

Theory of Change

Reflections about Good Living, Theory U and Pathway to Vision
in the Central American Context



Systways.

Reflections about Good Living, the Pathway to Vision and the Theory U in the Central American context

Questions

Some of the issues we are going to exchange at our network 'Learn2change' to find out new ways for a good life in a sustainable planet are:

- What does 'wealth'/'Good Life'/'development' mean for you in your particular work and living context/in your country?
- Which local challenges for an ecologically sound and globally just world are you actually facing in this context?
- What role does education play in achieving a Good Life for all?

The meaning of wealth, good life and development

There are a lot of definitions and different notions about the same concept when we talk about development or more recently 'good life'. It's incredible how even the most contrasting sectors are using both concepts as a part of their daily vocabulary.

In all honesty, I think we are still far away from actually finding a consensus about how and what we want to achieve.

According to the reports from UNPD, Nicaragua is still the second poorest country in Latin America after Haiti. But due to the income of 190 really rich families, the average national income percentage has increased; so the country is no longer a priority for development cooperation. Maybe, the macro economical indicators are doing better, but that doesn't mean that there is less poverty, so it's an issue related to inequity.

Bolivia and Ecuador have made big advances in their national plans, including the concept of 'good life'; even in their Constitutions. Nicaragua's government tried to copy it in a campaign 'Live beautiful, live good, live healthy', but there is a long way to go for a real profound and concrete implementation of the concept and there are too many contradictions with the way they want to impose their policies.

It appears contradictory that on the one hand the government makes efforts to foster the 'good and healthy life', but on the other, they give a Chinese company the clearance to build a big channel crossing the Lake Nicaragua, which is the biggest fresh water reserve for Central America and beyond.

Ecuador defines Good Living as 'living at it's fullest in harmony with oneself, with the community and with nature, by covering needs, achieving a dignified quality of life and death; loving and being loved; the flourishing health of all individuals in peace; and achieving a perpetuation of human cultures'.

According to the National Plan of the Good Living for the Republic of Ecuador (2009–2013), the elements which constitute the governmental policies are:

1. The satisfaction of the needs.
2. Life quality.
3. Dignified death.
4. To love and to be loved.
5. Healthy development of all in harmony with nature.
6. Indefinite prolongation of the cultures.
7. Free time for contemplation.
8. The emancipation and expansion of liberties, capacities and potentialities.

Especially in the indigenous communities we can find a lot of examples related to the philosophy of good living coming from their world vision.

But it seems as if there is still too little and often isolated experiences; there are a lot of challenges to overcome before ensuring adapting this approach more quickly due to the urgency of challenges that humanity has provoked and now needs to deal with first.

Principles of the Good Living¹

Reciprocity

Everything is alive and connected. This is a universal principle of justice; the reciprocity in interpersonal relationships is conceived as social duty related to mutual help (barter or mutual provision of services), but is not limited to just that; it also has to do with cosmic, religious and economic relations.

Complementarity

A state where every being and occurrence is 'complete', because it contains both of its constituent parts—one of simply being and the other that complements it. Everyone and everything has a complement, we complete each other because we are brothers and sisters of Mother Earth. No one is superior to another. Complementarity impedes competition; it is a mutual and permanent help within the community.

Harmony

Here is no possible equality, there is always diversity. Good Living is being in permanent harmony with everything. Good Living is an ethical concept, it is living in harmony with the cycles of life, knowing that everything is interconnected, interrelated and interdependent; it is in knowing about the conservation of traditional agricultural practices. In Peru, Andean and Amazonian women, despite being the most vulnerable to poverty and discrimination, are the ones who are formulating proposals aimed to build the Good Living of their peoples; in rural areas, there are efforts to include the philosophy of Good Living and the Andean culture in educating children. As part of Good Living, the education system is designed on the basis of society and common interests, that is to say, in a way that the knowledge of all cultures is valued. Deterioration of one species means the deterioration of the whole.

Duality

Everything works in pairs (masculine and feminine; big and small; tall and short; sun and moon; sky and earth); one cannot exist without the other.

Relationality

Everything is connected with everything and there are no completely separate entities; there is interdependence between everything and everyone.

Cyclicity

Space and time are one and are repetitive. Time is not linear, it is cyclic, that is to say that it is not conceived through a beginning and an end, but it is in a continuous state of flux. There is no logic to a progressive linear process. There is no notion of an underdeveloped state to be overcome or a developed state to be achieved.

Connection

Different aspects, regions or fields of reality correspond with each other in a harmonious way.

¹ http://www.latinamericapress.org/objetos/informe/18PI_goodliving-2.pdf

Challenges for Good Living

The approach of Good Living is rescued from the philosophy and world view (cosmovision) of several Latin American indigenous populations. The concrete experiences proves that Good Living works in more or less intact indigenous communities with less influences from Western consumerism.

Reviewing documented experiences and talking with people promoting the approach of Good Living, there are a couple of questions and challenges for me.

- What about the cities, the urban areas?
Considering that in 2050, 70% of the world population will live in the cities, how can the model of Good Living face the necessity to feed all these people?
- All around the world there are a lot of disintegrated families and communities due to social, political, religious and over all economical conflicts as well as the poverty related migrations from the rural to the urban areas, from the 'south' to the 'north'.
- Even if in the ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas) countries, there exists the intention to foster the Good Living, there is a big gap between the intention (often expressed in inspiring official discourse) and the practice. For instance in Nicaragua, there are campaigns with the motto 'Living beautiful, living good, living healthy' which refers to a lot of topics treated only by the civil society before. But the critical point is **how** do you work on it (populist/electoral or sustainable approach) and **for what** (more votes for the next elections or sustainable development).
- We are fighting against extraction of heavy metals and at the same time using cellphones and other electronic devices made from them. This observation is not to criticise, but to provoke reflection about how we can be more conscious related to our own behaviour, contradictions and think about how to reduce consumerism without losing the advantages, for example, of technology in a more appropriate way.
- For now the discussion about Good Living is limited to people working at NGOs, communities with relationships to other

indigenous people (most of them also supported by NGOs) and some intellectuals from the South and the North.

Of course, the approach of Good Living is inspiring and necessary. Our job now is how to adapt it in every context. That's why I'll try to present two interesting approaches and methods we're using in our concrete work in Nicaragua.



The pathway to vision

In our daily work with organisations and communities we use the 'pathway to vision' as a concrete approach and method to achieve changes which appoints to the good living.

During the last 15 years there arose a lot of questions and critique related to the development projects considering that the invested resources don't generate the correspondent expected changes.

That's why the Results Based Management emerged putting our focus on the following categories or levels:

- Changes in the well-being and the good living of people and the environment.
- Changes in the performance and collective practices of families, groups, organizations or institutions.
- Changes in behaviours, attitudes, routines and practices of people and groups.
- Changes in knowledge, competencies and capacities of people.

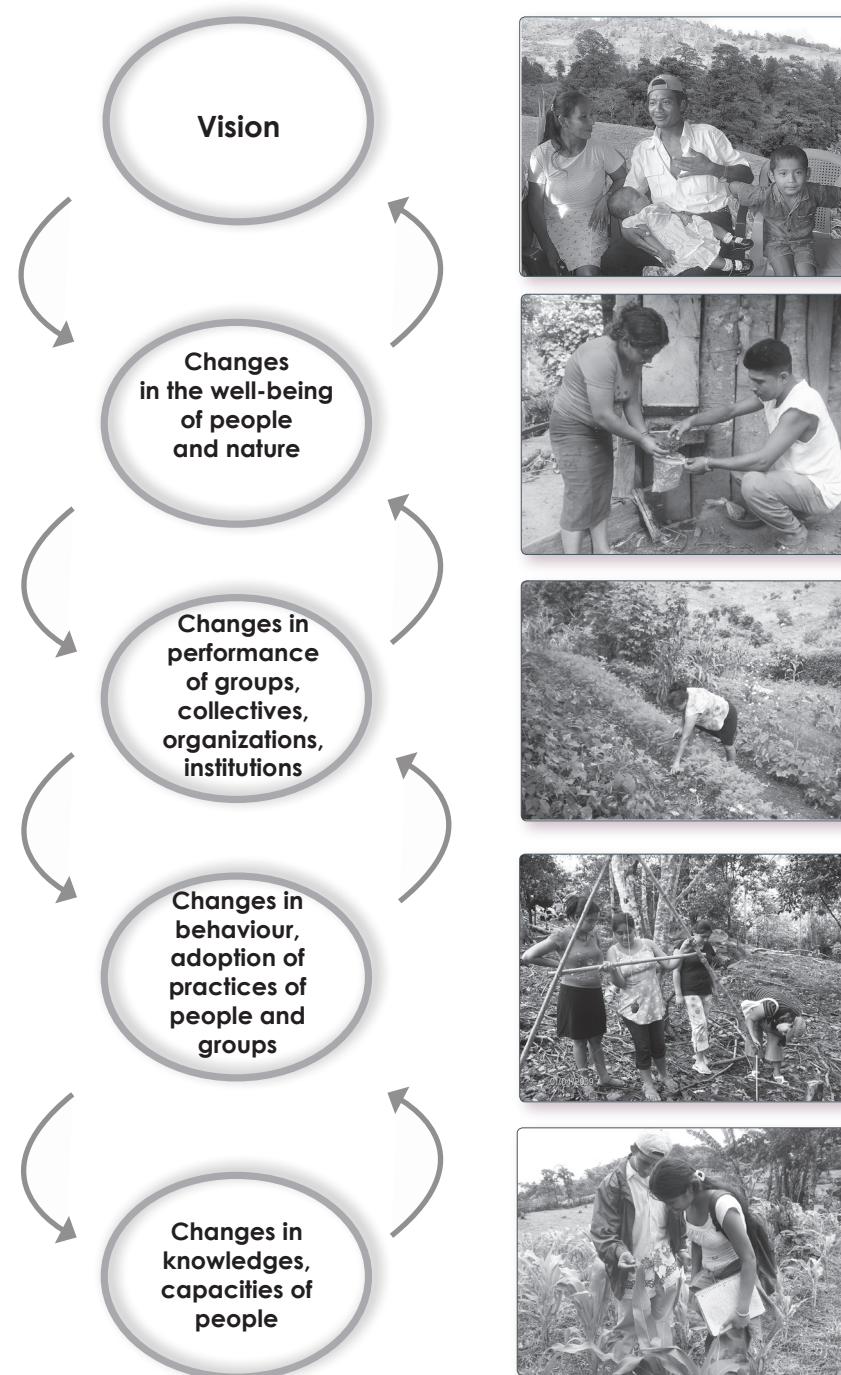
The most difficult step for the people is to use the new knowledge, competencies and capacities and to convert them into permanent behaviours, attitudes, routines and practices.

So, one of the findings was that the social actors have difficulties in identification of changes, beginning with the changes related to well-being or good living.

From a holistic perspective, these changes, considered also as impact, need to include the following dimensions for sustainability: physical, emotional, spiritual, economical, social, cultural, technological, political and ecological dimensions of well-being and good living.

To identify the different types of changes, there are easy comprehensive tools like the 'Parable of the cow' and 'Pathway to vision... a sensitive journey'.

The most important tool we always use to understand the connection between the different types of changes are questions:



- **Vision**
What kind of future do we imagine in the year.....?
How do we visualize our community, neighbourhood, country and planet?
- **Changes in the well-being and the good living of people and the environment**
Which kind of changes do we want to achieve related to physical, economical, emotional, social, cultural, political, spiritual, and/or ecological well-being and sustainability of the target groups? How do they live now? What is their social context and how is their surrounding environment?
- **Changes in the performance and collective practices of families, groups, organizations or institutions.**
In order to achieve these changes for the well-being of the target group, some social actors have to change their performance, their collective, organizational or institutional practices, as well as their way of working. Are there actors who simply need to assume and put in practice their correspondent role in the society? Which actors influence the well-being of the persons? What do they concretely need to change related to their collective, organizational or institutional practices and functions?
How do they have to assume their role according to their responsibilities and competencies?
- **Changes in behaviours, attitudes, routines and practices of people and groups**
Which members of these social actors need to change which types of attitudes, behaviours, routines and/or practices?
Which other persons or groups need to assume new practices to influence the performance and collective practices of the social actors?
- **Changes in knowledge, competencies and capacities of people**
Which new knowledge systems do these people need to acquire?
Which competencies? Which capacities do they need to strengthen? Which kinds of resources do they need to have access to?

The other finding is related to the strategies, methods and tools in order to facilitate the step from the incorporation of new knowledge and capacities to the use of them. How can we motivate the people to do that step in the easiest way?

That is the point where the facilitators are challenged to innovate, to reflect about our practices and to integrate new approaches like the Theory U, the creative thinking, the systemic approach, etc.

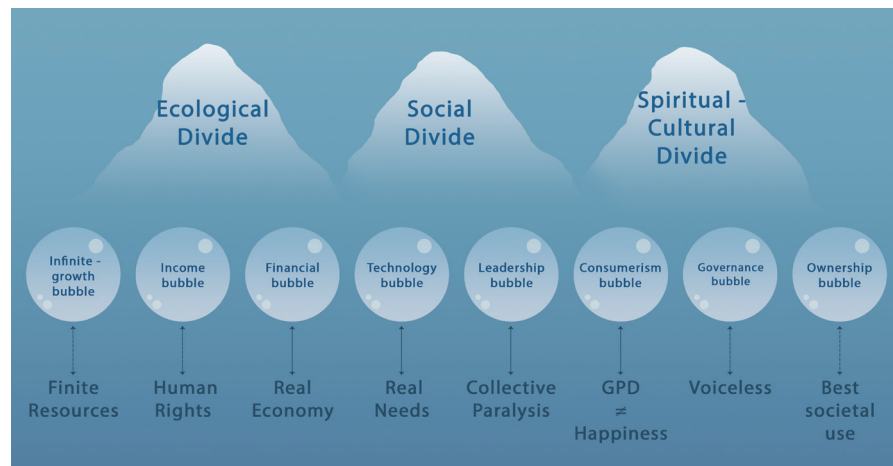


The Theory U

The Theory U addresses what seems to be a blind spot in global discourse today: how to respond to the current waves of disruptive change from a deep place that connects us to the emerging future rather than by reacting against the patterns of the past, which usually means perpetuating them.

In my opinion, the Theory U contributes with a theoretic and methodological proposal to the good living approach, but going even deeper and wider. It also considers the need of the connection and balance of the spiritual, social and ecological dimensions.

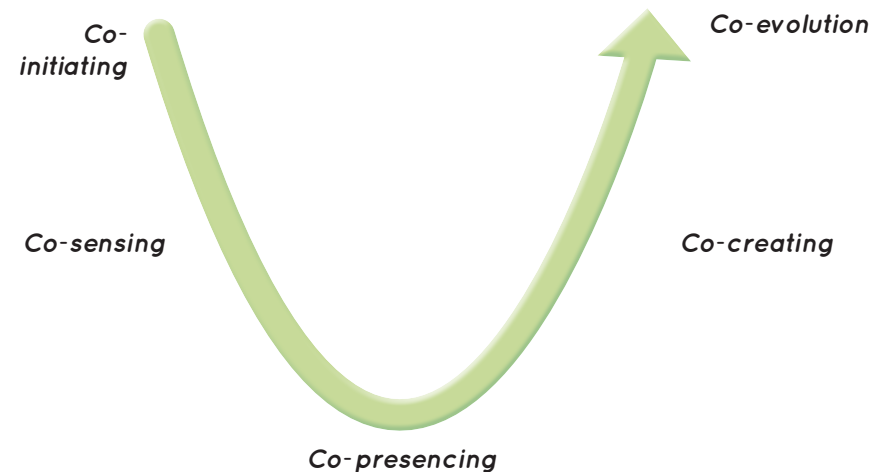
*'Like the tip of an iceberg—the 10 percent that is visible above the water- line—the symptoms of our current situation are the visible and explicit parts of our current reality. This symptoms level is a whole landscape of issues and pathologies that constitute three 'divides': what we call the ecological divide, the social divide, and the spiritual-cultural divide.'*¹



In Central America we began to use the Process U which provides the integration of a political approach, mindfulness practices, awareness of our listening and conversation practices and the designing of prototypes.

¹ Scharmer, Otto; Käufer, Kathrin. *Leading from the Ego to the Eco-System*. 2014.

The prototypes, especially give us new insight for innovation and acumen to overcome the step from knowledge and competencies to the change of behaviours and practices.






The application of the Process U has been very useful in the context of strategic planning, sustainability initiatives of NGOs and re-organization processes (for example, the Mayan Women's Group Kaqla, Children's Protection Alliance, Women's Funds, Group Venancia, La Cuculmeca, etc.).











Sources of knowledge, perspectives and wisdom



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Date:	29 August 2015

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What is the Box of Systemic Tools 4.0?

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