

Discussion paper



# Towards a socio-ecological transformation of the economy

An overview of concepts,  
approaches and practices

Report by  
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# Foreword

**E**conomic development can and should contribute to the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. Today, however, the global economy often exploits and exhausts human and non-human nature; it perpetuates inequality on a massive and increasing scale. It seems at best naïve to continue to rely solely on ‘free’ markets, corporate self-interest and large-scale technology, considering the role they have played in creating the problem. Naturally, the economy is not the only sphere where fundamental change is needed. The ‘flower of transformation’ model used in the present study aptly illustrates the many dimensions of the challenge ahead. At the same time, the authors argue that ‘the capitalist economic system is one major root cause of [nowadays’] multiple crises’. In this light the economy clearly is one important sphere of transformation and we urgently need to find new ways of organising it.

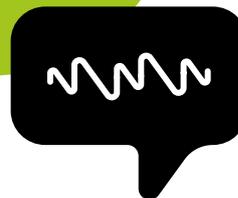
As the need for a socio-ecological transformation becomes more and more apparent, the question of viable alternatives to the capitalist economic system arises; alternatives that meet the needs and rights of billions of people and ensure justice and peace while also respecting the boundaries of our planet.

Transformation must not be another project imposed by a powerful Global North on the rest of the world’s population. Approaches and experiences of communities struggling against or overwhelmed by modern economic expansion need to be given greater consideration in the debate. We need more exchange and networking among the promoters of transformation, both within the Global South and between the Global South and the Global North. We also need better strategies to ensure that alternatives gain visibility and become effective in political and structural terms.

Against this background, a platform for networking, dialogue and learning between a wide range of actors shall be built through a new project developed by organisations from the Global South and the Global North and funded by Misereor. We commissioned an international group of consultants to prepare this study. It aims to give an overview of viable alternatives to our



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current economic system and to serve as an input for a broader dialogue on the topic.

We are very grateful to the authors: for skilfully presenting a myriad of concepts and examples of alternative, non-exploitative economies and for offering a clear, holistic vision of what these approaches entail, what they have in common and how they offer different entry points and pathways to transformation. The analysis and recommendations presented here shall stimulate critical reflection and discussion. We cordially invite readers to explore this promising landscape of alternatives.

*Kathrin Schroeder*

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

**T**he world we live in faces several ecological, social, cultural, economic, political and spiritual crises. The climate crisis that has long been announced but not been taken seriously by political decision-makers is showing its devastating effects all over the globe. The extinction of species is progressing, diseases are spreading all over the world. Environmental pollution has reached unprecedented proportions. The destructive and exploitative relation of humans with nature is producing an imminent collapse of the ecosystems. Social relations are marked by inequality in the enjoyment and realization of rights. Social inequalities have worsened in almost all the countries, and especially in the Global South where the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the social crisis. Financial and economic crises fuel each other. The promises of ever-growing wealth for everybody have turned out to be a chimera. The foundations of life for human beings and other creatures on this planet are at extreme risk. It is becoming obvious that the hegemonic (economic and political) model has failed and that a fundamental system change is needed.

It is the belief of the authors of this study that the capitalist economic system is one major root cause of these multiple crises. Other major root causes include statism, patriarchy, racism and anthropocentrism. The capitalist system is intimately linked to a lifestyle of consumerism, individualism and competition. The values, attitudes and practices that arise from this lifestyle are extremely hostile to life.

Over the last decades, more and more people from different backgrounds and regions, communities, organizations, academic institutes, think tanks and global movements have started to explore alternatives that contrast with this destructive life style and respect the natural boundaries, strive for inclusion and social cohesion and put values such as solidarity, equality, sustainability and joint decision-making in the center. A significant transformatory process is going on. One dimension of such transformation is that of the economy, including e.g. economic organization, practices, ideas etc. Many concepts, approaches and practices exist that involve or demand economies fundamentally different from the dominant capitalist system, thus offering alternatives and positive orientation to

transformation in economic domains. The different expressions and approaches to economic transformation need to be seen as a colorful fabric in which it is impossible to separate the threads which are connected to specific territories, cultures, political dynamics and the respective historic processes.

This study gives an overview of existing concepts and approaches. The study does not only focus on theoretical concepts and approaches but also depicts concrete, practical examples that illustrate the richness of existing experiences – whether or not the examples are systematically based upon aforementioned approaches.

The approaches and examples represent alternatives to the hegemonic system as a whole or to important elements of the system, such as:

- appropriation of labor, land and resources
- the exploitation of people and their environment
- the commodification of ‘nature’ as external to humans
- the privatization or state ownership of the means of production, in both cases alienating them from producers and workers
- the non-local market as a tool to decide on which goods to produce and how to distribute
- consumerism as an economic and cultural phenomenon
- competition as a guiding principle

The approaches and examples that are described in this study have been chosen because the authors of the study consider them to be particularly relevant for the respective continental context. In the view of the authors, all of the approaches, concepts and examples have significant transformative potential to influence the root causes of the multiple crises the world is facing today.

Many alternatives start from practical experiences, some have, others don’t have a theoretical foundation. Some approaches and concepts have been developed in theory – not all of the theories have been tested in practice. The concepts, approaches and examples are presented by continent. Some concepts have taken their origin in a specific continental context and from there have spread all over the world. Other concepts have maintained their local or regional character. While

the local context does matter, the concepts are not mutually exclusive, but have significant overlaps within and between continents. A brief analysis of commonalities and differences between the approaches can be found in the concluding chapter.

It is important to note that the examples we present in this study are, of course, not the only ones. There are many others that are equally important and instructive. Examples have been chosen for their overall relevance to the project theme, their importance with regard to an economic transformation, their ability to give us lessons and learnings, the diversity of situations they represent, and to cover a broad geographic area. Examples have also been picked because the authors of this study were familiar with the concrete experiences they represent. This inevitably involves a biased sample. Necessarily, in a short paper like this, it is impossible to be representative. This means that hundreds of good and interesting experiences as well as several countries or regions have been left out.

The findings of this report are our joint work. The chapters of the continents were contributed separately according to our different backgrounds. Shrishtee Bajpai and Ashish Kothari focused on Asia, Boniface Mabanza Bambu on Africa, Susanne Friess on Latin America, Kai Kuhnhenh and Nina Treu on Europe and North America.

## 1.2 Misereor's platform project on the socio-ecological transformation of the economy

This study as well as the actor mapping that has been elaborated along with this study have been mandated by Misereor and shall serve as an input for a platform project to be launched in 2023. The platform project has the objective to actively support actors worldwide who are promoting a socio-ecological transformation of the economy by implementing concrete projects on a local level, by doing lobby and advocacy on respective topics, by promoting the debate on transformation in

their countries or on an international level, and others. The platform wants to bring them together, discuss with them concepts and approaches as well as practical cases and examples, promote networking and enable the development of joint activities.

The present study gives an overview of approaches, concepts and examples. However, since there are many approaches and concepts and even more practical experiences, the study cannot be complete but can only pick some prominent examples and serve as a starting point for the platform project. Participants of the platform project will add many more approaches, concepts and examples from their practical work to this initial collection and enrich it with their expertise, views and experiences.

## 1.3 Structure of the report

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 on “Radical Alternatives” introduces an analytical framework called the “Flower of Transformation”. The idea of this tool is to recognize that transformation cannot be limited to only one sphere of life but must be a holistic process that needs to take place in various spheres at the same time. The “Flower of Transformation” can be used to assess the transformative potential of an approach or experience and to distinguish false solutions from real, radical alternatives.

Chapter 3 to 6 present a selection of concepts / approaches and practical examples in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America. Each chapter starts with a description of the respective continental context, followed by underlying concepts and philosophies and finally presenting some approaches and concrete examples in the respective continent.

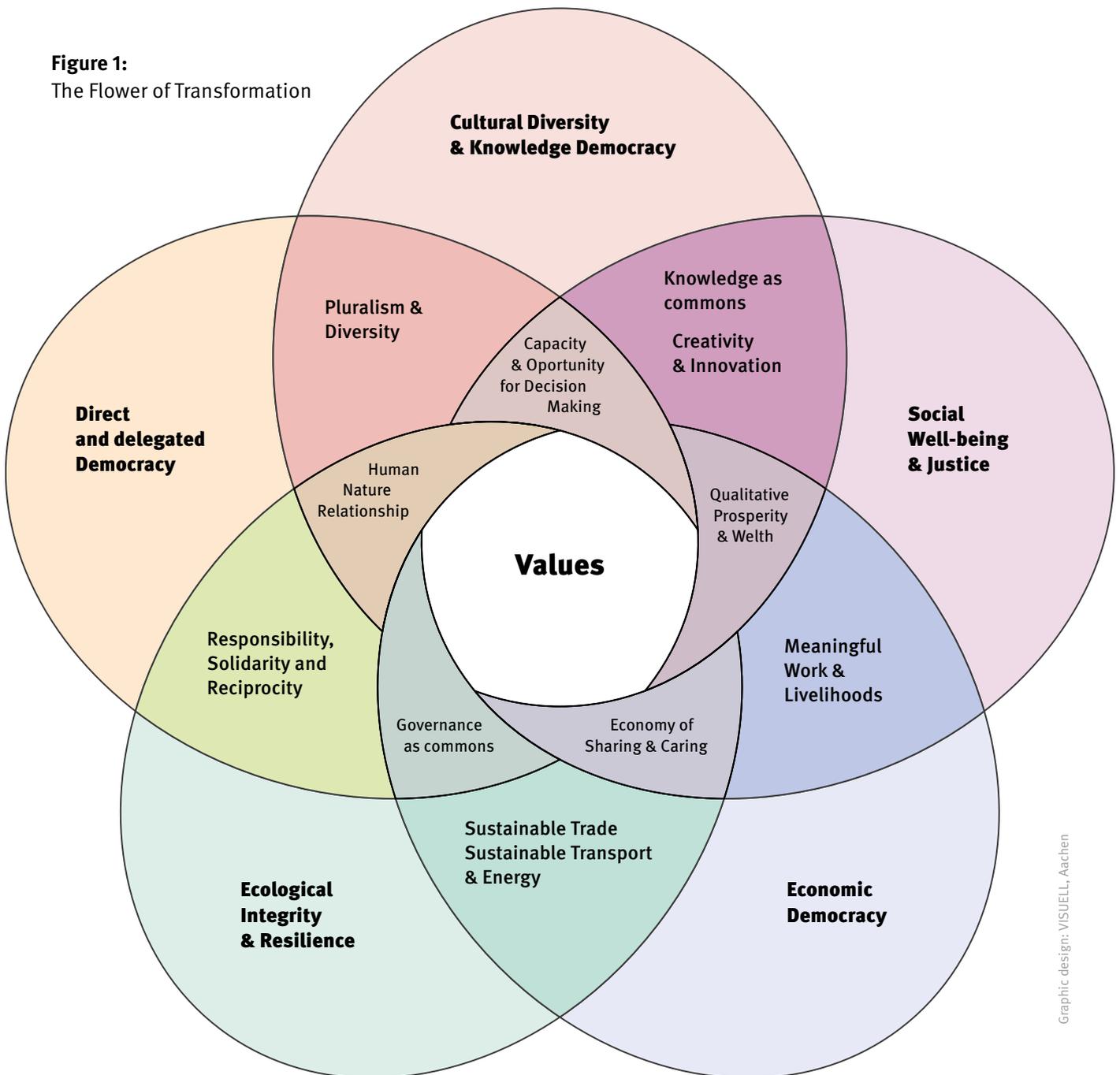
Chapter 7 analyses differences and commonalities of the different concepts and approaches that have been presented in the continental chapters. The chapter also emphasizes the idea that was introduced with the “Flower of Transformation”: that radical transformation is intersectional and cuts across different spheres of life. The report then concludes with an outlook.

# 2 Radical Alternatives

**O**ver the last decades, the search for alternatives to the currently dominant system has gained importance in all the continents. Many alternatives have existed for centuries or millennia, and could be preserved despite the hegemonic pressure of capitalism, statism, patriarchy, etc. Other alternatives have been developed more recently, and are being tested in small-to-medium-scale experiences in practice.

Different actors have started to discuss, document, examine, analyze and compare the alternatives. As part of this process, an analytical framework called the “Flower of Transformation” has been developed, which outlines what a real grounded ‘alternative’ is and how we can understand them.<sup>1</sup> The “Flower of Transformation” has five petals that represent different spheres of transformation (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:**  
The Flower of Transformation



It proposes that transformation is happening, and needs to further happen, in political, economic, social, cultural and ecological spheres of human existence and activity.

The five petals must not be seen as separate areas, but as inter-related, interlocking spheres:

1. Ecological integrity and resilience, including the conservation of nature and natural diversity, maintenance of ecological functions, respect for ecological limits (local to global), and ecological ethics in all human actions.
2. Social well-being and justice, including fulfilling lives (physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually), equity between communities and individuals, communal and ethnic harmony; and erasure of hierarchies and divisions based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and other such attributes.
3. Direct and delegated democracy, with decision-making starting in spaces enabling every person to participate meaningfully, and building from this to larger levels of governance by downwardly accountable institutions; and all this respectful of the needs and rights of those currently marginalized.
4. Economic democracy, in which local communities and individuals have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, and markets, based on the principle of localization for basic needs and trade built on this; central to this would be the replacement of private property by the commons.
5. Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy, with multiple co-existing knowledge systems in the commons, respect for a diversity of ways of living, ideas and ideologies, and encouragement for creativity and innovation.

The flower of transformation can be used to assess an alternative and its transformative potential. The framework proposes that a “real” alternative needs to

cover at least two of the above-mentioned spheres and may not be violative of other spheres; this is because no single initiative is likely to be perfect in achieving all spheres of transformation, but may be in the process of getting close to this, or may be early in its journey of getting there.

While the framework has emerged from experiences in India (and to some extent other parts of South Asia), we believe that it has equal applicability across the world, albeit in diverse forms as determined by local contexts.

The ability to assess and critically discuss alternatives is important because the dominant system also wants to put forward its own “solutions” which are intended to give the impression that they are serious about resolving the different crisis, but actually only strengthen the status quo. Prominent examples of such false or superficial solutions are recycling (while not tackling the creation of waste in the first place), carbon trading and ‘net-zero’ climate approaches (which in fact do little to tackle greenhouse gas emissions at source), the ‘green economy’ (which greenwashes neo-liberal or capitalist profit-making) and others.<sup>2</sup> Given the large number of concepts that are unsuitable for solving the crises, criteria are needed in order to distinguish between false / superficial / symptomatic solutions, and real alternatives that help transform at a systemic level.

In the following chapters, we describe concepts, approaches and examples that are encompassed within this framework. For the purposes of this paper and given the focus of Misereor’s platform project, we have chosen approaches, concepts and examples that do have strong implications for the economic sphere. However, all the concepts and approaches chosen as well as the practical examples clearly show that a radical transformation of the economy necessarily also includes or is built on profound changes in the political, social, cultural and spiritual spheres.

# 3 Africa

## 3.1 The African Context

**A**frica consists of 55 countries and 5 major regions. The current frontiers between the countries, based exclusively on political and economic criteria, are recent and reminiscent of European colonization. There is a very widespread tendency to consider Africa as homogeneous, but the continent is very diverse and this diversity concerns not only the political and economic structures and traditions, but also the cultures and natural conditions. With a total area of 30 million km<sup>2</sup>, Africa accounts for 20.06% of the earth's habitable surface. It is estimated that 2 billion people will live in Africa in 2050, and as many as 2.7 billion in 2060. Every fifth inhabitant of the earth will then live in Africa, and every 3.4 young people will be under 30 years of age. With the Congo Basin of Central Africa, the African continent has the second largest tropical jungle area in the world and thus also the second largest lung of our planet. At the same time, the continent has some of the world regions that are already most affected by climate change: long periods of drought, desertification, floods and dying biodiversity are spreading. With almost 60% of the world's uncultivated land<sup>3</sup>, Africa has great potential for agricultural production.

Africa is rich in natural resources: 1/3 of the reserves of all mineral resources are found on the African continent – 89% of the reserves for platinum, 81% for chromium, 61% for manganese, 60% for cobalt, 46% for diamonds are found in Africa. Gold is exploited to 21% in Africa, uranium to 20%, oil reserves amount to 10%. Other minerals such as coltan, niobium, bauxite, lead, copper, iron, etc. are of crucial importance depending on the region. Because of this wealth of resources, the African continent is seen as crucial for the long-term energy transition in other parts of the world, but also as one of the alternatives in view of the geopolitical situation triggered by the war in Ukraine, as far as fossil fuels are concerned.

Despite this great potential, the continent itself remains little industrialized, the average income is low with very large differences between and within countries. However, it must be taken into account that a huge part of the population is considered self-sufficient. In other words, in many agricultural regions, the inhabitants themselves meet their needs and

therefore do not depend on money, which could be saved through measurement methods based on the finance of industrialized countries. It is estimated that 30% of the sub-Saharan population is entirely self-sufficient and that 50% of the people living in the sub-Saharan region contribute, at least in large part, to their needs through agriculture, livestock farming and other means that are not measurable in monetary terms. In many countries, the so-called informal economy plays a major role.

Until the onset of the Corona pandemic, some African economies were among the fastest growing in the world. The growth-based model is known to deepen social inequalities. With very few exceptions, this trend can be observed wherever this model is implemented. In the case of Africa, an analysis of the period of economic boom with high economic growth in many countries shows that this economic growth has not contributed to the structural transformation of African economies. More than that, in the African countries with high economic growth, which are usually resource-rich countries, to which the economic growth can be attributed, the price has been far too high: illicit capital outflows have reached worrying dimensions and with them corruption. In these resource-rich countries, people living on the edge of mines and large plantations have often had to experience what it means when wealth goes away, its downsides remain in the form of soil and air contamination and river pollution. Seen in this light, the growth phase that has informed the narrative of “Rising Africa” and “Africa as the continent of the future” has been nothing more than an access to a few productive sectors of national economies by foreign companies and their domestic partners through foreign direct investment (FDI) and joint ventures. With a few exceptions, FDIs have become instruments of plunder of the continent's resources, while the growth they have generated has cosmetically contributed to the improvement of macroeconomic data of national governments. This economic growth has translated into real improvements in living conditions for the majority of people only to a disproportionately small extent. The social and environmental costs are catastrophic.

For all the diversity of Africa's geographical, political, economic, cultural and social manifestations, one commonality cannot be overlooked: the colonial continuities that shape different areas of life. The decolonization processes that began in the mid-20th century did not lead to the hoped liberation from colonial clutches: Political decolonization has remained incomplete, while epistemological decolonization is just beginning. Those who speak of alternatives in the African context take this into account.

When we speak of alternatives here, we do not only mean knowledge elaborated by African experts in the sense of technical or technocratic solutions that are (supposed to be) implemented by specialized bodies thanks to formalized and standardized procedures. We also mean life plans in which people create space for themselves, organize themselves and shape their lives according to their own interests and visions. Such life plans are not determined from above but developed according to one's own needs and insights.

The macro-level is externally oriented and the countries of the continent are integrated into the world economic system in a way that only forces them into subaltern positions. This neoliberal integration into the world economic system bears a great responsibility for the economic, social and ecological crisis. Even after the formal independence, the foundations of this crisis are stabilized by the collaboration between the African elites and the imperialist interests. Because the elites benefit from the ruling system and are externally oriented, the voices of those working at the grassroots are still rarely heard, so that alternative positions and the questioning of orthodox economic development models remain at the margins of regional and global negotiating tables where decisions are made. Alternatives therefore articulate themselves in categories of resistance as "no" to what needs to change and as "yes" to practices that also draw their inspiration from a return to their own emancipatory traditions. This is a new discovery of culture "as a search for purposes, for goals and reasons to live at all, as a procedure for making sense of the human adventure."<sup>4</sup>

Seen in this light, the greatest challenge of working on alternatives is to perceive, identify and document understandings of the world and ways of living. In discovering, in seeing small initiatives and lifestyles, in listening, in perceiving thoughts that hardly have a chance to develop in the prevailing model, let alone assert themselves, in supporting and defending them, the design of alternatives in the face of capitalist destruction is articulated. In this rediscovery, the full

significance of African cosmovisions<sup>5</sup> must also be perceived because different epistemologies, meaning knowledge production and knowledge systems open different forms of conceiving political participation, Well-being, society and nature.

## 3.2 Underlying Concepts and Philosophies

### 3.2.1 Ubuntu and Sankofa

Ubuntu and Sankofa are repeatedly mentioned among others as some of the transformative concepts from the Global South in which the Circular Economy can be located. Those cosmovisions that, in the face of thinking in binary contrasts that characterizes modern science (human-nature, male-female, rational-emotional, white-black, heterosexual-homosexual, cis-trans, developed-underdeveloped, adult-child) show a way out: Circular rather than hierarchical human-nature relations, reciprocity, recognition of mutual dependence of humans and nature, but also of humans among themselves – across generations.

This includes the lessons:

- The interconnectedness of all being and all living beings is not an esoteric idea, but a simple fact.
- Our lives depend on a global ecosystem of which we are a part.
- Holistic approaches shape this consciously and responsibly.
- The connection of past, present and future as shared responsibility.

History is not only evolutionist, but also consists of ruptures and new beginnings. There is a diversity of trajectories and ways of responding to the challenges that arise over time. Given the socio-ecological challenges of the Anthropocene, those cosmovisions could indeed help the transition to a sustainable, just, and resilient future. The forms of implementation of their ecological intelligence, ethical and institutional framework are still to be defined.

The idea of circularity in people's relationships with each other across generations and with the world around them still shapes social practices in many small spaces on the African continent. The plurality of these

practices must be preserved in order to increase the chance to overcome the global crises the humanity is facing. The social and ecological components of those practices have not been enough reflected for the future to be built.

South African Bishop Desmond Tutu<sup>6</sup>, who died in 2021, is one of the thinkers who popularized Ubuntu. He addresses the fact that “in the spirit of Ubuntu, success due to aggressive competitive behavior and at the expense of others is not a high good. Ultimately, social and communal harmony and the well-being of all is our goal. Ubuntu does not say, ‘I think, therefore I am’. Rather, it says, ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share’.”

“Harmony, kindness, community”, D. Tutu continues “are high goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum – the highest good. Anything that undermines social harmony is to be shunned like the plague. Anger, resentment, vindictiveness, even success through aggressive competition destroy this good.” For Desmond Tutu, this harmony also concerns the relationship with the world around us: “When Africans used to say, ‘Don’t treat the tree like that, it hurts it,’ the others would laugh: Oh, they are so uneducated, they are primitive. How wonderful that they are now discovering that we were right – that the tree does feel a culture of achievement very much and that whoever hurts a tree is in a way hurting himself. Now they are making big speeches about it and writing dissertations in ecology and so on.”

Ubuntu – just like other cosmovisions of Africa – emphasized the centrality and sacredness of life, the promotion of which should be the goal of all political, economic, social and religious institutions. This life is understood not only as communal but also as cosmically mediated. This means that responsible living can only be realized in harmony with Mother Nature and everything that makes up ecosystems. As the Congolese theologian Matondo Tuisila writes: “The promotion of life means the enhancement of vitality, i.e. the strengthening of participation in the unity of reality, which can only exist in the ‘referencing of everything to everything’. An increase in vitality that is not intended as a strengthening of this strictly communally and cosmically mediated participation poses extreme threats to society, because it can only be accomplished by simultaneously impairing the viability of others and at the expense of cosmic equilibrium.”<sup>7</sup> Ubuntu shapes the lives of people in many decentralized spaces in Africa. The informal economy offers many clues to the practices derived from it. But a macro-level operationalization that can

show how Ubuntu is applicable at this level is not yet available. This requires national governments that are willing to restructure their economies in light of the values of Ubuntu.

### 3.2.2 Post-development/ Posteconomy

Criticism of the concept of development and what it implies is very old. It also has a long tradition in Africa with people like Eboussi Boulaga and especially Felwine Sarr questioning not only its Eurocentric genesis and cultural transferability, but also its adherence to ideology (modernity, market fundamentalism...) and its concealment of power interests (exploitation of raw materials, sales market). Felwine Sarr also makes it clear that the concept of development cannot be separated from an economic model based on exploitation and domination. In this context, he speaks of development as “Wrapping” (Enveloppement) and of the necessity to unwrap oneself. Seen in this light, the goal should not be development, but transformation as overcoming the dominant economic and society model in the direction of comprehensive common good orientation. Post-development in this context means saying goodbye to the framework preached by the development discourse in favor of a focus on shaping the necessary changes that local demands require. This is also about overcoming the economy as the central explanatory and controlling element of life in order to make it “Lebens-Mittel“, to put it at the service of life. In this sense, Post-development and Post-economism are not alternatives in the narrow sense, but a matrix that makes it possible to think of different alternative approaches.

For Sarr, it is a question of rejecting what he calls the economy of presentism<sup>8</sup>, excess, generalized precariousness and suffocation, which, in order to produce consumer goods, often in excess, exhausts the planet’s bio-capacity, overexploits its resources, hinders its capacity to regenerate itself and transfers future income into the present. It must be rethought in its structural foundations, its modes of operation and its purposes. He advocates “an economy of living beings” (Economie du Vivant), based on a re-evaluation of the usefulness of all sectors of economic life in terms of their contribution to health, care, well-being, the preservation of living beings and the perpetuation of life, and social cohesion. In his view it will no longer be able to afford the luxury of not questioning the purpose of economic life and its modes of production, nor of including it in a cosmopolitic of life.

The priority for him is not to replicate in Africa the same economic and civilizational system that has shown its limits elsewhere in terms of ecological footprint, economy and social choices.

What he proposes is to find a balance between the economic, the cultural and the symbolic. The first difficulty in his view is in the choice of semantics and terminology: “We have an economy that is popular, based on an economic action derived from socio-cultures, which currently feeds 70% of Africans. We call it informal because what interests us is being able to levy taxes on it. But we forget that the economic act is first and foremost a social act that enables us to establish a link with others... As long as we don’t integrate our economies in our socio-cultures, we will spend a lot of time testing models that won’t work.”<sup>9</sup>

Economic resilience is more delicate to achieve. It requires breaks with production and accumulation models inherited from the colonial period. African economic growth is mainly driven by extractive industries and services. However, despite the foreign exchange earnings they generate, it is necessary to put an end to enclave and extractive economies. These do not lead to integrated development of countries, create environmental and societal problems, foster corruption and distort inter-temporal trade-offs and resource allocation.

Given the short-term and reductionist thinking that accompanies the exploitation of natural resources and in many cases leads to the destruction of livelihoods for present and future generations, Sarr proposes citizen control over the mining contracts that governments sign and the use of the profits from them. His recommendation is above all a better inter-generational awareness and a long-term action. It is in this context that he proposes to imagine institutional arrangements that delegate the management of the nations’ natural resources to institutions that are independent of the electoral cycle and the regimes in place.

In traditional African societies, the economy was part of a larger social system. It obeyed its classical functions, but was above all subordinated to social, cultural and civilizational goals. This is no longer the case in contemporary societies, where the economic order tends to become hegemonic, overrunning its natural space and attempting to impose its meanings and logic on all dimensions of human existence. Thus, for him, it is a question of thinking about the multiple interactions of the social project: the environmental dimensions that aim to ensure the conditions of existence (the economy and ecology) with those that aim to operate on the meanings of existence itself. It is

therefore a question of thinking about the place to be assigned to the economic order in the social dynamic and of avoiding the confusion of aims between economic and cultural orders. This is how coherent social projects can be born.<sup>10</sup>

The post-development debate is academic, but many of these academic discourses only bring to the scientific table the small-scale experiences of thousands of communities whose livelihoods are being destroyed by macro-level options adopted in the name of development and who build resilience by embracing values such as *jom* (dignity), *communality* (*lisanga*), *teranga* (hospitality), *kersa* (modesty, sufficiency) that enable them to affirm life despite great material poverty and all the adversities that come with it. This affirmation of life is possible because what they value is much broader than fixation on material wealth alone. This brings us closer to the core idea of the Post-development approach. Unlike the top management principle, which prescribes what should be good for the whole world and through which measures this should be achieved, “post-development” can only be context dependent. The guiding principle here is to seek collective realization opportunities that favor goals other than material prosperity at the expense of the environment and social relations.

## 3.3 Approaches and examples

### 3.3.1 Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Southern Africa (ANSA)

In the early 1990s, the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the IMF were increasingly presented as having no alternative. Zimbabwe was one of the African countries that resisted this for a long time and looked for alternatives. External pressure increased and the ZANU-PF regime decided to implement the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) against the will of the country’s trade unions. The negative effects on the country’s economy were not long in coming, with moderate, if not non-existent, economic successes. Against this background the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) developed an alternative to the IMF/World Bank inspired ESAP called “Beyond ESAP, Framework for a long-term development

strategy in Zimbabwe beyond the economic structural adjustment program” in 1995.

ANSA was developed as part of the ‘Beyond ESAP’ project following discussions around the ‘Beyond ESAP’ document at various levels (national, regional and continental) in order to develop alternatives at all these levels. The importance of the development of home-grown national policies to establish a true sense of ownership was stressed. Another objective of the program was to translate the ideas into actions and to broaden the ownership of the program and turn it into a mass movement over a period through sustained education, consultations and debate. This therefore implies that even though it is trade unions in the region that initiated the program, other stakeholders, including the regional States and churches, would be mobilized and engaged around the issue of alternatives to neo-liberal policies.

Unlike many alternative approaches, ANSA does not reject the term “development”, but inspired by the Ugandan economist Yash Tandon, defines development through an interplay of four factors:

Development = SF + DF + PF – IF<sup>11</sup>

- SF is the social factor – the essential well-being of the people free from want and exploitation
- DF is the democratic factor – the right of the people to participate in state policy making that affects their lives and livelihoods
- PF is the development of productive forces (industry, science, technology and the organization of production)
- IF is the imperial factor – the right of nations to liberate from colonial and imperial domination.

For ANSA development is not just economics. In the ANSA-Strategy development is a much broader concept: “It incorporates human rights, community rights and the right to national or regional self-determination. It also seeks to address issues of equity and fairness in the distribution of resources at national, regional and global levels. A basic tenet of the ANSA-Strategy is that the provision of social services, such as water, energy, health and education, cannot be ensured and secured when left to the market. The market is not a neutral agency of allocation of resources. Social services are not matters to be privatized or commoditized as they are parts of the basic human rights of the people and a people’s state would be responsible for the provision of services. In other words, the state has to not only be a development state, but also an ethical and responsible state that can be held accountable.”<sup>12</sup>

ANSA is noteworthy because it represents one of the rare attempts to formulate alternatives to the neo-liberal turn, and in doing so, it had the connectivity to the macro-level in mind. The alternative economy to neoliberalism outlined by ANSA focused on the following goals, among others: Solidarity and cooperation instead of competition, economy in the service of life, autonomy, Self-sufficiency, Thrift, Interdependence, Participation in decision-making processes.

The ANSA project started as a response to the structural adjustment programs has differentiated over time and has set different priorities that are country specific.<sup>13</sup> The new publications have addressed the issues of jobless and non-inclusive growth as well as New forms of work organization and employment pattern.<sup>14</sup> Growth, which was not accompanied by structural transformation as poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and inequality persist is still major topic since structural transformation has not been – and indeed cannot be – delivered by market forces and neo-liberal economic policies.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to emphasize that among the 10 principles that ANSA<sup>16</sup> defined at the beginning of the program, the ecological dimension was not explicitly addressed, but it was included as a prerequisite for enabling life. In ANSA’s original vision, the ecological dimension was mentioned as part of the system coordinates, to be reflected in the context of the role of culture for transformation processes. This work has not yet been done systematically. Nevertheless, ANSA warned very early on about the dangers of the environmental destruction through mining. Besides the pollution of surface and ground water it emphasized “the massive areas of forest and indigenous plants being destroyed when mines are established. The costs of destruction were and are never calculated and used in the planning of mines. Therefore, it is the surrounding communities and the general population in Southern Africa that have had to bear the costs of the destructive nature of mining”<sup>17</sup>. For this reason, ANSA recommended the governments of Southern Africa to create alternative livelihoods for mining communities. Also, with regards to agriculture ANSA also explicitly addresses the ecological question. For example, positions are taken against GMOs:

“GMOs should be considered for what they are: dangerous and irresponsible tinkering with ecological systems, in most cases with only the aim of generating profits for large companies and making farmers more dependent on them instead of promoting food security, food sovereignty and food safety. For Zimbabwe ANSA proposes a new ecological approach, which

among others should be driven by local stakeholders “as they possess the greatest knowledge about their locality and as they will have to be the implementers and beneficiaries of any agricultural and rural strategy to their locality”.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.3.2 African Ecofeminist Future

The mixture of colonial influences and some local patriarchal traditions in some parts of the continent mean that women’s voices in particular are not heard in public spaces. The absence of their voices and perspectives deprives not only their own respective societies, but humanity of potentials that can be important for the desired paradigm shift in the face of global crises. Throughout history, African women have not been content with a victim role in the face of prevailing exclusion mechanisms but have excelled at various levels with numerous initiatives. Their struggle for recognition, justice and participation articulates options that are relevant for the future of humanity and has a long history. From abolition to anti-colonial movements, Black women have been at the forefront of liberation struggles and have made clear that no emancipatory movement is to be taken seriously unless the specific oppression faced by Black women – based on race, class, gender and sexuality – are addressed.

This intersectionality also plays a central role in today’s struggles. In the face of the continuation of exclusionary mechanisms in the present, women’s groups come together to undertake creative resistances and imagine radical new futures. More than 80% of the food consumed in Africa is produced in small family farms, where women do most of the work. In the process, they resist economic models that have already ecologically compromised the rest of the planet. African women are often at the heart of communities dealing with Food security and with the burden of environmental mismanagement due to agribusiness farming and extractivism. Women’s groups address both challenges by drawing on their own knowledge traditions: “It’s the indigenous knowledge and the practices that have always supported food sovereignty and this knowhow is in the hands of the women ... Ecofeminism for me is the respect for all that we have around us.” (Mariama Sonko, *Nous Sommes la Solution*, Senegal). Seed sovereignty is therefore a key pillar of ecofeminism and connected with it is the seed biodiversity and the protection of Land from the threats of extractivism and land grabbing. Women in Africa are thus not only at the center of feeding their

communities, but of diversifying this diet by preserving many local products that are in danger of disappearing. The biodiversity they often reproduce in their fields is also a fight against the massive destruction of nature caused by agribusiness monocultures. They are at the center of the clash between the diverse indigenous crops and the cash-cropping agenda. Ecofeminists in Africa see themselves as custodians of land, life, diversity and knowledge and of the possibility of remaining subjects of their own history instead of being reduced to objects of the care of agribusinesses. They also claim a spiritual function for themselves because they create the connection between the different generations. They fight for a radical future which pillars are justice, equity and dignity harmonising with environmental sovereignty. African ecofeminism offers a holistic approaches and key elements for an alternative to the capital-centric ideals of economic growth that have defined progress so far.

Examples are:

- Wangari Maathai and the “Green Belt Movement”.<sup>19</sup> As the first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2004, Maathai highlighted the close relationship between African feminism and African ecological activism, which challenge both the patriarchal and neo-colonial structures undermining the continent.
- Mariama Sonko and “*Nous Sommes la Solution*”(NSS, *We are the Solution*).<sup>20</sup> NSS is an ecofeminist movement of more than 500 rural women’s associations in Senegal, Ghana, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Mali. The movement promotes sustainable agroecology and fights large-scale industrial farming.
- Ruth Nyambura and “African Eco Feminist Collective”.<sup>21</sup> It uses radical and African feminist traditions to critique power, challenge multinational capitalism, and re-imagine a more equitable world. The movement sees itself in the praxis of anti-capitalism and decolonization.
- African Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction (WoMin): campaign against the devastation of extractive industries.

Just like the African concept of UBUNTU, African ecofeminism emphasizes the connections and the dependency between all forms of life. No life form can exist separate and on its own. Living in relationship to other living beings and nature demands an understanding of and compassion for the other.

The African ecofeminist ethic therefore values inclusion, togetherness, relationships and conserving life

and nature. It is based on empathy and care, on the ability to hear and listen. So also, should the use of land, water and forests should be guided by care and an ethic of reciprocity. This is essential to preserve natural ecosystems and their diversity. Leonie, a participant in the women's dialogues on ecofeminist development alternatives in Toliara, Madagascar: "When we use natural resources, we must take only what is sufficient for meeting our needs. If we cannot consume all of them, we must share them with others, but we must not sell them for our sole profit. This means that we must live in love, trust, and solidarity with each other. We must feel and behave the same way with the nature and trees which give us the fresh air, joy and happiness, along with the rain and water we need every day."<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3.3 African Renaissance as Alternative approach

It is difficult to think about alternatives in Africa without mentioning the paradigm of the African Renaissance. The term is in vogue and is powerful in academic circles, in political spheres as well as in activist circles. Due to this omnipresence, the term has undergone a change of meaning. The African Union's "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want", for example, is written under this heading, although its thrust is to stabilize the structures that keep the continent dependent. The former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, one of those who helped shape this agenda, even defines African Renaissance as an instrument of catching up: "The African Renaissance is to make the 21st century the century of Africa." What is important for this project is the original meaning of this term, which in many activist circles is having a rebirth itself, especially among the youth in different parts of the African continent.

This term was first used explicitly in 1948 by Professor Cheikh Anta Diop in the article: "Quand parlera-t-on de Renaissance africaine?" (Published in the collection "Alerte sous les Tropiques"). Cheikh Anta Diop means several things: African historical consciousness, strengthened by a thorough and autonomous knowledge of the entire African cultural past; the fruitful dialogue of Africans with their own cultural heritages, dances, music, oral and written literature, aesthetic values, social values; African languages; the new creativity of Africans in today's world where it is not only a question of "receiving" but also of "giving", "participating", "building", "acting". The African renaissance is not only a vision of the world, but also a way of being and having, a way of existing, a way of

living, of building Africa. Molefi Kete Asante, who is one of those who conceptualized the African Renaissance in theory and what it should be in practice, believes that "Africa's vocation is not to become Europe. Africa must become Africa again. The African Renaissance is the rebirth of an Africa that must depend on itself, that has a vocation to be itself and not Asian, not American, not Westernized."

The Africa of the African Renaissance must be proud of itself, must think of itself, must be built on the thoughts and works of its great minds. In this sense, Africa does not lack models. To be reborn, Africa must rely on its cultural heritage. This paradigm invites the question of modernity in Africa to be posed in terms of historical rebirth (the process of rebuilding the social fabric). The African renaissance is the reconstitution of the African Being.

One example for African Renaissance is the Collective for the Renewal of Africa (CORA):<sup>23</sup>

Africa lives and thinks through its intellectuals who are redefining the new contours of a pan-Africanist revival. This is the mission of CORA. The birth of this collective follows an open letter dated April 2020 calling on African heads of state. This letter had been signed by a hundred intellectuals from the continent to invite the addressees to take measures adapted to the social and economic realities in the face of the pandemic. Indeed, it recalled the need for Africa to rely on its own strengths and to fulfill the economic and monetary sovereignty. The aim is to put African intellectuals collectively back at the center of the debates that are shaking the continent and the world. The Covid-19 was used as opportunity to reflect on new paradigms and to better reposition Africa in the "current global disorder".

The Senegalese economist Ndongo Samba Sylla<sup>24</sup>, one of the coordinators of CORA outlines the contours of orthodox economics in Africa, which he calls Afro-liberalism under the guise of Pan-Africanism: Pursuit of blind growth / economic catch-up strategy, Export-oriented growth, Liberalization of foreign direct investment, Privatization of public enterprises, Liberalization of financial markets, Over-promotion of Tourism. He contrasts this with the economic policies that Africa and the global South need. They are based on Delinking/ Reclaiming economic and monetary sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

Goals: Decommodification of basic goods and services necessary to a dignified life; food and energy sovereignty; ecologically sustainable transformation; social protection for all.

Means: rely first and foremost on domestic resources and financing; job guarantee; stimulate domestic innovation systems; participatory democracy.

Condition: A new partnership between the Global North and the Global South based on technology exchange, cooperation in research, sovereign insolvency structures including debt cancellation, Reparations.

### 3.3.4 Community-based Land Access and Housing

The land question is very explosive in the entire Southern African region and is being discussed very emotionally against the background of colonial expropriations and a failed capitalist land reform concept (willing seller willing buyer) in Namibia and South Africa. The different local cultures of this region contest the belief that land stands for production of agricultural commodities destined for the market. The primacy of the market and private property of land, which is the core of capitalist thought and logic, is contrary to their worldview. Land is viewed as life and what it is constituted of as a totality. Land is neither a commodity nor an individual possession. It doesn't belong to humans, it is a gift from the ancestors, who are buried in it. It embraces the ecological, cultural, cosmological, social and the spiritual dimensions. It is a question of being and of identity. Activists in Southern Africa and in other parts of the Continent campaign national governments to transcend the flawed economic determinist view current in land debates that denies People the right to land on the premise that they would not be able to productively use it.

Nowhere is the problem more acute than in Namibia, where more than half of the population lives on informal settlements. It is against this background that the approach of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) should be understood. SDFN<sup>26</sup> improves the lives of the poor by securing affordable land and shelter and improving the living conditions of those excluded from commercial housing and financial processes, using a community-driven approach.

The Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) is a network of community-led savings groups. Residents in informal settlements started organising savings groups in 1987 to improve their poor living conditions and Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) was established in 1992 to support this process. The community's own development fund (the Twahangana Fund) was established in 1996 and the savings groups came together as a national network to form SDFN in

1998. Activities carried out by NHAG/SDFN include supporting small savings groups, capacity building, problem solving and learning facilitated through the community exchanges at local, regional, national and international levels.

The SDFN has proven that a community-driven process can result in affordable land and shelter if supported and recognized by local authorities and the national government. Conventional planning and design standards and approaches have been challenged and amended to make the housing more affordable for those on very low incomes.

The following transformative elements are included in this approach:

- **Democracy/participation:** Initiatives come from the grassroots, mobilizing the power of the community. Lobbying succeeds in getting the decision-makers to operate through the procedures determined by the grassroots. This has an empowering effect on the members.
- **Gender Justice:** women's participation is promoted.
- **Frugality:** Having a roof over one's head is a step for members to achieve some stability and thereby improve the lives of the poorest. This house project shows that it is possible to ensure a minimum standard of living for all in Namibian society if the rich and powerful would see the need to live more frugally and simply. This is true not only in terms of housing, but also in terms of the distribution of all vital resources.

Environmental aspect: "Environmental sustainability is often not a priority for the poor, due to their immediate need for water, food and shelter. However, NHAG/SDFN encourages opportunities to address these issues. The local production of hollow concrete blocks on site, for example, reduces the need for transport and the planting of trees on individual plots is encouraged. By developing the land themselves, members are flexible in how it is used enabling sensitivity to current environmental features such as large trees and foliage. A new rainwater harvesting initiative has been introduced as part of a soil protection and flood prevention program in the hilly areas of Windhoek. The water is used to grow vegetables. This experience is currently being shared with other community groups through the community-to-community exchanges. Old car tyres are also being re-used to help stabilise the soil on a steep site."<sup>27</sup>

# 4 Asia

## 4.1 The Asian Context

**A**sia is the largest continent, both in size (44,579,000 square kilometers) and in human population (4.7 billion people, 60% of the world's). It is a region of enormous ecological, biological, socio-cultural and economic diversity.

While any generalizations for such a large part of the world are difficult to make, there are some broad trends that are discernible regarding the ecological problems it faces:

- The loss of biodiversity is heavy across the region, it contains most of the world's heavily polluted cities as also growing mountains of solid waste, and land degradation is serious. The climate crisis is already making itself felt in the form of visibly changing weather patterns, sea level rise, bleaching of coral reefs, more temperature extremes, increased frequency of cyclones and other extreme weather events, glacier recession, and so on.
- Given that the majority of the population in most of Asia's countries are still heavily dependent on the primary sector of the economy, such ecological damage has a serious impact on livelihoods. Loss of livelihoods in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, pastoralism and natural resource-based crafts, is not necessarily compensated by new jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors, especially due to lack of relevant skills and increased automation. Unemployment and under-employment, along with all the socio-psychological, cultural, and other impacts of loss of livelihoods and place, are therefore extremely high.
- Simultaneously, reflecting the trend of the world as a whole, economic and wealth inequalities have climbed steadily across the continent.
- Parts of the continent are prone to periodic or continuous international or intra-national conflict and war, such as in the Iran-Iraq-Syria-Turkey region.
- Several nation-states are being ruled by authoritarian or theocratic regimes, with all their attendant issues of human rights violations, curtailment of democratic rights, and so on.
- Various neo-colonial approaches, for instance to education, continue to threaten the cultural,

linguistic, spiritual, and knowledge diversity that has been Asia's heritage. Internal colonization by ruling elites (class, caste, gender, ethnic) also exacerbates deprivation, ecological devastation, and other issues mentioned above.

As a counter-trend to the above, several parts of the region have strong civil society presence, with people's movements of resistance against the structures and relations of oppression and injustice and widespread initiatives at creating alternatives to the dominant system. In the following we focus on the latter, while acknowledging the crucial role of the former, not only in slowing down the juggernaut of 'development' and the forces mentioned above, but also in articulating alternative ways of knowing, doing, being, and dreaming. Constructive alternatives build on these articulations, giving them specific conceptual shape and practical application.

## 4.2 Underlying Concepts and Philosophies

Many of the approaches and examples cited below are linked to a diversity of worldviews and philosophies. We don't have the space to go into these here, but some examples are worth mentioning.<sup>28</sup> Swaraj (from ancient India, popularized more recently by Mahatma Gandhi) is a combination of radical autonomy (individual and community level), responsibility for the well-being of others, restraint on one's own consumption and behavior so as not to impinge on the autonomy and well-being of others, and a non-binary relationship between the material and the spiritual; as part of the ongoing movements in India, this has been extended to include the non-human world as 'eco-swaraj'. Kyosei in Japan is an ancient concept denoting conviviality, symbiosis, living together, and has seen some revival in the context of agricultural labour's role in mediating between humans and the rest of nature. Shohoj in Bangladesh is one

of the concepts underlying the *Nayakrishi Andolan* (mentioned above), denoting a ‘simple’, harmonious relationship with the earth and each other. Radical reinterpretations of Buddhism (e.g. in the movement of socially-engaged Buddhists), Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Jainism and other mainstream faiths have also been attempted in various parts of Asia.

## 4.3 Approaches and examples

### 4.3.1 Basic needs self-reliance and sovereignty

State-centered and/or corporate-driven approaches to ‘development’ and welfare have resulted in significant dependence of Indigenous peoples and local communities (rural and urban; hereafter, IPs & LCs) on entities outside of their own territories. Given the frequent failure of governments and the exploitative nature of corporations, many peoples and communities have been trying to assert some level of localized self-reliance and sovereignty for basic needs. Of these, food sovereignty (full community control over everything to do with food production and consumption) is relatively widespread in parts of Asia. In India, 5000 Dalit and Adivasi (Indigenous) women and their families have achieved such sovereignty under the term *anna swaraj*<sup>29</sup> as part of the collective Deccan Development Society, transforming a status of nutritional deprivation, caste-based and gender discrimination into one of dignified living while also resisting GMOs in agriculture.<sup>30</sup> In Bangladesh, 300,000 member-households are part of the *Nayakrishi Andolan* (New Agriculture Movement), whose objective is “to demonstrate the *shohoj* way to joyful living by ensuring biodiverse ecological regeneration of nature to receive food, fibre, fuelwood, medicine, clean water, and many different bio-material and spiritual needs of the community”.<sup>31</sup> The Tao people of Pongso no Tao Island, off the coast of Taiwan, have sustained their centuries-old processes of food sovereignty from the seas and land to this date.<sup>32</sup> Movements for food sovereignty and tree-planting in Palestine have been part of its people’s overall struggle for autonomy and independence in relation to Israel occupation.<sup>33</sup> In many parts of South Asia, communities have also achieved *jal swaraj* or water sovereignty, through technical and governance innovations that

combine traditional and modern forms of knowledge and decision-making. These have helped achieve water security even in extremely arid areas, such as Kachchh and Rajasthan in western India.<sup>34</sup>

### 4.3.2 Economic localization and solidarity economy

Having suffered the consequences of long-distance economic exchanges frequently breaking down (as during the COVID crisis, or in areas prone to conflict), several IPs/LCs have tried to localize essential economic activities. Producer-consumer links are among the commonest of these, with examples like community-supported agriculture, localized markets for crafts, and village-based small-scale manufacturing and services. In China, to respond to the state-sponsored modernization and marketization program, academics and activists have pushed a Rural Reconstruction programming, that includes the revitalization and revalidation of traditional occupations and knowledge, and community-supported agriculture.<sup>35</sup> Given the political context in China, this program has to tread carefully, but has managed to spread itself and even get some support from the state. In Indonesia, the *Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia* (KPRI) or Confederation of Indonesia Peoples Movement, a national organisation consisting of over 70 unions or federations of women, workers, peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous people, and urban poor, aims for people to “consume what they produce and produce what they consume”. KPRI members promote a solidarity economy through alternative schools (emphasizing agriculture and agrarian reform), credit unions and cooperatives, mangrove eco-tourism, community television channels, medical assistance and legal aid for the urban poor, street libraries, urban gardening; because of all this several communities were resilient through the COVID pandemic.<sup>36</sup> In India, several examples of community resilience in the COVID period of 2020-21, were based on the existence or emergence of localized exchange between villages and towns, that overcame the collapse of long-distance trade.<sup>37</sup>

### 4.3.3 Collective custodianship of livelihood resources

Across much of Asia, colonialism and post-colonial centralized rule, or traditionally authoritarian politics,

has deprived indigenous peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) of control over the ecosystems and livelihood resources that are crucial for their economy. People's movements in several countries have therefore tried to regain collective custodianship and rights over crucial livelihood resources. An approach that has been globally labeled as 'Territories of Life' (formerly, ICCAs or Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas) is spread in various forms and names across the continent.<sup>38</sup> Community Conserved Areas and Community Forest Resources in India, Community Forests in Nepal, Ancestral Domain areas in the Philippines (referred to again below), Community Hunting or Wildlife Reserves in Pakistan, Indigenous territories and CCAs in Taiwan, Satoyama landscapes in Japan (to which we will return later), and many others are part of this approach. In Iran, several nomadic pastoral peoples have tried to reclaim rights to their large migratory paths; in Indonesia, after many decades of struggle coordinated by Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN, the National Indigenous People's Organisation), its Constitutional Court recognized the customary rights of Indigenous peoples to several million hectares of forest (though implementation has been weak); in China, under severe constraints of state oversight, several communities maintain forest reserves under their management.

The degree of autonomy and control of the community over such areas and livelihood resources varies considerably across Asia. Some are sustained on people power, challenging the authority of the state in determining crucial aspects of political, economic and socio-cultural life, while others have some state sanction or backing such as with the Forest Rights Act in India and the Ancestral Domain law in the Philippines. Some cut across current political boundaries within nation-states, others even challenge nation-state boundaries, at least conceptually, to align better with a bioregional or biocultural approach (see below section 7.2).

#### 4.3.4 Producer Collectives

The alienation of workers and producers from the fruits of their labor, from the market, and even from their own conditions of reproduction, are a hallmark of capitalist economies. Alternatives to these involve workers regaining control and custodianship over the means of production, determining the conditions of the market and of trade including making them

focused on exchange based on equity, caring and sharing, and getting back control over the conditions of reproduction (especially for women). Apart from collective custodianship over livelihood resources mentioned above, many worker movements have also created producer collectives (cooperatives, companies, unions) that are able to negotiate better terms, enter into more equitable relationships with customers, and ensure more equitable distribution of revenues among themselves. In Japan, several worker cooperatives across primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy are federated under the Japan Co-operative Alliance; not all the constituents may have radical principles of worker ownership and internal democracy, but the inclination towards worker-led economy is clear in many.<sup>39</sup> In southern India there are several such initiatives, such as the Sangham Cooperative run by Deccan Development Society's Dalit women farmers (mentioned above) and Dharani Producer Company initiated by the Timbaktu Collective.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.3.5 Territorial self-determination, autonomy and radical democracy

Linked to many of the above approaches, but taking a more holistic view of custodianship over entire territories in all aspects of life, IPs and LCs have in some parts of Asia struggled for self-determination and autonomy over their full territories. They argue that democracy is not only (or even most importantly) about going to elections to choose the government (at various levels, from local to national). Rather, or beyond this, it is about peoples and communities themselves being decision-makers, especially for all processes impacting their lives and territories. While explicitly political in nature, this approach has obvious bearings on economic approaches mentioned above, especially to secure the most crucial elements of sustainable livelihoods.

Perhaps the most radical example of this is the Kurdish Rojava movement in Syria, contained within a larger struggle for autonomy for the Kurdish people in the confluence region of Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Using worldviews like 'democratic confederalism' and 'jineoloji', evolved by revolutionaries like Abdullah Ocalan and taken further by women's groups, this movement has evolved a structure of radical local democracy in communes, confederating at larger scales over the entire Rojava area.<sup>41</sup>

Some of these struggles have legal or policy sanction, such as with the Ancestral Domain legislation in the Philippines, under which several IPs have claimed full custodianship of their traditional territories. However, there are limits to their autonomy; for instance, the government still retains the right to grant mining concessions in these territories; the local peoples therefore have to go beyond the letter of the law and assert autonomy, or at least the right to Prior Informed Consent regarding activities proposed by the state that could impinge on their rights, livelihoods, and environment. Several peoples and communities who have been active in the ICCA movement (mentioned above) have also been part of these struggles, and have been helped by civil society groups like PAFID.<sup>42</sup>

IPs in Taiwan, such as the Tao people mentioned above have also come together in a national alliance to collectively assert their rights to self-determination. In central India, the movement for Adivasi self-rule has been going on for several decades, and many villages like Mendha-Lekha and constituents of the Korchi Maha Gramsabha (Federation of Village Assemblies) have declared that ‘we are the government in our village’ or equivalent approaches.<sup>43</sup> This combines with the movement to gain custodianship and collective rights to their forests, using the Forest Rights Act, mentioned above. Mahatma Gandhi’s notion of swaraj as ‘responsible self-rule’ in which personal and community autonomy is asserted by with self-restraints that ensure other people’s well-being is not undermined, is at times used to back up such movements.

It is important to note that autonomy is by itself not a panacea, leading to movement in all spheres in the Flower of Transformation. Internal dynamics of autonomous communities can be exploitative and hierarchical, e.g. in gender, class and caste terms, and this needs to be dealt with through struggles for justice and equity. Additionally, autonomy does not mean isolation; there is a need to link with larger landscapes of relationships and inter-dependence, which many initiatives do (or intend to do) through networks and landscape level institutions, including the bioregional approach described in section 7.2 below.

### 4.3.6 Participatory urban planning, budgeting, and sustainability

While not as fundamentally challenging of the current centralized systems of political and economic decision-making as many of the above approaches, there are movements by urban civil society and neighborhoods for a greater say in how the city is planned and budgeted for:

- In Kathmandu, the Digo Bikas Institute and Cycle City Network Nepal have been advocating public transport, cycling and walking along with car-free zones<sup>44</sup>.
- Ecotopia 2121 includes an evolving vision of Phnom Penh in Cambodia as an ecofriendly city<sup>45</sup>.
- In India, participatory budgeting and planning are growing (with ups and downs) movements in several cities and towns, with Kerala state taking a lead.<sup>46</sup>

### 4.3.7 Alternative indicators of well-being

The fact that GDP or rates of economic growth are not necessarily an indicator of well-being, and in fact are very problematic in obscuring ecological damage and socio-economic inequalities, is increasingly acknowledged.<sup>47</sup> Yet nearly all countries of the world still stick by it in assessing their levels of ‘development’. A prominent exception for nearly two decades is Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index, which involves the use of over 30 indicators to assess whether development or welfare measures are indeed leading to increased well-being.<sup>48</sup> While observers have pointed to several flaws, it is nevertheless a bold attempt at trying a very different approach to development, and has inspired rethinking and some tentative attempts at going beyond GDP in several other countries (mostly in Europe). At a smaller scale, people’s initiatives in parts of India (e.g. Sikkim<sup>49</sup>) are also trying to promote indices of well-being that take into account multiple facets of life, including security and sovereignty over basic needs, socio-cultural relations, ecological harmony and interdependence, levels of satisfaction and happiness, and so on.

# 5 Latin America

## 5.1 The Latin America Context

**L**atin America with the Amazon basin and the Andes is a continent of great geographical, biological and cultural richness and home to the highest number of indigenous peoples (about 8,3% of the continent's population) who have been defending their economic, social and cultural habits against the predominant Western concept. At the same time, Latin America has been strongly impacted by colonization: since the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese on the continent, Latin America's resources have been systematically exploited. While the countries have long become politically independent, mechanisms of economic and cultural imperialism, globalization and political hegemony have led to the establishment of a neo-colonialist system that perpetuates the old power relations and economic dependencies. The introduction of the concept of "developed" and "under-developed" countries in the 1950s served to introduce new mechanisms of economic domination. The Washington Consensus 1989 aggravated the situation. The exploitation of natural resources (minerals, oil, gas, wood, fish, meat, soy and other agricultural products) was praised as the path to development. This narrative has been accepted by Latin American left-wing and right-wing governments alike and has led to a one-dimensional economic orientation on the exploitation of raw materials conceding far-reaching rights to transnational corporations, violating the rights of indigenous and rural communities, destroying their traditional economic structures and reducing the space for practicing alternative economic models and ways of life. The exploitation of natural resources has also led to the systematic destruction of ecosystems of which the Amazon forest is only the most prominent example. The benefits of this economic model are short-term and scarce compared to the long-term social, ecological, political and even economic costs. It has led to enormous social and economic disparities which are a constant source for discontent and social unrest.

With the "blessings" of years of development efforts and globalization falling short since the beginning of the millennium, resistance has intensified. The (indigenous) peoples and traditional communi-

ties are less and less willing to pay the price of the imperialist paradigm imposed by the North. Social conflicts spread all over the continent as people demand the right to cultural and economic self-determination.<sup>50</sup> A rising number of civil society movements and actors on the continent demand emancipation from the imperialist concepts of the Global North and a focus on Latin America's own needs, values, ideas and experiences. It is about achieving real autonomy, the right to self-determination and about being allowed to maintain and live alternatives to the predominant capitalist model.<sup>51</sup> Alternative concepts such as Buen Vivir or the Rights of Nature that originate in Latin America got inspired by the cosmovision of (indigenous) communities, by their way of perceiving the world and the way they see the interrelations between human beings and nature.

## 5.2 Underlying Concepts and Philosophies

### 5.2.1 Alternatives to Development

Latin American civil society movements speak of "alternatives", "alternatives to development" or "transitions" rather than using the term "socio-ecological transformation". "Alternatives to development" implies the need to overcome the Western concept of "development" and to strive for real autonomy, self-determination, decolonization and depatriarchalization, for a fair global trade system and for climate justice. It also demands the respect for and revalorization of concepts and approaches that have their origins in the cultures and peoples of the Latin American continent that have been rejected as "unmodern" or "uncivilized" by the hegemonic development concept. Alternatives are plural. Many of the alternatives have managed to coexist with the hegemonic system. Others have been developed as a reaction to it and as a way to enact alternative economic approaches. Alternative

economic approaches are also described with the umbrella term “Alter-Economías”. They are united by the fact that they do not conform to the economist, mercantile, inequitable and nature-predatory principles of the capitalist system. They apply different values and principles, the most fundamental ones are (1) the respectful, solidary relationship with other human beings and nature as a whole (2) the re-distribution of power and wealth, breaking the established power structures and culture. The Alter-Economías are not limited to the economic sphere but include the political, social, cultural and spiritual sphere. Examples of Alter-Economías are the Solidarity Economy, the Community Economy, the Ecological Economy, the Coevolutionary Economics, the Bio-Economy, the Economy of the Commons, the Feminist Economy and others. Many of the alternatives are living manifestations of Buen Vivir, putting into practice agroecological approaches, striving for food sovereignty, celebrating and protecting the rich bio-cultural heritage. Alternatives are real-life, small or medium scale counter models to the prevailing economic mainstream. They come from thousands of grassroots experiences of rural, urban and indigenous communities. Picking examples always includes a high element of subjectivity while all the other interesting experiences are spared out. Nevertheless, in the context of this study, examples are regarded to be useful to illustrate the concepts that are being presented. This does not mean that the examples chosen are “better” than other experiences that could not be taken up in the study.

## 5.2.2 Resistance as a Transformative Power

Today, the main conflicts in Latin America are over land and resources. Indigenous groups, rural communities and social movements protest against different forms of domination, social exclusion, ecological destruction and the commodification of human beings and nature. All over Latin America, there are hundreds of social conflicts demanding respect of their rights and ways of living, greater autonomy and sovereignty and the right to self-determination.<sup>52</sup> Resistance could be understood as the rejection of and the opposition to the prevailing capitalist, neo-colonial, patriarchal system. However, resistance goes beyond opposing: Resistance is the fight to protect and preserve the territories and livelihoods of those who have been practicing non-capitalist forms of economy for cen-

turies, to learn from them and to multiply them. The search for alternatives to the prevailing system does not start from scratch but starts with the protection of the existing alternatives that are at risk.

Resistance movements in Latin America are key drivers for promoting the debate on socio-ecological transformation. They are united by the goal of protecting territories that have not yet been taken over by the capitalist logic. Their vision is not a single, homogeneous new model but a pluralistic spectrum of forms of Buen Vivir (see chapter below). In this sense, resistance needs to be seen as a powerful contribution to transformation.

There are numerous examples of successful resistance all over Latin America: In Bolivia social movements managed to stop the privatization of water and gas. In Ecuador, the indigenous people of the Sarayaku have managed to prevent oil drilling on their land. In Bolivia, the indigenous people of the Takanas have stopped gas exploration on their land.

In Colombia, a wide civil society movement has formed in defense of the Páramo de Santurbán, a fragile inter-tropical mountain ecosystem located in the Andes threatened by a Canadian gold mining project. The Defense of the Páramo de Santurbán became an emblematic case. The movement spread into the neighboring countries and formed the international movement in defense of the Páramos of the Andes with thousands of activists and numerous other cases of resistance following the example.<sup>53</sup>

The Amazon Sacred Headwaters Initiative brings together Indigenous nations and civil society groups in promoting a 30-million hectares bioregion that cuts across the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border. The initiative resists the expansion of extractive industries and promotes localized economies based on hybrid knowledges and economies. The territory is governed in accordance with traditional indigenous principles of cooperation and harmony that foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. The initiative strives to create a new ecologic-economic model that safeguards the heart of the Earth’s biosphere and enhances human well-being.<sup>54</sup>

The “Right to Say NO” campaign is a famous example for the internationalization of resistance: it claims the right of communities to say “NO” to mining projects and determine themselves what should take place on their land. The campaign has been endorsed by more than 50 organizations<sup>55</sup> who have signed the final declaration of the Thematic Social Forum on Mining in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2018: “The claim to the right to say NO to extractive activities in

our territories, is at the same time a clear YES to other alternative ways of living in harmony with the rest of the web of life. YES to the right to decide how to live our own lives. YES to the recognition that nature cannot be conceived as a collection of so-called resources to be exploited at will in the search of (maximising) profit. YES to valuing the work of subsistence and care over economic growth and profit. YES to production for use and not exchange. YES to valuing of indigenous identity, knowledge and perspectives. YES to a new sustainable economic order, sensitive to social and environmental justice”.<sup>56</sup>

All these examples show that resistance is not limited to opposing to something but also involves the need to define what is at stake, what people want to preserve and what alternatives they want to push forward. Resistance often leads to the rediscovery and revalorization of the people’s own social, political, cultural and economic practices and knowledge and thus inspires and strengthens local economic alternatives. It gives a strong impulse to the debate on alternatives, the purpose of the economy and to the search for alternatives that are socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable and lead to a better life for all.<sup>57</sup> Very often, it is the women who stand in the forefront of the resistance movements. Their protagonism in the resistance movements changes their role in society and has made strong contributions to the Latin American ecofeminisms (see chapter on Ecofeminism below).

## 5.3 Approaches and examples

### 5.3.1 Buen Vivir

A well-known alternative concept from Latin America is *Buen Vivir*. The term is a Spanish adaptation of the Quechua *Sumak Kawsay* which can be translated with ‘living well’. The concept is broad and plural and includes concepts of different indigenous groups such as *Suma Qamaña* (Aymara), *Ñande Reko* or *Tekó Porã* (Guarani). It is a philosophy of life rather than a closed concept and covers all spheres of life (political, cultural, social, ecological, economic, spiritual). Since the beginning of the century, the concept has seen a great interest and a wide range of social movements have supported it, especially

in the Andean countries. From there, it expanded all over Latin America.

The philosophies that have inspired *Buen Vivir* share the vision of a sustainable, dignified life for all. Living in harmony with individuals, within communities and with nature is a central postulate of *Buen Vivir*. It also includes harmony between the material and the spiritual world, between knowledge and wisdom, between different cultures and identities and realities.<sup>58</sup> *Buen Vivir* rejects the concept of “development” because of its obsession with economic growth, consumerism and the commodification of nature. It expresses a deep change in knowledge, affectivity, and spirituality, an ontological opening to other forms of understanding the relation between humans and non-humans which do not imply the modern separation between society and nature. *Buen Vivir* is oriented towards community-oriented action and implies the appreciation of intangible goods. Solidarity, collaboration, cooperation and the principle of reciprocity are fundamental pillars of *Buen Vivir*. The concept is not static but is undergoing a constant construction and reproduction process. Although the concept took its origin in the indigenous communities in the Andean region, *Buen Vivir* is a central element of the philosophy of many traditional and indigenous societies and similar concepts can be found on other continents (see “Ubuntu and Sankofa” in chapter 3).

*Buen Vivir* and the role of the Economy:

To build the *Buen Vivir*, a different economy is needed - an economy that returns to nature and satisfies the needs of society, not capital.<sup>59</sup> One of the most important postulates of *Buen Vivir* is to stop over-exploitation of nature’s resources as this is part of an imperial thinking and a colonial practice that needs to be overcome (see the chapter on “post-extractivism” below). Consumerism has to be stopped and reasonable patterns of production and consumption need to be developed. The concept of *Buen Vivir* sympathizes with the idea of degrowth: especially the global North needs to degrow while poor and exploited countries must have the right to grow in a responsible way. Degrowth in the global North needs to go hand in hand with post-extractivism in the global South. The economy must be subordinated to ecology. Nature needs to be a subject that holds rights and can claim these rights in court. Diversity must be a guiding principle for the economy in order to make it more resilient. The economy needs to be deglobalized and re-regionalized. New forms of production, trade, consumption, coopera-

tion and accumulation need to be developed, as well as different forms of distribution of income and wealth. Sufficiency (not efficiency) is at the core of this economy.

Strategies for a transition to *Buen Vivir* must be plural and bottom-up. There is not one way or one model, but a pluralistic set of strategies that all serve the same ultimate goal: to create a non-capitalist economic system that is based on collaboration, solidarity, sustainability and harmony.

In order to be socially sustainable, this economic system needs to have a solid, democratic foundation. The biggest challenge for the transformation towards *Buen Vivir* is to overcome behavioral patterns that are deeply rooted in modern societies and have been imposed on and adopted by vast parts of the societies in the countries of the global South.

*Buen Vivir* has been inspired by many traditional economic practices. Here some examples:

- Indigenous communities in the Andes practice the tradition of the *minka* or *minga* – a practice of mutual support and collective work which is a practical expression of the principle of reciprocity. For example, in Ecuador, the members of the community of Pacto practice the *minga* every first Saturday in a month for the common good of the community.
- *ranti-ranti* or *makimañachina* are also based on the principle of reciprocity. It consists in the idea to give / help in one moment and to receive / get help in another moment.
- *uyanza* is a donation of part of the harvest to those who were providing their free labor.
- *uniguilla* is the practice of exchanging agricultural products and foods from different ecological niches exclusively between kin and neighbors
- *Trueque* is a non-monetary practice of exchanging goods and services that is quite widespread in rural regions of the Andean countries. Is is an ancestral cultural manifestation based on the guiding principles of solidarity economy, which promotes complementarity, reciprocity, redistribution, dialogue of knowledge, autonomy, promoting interculturality, and revitalizing culture. The practice consists of exchanging products, knowledge and/or services for others that are needed.<sup>60</sup> The practice of Trueque got very popular during the economic crisis in Argentina which took on extreme proportions in 2002 and relegated around half of Argentines population to a life of poverty. In this context, thousands, and later millions, began to seek refuge in the numerous “clubes de trueque”

that took their origins in Buenos Aires and spread throughout the country. The members who are producers and consumers at the same time are referred to as “prosumers”. Everyone must offer products or services in order to receive credit points, with which they can purchase services from other prosumers. After the end of the crisis, the system declined.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, different forms of trueque still persist in the Andean countries.<sup>62</sup>

*Buen Vivir* integrates traditional practices that are still applied to date. At the same time, it can also find its expression in new, innovative experiences striving for food sovereignty, agroecology, solidary economy etc.

### 5.3.2 Biocultural Heritage Territory

The Parque de la Papa (“Potato Park”) in Písaq, Peru is a biocultural heritage territory. The Quechua communities who collectively own the 9,000 hectares park, protect and celebrate old agricultural traditions and innovations. They maintain a relationship of respect and harmony with the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth), based on traditional principles of reciprocity, equilibrium and duality. The great cultural and biological diversity found in the Park is a living manifestation of *Buen Vivir*. The area houses more than 1,400 different varieties of native and domesticated potatoes. The conservation, creation and celebration of this rich biogenetic diversity and their habitats creates multiple options for local subsistence such as agro-ecotourism projects; traditional and novo-andean gastronomy; the production of natural medicines, cosmetics and functional food. There is also a local registry of biocultural resources which has the objective of protecting and promoting the collective biocultural heritage.<sup>63</sup>

### 5.3.3 Solidarity Economy

The Solidarity Economy (SE) or Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) is a comprehensive concept that took its origins in Latin America in the 1990s and has turned into a global movement of people, organisations, networks, economic initiatives, projects and a very diverse range of local and regional activities all of them united by the vision to build a better, more solidary world and to promote a system change. The

SE has very different forms and expressions depending on the respective context, e.g.: community land trusts; housing cooperatives; worker and production cooperatives; barter systems and non-monetary exchange; credit unions; micro-finance systems and many others. Many agroecology and food sovereignty initiatives are expressions of SE. No matter where it is, or what it looks like, the actors who promote SE actively pursue a set of important core values which mark a fundamental difference to the mainstream economy: (1) Consensual decision-making (2) Cooperation and solidarity (3) Active opposition to all forms of oppression (4) Embeddedness in a local and social context and (5) The strive for a profound system change.

Examples: In Ecuador, the network of the *Seed Guardians* conserves and exchanges more than 4,000 varieties of native and endemic seeds. Each family in the network manages several projects for farm income and to promote the ecological and social regeneration of the communities and territories they inhabit. The projects include producing organic crops and seeds, working on community schools, giving technical assistance, trading, promoting ecotourism, conservation and reforestation, among others.<sup>64</sup>

In Ecuador and Colombia, *forest schools* have been established in the region of Chocó. Sustainable productive practices that follow the principles of agroecology, permaculture and analogue forestry are being implemented. The experience is being accompanied by experiential education through the dissemination of knowledge and practices of sustainable forest use.<sup>65</sup> These experiences are preserving ancestral knowledge and biodiversity and strengthen the territorial identity of the people involved. At the same time, they pursue the values of the Solidarity Economy.

Many interesting examples for experiences of Solidarity Economy experiences can be found in the *Almanaque del Futuro*<sup>66</sup> and the *Alternativas al Desarrollo*<sup>67</sup>.

### 5.3.4 Post-Extractivism<sup>68</sup>

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Latin America experienced a new wave of extractivism due to the rising demand for raw materials on the global markets. The neo-extractivist policies filled the state coffers, some of which flowed into social programs e.g. in Brasil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, but did not lead to sustainable development and a redistribution of wealth.

At the same time, the high social and ecological costs of the neo-extractivist policies became more and more visible. With the financial crisis of 2008, the dependency on the extraction of raw materials turned out to be fatal and led to severe economic crisis in many Latin American countries. As a consequence, anti-extractivist movements grew stronger and started to promote the debate on a post-extractivist paradigm.

Post-extractivism is not only about rejecting the exploitation of raw materials in countries of Latin America but needs to be understood as a fundamental criticism to the prevailing development model with strong implications for the economies of the Global North. There is no equivalent concept in the Global North that fully translates the connotations of the concept of post-extractivism. The concept questions the belief in “progress” as a seemingly inevitable result of a linear process and thus shares some characteristics with the concept of degrowth. At the same time, post-extractivism strongly questions the concept of nature as a provider of resources, the authoritarian and vertical political dominance models, and the asymmetric integration into the global market. The post-extractivist perspective criticizes the hegemonic and destructive mechanisms of a post-colonial, patriarchal and hierarchizing capitalist system and aims at a widespread societal change and environmental justice.

The Latin American debate distinguishes between three forms of extractivism which can also be seen as stages on the path to a post-extractivist economy: “predatory” extractivism, which is the currently dominant form; “sensible” extractivism, which would be carried out according to high ecological and social standards; and “indispensable” extractivism, i.e. that which is necessary for social development. What constitutes “indispensable extractivism” needs to be negotiated by all members of society. The path through these 3 stages leads to an economic model in which the exploitation of natural resources is reduced to an absolute minimum. Parallel to the reduction of extractivism, a much more plural economy needs to be installed, including far-reaching measures such as agrarian reforms, adapted technologies, a restructuring of the existing system of taxes and subsidies, a fundamental restructuring of the generally authoritarian systems and concepts of education, a deeper level of cooperation between Latin American countries and, especially in the Andean countries, the development of plurinational states. The post-extractivist concept frequently refers to “Buen Vivir” as a positive vision

for the post-extractivist society. Post-extractivism is a *glocal* undertaking, i.e. it goes from the local, through the national and regional, to the global, and back again.

While there are no examples of post-extractivist societies in Latin America, various countries in Latin America have taken important measures on the post-extractivist path in the last few years, such as El Salvador's ban of metals mining in 2017<sup>69</sup> or Honduras' recent announcement to stop the exploitation of minerals<sup>70</sup> or the discussions on the role of mining in Chile's ongoing constitutional process.

On the regional and local levels, hundreds of communities in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras and other Latin American countries have declared themselves “no-go zones for mining”, more than a hundred municipalities have organized referendums to express their rejection of extractivism and to claim their right for self-determination.

One of the most prominent examples for an innovative post-extractivist approach is the Yasuní initiative in which the Ecuadorian state invited the international community to participate in a moratorium on oil extraction in the the Yasuní jungle by paying half of the market value of the oil as a financial contribution to a trust fund that should help to protect the area. The idea of the moratorium was unprecedented and attracted huge attention, not only in the country but at the international level. The initiative made quite some progress but in the end was cancelled by the Ecuadorian government. Nevertheless, the vibrant YASunidos movement is alive and critically observing extractivist projects in the country, raising awareness on the effects of extractivism and using different strategies in order to stop these projects. All these examples show that the fight against extractivism as the fuel of capitalism is not an issue of a small group in the periphery but has become a mass movement in Latin America that already has considerable effects for the mainstream economy.

### 5.3.5 Ecofeminisms<sup>71</sup>

Ecofeminism is a critical theory, a philosophy and a concept to transform the world. It combines Ecology and Feminism, and seeks to explain and transform the current system of domination and violence, focusing its attention on the critique of patriarchy and the overexploitation of nature as part of the same phenomenon. Ecofeminism considers that people

are both, interdependent (depending on other human beings) and eco-dependent (depending on Nature) and thus questions the way human social relations are shaped today as well as the relation of human beings with nature.

Ecofeminism proposes a critical analysis of patriarchy and of the capitalist economy that structures the world as pairs of opposites and gives them a hierarchical value “man-nature” “good-bad” “rational-wild”. These categories serve to give men power and dominion over nature and over women, which is functional to capitalism. Ecofeminism is a theoretical and political proposal under construction that is nourished by a diversity of movements, which is why it is more appropriate to speak of “ecofeminisms”, that is to say, of a diversity of movements, positions and currents that are in dialogue and debate.

Ecofeminisms contribute to think of an ecological and socially sustainable society, through values such as reciprocity, cooperation and complementarity. The concepts developed by ecofeminists share many of the approaches of “Buen Vivir” and add an important element to it: the construction of a different way of life will not be possible if patriarchal capitalism is not overthrown and the contributions of women are not taken into account in the implementation of the principles of justice, dignity and freedom for all, for nature and for those who depend on it.

Female Latin American activists have contributed to ecofeminism with the concept of “body-territory” which allows them to articulate two important dimensions: 1) The defense of the territory constitutes a significant part of the anti-capitalist struggle because defending the territory means defending cultures and alternative lifestyles of the communities that inhabit it. 2) The feminist struggle to defend the autonomy of their body against the violence imposed by a extractivist, patriarchal and capitalist system. Extractivism brings significant changes for women's lives: water is contaminated and family members or animals grow sick as a consequence of water contamination. Conflicts within the family grow stronger. Families are displaced due to extractivist projects. All these physical, psychological and emotional consequences of extractivism have a strong influence on women's bodies and lives.<sup>72</sup> Ecofeminism questions patriarchy, capitalism, anthropocentrism and colonialism: “Patriarchy does to our bodies what extractivist and capitalist economies do to our territories.”<sup>73</sup> Ecofeminism is an important contribution to the debate of socio-ecological transformation because it demands an absolutely different view of social, political and

economic organization: one that points out the unsustainability of the current system, one that instead of accepting the neoliberal dogma, recognizes the work of care, harmony with nature and solidarity as the most real and beneficial basis of society; that is, the societies of care for life and a life that “deserves to be lived”.

Apart from being a theoretical proposal, eco-feminism is also a practice of anti-systemic resistance in the global South: In Latin America, women play an important role in the strive for social justice and ecological sustainability. Women are protagonists of resistance and very often stand in the forefront in the marches to defend the territory and denounce environmental violence. Outstanding activists are Berta Cáceres, the Honduran leader and Goldman Prize winner who was assassinated for defending indigenous land or Máxima Acuña, a Peruvian leader who defends the lagoons of the Andes of Peru against a gold mining company facing harassment and threats for her activism.<sup>74</sup> Latin American networks of women who propose a radical activism to defend the land have multiplied in the last two decades, for example: the Network of Women Defenders of Environmental and Social Rights<sup>75</sup>, the National Network of Women defending the Mother Earth in Bolivia<sup>76</sup>, the Network of the Solidary and Feminist Economy<sup>77</sup> or the Conference “Women against extractivism” held in Quito in 2015, where women affected by the extractivism drew the attention to the damage caused by extractive companies to nature, territories and women’s bodies.

### 5.3.6 Rights of Nature<sup>78</sup>

Rights of Nature is a short-hand term for a form of ecological governance that provides for Nature’s right to flourish. The approach is often associated with the ontologies and customary laws of indigenous peoples who perceive natural entities such as rivers or mountains as living beings. The approach discards the anthropocentric conception of nature as property, worthy of protection only for the services it provides to humans. Instead, it suggests a biocentric perspective according to which all forms of life have the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate their vital cycles and humans have the legal authority and responsibility to enforce these rights on behalf of nature.<sup>79</sup>

The term “Rights of Nature” gives the impression that the primary focus is defending Nature’s rights in

courts of law. However, the Rights of Nature paradigm subordinates the economy to ecology since nature can exist without economy but the economy cannot exist without nature. It aims for a fundamental shift in governance in which ecosystems and natural communities are not merely property but entities that have an independent and inalienable right to exist and flourish. Providing Nature with legal personhood changes the framework to a form of ecological governance.<sup>80</sup> The Rights of Nature do not promote an untouchable nature but demand to respect the cycles of nature where all processes tend towards a dynamic equilibrium. The heart of the Rights of Nature is to pursue a biocentric balance, centered on the whole and not only on human beings.

Ecuador was the first country in the world to place Rights of Nature in its new Constitution adopted in 2008. Article 7 says: “Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes.” The Constitution requires the government to prevent or restrict activities leading to species’ extinction, ecosystem destruction, and permanent alteration of natural cycles. This new Constitutional provision is slowly changing the face of Ecuadoran law. The very first lawsuit using the Rights of Nature provision was decided in Ecuador in 2011. It concerned a new road built along the Vilcabamba River and the dumping of construction rubble into the river. The Court ruled in favour of the river and required the government to take immediate corrective actions. In 2021, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador used the “Rights of Nature” provision to safeguard Los Cedros – a protected forest ecosystem with a huge biological diversity – from mining concessions. The Constitutional Court ruled that no activity that threatens the Rights of Nature can be developed within the ecosystem of Los Cedros, including mining and any other extractive activity. The case is of great significance because the Court must now develop a binding jurisprudence in which the Rights of Nature, the right to a healthy environment, the right to water, and environmental consultation must be respected. This helps to further develop jurisprudence on the Rights of Nature.<sup>81</sup>

In 2016, Colombia’s Constitutional Court in a landmark ruling recognized the Atrato River as a legal subject. Against the background of the devastating environmental and social impacts caused by illegal mining in the Atrato region and the failure of the State to address them, the court ruled in favor of the

claimant communities and not only protected the claimant's rights to life, health, water, food, territory, culture and a healthy environment but also pushed the boundaries of constitutional law by recognizing, for the first time, a non-human natural entity – the Atrato River - as a subject of rights. While the Río Atrato court decision has attracted considerable attention on a national and international level, the implementation of the ruling is disappointing and has brought only few concrete improvements in the river's environmental condition. The case shows that while rights of nature decisions can create an important impetus for change, actually improving environmental protection requires more than awarding legal rights to a natural entity in a courtroom.<sup>82</sup>

Despite of the practical challenges in the application and implementation of this new concept, the Rights of Nature movement is growing worldwide. In Colombia, several court decisions have taken up the ecocentric approach, granting legal personality to rivers and other ecosystems and even the entire Colombian Amazon.<sup>83</sup> Other countries follow the example: the Constitutional Convention of Chile has recently approved article 9 of the new constitution of Chile which states that “Persons and peoples are interdependent with nature and form with it an inseparable whole. Nature has rights. The State and society have the duty to protect and respect them”.<sup>84</sup> Rights of Nature laws are present in more than three dozen local laws in the USA. In New Zealand, several ecosystems have legal rights. The European Citizen's Initiative on the Rights of Nature is working to introduce a Directive to recognize and enforce the Rights of Nature. Rights of Nature policies have been adopted by the Scottish Greens Party and the Green Party of England and Wales.<sup>85</sup> The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, a network of people from all walks of life in over 100 countries on 6 continents, states: “Breaking out of the human-centered limitations of our current legal systems by recognizing, respecting and enforcing Rights of Nature is one of the most transformative and highly leveraged actions that humanity can take to create a sustainable future for all.”<sup>86</sup>

### 5.3.7 The Economy of Francisco and Clara<sup>87</sup>

The “Economy of Francis” (EoF) was launched by Pope Francis in May 2019 with the intention “to initiate a global process of change involving young people and qualified experts in order to build a more just, fraternal,

inclusive and sustainable economy.” The initiative substantiates Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Sí*<sup>88</sup> which covered a wide range of social and ecological issues and included a harsh criticism of the current economic model that culminated in the statement “This economy kills”. In continuation of the ideas presented in the Encyclical, Pope Francis launched the global EoF movement to promote “an economy with a human face, one that is attentive to the weakest members of society and is not focused exclusively on the gain of material wealth, one that helps people live and does not kill, that includes and does not exclude, that humanizes rather than dehumanizes, that takes care of creation and does not plunder it”.<sup>89</sup>

In Brazil, the process has been taken up with great enthusiasm by church actors and networks and has been further developed<sup>90</sup>. The Brazilian Articulation included Santa Clara de Assisi in their name in order to stress the need for a new economy to integrate the female perspective with care and affection as important attributes.

The Brazilian Network elaborated 10 principles of the Economy of Francisco and Clara<sup>91</sup>:

- Integral Ecology: Recognizes human, social, environmental, political and economic relationships; everything that exists and lives must be respected
- Integral Development<sup>92</sup> is a fundamental principle of the necessary structural changes; development needs to take care of creation; the impoverished need to have participation in the processes of building social and economic policies; sovereignty of the peoples and the struggle in the territories; need for a solidary, fraternal, ecological and democratic economy.
- Anti-capitalism and Buen Vivir: Buen Vivir makes us walk towards the new economy built under the paradigm of equality, sustainability and citizenship.
- Developing policies for the Common Good
- Everything is interconnected: The environmental, social, economic, distributive, political spheres cannot be separated from each other.
- Living peripheries: the path of rebuilding new economies starts with the peripheries (social movements, communities, indigenous peoples, networks etc.) Their emancipatory struggles are key experiences for building the new economy.
- An economy at the service of life: the new economy needs to place life in its diversity and dignity at the centre of everything; inclusion of all the members of society; building a more egalitarian society, with the rights of all respected.

- Territory and practice: Territoriality, understood as the space of concrete experience in daily life, has a crucial role in the construction of new economic practices; protagonism of local actors as part of a macro-territorial change; decolonisation and historical reparation, guarantee the sacred and territorial rights of the original peoples and quilombolas;
- Comprehensive education: public, free, inclusive, innovative, liberating, environmental and artistic education that responds to the needs of society and that motivates critical thinking.
- Social movements: a sustainable, democratic and fraternal economy that breaks with social inequalities; emancipation; social justice; recognition of diversities; economic solidarity; agroecology.

Up to now, the initiative is an intellectual exercise that needs to be further developed. However, it shows the paradigm shift that is taking place in the Catholic Church and that has an influence on church structures and actors all over the world.

# 6 Europe and North America

## 6.1 The European and North American context

**T**he present situation of Europe and North America was shaped by an early introduction of capitalism and industrialization. Vast amounts of material wealth have been accumulated through colonialism and the exploitation of labor and the environment in all parts of the world. In contrast to the other continents described above, alternative indigenous concepts of the economy have been much further destroyed. Instead, a neoliberal capitalistic growth paradigm remains largely unchallenged since the decline of the Soviet Empire.

At the same time, fights against inequality (e.g. by labor unions) and environmental destruction (e.g. early conservation efforts) have a long history. The former resulted in a white wealthy middle class whose wealth is nevertheless being eroded by neoliberal policies in the last decades. This spurs new forms of protest and the build-up of alternatives, often borrowing from strategies and concepts stemming from the past and/or practices elsewhere.

The environmental movement can be distinguished from movements on other continents by the fact that it was and is not always a reaction to being directly impacted by environmental destruction (e.g. protest against nuclear power and lignite mining) but also fuelled by a general motivation to conserve nature for its own sake (and thus seeing it as something apart from human life), its beauty, recreational aspects or its importance to sustain the life of future generations or those in other regions of the world.

In the last years, many movements began to see the interconnectedness of fights against material inequality and environmental issues. This systemic view on the crises is becoming more and more sophisticated by the realization that the economic system – combined with societal belief systems such as patriarchy and white supremacy – is also resulting in discrimination based on gender, race\*, class and ability.

## 6.2 Underlying Concepts and Philosophies

### 6.2.1 Ecosocialism<sup>93</sup>

With the end of the Soviet Union and the re-existing socialism, the end of history and the victory of capitalism was celebrated – obviously a very narrow interpretation of the situation. Since then, struggles for a social, democratic and ecological society and economy mostly lack a common overarching frame.

In recent years, big narratives have made it back on stage, with “ecosocialism” as a modern, ecological, democratic version of socialism being on the rise. While ecosocialism borrows from many practical concepts, it is foremost a theoretical framework, a narrative and political project that aims at envisioning a different society as a whole.

Many struggles and initiatives on the ground, e.g. for the right to housing, democratic energy production, wealth redistribution, reduction of working time, socio-ecological tax reforms and land reforms refer to ecosocialism as a bigger frame.

The main concepts of ecosocialism are to

- overcome capitalism,
- withdraw basic services from markets towards (decentral) democratic planning,
- socialization of social infrastructure,
- strong democratic control of remaining markets,
- massively redistribute wealth,
- democratize the production process through self-organization of the work forces,
- integrate feminist, ecological and democratic struggles and elements into the concept of socialism, thus modernizing the concept.

Practical examples of socialism being put forward i.e. by

- US-American Democrats Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders & Co. (Green New Deal),
- the New Socialists in the UK,
- the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation in Germany,
- the municipalism-movement in Croatia,
- the Vändpunkt Party – a radicalized splinter party of the Greens in Sweden.

## 6.2.2 Degrowth

Degrowth is a major branch of critical debate in many parts of the Global North.<sup>94</sup> While ecosocialism stems from the critique of a privatization of means of production, degrowth has its roots in a general critique of the capitalist system's need for an ever-increasing production and consumption of goods and services. The concept connects to and integrates a variety of other approaches in the Global North as well as in the Global South, for example Post-Development and Post-Extractivism<sup>95</sup>. It is a dynamic concept which involves academia, practice and activism, e.g. through conferences, camps and summer schools in different countries.

In the 1970s, the critique of growth received a name, but the critique and the thoughts about alternatives to growth had already been around for a long time. The first economists to talk about economic growth, for example, never thought of growth as a never-ending process, but regarded it as necessary only for a period of time.

What we today call the degrowth movement started about 30 years after the first appearance of “*décroissance*” in Lyon in 1972. In 2002, the magazine “*Silence*” published a special issue on the topic of degrowth. Since then, several international degrowth conferences took place (Paris 2008, Barcelona 2010, Venice/Montreal 2012, Leipzig 2014, Budapest 2016, Malmö / Mexico 2018, Manchester / the Hague 2021), hosting up to over 4,000 participants from over 70 countries.

The main pillars of the concept are:

- a reduction of consumption and production, especially in the Global North, to an environmentally sound level
- the search for an economy beyond growth, oriented around human needs and ecological stability
- the belief that the economy should serve the needs of society and be reduced to that role

For many currents — especially those working on a local, practical basis — degrowth has a horizon-broadening effect, helping ideas and perspectives related to their own practices become more visible. In these cases, degrowth presents a more comprehensive perspective of, and helps to provide a framework for, their own activities (e.g. free software movement, open workshops, ecovillages movement, animal rights movement, environmental movement). For others, degrowth provides a theoretical basis for debate (e.g. right to the city), makes it possible to reach new target groups (e.g. anti-coal movement),

or helps to repoliticize critical consumption (e.g. youth environmental movement). For those groups and actors with a greater social emphasis, degrowth opens up a horizon of ecological questions (e.g. 15M, commons movement, demonetization, right to the city). In contrast, it provides the more ecologically oriented movements with an economic-political and social framework (e.g. animal rights movement, environmental movement, urban gardening). Movements that are both social and ecological thus have an a priori connection to degrowth (e.g. food sovereignty, common good economy, solidarity economy). For their part, movements from or with connections to the Global South (Buen Vivir, refugee movement, radical ecological democracy) see degrowth as a valuable partner in the Global North in their quest for alternative development and transformation perspectives.

As a theoretical framework, degrowth refers to and includes i.e. eco-villages, repair cafés, urban gardening, community-supported agriculture — in some places, these initiatives consider themselves as part of degrowth, in others as commons, solidarity economy, transition town or others.

## 6.3 Approaches and examples

### 6.3.1 Socialization of basic goods and services

Concepts and practical examples of commonly owned and governed companies, means of production, land as well as infrastructure have always existed and evolved in different ways. Similarly, the discussion about private property, distribution of wealth and means of (re-) production has been around as long as there has been private property.

That said, the push for a socialization of basic goods and services was always strongest when enclosures and expropriation increased, starting with the development of industrial capitalism and the privatization of land on a massive scale in England in the 19th century.

Faced with hypercapitalism and ever-growing costs for basic goods and services, we are now seeing new initiatives striving for the collectivization and/or socialization of these arise in many European countries (and North America).

The beliefs of socialization advocates are:

- In order to satisfy everyone's needs, basic goods and services should be affordable and not profit-driven.
- Various sectors such as housing, water, electricity, mobility, digital access and cultural services should be at low-cost or no-cost.
- The privatization of basic services needs to stop, already privatized services need to be socialized.
- By providing basic goods and services for no or low cost, the dependency on paid labor is much reduced, thus increasing independence, protection against price fluctuation and the time available for political engagement.
- The joint democratic organization and common struggles around socialization can politicize and give practical impression of real alternatives – even if the aims are not achieved, a different system becomes alive.

Practical examples of recent socialization actors are

- Deutsche Wohnen & Co Enteignen (Berlin)<sup>96</sup>
- Mietshäusersyndikat (spreads around Europe)<sup>97</sup>
- Water in the hand of the municipality
- Citizen-owned energy production<sup>98</sup>

While the above-mentioned ecosocialism may seem as the natural end point of socialization struggles and advocates often refer to other successful socialization initiatives in their struggle, not all of them subscribe to the concept as a whole.

### 6.3.2 Community-based Agriculture<sup>99</sup>

A long series of food scandals, the use of GMOs, chemical fertilizer and pesticides and the horrendous treatment of animals have eroded the trust in industrial agriculture in many places of the Global North. At the same time, many small- and medium-sized farms find it more and more difficult to survive economically while agro-companies and politicians set the stage for ever-bigger farms.

In this situation, community-based agriculture, originating from Japan in the 1970s, became an attractive practical alternative for both farmers and consumers. From there it spread to Switzerland, the US, Germany and many other countries and saw steady growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In the past decade though, the number of community-supported agriculture projects (CSAs) has increased rapidly with 1000s of farms e.g. in the US and Germany.

While CSA-projects differ in many aspects, the general concept is this:

- A community of consumers bears the costs of agricultural production of a farm as a whole for a predefined period of time. In this way, the individual product loses its price and consumers and producers share the risk of production.
- The financial budget of CSA is calculated to cover costs, profit maximization is excluded. The produced food is shared between the consumers. The costs can also be financed in solidarity within the consumer community, for example in bidding rounds.

In addition, most projects have the following aims:

- A long-term relationship between producers and consumers
- Appreciation and recognition
- Direct relations and involvement of consumers
- Transparency about annual budget and farming methods
- Sustainable agricultural practices
- Social security and good working conditions
- Tolerance and openness to the world

On a global level, CSA has many different names:

- AMAP (Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne) - France
- Teikei - Japan
- GASAP (Groupe d'Achat Solidaire de l'Agriculture Paysanne) - Belgium
- GAS (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale) - Italy
- ASC (Agriculture soutenue par la communauté) - Quebec
- Reciproco - Portugal
- Andelslandbruk – Norway
- Solidarische Landwirtschaft/Solawi, Solidarhof, gemeinsame Landwirtschaft (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)

As the name suggests, the wider approach that CSA refers to is that of the solidarity economy. Additionally, it is a practical example of food sovereignty in the Global North.

### 6.3.3 Trade Unions

With the industrialization in the 18th century, a concentration of workers in factories and cities took place. These workers – in contrast to farmers and independent craftsmen – were completely dependent on their employers who thereupon increased the exploitation

of their workforce. It is in this context, then, that modern trade unions emerged as a practical solution to the increasing political powerlessness of the workforce. In the beginning of the 19th century, the first trade unions were formed as a method of workers to build up countervailing power.

Trade unions were thus formed in the beginning of the 19th century as an organization of workers who use their collective bargaining power to advance specific goals, such as reducing working hours, increasing wages, improving safety standards and more. Their unique power comes from the possibility to strike, this means to lay down their work and bring the production of their company to a halt.

The degree of radicality of unions differs widely between countries, regions, sectors and eras. While workers and unions were seen as the primary actor of a revolutionary overthrow by Marx, nowadays unions often make the concerns of their companies their own, thus fighting against regulations by the government and accepting the hollowing out of workers rights in order to stay competitive in a globalized world.

On the other hand, some (parts of) unions are convinced that the workers in different countries and continents have to unify in order to assert their demands in a globalized economic system.

In addition, unions have been progressive actors, for example in the context of

- the anti-nuclear movement,
- global inequality,
- nature conservation,
- new feminism,
- the environmentally oriented critique of technology,
- alternative and self-management economy,
- various emancipation movements of social, ethnic and sexual minorities.

With regard to a socio-ecological transformation, the “Just Transition” concept originated by the North American labor movement is of special importance, since it serves as a rebuttal to the notion that environmental protection and social goals are at odds.<sup>100</sup>

### 6.3.4 Economy for the common good<sup>101</sup>

In contrast to many of the approaches presented in this study, the “economy of the common good” is only about twelve years old and started with the book by Christian Felber with the same title.

Starting point of the approach is the analysis that companies are evaluated by the profit they produce instead of their contribution to the common good. In order to change this, Felber developed a matrix for companies (later expanded to include municipalities, organizations, etc.) to evaluate their common good score. Companies are then to compete with each other on the basis of this score instead of company profit. Thus, in contrast to many other approaches, the economy for the common good does not want to abolish competition outright but change the goal of it. The matrix includes the values human dignity, solidarity and social justice, environmental sustainability and transparency and co-determination. Each of these values should be adhered to when dealing with suppliers, owners, equity and financial service providers, employees, customers, other companies and the social environment. Thus, on an economic level, the economy for the common good aims at being a viable, concretely implementable alternative for companies of various sizes and legal forms.

Additionally and on a political level, advocates of the approach strive for comprehensive regulatory changes to enable a good life for all living beings and the planet, supported by a common good-oriented economic system. Examples for policies that are promoted are a minimum wage, a maximum wage, a limitation of the right of inheritance and abolition of the ownership of land.<sup>102</sup>

While still being most widespread in Germany, by now the approach has been adopted in 35 countries with over 4000 members. 171 local chapters, 835 businesses and 44 municipalities having undergone an evaluation using the common good matrix.

### 6.3.5 Unconditional Basic Income (UBI)<sup>103</sup>

The idea of a basic income was established by Thomas Spence in 1796. During the 20th century, the circle of suggestions for basic incomes or partial basic incomes widened enormously in Europe and the USA. Nowadays it is being proposed in many different forms by various actors such as libertarians, socialists, communists, feminists, critics of the growth system, critics of globalization, trade unionists, self-employed or unemployed persons, business people and representatives of solidarity-economic co-operations, academics as well as party members. Accordingly, many different forms of a UBI are put forward with some merely trying to reduce the costs of social services while others incorporate comprehensive concepts of social and global justice.

The critique towards a UBI also comes from very different directions. Mainstream economists usually question its affordability and the lack of performance equity while critique from the left centers around the notion that it does not distinguish between peoples' needs and can easily digress into a tool to cut social spending. On a global scale, advocates of a basic income are organized as part of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN, founded in 1986), and on a European level, they are part of the Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE, founded in 2014).

While justifications for an UBI differ, most include the conviction that every person has a right to an unconditionally ensured material existence and social participation with a basic income being the monetary form of this security. The four criteria that identify the unconditionality of the basic income are as follows.

The basic income should:

- Be guaranteed to all people as a legal individual right,
- ensure the existence of all people and enable their social participation,
- not be subject to means testing, and
- not be tied to any obligations to work or provide other services in return.

While the approach comes from theory, it has been tested in several places all over the world, e.g. USA, Canada, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Iran, Kenya, Namibia, India, China and Japan<sup>104</sup>. A meta-study in 2020 came to the conclusion that “Findings are generally positive that UBI-type programs alleviate poverty and improve health and education outcomes and that the effects on labor market participation are minimal”.<sup>105</sup>

# 7 Conclusions

**T**he preceding chapters show that in all the continents that are covered in this study, different actors are on the way to develop alternatives to the prevailing (economic) system. Some do this in theory – many others in practice. There is a lot of activity in the field of socio-ecological transformation and the approaches and numerous experiences are very pluralistic. Although they show quite a number of commonalities, they also have differences. The authors of this study are convinced that this pluralism is necessary since contexts vary from continent to continent, from country to country, from region to region, from community to community. Pluralism is a strength. The process of a socio-ecological transformation of the economy must respect diversity and embrace it. At the same time, there need to be more efforts to synergize and to connect. In this perspective, Misereor's platform project can make an interesting offer to the actors involved in transformation processes.

## 7.1 Commonalities and Differences

As presented above, the concepts, approaches and examples working towards socio-ecological transformation, including that of the economy, are very diverse and pluralistic. They are also at different stages of achieving transformation in the political, economic, social, cultural, and/or ecological spheres.

There are however, **significant commonalities** that we can find in all or most of the concepts, approaches and examples presented in this study:

- Alternatives are pluralistic. Accepting and encouraging this diversity is key – whatever is being developed as an alternative to the prevailing systems needs to be context-specific.
- Alternatives are intersectional. This means that despite of the fact that this study looks especially at concepts and approaches that target the transformation of the economy, almost all approaches and examples also involve other spheres (political, social, cultural, spiritual). This characteristic of being intersectional may be explicitly a part of the initiative / approach, or happen as an unintended consequence.
- Many alternatives, especially in the Global South, are born from experiences of resistance and are forms of sustaining traditional non-capitalist, non-statist community-based livelihoods and forms of living, at times with modifications for current contexts and to deal with injustices that may have existed in traditional systems also (such as gender inequities).
- Alternatives try to break with the dependencies and the mental structures that have been imposed by colonization and globalization, such as debilitating dependence on the state and market, or individualisation of economic and socio-cultural life and privatisation of the commons.
- When looking specifically at the economic sphere, we note that many of the alternatives are pointing to non-capitalist, non-statist, post-growth forms of production, trade, consumption, and other economic processes and relations, building on or complementing forms of resistance against the dominant systems. The role and purpose of the economy is questioned, especially the primacy of the economy over all other spheres. The economy cannot be an end itself but must serve the common good and human well-being. It must also be subordinated to ecology since the natural boundaries of our planet are incompatible with the idea of infinite growth.
- Alternatives stress the need for values and practices that are fundamentally different from those followed by the dominant system, e.g. cooperation, solidarity, equality and equity instead of competition, the commons instead of privatisation, inclusion instead of exclusion, togetherness instead of individualism, conserving life and nature instead of exploitation of nature, diversity instead of homogeneity.
- Alternatives recognize the necessity to redefine the relationships between humans amongst themselves and with the rest of Nature including all other forms of life. Humans need to recognise their interconnectedness and interdependency.
- Sufficiency is a guiding principle. The alternatives propose to produce and consume what is really needed for a good living. This requires joint reflection and participative debates on the question what is really needed. Following this, different well-being

approaches including post-growth are developed and connected to the practice.

- Autonomy, self-reliance and sovereignty are key goals in order to be less independent from global structures and trends.
- Alternatives develop different forms of governance, where direct participation in decision-making are strengthened.
- On a micro level, alternatives often have more chances to develop in decentralized spaces where the capitalist or statist logic is not yet present, or where community spirit and ways of living are still intact or being revived.
- Resistance movements often have a vague idea of alternatives until they start practicing and experimenting.
- Alternative initiatives often use, explicitly or implicitly, indicators of progress and well-being that are very different from GDP or purely material indicators used in conventional ‘development’ approaches. Many people living in localised spaces where some of the alternatives described are put into practice often display a joy of life that contrasts with the adversities and struggles for survival they often face. This also has to do with the fact that these spaces value collective development opportunities that favour goals other than material prosperity at the expense of the environment and social relations. Therein lies a great potential and learning field for the search for alternatives in the global North, where patterns of consumption, the kind of production they condition and the quasi-religious function they assume are a central dimension of the current crises.

The **strongest differences** we found are:

- Some of the alternatives have been existing before and along with structures and relations of domination and marginalization, others have been developed as an answer to situations of crisis caused by the capitalist or statist extractivist system.
- Some alternatives focus more explicitly on the economy while others refer to the economic sphere as one important sphere among others.
- Not all alternatives combine theory and practice in the same way. Many of the alternatives especially in the Global South are developed as practical solutions to real threats, not as theoretical approaches, though they also always encompass worldviews and cosmologies. As such, they do not follow some (economic) design that has been laid out beforehand but solve problems iteratively, with worldviews and practice in dialectics with each

other. Some (but by no means all) of them have been theoretically examined and investigated. At the same time, we can find rather theoretical approaches – some of these are tested in practice, others not. In general, approaches in the Global North tend to be less practical, and in the Global South less theoretical. This may be due to the fact that basic human needs are mostly satisfied in the Global North, so that initiatives can allow themselves to leave practice aside.

- On the same note, approaches from the countries of the Global South often come as a reaction to existential threats while approaches from countries of the Global North can circle around issues that have no directly felt impacts on the livelihoods of the people. An example of this would be ecological movements to conserve nature/animals in other parts of the world.<sup>106</sup>
- The alternatives have different initial triggers and focus areas. Some start from basic needs, others from a desire for more autonomy or reviving identity, others as a reaction to external threats, yet others from internal struggles for equality (gender, caste, class, race, etc), and so on.
- Alternatives in the Global North seem to be focusing more on the material and social transformations, while those in the Global South include a lot more of spiritual and cultural transformations as part of material/social and tend towards greater holism.
- In the Global South, approaches tend to combine or arise from reactions to deprivation and marginalisation. In the Global North also they are often reactions to illness and crises, but these arise from the excesses of affluence and consumption.

## 7.2 Intersectionality and the Interfaces of the Flower’s Petals

While this report is especially focused on approaches and concepts that look at the economy as one important sphere, we would like to stress once more that a meaningful transformation must go far beyond the economy. While capitalism and statism indeed perpetuate a system of domination and discrimination, the Flower of Transformation with its different petals

points out that all spheres are crucial for bringing about change, and are in some way or other related to an economic transformation. Moreover, lived experience in transformative initiatives is not necessarily contained within each of the petals, but more often is in taking place in the intersecting spaces between or among them. In other words, radical transformation is intersectional. Looking at them with an intersectional lens, the alternatives described in this study offer experiences of resilience and empowerment arising from the diversity of human resources and traditions.

Discrimination and marginalization cuts across all spheres, e.g.

- environmentally poor working and living conditions are most pronounced for those who are marginalized in race, gender, caste or class terms
- inadequate access to nutritious food can further build on other discriminations against women.

And so, the responses to these, in many of the above initiatives, are also intersectional or cutting across the five spheres. This may be explicitly a part of the initiative / approach, or happen as an unintended consequence.

As stated above, most or perhaps all the concepts and philosophies and practices that have been mentioned above, from various continents, are intersectional and multifaceted and cannot be separated from governance, society, culture, or ecological spheres.

For example:

- In **Africa**, Ubuntu, Sankofa and other related world-views emphasize circularity and non-binary relationality, not only in socio-cultural spheres but also economic. Ecofeminism is explicitly intersectional, with women's groups coming together to undertake creative resistances and imagine radical new futures, assert their crucial role in food security and sovereignty, and their community's knowledge systems as a crucial base for this. For African feminist ecological activism poverty reduction must go hand in hand with environmental protection and challenge both the patriarchal and neo-colonial structures undermining the continent. The intersection of gender, economic, ecological justice and decoloniality is very key in order to overcome the solutions proposed by the global centres of power, which only take into consideration their own aspirations while those who sit at the intersections of these structural inequalities continue to be marginalised.
- In **Asia**, swaraj, kyosei, shohoj and others encompass holistic visions and practices of political and

economic autonomy, well-being of humans and the rest of nature, equity in social relations, and cultural diversity. Some radical reinterpretations of mainstream religions combine the material, spiritual and cultural aspects of transformation towards justice.

- In **Latin America**, concepts under the umbrella of Buen Vivir are very broad and cover all the aspects of the Flower of Transformation – including spiritual and cultural aspects. The Post-Extractivist paradigm is not limited to the economic sphere either but is associated with the need of a profound political and ecological transformation. Eco-Feminism has strong impacts on the economy, but includes profound changes in social relations, attitudes and culture. The Solidarity Economy with all its different expressions is a holistic approach that includes the political sphere, values and habits, social relations as well as the cultural sphere. The Economy of Francis and Clare re-interprets Christianity in a radical way to insist on 10 principles including anti-capitalist integral development within ecological limits, an economy at the service of life, and social movements for equality and justice.
- In **Europe and North America**, degrowth may have begun as a counter trend focused on the economy, but has quickly brought into its fold the political, cultural and social transformations necessary for a rapid and just transition to societies with significantly less material and energy throughput. This and other concepts such as eco-socialism do include democratization, social justice and ecology. In their practice, the distribution of power and roles within the groups and organizations, meaning the inner democracy and the intersectionality of different forms of discrimination, has always been part of the portrayed political projects. In recent years, the fight for non-discriminatory spaces and behavior, especially concerning an anti-racist and queer-feminist approach, has gained strong momentum outside and within the approaches described above.

Such intersectionality, cutting across the five spheres of the Flower of Transformation, is also seen in grounded practice. For instance:

### In Africa:

- The widespread food sovereignty movement, as represented by the constituent groups of the African Food Sovereignty Alliance and NSS-We are the Solution, combines the revival or continuation of

agroecological methods for localized food and livelihood security, with control over and conservation of land and seeds, an assertion of the importance of women's knowledge and management of farming.

- Movements like the One Million Climate Jobs in South Africa, are demanding just transitions out of the climate crisis in ways that will benefit the most marginalized sections of society (tackling structural inequality and providing livelihood security) while achieving climate mitigation and adaptation. The Climate Justice Charter which was published in August 2020 by the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre, defines seven dimensions for a just and deep transition: Social Justice, Eco-centric living, climate justice, participatory democracy, socialised ownership, decoloniality, intergenerational justice and international solidarity. The charter has been informed by grassroots input from water stressed communities, the media, labour, faith-based communities, youth, climate scientists, academics, women's organisations, environmental and social justice organisations, as well as, think pieces by leading activists. It calls for a more radical transformation and tackles the connection between sustainability, livelihood, production chains, and global political economy.<sup>107</sup>
- In Kenya, the Society for Alternative Learning and Transformation (SALT), has revived traditions of community health that were vital in coping with the COVID pandemic, linked to the return of agroecological practices, community mechanisms of mutual aid and solidarity, traditional governance system, and their biocultural knowledge.

### In Asia:

- In the Korchi Maha Gramsabha in central India, mentioned above, political self-determination, control over crucial livelihood resources, conservation of forests, celebration and use of cultural and spiritual traditions, assertion by women of their equal right to decision-making, and an attempt to help local youth retain some roots in their own indigenous culture while learning from outside, are intricately intertwined.
- The Tao people of Pongso no Tao build their food and livelihood sovereignty on continuing cultural and spiritual relationship with the sea and land, including a unique calendar that combines daily activity with the changing seasons.

- The Dalit women farmers of Deccan Development have challenged gender and caste discrimination while moving towards food sovereignty and sustaining a respectful, spiritual relationship with the earth and with seeds.
- In Rojava, the Kurdish women have democratized politics and economy with a firm rooting in the feminist worldview of jineoloji.

### In Latin America:

- The Quechua Indigenous people of Parque de la Papa integrate livelihood security with the conservation of their biocultural landscape, political self-determination, celebration of their cultural identity and traditions, and a feminist orientation.
- Movements for indigenous self-determination have combined the reclaiming of collective territorial rights, responsible custodianship of (and within) nature, community knowledge and traditions of health, agriculture, forestry, water governance, and more.
- The Amazon Sacred Headwaters Initiative brings together Indigenous nations and civil society groups in promoting a 30-million-hectare bioregion (that cuts across the Peru-Ecuador political border) which is off-limits to extractivist activities, and enables localized economies based on hybrid knowledges and economies (combining traditional and modern, the latter including community-led ecotourism).

### In Europe and North America:

- Community-supported agriculture focuses both on security of livelihoods as also the health of people and the land, though it is limited to certain projects.
- The Transition movement in many towns such as Totnes, UK (where the movement began) encompasses a combination of re-commoning of spaces, assertion of people's decision-making power in urban neighborhoods, and the rebuilding of community level institutions and relationships.
- The cooperative movement (e.g. Cooperation Jackson, USA) often combines radical economic democracy with struggles against racism and gender discrimination.

One of the most interesting, though very under-developed, movement of intersectionality is bioregionalism (or biocultural regionalism). In many parts of the world, political boundaries intersect and interrupt

the flows of nature (e.g. a national boundary cutting a river basin), or cultural connections (e.g. fences and armies blocking traditional routes of nomadic pastoralists). This is especially (but not only) the case with colonized areas of the world, such as South Asia and many parts of Africa and Latin America. This kind of interruption or blockage has many negative ecological, economic and socio-cultural consequences. The bioregionalism movement attempts to interrogate such political boundaries, and imagine, as also plan and implement policies and practices that can re-establish flows and connectivity across these boundaries. In West Africa the free movement of people implemented by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since 1975 was largely demanded by peoples who could no longer implement their way of life based on the rhythms of nature and the seasons within the confines of the colonial nation-state demarcations. In Latin America, the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Initiative (mentioned above) is an example of transboundary governance and management centered on indigenous nations rather than on the nation-states of Peru and Ecuador. In Asia, very preliminary initiatives in this direction include the Hindu Kush trans-Himalayan conservation program run by ICIMOD, a similar initiative for the Mekong basin in South-east Asia, and a recently established South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group. The ancient practice of Satoyama in Japan, encompassing an integrated governance and management of land-to-sea scapes, has also been recognized by UNESCO and others, and sustained or revived in some areas.<sup>108</sup>

## 7.3 Outlook

While this report presents a collection of concepts, approaches and examples as well as a rough comparison of these showing some commonalities and some major differences, it does not present an in-depth analysis. Such an exercise of deeper analysis might produce further insights and facilitate a deeper understanding of the different types of approaches and their potential for transformation. However, we would like to stress that any simple kind of categorization of concepts and approaches is fraught with dangers of simplistic analysis and conflating a complex reality into straitjacketed boxes. Therefore, we opted for describing different concepts, approaches and examples and to show how they relate to or provide

alternatives to various aspects of the currently dominant system. The collection is far from being complete and it is also strongly influenced by the world views and experiences of the authors, their professional backgrounds and their subjective filters.

The approaches and the examples given have their own limitations. In particular, indigenous peoples and local communities involved in these are swimming against the tide, and this involves compromises of many kinds. In many cases, the attempt to establish some level of livelihood security, or autonomy, entails negotiating with the state, or working with the national and global markets. In many, it is not possible to simultaneously deal with challenges from outside as also inequities and injustices within. None are holistic in having achieved all the transformations described in the Flower of Transformation. Seen collectively, though, they do demonstrate the potential of radical and holistic transformation. But they also illustrate the limits of scattered, fragmented and mostly small-scale initiatives when not yet connected up to become a critical enough mass to change the macro-economic or larger political systems they are embedded within. The issue of scale is crucial; but importantly, as against an approach of upscaling that implies single initiatives and institutions becoming bigger and bigger (and tending to lose many crucial values such as democratic functioning), this can be achieved by outscaling, i.e. learning crucial lessons from successful initiatives and applying them in one's own unique context, and then networking these horizontally to reach an impactful mass. Examples of actors conducting this networking can be found in the actor mapping. Misereor's platform project can be a contribution to this process of outscaling.

For this reason, there are several crucial steps necessary to optimize and outscale the potential of these approaches and initiatives: documentation, public outreach, networking, collective visioning, advocacy, and others. There are various attempts of contributing to such an effort at national or regional scales, such as Vikalp Sangam in India, AltDev in South-East Asia, Crianza Mutua in Mexico and Colombia; and some initiatives at global scale, such as the Global Tapestry of Alternatives. These and other networking and meta-networking initiatives need support and strengthening. Misereor's platform project could be a contribution to this process of supporting, strengthening, networking and outscaling the existing initiatives. It is important to integrate existing the efforts in the project and not to build parallel and isolated structures that do not contribute to a convergence of initiatives into a global movement.

# 8 Abbreviations

<b>AMAN</b>	The National Indigenous People's Organisation, Iran
<b>ANSA</b>	Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Southern Africa
<b>CORA</b>	Collective for the Renewal of Africa
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ESAP</b>	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
<b>EoF</b>	Economy of Francis
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GMO</b>	Genetically Modified Organism
<b>ICCA</b>	Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas
<b>ICIMOD</b>	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPs</b>	Indigenous People
<b>LCs</b>	Local Communities
<b>NA</b>	North America
<b>NHAG</b>	Namibia Housing Action Group
<b>NSS</b>	Nous Sommes la Solution
<b>KPRI</b>	Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat, Indonesia
<b>SDFN</b>	Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia
<b>SE</b>	Solidarity Economy
<b>UBI</b>	Unconditional Basic Income
<b>ZCTU</b>	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
<b>WOMIN</b>	Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction

# End Notes

- 1 <https://vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles> ◀
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- 9 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/307679/culture/senegal-felwine-sarr-lafrique-nest-toujours-decolonisee/>; *Habiter le monde. Essai de politique relationelle*, 2017. ◀
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- 16 The 10 ANSA Principles: Development led by the people (not by the World Bank, IMF, WHO or other donors); An alternative production system based on local needs, local resources and savings; Grassroots-led regional integration; selective de-linking from neoliberal globalization; Use of alternative science and technology by integrating existing local knowledge systems; Creation of new international connections based on a new global production and distribution system (new alliances and networks); Systematic redistribution of wealth and opportunities beyond the formal sectors of the economy to the informal economy; Ensuring women's rights as the foundation of a new society; Education as empowerment to use local potentials and strengthen the capacity to serve the community; Creating a radical, dynamic and participatory democracy. ◀
- 17 ANSA, *Towards a people-driven development agenda*, 2007, 15. ◀
- 18 Godfrey Kanyenze, Timothy Kondo... (Ed.), *Beyond the enclave. Towards a pro-poor and inclusive development strategy for Zimbabwe.*, 2011, 118-119 ◀

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<https://www.gaiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Celebrating-African-Rural-Women.pdf> ◀
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<https://www.nawi.africa/activists-say-african-eco-feminist-collective> ◀
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- 28 These and others are described in individual essays by Shrivastava, Motei, Mazhar, Damdul, Narayanan, Yongjia, Ammar, M'barek, and Kumar in Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary. ◀
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<https://countercurrents.org/2022/06/india-millions-of-small-conservation-and-harvesting-efforts-the-key-to-ending-water-scarcity> ◀

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- 38 For case studies of examples given in this section, pl. see [www.iccaconsortium.org](http://www.iccaconsortium.org) and <https://report.territoriesoflife.org> ◀
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- 106 This view, however, ignores a) the fact that conservationists argue that even if wildlife is being impacted somewhere far away, it does have psychological/ethical implications in their lives and concern about 'nature' is now acknowledged as a clinical source of depression and anxiety in the west and b) struggles such as the ones from villages being threatened by lignite mining, communities afraid of nuclear radiation or tenants fighting for affordable housing. What is interesting is that while many of these movements start out conservatively, i.e. trying to preserve the status quo, through their struggle often adopt more radical stances that do not only question the direct threat but also the forces behind it. This change is often catalyzed through a cooperation of local initiatives with left wing groups from elsewhere. A good examples for this is the fight against nuclear power that managed to politicize a whole region in Germany. ◀
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