



Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development

Theme 4: 2024

***Buen Vivir*: Shared future for transformative change**

Background

Social work operates in a world in crisis which is evidenced by thousands of people who die daily from violent conflict; millions who are displaced because of wars and violence or climate warming and environment destruction; persisting poverty, increasing inequality, and governments who choose “competition over collaboration and sovereignty over solidarity”¹. Linked to the crisis is the impact of the economic recession and politically driven decisions and actions. To effectively respond to this crisis, social work needs new approaches, actions, actors, movements, and platforms for transformative change which is community-led and informed by indigenous wisdom. New ways of doing include escalating micro level practice to the meso and macro levels; thus, bridging micro and macro practice to bring about structural change. We can achieve this by embracing the principle of *Buen Vivir*², meaning that true well-being is only possible by being part of a community that lives in harmony with nature and work together in achieving balanced development.

To contribute to structural change, it is important for social work to recognise that sustainable change has resulted from mass movements where diverse populations have worked together for common interests. It is also important to recognise that all political actions are underpinned by cultural beliefs and worldviews that need to be considered in co-building an eco-social world. Furthermore, that local, and global expertise, action, and support are required to find new ways to respond to the crisis while co-designing and co-building policies, practices and actions embedded in inclusion, intergenerational respect, and mutual understanding, but also in co-creating conditions for peace, balanced development, upholding of human rights, and sustainable development. New ways of doing include the use of political methods to elicit social change. However, social workers generally find it difficult to make political statements

¹ From The People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World (2022)

for different reasons and even more so to challenge and act against political decisions and activities. Hence, social workers must globally unite and share methods of transformative change. It requires a focus on what unite the profession of social work and social development as opposed to what divides us, acknowledging differences while agreeing on our shared futures. We can achieve this vision by embracing the value of *Buen Vivir*.

Buen Vivir (Spanish translation of the Quechua people's 'Sumak Kawsay') is an Indigenous philosophical principle and worldview rooted in the human being as a part of a natural and social environment. Its goals are the "satisfaction of needs, the achievement of a dignified quality of life and death, to love and to be loved, the healthy flourishing of all in peace and harmony with nature, the indefinite perpetuation of human cultures. ***Buen Vivir*** implies having free time for contemplation and personal emancipation, enabling the expansion and flourishing of people's liberties, opportunities, capabilities and potentialities so as to simultaneously allow society, specific territories, different collective identities, and each individual, understood both in universal and relative terms, to achieve their objectives in life (without causing any kind of material or subjective dominance over any other individual)" (National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013, Bolivia).

Buen Vivir proposes the collective fulfilment of human beings through a harmonious, balanced life, based on ethical values, as opposed to the economy-oriented approach, focused on the production of monetary valuable goods.

This life principle, rooted in the LAC Indigenous cosmovision and ancestral knowledge, is based on:

- (a) relationality -the interconnection between all the elements of a whole;*
- (b) reciprocity, the reciprocal relationship between the worlds above, below, now, between human beings and nature, a sort of co-participation;*
- (c) correspondence, which refers to how the elements of reality correspond to each other in a harmonious way;*
- (d) complementarity, which is based on the fact that opposites can be complementary, since nothing is superfluous.*

We acknowledge the *Buen Vivir* translation confirmation of the global agenda theme by our Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) colleagues and the endorsement thereof by the IFSW Indigenous Commission.