

MEXICO

The challenge of inequality



The greatest development challenge facing Mexico is to bridge the inequality gap. The Government's report on the Millennium Development Goals recognizes that the goals achieved so far are not equitable when analyzing the population from a geographical, gender or ethnic group perspective. Nevertheless the federal authorities do not approach the fight against poverty from a human rights perspective and they have not incorporated the substantial contributions of citizen organizations.

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Mexico, a middle-income country in the most unequal region of the world, ranks high among other Latin American countries in terms of economic, social and gender inequity.² Twenty-four years after the ratification of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 10 years after assuming important international commitments related to social development and gender equity³ and five years after the Millennium Declaration and a commitment to abide by its objectives, inequality is Mexico's principal development challenge.

A group of civil organizations and networks undertook an alternative study in connection with the upcoming September 2005 plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration in order to contribute to the debate and the search for solutions. This report presents some of our ideas, concerns and proposals, together with comments on the Government's 2005 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Progress Report and some of its goals and targets (henceforward referred to as the official report).⁴

Even if the contents of the official report can and should be discussed, the document itself recognizes that "just by disaggregating the MDG follow-up information by geographical area, sex or ethnic group we obtain not only different levels of progress but also

results with wider gaps between them. Therefore, many of the achievements are not yet equitable; this shows that inequality and backwardness are prevalent as major issues in the development of Mexico."⁵

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Reduce poverty by half

In order to formulate public policies and programmes that foster social development and combat poverty, it is essential to use a multidimensional approach that defines poverty as the denial of human rights since poverty is a sustained and chronic deprivation of the capacity, options, security and power necessary to enjoy an adequate standard of living as well as other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.⁶

Unfortunately, this is not the approach of the "With You" (*Contigo*) Human Development and Social Strategy of President Fox's government (2001-2006). None of the programmes included in the poverty reduction strategy were designed from a human rights perspective and are therefore limited in scope. For example, the "Opportunities" (*Oportunidades*) Programme stresses the importance of strengthening human capital (capacity building) in health, education and nutrition-related areas. This approach, promoted by the multilateral banks, has proven to be inadequate in solving the vicious cycle of poverty.⁷

If the federal Government was to promote a social policy based on human rights, both the budget and public spending would be consistent with Article 2 of the CESCR, which regulates the adoption of measures up to the maximum of the available resources to the progressive fulfilment of the rights recognized in the Covenant.

Although the official report recognizes that social spending is the main instrument to combat poverty, and that resources for social programmes have increased, it is necessary to highlight two key aspects.

First, a closer look at the Federal Public Economic Accounts reveals a trend that disfavours social spending since not all of the allocated resources are being used. Conversely, an excessive use of resources is evident in programmes or by entities outside of the social spending area, as is the case of the Ministries of Economy and Public Credit, National Defence, Foreign Affairs and Government.⁸

For instance, the "With you" (*Contigo*) Strategy sector in charge of "creating jobs and income opportunities in marginalized regions and areas of the country" used only 96% of the resources allocated to it in 2003, which in turn were 22.3% less than those used in 2002.⁹ This is the sector leaving the most resources untouched and its budget has been cut since the beginning of the present administration as a result. The Temporary Job Programme is one of the most affected by the allocation cuts. During 2003, it used 94% of the total resources assigned to it. However this amount is 54% less than its allocated resources in 2002. The number of positions created by the programme in 2003 was reduced by a similar proportion.

Meanwhile, the asset development sector - Programme on Savings, Subsidy and Credit for Progressive Housing (*Tu casa*) - has not seen its funding increase since 2002. In fact its resources show a downward trend. The explanation given by the Government in 2003 was that the executing institutions had not submitted a request or were not interested in being part of the programme. Considering that the population considers housing the main family asset and that many families are in need of a home, this statement is worrying.

MDG 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce maternal mortality

The official report does not study in depth how public health services are lagging behind and how this translates into inequity across sectors of the population and

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2 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/United Nations Development Program (UNDP)/Instituto de Pesquisa Económica Aplicada. *Hacia el objetivo del Milenio de reducir la pobreza en América Latina y el Caribe*, 2003.

3 During the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

4 Government of the Republic. Human and Social Development Bureau. *Los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio en México: Informe de Avance 2005*. (Prepared jointly with the United Nations System in Mexico).

5 *Ibid*, p. 3.

6 UN Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee. Cuestiones sustantivas que se plantean en la aplicación del Pacto Internacional de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y culturales: La Pobreza y el Pacto Internacional de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales. Declaration E/C.12/2001/10 approved by the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee on May 4, 2001, www.unhcr.ch

7 Sandoval Terán, Areli. *Estudio sobre estrategias de reducción de la pobreza en México*, DECA Equipo Pueblo; Social Watch Regional Network. *Pobreza y Sociedad Civil. Análisis y Desafíos desde la perspectiva de la Sociedad Civil en Centro América y México*. El Salvador: Asociación Intersectorial para el Desarrollo Económico y el Progreso, 2004, pp. 108-129.

8 The budget and social spending analysis presented in this report was prepared by FUNDAR researchers (www.fundar.org.mx).

9 Ministry of Economy and Public Credit. *Cuenta de la Hacienda Pública Federal 2003, Resultados Generales, Desarrollo Social y Humano*. p. 205.

between the different states. The "Start life off equal" (*Arranque parejo en la vida*) Programme focuses resources and action on high-risk pregnancies, even though maternal death takes place mostly during unpredictable obstetric emergencies. Another aspect of the programme that should be revised is the collection of payments to cover costs. Although it has been established that the poorest 10% will be exempt from payment, the cost of assistance during childbirth, plus transportation and accommodation, is unaffordable for poor women, especially when they live in remote areas. The programme foresees the construction of inns in the southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, but the implementation has been minimal.

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 7: Combat HIV/AIDS

The official report confirms that the struggle against HIV/AIDS is a national priority and assures that the resources allocated to prevention and control programmes in 2004 are 14 times greater than those allocated in 2000. However, this increase was primarily due to the acquisition of anti-retroviral drugs. Data from the National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Centre indicates that in 2002 the expenditure by local governments was 43 times greater than the amount invested for that purpose in 1999, while spending on condoms was only 4.6 times more than 1999 figures.¹⁰ It is precisely this disparity between treatment and prevention resources that makes the strategy inconsistent with the discourse.

In Mexico, a meagre 13% of the prevention expenses are geared to risk populations. For example only 10% of condom expenses are geared to men who have sex with other men.¹¹ If prevention efforts are not enhanced, especially with regard to sexual transmission and higher risk groups, will Mexico will reach a point where there will be insufficient resources to offer treatment and medicine to all people living with HIV/AIDS.

MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 10: Safe drinking water and sanitation

According to the official report, between 1990 and 2003 there were improvements in water supply and sanitation coverage and the number of people with piped water and connections to public sewerage systems or septic tanks increased.¹² However the report omits the problem of regional differences in water availability, access and quality.

The Federal District (DF) has a human development index of 0.891 which is higher than the other 31 federal states and superior to the national mean of

0.802.¹³ Nevertheless water access inequality is alarming in the DF. In the Iztapalapa Delegation - home to two million people accounting for approximately 20% of the DF population - over 600,000 people do not have piped water on a daily basis and they obtain their water on an rotating system three times a week.¹⁴ Some DF neighbourhoods get their water once every fortnight while other areas of the city are free to consume over 350 litres a day per inhabitant.¹⁵

Target 11: Improve the living standards of those with poor housing conditions

The official report considers urban poverty to be "mostly moderate or asset-related".¹⁶ The asset poverty concept excludes other options relative to rental, use, co-operative ownership and other tenure modalities whose security must also be recognized. The report fails to mention that there is lack of public policies and programmes offering cheap, legal, accessible and affordable housing options for people living in poverty and extreme poverty. Conversely, the report appears to blame the poor for the tenure and housing irregularity problems without clearly presenting the reasons for the problem or highlighting the lack of a human rights perspective in housing policy.

MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 13: Needs of the less developed countries

The official report describes some measures relative to trade, international cooperation and human development, and mentions the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) which covers nine states in the south and south-eastern region of Mexico and seven Central American countries and is the 2001 Mexican proposal to Central America for regional economic and social development.¹⁷ Since the Meso-American Human Development Initiative in 2003, the Government has decided to reorient and build on this initiative for the fulfilment of the MDGs. However it has not mustered sufficient resources for the project or support from the communities that guarantee its feasibility. Between 2001 and 2004, most of the PPP's resources were invested in the Highway Integration, Energy Integration, Promotion of Tourism, Trade Promotion and Integration of Telecommunications initiatives while human and sustainable development initiatives were allocated more limited funds.¹⁸

13 UNDP. *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano México 2002 and Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano México 2004*.

14 Federal District Environmental and Land Use Management Bureau, www.paot.org.mx

15 Federal District Human Rights Commission. "Concluye el Foro Intersectorial sobre el Derecho al Agua en la Ciudad de México", Press release N° 27/2005, March 13, 2005, www.cdhdof.org.mx and www.derechoalagua.org

16 Government of the Republic, *op cit*, p. 109.

17 Delaplace, Domitille. "Reflexiones sobre el Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) para el V Foro Social Mundial". DECA Equipo Pueblo, mimeo, Mexico, January 2005.

18 Alianza Mexicana por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos. "Violación a los Derechos Económicos, Sociales, Culturales y Ambientales (DESCA) por el Plan Puebla-Panamá", unpublished, Mexico, 2004.

The Mexican Government should not disregard the strong criticism and resistance of PPP opponents. These include not only the hundreds of civil organizations in Mexico and the region but also the peasant and indigenous communities, who have not been informed or consulted on infrastructure mega-projects and have been deprived of their lands by deceit and threats.¹⁹

Conclusions

The structural problem of Mexico's inequality calls for the right combination of legal measures and public policies (social, economic, labour, environmental, farming, etc.) to redistribute income and allocate budgetary resources. These solutions must clearly incorporate human rights, gender and sustainability perspectives. This is a must in order to go beyond the MDGs and it reinforces the need to "establish additional commitments that are more in line with the reality of the country", as stated by the Government in its report.

The measures must be defined in the framework of an in-depth, comprehensive and participatory discussion on the development model, priorities and alternatives. In his speech during the presentation of the 2005 MDG Progress Report in April 2005, President Fox underlined that the main purpose of the publication was "to trigger a national debate that leads to the construction of a long-term development perspective, the consolidation of democratic governance and the strengthening of citizenship. The three levels of government (municipal, state and federal) must participate in this debate along with legislators, the academic sector, the private initiative, international organizations and civil society in general."²⁰

Civil society has permanently contributed proposals to this end. For example, during the National Programme on Human Rights (NPHR) formulation process in 2004, we suggested a review of the existing social programmes and their reorientation to meet the obligations of the State outlined in the CDESCR: appropriate measures, allocation of maximum resources, progressiveness, no discrimination, and comprehensive rights.

However the proposals relative to economic, social and cultural rights were not incorporated into the NPHR, revealing a lack of vision on the part of the Government for human rights based social and economic development and reducing the potential of social policies to contribute fully to the country's development. It will be necessary to set up adequate and effective mechanisms for institutional consultation, dialogue, priority identification, appropriate measures definition, correct decision-making and follow-up processes. In the meantime, the democratic planning of development as foreseen in Article 26 of the Constitution will not be a reality in Mexico. ■

19 International Peace Brigades, "Paquete de Información Quincenal sobre México" N° 85, 10 - 23 November 2003, www.peacebrigades.org/mexico

20 Government of the Republic, *op cit*, p. 4.