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**FROM FINANCIAL  
ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY  
TO WELL-BEING  
OR GOOD LIVING.  
REFLECTIONS ON  
THE NECESSARY  
APPROACH TO RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN  
MEXICO**

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**Abstract:** After the abandonment of the governments towards the indigenous and peasant sector suffered not only during the colonial history of our country through attempts at physical extermination, epistemicide, ignorance and lack of appreciation towards their technological heritage, we are still faced with the imposition of public policies of technological modernization of the productive units that have intensified during the neoliberal period, which ignore the technological and biocultural heritage generated by the Mesoamerican agricultural cultures. This ignorance has led to the elimination of all development plans, not only the knowledge generated by these cultures, but also the invisibility of these sectors that have been considered backward. However, these invisible sectors have shown their survival through the use of traditional technology, motivating proposals for the construction of alternatives to development based on ancestral technological elements, their worldviews and ways of life. This way, this article emphasizes that, in the face of this multifaceted crisis that befalls us, it is necessary to generate technological alternatives that must be complemented with other knowledge, where science is just one more, in such a way that the result will be a vision of development that is theoretically based on ancestral knowledge, ethno-development, knowledge dialogue, communality, good living and well-being. Proposal that enriches the intention of the government of the 4T (2018-2023) to achieve support for poor farmers, combine food security and achieve a transition towards agroecology.

**Keywords:** Ethnodevelopment, alternatives to development, knowledge dialogue, agroecology, ethnoagronomy.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of the rural environment in Mexico has operated through an economic vision, which has had as its objective the increase in the production of capital and work as the only valid strategy for agricultural producers. In such a way that the objective of productive activities, promoted by rural development programs, has been to obtain high yields through the use of improved species and varieties, hybrids and transgenics that generate high amounts of inputs for the production.

These agricultural development policies are directly associated with the use of modern technology, derived from science, for which these strategies for the production of food and primary satisfiers become activities whose main purpose is the reproduction of capital, for Therefore, their main concern is obtaining profits and high-value merchandise in the market, losing the environmental, social and cultural vision of the panorama.

One of the main criticisms of this economic vision of development is that it does not consider the finite nature of the natural resources on which agricultural production depends. The problems of environmental contamination and soil erosion are intensifying more and more and have been the result of the excessive use of agrochemicals and the intensive handling of agricultural machinery. This has led to the characterization of modern agriculture as highly polluting and alien to the prevailing practices of the societies of countries that have been considered underdeveloped.

These practices of overexploitation of resources and environmental pollution put the planet in a situation of no return, this due to the danger of losing the ecological balance and with it the extinction of living beings and human survival itself. Situation that has arisen and worsened in recent years and is described

in the sixth extinction of species by the Anthropocene (Cruzen, and Stoermer, 2000).

From the Report "Our common future" (UN, 1987), concerns about the environment are collected, so that an environmentalist discourse appears that incorporates concepts of sustainability that give rise to currents with ecological approaches that propose sustainable development, whose synthesis is to use resources without compromising survival in the future.

This environmentalist concern has served for the emergence of currents legitimately concerned with the conservation of resources and human life, which can be grouped as sustainable, agroecological and natural, and which confront the economicist position of development and try to build alternatives. viable for small producers and for the survival of the planet.

The economic support of the Mexican State to promote modern agriculture has only benefited a small sector, characterized by the availability of land, capital, machinery and modern technology; however, the vast majority of production units in our country do not receive support and consequently are those that use traditional technology, based on ancestral methods of generating knowledge and technology, which have their roots in the 62 indigenous peoples, which complemented with the rural peasant population, which is not indigenous but shares the characteristics of using productive technology, they constitute the most important food-producing sector in our country.

This situation reflects the privileged approach towards producers who have resources, in addition to being evidence of the abandonment of the vast majority of productive units, which, due to lack of capital to modernize their production, are not served and cannot access support for production. state-sponsored modernization.

However, given its cultural tradition and worldview, this invisible and forgotten sector has its own interests and determines the products to be obtained, where the production of food for consumption is privileged, and thus contributes to the food security of these small indigenous peasant production units and the country.

Given that this sector is not and has not been supported by the Mexican government, the technological option available to them is based on their own cognitive resources, which are distinguished by having a history that goes back to the origins of the Mexican agriculture, and that has survived the 500 years of colonization and the last 70 years of promotion of modern agriculture.

For this reason, the small peasant production units opt for a type of development that is based on their own environmental and technological resources, whose productive decision continues to depend on their community organization.

For this reason, the perspective in the 21st century of the indigenous and peasant production units, peasants, defined by Bartra (2010), is the use of their own development, ethnodevelopment, in Bonfil's terms (1995: 133), it is understood as :

(...) the exercise of the social capacity of a people to build its future, taking advantage of the teachings of its historical experience and the real and potential resources of its culture, in accordance with a project that is defined according to its own values and aspirations.

This concept of ethnodevelopment will have to observe the theory of cultural control, proposed by the same author, in the following terms

the social decision-making capacity on cultural resources, that is, on all those components of a culture that must be put into play to identify the needs, problems and aspirations of society itself, and try to satisfy,

resolve and fulfill them (Bonfil, 1995: 134).

Thus, considering development for and by the peasants, there will be a development from the perspective of good living, which is presented as an alternative that includes different ways of life with community roots, breaking with the anthropocentric logic of capitalism as a dominant civilization (Acosta, 2015).

Thus, the long-awaited development promised as a goal in Truman's founding speech in 1947, whose criticism based on that lack of development characteristic of the countries of the South, has led to criticism of this term, inaugurated thus, the post-development era, where the search for alternatives to development glimpses good living as one of the options.

Thus, in this article the perspective of development of the Mexican peasant communities is analyzed, it is explained that, given their dominant characteristics, they will have to go through an ethno-development and with it, contribute to enrich the vision of good living (Acosta, 2008).

Therefore, the realization of the research project called: "Ethnoagronomy, Epistemology and alternative rural development" has been carried out, which has consisted in the elaboration of diagnoses from discussions that have been carried out in workshops with the farmers.

## METHODOLOGY

The aforementioned project has been carried out based on the participatory action research methodology, which has fostered horizontality through a constant dialogue of knowledge, raised from research tools such as participant observation and workshops where the ideas about the development and the perspective of the future of the indigenous peasant communities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The foregoing has allowed the construction of the present proposal that starts from the criticism of the dominant system, where the modernizing development promoted through State programs has not eliminated hunger in the world and has left unsustainable levels of pollution.

Therefore, a vision is proposed that tries to solve the ecological problem of production and combats the consumerist and accumulation idea that allows sustainability and a different development, which is the product of the vision of the peasant communities.

And it is that, in the agrarian structure of the country, small production units dominate. According to data from the 2014 National Agricultural Survey, the country's agricultural area was made up of a total of 27,496,118 ha, which were cultivated by a total of 3,248,385 production units. The irrigated surface consisted of 20.3% of the total surface and the rest was classified as rainfed surface.

Regarding the irrigated area, 68% of the production units (less than 5 ha) had only 14.5% of the total area; while, in the temporary area that corresponded to 70% of the production units, only 6.1% was owned by producers with areas greater than 20 ha.

In such a way that we can visualize how the dominance of small production units is established, where about 70% of them have small surfaces.

In addition to this, it is worth mentioning that there are other limitations that have led to a limited appropriation of modern technologies, and that have to do with the topographical limitations characteristic of the national territory that hinder agricultural activities, such as the superficiality of soils, the presence of stone and lack of rain.

The support for production that has been given from programs of direct support to the countryside, such as PROCAMPO, which

operated from 1994 to 2014, and which later continued as PROAGRO-productive, was distinguished by the stimulation of a polarized agriculture, strengthening commercial agriculture in the country and excluding small-scale agriculture.

Based on data from the latest Agricultural Census (INEGI, 2008) collected in 2007, the adoption of modern technology shows limited adoption. 89% of the production units do not use improved seed, 63% do not use chemical fertilizers, 66% do not use agricultural machinery and 82% do not use herbicides.

These data show the lack of appropriation of the modern technology promotion policy, despite the years and financial resources of the State invested in it. Therefore, in addition to this lack of technological adoption, we also have a significant presence of small production units of less than 20 ha present in the country.

Through the data, we can account for the importance of small producers, who, by not using modern technology, are forced to use traditional technology, which belongs to the cognitive capital corresponding to indigenous people and peasants who have a nascent cultural wealth. of the 62 indigenous peoples recognized in Mexico, added to the rural mestizo population that has the same socio-cultural capital, despite not being recognized as indigenous.

Therefore, the knowledge and practices of traditional agricultural technology used by a little more than 70% of the production units in the country, are an expression of knowledge, technology and worldview based on the worldview of the indigenous peoples who have populated the current Mexican territory, which allows them to build technological alternatives with productive efficiency and sustainability that are efficient given the limiting environmental and socioeconomic conditions where it is developed.

However, we see how public policies

have privileged a market logic that opted for monocultures and the competitive advantages of crops considered for agro-export (Hernández et al., 2021).

In contrast, diversification and family production did not have a place in this logic, therefore, the monetary support of these programs was channeled in greater quantity towards the large producers and in an incipient way to the small ones.

With the change of administration starting in 2018, under the presidency of Lic. Andrés López Obrador, heading the transition proposal that he named “The fourth transformation (4T)”, it was intended to give a turn in the application of public funds destined for the support of producers in the Mexican countryside.

Therefore, during this administration, the Production for Welfare program emerged as a proposal, which represents a change in policy over the last 29 years and a watershed for the rural sector, since a new agri-food policy oriented towards internal production, with technical support, financial support and a new agroecological production model. In addition, it considers the rescue of the countryside and the search for food sovereignty within the framework of an agroecological transition. However, very little time has passed to assess the impacts of the program in the field.

Production for Welfare represents a challenge in its operation, since it has to make a change in the culture of technicians and institutions that operated under patterns of corruption and patronage, in addition to facing poverty inherited from more than three six-year terms.

Added to these challenges are those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced production activity to a minimum during 2020 and 2021.

Therefore, the pending questions to be answered are: ¿Will the 4T government's



production for welfare program combine with the reduction of poverty in rural areas? Does the operation of the program have the efficiency of the institutions, technicians and peasants who have been poorly trained in neoliberal policies?

Given the characteristics of agriculture in Mexico mentioned above, what type of development is promoted to serve the peasants who were marginalized and excluded in the administrations prior to the 4T?

The synthesis of this proposal considers that given the situation of abandonment that small production units have suffered, these are the protection, diversification and conservation of the genetic heritage of around 300 domesticated species. In addition to this, they have their own productive technology, which becomes a productive technological heritage that must be used.

In such a way that, based on the traditional technology of these production units and through the dialogue of knowledge with peasants and indigenous people, the construction of productive technological proposals is proposed, in whose construction diverse knowledge can be incorporated, including Western science as one of these.

It starts from recognizing the validity of knowledge, knowledge and technologies that support traditional technologies, the sufficiency and efficiency in the production conditions of these technologies to obtain sufficient productive satisfiers, and above all, the right of producers to propose according to its vision, needs and aspirations, the products to be produced, the technology and the destination of the generated products.

The dialogue of knowledge is a condition for the construction of viable proposals and that corresponds to the necessary space to know, value and decide on the technological elements to be considered as foreign resources, but that due to their potential can

be incorporated as part of the proposals, for which, they must go through an appropriation process that allows knowledge and recognition as appropriate elements that will be part of the technology of peasants and indigenous people, characteristics of these production units.

To the extent that it is based on the knowledge, worldview and interests of the peasants of the small production units and the technological elements of different forms of knowledge are brought together; Proposals will be built that will consolidate the alternatives to development and with this, put into practice the ethno-development considered by Bonfil (1995) or specifically the achievement of well-being proposed in the development programs headed by the 4T government.

This practice will lead to a vision of development different from the one promoted by past public administrations, which will allow the recognition of their own vision, which in terms of the Andean indigenous people they have called “good living”, the same as their Mesoamerican equivalents. that it is urgent to study and deepen.

Some approaches point to the fact that “good living” among peasants in the mountains of Guerrero is related to the abundant harvest of corn of all colors and uses, to make food and share with family, friends and neighbors; that there be music that cheers the heart in private and community parties; that there is no lack of mezcal -without excesses- to share and achieve happiness; that there be products of the harvest to offer to the mountain, but also in the Catholic church; to ask for and be thankful for water and health; but also, being healthy and happy with everyone, that you can participate in the town festival, be a mayordomo and offer pozol, mezcal, music, cuetes and taste for everyone.

Similarly, the Mixtecos of the pitaya area of Oaxaca, express the same feeling that can

be translated as “being well in community”. This vision is the one that Ethnoagronomy has tried to adopt through the improvement of agricultural production and with it, he managed to prosper the production of satisfiers of the communities, that is, the achievement of development, according to his own conception and resources.

## CONCLUSIONS

The period from 1994 to 2018 is identified as the stage of the neoliberal governments in Mexico, in this period the modernization of agriculture was promoted in order to obtain goods and profits. The resources of the State were channeled for direct support to the countryside destined for the producers with the greatest amount of land, abandoning the small producers who turn out to be the most numerous in amounts close to 70% of the total production units. As of 2018, with the change of government led by the 4T, rural policy is refocused, reorienting itself towards “well-being”, privileging small producers, trying to combine food security and postulating a transition towards agroecology.

The country’s situation, where domination by small production units prevails, makes it necessary to propose, as an alternative for rural development, a strategy that efficiently uses the scarce natural resources available, conserves them for the future, and allows the aspirations of peasant growers to be covered from the start. your own perspective.

This proposal is supported by decolonial practices and alternative visions of development that lead proposals such as ethnoagronomy, the epistemology of the south, ethnodevelopment, the dialogue of knowledge and cultural control, which contribute to what is called from the south as the “good living”.

The persistence of indigenous and peasant culture to the present, including traditional

agricultural technology, which has allowed the survival of indigenous and peasant cultures during the colony and neoliberalism, are a sign of sustainability, therefore, they are proposed as a point As a starting point, as the beginning of the proposals for alternatives to development that must be enriched through the dialogue of knowledge that considers the vision of the future of peasants and indigenous people, put well-being into practice.

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