who is (or should be) now supported by the *panchayat* and the Council through funds and other government schemes. In several conversations it was evident to us that the *sarpanch's* position is important but he cannot replace the *goba*, as was the common refrain across all the respondents. This

is especially so for the *goba's* role in cultural and spiritual matters that are quite essential for maintaining village order; in matters of land and water; and in Changthang, in matters related to pastoralism. We also see that wherever people's traditional livelihoods of herding and farming continue, the *goba* remains highly relevant, but this is not the case with the villages closer to Leh or Leh city itself where there has been an increasing loss of traditional livelihoods.

A recent development of concern is official imposition of an age limit of 60 for *namdardars*, considered by nearly all respondents as unfair.

6. *Sought-after position, or a burden?* Across all the regions, the role of the *goba* is perceived as burdensome now, because his own livelihood responsibilities have grown (and are not necessarily being shared by the village as was earlier the case), along with all the *goba* functions. Another reason for this lack of interest is also very meagre salaries for the *goba*, i.e., Rs. 1500/month, which is reportedly not enough even to cover expenses of carrying out the *goba's* essential roles. Due to this, many villages have switched to rotational or lottery system for choosing the *goba*, which means that every once in a while, a person without adequate knowledge or not having everyone's trust, may get designated; the tenure is also now too short (one to two years) for the *goba* to settle in properly.

Recommendations

1. *Greater recognition of and incentives for the goba:* an increase in the *goba's* salary/compensation for expenses should be considered. We would suggest from the current Rs. 1500/ month to at least Rs. 5000/month; and that this should be paid promptly every month. Importantly, this should not be used as a reason to think of the *goba* or *namdardars* a 'government employee' any more than a *sarpanch* is; he is first and foremost a representative of the people, and the salary or compensation for expenses is a recognition of the services he also provides to the government. Additionally, in

some form, *gobas* need to be accorded explicit social recognition and benefits, like being rightfully acknowledged for their work by the UT administration and the Council. This would also call for the communities to revive their traditional practices to figure out internal ways to support serving *gobas*.

2. *Tackling internal inequities*: steps are needed to transform the *goba* system on the basis of values of equality, justice, inclusiveness and fairness, especially regarding gender and caste exclusion. One possibility is asset of rules or guidelines under the Lambardari Act, to open up and incentivize the position to women, youth, and marginalized castes.
3. *Clearer lines of governance between goba and other governance institutions*: All relevant laws, including the LAHDC Act, J&K Panchayati Act, and rules of procedure under which the UT Administration work, would need amendments or subsidiary rules/guidelines to ensure that the *goba* is consulted by the Council, *panchayats*, and the UT Administration in relevant community matters. The Lambardari Act could also be amended, or rules or guidelines issued under it, to clearly list out the functions of the *goba* beyond what is already listed. These measures could also be introduced for the Leh Municipal Corporation, such that the corporation and the city's ward members need to consult the *goba* for relevant matters, and the *goba's* role in urban and peri-urban areas is clarified (as recommended in the Leh Vision 2030).
4. *Age limit*: The age limit of 60 should be immediately withdrawn, and either kept open or replaced by an age limit of 70.
5. *Ladakh level goba association*: A Ladakh level *goba* association should be formed along with regional associations, with a structure and rules as considered appropriate by *gobas*; *this is essential for collective voice and advocacy, and sharing of good practices*. If formed, this should be formally recognized by the Hill Council and UT Administration.
6. *New norms / rules around current issues*: The customary rules, *thims*, do have some measures around maintaining clean water, not littering, etc, but these are not enough in light of drastic changes in recent times, or have themselves become weak. For instance, they have not yet been adapted to cope with the problem of solid waste, or with challenges created by mass tourism and climate change. Some discussions and changes around these are important, and could be initiated by *gobas* themselves, youth and women's associations, or relevant religious institutions.
7. *Constitutional status of Ladakh*: It is important to consider granting the status of 6th schedule in the Constitution of India to Ladakh, because of its unique socio-cultural and ecological character. If such recognition is given, Ladakh's governance institutions including the Hill Council would be able to provide Constitutional recognition to the *gob* system to strengthen grassroots governance.
8. *Role of yulpa*: The spirit of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, and in particular of the *Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act* is to enable the village assembly to be the most powerful and basic unit of decision making. For this reason, bringing Ladakh under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution, providing for self-governance of scheduled tribes (and specifying that the *yulpa* is the equivalent of the *gram sabha*), could be considered; or alternatively, such formal strengthening could take place under the 6th Schedule.
9. *Awareness building*: In several conversations with *gobas*, *sarpanches*, councillors, officials, civil society groups, among others complained about lack of awareness and clarity of various roles and functions of various positions in traditional and modern institutions. It is recommended to undertake awareness programs to various sections of society, systemically explaining relevant laws and customs, and various institutions and their functions.

10. *Further studies*: this study needs to be extended to different parts of Ladakh, including Kargil district, and Nubra in Leh district, to bring out and highlight the importance of place-based, local governance practices. Also, studies are needed to get a better understanding on traditional or ongoing forms of discrimination (gender, caste, class, age, religion) in the selection and functioning of *gobas*. Ladakhi students could be involved in such studies.

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