

■ GUATEMALA

Poverty eradication requires citizen participation



The absence of a state policy to steer social programmes and the lack of mechanisms to secure the participation of civil society in decision-making processes pertaining to public policies represent major obstacles to poverty eradication and the achievement of inclusive development and gender equity in Guatemala.

Iniciativa Social¹

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Guatemala will be the most highly populated country in Central America by 2015.² Fulfilling the goal of reducing extreme poverty and hunger by half entails enormous challenges. It is time to consolidate peace and national reconciliation and ensure compliance with the 1996 Peace Accords that put an end to 36 years of internal armed conflict and which offer a solid plan for advancing the country towards development and democratization.

Another challenge is to achieve a substantial improvement in the quality of life of 11.2 million Guatemalans. Over half of them live in poverty and over two million survive with less than one dollar a day,³ lacking sufficient income or productive resources to make a decent living.

More than half the population (56%) are under the age of 18,⁴ but only 66% of children complete primary education.⁵ This very low rate of schooling is reflected in the lack of citizen participation in decisions relative to their present and future.

Social exclusion

Historically, Guatemala was characterized by a model of economic and social exclusion, based primarily on the concentration of agricultural land ownership and the exploitation of peasant and indigenous labour.

The concentration of land tenure remains unchanged. Of the total number of farming and agricultural establishments, only 1.5% comprise 62.5% of arable land. In terms of the distribution of na-

tional income, the richest 20% of the population receive 63% of the income while the poorest 20% have access to only 2.1%.⁶

Economic and social inequalities seriously limit the options and opportunities of the rural population and of women and indigenous peoples in particular. An estimated 56% of the total population live in poverty. The poverty situation is even worse in rural areas, where the poverty rate rises to over 80%.⁷

During recent years, according to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates, the gap between the urban and rural areas has become more distressing and the growth of extreme poverty in urban areas is remarkable: in 2000 it affected 2.8% of the population and by 2002 the rate had risen to 4.9%. In rural areas it rose from 23.8% in 2000 to 31% in 2002.⁸

The disadvantaged

Two thirds of children in the country are poor and 48.7% suffer from chronic malnutrition which produces harmful consequences and is visible in the children's low height for their age.⁹

Indigenous people represent 43% of the total population. The majority work in the agricultural sector and receive low salaries, especially those who do not speak Spanish.

Although authorities in the last two government administrations¹⁰ have referred to the important role of women in development, they have not encouraged the participation of women at the social level, even less so in the case of poor and indigenous women.

One third of indigenous girls do not attend school; in the case of indigenous boys this rate falls to 18%.

Poor women face very severe health risks; only 14% of the poorest quintile are assisted by a doctor or a nurse during childbirth, 71% have their children with the help of a midwife and the other 15% receive no attention at all, which increases the risk of death for both mother and child.¹¹

Poverty, exclusion and social inequity have become the characteristics which underlie the development of society¹², seriously limiting the options and opportunities of the general population and severely affecting the rural population, women and indigenous peoples.

Commitments and reality

The situation contrasts with the commitments which the State assumed in 1996, when after a prolonged negotiation, the Peace Accords put an end to armed conflict between the army and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca). The Peace Accords created a national agenda – reached by consensus – to eradicate the causes that had led to such conflict.

The State has not complied with its Millennium Development Goal commitments to reduce poverty and hunger by 2015. By poverty we refer to all conditions that prevent men and women from fully enjoying their economic, social, political, cultural and environmental rights.

Addressing the goal of poverty eradication implies that the State should envisage short, medium and long-term measures for the effective protection and guaranteeing of human rights which would bring real improvements and changes to people's lives. This includes building citizens' capacity to expand their options and opportunities to live a decent life, without discrimination, poverty, injustice or insecurity.

Transparency in state management must be seen as a permanent endeavour and goal. The uprightness and ethics of civil servants are not enough to achieve this goal. It is also necessary for citizens to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and to have access to information. Only then will it be possible to promote social participation in public management.

1 Iniciativa Social (Social Initiative) está integrada por la Asociación de Instituciones de Desarrollo, el Comité Beijing, la Coordinadora Sí Vamos por la Paz! y el Instituto de Investigación y Autoformación Política - INIAP (iniap@intelnet.net.gt).

2 Estimaciones del Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) con base en el XI Censo Nacional de Población 2002.

3 Gobierno de la República. Estrategia de reducción de la pobreza. "El camino de la Paz". Guatemala 2001.

4 Dato de UNICEF para 2004 (www.unicef.org/infobycountry/guatemala_statistics.html).

5 Dato del Banco Mundial para 2003 (www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/countrydata.html).

6 Colectivo de Organizaciones Sociales (COS). *Proceso de Paz: situación actual, análisis y propuesta*. Guatemala, mayo 2003, p. 28.

7 Secretaría General de Planificación del Gobierno de Guatemala. *Metas del Milenio. Informe del Avance de Guatemala*, 2000, p. 3.

8 Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD). *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano 2003. Guatemala: Una Agenda para el Desarrollo Humano*, 2003.

9 *Ibid*, dato para 2002.

10 Alfonso Portillo, del derechista Frente Republicano Guatemalteco, fue presidente en el período 2000-2004. En enero de 2004, la Gran Alianza Nacional, una coalición de partidos de derecha, asumió el poder bajo el mando del presidente Oscar Berger.

11 PNUD. *Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano 2002*, 2002.

12 PNUD. *Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano 2003*, 2003.

This participation will enlarge the public sphere and promote interaction between the State and civil society as well as between civil society and State. In this way they can share the efforts and responsibilities of improving living conditions and the quality of life through concrete social coexistence practices.

Values such as freedom, equity, inclusion, respect for ethnic diversity, women's empowerment and gender equity cannot be ignored when facing problems that cut across the whole society in its quest for a better quality of life as a pre-requisite for peace.

The World Bank has reported that investing in the development of one woman is compensated for by the high rates of social return to socio-economic systems. This return can be measured in terms of a higher rate of schooling for future generations, the curbing of infant mortality, and a reduction in fertility rates, among other indicators.¹³

Lacking a state policy

As in the past, the population today suffers from the fragility of its democratic system. Every four years new authorities renew their promises of change. However deeply rooted problems which constitute the basis for discrimination and exclusion in the country continue to go unresolved. These include unemployment, public safety, food insecurity, corruption, escalating organized crime and drug trafficking, poor provision of basic education and health services, as well as political, social and cultural inequities.

Not to acknowledge the effort made by governments after the Peace Accords is to ignore the mandate for change bestowed by society on its governments to promote development along with equity and inclusion.¹⁴ These efforts however have not materialized into state policy; they have become instead political programmes of the party that will eventually assume power. It is necessary to reach a national consensus over the Peace Accords, a task for which the State is responsible in coordination with civil society. This must guarantee and enforce compliance with the contents of the treaties and generate initiatives and actions to improve the quality of life and living conditions in order to move ahead in the construction of national peace.

The General Planning Secretariat was created in 2001 with the purpose of formulating, assessing and monitoring social development and population policy. The Secretariat was in charge of designing the Strategy to Reduce Poverty (ERP) and other specific strategies at the provincial and municipal levels, within the framework of the Urban and Rural Development Councils. ERP was based on three core pillars around which government actions should

13 Winkler, Donald R. y Andrea Guedes. *Mejorando la Contribución de la Mujer al Desarrollo Económico en América Latina y el Caribe*. Washington DC: Banco Mundial, 1994.

14 Se firmaron más de quince acuerdos multitemáticos, incluido el Acuerdo sobre Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Situación Agraria. They signed more than 15 multi-thematic agreements, including the Agreement on Socio-economic Aspects and Agricultural Situation.

TABLE 1

Reality in figures	
Human Development	
<i>Human Development Index (HDI)</i>	0,672
Urban	0,747
Rural, 583	0,610
Indigenous	0,578
Non-indigenous	0,724
<i>Gender-related Development Index</i>	
Urban	0,740
Rural	0,575
Indigenous	0,546
Non-indigenous	0,711
<i>Gender Empowerment Index</i>	
	0,467
Education	
Literacy rate (% of population aged 15 and over)	69,7
Urban men	86,8
Urban women	77,6
Rural men	64,4
Rural women	49,0
Employment	
Participation rate	61,4
Men	79,4
Women	44,6
Access to public office	
Elected representatives	
Men	144
Women	14
<p>Source: Our own elaboration on the basis of data included in the <i>Statistical Compendium on Human Development and Rural Reality</i>. United Nations Development Programme. Guatemala, 2004.</p>	

have been implemented in order to "sustainably enhance the levels of well-being and quality of life of all Guatemalans, especially the poorest and most excluded ones, in the short and medium terms and comply with the Peace Accords. These pillars are: equitable economic growth and investment in human capital and infrastructure".¹⁵

Lack of consultation

The design of the ERP coincided with the process to define a poverty abatement strategy in other Latin American countries participating in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. However, contrary to what happened in other countries, the initiative was not subjected to a participatory consultation process in Guatemala. There was little contribution by key government stakeholders such as the ministries of health, education and agriculture and few social funds were dedicated to the elaboration of the strategy. Neither were the opinions, demands and proposals of social organizations included.

15 Gobierno de la República de Guatemala: Estrategia de Reducción de la Pobreza. "El camino de la paz", noviembre de 2001.

The 2004-2008 Government Plan targeted four basic areas to deploy its action:

- strengthening of family income through the promotion of investment and productive employment,
- fighting impunity, violence and crime,
- human development through education, health and access to basic services,
- inclusion and citizen participation.¹⁶

The Government is signalling its good intentions but there is a lack of clarity and transparency around State interventions aimed at alleviating hunger and poverty. People have not been taken into consideration when setting priorities and defining lines of action to meet their needs. "The short-term vision of governments has led to a discontinuity of important medium and long-term projects for the country, such as the Peace Accords".¹⁷

Civil society participation

One of the biggest obstacles impairing progress towards poverty reduction is the lack of participation of civil society in decision-making processes relevant to public policies.

The 2000 UNDP Human Development Report states that equitable economic and social policies are directly linked to the preservation of civil and political freedoms and these, in turn, foster social and economic growth and abate poverty and inequality at the economic and social levels. It is the duty of public institutions and relevant stakeholders in the area of human rights to pursue policies that favour the poor and to apply processes that ensure the rights of the poor to participate in policy-making.¹⁸

These processes will be effective only if they are implemented and if the population perceives an improvement in its quality of life in the form of employment, social mobility and development opportunities.

In order to make substantial progress towards poverty reduction, the State must promote growth while ensuring the well-being of disadvantaged sectors, families, the rural population and communities in greater need. In this way development and equity will be pursued along with growth. Additionally, economic and social policies are required at the national level, and sectoral and territorial measures should prioritize human and natural needs and potential. ■

16 "Lineamientos de Gobierno Período 2004-2008". 20 de junio de 2005. www.cgplan.gob.gt/docs/plan2004/plan2004.pdf

17 Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. *Análisis del Programa de Reactivación Económica y Social. ¡Vamos Guatemala!* Agosto de 2004, p. 8.

18 PNUD. *Informe de Desarrollo Humano 2000. Guatemala: La Fuerza Incluyente del Desarrollo Humano*, 2000, pp. 86-87.