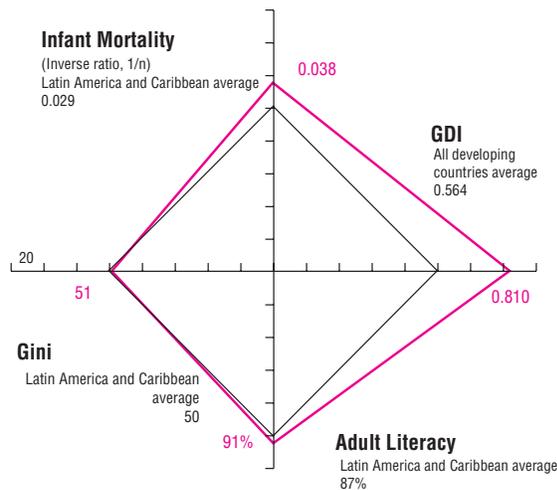


• ALBERTO YEPES PALACIO



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

In the last ten years, forced displacement of persons has caused a major fracture in Colombia, tearing apart its social web. It is the main generator of social disintegration in the country. Colombia rapidly became the country with the greatest number of displaced

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nationals. Displacement results from the intensification of armed conflict and deliberate dispossession strategies of economic elites that seek to concentrate landholdings. Achievement of an integrated, social, safe and just society is a distant goal in Colombia. Some progress has been made recently, but over the last few years there have also been regrettable setbacks.

The last three decades have witnessed an improvement in the country's basic social indicators, expressed in greater coverage regarding literacy, primary education, basic health care, provision of drinking water, sewage and energy, better sanitary conditions and the expansion of social care networks for children. The Basic Needs indicator dropped from 70.2% at the beginning of the sixties to 32% by the mid-nineties.¹

In contrast to this situation, poverty by income, social inequality, concentration of income and property, forced displacement of persons and unemployment have all risen. The inefficiency of institutions and alarming levels of corruption also negatively affect the country's social integration policies.

The very high level of income concentration is one factor explaining the increase of poverty. Throughout 1996, the three main economic groups appropriated 36% of the USD 1.5 billion in growth of the national economy. Five groups control 92% of the financial sector's assets, and 48% of the land is in the hands of 1.3% of the owners. 20% of the richest households concentrated 52% of the income.²

According to a household survey by the National Statistics Administration Department, the Gini index of income concentration per person (which rises between 0 and 1 as inequality increases) grew from 0.55 in 1991 to 0.56 in 1995. For 1997, this indicator was expected to be 0.57.³

1 BERNAL, Jorge. Propuestas sobre política económica y social para la paz. Documento central de la Cumbre Social contra la Pobreza, por la Equidad y la Paz. September 1998. Mimeo.
 2 SARMIENTO A., Libardo. El desarrollo social en la encrucijada. In: Síntesis 98. Anuario social, político y económico de Colombia. TM Editores. 1998. pp. 23–33.
 3 SARMIENTO A. *Ibid.* p. 29.

Since the Social Summit in 1995, poverty has persistently increased: from 55.1% in 1995 it rose to 57.0% in 1997. This implies that the number of people having insufficient income to obtain the minimum shopping basket, rose from 13.3 million in 1972 to 22.9 million in 1997. In the same period, rural poverty by income rose from 72.8% to 78.7% of the entire rural population; urban poverty by income rose from 45.2% in 1994 to 48.0% in 1997. Unemployment (between 11.4% and 13.8% throughout 1996 and 1997) rose to 15.8% of the economically active population by June 1998. In the country's four main cities, the unemployment rate has doubled in the last four years.⁴

About 603 thousand indigenous people, that is almost 2% of the population, live in Colombia. Indigenous people do not have access to most of the rights enjoyed by the mestizo and white populations. **Only 11.3% of indigenous children of school age have access to primary education, while the national coverage is 85%.** The illiteracy rate is 44%, while the national average is 13%.⁵ This situation is shared by the Afro-Colombian communities where 80% of the families have unsatisfied basic needs, 76% live in conditions of extreme poverty⁶ and their rate of unemployment is 42%, almost three times the national rate.

The persistence and intensification of the prolonged armed conflict suffered by the Colombian people for nearly 40 years is the main expression of a fragmented society and the absence of any important progress in achieving social integration goals. Forced displacement goes hand in hand with serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

According to a report to congress by the People's Defender, from 1985 through the first half of 1998, over 1.3 million Colombians were displaced, with an average 100 thousand people per year. One of every 30 Colombians has been driven from his/her place of origin—and the situation continues to worsen. Data provided by the Colombian Episcopal Conference show that over 50% of the displaced are minors, and women represent 58.2% of total displaced persons.⁷ Presently most of them live in shantytowns in the major cities, intermediary cities and municipalities, under precarious conditions, lacking public services. There is no direct and concrete commitment on the part of national or local authorities to take care of the displaced population.

This situation requires priority action by the various State offices. Their priorities, however, lie elsewhere. In 1996—1997, expenditure on security and defense rose by 7%, while investments in the agricultural sector fell by the same percentage.⁸

Despite efforts to integrate new social sectors, other indicators have worsened or may worsen: social security coverage is low (53% of the population); 15% of the population lacks access to drinking water and basic sanitation; 8% of children under five years of age are under-weight (indicating under-nutrition); gross enrollment in schools at all levels does not exceed 70%; 15% of births are not assisted by trained personnel and the maternal mortality rate is 100 per 100 thousand live births.⁹ In sum, problems related to the social welfare of the Colombian people have become more serious over the past decade and particularly during 1996, 1997 and 1998.

The phenomenon of forced, massive and systematic displacement shows the enormous gap that has widened in Colombian society in the last ten years. It places at risk achievements regarding social indicators, integration of the various sectors, and the level of human development that had steadily been gaining for 40 years. Lack of adequate attention to this phenomenon is the main factor placing at risk the country's progress toward a stable, integrated, just, tolerant society, respectful of diversity and enabling all people to participate, including vulnerable groups. This is the fourth commitment taken on by governments, including Colombia, that attended the Social Summit.

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4 El desempleo no da tregua. In: El tiempo, October 20, 1998. pp. 1B y 7B.

5 Presidential Council for Social Policy—PNR—UNDP. Colombia Report to the Fourth International Women's Conference, Beijing, China. 1995.

6 Social Summit against Poverty, for Equity and Peace. Negro Communities' Document. October 1998. p. 1.

7 Comments and proposals on the situation of economic, social and cultural rights and forced displacement in Colombia. In: Éxodo Nº 9. September 1998. pp. 3–21.

8 DNP—UIFP «Ejecución Presupuesto de Inversión. Vigencia fiscal 1997». Cited in OLEA, Helena, 1989 «Seguimiento del cumplimiento de las recomendaciones del Comité de Derechos Económicos, sociales y culturales». Colombian Jurists Commission, polycopied. p. 9.

9 BERNAL, J. *Op. cit.* p. 1.