

Indigenous Community Cooperatives, Creating Small Businesses as a New Paradigm for the Common Good and Communion of Persons

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Abstract

One place the profoundly new way to understand the business enterprise in order to foster true communities that *Caritas in Veritate* (40) calls for, can be found is in a new kind of cooperative among the indigenous of the global south. Inspired by a Christian humanism that includes the community in solidarity with all living things and mother earth, these small cooperatives are more sustainable and more nimble than capitalist models of business. This paper looks at examples where small businesses are being created in Bolivia in the sectors of timber and gold extraction, as well as Kenya and Ghana, in sanitation.

These indigenous cooperatives are examples of the integral ecology that *Laudato Si* points to “in service to another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral” (112). Their ties to the land and community are transformed into a sustainable business model that may not be as efficient as the capitalist model from a production perspective, but are more sustainable as forces for the greater well-being of the community and the earth.

The paper draws from fieldwork with the Global Sustainable Aid Project and the Providence College Business School’s program for Ethics in Business Education’s course on sustainability and social value. This interdisciplinary course is a collaborative effort of the Theology, Physical Science and Marketing Departments. Students help create small businesses in these communities training cooperatives and individuals to build toilets and water filters, using locally sourced materials, that are then supported with micro financing. This is a means of empowerment, as well as a way to turn business into a force for the common good that in turn becomes a basis for strengthening communities toward a civil economy.