

# Rural alternatives for local development: an intercultural analysis (cases from northern Ecuador)

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## Abstract

This study takes a historical and analytical tour of the experiences, ways of life and community knowledge oriented towards the construction of alternatives to achieve development in the communities of Cotacachi and Yunguilla, Ecuador. Rural development has been an extremely neglected issue by the Ecuadorian government and local authorities. In the 21st century, this neglect continues to impact peasants and indigenous people, manifesting itself in all kinds of inequalities that affect the quality of life of their families. From this reality, alternatives for change arise within the communities and community organisations, which are oriented towards local development and thus avoid deterritorialisation. During this process, the cooperation of external actors such as foundations and non-governmental organisations has been of vital importance. In addition, the intercultural approach presents social and economic development in accordance with the national reality itself. However, on some occasions, the traditional knowledge of local communities is not valued because it is empirical, oral and transgenerational. In this sense, bioculturality highlights the relevance of community dynamics and their attachment to the natural environment. For this study, a qualitative methodology was applied, together with qualitative techniques and instruments. The present work informs on two cases of rural development that are born from the active participation and empowerment of local actors, located in the northern Andean region of Ecuador.

*Keywords:* bioculturality, traditional knowledge, dialogue of knowledge, eco-development, transgenerational

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## 1 Introduction

Rural alternatives which are oriented to local, alternative development arise from the socio-economic discontent in which families in rural Ecuador live. The study was carried out in the peasant community of Yunguilla located in the province of Pichincha, and in the rural kichwa community of the Cotacachi canton in the province of Imbabura. The invisibility of rural areas in the planning and execution of social development policies tends to reproduce economic inequality to the detriment of rural communities.

The research material analyses the idea of development from two different perspectives. On the one hand, there is development with a productivism approach and market predominance, which is based on a new commodity consensus that increasingly leads to deepening aggressive neo-extractivism, under international agreements that adapt to

the demands of financial capital (Svampa & Viale, 2014). This type of development has been consolidated over the course of history, through industrialization and legitimisation in political power. It has been established through geopolitical control, producing the development of the countries of the North and the underdevelopment of the countries of the South. Its political dominance manifests in an unequal growth of development that confers predominance on industrial capitalism (Cardoso & Faletto, 1977).

On the other hand, there is rural development which arises from the active participation of peasant and indigenous communities. In opposition to conventional productivism development, rural development highlights the importance of the human being and nature over financial capital. The Community Directive plays a leading role in the planning and implementation of local rural development projects, as well as in the management and relationship with national or foreign entities that contribute to the strengthening of community projects (UNORCAC, 2008).

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This article describes a historical and analytical journey of the experiences, ways of life and community knowledge which lead to the construction of alternatives to achieve rural development. This academic exercise allows us to know another reality of Ecuador told by the rural actors themselves.

For a better explanation and understanding of the research, the article is structured in two sections: A). The first section reviews theoretical content related to the following points: An analysis of development, interculturality as a perspective towards another development as an alternative of development, the dialogue of knowledge, the importance of bioculturality in the construction of rural development, and the relationship between human beings and nature from the look of rurality. B) The second section analytically describes the ethnographic work carried out in the rural peasant community of Yunguilla and in the rural kichwa communities of the Cotacachi cantón.

#### *An analysis of the idea of development*

Development studies provide insight into a country's economic progress and social well-being. By the end of World War II, the categorization of countries as “developed” and “underdeveloped” arose. The categorisation constructed “the existence of already developed countries [...] and others who were below those, on an imaginary scale that everyone should travel” (Unceta, 2009, p.8). Latin America was among the group of countries classified as “underdeveloped”, destined to continue with the overexploitation of natural resources, and forced to maintain economic dependence through suffocating financial policies imposed by the countries of the North. According to Guzmán (1976, p. 216) “underdeveloped” was a question of “understanding underdeveloped economies that are within a world economic system”. Meanwhile, Latin America was the place of obtaining raw materials for the “developed” countries, which caused environmental destruction and poverty due to the overexploitation of natural resources (Guzmán, 1976).

Classical analyses looked at development as a socio-economic progress (Unceta, 2009). Similarly, the philosophical ideal of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century motivated the development of people's freedoms, human rights and well-being. However, analyses of nature and its limited productive capacity continued to be ignored (Argemí, 1988). Since the second half of the last century, international cooperation has boosted economic aid to “underdeveloped” countries. However, there were “not only quantitative but also qualitative differences of a structural nature between developed and underdeveloped countries, differences that generate dependency relations, capable of hindering, impeding,

or strangling economic growth, which may block the development process” (Unceta, 2009, p. 10).

Bad-development was the critique of conventional development that caused inequality between countries (Unceta, 2009). The questions revolved around poverty and development, the deterioration of nature and population density. The scientific report “The Limits of Growth” carried out by the Club of Rome in 1972, gave a first overview of the limits of nature's capacity for economic growth as a form of development. Since the end of the 1980s, the idea of eco-development was born in the United Nations Environment Program, promoting the rational use of natural resources for human needs (Unceta, 2009). However, global economic terms and the collaborative dynamics of a structural nature among some countries did not allow the cessation of environmental destruction of so-called underdeveloped countries.

Post-developmental ideas oppose the industrialization, innovation and modernity originating in the West (Rist, 2002). According to these theories, conventional development affects local communities and causes the “destruction and marginalization generated by Western countries in the name of development, emphasizing mainly the cultural aspects and values of societies subjected to the forced expansion of modernization” (Unceta, 2009, p. 18). A modernization seen from purchasing power, without prejudice to environmental destruction. Therefore, the communities organise themselves to safeguard their territory. According to Martínez (2015, p. 68) he qualifies it as a “popular environmentalism, environmentalism of the poor and impoverished indigenous people” who organise themselves to “achieve a less unsustainable and more ecological economy than the efforts of eco-efficiency environmentalism or international conservationism”.

Sustainable Development emerged in 1987 as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own” (Gallopín, 2003, p. 23). Efforts were being made to ensure economic and social sustainability in a world of finite natural resources. However, this concept represented another strategy for economic growth and the functioning of the market through natural resources (Escobar, 1996). In the same context, Svampa & Viale (2014) argue that progressive governments contributed to deepening the extractivist model, based on a strong tendency to reproduce the reprivatisation of production (commodities) for large-scale export. In this process, the bilateral agreements rule out and make invisible environmental contamination, the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of the socio-cultural fabric of the indigenous and peasant populations that inhabit these territories. Therefore, this type of development is defined by Svampa &

Viale (2014) as unsustainable development or poor development, which leaves aside the different forms of development of local communities.

Endogenous development promotes sovereignty over the territory and is oriented towards local needs and not the market (Llistar, 2009). Building development according to local reality is a way to recognise diversity as Veltmeyer *et al.* (2003, p. 8) mentions: “Development, it was argued, should recognise the radical heterogeneity of experience, the existence of multiple paths to development, community as the basis of the process involved, and people themselves as the only effective agency for change”. That is why the revaluation of local knowledge is a step out of the labyrinth of conventional development. The universal idea of conventional development does not apply to local realities, since it is only achieved through modernity and “globalization [...] that conditions the existence of human beings” (Unceta, 2009, p. 26).

#### *Interculturality for development in Ecuador*

In Ecuador, the term development refers since the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to a neoliberal economic policy, centred around the state economy and the exploitation and export of raw materials to international markets (Acosta, 1996). Development in Ecuador was a process that was accompanied by the formation of social organisations and political parties that disputed their interests, agrarian reforms and external economic models that influenced the national economic system.

Faced with this whole system of national and international disputes for national economic development, indigenous and peasant communities were relegated outside of national development (Korovkin, 2002). However, in the 80's, according to Ospina (2000, p. 133) “the growth of ethnic 'vindication' in the discourse of indigenous organisations was observed”. All indigenous and peasant organisations agreed on the demand for their rights to a plurinational State, the preservation of their territories and socio-economic equality. The social and political participation of indigenous organisations is developed from the conformations of each of them, with the common denominator, the fight against social inequality. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) formed in 1986 is the political actor of the indigenous peoples and nationalities with greater relevance at the national level, to which the other indigenous organisations such as Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui, The awakening of the indigenous (ECUARUNARI), Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organisations of Ecuador (FEINE), National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organisations (FENOCIN) and

the Ecuadorian Federation of Indigenous (FEI) (Altmann, 2013).

CONAIE takes a social and political position as of June 1990 in the first Indigenous uprising of contemporary times known as the Inty Raymi uprising (Altmann, 2013), where the visible social inequity and political exclusion triggered the mobilisation of the indigenous movement to the capital city (Larrea, 2004). From the beginning, the struggle of indigenous and peasant peoples had the objective of “decoupling development policies from the unresolved issue of wealth concentration” (Bretón & Martínez, 2015, p. 29).

In 1995, the Pachakutik-New Country Plurinational Movement was formed, a political project of the indigenous movement. One of its first achievements as a political party was the fight against the privatisation of social security and the attempt to penalize the right to protest of public servers (Larrea, 2004). In 1998, the Constitution of Ecuador recognised “the collective rights of indigenous peoples, their self-definition as “nationalities” and indigenous territorial constituencies, among other claims” (Larrea, 2004, p. 71).

The wide social and political participation of the indigenous movement was transcendental for the overthrow of the former presidents: Abdalá Bucaram (1997), Jamil Mahuad (2001) and Lucio Gutiérrez (2003), an action that demonstrated the disagreement of the Indigenous Movement against the policies neoliberals implanted in the governments of the day. Likewise, his continuous struggle for Ecuador to be recognised as an intercultural and plurinational country was achieved in the 2008 Constituent Assembly, which also established “legal changes in favor of indigenous rights such as the prohibition of discrimination and affirmative action policies” (Bretón & Martínez, 2015, p. 37), among others. However, public policies have not responded to the needs of rural communities, which is why the indigenous uprising of 2019 arose due to the increase in fuel prices with Decree 883 in the government of Lenin Moreno, the same one that it was repealed after eleven days of national mobilisation in a meeting between the government and the indigenous movement that was broadcast nationally (Bonilla & Mancero, 2020).

The last national strike called by CONAIE was on June 13, 2022 in response to the neoliberal policies of the Guillermo Lasso government. The CONAIE in its proposal revealed ten points to be addressed by the government, such as a moratorium on the expansion of the extractivist border, health, education, fuel prices, respect for the twenty-one collective rights of indigenous peoples, an end to privatisation of strategic sectors, financial moratorium, employment and labor rights, fair prices for farm products and security. After eighteen days of mobilisations at the national level, agreements were reached to work together on the issues (El Comercio,

2022). The 2008 Constitution establishes that Ecuador is a plurinational and intercultural State (Grijalva, 2008). In this way, ethnic diversity and local diversity were recognised in which “the State will promote interculturality, inspire its policies and integrate its institutions in accordance with the principles of equity and equality of cultures” (Walsh, 2000, p. 129). The social struggles in Ecuador thus attained the recognition of the country’s cultural diversity within its Constitution of Ecuador. Public policies supported the social struggle which manifested an integration as a country and reflected a recognition of the historical struggle against the dominant or occidental culture (Walsh, 2000). In this sense, interculturality becomes a process of interrelation in Ecuador. According to Walsh (2010), interculturality includes the ethnic-cultural since:

[...] attention based on legal recognition and an increasing need to promote positive relations between different cultural groups, to confront discrimination, racism and exclusion, to form citizens awareness of differences and capability of working together in the development of the country and in the construction of a just society, equitable, egalitarian and plural. Interculturality is part of this effort (Walsh, 2010, p. 76). Interculturality promotes interrelation, coexistence and the sharing of knowledge. The Constitution of Ecuador of 2008 recognises Ecuador as a plurinational and intercultural State that promotes the "enhancement of ancestral knowledge in order to contribute to the realization of good living, to *sumak kawsay*" (Art. 387). Ancestral knowledge thus became recognised as a part of conventional science (Walsh 2010). In this way, the knowledge of indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant communities emerged as new epistemic fields that strengthened the social development of the country. Likewise, they promoted local development as an alternative to conventional development (Krainer, 2018).

#### *Dialogue of knowledge and bioculturality*

For Delgado (2016) and Boaventura de Sousa (2010) the production of a different epistemology is revealed in the framework of the dialogue of knowledge, where those involved identify themselves as part of this mutual knowledge. There, both traditional and conventional science articulate their experiences and approaches to generate inclusive epistemic principles, oriented towards alternative development. Within this conception, science is not limited to western knowledge, but recognises ancestral knowledge and all knowledge systems as science (Delgado & Rist 2016). In this sense, it is essential to recognise and value each knowledge and its origins as part of a whole, trying to create a horizontal dimension and interaction between traditional and scientific knowledge from different disciplines – recognizing

and transforming (improving) the conditions from the territory (Krainer, 2022).

The dialogue of knowledge, or intercultural dialogue, points at the construction of a holistic thought, framed in the recognition of cultural diversity, in function of a biocentric human development (Hernández, 2014). It seeks to establish synergies between the empirical and the scientific, between the feelings and thoughts of opposites, and from this space of dialogical interaction each science becomes a complementary contribution of knowledge.

From the consolidation of modern science in the seventeenth century (Micheli, 2000), the relational rupture of the human being with nature occurs, generating an abysmal distance between traditional science and modern science, which has hegemonically controlled the scientific field for almost four centuries. This event produced exclusion of traditional knowledge, in such a way that traditional knowledge was devalued for not adjusting to the guidelines proposed by the Western scientific community. His methodical, systematic and objective posture made the biological rhythms of nature invisible. These were known in depth by peasants and indigenous people for their direct and permanent relationship with nature.

In such a way that over the centuries a local scientific knowledge was built as a product of daily empiricism that is inserted in the genetic and biocultural memory (Toledo & Barrera, 2009) of rural men and women. Traditional knowledge made a relevant contribution to the development of conventional science. However, his contribution has been undervalued and even annulled from the conventional scientific field. This has meant a lack of ethics to traditional knowledge for not allowing its intervention with its particularities in scientific development. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize that the characteristic of traditional knowledge is to be oral, intergenerational and open to the public, which makes it susceptible to biopiracy (Barreda, 2015). This illegal practice has become widespread in rural communities in countries of the global south, turning them into vulnerable societies for having a large intangible heritage.

To achieve the dialogue of knowledge, it is transcendental to expand subjective and objective frontiers of ways of thinking and understanding, which leads to incursions into different discussions within the understanding of interculturality. “A necessary starting point for interculturality is the knowledge of the bases of cultures, of codes, of the worldview of groups and individuals in relation, in order to act in terms of respect” (Krainer *et al.*, 2012, p. 11). The dialogue of knowledge is the determining factor to develop qualitative research of high academic level, where the active partici-

pation of local actors as well as the academy are equally relevant to build an intercultural knowledge without borders.

According to Leff (2003), the civilizational crisis is a result of the anthropocentric attitude of humanity to development, this action is embedded in the myopia of linear and infinite progress, which leads to the destruction of biodiversity and cultural diversity. “The dialogue of knowledge is established within an environmental rationality that breaks the fence of objectifying rationality and opens up to otherness; seeks to understand the other, negotiate and reach agreements with the other” (Leff, 2003, p. 9). This demonstrates the existence of other logics of coexistence with nature without threatening the life and subsistence of the current socioeconomic system.

From the dialogue of knowledge, the wisdom of peasants, indigenous people and other social groups are part of universal scientific knowledge. The dialogue of knowledge is an alternative to conventional development that is built with the active participation of local communities and Western science. This intersection space reveals the conceptual differences and the diversity of knowledge that give rise to an intercultural epistemology based on the ecology of knowledge (Boaventura de Sousa, 2013). The diversity of knowledge is evident when there is a predisposition and openness of opposites to achieve comprehensive changes for the benefit of humanity.

However, recognizing the differences of each of the knowledge, is not enough to change the domain of an established scientific paradigm. It is necessary to put into practice the dialogue of knowledge to construct a diverse epistemology. Approaching the knowledge of peasants and indigenous people, which in a certain way has been made invisible and marginalized from the guidelines of conventional science, would allow expanding knowledge and generating a comprehensive scientific approach, which should be built from the contribution and equitable value of conventional knowledge and traditional to achieve diversity in the scientific field, as described by Delgado *et al.* “This implies adopting modes of production of transdisciplinary knowledge: disciplinary science is still valid, but its condition must be clarified [...] and the claim of absolute truth must be renounced” (2013, p.193).

Regarding bioculture, it shows us the relevance of biological diversity and its relationship with cultural and linguistic diversity (Toledo & Barrera 2008) allowing to maintain an ecological balance. This interrelation explains how the socio-cultural dynamics of rural families are intrinsically linked to nature, generating a lifestyle different from that of urban families. The simple country life, less consumerist and calm, are peculiar characteristics of rurality that invite us to

reflect on the anthropocentric and productivist attitude, and its effect on the environmental crisis (Leff, 2004).

The environmental crisis has historical, political and economic roots that revolve around the world-system phenomenon (Wallerstein, 2005). Globalization as an effect of the world-system maintains the continuity of capitalism and with it, the perpetuation of environmental degradation. This environmental problem has aroused the concern of certain social groups in the search for alternative solutions to the crisis. Among them, the theory of degrowth expressed by Acosta *et al.* (2018) is a proposal under discussion carried out by the academy. Another more direct form of rejection and disagreement with the neoliberal system are the large strikes and mobilizations in the streets carried out by leaders of social movements, among them, indigenous communities from a biocultural perspective raise their voices of protest in defense of the territory. In this context Toledo (2013) argues that “the biocultural paradigm is very important, it is framed in the crisis we live today, we cannot be indifferent, we are for or against the crisis, we pay or resist the crisis.” (Toledo, 2013, p. 11). Therefore, bioculturality refers to the traditional knowledge that is still practiced in rural communities and is part of the great biocultural heritage that differentiates it from another social groups.

According to what was explained above, citizen participation is important, retaking old community relations and strengthening social movements to stop all kinds of outrages that threaten human beings and nature. Traditional knowledge is present in the daily lives of rural families: in traditional agriculture, ancestral medicine, language, clothing, music, dance, poetry, philosophy, etc., which are built from interaction with their biophysical space. These acquired experiences generate cognitive processes that are recorded in the biocultural memory (Toledo & Barrera 2009) of the community.

This study analyses the visions of rural development practiced by the rural communities of Yunguilla and Cotacachi, and from a wider perspective, the study is related to the level of organisation and community participation necessary to improve local living conditions. In addition, the long history of struggle, perseverance, empowerment and ways of relating to public entities and non-governmental organisations (NGO) are two examples to be followed by other communities at the national level. In this sense, the territorial dynamics of rurality and the negligence of the State have determined the communities to generate alternatives for change that arise from their local needs. A transcendental point in this development is the interrelation of these communities with nature that manifests itself in a lifestyle different from urban life. Therefore, rural communities, whether indigen-

ous or mestizo, undertake productive and economic activities that contribute to rural development, and thus avoid the deterritorialisation that alludes to rural decomposition (Martinez, 2020).

## 2 Materials and methods

The research methodology was qualitative and included a bibliographic and documentary review. The applied qualitative research techniques were the following: semi-structured interviews, field diary, focus group discussions, participant observations and life reports. These data came from community leaders, community members and external persons working in the study communities. The fieldwork was carried out in 2019 in two community groups: peasant and indigenous. The peasant community group consisted of the mestizo community of Yunguilla in the province of Pichincha and the indigenous community group of the kichwa communities in the province of Imbabura, Cotacachi canton. The relevant contribution that these two cases offer to other communities lies in the openness of the leadership in establishing relations with NGOs to work together in the planning and execution of projects. For this, the training given to community leaders and members, within the logic of collaboration, was vital for the creation of economic enterprises that improved the lives of the families.

In the community of Yunguilla, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen relevant people from each community who are immersed in community productive development (e.g. the local president of the community, as well as women dedicated to caring the community garden and those in charge of the community store, and youngsters engaged in community tourism). There were also interviews with external actors (especially with management persons and technicians of the Maquipucuna Foundation, an NGO working in Yunguilla). Further, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with 8 adults in the age range of 65 to 80 years. This FGD was important since the participants were able to give a particular vision of the history of the community of Yunguilla and its insertion in rural productive alternatives, such as the community women groups, the community store, and the orchards (Geilfus, 2002).

The same qualitative approach was applied in the rural communities of Cotacachi. An initial step in the fieldwork in this study area was to determine the number of communities to be involved in the study. In this case, due to the extension of the territory, only 15 communities out of the 42 that are part of the Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas

de Cotacachi (UNORCAC) organisation have been selected. This selection was made at the suggestion of the president of the Comité Central de Mujeres UNORCAC (CCMU). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the organisation, with local authorities, and with heads of family (23 families in total) in each of the selected communities. Further interviews were held with representatives of the fair "Pachamama feed us", the Jambi Mascari association of women in traditional medicine, the Muyu Raymi seed fair, the Runa Tupari community tourism association, and the Santa Anita savings and credit cooperative. In addition, interviews with the leaders of the UNORCAC organisation allowed to know in detail the historical context of the organisation, and gave information on the opportunities and challenges for indigenous women in the organisation. Moreover, a field diary was kept and direct participant observation made by the researcher in both study areas. This field diary became an everyday instrument for documenting unique passages of relevance.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Rural kichwa families in Cotacachi

The Cotacachi canton is located about 100 km north of the city of Quito and about 25 km south of the city of Ibarra. Its surface area is the largest in the province of Imbabura, reaching 1,728 km<sup>2</sup>. Due to the irregularity of its topography, the area is divided into two well-marked biophysical zones: the Andean zone that borders 2,600 and 3,350 m asl, and the subtropical zone (Intag) with its characteristic tropical humid and dry forest (bordering Esmeraldas) that starts from 200 m asl to 1800 m asl with a humid forest (UNORCAC, 2008). For political and administrative purposes, the canton is divided into three zones: Urban, Andean and Subtropical. It is made up of two urban parishes: Sagrario and San Francisco (subdivided into neighbourhoods and communities) and eight rural parishes: Imantag and Quiroga belonging to the Andean zone, and García Moreno, Peñaherrera, Apuela, Cuellaje, Plaza Gutiérrez and Vacas Galindo located in the subtropical-Intag zone (UNORCAC, 2008). The city of Cotacachi, the cantonal capital, is located in the urban area. Here you find the administrative functions of the municipality and other activities of public and private management of the Cotacachense population.

According to the last Population and Housing Census from 2010, the total population of the canton is 40,036 inhabitants. 77.9 % of its population lives in rural areas and 22.1 % in urban areas. Regarding their identity, "More than half of the population of the Cotacachi Cantón, 53.53 %, self-identify as mestizo and 40.56 % as indigenous; there

is a 2.46% self-identified as white and the rest is distributed in small representations of mulattoes, blacks, Afro-descendants, montubios and other” (PDyOT Cantón Cotacachi, 2015, p. 95). In the economic field, the main economic activity of the economically active population is agricultural production. In second place comes manufacturing and artisanal production, especially clothing design and working with leather which is characteristic for Cotacachi. Other common economic activities are tourism and lodging (PDyOT. Cantón Cotacachi, 2015), as well as community tourism, which is carried out in the rural area.

As for basic public services such as: electricity, drinking water, telephone, internet, nearby schools, roads, and medical centres, these are services enjoyed by the city of Cotacachi and the parishes. Meanwhile, services are precarious and scarce in the rural sector (PDyOT Cantón Cotacachi, 2015). For example, the lack of drinking water in the communities has forced families to consume non-purified water. Those communities located in the upper part of the canton lack the vital liquid, as expressed by one of the respondents: “Basically the problem we have in Cotacachi is water in the upper communities, in truth the great disadvantage is that there is no clean water” (Interview. MUN01, 2019).

This situation reveals the low interest among responsible authorities to strengthen the infrastructure development, access to education and health services in the countryside. Further, the rural sector has been mired in extreme poverty affecting the most vulnerable, “it is evident that poverty is higher in rural areas; and, compared to Cotacachi as a cantón, poverty is 77.7% and, in the province, it reaches 58.18%” (PDyOT Cantón Cotacachi, 2010, p. 65). Taking as a starting point the rural population self-identifying as indigenous (40.56%), the ethnographic work was developed in the kichwa communities of the Andean area of the cantón. These communities are located between the urban area around the city and the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve (UNORCAC, 2008) and are active members of the Union of Peasant and Indigenous Organisations of Cotacachi UNORCAC. In 1980, UNORCAC was recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock as a second-degree organisation that brought together 45 rural communities in the Cotacachi cantón. Its organisational work has managed to claim some rights such as the legalisation of certain territories for the benefit of kichwa families, curbing the system of exploitation of the haciendas generated in the colony, as well as eliminating the compulsory tithe and free labour that the church imposed on the indigenous people in the name of the Catholic god (UNORCAC, 2008).

The social problems that affect indigenous families led the organisation to seek alternative solutions, based on their

own needs. In this sense, UNORCAC proposed to build the 2008-2018 Strategic Plan for rural development based on indigenous identity (UNORCAC, 2008), as an alternative to the current socioeconomic system. For this, projects were planned with the active participation of the communities. These socio-economic projects focused on establishing alliances with universities, development organisations (national and international) and entities of the Central Government (Interview. CC03, 2019).

Heifer-Ecuador is one of the organisations that have been cooperating to a high degree with rural communities, developing projects in the period 2001-2007. The work was based on sustainable agriculture, agroecology, natural resource management and community organisation (Interview. CC03, 2019). The projects were carried out under agreements revised and accepted by UNORCAC, one of them being the convention of agricultural products “Pachamama feed us”. This convention is an initiative of the women of the communities (Interview. PC01, 2019) and arose from the need to improve the economic situation of their families. Here they sell the surplus of products harvested in the *chakra* (kichwa word that refers to a cultivated land). The convention is held every Sunday in the vicinity of the Jambi Mascari (headquarters of the organisation): “We have a need to sell our products at the market; thus, we look for a way to sell it ourselves at a fair price, since it serves to improve the economic situation of our home” (Interview. CC03, 2019, trans.). The project was supported and improved by UNORCAC and the technical intervention of Heifer in issues related to sustainable agriculture.

As the following quote from one of the interviewees reveals, different trainings were carried out in order to prepare for participating in the convention. The families were trained in soil management and agroecological technique, all of vital importance for being able to sell products at the convention: “Oxfam trained us to plant: quinoa, amaranth, and we were trained in biology. Heifer also trained us in agroecological farming” (Interview. CC03, 2019, trans.). Through the application of agroecology, the 23 families interviewed recognise that their *chakras* have recovered the vitality of the soil, allowing them to produce healthy crops without the application of the agrochemicals often used in the Andean zone. Another project that has been carried out the past two decades is the Muyu Raymi or seed convention, in which most communes participated. At the seed fair, the practice of bartering is resumed to boost the local economy. Through the exchange of harvested products, families are supplied with a variety of seeds that will be cultivated in their *chakras*, as well as the redistribution and strengthening of native seed (Interview. CC04, 2019). In this space, native and recovered

seeds are offered such as amaranth, rocoto pepper, chigualcán, chimbilito and other native products (Interview. CC01, 2019).

The leadership of the community organisation and the empowerment of its participants have managed to form companies based on the principles of the social and solidarity economy. The companies are the following: Runa Tupari-community tourism, Jambi Mascari-traditional medicine, Sumak Mikuy native crop entrepreneurship, Santa Anita cooperative of savings and credit, Sumak Jambina cultivation of medicinal plants. These are initiatives that were strengthened through collaboration with international and national organisations.

### 3.2 Rural development in Yunguilla

The community of Yunguilla is located about 15 km north-west of the Ecuadorian capital Quito, in the parish of Calacalí. It extends 3000 hectares (Collaguazo, 2012, p. 24). The community is located within three protected areas: the Maquipucuna Reserve that is part of the Protective Forest of the Upper Basin of the Guayllabamba River, the Forest and Protective Vegetation Eastern Flanks of the Pichincha Volcano and the Green Belt of Quito (Tamayo *et al.*, 2012). Its population is made up of 250 inhabitants of mestizo origin (Tamayo *et al.*, 2012, p. 10-21). The community of Yunguilla has a fiscal primary school called ‘Miguel de Santiago’. To attend high school, young people from the community must go to the surrounding parishes of Calacalí, San Antonio de Pichincha or Pomasqui. For higher studies they must go to the urban area of Quito. For this reason, many young people migrate to the city (Interview DC-01, 2019). Yunguilla does not have a health centre but they do enjoy basic services such as water, electricity, telephone and internet (Interview DC-01, 2019).

The organisation of Yunguilla is structured in committees managing projects in favour of the community. The committees are: Pro-improvements Committee, Yunguilla Microenterprise Corporation, Yunguilla Environmental Management Committee, Yunguilla Neighborhood League and Social Affairs (festivities) (Interview DC-01, 2019). The productive activities of the community are based on organic agriculture, community tourism and work outside the community. The history of Yunguilla dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, where it was constituted within the great farmlands such as Pelagallo, Yunguilla, Guaromal and Guadalupe. The great farmlands modality of work was landowner and pawn (Collaguazo, 2012). With the Agrarian Reform, in the decade of the 70s, the workers of these haciendas were accredited with extensions of land (Interview JC-07, 2019). Similarly, the colonization of forest lands was promoted through defor-

estation (Roux, 2013), thus extending the agricultural frontier and enabling increased production (Collaguazo, 2012). Since then, the large haciendas have been divided into communities organizing themselves such as the community of Yunguilla. The productive activities of the community in those years were agriculture and liquor smuggling. Between the 80s and 90s they began with the logging in order to produce charcoal and sell it in the San Roque market in Quito. Despite all these productive activities, its development was stagnant in an “incipient economy that did not show much improvements for the population” (Interview GC-04, 2019).

The decade of the 90s was heavily influenced by developmentalism in the so called “underdeveloped” countries. The Maquipucuna Foundation was the first national NGO in Ecuador to promote environmental conservation, scientific research and development of productive activities with local communities (Justicia, 2007). Bordering the community of Yunguilla is 6,000 hectares of rainforest (Interview RJ-05, 2019). For this reason, in 1995 Maquipucuna paired up with Yunguilla as an external agent to promote environmental conservation. The Foundation entered Yunguilla with the idea of sustainable development that promoted socioeconomic development, environmental conservation, and cultural revaluation (Interview RJ-05, 2019). However, at the start there were difficulties for the community to embrace environmental conservation, as this meant stopping the cutting down of the forest from which they produced coal to sell. Their testimonies related that it was not easy to leave their main economic activity, as shown below:

“Well, we have already stopped cutting down the forest but what are we going to live on? They told us we are going to plant trees, this is what others have done. But we did not want to work [...] we had created a total dependence on the forest. For us who come to talk about conservation or something similar we did not want to listen to anyone because we thought that if we did not make coal we would die and with us the families too. It was the only thing that existed” (Interview GC-04, 2019).

This is how Maquipucuna’s proposal for local development and environmental conservation emerged in Yunguilla. Over time the community joined this project. The process of working together with the Maquipucuna Foundation and the community was gradual, at the beginning they met once or twice a month with the community leaders and some community members, until they formed a group of “eighteen crazy people, who did not know what it was what they were going to do to replace deforestation, they just wanted to change their reality” (Interview GC-04, 2019). In these meetings they dealt with the issue of carrying out other activities that suppressed the felling of the forest. With time and



the meetings held, the relationship between the community and the foundation was strengthened, which opened the way for the foundation to meet more frequently, so the foundation technician in charge of the project had to go live for some time in the community. This way, more community members were joining the conservation project.

The activities with which they began to work together were the construction of boundaries, planting trees in the area, studying the vegetation of the place, home gardens, recognition of their territory, among others. This entire process took place from a horizontal approach, where the foundation also adapted to the activities that the community traditionally carried out such as the *minga*, community assemblies, parties, sharing food or “*pamba table*”. The negativity that initially existed was dissolved thanks to the teamwork within the community as well as with the Maquipucuna technicians. There was a dialogue of knowledge, as mentioned by the technician in charge of the training in Yunguilla “[...] the way to learn, to train, was through the exchange of knowledge with them, because I have to admit also that I learned many things with them” (Interview BC-06, 2019). The differences presented in the activities was a clash between the community logic and the technical logic of the foundation, these were channelled through agreements to make the best option for the community. This is how the work began between the Maquipucuna Foundation and the Yunguilla community to create more conservation projects.

The projects that were developed in the community of Yunguilla considered environmental education for children and adults, organic agriculture, making jams and cheeses, and finally, forming the Community Store that would supply the community with organic products and necessary products brought from the city. Before that, Yunguilla did not have stores in their community. The Community Store was initially managed by the Mamapallo Women’s Group, however, it later became managed by the whole community. The Mamapallo Women’s Group was born as a community initiative in order to engage the women of the community in the projects (Interview RP-09, 2019).

Tourism emerged in Yunguilla in 1997 as a productive alternative for its local development. It began with small tours in the “*coluncos*” (pre-Hispanic roads), food services, and experiences with families in their organic gardens. With the passing of time Yunguilla formed the Yunguilla Microenterprise Corporation to manage the tourist activities. About 95 % of the community is associated with the Yunguilla Corporation in order to be part of the tourist activities (Interview DC-01, 2019). The people of the community work as guides, in the restaurant, offering accommodation to volunteers or tourists, or providing food for the restaurant. In this way, the

people of the community are linked to the Corporation in order to benefit economically. However, it should be noted that tourism in the community of Yunguilla does not represent the main economic activity. Community tourism is implemented in Yunguilla as an alternative to diversify its economy. In this sense, it responds to the construction of the local development of the community framed in sustainable development that allows taking into account the environmental, social and economic dimensions (Interview GC-04, 2019).

#### 4 Discussion

The analysis of the two case studies allows comparisons to be made and similarities to be identified in relation to local rural development. The starting point for reflection is the developmentalist vision that the community of Yunguilla and the rural kichwa Communities of the Cotacachi canton had.

The rural kichwa communities of Cotacachi are part of one of the most important social and political organisations in Ecuador, UNORCARC. The organisation was formed as a response to the colonialist exploitation affecting the communities. Its objective was to promote rural development based in the indigenous and rural identity. For these reasons, they developed projects supported by international cooperation partners on sustainable agriculture, agroecology, natural resource management and community organisation. Thus, the development paradigm for communities is framed by intercultural development based on identity.

The community of Yunguilla is recognised as a pioneer peasant community in community tourism. Their ventures arose with the help of international cooperation partners. The community has the Yunguilla Microenterprise Corporation that manages the tourist activities. Its tourism initiative is part of their vision of development: to build an economic alternative that follows the principles of sustainable development. Their tourism encompasses a series of sustainable productive practices such as organic gardens, elaboration of jams and cheeses, and a community store that is part of the tourist experience.

The experience of local development between the two studied communities shows differences. 1) Rural development with identity and sustainable development are different theoretical concepts used in the communities. 2) The political position marks a distance in the creation of each community organisation. 3) The development of the projects shows the objective of each experience. One is revaluing their local knowledge and the second is building sustainable productive practices that are part of a tourist experience. Despite these differences, there are some commonalities to be found. 1) Both experiences express criticism

of conventional development. 2) The two experiences initially undertook their alternatives with the support of international cooperation. 3) Although it is true, the NGOs were an initial support in the community enterprises, however, the communities were strengthened until they reached their autonomy in the management of their local-rural 4) Community participation was crucial for the formation of each community organisation.

## 5 Conclusions

Cotacachi and Yunguilla are indigenous/peasant communities that share a colonial historical past, based on the hacienda system that was characterized by exploitation of and poverty in the rural sector. The application of the agrarian reform generated structural changes in the country, such as the land reform to promote the country's economic development. However, it is necessary to state that legalisation did not focus on the socioeconomic development of rural families. For example, the lands given to the peasants and indigenous people were of poor quality, located on the higher altitudes, less accessible and without water, which hindered the development of agricultural production, while the landowners were left with the best lands, flat and with water.

The problem of rurality was pushed into the background and even made invisible by the central government and other authorities on duty, and this neglect of rural areas deepened the poverty of peasant families. From a multifactorial perspective, there were other variables that affected the poverty of rural families, such as: the level of basic education and illiteracy (high rate of illiteracy in Cotacachi), lack of access to bank credit, lack of basic services and infrastructure, etc. which are registered in shortcomings that go against rural development. The poverty that rural families suffered from forced them to seek alternative solutions through community organisation, which was based on the active participation of its members and the principles of solidarity and reciprocity. Through the struggle led by community organisations, it was possible to claim the right to land, water, education, etc. The journey made by community organisations is heterogeneous, because it responds to different socio-geographical contexts. In this sense, the mestizo community of Yunguilla and the indigenous kichwa communities of Cotacachi present somewhat different experiences in their socio-political journey. However, the resilience of its inhabitants has allowed them to pursue the same objective, rural development from within the community bases.

The community of Yunguilla is recognised nationally for being one of the pioneers in community tourism. Their com-

munity work and organisation has been a reference for other organisations. The strong leadership of their leaders and the help of international cooperation partners has made it possible to empower themselves. Currently, the community has the Yunguilla Microenterprise Corporation that manages the tourist activities. The tourism initiative is part of a sustainable form development that refers to living in nature and not living from nature. In that sense, the economy generated by the community is based on sustainable productive practices such as organic gardens, jam and cheese making, and community store that are part of the tourist experience.

In the case of the rural kichwa communities of the Cotacachi canton, like Yunguilla, the community organisation constituted the platform from which structural changes were achieved that allowed to improve the conditions of the communities. The alliances initiated by the Union of Peasants and Indigenous Organisations of Cotacachi UNORCAC, made it possible to establish agreements with public and private sector entities as well as with international NGOs such as: Xarxa Consum Solidari (solidarity consumption network) or Heifer, oriented to agroecological agriculture projects. UNORCAC has worked on rural development projects with identity and thanks to the empowerment of families they were able to launch community enterprises such as: the fair "*La Pachamama nos alimenta*", which is an initiative by women trained by Heifer, the community tourism initiative Runa Tupari, the Savings and Credit Cooperative, Santa Anita Ltda, the agribusiness microenterprise Sumak Mikuy etc.

Both the cases of Cotacachi and Yunguilla are examples of empowerment thanks to their high level of internal organisation, the implementation of a dialogue of knowledge, and experiences with intercultural aspects. It is obvious that community work, commitment and active participation of men and women, that show that alternative rural development is possible and hopefully can be emulated in other areas of the region and the planet.

### Acknowledgements

The collection of data and the experiences were acquired during the stay of the researchers in the communities of Yunguilla and Cotacachi. It was possible thanks to the openness of the community authorities, the local families and other authorities belonging to the Municipality and Museum of Cotacachi. In addition, we are deeply grateful to the women of the Comité Central de Mujeres that belong to the UNORCAC and to the members of the Pachamama Fair that fed us. Thank you all for making this work possible.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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