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Community work, love and the Indigenous worldview of buen vivir in Peru

Naomi Joy Godden
Edith Cowan University

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Dr Naomi Joy Godden, Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow, Edith Cowan University

n.godden@ecu.edu.au

Abstract

The Latin American indigenous knowledge paradigm of *buen vivir* ('living well') encapsulates an equilibrium of rights of people and nature, with a 'solidarity economy' emphasizing equities, equality and freedoms, social justice and ecological justice. In participatory research in Peru, community workers developed a love-based framework of practice that reflects features of *buen vivir*. Participants suggest love is values-based feeling and action aiming for a world of peace, happiness and prosperity by transforming social conditions for a system of equality through participatory and democratic processes. The findings enhance developmental social work and *buen vivir* literature with a localised, relationship-oriented practice approach.

Introduction

Social work is concerned with 'social change and development' (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). Influenced by the Global South, developmental social work is an emerging paradigm that embeds social development, particularly poverty alleviation, into social work practice (Gray, 2002; Midgley and Conley, 2010; Patel and Hochfeld, 2013). Yet 'development' is a contested concept (Kothari, 2005), and some activists and social movements challenge neoliberal and anthropocentric development discourses by advocating *alternatives* to development. The indigenous knowledge paradigm of *buen vivir,* understood as 'living well', is (re)gaining traction in Latin America, and is increasingly embraced internationally, as a model for a new regime of development (Acosta, 2011). Encapsulating indigenous wisdom and spirituality, a solidarity economy of justice and redistribution, and the interdependent wellbeing of people and nature, *buen vivir* can support developmental social workers to challenge neoliberalism.

This article explores the opportunity for developmental social workers to engage with *buen vivir*, focusing on the under-explored relationship between *buen vivir* and love, a feature of indigenous Andean spirituality. It begins with a literature review regarding development, *buen vivir*, and the relevance of love. I then discuss community-based research that examined the 'love ethic' in community work through a co-operative inquiry with four community workers in Lobitos, a fishing village in northern Peru. Participants generated a framework of community work[i] practice whereby the love ethic is a mutually reciprocal and relational core of social change. As one of three international case studies, the Lobitos research generated findings that reflect many elements of the (re)emerging *buen vivir* paradigm in Latin America, providing interesting insight for social workers interested in alternative development models.

Development and social work

The global development movement has been described as neocolonial, oppressive and neoliberal (see Kothari, 2005 and Nederveen Pieterse, 2010 for analyses of development theory). Such characteristics are disguised in discourses of 'human development' (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015) and 'sustainable development' (United Nations [UN] 1992). For example, the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2015) outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets for every UN member nation to bring about 'sustainable development' that balances economy, environment and society. The broad Agenda includes goals such as eradicating extreme poverty (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 6), climate action (Goal 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). Despite seeking to 'realize the humans rights of all' and acknowledging the need to 'heal and secure our planet' (UNGA, 2015 p. 1), the 2030 Agenda frames sustainable development within the neoliberal paradigm of the globalised market economy and 'inclusive economic growth' (p. 4). Concerningly, in recent UN meetings, some conservative world leaders have also questioned whether human rights are integral to development, indicating an ideological retreat (Sen and Mukherjee, 2014). This is met with considerable backlash from civil society groups, exemplified in a *Civil Society Red Flag* at the

58th Commission on the Status of Women in 2014 (Gestos et al., 2014)[ii]. The dominant neoliberal interpretation of development is a challenge for social workers who are committed to the *Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action*, which advocates a 'new world order which makes a reality of respect for human rights and dignity and a different structure of human relationships', with a 'people-focused global economy' (IFSW, International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW] and International Council on Social Welfare [ICSW], 2012 p. 1, 2). Developmental social work purports to reject neoliberalism, with a socialist emphasis on structural change to improve the quality of life, material wellbeing and social and economic inclusion of people in poverty (Gray, 2002; Midgley and Conley, 2010; Patel and Hochfeld, 2013). This is achieved through 'the use of strengths, empowerment and capacity enhancement, the notion of self-determination and client participation, and a commitment to equality and social justice' (Midgley and Conley, 2010 p. 13).

Despite international endorsement of 'development' to include environmental sustainability and climate change (UNGA, 2015), the field of developmental social work does not yet holistically encompass the interconnectedness of people *and* nature in the development process, with limited focus on strengthening ecological integrity (see Gray, 2002; Lombard and Wairire, 2010; Midgley and Conley, 2010; Patel and Hochfeld, 2013). It therefore appears that developmental social work is grounded in anthropocentric ethics. Comparatively, ecological social work (see, for example, Dominelli, 2012; Gray, Coates and Hetherington, 2013; Alston and McKinnon, 2016) accentuates the relationship between social injustice and environmental degradation; however, some scholars marginalise the spiritual and intrinsic value and rights of ecological systems, particularly from indigenous perspectives. For example, Estes (2010 pp. 80-81) identifies, 'sustainable development is all about meeting *human* needs and aspirations' (emphasis added).

There is a need for developmental social workers to challenge Western constructions of 'sustainable' development (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014) by encompassing the wellbeing of

people *and* planet. Emerging literature about post-anthropocene and critical posthumanism social work provides an alternative perspective of development, stressing the interrelationships between social and ecological justice (Besthorn, 2011; Furness, Gilligan, Gray and Coates, 2013; Ife and Tacson, 2016). This movement calls for a shift from homocentric to ecocentric social work, which Besthorn (2011) describes as 'deep justice' as it 'recognises all things in the cosmos as nested in a complex web of interconnections between the human and non-human. All are seen to have intrinsic worth and moral considerability' (p. 255). A key consideration within this theoretical space is *buen vivir* - an ethical, values-based and indigenous discourse from Latin America that centres on the spiritual relationship between people and planet, and provides an alternative paradigm to 'the depleted development model and neoliberal period that has led to multiple interconnected global crises' (Villalba, 2013 pp. 1438-9).

Buen vivir: an alternative development paradigm

Buen vivir is translated slightly differently in various publications to mean, 'the good way of living' (Republic of Ecuador, 2008), 'good living' (Acosta, 2011), 'living well' (Villalba, 2013) and 'harmonious coexistence' (Gudynas and Acosta, 2011). At its core, *buen vivir* is a Latin American indigenous knowledge paradigm that encapsulates the living equilibrium of the collective rights of people and the rights of nature in harmonious relationship, with a 'solidarity economy' emphasizing equities, equality and freedoms, social justice (productive and reproductive), and environmental justice (Acosta, 2011). It is grounded in indigenous knowledges and traditions that are marginalised by dominant development theory and practice (Gudynas and Acosta, 2011), and intersects with other social movements and political philosophies such as ecofeminism, liberation theology, deep ecology, trade unionism, and movements connected with the World Social Forum (Arruda, 2003; Gudynas, 2011; Giovannini, 2012; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014).

There are plural interpretations of *buen vivir* amongst Latin American indigenous groups, governments, social movements and academics (Gudynas, 2011), and ontological differences

between indigenous conceptualisations of *buen vivir* (core concepts of nature, community, labour, consensus and democracy, spirituality, and fundamental principles of reciprocity, complementarity and relationality), and emerging Western / *mestizo* constructs (Villalba, 2013). Nevertheless, similarities amongst these various constructions provide important considerations for developmental social work:

An alternative development paradigm: Buen vivir rejects a lineal, neoliberal capitalist construction of development (Villalba, 2013; Ranta, 2016a). Instead of pursuing capitalist outcomes of consumption and profit through the control of people and nature (Gudynas, 2011), development is based on living well through 'solidarity, equality, harmony, complementarity and reciprocity' (Villalba, 2013 p. 1143). Economic, political, sociocultural and environmental spheres are interconnected, along with the necessities, capacities and potentialities of human beings (Walsh, 2010 p. 16), through collectivist social welfare (Caria and Dominguez, 2016) and a social and solidarity economy comprising cooperatives institutions and associations that challenge structural inequalities (Giovannini, 2012).

Relationships: Western dichotomies that separate people and nature are discarded for harmonious relationships, coexisting communities, and citizenship structures of participatory democracy that reject domination and control and extend citizenship to non-human actors in the environment (Gudynas, 2011). *Buen vivir* builds a society based on 'peaceful coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature' (Acosta, 2011 p. 189).

Holistic wellbeing: *Buen vivir* encompasses material and spiritual wellbeing (Caria and Dominguez, 2016), extending anthropocentric notions of the 'good life' by transcending material consumption to include feelings, affections, happiness, relationships and spirituality (Gudynas and Acosta, 2011). As an ethical framework, *buen vivir* comprises aesthetic, cultural, historical, environmental, spiritual *and* economic values within a 'cosmo-centric view' (Villalba, 2013).

Decolonization: Respecting the values and worldviews of indigenous peoples (Caria and Dominguez, 2016), decolonization of state structures, institutions and knowledge is integral to *buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011; Villalba, 2013; Ranta, 2016a, b). This 'opens the doors to different sets of understandings, rationalities and feelings of the world' (Gudynas 2011, p.445), particularly spiritual relationships (Villalba, 2013).

Reflecting the plurality of *buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011), the paradigm has diverse applications (Villalba, 2013), including official adoption in two Latin American governments, and in indigenous and social movements.

Buen vivir in practice

In 2008, the Republic of Ecuador adopted a new Constitution that enshrined *sumak kawsay,* an indigenous Kichwa (Quechua) concept translated as *buen vivir* in Spanish ('good way of living'). The Constitution outlines the State's duty to ensure collective human rights, including rights to water and food, healthy environment, information technology, culture and science, education, habitat and housing, health, and labour and social security (Republic of Ecuador, 2008 Article 2). The Constitution also frames *buen vivir* with the rights of nature (Pachamama or Mother Earth), including nature's right to integral respect for its existence and for maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes, and the State's duty to apply preventive and restrictive measures on activities that cause species extinction, ecosystem destruction and permanent alteration of natural cycles. *Buen vivir* is operationalised in the Ecuadorian Constitution within an alternative 'development structure' (Republic of Ecuador, 2008 Article 276) emphasising quality of life, rights, a 'fair, democratic, productive, mutually supportive and sustainable economic system based on the egalitarian distribution of the benefits of development and the means of production', and decent, stable employment. It aims to foster participation and social monitoring, restore and conserve nature and maintain a healthy and sustainable environment, guarantee national sovereignty, promote balanced, equitable land use planning, and protect and promote cultural diversity. This

development regime intends to challenge the neoliberal capitalist paradigm by envisioning a new society based on '…equality, fraternity, solidarity, complementarity, equal access, participation, social control and responsibility' (Walsh, 2010 p. 19).

In 2009, the Plurinational State of Bolivia also ratified a new Constitution. Drawing from knowledge and Aymara language of Andean indigenous peoples, the Constitution uses a similar term, *vivir bien* (translated as 'wellbeing') to elucidate the ethical principles of the State:

> '*ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa* [do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief], *suma qamaña* [live well], *ñandereko* [live harmoniously], *teko kavi* [good life]*, ivi maraei* [land without evil] and *qhapaj ñan* [noble path or life]' (Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2009 Article 8).

Furthermore, the State is based on the values of 'unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, interdependence, harmony, transparency, equilibrium, equality of opportunity, social and gender equality in participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice, distribution and redistribution of the social wealth and assets for well being' (Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2009 Article 8 Section II). The Constitution proposes a plural economic model that emphasises co-operative economic organisation, principles of complementariness, reciprocity, solidarity, redistribution, equality, legal security, sustainability, equilibrium, justice and transparency, and the 'equitable redistribution of economic surplus in the social policies of health, education, culture, and the re-investment in productive economic development' (Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2009 Article 306), along with the elimination of poverty and social and economic exclusion and inequalities.

As a transformative system of collective rights of people and nature (Ecuador) and an ethical framework for structural change (Bolivia), *buen vivir* is challenging to implement (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014). It is suggested there are significant contradictions between official discourse and practical execution of *buen vivir* in Ecuador and Bolivia (Walsh, 2010; Villalba, 2013; Caria and Dominguez, 2016; Merino, 2016; Ranta, 2016a, b). Caria and Dominguez (2016) report a

significant increase in extractivism and deforestation in Ecuador since 2007, without comprehensive consultation with indigenous communities, maintaining the existing exploitive relationship between people and nature. Furthermore, they argue that despite increased social spending (funded by increased extractivism), Ecuador has not yet seen a radically transformed economic model to redistribute wealth, and indeed, the rise in public income is said to weaken indigenous solidarity economic systems (Villalba, 2013). In Bolivia, the state nationalised natural resources, but also increased large-scale extractivism and repressed protesting indigenous peoples who lack consent rights (Merino, 2016; Ranta, 2016a). Furthermore, although indigenous, peasant and socialist social movements were, until the 2019 change of government, actively involved in running the Bolivian state, Ranta (2016b) argues that such institutionalization may actually control collective, grassroots radical activism. Similarly, participatory democracy in Ecuador is purportedly reduced to plebiscites, whereby citizens simply vote on proposed reforms (Caria and Dominguez, 2016).

Given that *buen vivir* was only recently established as the foundation of public policy in Ecuador and Bolivia, it is unclear whether contradictory implementations of *buen vivir* reflect the transition to post-neoliberalism, or if *buen vivir* is actually a 'false consciousness that conceals reality and is being used to legitimize the government's action' (Caria and Dominguez, 2016 p. 26) - an ideology to 'discipline the masses' (Ranta, 2016b p.1). Meanwhile, Torres and Acedevo (2011) advocate localised rather than generalised approaches to *buen vivir,* of which there are numerous examples. Merino (2016) shares that Amazonian indigenous movements in Peru are embracing *buen vivir* as a cultural tool and activist discourse for self-determination and post-extractivism. Self-organised collectives are coordinating plans that respect indigenous cultures, determine indigenous consent rights, and establish an alternative, redistributive political economy. Gordon (2003) also reports Peruvian Andean peoples engaging in meditations and offerings to Pachamama as acts of love and care of nature, nurturing bi-directional relationships. Acosta (2012) highlights indigenous community-based activities of reciprocity within the solidarity economy in Brazil, such as mutual aid institutions as a mechanism of collective work,

barter systems with ongoing transfers of labour and produce, and redistributing leftover crops to community members without productive resources (such as widows and orphans). It is difficult to know whether entrenched inequalities are addressed in these community-based contexts, particularly gender inequality - despite congruencies between feminism and *buen vivir* (Cortez, 2011), feminist analyses (for example, Leon, 2008, 2009) are marginal to dominant, gender-neutral discussions of *buen vivir*.

Notwithstanding these criticisms*, buen vivir* provides an alternative discourse to examine the glaring inadequacies of neoliberal globalization that social workers, particularly developmental social workers, attempt to transform (IFSW, IASSW and ICSW, 2014). Relationships, a central domain of our profession, provide an opportunity to explore the appropriateness of *buen vivir* to developmental social work.

Love, *buen vivir* and social work

As discussed, *buen vivir* is oriented around empowering relationships for structural transformation. Although rarely discussed in academic literature regarding *buen vivir*, it is suggested that Andean indigenous epistemology is grounded in an intimate, loving and bi-directional relationship between people and Pachamama through *munay,* the Quechua term for the love energy centre of the body (Gordon, 2003; Apgar, Argumedo and Allen, 2009). Gordon (2003 p. 6) explains:

> 'The Andean people have an intimate, loving, and reciprocal relationship with the Cosmos, particularly with the Pachamama (the great spiritual being who is the planet Earth). They experience the Pachamama as a loving and nurturing mother. They love her and depend upon her, and are loved in return'.

'To love and be loved' is also considered a goal under Sumak Kawsay policy planning in Ecuador (Thomson, 2011). Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg (2009) also identify that the solidarity economy, a key aspect of *buen vivir,* resonates 'to solidarity, to caring for each other and Mother Earth, to cooperation, to participatory democracy, to equity, to mutual aid and to

9

love' (p. 7, emphasis added). Scholars suggest that love occurs in mutually-beneficial relationships for reciprocal wellbeing.

These references endorse feminist bell hooks' (2000; 2009) theory that love between individuals, collectives and between people and nature enables relationship-oriented action to transform structures of domination and inequality. Indeed, around the globe, activists such as Mahatma Gandhi (2005), Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) and Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) maintain that love is fundamental to lasting and nonviolent social change, and love is prominent in various Latin American activist theories to gain freedom from oppression, including liberation theology which arose through Catholicism (Guitierrez, 1974), and dialogue (Freire, 1989). For Western scholars, love as action and choice (Fromm, 1957; hooks, 2000) involves abandonment of self-interest (Bauman, 2003), co-operation (Mackay, 2013) and a commitment to justice (King Jr., 1963; Hanh, 1993) – values closely affiliated with *buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011; Villalba, 2013).

Despite the documented significance of love to global activism for structural change, very limited empirical literature explores love within social work relationships. Butot's (2004) research with seven Canadian social workers found that love in social work is spirituality conceptualised as the intrinsic interconnection of all beings, and of one's intrinsic wholeness, sacredness, and value as an expression of the diversity of this interconnection. Love was understood as emancipatory, critical practice. In contrast, a community work study with women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the United Kingdom found that, 'love as a social ethic recognises that oppression instils self-hatred and love as the practice of freedom must therefore promote self-love among oppressed people' (Nelson, Dickinson, Beetham and Batsleer, 2000 p. 359). Finally, some studies with volunteer carers of people with HIV in South Africa and the United States found that love for community was a primary motivating factor for caring (Hudson and Robinson, 2001; Akintola, 2011). The limited ethical analysis and anthropocentric focus of this small collection of English language research indicates a

significant research gap regarding love, development and social work relationships, including in Latin America.

It is argued that love is marginalised in development and social work (Edwards and Sen, 2000; Banks, 2006), purportedly due to the 'colonialist history of missionary 'benevolence'' (Butot, 2004 p. 9), and because love is considered a private emotion that contradicts rationalised professional practice (Morley and Ife, 2002). However, given that some scholars identify love as central to indigenous relationality and to transformative activist movements, it is appropriate to consider the relevance of love to developmental social work, particularly in the Latin American context. The remainder of this article discusses participatory research in Peru that produced a love-based framework of grassroots community work practice that reflects many features of *buen vivir*.

Research methodology

In February 2014, feminist participatory action research (FPAR) was conducted in Lobitos, Peru as one of three sites in an international doctoral study to explore and develop a framework of community work based on love. As reported elsewhere (see Godden, 2017, 2018), similar research was also conducted with community workers in the rural communities of Liquica (Timor-Leste) and Margaret River (Australia). Through cycles of action and reflection, FPAR generates multiple and contextualised knowledges that empower participants to collectively take action for sustainable change. FPAR incorporates participation, social justice and change, decentralisation of power, democracy, context and relationships, and deliberatively examines and subverts traditional gendered power structures in research (Maguire 1987; Brydon-Miller, Maguire and Mcintyre 2004; Reid and Frisby, 2008). Within the FPAR paradigm, I applied the co-operative inquiry method, supporting dialogical, culturally-responsive and feminist research collaboration.

Co-operative inquiry is a form of 'participative, person-centred inquiry which does research with people not on them or about them. It breaks down the old paradigm separation between the roles

of researcher and subject' (Heron, 1996 p. 19). The initiating researcher joins with 'co-researchers' (not research participants or subjects) for a dialogical, systematic process to collaboratively inquire into a topic through cycles of reflection and action. The co-operative inquiry process involves several stages (drawn from Heron, 1996). *Stage 1* is the first reflection phase for co-researchers to choose the inquiry topic, type of inquiry and develop a launching statement. Co-researchers then plan the first action phase to explore an aspect of the topic, and a method to record experiences during the first action. *Stage 2* is the first action phase when co-researchers explore in experience and action some aspect of the inquiry topic, apply a range of inquiry skills, and record their experiential data. *Stage 3* involves full immersion in Stage 2, with openness to experience. Co-researchers may gain new awareness, lose their way, and/or transcend the inquiry format. *Stage 4* is the second reflection stage, where co-researchers share and make sense of the data from the first action phase and review and modify the inquiry topic. Co-inquirers then plan the second action phase to explore the same or different aspect of the topic and review methods of recording data. This stage can include reporting, collating and reviewing, making sense, reaching agreement and finding meaning. The *subsequent stages* continue the cyclical process of reflection and action, involving five to eight full cycles. The inquiry ends with a *major reflection phase* for pulling threads together, clarifying outcomes, and deciding whether to write a co-operative report. It is a celebration of bonding and a mourning of ending.

Research context and sample

This research was conducted in Lobitos, a remote coastal community located 1,115 km north of Lima, the capital of Peru. In the census of 2017, the population of Lobitos was 1,312 (590 female and 722 male) (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica e Informacion [INEI], 2018). The community's main economic industries are artisanal fishing, surf tourism and the municipal government (Godden, 2013). To recruit co-researchers, a local organisation invited community workers, volunteers and community members to participate in the study, and interested people contacted me to express their willingness to participate. No selection criteria excluded interested

participants. Our co-operative inquiry involved four employed community workers (including me), comprising three women and one man, representing two local organisations working on youth access to education and local governance. As artisanal fisherfolk, the co-researchers were also associated with the local *Gremio de Pescadores* (fisherfolk union), along with church groups and *Vaso de Leche* (Glass of Milk program for children). Although a small-sized co-operative inquiry, Baldwin (2002) asserts that committed participation has more impact than the number of co-researchers. Ethics approval was granted by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number CF13/724 – 2013000321), and all participants gave written consent to partake in the study.

Research process and findings

Our four-week co-operative inquiry involved five cycles of reflection and action, within three two-hour meetings and one four-hour meeting. Both the process and the outcomes of our co-operative inquiry provide insight into our proposed love-based approach to community work. Honouring the ethics of co-operative inquiry, I do not speak on behalf of my co-researchers. They gave me permission to share my perspective of our experience and our collaboratively generated knowledge.

Developing our group structure

Buen vivir promotes participatory and democratic decision-making. Our group actualised this process in the First Reflection meeting, which involves an introduction to the co-operative inquiry process and collaborative decision-making about the inquiry structure, topic and intended outcomes. We discussed a number of ethical challenges that may arise in participatory research, such ensuring confidentiality and anonymity; managing factions; making the research useful; and sharing control over the research (Stoecker, 2005; Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). We developed collaborative research ethics strategies to mitigate risks and heighten collective ownership of the process and findings. Our group values included:

- Respect

- Confidence

- Punctuality

- Sincerity

- Honesty

- Group responsibility

- Self criticism

- Reach an agreement / solution

- Know how to listen

- Know how to speak orderly – wait for your turn.

These values reflect a relationship-centred approach to community work.

Furthermore, our collaboratively-developed group structure also reflected the dialogical impetus of *buen vivir*. We decided to use consensus decision-making, involving debate and searching for mutual agreement. Our group structure was flexible, with open boundaries to welcome other community members to participate. The intended outcomes of our co-operative inquiry were personal and community transformation through strengthening personal knowledge, developing a personal plan for action, and sharing knowledge with the community. The group chose to focus on the launching statement, *Como practicar y difundir el amor fraternal en el trabajo comunitario?* [How do we practice and share love in our community work?].

Self-reflections on love

As discussed, *buen vivir* embraces diverse and holistic values beyond neoliberal preferences of consumption and the free market. The First Action of our co-operative inquiry involved self-reflection of our community work practice to identify our personal and professional values and explore our personal understanding of love. In journals, we recorded responses to the following collaboratively formed questions: How do you feel in your job? What do you desire to improve

in your life? What do you understand by love? How do you transmit love? Our individual responses were shared and collated in the Second Reflection meeting. Love was understood as a 'deep feeling that helps me give to others in everything I do'; desire; a 'feeling that motivates us to act'; essence; actions such as helping, teaching, valuing and forgiving; and giving without expecting in return. We described giving love as 'proving to others'; trust; support; helping others; listening to others' problems; and, spreading good spirit.

Collaborative analysis of the shared data supported us to develop a foundation definition of love:
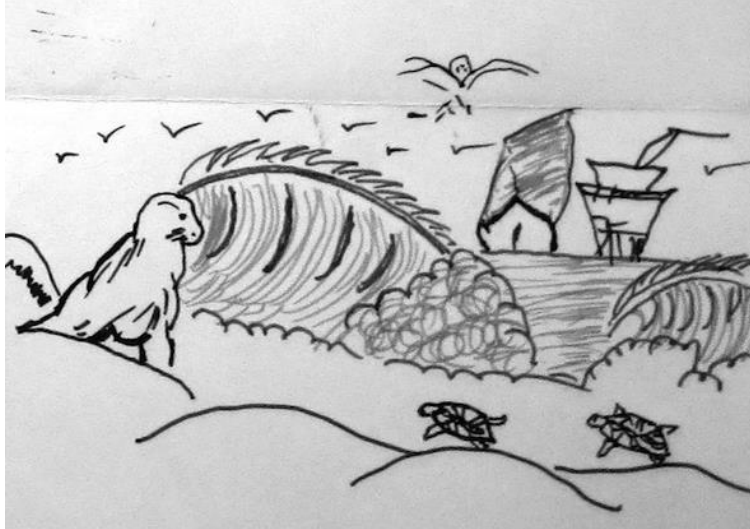
> *El amor fraternal es un sentimiento profundo que nos impulsar a actuar por el bien estar de los demás sin recibir nada a cambio* [Love is a deep feeling that motivates us to act for the wellbeing of others without expecting anything in return].

We used this as a frame of reference for our Second Action, which involved recording a story/example of applying our concept of love.

Love in action

An emerging aspect of the *buen vivir* discourse is integrating the conceptual paradigm with localised practice. In our co-operative inquiry, we shifted from theoretical considerations of love to knowledge development through practice using collaborative action-reflection processes. In the Third Reflection meeting, we shared our stories from the Second Action through drawing, embracing narrative and arts-based research tools (Abma, 1998; Cole and Knowles, 2008). Our stories shared acts of love such as interaction, being at ease with each other, trying to solve problems in the family and community collectives, dialogue, being calm, caring and giving importance to others' problems, being open and removing pride. One co-researcher explained that he experienced love through visiting the beach with his family, observing nature and 'seeing things differently' (Figure 1), while another co-researcher located love in trusting relationships with others. A third co-researcher identified the connection between self-love and love for others.

Figure 1: Co-researcher drawing of experience of love

We analysed the data by comparing our stories to other experiences that were not mindfully actions of love, and reflecting on each story through our definition of love. During the collective reflection, we explored the process of working through love, discussing actions of love, dismantling concepts such as *bienestar* [wellbeing], and critiquing each concept of the definition. We further developed our definition of love:

> *El amor fraternal es un sentimiento profundo que nos ayuda e impulsar a actuar por el bien estar de los demás sin recibir nada a cambio* [Love is a deep feeling that helps and motivates us to act for the wellbeing of others without expecting anything in return].

We also interpreted various elements of our definition. *Actuar* [act] means: help, dialogue, reflect, feel, want, advice, and accompany. *Bienestar* [wellbeing] means: be at ease, peace, happiness, prosperity and wish for the best. *Amor* [love] includes: love of family, love of nature, love of others and self-love.

When discussing love as a model of practice to enable *bienestar*, we recognised we had not properly identified the social conditions / social system necessary for wellbeing of people and nature – congruent with structural transformation promoted by *buen vivir* and developmental social work. Therefore, our Third Action involved conversations with others to explore a community of equality.
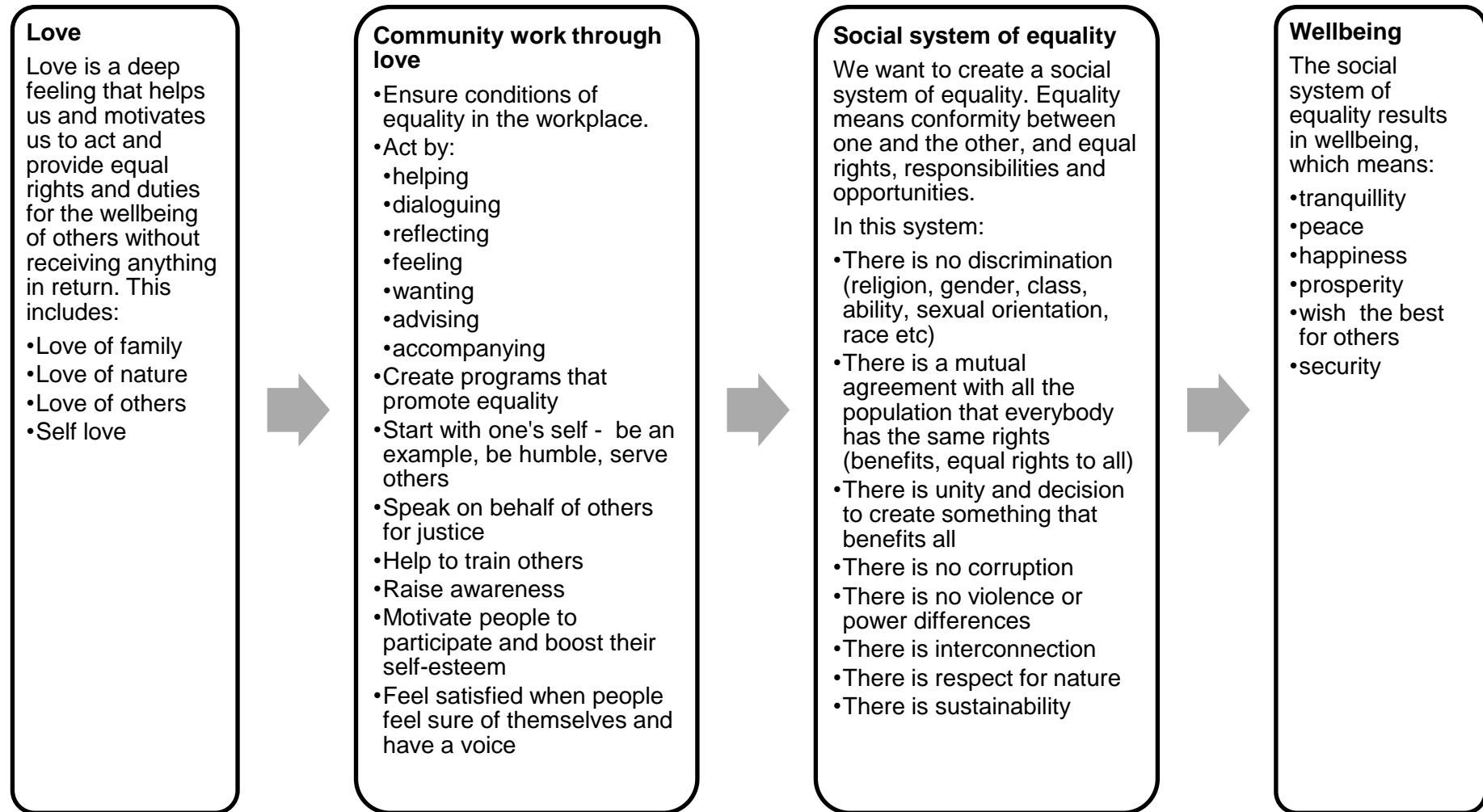
Theory of practice of love in community work

Buen vivir promotes a holistic justice platform based on collective rights of people and nature. During the Fourth Reflection meeting, my co-researchers and I shared our understanding of equality. Our collective analysis identified key concepts of the social conditions in a *comunidad de igualdad* [community of equality] that are required for *bienestar* [wellbeing]:

- Conformity of one with another

- Equal rights, duties and opportunities

- No discrimination (religion, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, race etc)

- Mutual agreement amongst all the population that everybody has the same rights (benefits and equal treatment to all)

- United in decisions to do something that benefits everybody

- No corruption

- No violence and power differences

- Interconnection

- Respect for nature

- Sustainability

Our discussion led to further expansion of our definition of love, and a clearer understanding of the social conditions that we aim for through community work to achieve universal wellbeing. Bringing together information from our previous reflection meetings, we outlined our model of practice for love-based community work, outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Practice framework of love-based community work

Love	**Community work through love**	**Social system of equality**	**Wellbeing**

Love is a deep feeling that helps us and motivates us to act and provide equal rights and duties for the wellbeing of others without receiving anything in return. This includes:
 	
•Love of family
•Love of nature
•Love of others
•Self love
	•Ensure conditions of equality in the workplace.
	•Act by:
	  •helping
	  •dialoguing
	  •reflecting
	  •feeling
	  •wanting
	  •advising
	  •accompanying
	•Create programs that promote equality
	•Start with one's self - be an example, be humble, serve others
	•Speak on behalf of others for justice
	•Help to train others
	•Raise awareness
	•Motivate people to participate and boost their self-esteem
	•Feel satisfied when people feel sure of themselves and have a voice
		We want to create a social system of equality. Equality means conformity between one and the other, and equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.
		
		In this system:
		
		•There is no discrimination (religion, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, race etc)
		•There is a mutual agreement with all the population that everybody has the same rights (benefits, equal rights to all)
		•There is unity and decision to create something that benefits all
		•There is no corruption
		•There is no violence or power differences
		•There is interconnection
		•There is respect for nature
		•There is sustainability
			The social system of equality results in wellbeing, which means:
			
			•tranquillity
			•peace
			•happiness
			•prosperity
			•wish the best for others
			•security

After discursively finalising our model of practice, we visually articulated it with a collaborative

drawing that featured symbols such as scales, people descending stairs towards equality, birds

(nature), and a circle of united people, as shown in Figure 2. This concluded the co-operative

inquiry process.

Figure 2: Collaborative drawing of love-based community work
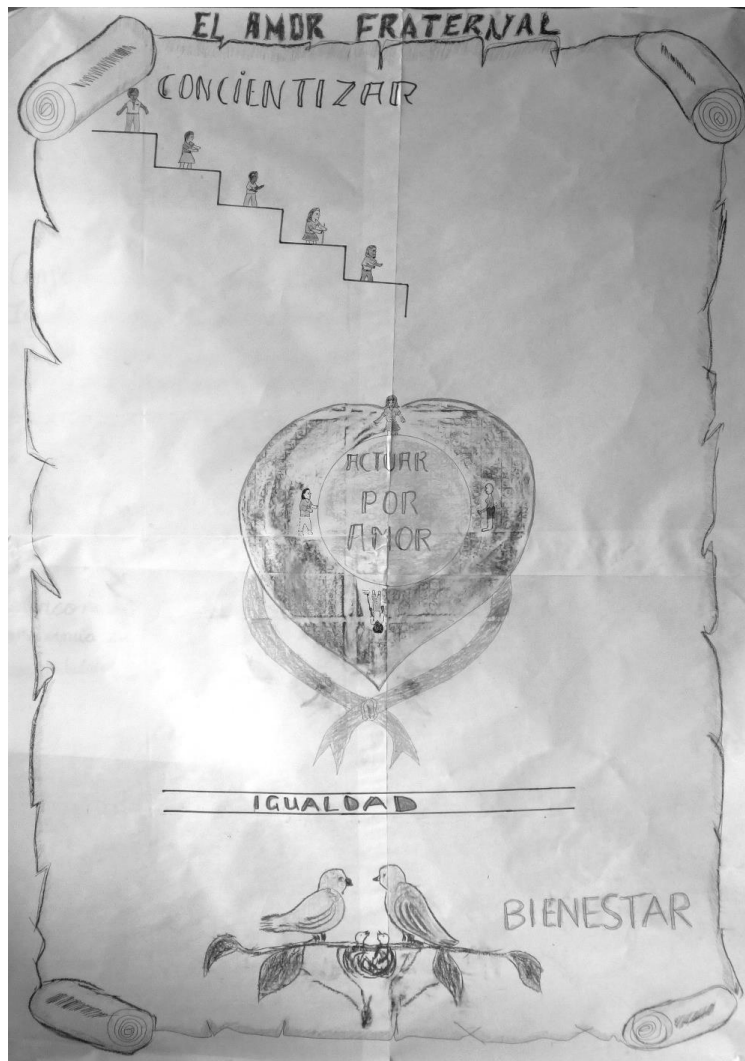
[Translation of key terms: *El amor fraternal* - neighbourly love; *concientizar* - consciousness-

raising; *actuar por amor* - act through love; *igualdad* - equality; and, *bienestar* – wellbeing].

Discussion

Buen vivir responds to post-developmentalism, and reinforces cultural identity while promoting

alternatives to Western modernity (Gudynas, 2011). Similarly, the practice framework emerging

from the Lobitos co-operative inquiry shows that, unlike neoliberal development approaches that aim for market-based economic advancement, the ultimate aim of love-based community work is universal wellbeing of people and nature, understood as peace, tranquillity, happiness, prosperity and hope. In order to achieve wellbeing, we must transform social conditions for a system of equality: a system upholding the interdependent rights of people and planet, non-discrimination, shared power, non-violence, interconnection and sustainability. We believe that societal transformation is achieved by working through love, which involves fair work conditions, being an example, advocacy, programs that promote equality, capacity building, and consciousness-raising. The foundation of this framework is our collaborative definition of love:

> *El amor fraternal es un sentimiento profundo que nos ayuda e impulsar a actuar y proporciona igualdad de derechos y deberes por el bienestar de los demás sin recibir nada a cambio* [Love is a deep feeling that helps us and motivates us to act and provide equal rights and duties for the wellbeing of others without receiving anything in return].

Rights of people and nature, community connectedness and universal wellbeing are privileged over economic growth and narrow material interpretations of development captured in economic indicators.

Due to time and resource limitations, the research could not examine the application of this framework in practice. Nevertheless, our conceptual framework of love-based community work practice reflects many aspects of *buen vivir.* The framework involves interconnected and bi-directional relationships in communities, and between people and nature. Like *buen vivir,* this framework emphasises ethics, values and relationships as the foundation for transformed socio-economic and political structures. Furthermore, some language in the framework, such as 'serve others', may also reflect the Christian philosophies of the Peruvian co-researchers. The framework suggests an interesting interplay between indigenous and Christian spiritualities. Additionally, our concept of wellbeing is more holistic than limited Western constructs of human wellbeing promoted in dominant development models (such as equating wellbeing with

Gross Domestic Product), encompassing non-material aspects such as happiness and tranquillity. The framework also suggests a collaborative and democratic approach to social change, embracing practicable participatory processes such as awareness-raising, knowledge-sharing and equality-focussed programming led by marginalised peoples. Interestingly, while *buen vivir* emphasises collective rights, it was unclear whether the Lobitos co-researchers also conceptualised rights as collective, although the framework does use terminology such as 'mutual' and 'unity', suggesting a collectivist mentality. It is also worth noting that, like some experiences at a national level, love and *buen vivir* in community work could be misused to perpetuate oppression, such as enforcing patriarchal practices. Further research is needed to examine these potential tensions.

The study results demonstrate how participating community workers conceptualised community work practice through the lens of love, with values and processes that strongly reflect *buen vivir.* Given the relevance of love in Andean indigenous epistemology (Gordon, 2003; Apgar et al., 2009), the findings also suggest that love is relevant to the ethical framework of *buen vivir* and other alternatives to development. A greater scholarly emphasis on love may strengthen relationship-oriented practice to challenge dominant neoliberal development discourse and the anthropocentrism of developmental social work.

This article encourages developmental social workers to honour indigenous wisdom by engaging with alternative development paradigms, particularly in this pivotal period of implementing the SDGs. Indeed, civil society lament that neoliberalism prevailed in the 2030 Agenda, as indicated by this statement at the 8th SDG Open Working Group (OWG) meeting to develop the goals:

> 'The Women's Major Group is strongly concerned that many of the proposed targets for the Sustainable Development Goals do not adequately address the structural, gendered and power inequalities due to the current neoliberal, extractivist and exclusive development model… Sustainable development requires a radical paradigm shift regarding the current growth model, and we cannot expect transformational change if

21

we continue a "business as usual" approach to our current economic and ecological systems' (Reyes, 2014 pp. 2-3).

Alternative paradigms to development are marginalised, in spite of persistent pleas from civil society organisations including social work bodies (IFSW, IASSW and ICSW, 2014). Developmental social workers must persist in usurping the corporatised global development agenda by advocating the rights of people and planet.

Buen vivir supports developmental social workers to practice outside an anthropocentric frame. It is not necessarily a panacea for structural transformation for every country and community; as Walsh (2010) argues, attempts to globalise this indigenous paradigm could emulate colonial developmentalism. However, by prompting social workers to consider alternative sustainable systems (as opposed to ways to refine our current system), *buen vivir* is revolutionary. Furthermore, as suggested by co-researchers in Lobitos, the love ethic may support developmental social workers to engage in democratic and participatory relationships to support transformational community work practice.

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[i] I refer to 'community work' instead of the more common social work term of 'community development', recognising Dominelli's (2006) assertion that community development pathologises communities and individuals as 'backwards'.

[ii] Importantly, some social work theorists identify limitations of the dominant human rights framework as it maintains a neoliberal status quo and promotes development that is Western-centric, patriarchal, colonial, individualistic and institutionalised (Ife 2016; Ife & Tascon 2016). Besthorn (2011) argues that conventional human rights promote 'shallow justice' by focussing only on humans, without intertwining social *and ecological* dimensions.