

The Case for a Culturally Appropriate Empowerment-Based Measurement Tool for Social Businesses

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Bogdan Bors

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Professor Dr. Kelly Brotzman

Abstract:

Anti-poverty social businesses which aim to assist disadvantaged groups by offering them employment opportunities emerged as a better alternative to classical top-down international development programs. While their main goal is to create social value for their employees, they still measure their success through financial indicators. They have to elaborate more suitable measurement tools of their success. Such social businesses should define poverty in the Senian framework of the capabilities approach. Then, they can operationalize their measurement in terms of empowering their employees. In order to create the most appropriate and valuable indicator, social businesses have to investigate the cultural context of their employees through anthropological lenses. Community Empowerment Solutions, an Ecuadorian social business which aims to empower its Quechuan indigenous employees, should firstly determine what capabilities Quechuans value and what empowerment spheres they pursue. *Ayni*, the central element of Quechuan life, refers to the importance of reciprocity, and is fundamental in elaborating specific Quechuan capabilities and empowerment areas. Some of the capabilities Quechuans have reasons to value are thus related to the ability to reciprocate, to participate in their communities and maintain good relationships with them. By increasing such capabilities, they would become empowered to have access to the social capital and the resources of their communities, contribute towards the balance of the universe, create new social connections, help other people and fully participate in the life of their communities. Culturally appropriate empowerment-based measurement tools for social businesses would be a more precise indicator of their success and would better guide their activities.

Introduction

International development has gone through important changes over recent decades. Old practices have been abandoned, and new ones have emerged. Heavily philanthropic and top-down government approaches lost their appeal in front of major failures, such as the incapacity to adapt to various cultural contexts. New development mechanisms have emerged. Today, social entrepreneurship is one of the buzz words of international development work. It is seen as a more sustainable and adaptable source of development, and especially a powerful tool to alleviate poverty. Social businesses promise to do this while directly involving those in need. Operating through the markets, they either aim to bring impoverished or disadvantaged groups to the workforce or to provide services and products for them. The rise of social enterprises has been simultaneous with the emergence of new ways of looking at poverty. Increasingly, poverty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that goes far beyond the lack of financial resources. Amartya Sen's work has been especially influential in this sense. It defines poverty in terms of capabilities people have reasons to value. Despite this new perspective on poverty, most social enterprises in the developing world still measure their impact primarily in economic terms.

This is a critical concern for social enterprises in the developing world, and it needs a comprehensive solution. Simple economic indicators for social enterprises do not comprehensively grasp the extensive effects of their work. For example, measuring the additional income added to a household by a social business employee may be easy to measure, but it does not capture the entire story of how his or her life might have improved. Many anti-poverty social enterprises empower people and communities in ways which are not reflected in indicators such as the median household income generated by their employees. Unlike Western countries, not all cultures are strictly preoccupied with economic development. Renewed

measurement tools for social business would not only better reflect these social businesses' outcomes, but would also serve their self-improvement.

A potentially more appropriate alternative to observing the impact of social businesses in the developing world would be an empowerment-based indicators grounded in a Senian capabilities understanding of poverty. Nonetheless, each individual and community value different capabilities, and consequently have different meanings for the concept of empowerment. Because of this, an appropriate empowerment-based indicator for social businesses should reflect such specific variations grounded in the cultural context where they are operating. Therefore, an anthropological understanding of the culture in the specific place where a social business aims to alleviate poverty can better inform the development of appropriate measurement tools of this kind. This is not an easy endeavor. In order to approach such an alternative to limited economic indicators, developers of new social business indicators based on empowerment need to be able to incorporate local cultural variations in their work. The goal of this capstone is to argue for the importance of creating culturally appropriate empowerment-based indicators for social businesses which work in "underdeveloped" communities. To better illustrate how such indicators would be created, this capstone will specifically look at how Community Empowerment Solutions, an Ecuadorian social business, can use an anthropological understanding of the indigenous culture of the Quechuans it employs in order to develop a culturally appropriate empowerment-based measurement tool.

First, I will look at the limitations of past top-down international development programs. Subsequently, I will explain why social enterprises represent a superior alternative. Then, I will discuss the importance of developing more appropriate assessment tools for the work of social businesses in the developing world. In the fourth part of the paper I will militate for a capabilities

understanding of poverty. Following this, I will examine how empowerment emerges out of the capabilities approach as an operationalization tool of great evaluative value. Following this, I will analyze the most significant aspects of the Quechuan culture which are imperative in developing a culturally appropriate empowerment-based measurement tool for Community Empowerment Solutions. In the last section I will present some of the capabilities and empowerment areas which are significant for Quechuans.

Section I – Moving Away from Top-Down International Development

Predominant top-down approaches in international development have been met with major criticism either for being a new form of colonialism or failing to deliver on their promises. The most critical authors argue that international development programs have become a form of “neo-imperialism” which increased the political and economic dependency of recipients on their donors (Hayer, 1971). In his seminal critique of development presented in *Encountering Development*, Arturo Escobar argued that “the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression” (Escobar, 4). As Escobar and other intellectuals have noted, these attempts remarkably failed: “The idea of development stands like a ruin on the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work” (Sachs, 1). Such authors dispute that international development programs have been an exercise of power detrimental for the “underdeveloped”.

Many development scholars point towards the fact that development programs are unhelpfully top-down, and in many cases have negative effects (Mosley et al., 1987; Madeley,

1991; Crewe & Harrison, 1998; Narayan-Parker, 2000; Easterly, 2007; Riddell, 2008; Moyo, 2010). Authors such as Ferguson (1994) claim that even if the intentions of the donors might not have been necessarily related to increasing their power, their effects were equally damaging. He believes that “whatever interests may be at work, and whatever they may think they are doing, they can only operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures so deeply embedded and so ill-perceived that the outcome may be only a baroque and unrecognizable transformation of the original intention” (Ferguson, 17). Gardner and Lewis observed that most anthropologists today understand that development interventions that are insensitive to the social and cultural complexities of the “underdeveloped” world are set to fail (Gardner, 91).

The UNESCO document prepared by Irina Nechifor observes that about a third of World Bank’s development projects have failed their goals (Nechifor, 2). More precisely, she specifies that the nature of the development aid contradicts the culture of the recipient country and unbalances it in most cases:

Since a cultural system is determined by the internal balances among the forces making up the group if a hegemonic outside system intervenes, the balance of the old system breaks down, to the advantage of the dominant values of the dominant system. Thenceforward, new alienating and alienated cultural signs, detached from the hegemonic system, are introduced into the old culture. As these signs and productions are no longer produced by the group concerned, they are outside their control, and thus produce a typical alienated culture situation (Nechifor, 23).

Exogenous development practices can create great social and cultural dysfunctions that can contribute to deeply destructive consequences. Applying culturally inappropriate strategies in countries that lacked a fitting cultural background happened at a great social and cultural costs. The imposition of external economic and political models which are inherently incompatible with the local context often lead to the surge to power of a minority wealthy elite that served their own private interests in the detriment of their society’s, the destruction of established

communities, a schism of identification mechanisms, a loss of cultural identity, and an irreparable damage of collective bearings (Nechifor, 35).

Mansfeld (1999) looks at the example of three historically egalitarian indigenous communities which profited considerably from the commercial interactions with the increasingly invasive outside world. The Muria from India, the Osage from North America, and the Kayapo from Brazil went through major changes after these new synergies. Mansfeld observes that all these communities had considerable difficulties in adjusting to the new influx of market wealth. Since these communities slowly lost touch with their egalitarian cultures, economic and social inequalities increased, and eventually created major conflicts in previously harmonic groups. Based on such unfortunate experiences from the past, it becomes clear that international development programs which promise to alleviate poverty in foreign cultural contexts must fully understand the culture in which they are working in order to reach the best results.

Section II – Social Businesses

Social enterprises have recently emerged as a more sustainable and adaptable alternative to previous large-scale development tools. Because social enterprises are a relatively new phenomenon, a clear or unified definition of social entrepreneurship has not appeared yet (Christie and Honig, 2006; Mair and Marin., 2006 Weerawardena and Mort, 2006). In broad terms social enterprises have generally been seen as a more appropriate development tool that focuses on social missions with a business-minded approach (Austin et al., 2006; Marin and Osberg, 2007; Van de Ven, Sapienza, and Villanueva, 2007; Certo and Miller, 2008). Dees (1998) notices that social enterprises have the potential to perform better where governmental and philanthropic approaches were inefficient, ineffective or unresponsive. Social enterprises are

representative for the shift towards helping the poor to help themselves. Anti-poverty social businesses in the developing world promise to move away from top-down practices, and to focus on poverty issues while involving the poor. This enables social businesses to make the poor actors of their own transformation, and at the same time it allows social businesses to better adapt to the specific cultural context in which they operate.

Like any other business, a social business has employees, creates goods and services, and sells them on the market. The fact that social businesses utilize business tools to solve social problems has been considered the major contribution of this new phenomena. Kurt Hoffmann, the former director of the Shell Foundation, considers that

when a business is faced with a problem it can't look up to the heavens and pray for a solution. It rolls up its sleeves and solves the problem. Because if a company doesn't solve the problem, it goes out of business. This problem-solving capacity is why I think the private sector can provide tremendous social value in tackling poverty (Hoffmann, cited in Rangan, 3).

Thus, instead of resolving social problems through controversial international development programs, social businesses become a very convenient and sustainable solution. Because a social business is “self-sustaining, self-propelling, self-perpetuating, and self-expanding” (Yunus, 25) project, it aims for full cost recovery and social impact at the same time. This considerably lowers the dependency on foreign donors. As we have observed, the apparent good intentions of large international development projects might mask the self-interests of the donors. Since social businesses are coordinated by entrepreneurial individuals which do not depend and do not have to subject to governmental funds, this lowers the risk that they become an exercise of power.

Social business can help poor in two different ways: on one side, they can employ disadvantaged people and offer them a fair chance to make a living. On the other hand they can create affordable and quality services especially designed for their needs. Two types of social

enterprises emerge: the first one deals with social objectives, while the second one is a profit-maximizing business if it is owned by poor or disadvantaged people (Yunus, 28). A social business of the first type could serve social objectives by employing disadvantaged groups, by designing affordable products aimed at disadvantaged groups, or by simply donating all the profit to a social cause, such as an NGO. The second type of social enterprises are also encouraged to get involved with such objectives, but they are not obliged to do so. Thus, from Muhammad's perspective, the concept of social entrepreneurship is essential because "it brings out the power of yearning in people to do something about problems that are not currently being addressed with the efficiency and urgency they deserve" (Yunus, 32). Instead of making the poor reliant on foreign coordinated international development programs, social businesses allow the poor to get directly involved in their own development process. By directly involving the poor in the process of increasing their well-being, social businesses can learn more about their cultural context and thus can more easily adapt to it.

Community Empowerment Solutions (CES) from Ecuador is a social business of the first type: it employs impoverished Quechuan indigenous individuals and it sells affordable products which are highly necessary in rural Ecuadorian communities, such as water filters and reading glasses. CES pioneered and is operated on what is called the MicroConsignment Model: the Quechuans employees sell the CES products and they receive a commission for each item. Since CES is an autonomous and sustainable enterprise, it does not have to abide the interest of any donor. Moreover, since CES is directly collaborating with the Quechuans, it can learn how to integrate their culture in order to increase its impact. The main focus of CES is to empower its employees, and consequently it is striving to develop a new empowerment measurement tool to assess its impact on its Quechuan employees.

Section III - Why Do We Need an Alternative Indicator for the Impact of a Social Business?

Traditional businesses generally measure their success in financial terms, giving close attention to profits or returns on investments. The allure of this simplistic indicator of business accomplishment has influenced the success indicators used by social businesses. Numerous studies that look at social enterprises analyze how they measure their impact. An article by Short, Moss and Lumpkin (2009) identified and analyzed numerous studies which focused on this aspect. They discovered that there is great variance in the measurement of social enterprises' impact. From the 72 empirical articles from their sample, they found that the greatest majority of social enterprises used quantitative methods, most of which were focused on financial measures, such as profit, income generated for the employees etc. However, while financial indicators might serve well traditional businesses in keeping track of their goals, they are not as useful for social businesses. As noticed before, the main difference between traditional business and social businesses is revealed in their goals. Traditional businesses indeed aim for profit maximization. Meanwhile, social businesses pursue the accomplishment of social goals. Even though financial success is important for social businesses in that they offer important information on the sustainability of the enterprise, overall they are only a secondary objective. The success of social enterprises is only incidentally reflected in conventional financial indicators; the real success of a social business should be measured in terms of the social value they create.

Some might argue that social businesses which strive to employ disadvantaged groups, such as CES, could still use financial indicators to measure their success. They would claim that the income the employees generate is a good indicator of how well the social business is performing. However, while in Western cultures people tend to equalize well-being with

economic prosperity, this does not necessarily apply to many of the “underdeveloped” contexts in which social enterprises operate. It is important to acknowledge that there is nothing intrinsically superior to the Western preoccupation with economic wealth. It only reflects the Western social construction that values things in economic terms. Huang observes that the numbers which Western business use to measure their success “mask the sociopolitical maneuvers undertaken to define the categories and units of measure, and they reveal the bottom-line concerns of the measurers” (Huang, 156). In other words, Western businesses rely on financial indicators because they value economic well-being.

Meanwhile, other cultures do not place the same value on economic wealth. For example, anthropological research has shown that income resources do not have any intrinsic value for Quechuans (Steel and Zoomers, 382). Far from revealing what is important for the communities where social businesses are working, financial indicators divulge the Western preoccupation with economic wellbeing measured through income. Consequently, solely financial indicators might be a misleading compass for the purposes of social businesses which try to assist individuals from foreign cultural contexts. Short et al. observe that since social enterprises are operating in a wide variety of cultural contexts, “cultural and ethnic nuances of social entrepreneurship seem to be an especially fertile area for future research” (Short et al., 179). However, they observe that even though their sample of articles covered social enterprises from 34 different countries, most of them were focused on generalizations of social entrepreneurship independent of culture. This suggests a great need for academic work on social enterprises that focuses on their cultural context. If social businesses are serious in their attempt to serve the real needs of their employees, they must first understand what they might value in lieu of economic well-being.

A first reason for developing more culturally appropriate indicators of success for social businesses which employ disadvantaged groups emerges from these observations: what is not counted does not count. If social businesses simply estimate their success based on the income their employees earn, then they will be blind to others benefits the employees derive from their job. At the moment CES simply measures its impact on its employees in terms of the extra income they generate. However, while its Quechuan employees indeed bring extra income in their households, they might consider that the extended network they have access to because of their job is far more important for their wellbeing. This might be the case because now they have multiple sources from where they can borrow money in case of an emergency. According to a specialist in international development aid, “What evaluation centres on is not the dynamics of local development, with its own logic, but measurement of the immediately visible impact of the aid being provided” (Irina, 32). Social business indicators which look solely at the income generated by their employees tend to especially study effects planned for, which is the income the employees generate. Much more valuable lessons would be learned secondary effects. If a social business does not determine their success on a broader spectrum that surpasses the economic advantage for their employees, it will tend to ignore other potentially essential ways in which it alters their lives.

A second reason for which social businesses should build more culturally appropriate indicators follows: the indicators of a business directly govern its goals. If a business measures its success in financial terms, then it will aim to perform better on financial indicators. A reassessment of the business’ indicators of success can change its goals. For example, if CES acknowledges that its employees indeed derive more benefits from the larger network they have now access to, it can focus more on fostering and improving such connections. Developing

appropriate culturally appropriate indicators for social business success will allow a more comprehensive mechanism of understanding the realities of their impact and a powerful means to reshape their goals according to the needs of their beneficiaries. Social businesses must appropriately measure their impact to understand how they can better serve its employees. Social businesses must accurately evaluate to evolve!

Short and his colleagues suggest that the field of social entrepreneurship will not advance unless it develops appropriate empirical assessments of the determinants and effects of social businesses (Short et al., 168). Other authors also point out that poor construct measurement tools for social enterprises reflects that the field is still in an embryonic state (Low and MacMillan, 1998; Boyd et al., 2005). Eisenhardt (1989) argues that qualitative studies are of great value in the early stages of a new field of enquiry, such as the one of social enterprises. Thus, a focus on qualitative approached in measuring the impact of social enterprises should receive more attention. Consequently, based on all the arguments presented before, social businesses should develop culturally appropriate qualitative indicators of their success. What would be a culturally appropriate tool to measure the impact a social enterprise has on its employees?

Section IV - The Capabilities Approach

In the late 1970s the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen introduced a promising alternative for the dominant approach in international development: the new human-centered alternative was called the capabilities approach. This approach focuses on “the ability—the substantive freedom—of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have” (Sen, 293). The economic growth perspective in international development

dominated the field since the 1950's (Lichtenberg, 20) and viewed poverty in terms of income poverty. The capabilities approach recognizes the value of markets, economic growth, and income, but it asserts that for many people around the world lowness of income does not explain their deprivation.

Amartya Sen's understanding of poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities is a more appropriate paradigm to understand the many deprivations associated with poverty. Sen asserts that

“what the capability perspective does in poverty analysis is to enhance the understanding of nature and causes of poverty and deprivation by shifting primary attention away from means (and one particular means that is usually given exclusive attention, viz., income) to ends that people have reason to pursue, and, correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends.” (Sen, 90).

He understands that the relationship between income and capability is influenced by factors such as age, gender, social roles, location. For example, older people might need additional income to spend on healthcare compared to the youth. While Sen acknowledges that income is instrumental, he believes that it does not have any intrinsic value.

The two essential concepts in his human-centered perspective of development are capabilities and functionings. Functioning represent the different doings and beings a person values. Functionings can range from elementary forms, such as being well-nourished or being adequately housed, to more complex ones, such as appearing in public without shame. The term capability refers to the “the substantive freedom to achieve alternate functioning combinations” (Sen, 75). For example, a person has the capability of being well nourished if the person has access to sufficient varieties of nutritious foods. In this case, capability deprivations can refer to not being able to afford, procure, prepare or consume the food. Such capability deprivations might be influenced by not having sufficient money to pay for the food, not having adequate

physical proximity to a market, lacking the means to prepare the food, or being unable to consume it because of an unhealthy digestive system or lack of treatment.

Individuals' capability sets refer to the real opportunities people have to live the life they have reasons to value. Sen's capability approach appreciates the individuals' exercise of their own agency in selecting certain functionings and not pursuing others as a key part of well-being itself. This explains that while some people choose to have a diet preponderantly based on one food despite having everything needed to procure and consume other types of foods, other people simply have no choice but consuming the same food and being undernourished. None of these people achieve the functioning of being well nourished, but the first group of people have the capability to be so. From this example two distinctive forms of individual agency can be formulated: agency achievement ("the realization of goals and values she has reason to pursue, whether or not they are connected with one's own well-being" (Sen, 1993, 56)) and agency freedom (the freedom to individually decide to "bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce" (Sen, 1992, 57)). This aspect of the capabilities approach is extremely significant, since it allows for cultural variations.

It follows from this that using income to measure well-being is profoundly short-sighted. Poverty is a deprivation of capabilities to live in a desired way. The capabilities approach views poverty as a multidimensional concept. Premature mortality, undernourishment, illiteracy, social exclusion are just as important as low income in his approach. Because of this, "capability improvement helps both directly and indirectly in enriching human lives in making human deprivation more rare and less acute." (Sen, 92). This broader perspective on poverty can inform better development practices in general, and social businesses in particular.

Section V – Empowerment

Empowerment has become a buzzword in the development field. A World Bank publication asserts that “in its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action”, representing increased control over one’s life. (Narayan, 11). This definition of empowerment includes an expansion of a person’s physical and financial assets, which enable people to use their assets in order to increase their wellbeing. Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach clearly underpins this definition. A focus on the empowerment of social business employees is a suitable way to operationalize the measure of the evolution of their capabilities.

Even though the term empowerment rarely explicitly appears in Amartya Sen’s work, he “recognize(s) empowerment as an important aspect of ethically-based human development” (Keleher, 99). In this sense, empowerment “can be understood as the process of expansion of the valuable substantive freedoms people enjoy” (Keleher, 58). Consequently, every development initiative can empower if it helps people be able to achieve the kind of life they value. If a person has the capability to be well-nourished, be adequately sheltered, learn and become educated, be in good health, he or she is empowered to be well-nourished, have a shelter or have access to education or healthcare facilities. Naturally emerging out of Sen’s universalistic capabilities approach, empowerment naturally inherits some important characteristics of the model. First and foremost, since the capabilities and functionings people value vary from individual to individual, it also becomes evident that the term empowerment also varies by sociocultural, economic and political contexts and is dependent on value and belief systems of specific peoples. It is thus clear that social, cultural, political, institutional contexts are very important for empowerment

approaches. Consequently, the key to defining empowerment is synergistically taking into consideration all these factors and appropriately incorporating them.

Within the capabilities approach, empowerment shifts away from a narrow economic empowerment translated by higher income, and offers a more comprehensive theoretical and practical venue to look at poverty alleviation. Theoretically, empowerment within the capabilities approach understands individuals as complex human beings. Practically, the conception of empowerment facilitates a more comprehensive treatment of empowerment in antipoverty or development projects. Besides the fact that empowerment is of great intrinsic value in a capabilities understanding of poverty, it also has powerful instrumental value.

Section VI - The Quechua Cultural Universe

CES Ecuador is predominantly working with Quechuan indigenous peoples. Quechuas are one of the largest indigenous population in Latin America, inhabiting countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile and Colombia. They have been a major segment of the Andean civilization even before the Spanish conquered their territories about 500 years ago, and today remain the largest of any indigenous peoples in the Americas. Even today, Quechuans still share the major characteristics of the Andean culture, such as the centrality of reciprocity in all aspect of life. There are around two and a half million Quechua inhabitants in Ecuador, making them the largest indigenous population of the country. In Ecuador, Quichuans are clearly distinctive from other Ecuadorians, such as whites and mestizos (mixed European and Amerindian race), through more visible and less visible elements. On one hand, their darker tone of the skin and their specific traditional clothing makes them clearly distinguishable. On the other hand, Quechuans share a long history of subjugation, oppression and poverty. In Ecuador,

to be Quechuan in to be stigmatized (Hanratty, 87). Today, poverty is particularly endemic among Latin American indigenous peoples in general and Quechuans in particular (Psacharopoulos, 1994).

The historical oppression and high poverty levels of indigenous groups in Latin America is not a secret. Scholastic literature covering the ways in which Andean populations have been constantly under the oppression of other groups and consequently lived in deep poverty is nothing but scarce. On one hand, academics from the Marxist tradition analyze the oppression and poverty of Andean groups in terms of unfair labor markets, unequal land distribution, or unjust merchandise exchange (Collins, 1988; Smith, 1989). Scholars who investigate the issue from a cultural perspective focused on the symbolic violence and domination of indigenous groups by white and mestizo norms, values and ways of being (Isbell, 1978; Allen, 1998). This issue of Andean indigenous poverty and oppression in Latin America must be addressed, but must be tackled carefully. Classical economic modes of solving this problem might not just be ineffective, but they could also be detrimental for Quechuan indigenous peoples. CES is trying to respond such issues, and they aim to empower their Quechuan employees while being sensitive to their specific culture. Using anthropological literature and my own observations from my two-months stay in Ecuador while working for CES, I will present the central aspects of Quechuan culture.

One of the defining tenants of Andean culture in general, and Quechuan culture in particular, is *ayni*. Dr. J. E. Williams (2005) explores the five guiding principles in the Andean culture: the way of love and beauty, the way of knowledge, the way of action, the way of life, and the way of reciprocity. Out of the five, he asserts that the last principle, the way of reciprocity, *ayni*, is the single most important notion in understanding the Andean way. In

Williams words, “it means to give back, and to circulate energy, goods, knowledge, and labor for the benefit of family, society, and culture” (Williams, 174). Other authors, such as Allen Catherine expresses that “reciprocity is like a pump at the heart of Andean life” (Allen, 93).

Walshe and Argumedo (2016) translate the term as “reciprocity through mutuality and compensation” (Walshe and Argumedo, 167), and mention that it is a typical form of morally grounded economic and cultural reciprocation. Multiple authors acknowledge that reciprocity is central to any tradition Andean economy (Alberty and Mayer, 1974; Isbell, 1978, Allen, 2002; Mayer, 2002). More than being about economic and political power, reciprocity is a core of Andean cosmology: in order to receive *sami*, the essence of life, one must achieve reciprocity with his or her family, community members, and even nature and gods. Jennings (2009), explains that “Since shirking one’s responsibility as a woman, a leader, or a community member invites divine retribution on all (Bode, 1990), social roles, and the reciprocal obligations commensurate with these roles, have long been communally enforced (Ramirez, 2005)” (Jennings, 10). Consequently, reciprocity is inherent to the Quechuan life.

According to Andean cultures, this reciprocity reflects beyond human interconnectedness and community harmony. The respect and benevolence which is implied in goods and services exchange contributes to the harmonization of the entire universe: “all elements of nature, including human beings, give and receive, thus contributing to the common good and harmony of the world” (Belair, 180). A well balanced universe supposedly contributes to prosperous and happiness in the community. Allen comments on this aspect: “This responsibility is inherent in life ... As all things are alive and interconnected, our responsibility extends to the whole world” (Allen, 94). All Quechuans have to actively contribute to the balance of the universe through their continuous participation in acts of reciprocation. An Andean explains that when the

universe is balanced, then “our newborn infants and baby animals are delivered easily and are born healthy, our fields yield abundantly, and the alpacas and llamas are strong and don’t get sick” (Williams, 130). For Quechuans, continuing the tradition of reciprocity embodied in the concept of *ayni* is a form of guaranteeing good life prospects, whereas breaking or ignoring this tradition can bring upon great misfortune on the entire community. If any member of the community fails to continue the tradition of reciprocity, then the balance of the universe and consequently the harmony of all Quechuans’ lives are at great risk. Consequently, being capable to reciprocate is an inherent and imperious requisite for a harmonious universe and flourishing life.

The fact that reciprocity is central to the Quechuan life is reflected in rituals which are anthropologically viewed as “an ideal version of the social structure. It is a model of how people suppose their relations to be organized” (Leach, 286). At the end of a day of hard work, Quechuans come together and celebrate in *fiestas*, communal parties. Mansfeld describes how the spirit of reciprocity can be easily identified in drinking patterns at such *fiestas* (Mansfeld, 156). The host approaches the guests with a bottle of beverage and a small glass, and offer him or her to drink. When the guest accepts the drink, the host gives him or her the bottle, and the receiver pours a shot for the host. Only after that the guest will be allowed to drink, and he or she will continue to serve the other participants in the *fiesta*, and must drink together with those he or she serves while saying “ishcandi nishun” (the two of us will drink). This individual can only leave the party once the bottle is emptied.

Another ritual that also reveals the value of reciprocity is chewing coca together, or *k'intu*. Coca is the most important plant in the Andean universe, and it is sometimes referred to as “*Mama Coca*”, “Mother Coca”. The consumption of coca reflects perfectly the spirit of *ayni*.

Williams argues that the ritual of sharing coca is the most emblematic act of *ayni* among Andeans. Everybody sits around a pile of leaves and selects the freshest and greenest ones. Then, everybody puts between their fingers three leaves which are equal in size in a fan shape, which is referred to as a *k'intu*. Participants in this ritual do not consume their own *k'intus*, but they offer it to somebody else. The receiver thanks the giver, and then chews the leaves he or she received. Everybody offers and receives multiple *k'intus*. At the end of this sharing ritual, the participants remain together and spend hours talking, joking, playing music and dancing. Cocoa chewing is never meant to be performed individually, since it would break the balance of the universe, and consequently the harmony of the community.

These ritual implies a physical sense of reciprocity. Mansfeld comments that through such acts of consumption, Quechuans “bundle together conventional rules of behavior, shared cultural meanings for the material world, and personal bodily experiences of that world” (Mansfeld, 158). These two rituals serve as a powerful illustration for the notion of reciprocity which is central for Quechuan indigenous groups. Handing drinks or coca, then receiving one’s own portion in return, consuming and reiterating the ritual, reveal the intrinsic importance of reciprocity in the Quechuan tradition. Moreover, such rituals also instill a sense of identity for the participating Quechuans, and continue to symbolically perpetuate the importance of reciprocity in their communities.

In Western cultures, labor is generally an individual activity from which people can derive individual benefits. Meanwhile, in the Quechuan cultural universe, labor is shared: people know that if they help somebody today, then when they will need help in return, they will have access to it from one of their fellow community members tomorrow. In other words, individual reciprocity insures access to the social capital of the community. In this case, social capital

would represent the resources generated by social, community and family relationships. For Quechuans, social capital is sustained through this system of reciprocity, which gives access to all the resources of the community. Bebbington explains that the social capital derived from participating in communal labor is vital for Andean groups because “access becomes perhaps the most critical resource of all if people are to build sustainable, poverty alleviating rural livelihoods” (Bebbington, 2022).

An interesting example in this sense are *mingas*. Communities are usually working together towards a great deal of communitarian affairs. *Mingas* are performed either when one of the members needs help with a task that requires a large group of villagers, or for the completion of communal duties. Through the two weeks I spent in Pulingui, I participated in three such *mingas*: in two of them we cleaned up with the rest of the village the water sewage system, and in another we cleaned up the central park of the village. When I moved down South to Saraguro, all the villagers came together in the weekend to reconstruct a villager’s house that had burned down a couple of week ago. In Saraguro, the community had very tight rules about participating in weekly *mingas*: if a family skipped the *minga* twice, they had to pay a fine. Allen (1988), explains that “bad or sinful behavior involves the denial of this participation through the wasting of energy or the participation in negative exchanges that direct the flow of life into destructive channels” (Allen, 94). The force of *ayni* obliges all the community members to partake in communitarian actions.

Consequently, if a Quechua is not capable to participate in a *minga* or another act of communal labor, then the harmony of the universe risks to be unbalanced. In such a case, that specific individual would become stigmatized by the community, and he or she will be slowly excluded from it and lose access to its social capital. There is no greater grievance for a Quechua

than this. Such people are called *waqcha*, which means orphan. Quechuans use this term to describe what they consider to be a truly poor person: somebody without social relationships who lacks social capital rather than money (Zoomers, 1035).

The fact that in the Andean culture reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of life goes beyond shared labor. For example, Williams describes that if one member of the community happens to harvest more potatoes than he needs for himself and his family, he is happy to deliver on his duty to share the surplus with others. I have personally witnessed the same practice in the community of Pulingui. Juan, my host father, had a particular successful production of cui, Guinee pigs that are only consumed on very special occasions, such as birthdays, family reunions or traditional annual festivals. As Inti Raymi (the annual celebration of the Sun) was approaching, numerous families asked Juan for cuis. I was surprised to see that in these exchanges there did not seem to be any form of direct bargain or trade. When I asked Juan if he gave the cuis away for free, he explained that he did not receive anything in exchange. Since he had so many cuis this year, he was happy to offer them to his fellow community members. He added that he was sure that, if next year he will not be as lucky as this year, he would be able to ask other villagers for cuis.

Mauss elucidates this apparent unselfish behavior: exchanges which “are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behavior is formal pretense and social deception” (Mauss, 1). Juan was in fact fulfilling a formal requirement imposed by the Quechuan tradition of reciprocity, which was eventually also going to serve his interest sometime in the future. His actions connoted the typical Quechuan *ayni*: accounts were at least implicitly kept, and he expected that the favor should be repaid in kind sometime in the future.

Section VII - Quechuan Capabilities and Empowerment Capabilities

An anthropological exploration of the Quechuan culture revealed the importance of reciprocity mechanism in the daily lives of these Andean indigenous peoples. By now, it is increasingly clear that the Quechuan employees' generated income from CES is but a very limited to estimate how their lives have improved. Peredo (2000) also observes that "The economic life of Andean peasant families cannot be reduced and understood simply in terms of earnings and expenses" (Peredo, 19). The previous discussion of the anthropological observations about the culture of these indigenous peoples facilitates the elaboration of an appropriate set of capabilities that Quechuans have reasons to value. Based on these, CES can determine the areas in which Quechuans would seek empowerment.

First and foremost, the most important capability for Quechuans that emerges from the previous anthropological observations is the capability to reciprocate everything one receives from individuals or the community. As we have seen, the inability to reciprocate an apparent free gift can firstly threaten the relationships between community members. Even more severely, a bridge in the flow of all material and immaterial in the Quechuan world can unbalance the harmony of the entire universe. As Mauss explains, a gift, even though it is freely given, represents a challenge to the receiver to respond; it is based on this response by which the relationship between the two parties is defined. Consequently, a gift can be seen as a challenge that must be honored. In the case of incapacity to reciprocate, the recipient would be dishonored. According to Mary Douglas's reading of Mauss, "a gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction". Not being able to reciprocate can only fuel this contradiction, and is undoubtedly met with repercussions from the community. To have the capability to reciprocate is

imperative for individual Quechuans and for the equilibrium of entire Quechuan communities overall.

A related capability of vital importance for Quechuans surfaces from this capability to reciprocate: the capability to maintain good relationships with the other members of the community. As we have seen, for Quechuans, this capability would give them access to the social capital of their communities. Miyashita also insists on this aspect: “maintaining good relationships within the comunidad facilitates access to the comunidad’s resources” (Miyashita, 68). Being unable to participate in acts of reciprocation or in acts of communal labors, such as *minkas*, would lead to the gradual exclusion of a Quechuan from his or her community. This would make him or her a *waqcha*, an orphan, and would impede his or her ability to have access to the community’s resources.

Another capability important for Quechuans is the capability to participate in rituals that create a feeling of identity and community. Being able to participate in rituals such as eating the *k'intu*, the coca leaves, or other important celebrations, such as Inti Raymi, gives Quechuans a sense of belonging to their community, and at the same time it informs their identity as members of the Quechuan society. Miyashita also believes that mainly rituals that can create a feeling of identity and community (appealing to past and present experiences of the indigenous villagers) can be considered as contributing to capabilities (Miyashita, 173).

Empowerment

While working for CES, I interviewed all its Quechuan indigenous workers. I asked them what empowerment means to them, and the image they conveyed fit very well with the Quechuan cultural elements aforementioned. The most common elements they referred to when talking about empowerment were the ability to network, offer more access to resource to other

communities, and gain knowledge that could be disseminated in their own communities.

Networking seemed to be very important for them for one clear reason: they knew that their job with CES might be temporary, but they believed that the relationships they created while working for CES would last forever. The interviewed Quechuans explained that because they knew more people, they indirectly had access to more resources and more opportunities. Many of the CES employees borrowed money from CES staff in situations of emergency. Other CES employees mentioned that they received other job offers while travelling to other communities to sell the CES products.

I also asked the Quechuan CES employees why they had decided to work for CES: they had to rank “helping others”, “making money” or “professional experience”. Unsurprisingly, I found out that most Quechuans employees took on this job because it gave them an opportunity to help others. This is in full accordance with the spirit of *ayni*: Quechuans rely on each other to lift each other up so that their entire indigenous community flourishes. Moreover, these employees received income from outside their communities, and consequently felt that they have to give something back. Selling reading glasses and water filters was a way to reciprocate in the community the wealth they derived from the outside.

Quechuans also considered that empowerment is related to acquiring new knowledge and sharing it within their communities; it was a way of reciprocating in their communities. Euliria, a Quechuan woman, confessed that while travelling around Ecuador to sell the CES products she encountered numerous new ideas. She explained that she was very happy to learn new things, since she could share them with her family and her community. The clear trajectory that emerges is the fact that empowerment for Quechuans is less linked with individual empowerment, but instead refers to collective empowerment.

Based on the acknowledgement of the capabilities that Quechuans have reasons to value, CES can then operationalize them in terms of some specific empowerment elements. On one hand, Quechuans would value being empowered to have access to the social capital of the community. In other words, CES could measure how empowered its employees are in terms of access to the community's resources. Since Quechuans value creating new social relationship that spread their network and thus give them access to more social capital, CES could also observe the empowerment of its employees in such terms. CES could also track the empowerment of its Quechuan employees in terms of their ability to contribute towards sustaining a good balance of the universe. This would refer to assessing how capable its employees are to engage in mandatory acts of reciprocity which are considered to sustain a harmonic world. CES could also see how empowered its employees are in terms of helping other people, since this would indirectly answer their obligation to distribute their resources within Quechuan communities. Lastly, CES could measure how empowered its employees are in terms of full participation in the life of their community, be it acts of collective labor, like the *mingas*, or festivals that keep the community together and contribute towards a common identity.

This is a brief list that potentially gives a good basic insight into some of the empowerment areas CES could measure in order to determine its ability to increase the well-being of its Quechuan employees. It is important to notice that a comprehensive list of empowerment indicators informed by the Quechuan culture would require additional field based research. Undoubtedly, a more comprehensive list of empowerment indicators would emerge from field research specifically conducted with this objective in mind. The mechanisms of operationalizing such an empowerment-measurement tool for the success of CES would also require additional research to create a comprehensive, viable and informative tool.

Conclusion

Social enterprises in the “underdeveloped” world are a superior international development practice. They allow for the cultural adaptability, autonomy of the social business’ goals, and guarantee its sustainability through traditional business practices, such as profit making. However, this is not the main aim of a social business; it aims to create social value. Anti-poverty social businesses which employ disadvantaged groups, such as CES, which employs Quechuan indigenous peoples from Ecuador, have to develop more appropriate tools to measure their success. To begin with, such businesses should firstly reframe the way in which they define poverty: a Senian understanding of poverty in terms of capabilities is recommended. Then, such social businesses could operationalize how well they are doing in enhancing the capabilities of their employees in terms of empowerment. Both capabilities and empowerment are very useful for social businesses which work in international settings because they allow for cultural variations.

By looking at the Quechuan culture through anthropological lenses, we observed how the most important elements of their culture could inform some capabilities Quechuans have reasons to value, and determine some areas in which they would seek empowerment. *Ayni*, the central element of Quechuan culture which refers to the responsibility to reciprocate everything, emerged as a very useful concept to understand the Quechuan way of life. For Quechuans, engaging in acts of reciprocity gives them access to their community’s social capital, and consequently its resources. Moreover, being faithful to the reciprocity tradition maintains the balance of the universe, and subsequently the harmony of Quechuan life. Some relevant capabilities emerged from this anthropological investigation: the capability to reciprocate everything one receives from other individuals or the community, the capability to maintain good

relationships with the community, and the capability to participate in rituals that create a feeling of identity and community. Some important empowerment spheres that Quechuans would pursue also became evident. On one hand, CES should measure if its Quechuan employees are empowered to have access to the social capital of the community, which would then give them access to the community's resources. Then, CES should observe if its employees are empowered to contribute towards a good balance of the universe, create new social connections and help others. Lastly, CES should observe if its Quechuan employees are empowered to fully participate in the life of the community.

By transitioning from a traditional business measure in terms of income generate by its employees and looking at their cultural universe, CES would learn that income is indeed not very important for them. Moving to a culturally appropriate empowerment-tool, CES would be better equipped to measure how empowered its employees are in areas that matter to them. Based on such an indicator, CES would be able to adapt its objectives and focus on delivering what Quechuans value. By doing this, CES could tailor their work to create even more impact on their Quechuan employees. A culturally appropriate empowerment-based indicator of CES's success would allow them focus on elements they might have not considered before, and consequently evolve in respects with such elements. Other social businesses which aim to assist disadvantaged groups in "underdeveloped" communities could also significantly improve their work by engaging in similar anthropological exploration of their employees' cultures, and by subsequently elaborating their own empowerment-based measurement tools for their success.

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