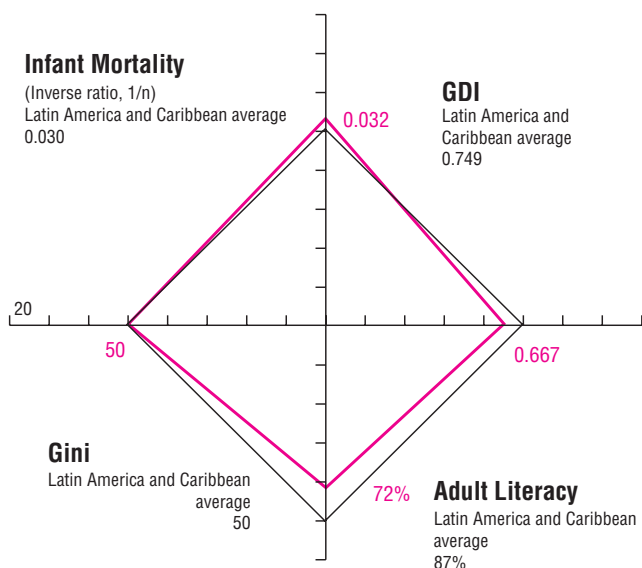


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PENDING DEVELOPMENT...



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*).

The beginning of the 1990s was a moment of hope for the Salvadoran people because of the signing of the Peace Accords and the subsequent signing –by the government– of international commitments. Of particular significance among the latter were those signed at the World Summit for Social Development and the IV World Conference on Women. These commitments established an explicit frame of reference –both internally and externally– that would enable El Salvador to chart a path toward sustainable development. However, whichever indicator is used, it is clear that the Salvadoran government has failed to comply with

the agreements and commitments it made. This is the case for commitments relating to social development, job creation, equality for women and solutions to problems affecting children. Although some progress has been made, no concerted effort was taken to develop systematic policies and plans that would make possible significant improvements in the medium and long terms. In fact, what progress was made is the result of pressure from civil society on the government. There is also no progress on incorporation of all actors in the process, which would legitimise the commitments still further and give them sustained support.

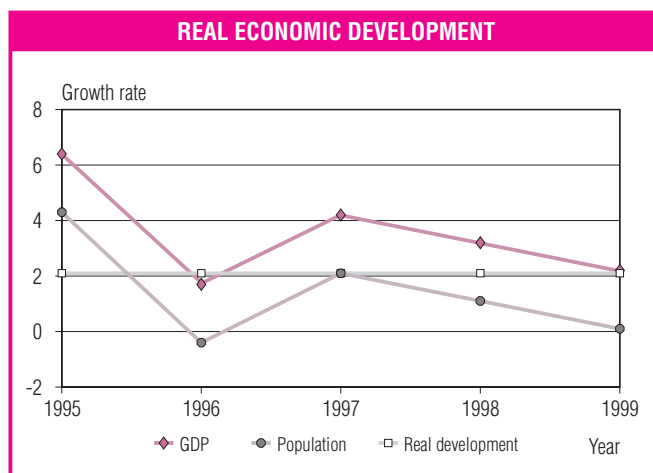
The points of reference for a critique of government action should not only be whether the set goals have been reached. Because they involve macroeconomic factors, it would be difficult to achieve these goals in the space of five years. We should also ask whether the necessary foundations have been laid for a national social project that will lead to sustainable development in the medium and long terms. It is in this latter respect that the government's failure to comply with its commitments becomes apparent. In these five years, the government has not taken the necessary steps to build a model of sustainable development or solve the serious problem of unemployment, nor has it moved toward resolving the problems affecting children and the education system. All of which –and much more– the government promised it would do at Copenhagen and Beijing.

EXHAUSTION OF THE ECONOMIC MODEL

In the 1995–1999 period, the Salvadoran government continued to apply—without much originality— structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

More than fifteen years have passed since the application of the first SAPs¹ in the country, and SAPs span four different governments—one Christian Democrat and three ARENA administrations.² Throughout this period, the implementation of SAPs has made absolutely manifest the government's inability to extend development to the whole Salvadoran population. Furthermore, ideological stubbornness in the application of such programmes has become a serious obstacle.

In particular, Calderón Sol's administration was unable to find a path towards sustainable development (economic growth plus increased quality of life for the population), and not even toward stable growth (continuous rise in GDP). This is demonstrated by the fact that the average growth rate of production fell by two percentage points, from 5.5% from 1990–1994, to 3.5% in 1995–1999. When compared with population growth (2.1%), this drop shows a tendency toward minor social development or even negative development.³



The unemployment rate fell minimally, from 7.65% in 1995 to 7.45% in 1999 (DIGESTYC).⁴ This small reduction is attributed to an increase in the number of temporary waged workers (in *maquilas* and consumer services) and of self-employed workers (forms of under-employment). In other words, while it is true that employment increased, insecurity of employment also increased,

since the number of temporary and low-paid contracts increased together with different forms of under-employment.⁵

If the trade and fiscal deficits,⁶ *Achilles' heels* of the Salvadoran neoliberal model, are added in for the same period, it is easy to conclude that ***the Salvadoran government has not complied with its commitments to devise a social and economic solution that would benefit the majority of the population.***

POVERTY, THE ETERNAL ILL

Poverty is not peculiar to El Salvador, but it has been endemic in the second smallest country on the continent. Almost half of Salvadoran households suffer from some kind of want and ***although the number of households below the poverty line decreased from 47.5% in 1995 to 45.1% in 1999, the number of households living in absolute poverty increased from 18.2% to 18.9% over the same period.*** Similarly, the gap between urban (decreased) and rural (increased) poverty has grown.⁷ In other words, a small decrease in the overall rate of poverty has been achieved at the cost of deeper poverty and greater regional differences.

This situation is exacerbated by the lack of systematic state policies designed to reduce poverty levels. Although certain anti-poverty policy directions have been laid down by the government, they are very general or simply not implemented, so they have ended up being no more than a list of good intentions. This situation casts doubt on the government's commitment relating to the eradication of poverty in the medium-term.

The true face of poverty, as well as its expansion, is revealed by the *high vulnerability of Salvadoran society in the face of natural disasters*. The high levels of destruction which resulted when the tropical storm Mitch (October 1998) swept through the country made plain the desperate lack of adequate state services, the existence of large pockets of poverty, the lack of prevention and reconstruction plans in case of natural disasters, and the corruption and mismanagement of aid for the affected population.

This vulnerability provides a clear and instructive reminder of the close relationship that exists between *poverty, natural disasters and the environment*, and signals the appalling record of ecological destruction in El Salvador: at the present time, only

1 In 1983, the Salvadoran government received its first «stand-by» loans from the IMF; in 1986, the first SAP—of a heterodox type—was implemented; from 1989, orthodox SAPs have been applied systematically.

2 The Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) in the following administrations: 1989–1994, Alfredo Cristiani; 1995–1999, Armando Calderón Sol; 1999–2003, current president Francisco Flores.

3 In 1996, GDP rose by less than the population growth rate, which points to a clear lack of development.

4 National Statistics and Census Office.

5 In 1998, under-employment affected 634,000 people (50.4% women, 49.6% men), approximately 50% of the urban EAP Multi-Aim Household Survey (EHPM), 1999.

6 The foreign trade deficit had an average value of USD 1,528 million between 1995 and 1999. The deficit was covered by remittances sent by Salvadorans working abroad. BCR, National Accounts.

7 In 1998, 13.7% of urban households were living in absolute poverty; in rural areas the figure more than doubled (27.3%). EHPM, 1999.

2% of primary forest remains (98% has been deforested), 12% of the country's surface is covered by vegetation (2% primary forest and 10% coffee plantations), 50% of national territory has seriously deteriorated owing to deforestation and erosion, and only 46% of land can still be considered appropriate for agricultural use. The average rate of soil erosion is calculated at 3 millimetres per year, which means an estimated loss of 32 million cubic meters of soil per year;⁸ 90% of rivers are contaminated by black water, agricultural products and industrial waste, which explains why more than 12,000 children aged 0 to 5 die each year from polluted drinking water and gastrointestinal diseases.⁹

WHAT ABOUT THE COMMITMENT OF DISSEMINATION?

In Copenhagen and Beijing governments agreed to disseminate information about the agreements signed so that citizens could make the agreements their own and press for fulfilment. Five years later, the government has not yet adequately recognised much less disseminated these agreements. In a recent opinion poll, 94.3% said they had never heard of, and/or knew nothing about the world summits.¹⁰ Of the 5.7% of people who said that they knew something about the conferences, 26.8% said they knew about Beijing and 15.5% knew about Copenhagen. With respect to fulfilment of the agreements, 35.2% believed they had not been fulfilled and 36.6% thought they had been partially fulfilled. What dissemination took place is due to the efforts of civil society organisations, particularly Social Watch.

ASSESSMENT OF BEIJING

Although awareness-raising on gender issues among the population has advanced, there is still a long way to go to achieve the objectives signed in Beijing.

As examples of positive advances we can mention: the creation by the government in 1995 of the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development (ISDEMU) and the formulation of the National Women's Policy for the years 1997–2000. In 1998, reforms to the penal, procedural and penitentiary laws came into force that incorporated as crimes those of intra-family violence and sexual harassment. These advances in the legal code were made possible by the untiring work of women's organisations.

The few existing measures designed to combat gender discrimination in access to work, wages, property rights, *etc.*, are not co-ordinated within a clear anti-discrimination framework policy and contain a *conservative approach* to women's and men's roles.¹¹ The greatest difficulties are concentrated in the culture of discrimination, the obstacles women face in accessing quality services, and the lack of funding to implement these measures.

There have also been serious setbacks, such as the change in abortion laws reinforced by reform of article 1 of the Political Constitution of 1999. *This change eliminated the three exceptional cases in which abortion was permitted by law*, which had been in force since 1940 (when the mother's life is at risk, in cases of rape and of foetus malformation). Civil society organisations consider this reform to be a flagrant violation of *Women's Human Rights*, since it denies women the right to decide over their own bodies.

Despite the advances made with respect to equality for women, institutional platforms dealing with gender need to be deepened and strengthened, especially with reference to participation in the labour force, the recognition of domestic work, the elimination of intra-family violence, and awareness-raising around gender issues among the whole population.

In short, we can say that ***the government has not fulfilled adequately the commitments signed at Beijing and Copenhagen with respect to equality for women.*** The agenda remains open, awaiting its fulfilment and implementation.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Both the World Summit for Social Development and the IV World Conference on Women emphasised the important role of investment in education and health as part of a national development project. In El Salvador, progress in these two areas continues to show serious deficiencies, which clearly illustrate the social gap of under-development and the lack of access to modernity for the majority of the Salvadoran population.

The clearest indicators of the social deficit in education are still the high illiteracy rates (17.8% according to the government or 28.6% according to UNICEF), which are most concentrated in rural areas and show higher percentages among women.

The average schooling rate is still very low, although it has increased in absolute terms from 4.67 grades in 1995 to 5.01 in 1998.¹² This situation is exacerbated by high dropout levels and repeat rates, a phenomenon that is particularly related to poverty levels and the need to start work at an early age to complement

⁸ Figures for 1996. *Estado del ambiente y los recursos naturales en Centroamérica*, CCAD, 1998, CR.

⁹ CIDEF, *Enfoque Ambiental Institucional*, 1999.

¹⁰ Public opinion poll on the summits, carried out by IUDOP/UCA and DIGNAS/Social Watch, 1999.

¹¹ In 1998, the average national wage was 20% greater for men than for women, the differential being greater—paradoxically—in the city. MPHS, 1999.

¹² Household Survey, 1995 and 1999.

END OF THE CENTURY DEMOCRACY

At the end of 1999, the model of democracy in the country is faulty, no matter how it is viewed. The new administration –headed by Francisco Flores– is characterised by labour crises and blocked access to information of a public nature. Wage adjustment and the non–privatisation of the health service have been the principal demands of employees in three strikes in the education sector, one in the judiciary and nine by unionists from the Salvadoran Institute of Social Security and the Medical Union. Communication and spaces for dialogue between the government and civil society are closing rapidly and dangerously; many sectors have called for consensus, but at the end of the twentieth century, the president of the republic maintained a confrontational attitude.

the family income. According to ILO data, 311,000 children currently participate full–time in the labour market. The problems of attending and remaining at school is reflected in the low level of studies completed (4.85 is the national average).

At the end of 1999, 72% of students taking a national secondary education test scored lower than 5.3 (on a scale of 0 to 10 where 6 is «average»). This reflects the serious problem that exists in the quality of education. To reverse this situation, greater effort is needed on the part of government institutions and more resources need to be assigned to education, together with more efficient use of the latter.¹³

With respect to health, the situation is yet more dramatic. The three most common causes of death among the population have remained almost unchanged since 1948: *diarrhoea and gastrointestinal diseases; pneumonia and bronchopneumonia; and various injuries*.¹⁴ In other words, in terms of practical results, not a lot has been achieved in the last 50 years as far as public health is concerned. Likewise, a large part of the health infrastructure is in a state of deterioration or is obsolete. In addition, the health budget allocation has remained stagnant. According to declarations made by the Minister of Health, «...if public investment in health does not improve considerably,

the whole health system could collapse in the space of 2 or 3 years.».¹⁵

Faced with this situation, the government response has been to transfer certain activities to the private sector, in a process of gradual privatisation of the public health system. Rather than resolving the problem, this actually exacerbates it. Civil society organisations have opposed this privatisation process, reaffirming the social commitment to a public health system accessible to the whole population.¹⁶

In view of the critical situation in the public health system, various civil society organisations have presented a range of initiatives, including the *Citizen Proposal for Health*, the result of analysis by the medical sector and civil society organisations and a wide–ranging social consultation in which 151 institutions participated (local governments, health unions, community and management health committees, universities, NGOs, private health service providers). Other initiatives are the creation of a «*social health comptroller*» with the aim of guaranteeing universal access to these services, and a call for a *national plebiscite* on the question of reform and privatisation of the health services.

These proposals have not been taken into account in the new government's health policy, however, which kicked off with labour reforms in the health sector and a confrontation with workers from the social security system.

The situation in the health system is expected to get worse next year, when, according to the national budget proposal, investment in health for the year 2000 will be the lowest for the whole fiscal period.

When all this is taken into account, in general terms we can state that the results in the area of **education and health in El Salvador are very far from what was agreed at Copenhagen and Beijing**.

THE TWENTY–FIRST CENTURY– WHOSE CENTURY IS IT?

In one way or another, the arrival of the new century has generated great expectations; most of them –reflected in hundreds of small and big screen films– represent the twenty–first century as a kingdom in which needs are met by technological progress. These fantasies are indeed becoming a reality, but not for everyone.

¹³ Although the education budget increased (67% between 1995/99), it still is not enough to cover new demands and implement in full the necessary changes, increase coverage and reduce dropout rates.

¹⁴ «Various injuries» includes all the cases caused by violence and crime, which are so extensive that the public health system has to assign 70% of hospital resources to attend to the population affected. A 1998 IADB Report classified San Salvador as the fourth most violent city in Latin America.

¹⁵ *Diario de Hoy*. January 12th 1999.

¹⁶ According to a public opinion poll, 80% of respondents do not agree with the privatisation of public health services, 96% hold the state responsible for public health, and 62% said they were not aware of the reform of the health system. *Acción para la Salud en El Salvador, Sondeo de Opinión sobre la Reforma de Salud*, November 1999.

They are a reality only for those who can pay—for that 1% of Salvadorans with monthly incomes between USD 1,700 and USD 8,000.

The majority, meanwhile, shares daily concerns in conditions that are very similar to those that existed at the beginning of the century and they earn less than USD 350 a month.

We conclude that the Salvadoran government has not adequately complied with the ethical and political commitments signed in Copenhagen and Beijing. Nor has it contributed much to the *civilta humana*¹⁷ project at a global level. The process must be strengthened and reoriented to take advantage of the end of the century, and to reaffirm and implement the commitments signed five years ago in Copenhagen and Beijing. Civil society organisations play a fundamental role, both in terms of political lobbying, and as actors in any sustainable development project. Only in this way will it be possible to continue building on the initiatives of the 1990s: the *civilta humana* project, the *internationalisation of human values*, to realise rights to a decent life, education and equality, and to oppose and subsume the current globalisation of capital across the world.

Social alliances must be constructed to promote a true project of national development, a social contract that requires a change in economic model, replacing neoliberal thinking by social development, criteria of strict profitability by those of social benefit, and microeconomic exploitation by macro-level sustainability. Only in this way will it be possible to offer modernity to the majority of Salvadorans, incorporate them fully in the new century and overcome once and for all the true legacy of the twentieth century.

- Social Watch Initiative in El Salvador. The following institutions participate: Women for Dignity and Life (Las DIGNAS); Maquilishuatl Foundation (FUMA); Intersectorial Association for Economic Development and Social Progress (CIDEP). <cidepnet@es.com.sv>

¹⁷ Latin phrase, for what the Salvadoran Social Watch Initiative understands: «A civilized world, a human world is the project nations must build... it is perhaps our utopia, maybe. But as someone once said: utopia is necessary to walk forward.»