

**INTERVIEW WITH RENÉ RAMÍREZ GALLEGOS, SECRETARY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF ECUADOR DURING THE PERIOD 2011 TO 2017<sup>1</sup>**

***ENTREVISTA COM RENÉ RAMÍREZ GALLEGOS, SECRETÁRIO DE EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR, CIÊNCIA E TECNOLOGIA DO EQUADOR DURANTE O PERÍODO DE 2011 A 2017***

***ENTREVISTA CON RENÉ RAMÍREZ GALLEGOS, SECRETARIO DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR, CIENCIA, TECNOLOGÍA E INNOVACIÓN DEL ECUADOR DURANTE EL PERÍODO 2011 A 2017***

Gustavo MENON<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The following interview was conducted in 2018 with Ecuador's Secretary of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, during the period 2011 to 2017, René Ramírez Gallegos. René Ramírez takes stock of the project that called itself “Citizen Revolution” (2007-2017), conducted by the President Rafael Correa and his party until then, Alianza PAIS. During the interview, René Ramírez points out the progress of the Correa government and, above all, highlights the theses that came to light during the “correísta” era. The issue of “buen vivir”, the new Constitution, the increase in investments in the area of education and the democratization of higher education are just some aspects explained by the secretary. At the same time, René Ramírez Gallegos denounces the reactionary “descorreizacion” project underway in the country, which put an end to the achievements of the so-called “década ganada” in Ecuador.

**KEYWORDS:** Citizen revolution. Ecuador. René Ramírez Gallegos.

**RESUMO:** A seguinte entrevista foi realizada, em 2018, com o Secretário de Educação Superior, Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação do Equador, durante o período de 2011 a 2017, René Ramírez Gallegos. Nela, René Ramírez faz um balanço do projeto que se autodenominou “Revolução Cidadã” (2007-2017), dirigido pelo presidente Rafael Correa e seu partido até então, a Alianza PAIS. Durante a entrevista, René Ramírez pontua os avanços do governo Correa e, acima de tudo, destaca as teses que vieram à tona durante a era correísta. A questão do buen vivir, a nova Constituição, o aumento dos investimentos na área da educação e a democratização do ensino superior são apenas alguns aspectos explanados pelo secretário. Ao mesmo tempo, René Ramírez Gallegos denuncia o projeto reacionário de

<sup>1</sup> This interview was part of the author's doctoral research. For consultation of the thesis, seek for: MENON, Gustavo. O projeto de extração de petróleo no Parque Yasuní na Amazônia equatoriana: a “Revolução Cidadã” entre o *buen vivir* e o neodesenvolvimentismo. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Interunidades em Integração da América Latina) - Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2019.

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*“descorreização” em curso no país, que colocou fim às conquistas da chamada “década ganhada” no Equador.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Revolução cidadã. Equador. René Ramírez Gallegos.*

**RESUMEN:** *La siguiente entrevista se realizó en 2018 con el Secretario de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación de Ecuador, durante el período 2011-2017, René Ramírez Gallegos. René Ramírez hace balance del proyecto que se llamó "Revolución Ciudadana" (2007-2017), dirigida por el presidente Rafael Correa y su partido hasta entonces, la Alianza PAIS. Durante la entrevista, René Ramírez señala los avances del gobierno de Correa y, sobre todo, destaca las tesis que salieron a la luz durante la era correísta. La cuestión del buen vivir, la nueva Constitución, el aumento de las inversiones en el área de la educación y la democratización de la educación superior son solo algunos aspectos explicados por el secretario. Al mismo tiempo, René Ramírez Gallegos denuncia el reaccionario proyecto de "descorreización" en curso en el país, que puso fin a los logros de la llamada "década ganada" en Ecuador.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Revolución ciudadana. Ecuador. René Ramírez Gallegos.*

**Description:** Interview with **René Alberto Ramírez Gallegos**, economist and Secretary of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador from 2011 to 2017.

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**Gustavo Menon** – I'm researching the national plans for *Buen Vivir*. How did the National Secretary of Planning and Development (SENPLADES) conceive the introduction of this concept? Knowing that Ecuador is which depends on the oil resources, especially for its exportation, it seems to me, there is an attempt to redefine policies with the idea of the *Buen Vivir*, how has this been happening over the last decade in Ecuador?

**René Gallegos** – Perfect.

**Gustavo Menon** – So, this is the first point: how did Rafael Correa's government, in the Constitution of Montecristi (2008), enforce the *Buen Vivir* idea? This is an idea that originated from the indigenous and has been enhanced by the antineoliberalism struggles in the South America region as a whole. So, I would like you to talk a little about the construction of the *Buen Vivir* in Ecuador ...

**René Gallegos** – It's a political project. To be a political project it must have political guidance of the directions to be followed by the associates. In 2006, we responded to a government program in which the heart of antineoliberalism is seen. We have always said that an antineoliberal constitution implies anti-capitalist aspects. However, a project can never be defined by the denial, but by affirmation. We must look for it for what it has to be and not by the "anti", right? It is a very interesting debate and there is always the concept of the *Buen Vivir* that can easily be read much more thoroughly in the Republic Constitution, where the constitution of the society of *Buen Vivir* is really established.

**Gustavo Menon** – It is completing 10 years now, right?

**René Gallegos** – Yes, it is just completing 10 years and I say that there are 5 points of epistemic ruptures of the previous model. The first is the change from anthropocentrism to biocentrism. The second change is to move from a capitalist economy to a social and solidarity economy. The third is to move from patriarchy to feminism. A feminine view. The fourth is to move from a colonialism to a plurinational and intercultural state and society. And the last is to move from a purely representative democracy to a participatory and deliberative democracy; so, what we said was a matter of participation. We cannot build a new society if

the pact of coexistence remains the same as it was in 1998, a liberal-utility pact. So, the first thing we have to do is a new pact of coexistence and these structural breaks emerge from historical struggles here in Ecuador: from the indigenous movement, from the workers' movement of popular economy and solidarity, from cooperatives, from women, from environmentalists; the will to create a constitution is something that allows you to give direction to the political sense and also allows you to take measures of ruptures. The fact is that what must be done is to dismantle all unconstitutionality, all previous politics and propose it, but this is hard, I believe that the 10 years are not over yet.

**Gustavo Menon** – Yes. It seems to me that in all these proposals there is a change of political direction, a change based on antineoliberalism. As we know, the neoliberalism produced harmful effects of political and economic crises in Ecuadorian society. There is a perverse effect of neoliberalism here in Ecuador, so I believe that at this time it is also worth commenting on the paths of neoliberalism that converge towards dollarization.

**René Gallegos** – The effects of neoliberalism were disastrous for Ecuador, which reached its peak in 1999 and 2000, [when] we lost sovereignty over the issuance of money. The economy declined by seven percentage points. Inequality and poverty have increased.

**Gustavo Menon** – Emigration as well.

**René Gallegos** – There was a process of emigration, an incredible peak emigration, there was a lot of employment precarialization, the social policies were completely subsidiary to try to avoid any kind of ungovernability process. In political terms, there were seven presidents in a few years, mistrust was part of the political parties and civil society was atrocious.

**Gustavo Menon** – President Correa calls it a participacy, doesn't he?

**René Gallegos** – Participacy is so profound that we came with the speech of "que se vayan todos!". The civil society applauded. Not because we said "we will not be attending the assemblies", but because that would be unconstitutional. What we're going to propose is a new constitution. The people, that is, the old politicians said that the people would not

understand a new constitution, just as we will not send candidates to the National Congress. And we didn't.

**Gustavo Menon** – Does Correa only appear in the 2006 elections?

**René Gallegos** – Yes. We passed to the second round vs. Alvaro Noboa and immediately won the election. In the first decree for the constitution [already] a popular consultation is convoked which is called "a constitution". A constitution is made in 2008 and a referendum is sought to approve the constitution, something that was not done in any constitution in Ecuador. In 20 years, there has not been a constitution in Ecuador that has been approved, exposed, or put to a referendum by the population. Despite a brutal participatory process [in the formatting] of the Constitution, it is still regrettably being plundered at the present time. Returning to being a gross failure and not a social normative mark, because it is being violated...

**Gustavo Menon** – Is the Constitution currently being infringed?

**René Gallegos** – It is being disrespected, so it really goes back to how it was before. Well, as in the past We lost. And what must be done is to defend this Constitution.

**Gustavo Menon** – And the participation of social movements in the constituent process, how was it? Of indigenous people, feminists, ambientalist and trade union movements?

**René Gallegos** – Yes, meaning that there has been a process of debate and dialogue. [ There was a big] difference because the constitution that we left behind was made in a military college, we say, closed among legislators. It was done in Manabí with an incredible participation. The legislators of the Alianza PAIS themselves came from social movements. Each one with super indications and proposals from the movements. Feminists, environmentalists...

**Gustavo Menon** – Teachers?

**René Gallegos** – Teachers, students... there were many proposals for constitution, and all of this was discussed, debated and the 444 existing articles became meaningful. My question is what is *Buen Vivir* in the first place? Sometimes there is a lot of arrogance from certain people about the concept. It is impossible to define, I would say. The Constitution obviously includes an indigenous perspective, but the *Buen Vivir* debate goes much further, since there are other types of sectors and views. However, we started to discuss what was not discussed before.

**Gustavo Menon** – With the 2008 constitution there is a movement to rescue the sovereignty of Ecuador, right? Because, for example, the Manta base has been closed... more than that, there is also a foreign policy orientation of rapprochements with South American countries, South-South cooperation. Is it possible to talk about foreign policy during the “Citizen Revolution” process?

**René Gallegos** – All these changes can be defined from the recovery of sovereignty. In other words, what our peoples have lost is their sovereignty over the right to decide what they want to do with history. And we, what we've done is recover that. It's impossible to achieve that sovereignty without going through an integration strategy. This is also a social and economic necessity. Perhaps for many countries like Brazil, Argentina itself, they don't need much integration, because they have enough size, enough organization, with their own internal strategy. Ecuador represents nothing in international trade, political or economic. We wanted it to be an intelligent integration initiative starting from UNASUL and ALBA to define supranational regional instances, because the [policies] that existed were insufficient to achieve a good role in international discussions.

**Gustavo Menon** – And they were under the neoliberal model...

**René Gallegos** – Completely... the globalization of capital. Then, the creation of ALBA, the creation of UNASUL, the proposal to create the Bank of the South, which unfortunately did not prosper. That would have been another story for the region, right? Another story. And obviously, we should follow that agenda because there will be no sovereignty without

integration. We have to have a strategy of greater economic, commercial and, obviously, social and political integration.

**Gustavo Menon** – And also with this new model of meaning to life, I think Buen Vivir talks about it, right? How we behave in front of life. There is the Yasuní-ITT initiative, which also goes through the government of the “Citizen Revolution” and in 2013 there is an announcement that the park will have to be explored and undergo oil exploration measures. How did this international recovery process fail? How is the extraction of these resources important for the Ecuadorian economy?

**René Gallegos** – What must be understood here very clearly is that capitalism, from my perspective, has to make a transition, and in this transition you have certain strategies to place limits on capitalism, right? While you're looking for another kind, because we need options for “developments”, alternatives for sustainable development. But in this transition, there are some issues that really bring a brake on capitalism itself, and these are biophysical, time and production changes. The initiative Yasuní-ITT is focused in the oil preservation, through a proposal limited to biophysics, [that point] into the era of fossil fuels. So, in practical terms, it is about facing the greatest power that exists in the world, which has to do with the big oil multinationals. So, the probability that it would prosper, already as an initiative, was very low. There are some very good statements from the German Minister for Cooperation who literally says this: “We cannot let it prosper!”. It would be a bad thing for the world. The second important point about this is another kind of relationship. It's an epistemic change, right? Because it is equivalent to what it implies for health, I call it moving from traditional medicine to health prevention. In ecological terms, right? I mean that it implies no longer reducing, but avoiding. It's making a return to the epistemic matrix of capitalism itself, right? So, to understand that there are more value in life than in the capital, than in a barrel of oil. It's very complicated. Obviously, this topic is part of political economy that we can't expect. Besides, the non-understanding of what was at stake, and the non-understanding that here [should be done] valuation, because here, I ask this question to us, that is, from the left ring, many have talked about the concept of *use value*, and the right ring talks about the exchange value, but what is really in dispute is the concept of value itself. And the only one that has value is life, right? And that's what's incorporated into the Constitution. So following the more Aristotelian perspective that is what has value in itself. And, obviously, after that, the value of

use has to come, but let's first discuss the value and change common sense. Life is more important than economic growth, monetary growth, or whatever. It was very difficult to understand and obviously in a society that has many needs, there is an opportunity cost that is very high, isn't it? Actually, I just posted... this week, a tweet from the president himself, you know? Which said that if we hadn't explored that moment, Ecuador would be broken. So, it's a subject that doesn't even benefit the [former] president. He took on all the costs and practically no benefit. Now, I think that the opportunity cost ratio issue should perhaps be valued differently, because it's a very high social-political cost as well, right? In the sense that...

**Gustavo Menon** – The divorce with part of the social movements...

**René Gallegos** – Exactly. It was very symbolic, right? We lost a lot of support...

**Gustavo Menon** – Since the Mining Law in 2009?

**René Gallegos** – Since the Mining Law in 2009 and well ... there were months that they were asking what were the real viable political options that allow them to dispute in the direction of transformation, that is, the important thing is the transition, so I call it a great transition.. Because if one says to me, "well, I'm not going to explore oil," "well, tell me where you'll get your money from?" Moreover, knowing that there are indigencies, there are many other basic unmet needs.

**Gustavo Menon** – Infrastructure, housing, social well-being, all that, right?

**René Gallegos** – All that and more. That's what I say to the leftist, you have to understand that another accumulation needs a lot of capital to make this other accumulation, or new accumulation, in the transition. And that's what the left doesn't like to hear, isn't it? So, they propose political projects that are not viable. Because there is no way to make the political project viable. And it's not just a matter of desire, you know? As for desire, that is, we have the Constitution.

**Gustav Menon** – Is that a materialistic perspective?

**René Gallegos** – Of course. Postmaterialist, because they do not realize that we need materiality now to build this constitution of this kind of society. And that sometimes emerges as if we were in Europe or in the Nordic countries, when there are many unmet needs here.

**Gustav Menon** – And a few more questions, René. It seems to me, with the economic crisis of 2008, the process of the “Citizen Revolution” was severely affected. On the other hand, there was the *commodities boom*. Oil prices intensified exportations and now the effects of the crisis are arriving in large South American countries and also in other peripheral countries, such as Ecuador. Is there a link between the 2008 crisis and the Yasuni's initiative? The need to explore this oil, these resources? Because from that moment there was a need to accumulate to promote public policies, health, education, all of that...

**René Gallegos** – So, the point is, you say: Constitution says that oil belongs to Ecuadorians, right? Therefore, I have to say to them: "you, oil companies extract the oil, but the oil is mine. Tell me how much I'm charged and I'm paying." But when there's a change, everything is lost. So, this is an issue primarily with energetic policy implications, which in my opinion had a sovereign perspective in the “Citizen Revolution”. Last week, once again, the old form of oil contract was returned here. That is a point that has to do with this, that has to be decided, a unique position on extractivism to get out of extractivism, you see? So, do you have to export oil, yes or no? Unfortunately, the idea of the initiative did not prosper. Well, let's make a territorial pact, which is a bit the proposal we made. If we're going to explore, let's explore places where there's no problem of conflict, of biodiversity, of exploitation. And even so, at some point in the discussion, it began to be said which places should not be explored. I mean, if there are reservations, will I explore? Do I need to? So, I think that's the point that we precisely proposed.

**Gustav Menon** – Is there in the Constitution a provision of consultation with the affected populations, right?

**René Gallegos** – There must be consultation. The consultation is made, but without the binding character. But I believe that a territorial pact must be made, right? From my point of view, we have to make a territorial pact, because then we can move on to the global political relationship, you know? So, this is a second point on the topic of sovereign policy. The second point is the question of these petroleum resources, where is it invested? And it is also this inversion that we made in this journey when redirecting to generate the conditions for another type of accumulation. This is obviously not done in 10 years or less. I believe that there have been totally 6, 5 years of government in terms of public policies and changes. But the work is done aiming at the whole issue of clean energy and the change in the energy matrix.

**Gustavo Menon** – Did this change also happen because of a strengthening of Petroecuador, [a public oil company]?

**René Gallegos** – Petroecuador and Petroamazonas. The oil companies that didn't want to renegotiate are gone and Petroecuador took over, understand? That allowed us to generate the resources to do the entire infrastructure that was done, which has to do with systemic productivity, right? That is, roads, energy, health, education, higher education, the whole broadband issue, which really gives you another perspective, of generating other kinds of conditions to do. There is a very structural issue for me that we discussed a lot with the (former) President himself, he never wanted to accept. It is the question of the productive part. Looking beyond the strategy... I could have two strategies. A change in the productive matrix of what exists or the generation of new industries that doesn't touch what exists, but that leads you to a slow change in the productive matrix. Ecuador went to the second one. I do the export, which from my point of view is good. Because you can't be against everyone, that is, in politics you have to have an ally, to focus very intensely on the question of the profitability of financial capital, I think it was the main one, the vital one, and now you suffer the consequences precisely because of a very strong power.

**Gustavo Menon** – Yes, with an audit process, of the debt...

**René Gallegos** – Exactly. But the audit process didn't arrive in the correct group and for me it had to arrive, because it would affect the most structured economic group. The process practically only reached the importers in the last 2 years, when the external shocks came. The problem is not being the preliminary exporter, but the secondary importer, and the tertiary importer of knowledge. Secondary importer of manufacturing and tertiary importer of knowledge. That is what is generating the structural problem that does not lead to productive change. And if a productive change is not promoted, it will hardly be possible to achieve social change. And that was a central issue. In fact, the analysis of the economic policy of the Ministers of the productive sector, of the industrial sector, makes an analysis of comex, you see clearly the dispute over Ecuador's economic policy. Now, worse, because now it's allied with the Pacific Alliance and signing trade agreements as if the signing was a joke, you know? So, structural conditions are being generated that are going to lead you into the abyss, understand? Even more now with the economy disorganized.

**Gustavo Menon** – The process of worsening dependence of Ecuador, right?

**René Gallegos** – The process of increasing dependency is completely contrary to that of sovereignty, right?

**Gustavo Menon** – And was there also a rapprochement with the Chinese capital?

**René Gallegos** – There was an approach to the Chinese capital, I think it's worth a regional reading here. Brazil did not want to lead Latin American integration. Which from this point of view had to do it, right? Starting with such simple questions as the Bank of the South. Never wanted to because it conflicts with the BNDES bank, and obviously that affects the integration itself. And China was offering loans that were going to public investment, you know? Which was necessary. Especially in the construction of the hydroelectric plants.

**Gustavo Menon** – How many hydroelectric plants have been built in recent years?

**René Gallegos** – 8 hydroelectric and 1 wind power for energy sovereignty.

**Gustavo Menon** – Yes. Ecuador is now an energy exporter, no longer dependent.

**René Gallegos** – No longer dependent, that's why it should be done, the best now is investment, that is, the best now is to have a healthy and educated society, right?

**Gustavo Menon** – Is it a question of energy sovereignty?

**René Gallegos** – It's a question of energy sovereignty in this case, right? I lived through the blackout times when I was young, and when we started that there was no hydroelectric, there was no sovereignty. Now there is, besides being clean. I mean, it's hydroelectric, you know? So what happened in this case, I was saying about China has to do with not only the issue of credit, because that worries me a lot, but also the issue of the trade relations that are established. This is a Latin American phenomenon, see? If memory doesn't fail me, I can prove, you can see, the Latin American data. The big problem is that 70% of primary exports go to China and over 90% of secondary goods come from China. So, the rise of the middle class, linked to the purchases of...

**Gustavo Menon** – Chinese value-added products.

**René Gallegos** – From purchases of Chinese products, see? But not with the capital that goes into the investment. There are problems of another order. And there are structural problems.

**Gustavo Menon** – With national industries...

**René Gallegos** – Of course. That to me is a matter that is not getting enough attention and that sometimes gets stuck is the question of credit. That's important, you have to look at the rates and all the discussions, but to me, that seems to be well employed in strategic public investment, because it was mainly in strategic sectors and I don't see any problem. Unless there are quality problems, then no.

**Gustavo Menon** – And yet, as part of the social movements confronted Rafael Correa's government for calling such policies neo-extractivist, what I want to ask is how do the social movements also adopt a conservative discourse with regard to anti-development? Because there are, it seems to me, CONAIE and other movements that want to paralyze everything, they want to paralyze the process of accumulation, which is important to be reversed in public policies, how has this been treated in recent years? Has Correa faced this opposition in a systematic way? How was the divorce with some of these social movements?

**René Gallegos** – There is one issue that needs to be discussed. This one goes through knowledge sharing, okay? We, no matter how, believed that material change, through redistribution, would improve the conditions of society, you know? It's really an improvement of welfare in Ecuador. But not in policies of recognition, especially related to the indigenous movement, in my perspective. Rafael [Correa] said the priority was poverty. But when you have to build a Plurinational State, it's not enough just to attack poverty. It is also necessary to recognize that there is a difference, that it is a country that has differences.

**Gustavo Menon** – Of languages, cultures...

**René Gallegos** – None of this, the specific topic you point to is a topic that is more ideological, so to speak. Because it doesn't give you alternatives, and they don't realize that this investment is going to benefit the whole society, obviously, it will also benefit the indigenous people...

**Gustavo Menon** – The poorest...

**René Gallegos** – The poorest...This policy collapsed very quickly and governments that are much more extractivists come, you know? Just as it is happening now in mining policy, in oil policy, without sovereignty, it is giving everything away completely.

**Gustavo Menon** – During the “Citizen Revolution” what seems different to me is oil exploration, as it was placed in the 1990s. We had the Chevron scandal. Has much changed?

**René Gallegos** – The technologies used; the improvement of the fields carried out by the “Citizen Revolution”, [the new extraction projects] goes on winning awards related to energy efficiency...

**Gustavo Menon** – Safety?

**René Gallegos** – Safety, especially in the wells made by Petroamazonas that had a hypersensitive perspective, how to regulate the oil performance, right? So, the point is, again, you have a goal to reach. But it starts with a foundation that supported you. How are you gonna do it? The debate for me is in this ecological transition. Which is an economic transition. So, it's not just an energy issue, it's the whole productive issue, see? We generated the conditions, obviously that, with the policy analysis, development analysis at the global level, it's clear that the ones that did it the fastest were Korea and [still] a few decades, right? So, you can't evaluate [a government only] for 10 years. One can talk about certain areas, certain public policies, certain areas or fields, economic sectors, in which there is much more care ... but much has been done! When you see the whole, clearly, the benefit, all the investment that has been made, I say, it won't happen again: it was like 100 years, you see? At no time in history has there been that, at least not from democracy. We have reduced poverty, we have reduced inequality, we have reduced polarization, we have improved the middle class, both in educational and subjective terms, you know? All this is very interesting and has to be analyzed.

**Gustavo Menon** – The reduction in indigence as well...

**René Gallegos** – The reduction of structural poverty is linked to the guarantee of rights. Because we attack precisely that materiality, don't we?! One example: higher education. It is a right that has been won. And what we are interested in is materiality. Materiality is the guarantee of rights in this case. And that was very impressive. 10 years in which deprivation has systematically diminished. Now, during Lenin Moreno's government, there are already indicators that point to increased poverty, increased inequality and increased precarious employment.

**Gustavo Menon** – Yes, because there is a resumption of the neoliberal agenda, right?

**René Gallegos** – Absolutely. In other words, an agenda that is to benefit the elites, the productive law presents almost no redistribution, it is at the best moment of neoliberalism that guidelines like this agenda are presented. The agenda of traffic to the United States, understand? And it is a perspective that free trade “is the best mechanism of development”. And we've experienced that, there are points that have been experienced. And we are repeating the mistakes of dollarization again. We're in a process of hyper accumulation of groups, especially financial ones.

**Gustavo Menon** – It's expensive to de-dollarize, isn't it?

**René Gallegos** – More expensive than entry. I have no doubt, see?! So, you had to live with dollarization and defend it, you know?! So, logically, they supposedly say that dollarization is the panacea, [but] everything is happening to make dollarization fall. So, we come to a question of historical responsibilities and in this case we have a clear conscience to say: “we did what we had to do”, which was to defend dollarization in its due historical moment, you know?

**Gustavo Menon** – Sure, sure. And finally, René, the Montecristi Constitution is effective in a series of rights. The rights of nature, the rights of people, the collective, private rights, the rights of minority groups, the rights of women. It is worth remembering that feminism was also a protagonist in the constituent process. However, how was the process in the field of education? You were a minister, there was the reaffirmation that education is a right, especially higher education. How did that happen?

**René Gallegos** – The constitution makes mention of gratuitousness and mentions that higher education is a non-profit public good, ok?! This has been managed in the private sphere. This has implied democratization in the field of higher education. It is not only the same reality for women, but it is a phenomenon that happens with international, regional scope, the enrollment of the poorest Ecuadorians, and the indigenous, whose admission has doubled. What happens is

the comparison between the ten years of the “Citizen Revolution” versus the other ten years of neoliberalism to compare similar periods. In other words, it is something that is very interesting that has to do with neoliberalism in the 10 years before the Citizen Revolution. The only economic statement that increased income was the 30% richest, you know? In the RC the only one that decreases is the 30% richest. So, by that I mean that it really [was] a process for the supporters of neoliberalism not to grow. There has been the process of democratization, and that is what worries me, and it has to be an agenda for the next processes of the left which has to think subjectivity, you know? We work with that hypothesis, the change in materiality brought a change in subjectivity. And it's true. But the problem is that there was a change in pro-hegemonic subjectivity instead of being anti-hegemonic. And it has made some dominant groups benefit, you see? It nullified the possibilities for the people to ascend. And it got a class spirit, the upper classes. I say that because the conflict and polarization that comes with it is because when you democratize that, obviously, the field of higher education, it bothers you. Some people who have never had access to the education are now studying. That is, we guarantee people who are the first generation of college students in their family. That changed the life of the whole family. Your community. And before, who had that guaranteed? Just an economic class that was looking for, in the case of higher education, a simple mechanism of distinction. These classes said about the universities: “How will I sit with the pickpocket, with the indigenous, how will I sit with the poor?”

**Gustavo Menon** – Was there an expanding process of the scholarships?

**René Gallegos** – Of the scholarships?

**Gustavo Menon** – Yes, scholarships.

**René Gallegos** – We had an increase in the scholarships, both at national and international level. Here comes the other issue where we always think that a structural change implies, placing great emphasis on the cognitive field. In the field of knowledge. And, for example, investments in higher education have increased from 1% to 2%.

**Gustavo Menon** – From one...?

**René Gallegos** – To 2%. Latin America in the last ten years remained at 0.8%, 1%. Ecuador, with that, was not only the one that grew the most, but also the one that had the highest level in relation to the size of its GDP. Along with Bolivia, which also had a significant increase. So that issue was deliberate. The recovery of the higher education system as part of a long-term development strategy. Obviously, this now seems to be completely stopped, because it's clear that there is a different accumulation strategy than the educational strategy. The accumulation strategy now is the free trade accumulation strategy where the public university is not needed, there will be a...

**Gustavo Menon** – What matters is the “God market”, nothing more.

**René Gallegos** – Exactly. And keep in mind a person with a doctorate who will work in stores to find out which television is best in terms of technology, but it is to sell imported products. Then there will be a problem of expectations. People would like to study in South America, in Europe, and in the United States or in the best universities all over the world, which before was unimaginable. To compare, look, in the last few years alone, before the RC, the state offered 264 scholarships. We have offered 20,000 scholarships in ten years. Why? Because universities needed to improve as part of a development strategy. So that's it, the only one who had them was the one who could afford a scholarship abroad. Because getting scholarships abroad was very complicated with the educational levels we had here. And, obviously, to see that before you had no voice and suddenly you start contradicting the person who recently was the master or the boss. That promotes a social polarization. So, in terms of education, the change was also brutal, all barriers were removed in education as a whole. I mean, in terms of the rights of education. The income, the uniform, the food, everything was free. This phenomenon is not seen in Latin America. An approach of the private to the public. Because what usually happens is an approximation of the public with the private. And, obviously, an issue has happened that is extremely important, that is structural, that is the subject of expectations. If asked before the “Citizen Revolution”, one in ten students wanted to follow higher education. Now it's one in two. The expectations of improvement in being educated were brutal. And, clearly, there was also a search in terms of an epistemological change. The rules of the academic regime dictate that universities rethink themselves based on

certain types of principles, such as: interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, interculturality. We have to build a Plurinational State.

**Gustavo Menon** – And in order not to take up its time, the Constitution has also approved the rights of nature and for many lawyers the Montecristi Constitution is a sophisticated legal mechanism from the point of view of rights, guarantees and nature too, right? As nature is the subject of rights in Ecuador, as it was built in a constituent process, how is this innovation taking place in terms of the formulation of the rights of nature?

**René Gallegos** – For me, that is one of the changes that I would say is not only epistemic if not anthological to the Constitution. As I was telling you, one of the first changes was to move from anthropocentrism to biocentrism. To the lives, you know? Not just humans, but all species. This is a topic that's been worked on a lot with the ecological movements themselves. It is a subject of much debate in the Constitution itself and it breaks with the liberal paradigm, let us not forget that the liberal paradigm says that only a few beings are endowed with rights.

**Gustavo Menon** – Is it a vision of understanding the human being as part of nature?

**René Gallegos** – As part of nature, but from an intergenerational perspective, that is, my children or grandchildren must have the same rights to life, biodiversity and the rights that we have. The same or more. This is the rupture, precisely...

**Gustavo Menon** – Water, for example, as a right and not as a commodity.

**René Gallegos** – Sure, I mean, there comes the biophysicist issue too. There's a delusion from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism or biocentrism. I insist on biocentrism, because it is the center of life, isn't it? Without life, the earth, the air, the water it makes no sense. But surely, in political economy one cannot see only what gives viability for life to happen. And, of course, in that the Constitution has put land and water as rights. Not as consumer goods. So there is also the factor, from my perspective, as much more Yasuni-style innovations. It's a clear example, it's the best example you have of what it means to have a policy as an orientation of an epistemic change of what the society of the *buen vivir* implies. So the point

is the political dispute of transition as society is: I call it *Republican biosocialism* or *Sumak kawsay's Socialism*. Where they obviously compose the rights of nature, it is a fundamental axis that must exist. It cannot conquer the *buen vivir* society without respect for the rights of nature. In fact, change your vision of citizenship. Why? Because the change in citizenship has to do with being at least republican, right? Now *ecorepublican*. Because if we have the right to nature, we have an obligation to nature. I have a duty, from a purely liberal perspective that refers to having rights, but also duties. So at least it's a change to an eco-republican citizenship, okay? So, the paradigm of, say, social revolution in political rights implies another democracy. I call it a sustainable human democracy. Because...

**Gustavo Menon** – A *sumak kawsay socialism*, too?

**René Gallegos** – A *sumak kawsay socialism*, exactly! And why do I say a sustainable human democracy? Because right now the representative democracy that coexists with capitalism is neither human nor sustainable. Thus, this paradigm of *Sumak Kawsay socialism* implies an epistemic change that is beyond capitalism. And we must have a propositive agenda. And that was and is the Constitution. Now, how could we generate a project of the impact of social coexistence that transcends the rupture and when it involves another anthology as well, because it implies another way of seeing it. An anthology of our own. Which obviously also implies an experimental democracy. Since the institutions that exist now will not decant. That is the conclusion of this society, so you must imagine what kind of institutions you need for this *Sumak Kawsay socialism*.

**Gustavo Menon** – Thank you very much, René.

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