PSICOPERSPECTIVAS
INDIVIDUO Y SOCIEDAD
ISSN 0717-7798 ISSNe 0718-6924

Volumen 24, Número 3, 15 noviembre 2025
Artículo de Investigación – Artículo de Sección Temática
DOI: 10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol24-issue3-fulltext-3451

Social representations of development among users and implementers of a housing project in rural Peru

Representaciones sociales del desarrollo entre usuarios e implementadores de un proyecto de vivienda en el Perú rural

Angelit Guzmán Chávez
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Perú (aguzmanc@pucp.edu.pe)
Meryliz Alonzo Torres
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Perú (meryliz.alonzo@pucp.edu.pe)
César Llanco Gonzales*
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Perú (cesar.llanco@pucp.edu.pe)
Franco Vásquez Vásquez
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Perú (franco.vasquez@pucp.edu.pe)
*Autor para correspondencia.

Received: 30-March-2025 **Accepted**: 04-November-2025 **Published**: 15-November-2025

Recommended citation: Guzmán Chávez, A., Alonzo Torres, M., Llanco Gonzalez, C., & Vásquez Vásquez, F. (2025). Social representations of development among users and implementers of a housing project in rural Peru. *Psicoperspectivas, 24*(3). https://dx.doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol24-issue3-fulltext-3451

Abstract
Amid the current crisis of social projects, a key challenge lies in understanding how their actors conceive development. From a qualitative approach (interviews and workshops), this study explores the Social Representations of Development (SRD) among 19 users and 18 implementers of a thermal housing project in a rural Peruvian community. Thematic analysis revealed that while users prioritize education and production, implementers emphasize education, politics, and essential services. Despite these differences, both groups' SRD align with the Human Development and Sustainable Livelihoods approaches. Users adopt a pragmatic view focused on subsistence and equality, resonating with post-development perspectives, whereas implementers hold a more structural and idealistic view highlighting environmental and cultural sustainability and elements of *sumak kawsay*. These findings pose theoretical, methodological, and sociopolitical challenges for project management. The study offers relevant insights for designing policies and programs that engage younger generations amid socio-environmental and economic crises in rural territories.

Keywords: human development, livelihoods approach, post-development, social representations, *sumaq kawsay*

Resumen
Ante la crisis actual de los proyectos sociales, un reto importante es conocer las concepciones del desarrollo entre sus actores. Desde un enfoque cualitativo (entrevistas y talleres), este estudio explora las Representaciones Sociales del Desarrollo (RSD) de 19 usuarios y 18 implementadores de un proyecto de vivienda térmica en una comunidad rural peruana. El análisis temático reveló que, mientras para los usuarios la educación y la producción son centrales, los implementadores priorizan la educación, la política y los servicios esenciales. A pesar de sus diferencias, las RSD de ambos se alinean con los enfoques de Desarrollo Humano y Medios de Vida Sostenibles. Los usuarios adoptan una visión pragmática, centrada en la subsistencia y la igualdad que concuerda con la perspectiva del posdesarrollo en tanto los implementadores tienen una visión más estructural e idealista que resalta la sostenibilidad ambiental y cultural con elementos del *sumak kawsay*. Estos hallazgos plantean desafíos teóricos, metodológicos y sociopolíticos para la gestión de proyectos. El estudio ofrece aportes relevantes para el diseño de políticas y programas que incluyan a las nuevas generaciones frente a las crisis socioambientales y económicas en territorios rurales.

Palabras clave: desarrollo humano, enfoque de medios de vida sostenibles, posdesarrollo, representaciones sociales, *sumak kawsay*

Conflicts of interest: Authors declare to have no conflicts of interest.
Financing: Proyecto de Investigación (CAP2023) del Vicerrectorado de Investigación, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

Publicado bajo Licencia Creative Commons Atribución/Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional (CC BY 4.0)

Rural development projects are often criticized for weak sustainability and poor alignment with local realities when technocratic frameworks impose standardized solutions (Bullón, 2009). Such approaches privilege implementers' views, reinforcing the urban-rural dichotomy that links modernity to cities and stagnation to rurality, while overlooking the cultural complexity and fluid exchange of ideas shaping rural development (Greene & Abrantes, 2021). In Peru, this tension appears in state-led housing programs addressing extreme cold in high-Andean regions. Since 2013, rural housing policies under national initiatives have sought to improve living conditions and reduce vulnerability (Ministerio de Vivienda, Construcción y Saneamiento [del Perú], 2013). Some involve academic and public-sector partnerships providing technical and implementation support. Yet independent assessments show that long-term sustainability depends on how rural households appropriate -or resist- the technical and cultural logics of these interventions (Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas [del Perú], 2020).

A key reason for this limited impact is the imposition of external development conceptions that overlook users' perspectives -especially those of younger generations- hindering intergenerational transformation. These views are shaped by Social Representations of Development (SRD), which influence how communities engage with, value, or resist initiatives. Although research underscores the value of integrating local perspectives to promote sustainability and ownership (Kim et al., 2020), participation often remains symbolic, with little influence on core decision-making (Ika & Feeny, 2022).

Social representations

Social Representations (SR), as defined by Moscovici (1982), explain how individuals construct and interpret reality through everyday interactions (Jodelet, 1985). They encompass beliefs, values, and behaviors formed through social processes that assign meaning to the world (Moscovici, 1982). This study applies the structural model of social representations, which includes a central core-shared, stable beliefs ensuring coherence-and peripheral elements that adapt to context (Moliner & Abric, 2015). Using this model is crucial as it reveals both stable and flexible components of social constructions, essential for understanding community engagement in social projects. SR shape how communities perceive and respond to interventions, especially in vulnerable settings (Zeletdinova & Diakova, 2019), while negative representations may reinforce exclusion and stigmatization (Prost et al., 2023).

Development perspectives

Development has been framed through diverse approaches reflecting distinct political and philosophical orientations. This study focuses on those most relevant to public policy in Peru, particularly in rural and socio-environmentally vulnerable contexts: the modernization paradigm, the Human Development Approach (HDA), the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), and the alternative model of *Sumaq Kawsay*. It also draws on insights from post-development thought.

Modernization, rooted in capitalist logic, conceives development as a linear transition from traditional to industrialized economies, aimed at closing national gaps through structural transformation (Pérez, 2012). Linked to liberalism, it emphasizes free markets and individual rights (Bullón, 2009), yet its technocratic orientation often marginalizes local knowledge and cultural practices, undermining sustainability and equity. HDA proposed by Sen (1999), conceives development as the expansion of individual freedoms to pursue valued ways of living. It emphasizes five key freedoms -political, economic, social, transparency, and protective- aimed at reducing deprivation and dismantling institutional barriers (Płachciak, 2017; Uribe, 2008).

SLA builds on HDA and adaptation theory. From the former, it adopts a people-centered focus on agency and survival strategies in vulnerable contexts (Chambers & Conway, 1992); from the latter, it recognizes that adversity drives immediate, pragmatic choices (Ellis, 2000). Unlike HDA, which emphasizes freedoms, SLA highlights the mobilization of human, social, material, and territorial resources grounded in rights, cultural relevance, and local agency (Narang & Meenai, 2016).

The alternative model of *Sumaq Kawsay* (SK), or "good living," rooted in Andean worldviews, envisions harmony among individuals, society, and nature (Doukh, 2017). It integrates material, spiritual, and collective well-being, challenging the universalism of modernization while aligning with sustainability through its emphasis on relational and spiritual balance (Piñeiro & Polo, 2021). Unlike frameworks centered on economic growth and individual capability expansion, such as Modernization and HDA, SK promotes a communitarian ethos grounded in territorial belonging and ecological reciprocity-a contrast especially evident in rural contexts, where communities often face external interventions that conflict with their own notions of well-being, collective rights, and sustainability (Narang & Meenai, 2016).

Finally, the post-development paradigm -of which SK is an expression- arises as a critical alternative to conventional models and to the very notion of development itself (Pérez, 2012). It exposes the contradictions of modernity and development, which overlook community needs, knowledge, and practices while being imposed in the name of vulnerable populations. Conversely, it underscores the contributions of Indigenous communities and social movements that propose new forms of modernity blending technology, biodiversity conservation, cultural preservation, and autonomous power rooted in communal life (Escobar, 2020). These dynamics are evident in recent studies showing that rural representations of natural resources, such as water, range from utilitarian views to hybrid forms integrating indigenous cosmologies (Aranda, 2023; Calixto & Ramírez, 2022).

Each framework entails distinct normative assumptions about what constitutes "progress," who defines it, and how it should be achieved. These differences are not merely technical but shape policy design, community roles, and power distribution in development interventions. Thus, the contrast between modernizing and relational paradigms becomes key to interpreting the divergent -and at times convergent- SRD identified between users and implementers in this study.

To address these challenges, this study analyzes and compares SRD of implementers and users of a thermal housing project in a rural Andean community in Peru[1]. Grounded in Social Representations theory and development models, it explores how these distinct understandings relate to broader socio-environmental conditions and aspirations, particularly those shaping the futures of children and adolescents. By examining a state-led intervention aimed at mitigating cold spells, the study contributes to rethinking development strategies that integrate environmental crises with the lived experiences of rural populations in the Global South. Accordingly, the study asks: What are SRD held by users and implementers of rural social projects? And how do they differ? Exploring these SRD sheds light on underlying values and aspirations that shape how development is lived and understood. Beyond conceptual insights, such understanding, provides a basis for more contextualized, inclusive, and sustainable strategies, particularly relevant in territories affected by socio-environmental crises and for the future generations of rural communities.

Method

Research design overview

This study employs a qualitative approach to holistically understand the phenomenon, integrating diverse perspectives (Rojas-Gutiérrez, 2022). Grounded in a social constructionist epistemology and interpretive framework, it assumes that conceptions are shaped by cultural and social structures (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Accordingly, participants' discourses are understood as socially constructed through family interactions, social relationships, media exposure, and other contextual influences (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

1 Award-winning project of the Annual Research Project Competition (CAP2023) from the Vicerrectorado de Investigación, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Perú.

Study participants

As shown in **Table 1**, the study included 36 participants: 19 users (9 women, 10 men) and 17 implementers (4 women, 14 men) from a public-sector thermal housing project in Cusco, Peru. Users were community members, some in leadership roles, who had direct experience with the initiative. Implementers were professionals involved in project management, including state housing officials, university implementers, healthcare workers, and district authorities, with eight residing in Cusco and ten in Lima.

Participant recruitment

Participants were based in Cusco and Lima, providing informed consent either in writing or orally (for users) in adherence to confidentiality and voluntary participation principles. Recruitment occurred in two data collection stages: an initial data-gathering phase and a results validation and audit phase. In the initial phase, we conducted 37 individual interviews and one participatory workshop in Cusco and Lima between October 2023 and January 2024. Fieldwork in Cusco was carried out in a rural community through in-person interviews and a workshop, while in Lima, interviews took place at a university or via video calls. Access to users in Cusco was facilitated by community authorities and a local contact, whereas implementers were reached through their respective institutions. The validation and audit phase involved individual interviews and group workshops with four implementers and three users in Cusco, and four implementers in Lima. The limited number of participants was due to access constraints related to their ongoing activities. To address this methodological limitation, results were integrated as a complement to the first phase.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. To uphold ethical standards, informed consent protocols were followed, and the identities of participants and affiliated institutions were anonymized.

Data collection

The study employed two qualitative techniques: semi-structured interviews and participatory workshops. The interviews provided an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2012), while the workshops facilitated the collective identification and analysis of key issues through interactive and intercultural dynamics.

Two data collection phases were carried out. The first aimed to examine SRD structure, focusing on the central core, peripheral elements, and their expression. The second, a results audit phase, sought to review and reflect on the findings. In the first phase, the interview guides were validated by specialists, and the implementers' guide was further refined through a pilot application. Each interview lasted approximately 75 min. In the first phase, the interview process comprised two stages. First, participants performed a sorting task, selecting and discarding concept cards to identify what they considered most central to development, guided by the question: *"What is most important for development, and why?"* For users, cards were complemented -or replaced- by oral references to development models to encourage participation and comprehension. Second, discussions focused on how development is achieved and the factors that hinder it.

Workshops with users lasted about 120 min. Conducted by the research team with experience in intercultural facilitation, participants worked in groups to present collective perspectives on development through drawings and oral presentations framed as a fictitious community fair. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. In the second phase, results were audited: implementers received printed SRD summaries, while users were provided with drawings and keywords.

Table 1

Users (U) and Implementers (I)' characteristics

Users				
Identifier	Age	Gender	Occupation	Region
U1**	41	Female	IT Technician	Cusco
U2	79	Female	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U3**	51	Female	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U4	70	Male	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U5	63	Male	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U6	71	Male	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U7	56	Male	Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U8	45	Male	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U9*	22	Female	-	Cusco
U10*	29	Female	-	Cusco
U11*	47	Female	-	Cusco
U12	76	Male	Farmer	Cusco
U13	49	Female	Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U14	38	Female	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
U15	19	Male	Student	Cusco
U16**	46	Male	Farmer	Cusco
U17	57	Male	Farmer	Cusco
U18	54	Male	Builder	Cusco
U19	40	Female	Farmer and Livestock Breeder	Cusco
Implementers				
Identifier	Age	Gender	Occupation	Region
I1*	38	Female	Researcher and Lecturer	Lima
I2	38	Male	Mechanical Engineer	Lima
I3*	53	Male	Metalworking Technician	Cusco
I4*	39	Male	Project Designer and Researcher	Lima
I5*	30	Female	Public Sector Administrator	Lima
I6	49	Male	Clinical Laboratory Technician	San Martín
I7	28	Male	Psychologist	Lima
I8	47	Male	Architect	Cusco
I9*	31	Female	Architect	Cusco
I10	34	Male	Architect	Cusco
I11	41	Male	Engineer	Cusco
I12	37	Male	Accountant	Cusco
I13*	65	Male	Engineer (Economics Specialization)	Puno
I14*	33	Female	Psychologist	Cusco
I15*	43	Male	Nursing Technician	Cusco
I16	54	Male	Architect	Huancavelica
I17	Unavailable	Male	Architect	Unavailable

Notes: U = Users; I = Implementers. Identifiers marked with an asterisk (*) refer to users who only assisted to the participatory workshop. Those marked with a double asterisk (**) indicate participants involved in the validation and audit phase.

Analysis

A prototypical analysis was conducted to determine the dual framework of core and peripheral elements (Dany et al., 2015), which was adopted to identify not only the dominant and stable SRD elements, but also the points of flexibility, negotiation, and tension that emerge in relation to specific experiences. This was operationalized and recognized considering the frequency and prioritization of development dimensions. Recurring prioritizations across groups identified the central core, reflecting collective significance, while lower-ranked elements were considered peripheral, representing more individualized and non-essential dimensions. To ensure that these categories reflected participants' own perspectives, the cards were constructed from spontaneous associations, emic language, and dimensions emphasized in earlier phases of the sessions. This approach made it possible to identify both the stable symbolic structure and the flexible margins of the representation, showing how meaning is reproduced and negotiated. The analysis was further supported by a validation and audit phase.

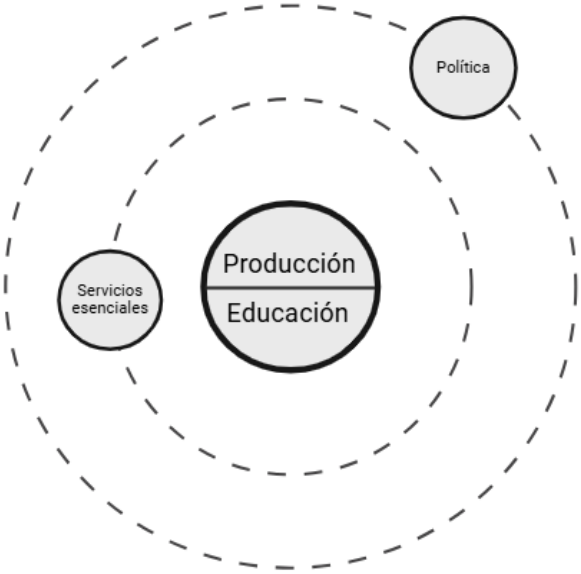
Complementing the prototypical analysis, thematic analysis was applied to inductively identify emerging codes and group them into common themes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step process-familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting-the analysis was conducted using *Atlas.ti*. The research team, trained in Social Representations Theory (both structural and symbolic variants), performed the coding after critically reviewing key theoretical sources to ensure conceptual consistency. To enhance transparency and minimize bias, coding decisions and preliminary categories were peer-reviewed by external researchers, who also validated coding criteria and category coherence.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to explore the SRD held by users and implementers of a thermal housing project in Cusco (Peru). Significant similarities and differences were identified in how these actors conceptualize development. Gaining insight into these shared constructions of meaning enables a deeper reflection on their role in the progress of a social project and its implications for the lives of new generations in vulnerable communities. Final results are organized into complex structures of patterns reflecting the Social Representations of Development (SRD), corresponding to the two participant groups -users and implementers- as illustrated in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2.**

Figure 1

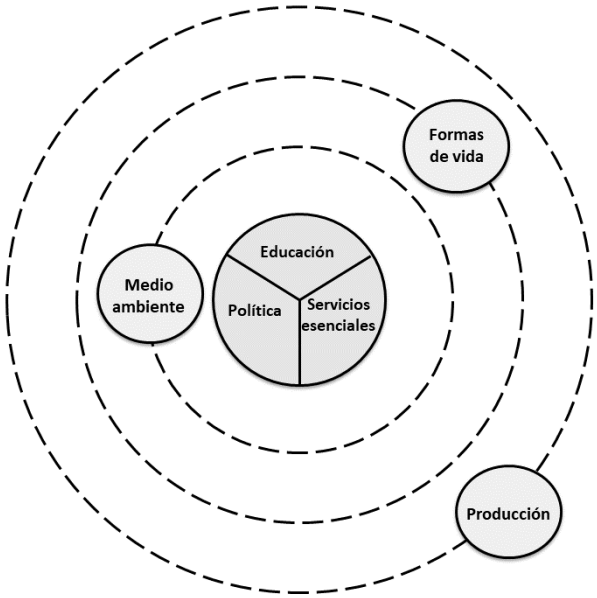
Users' SRD structure



As can be observed, among users, the core of SRD consists of two key elements: production and education, whereas the peripheral elements include essential services and politics. Among implementers, three core priorities emerge within the SRD -education, politics, and essential services- while at the periphery, three elements are identified: environment, ways of life, and production. The following section develops the identified convergences and divergences within these SRD.

Figure 2

Implementers' SRD structure



Education: Overcoming inequality vs. enhancing quality of life

Both users and implementers view education as a central component of their RSD though they assign distinct meanings to it. For users, education -which includes formal schooling, university education, and training for productive activities has as main meaning overcoming inequality while for implementers -closely encompasses both formal schooling and training for productive purposes- it involves enhancing quality of life. For users, in a context of limited productive opportunities, this dimension is viewed as essential to development, as it provides technical training in agriculture and livestock, strengthens local productivity, and enables youth to pursue professional careers within the community -thereby reducing forced migration-. Moreover, education promotes awareness of rights and responsibilities, empowering younger generations to protect themselves from exploitation. Rather than merely seeking better jobs or income, users aspire to shield the youth from mistreatment in urban areas. Education, therefore, becomes a tool for self-defense and empowerment. As one communal authority stated:

> I have always, through education (…) travelled to the coast, the highlands, and the jungle. So, I see (...) how people suffer, how they are also exploited. That is why education is good. With it, you can defend yourself (...). We already know these things, our rights, our duties. So, they can no longer deceive us easily ... (U18)

For implementers, education is fundamental to identity formation, value shaping, and acquiring knowledge for quality employment, ultimately ensuring a good life for the children of the community. In this sense, it is a pathway to an improved quality of life, which entails access to basic services and greater comfort, such as owning a home or a car. Furthermore, it is perceived as a driver of development, creating opportunities beyond traditional occupations and enabling engagement in diverse productive activities. For them, only education can transform by breaking the pattern whereby new generations simply repeat the limited livelihoods of their parents:

> It could be that they continue doing the same as they do now, but perhaps because, I don't know, there was no school in their community (...). So, right now, they work on the land or raise livestock, and in the future, they keep doing the same, but maybe because they didn't have the opportunity to access secondary education and later couldn't go to university. (I2)

Implementers contend that education fosters a growth-oriented mindset that promotes productive diversification and the industrialization of raw materials. This mindset -characterized by ambition and an entrepreneurial outlook- enables individuals to recognize and pursue opportunities beyond mere subsistence. From this perspective, users' limited ambition and persistent focus on basic production, small-scale trade, and bartering are seen as barriers to genuine development:

> The most critical issue (...) is that there are people who are simply focused on self-subsistence, right? That is, they produce solely for their own consumption and nothing else. And, in the local fairs, they barter the products they make to obtain new ones, but that is their cycle. In other words, there is no development, no vision of economic prosperity, to generate more income. (I3)

Because education is seen as key to shifting mindsets, raising awareness, and providing tools for productive diversification, it is viewed as a developmental pathway that must begin in childhood to enable transformative change. Early education is expected to create local opportunities and reduce migration to cities, where living conditions are often precarious, since remaining in agriculture limits access to secondary and higher education.

Findings indicate that although both users and implementers view education as central to development for its instrumental role in fostering agency (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), the meaning of that agency differs. For users, education is a means to overcome inequality by enabling their children's professionalization and creating local opportunities, thereby reducing internal migration (Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral-Espín, 2022; Uribe, 2008). This view criticizes the centralization of education and employment, and reflects awareness of the exclusionary conditions faced by migrants, especially youth. In contrast, implementers emphasize education's role in improving quality of life by broadening opportunities and fostering diverse capabilities through professionalization and a productive mindset. Their goal-oriented focus contrasts with users' concern with structural barriers and inequality, rooted in their experience of limited opportunities. Indeed, the district has only four public secondary schools, and just 27% of students achieve satisfactory performance in reading and mathematics (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social [del Perú] (MIDIS), s.d.), consistent with literature identifying education as a key driver of equality and social inclusion (Carrión et al., 2023; Tabares-Cruz, 2024).

Production: Water as the foundation for diversification vs. diversification as the basis for economic growth

While users regard production -closely tied to water availability, primary production for diversification- as a core element, identifying water as the foundation of diversification, implementers -understood as economic growth and diversification- consider it peripheral, conceiving diversification as the basis for economic growth. For users, production is viewed as essential for progress, personal fulfillment, and improved community conditions that help retain younger generations. Its central importance stems from water, which sustains not only productive processes but also the survival of humans, animals, and plants. Through irrigation, harvesting, and reservoirs, water enables diversified production based on territorial resources, with livestock breeding and agriculture at its core, extending beyond small-scale or family farming toward broader, diversified projects rooted in local resources:

> Speaking of an irrigation system here (…), we would work with milk (…). We would be working on (…) cheese, yoghurt (…), butter (…) with good cows and good livestock all year round ... (U18)
> Once we have water (…) we can build small greenhouses (…). Next (…) fish farms. Now, in these rainy times (…). God sends us water (…). To raise fattening cattle, we need a stable with a feeding and

> drinking area (…). We are more focused on the livestock sector (…). We want all of this in the future, irrigation to have improved pastures. (Workshop participant)

Furthermore, in this representation, water activates a productive chain that enables youth to remain in their communities rather than migrate to cities. This developmental aspiration reflects a future-oriented vision centered on providing younger generations with the conditions needed to thrive within their own communities:

> if there is no water, there is no life -neither animals, nor plants, nor human beings can live. If there were water, I imagine our young brothers and sisters would not migrate to the cities (…) We would work the land (…) developing the agricultural and livestock sector. (…). It would be a miracle if the Lord heard our plea (…) the harvesting of water in different areas. (Workshop participant)

However, beyond limited access to water and technical knowledge, users identified two additional challenges: the lack of genuine state support-which fosters distrust-and the erosion of traditional communal labor practices such as *minka* and *ayni*, *quechua* terms for reciprocal collective work among families and within the community. Participants noted that these cultural constraints have shifted production strategies toward short-term survival responses shaped by structural adversity and institutional neglect, which limit opportunities and income and drive migration as a survival strategy. The decline of these traditions has also hindered large-scale cultivation and weakened mutual care and appreciation for ancestral culture:

> Before, we used to work together in *minkas* and *aynis*, days of work, all in groups. (...) Nowadays, we no longer do that; each person works individually. (...) each one for themselves. (...) We hardly work on large farmlands anymore, just small ones … (U8)

Users' perspectives reflect the structural disadvantages of rural communities, where scarcity -especially of water- severely limits productive capacity (FAO et al., 2021). Water sustains production, subsistence, and growth, yet its shortage disrupts farming, livestock, and self-sufficiency, often driving migration. This mirrors the climate crisis, which intensifies vulnerability across southern Peru, including the study area (Farfán & Díez, 2025). Findings echo studies describing a utilitarian view of water but differ from research showing hybrid utilitarian-Indigenous representations (Aranda, 2023; Calixto & Ramírez, 2022). Users' utilitarian stance responds to production needs while seeking to retain youth. From HDA, viewing these aspirations as unattainable reveals deep precariousness that limits autonomy and choice, undermining productivity, cohesion, governance, and well-being (Farfán & Díez, 2025).

For implementers, production is seen as peripheral yet essential for enabling communities to process their own raw materials and reduce external dependence: "Communities would be developing or processing their own products... working for themselves and not relying on external actors" (I10). Diversification is viewed as key to expanding commercial opportunities, improving living conditions, and overcoming a subsistence economy-a broader, structural understanding of development (Fawzy & Shedeed, 2020).

In contrast, users emphasize territorial preservation and immediate improvements in quality of life, reflecting the structural disadvantages of rural communities, where resource scarcity -especially water- remains a critical constraint (FAO et al., 2021). Given that district data show only six agricultural units engage in commercial sales, while 861 produce for self-consumption and 548 for livestock (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, n.d.), it becomes clear why both groups seek to move beyond subsistence by strengthening production chains and expanding capacities for more efficient resource use (Fawzy & Shedeed, 2020; Iderawumi, 2020).

Politics: Participation for governance vs. a reliable state structure

For users, politics -primarily associated with participation- is considered a peripheral element, understood as participation for governance. In contrast, implementer's view politics -linked to legal frameworks, stability, and democracy- as central to development, insofar as it enables a reliable state structure. According to users, politics represents a space for dialogue where the community exchanges ideas, makes decisions, and reaches agreements on collective actions. It is viewed as a means to generate change in response to community needs. Accordingly, some participants highlight the importance of democracy and being heard by authorities:

> everyone should be able to participate. Sometimes, when we go to town, people don't let us speak; perhaps we don't speak well, so they silence us. (...) They ignore us sometimes. Those things shouldn't happen either. (U8)

From their perspective, community organization enables participation by providing a space to discuss political issues, share field -based knowledge, and plan collectively- facilitating joint action. Although they criticize state authorities as absent and indifferent, they also acknowledge their own passivity and lack of initiative. Therefore, they view training and capacity-building programs as essential to overcoming passivity and fostering productivity. From the implementers' perspective, Politics is a core element, as well-being is seen to depend primarily on political stability, democracy, and robust public policies. A stable political landscape ensures legal frameworks that promote investment and project implementation, reduce social conflict, and enable effective coordination while safeguarding rights and preventing abuses of power. Together, these factors foster well-being by ensuring protection, employment, and progress -particularly for the most vulnerable- thus contributing to national transformation:

> [referring to a stable democratic society] (…) Others have to respect our opinions and our rights (…) Just recently, well… there was a strike (…) Even if we do not share the same views, I do not believe that the abuse of authority is justified. That is why I argue that as long as a society remains democratically stable, it will function well. (I9)

The differing conceptions of politics reveal, on one hand, that users view it as a means to address state absence or remoteness, requiring participation to ensure governance mechanisms. Implementers, on the other hand, emphasize a reliable state structure as the foundation for citizens' well-being, particularly for the most vulnerable. Users' perspective likely arises from their need to meet subsistence demands and their disillusionment with the state. This experience fosters empowerment and may prompt state responsiveness (Chitra & Pradeepan, 2023), a pattern also observed in studies of marginalized communities (Cueto et al., 2015).

The form of civic engagement described by users aligns with Sen's notion (1999) of the intrinsic and instrumental value of political participation for vulnerable groups (Tezanos & Sumner, 2013). Moreover, these capabilities expand freedoms for vulnerable populations, positioning them as political agents rather than passive recipients of development initiatives (Clark et al., 2019).

The contrasting view of implementers, who prioritize a stable institutional framework grounded in law and democracy as key to effective development interventions, aligns with Sen's five freedoms -political freedom, economic opportunities, social facilities, transparency, and social protection (Płachciak, 2017; Uribe, 2008)- which they regard as essential for project feasibility. SRD of users and implementers echo findings from research on development officials, which emphasize the crucial role of institutional frameworks and the persistent mismatch between state agendas and community aspirations. These studies highlight the need for participatory policies that effectively integrate local actors into state-led development (Giraldo, 2015; Ramos, 2017). It is at this point that tensions between the central government and communities become evident -driven both by state absence and by a presence that fails to grasp the logic through which communities envision genuine participation and governance based on

inter- autonomy between citizenship and the state, as well as a shared political power that fosters collective well-being (Escobar, 2020).

Essential services: Modern housing vs. housing with ecological and cultural sustainability

Essential services -such as potable water, electricity, sewage, and housing- are considered peripheral by users but central by implementers. Although both groups emphasized sanitation, infrastructure, and public services, this analysis focuses on housing due to its foundational role in the project on which this study is based. Both agree that housing should fulfill basic needs; however, they diverge on what is non-negotiable: users prioritize modernity, while implementers stress ecological and cultural sustainability. Some users regard thermal housing -with its basic services- as a driver of rural transformation, shaping a sense of tangible progress through warmth and the possibility of enjoying closer family relationships. They aspire to improve housing quality so that it resembles urban dwellings, valuing order and cleanliness. This aspiration reflects not only a desire for higher social status but also for personal growth, which becomes attainable when living conditions improved:

> Living conditions (…) have improved (…) there is now some level of hygiene, something clean, something has changed (...). Not like before (…) because I used to live together with the animals in a hut and that (...) the personality has changed with this experience. (U1)
>
> All those who have benefited from the project are living well (...) because the little house is warm and you can live there just like in town or in the city. They have their electric stove. There's television, there's even a TV antenna repeater. We live like in a town; it's no longer like before, when we lived differently, in huts with straw roofs (U16)

For implementers, basic services are fundamental, as a house is considered insufficient without them. At the same time, they emphasize the importance of respecting rural housing traditions:

> what I believe constitutes quality of life, is to provide them with a transformation by improving their housing conditions, building homes with better quality and design. This is because ancestral culture has a deeply rooted construction method that is both durable and enduring over time. (I1)

According to these findings, both users and implementers view essential services as foundational to freedoms within HDA, assuming that basic needs must first be met to ensure a minimum standard of living. Regarding housing, both aspire to improved amenities, viewing it as a social good that enhances quality of life and expands capabilities (Płachciak, 2017; Uribe, 2008), unsurprising since only 30% of households in the district have access to sanitation (MIDIS, s.d.). Although both groups see housing, as part of Essential Services, as a means to expand capabilities and achieve well-being, they diverge in the deeper meaning of their aspirations.

Users equate urban-style housing with progress, whereas implementers prioritize ecologically and culturally sustainable dwellings that preserve rural identity. For users, modernity signifies overcoming poverty. As Rodríguez (2020) notes, improved housing fosters pride, while Greene and de Abrantes (2021) show that rural communities increasingly reframe modernity as a positive aspiration. This outlook aligns with capability, livelihood, and post-development models that emphasize hybridities combining technology, material progress, and communal values (Escobar, 2020). Conversely, implementers' emphasis on rurality and ancestry (Shawabkeh et al., 2022; Tripathy, 2021) reflects a commitment to sustainable development. The contrast exposes two coexisting development rationalities in users' pragmatism and implementers' holism. Ultimately, this divergence underscores the persistent challenge of reconciling local aspirations with external visions of development in rural territories-a tension that endures, since these discursive differences are themselves, social constructions reflecting power asymmetries (Pérez, 2012).

Environment and ways of life: Pragmatic approach vs. holistic vision

Environment -framed through ecological sustainability- and ways of life -emphasizing balance, harmony, equal opportunity, and cultural respect grounded in values and discipline- are both peripheral for implementers, who approach them from a holistic perspective. Although these dimensions are not priorities for users, when mentioned they carry a pragmatic meaning, linked to basic needs and family bonds. Regarding environment, users express a pragmatic view centered on what is necessary for living, placing physical conditions and emotional bonds on the same level. Concerning way of life, their practicality is reflected in the meaning they attribute to work-feeling well and putting it at the service of life:

> Natural (...). That there isn't so much pollution, that everything is clean and well kept, that my father is by my side, or that I can be by his. That's how I would like to live. There are so many things we could have … (U15)
> Of course, it feels good, satisfying, fulfilling, doesn't it? They have truly achieved their goal; they have worked for life itself. (U18)

Regarding environment, some implementers consider clean and renewable energy essential to preventing resource overexploitation, protecting human well-being, and preserving green spaces: "Renewable energy sources (...) preventing the overexploitation of resources" (I5). From this perspective, community practices appear contradictory, as they value unspoiled land while simultaneously engaging in environmentally harmful behaviors such as burning, dumping waste into water bodies, and deforestation.

Regarding ways of life, some implementers view harmony and peace in social relationships as essential to development. Balance entails both the absence of interpersonal conflict and the fulfillment of needs through state services and equal opportunities, allowing individuals to pursue aspirations beyond basic survival. In this way, the genuine possibility of achieving individual and collective goals emerges: "Many people mistakenly believe that development is just about building (…) but it is not only that. Development also stems from how you engage with people" (I1), and "you are not constantly burdened with the worry of having to seek money (…). Instead, you would be at ease and have opportunities (...) everyone would have equal access to certain conditions." (I4). Additionally, it implies safeguarding and respecting cultural heritage that strengthens identity, preventing the loss of essential traditions: "That's what it's mostly about our culture (...), valuing it again: our dances, traditions, customs, all of it" (I9). Hand in hand with that, some implementers even view rural communities as the ideal model of development due to their close connection with nature and sense of harmony: "My idea of a developed community is not necessarily a city; rather, it is more aligned with a rural community that has developed in a more harmonious way (…) green, with a good share of nature." (I6).

Findings show that users' practical outlook and focus on subsistence (Ellis, 2000) align with the SLA. In contrast, implementers' holistic view of harmonious living -free from unmet needs and in balance with oneself, others, and the planet- corresponds to the Human Development model (Sen, 1999), which assumes that such aspirations arise only when individuals have the freedom to choose (Płachciak, 2017). This vision is reinforced by the idea that development depends on preserving Andean traditions and maintaining a connection with nature, whereas users' emphasis on survival leads them to regard neither ancestry nor rurality as essential.

These results seem to diverge from studies suggesting that local agents prioritize sustainability and the preservation of traditional livelihoods, while external actors promote rapid modernization (Maulina et al., 2023). They also appear to distance themselves from the notion that *Sumaq Kawsay* represents the dominant development paradigm in Andean communities (Doukh, 2017; Piñeiro & Polo, 2021). From a post-development perspective, such tensions are not contradictions but expressions of how communities actively construct their own priorities through creative, autonomous hybridities that assert their right to life. Their emphasis on subsistence and social ties positions them beyond the idealized and

romanticized models often advanced by external agents (Escobar, 2020; Pérez, 2012) suggest that users' practical outlook and focus on subsistence (Ellis, 2000) align with the SLA. In contrast, implementers' holistic conception of harmonious living-free from unmet needs and in balance with oneself, others, and the environment, corresponds to the human development model (Sen, 1999), which posits that such aspirations emerge only when individuals possess genuine freedom of choice (Płachciak, 2017). This perspective is reinforced by the belief that development depends on preserving Andean traditions and maintaining a connection with nature, whereas users' subsistence orientation leads them to view neither ancestry nor rurality as essential.

Conclusion

This study highlights the need to apply qualitative research on social representations of development (SRD) to strategies addressing the socio-environmental crises affecting rural territories. Understanding SRD reveals the conceptual frameworks that shape behaviors not only toward specific projects but also within broader contexts of vulnerability and resilience. As dynamic, intergenerationally transmitted symbolic structures, these representations are especially relevant when working with children, adolescents, and youth.

Theoretically, the findings highlight the limits of traditional models and the relevance of multidimensional and post-development frameworks. While users and implementers construct social representations of development (SRD) that bridge the human development (HDA) and sustainable livelihoods (SLA) approaches -linking capability expansion with subsistence- their meanings diverge. For users, a hybrid and pragmatic rationality challenges fixed models of development. These perspectives inform project design and adaptive strategies in crisis contexts, fostering a future-oriented outlook among youth (Olmedo et al., 2023). Methodologically, this study highlights the value of culturally adapted procedures for capturing core and peripheral SRD elements across different actors, complemented by a results audit to ensure rigor. Future research should examine SRD of children, adolescents, and youth to better understand their aspirations and how intergenerational transmission shapes their ability to address current and future challenges.

Socio-politically, this study reveals key divergences between users and implementers in views on governance, housing, subsistence, and culture. As conventional project models reach exhaustion (Monje, 2018), it becomes essential to recover cultural sustainability, prioritize subsistence, integrate community-based and state-oriented perspectives, and reconcile aspirations for urban modernity. Policy wise, development programs must transcend top-down models and foster dialogue between rural symbolic frameworks and implementers' perspectives. Genuine participation -especially of children and youth- should guide community priorities amid environmental, educational, migratory, and cultural challenges. From a post-development perspective, this entails recognizing hybrid rural modernities and critically assessing how modernization erodes ancestral identities-a pressing concern for younger generations. The challenge is to balance these tensions without idealizing tradition, while reaffirming the users' emphasis on the primacy of the right to life.

Future research should examine the social representations of development among children, adolescents, and youth in rural areas facing socio-environmental crises to better understand their aspirations and the intergenerational transmission of development models. Comparative studies across regions or institutional actors could clarify how structural conditions shape representational differences. Longitudinal and participatory designs are also needed to trace how SRD evolve over time and influence migration, sustainability, and community engagement. Overall, this study offers scientific and ethical contributions, reaffirming the right of vulnerable populations -especially youth- to opportunities for a dignified life and active participation. Users' SRD reflect discursive power demanding greater symmetry in power relations. The findings call for policies that move beyond standardized interventions, integrating local symbolic dimensions of development and the critical emergence of post-development thinking.

References

Aranda, E. (2023). Representaciones sociales y cultura del agua: prácticas cotidianas y elementos hídricos del territorio en la ciudad de Piura. *Revista de Urbanismo, 48*, 177-193. https://doi.org/10.5354/0717-5051.2023.67026

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. Camic, D. Long, A. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in Psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association.

Bullón, F. (2009). *Transformación de América Latina y responsabilidad social*. Kairós.

Calixto, R., & Ramírez, I. (2022). La educación ambiental en las universidades pedagógicas: un estudio de las representaciones sociales del uso del agua. *Revista Electrónica en Educación y Pedagogía, 6*(10), 124-140. https://doi.org/10.15658/rev.electron.educ.pedagog21.11050908

Carrión, R., Real, A., Muñoz, G., Carrión, D., & Laines, C. (2023). Causas y consecuencias de la deserción escolar en el contexto ecuatoriano. *Polo del Conocimiento, 8*(11), 927-945. https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/9252215.pdf

Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century* (IDS Discussion Paper 296). Institute of Development Studies.

Chitra, M., & Pradeepan, S. (2023). Utilisation of zero priced rural healthcare system in India: A review. *Shanlax International Journal of Economics, 12*(1), 126-135. https://doi.org/10.34293/economics.v12i1.7030

Clark, D., Biggeri, M., & Frediani, A. (2019). *The capability approach, empowerment and participation: Concepts, methods and applications*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Dany, L., Urdapilleta, I., & Lo Monaco, G. (2015). Free associations and social representations: Some reflections on rank-frequency and importance-frequency methods. *Quality & Quantity, 49*(2), 489-507. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-014-0019-8

Domínguez-Serrano, M., & del Moral-Espín, L. (2022). The capability approach and child well-being: A systematic literature review. *Child Indicators Research, 15*(6), 2043-2063. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-022-09953-1

Doukh, N. (2017). El Buen Vivir: una perspectiva axiológica. *Ciências Sociais Unisinos, 53*(3), 558-567. https://www.redalyc.org/journal/938/93854911016/html/

Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford University Press.

Escobar, A. (2020). Antropologia e desenvolvimento. *Maguaré, 34*(1), 271-308. https://doi.org/10.15446/mag.v34n1.90546

FAO, FIDA, OMS, PMA, & UNICEF. (2021). *El estado de la seguridad alimentaria y la nutrición en el mundo 2021: transformación de los sistemas alimentarios en aras de la seguridad alimentaria, una nutrición mejorada y dietas asequibles y saludables para todos*. FAO.

Farfán, A., & Diez, A. (2025). *Entre la escasez y la abundancia: la lucha por la seguridad alimentaria en los Andes peruanos*. Oxfam.

Fawzy, Z., & Shedeed, S. (2020). Subsistence farming towards sustainable economic agriculture of small farmers in the developing countries. *NASS Journal of Agricultural Sciences, 2*(1), 1-3. https://doi.org/10.36956/njas.v2i1.16

Giraldo, E. (2015). Respuestas coyunturales al desarrollo rural: reflexiones analíticas para la construcción de políticas públicas participativas para la ruralidad. *Estudios de Derecho, 73*(161), 79-98.

Greene, R., & de Abrantes, L. (2021). Ni urbano ni rural: Lo 'citadino' como tipología para pensar la ciudad no metropolitana. *EURE, 47*(141), 231-250. https://doi.org/10.7764/eure.47.141.11

Iderawumi, A. M. (2020). Problems and prospects of subsistence agriculture among peasant farmers in rural area. *International Journal of World Policy and Development Studies, 6*(6), 51-55. https://doi.org/10.32861/ijwpds.66.51.55

Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (n.d.). *Sistema de Información Distrital para la gestión pública*. https://estadist.inei.gob.pe/map

Ika, L., & Feeny, S. (2022). Optimism bias and World Bank project performance. *The Journal of Development Studies, 58*(12), 2604-2623. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2102901

Jodelet, D. (1985). La representación social: fenómenos, conceptos y teoría. In S. Moscovici (Ed.), *Psicología social II: Pensamiento y vida social* (pp. 469-494). Paidós.

Kim, S., Sohn, H., & Lee, J. (2020). Evaluating participation: Empirical analysis of recipient and beneficiary engagement with IFAD international development projects. *Sustainability, 12*(14), 5862. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145862

Maulina, F., Hasanbasri, M., Busari, J. O., & Scheele, F. (2023). Primary care doctors' perceived needs for physician leadership development in rural and remote settings of Aceh province, Indonesia. *BMJ Leader, 8*(1), 70-73. https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2023-000757

Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social [del Perú]. (s.f.). *MIDIStrito*. https://evidencia.midis.gob.pe/midistrito/

Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas [del Perú]. (2020). *Informe de evaluación de intervenciones frente a heladas y friaje en el marco del Plan Multisectorial*. https://www.mef.gob.pe/contenidos/archivos-descarga/Informe_EPROC_Heladas_Friaje.pdf

Ministerio de Vivienda, Construcción y Saneamiento [del Perú]. (2013). *Decreto Supremo No. 016-2013-VIVIENDA que crea el Programa Nacional de Vivienda Rural*. Diario Oficial El Peruano. https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/per148998anx.pdf

Moliner, P., & Abric, J. (2015). Central core theory. In G. Sammut, E. Andreouli, G. Gaskell, & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of social representations* (pp. 83-95). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107323650.009

Monje, J. (2018). Antropología del desarrollo y factores críticos para el éxito de los proyectos de cooperación internacional: el caso de las ONGD en América Latina. *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana, 13*(1), 93-117. https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.v13i1.68210

Moscovici, S. (1982). *Psicología social I*. Paidós.

Narang, B., & Meenai, Z. (2016). Sustainable livelihoods perspective in social work education and practice. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development, 8*(1), 19-30. http://journals.rajagiri.edu/index.php/rssJ/article/view/90

Olmedo, L., Rinne-Koski, K., O'Shaughnessy, M., Matilainen, A., & Lähdesmäki, M. (2023). Support structures for a plural economy in rural areas? Analysing the role of community-based social enterprises. *Sociologia Ruralis, 64*(1), 82-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12463

Pérez, B. (2012). *Antropología y desarrollo: discurso, prácticas y actores*. Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación.

Piñeiro, E., & Polo, J. (2021). El *sumak kawsay* andino como resistencia sociopolítica y como desafío epistémico. *Athenea Digital, 21*(3), e2967. https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/athenea.2967

Pistrang, N., & Barker, C. (2012). Varieties of qualitative research: A pragmatic approach to selecting methods. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in Psychology: Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 5-18). American Psychological Association.

Płachciak, A. (2017). Sen's concept of development as freedom and the idea of sustainable development. *Annales. Etyka w Życiu Gospodarczym, 20*(6), 147-156. https://doi.org/10.18778/1899-2226.20.6.11

Prost, M., Piermattéo, A., & Lo Monaco, G. (2022). Social representations, social identity, and representational imputation. *European Psychologist, 28*(1), 24-34. https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000489

Ramos, J. (2017). Haciendo política y políticas en la Secretaría de Agricultura Familiar: miradas y voces de los funcionarios y técnicos militantes en el Chaco, Argentina (2008-2015). *Revista Estado y Políticas Públicas, 9*, 169-191.

Rodríguez, A. (2020). *Hacia una arquitectura de la pobreza: estudio y puesta en valor de la arquitectura vernácula en la vivienda rural panameña* [tesis de posgrado]. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Valencia, España.

Rojas-Gutiérrez, W. (2022). La relevancia de la investigación cualitativa. *Studium Veritatis, 20*(26), 79-97. https://doi.org/10.35626/sv.26.2022.353

Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Shawabkeh, R., Alobaidat, E., Alhaddad, M., & Alzouby, A. (2022). The role of social infrastructure services in developing the city centre planning: A framework for delivering sustainable cities in Jordan. *Ain Shams Engineering Journal, 13*(6), 101800. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2022.101800

Tabares-Cruz, Y. (2024). Factores socioculturales que influyen en el desarrollo humano en comunidades rurales. *Polo del Conocimiento, 9*(7), 3332-3342. https://polodelconocimiento.com/ojs/index.php/es/article/view/8190/html

Tezanos, S., & Sumner, A. (2013). Revisiting the meaning of development: A multidimensional taxonomy of developing countries. *The Journal of Development Studies, 49*(12), 1728-1745. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2013.822071

Tripathy, M. (2021). Perspectives on development. In *Rethinking development* (pp. 49-133). IGNOU.

Uribe, C. (2008). *Un modelo para armar: teorías y conceptos de desarrollo*. Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (2007). *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Zeletdinova, E., & Diakova, V. (2019). Frames of social representations: Structure and formation features. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews, 7*(6), 858-864. https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.76130

CRediT

Conceptualization: C.L.G., M.A.T.; Data curation: M.A.G.C, M.A.T.; Formal analysis: M.A.G.C., C.L.G, M.A.T., F.V.V.; Investigation: M.A.G.C., C.L.G, M.A.T., F.V.V.; Methodology: M.A.G.C., C.L.G, M.A.T.; Project administration: C.L.G.; Supervision: C.L.G.; Writing (original draft): C.L.G, M.A.G.C., M.A.T., F.V.V.; Writing (review & editing): M.A.G.C., C.L.G, M.A.T., F.V.V.;