

U R U G U A Y

R E P O R T

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A VERY VULNERABLE «DEVELOPMENT»

Uruguay has presented a highly privileged situation since the first UNDP Human Development Report was produced on the basis of the Human Development Index (HDI) created to measure this. Since then it has maintained one of the leading positions amongst the developing countries, at the head of Latin America. This position is a relative advantage in the international context, and cannot be underestimated, although the general HDI can suffer variations –as is seen in table 1– when some other data are taken into account (gender inequality, percentage of total income at the disposal of the poorest 20%).

by both development aid from the rich countries, and the multilateral agencies which manage this. The recession of the last twenty-five years has lowered the standard of living of a large part of the population –with less access to basic services, housing, social benefits, family subsidies, employment, etc.– and this justifies the lack of agreement. For while some believe these indices are adequate indicators of the degree of advancement of the present society, others discredit them for covering up the recessions which have taken place in the long term overview. Certainly, in the case of Uruguay, it would seem more apt to give greater weighting to interpreting the HDI value as a result of historical accumulation achieved at the beginning of the seventies than as a current advance in relation to former situations.

TABLE 1.

Human development index (HDI) – (Circa 1994) (1)					
	HDI	Ave.avail. accord. to gender	Adjusted accord. to gender	Adjust. acc. to income(a)	Adjust. acc. to inc. (b)
Total for country	0.859	79.90	0.686	0.625	0.725
Total for country (recalc.)	0.848	79.90	0.678	0.613	0.714
Montevideo	0.859	79.85	0.686	0.626	0.731
Urban interior	0.840	77.25	0.649	0.622	0.723

Source: On the basis of data collected by Fernández, M. and Fernández, A. «El Índice de Desarrollo Humano: un análisis crítico», in «Salario, Pobreza y Desarrollo Humano en el Uruguay», Claeh–PNUD (UNDP), Montevideo, 1995.

- (1) The recalculation and the adjustments were made using data from years near to 1994: 1991 for income, and 1993 for inequality between the sexes.
 (a) the distribution of income was taken according to the relationship between the 20% of poorest homes/20% of richest homes.
 (b) the distribution of income was taken according to the Gini index.

In the same way, the nations shows indicators equal to or above the aims set by the World Summit on Social Development for the year 2000 –and even for some years afterwards–, on literacy, education, sewage systems, access to drinking water, infant and maternal mortality rates, basic infrastructure and food security.

However, from another angle the «thermal sensation» of a large part of the citizenry is not in line with what is reflected by those indices, nor the «truthfulness» which they have been attributed

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY TODAY

Within the framework of a structural crisis which, with ups and downs, lasted until half way through the eighties, poverty increased to levels unknown since the first half of the century in Uruguay. In 1985, following twelve years of dictatorship, the country showed indicators which pointed towards an increase in inequality through a fall in standard of living for large groups of the population: economic crisis, high inflation, greater income concentration, around a fifth of the population in situations of poverty, a reduction in the most protected jobs, an increase in informality, unemployment which surpassed the historical limits and the deterioration of salaries.

From 1986 onwards, two poverty indicators started to show a certain level of recovery, although successive adjustments produced periodical backward movements up until the present. On one hand, the increase in real salaries has allowed for compensation – although only in part– for the large loss in relation to two decades ago (in Montevideo in 1985, the average real salary of the private sector, represented 65% of the highest value they reached in 1971 and in 1995 they had reached 86% of this maximum); on the other hand; since 1989, there has been an improvement in the household income, especially the most vulnerable homes (which did not manage to compensate for the previous deterioration either) although these improvements may not con-

tinue. as from 1995 to 1996 the average income of the homes showed a negative growth rate. Given that these improvements have been accompanied by fluctuations in income concentration, rather than a reduction of this, it can be estimated that the middle sectors are once again experiencing recession which keeps a quite large number of homes in a vulnerable position.

This relative recovery has allowed the percentage of homes under the poverty line to fall –independently of the method used to calculate this– in a sustained way from 1989 to date. According to Melgar, A. (1995), between 1989 and 1993, in Montevideo the poor homes fell as a percentage of the total, from 16.8% to 9.9% and in the urban interior, from 22.8% to 19.4%, taking into account the per capita income of these. These percentages embrace a wider group of people, given the composition of these homes: in Montevideo, the poor homes include 14.6% of the population of the department; and 29.2% in the urban interior, quantities by no means negligible, as a measure of socio-economic inequality.

There are other characteristics associated with poverty which serve to show the challenges to achieving self-sustainable and equitable development. The poor and very vulnerable homes have a high percentage of young people, presenting an age based distribution different to that of the population as a whole. Although the masculinity indices are close to 100 percent, which would indicate a balance between the sexes, the indigent or poor homes maintained by women are over-represented in the whole; and represent a percentage three times higher than in the total of homes with a female head of household, than those that correspond to the poor homes headed by men. Older data (from 1986) show these women had not completed primary school and that they had had one or more children before the age of 18 –the majority of whom were born to poor and vulnerable homes– they had an average of 4.1 children (while those with university education had 1.4). Thus the relation between the income earners and the dependants is more unfavourable in the poor sectors as a result of the greater number of children.

The over-representation of homes in the first cycle of family life and the differences in fertility rates between strata, are reflected in a disproportionate number of the total of children. On the other hand, in the non-vulnerable home the groups of the oldest ages are over-represented. It is the accumulation of material resources and retirement benefits carried out by these groups previously which has prevented large sectors of older adults falling into poverty, and in the last two years, the pensions paid to retired people have contributed to compensate the fall in salary of the vulnerable groups, keeping the income of many homes above the poverty line (three years ago a citizen initiative –via referendum– demanded that retirement payments be updated to their real value and be constitutionally protected from depreciation).

The over representation of young people also allows us to infer greater degrees on vulnerability in identical age groups in the income sectors closest to the poverty line, a situation which could facilitate the reproduction of the same in the long term. In a complementary form, the information indicates that socio-economic vulnerability is also associated with the presence of children: the homes with three or more children make up a large percentage of

those below the poverty line (21.8% in Montevideo and 34% in the urban interior), while the number of homes with this quantity of children is extremely small in the other income brackets (2.8% in Montevideo and 1.4% in the interior, for the group of non-vulnerable homes).

TABLE 2.

Table 2 shows the unequal distribution of homes with and with-

Percentage of homes according to poverty lines (1994–95)				
Homes	Montevideo		Urban interior	
	childless	w/children	childless	w/children
Total	61.0	39.0	55.8	44.2
Poor	23.5	76.5	20.0	80.0
Very vulnerable	41.6	68.4	33.5	66.5
Vulnerable	56.4	43.6	47.1	52.9
Not vulnerable	74.7	25.3	77.0	23.0
20% richest	81.1	18.9	85.1	14.9

Source: «Cuantificación de la pobreza por el método del ingreso para Uruguay urbano», INE, Montevideo, 1996.

out children to care for, taking into account of the differing degrees of socio-economic vulnerability: 74.7% of the non-vulnerable homes in Montevideo and 77% in the interior do not have children. Moreover, this allows us to infer a specific problem in terms of reproduction: with very different fertility norms between the strata, which provoke other forms of inequality which affect the majority of children –and their mothers– who are concentrated in the vulnerable or poor sectors. Data from ten years ago indicate that 4% of all the first year primary school children in the country showed a large shortfall in relation to the height/age measurements and another 16% were slightly smaller than normal size; while the children of mothers with a very low educational level were far smaller than average. Data from 1975, already showed the higher rates of child-raising amongst the mothers with a lower educational level in relation with the rest.

TABLE 3.

As a result the situation of children in the country is strongly

Percentage of children under 14 years old in the poorest fifth		
	Montevideo	Urban interior
1983	40.7	38.2
1989	40.7	41.7
1993	43.8	48.3

Source: Melgar, A., «Pobreza y distribución del Ingreso: la evolución reciente», in «Salario, Pobreza y Desarrollo Humano en el Uruguay», ClaeH-PNUD (UNDP), Montevideo, 1995.

marked by the circumstances of living in poverty. The tendency for the over-representation of children and adolescents, appears

to be consolidating itself at present according to Table III. Taking 1983 as a baseline, it can be seen that the percentage of children aged under 14 years–old who belong to the group of lowest income homes has been increasing constantly, both in Montevideo and the urban interior. This situation becomes more impressive if the homes are considered according to the different levels of vulnerability calculated by the INE (op.cit.): in Montevideo, only 34.6% of the children under 14 years–old lived in non–vulnerable homes (and barely 20.3% in the urban interior).

Given the «historical accumulation» of basic infrastructure, the most serious needs of the poor and very vulnerable sectors appear to be, fundamentally, to overcome their greater difficulties in access to employment, health and housing (including basic services like electricity, drinking water installations, street lighting, access to certain services). In the matter of housing, the national stock built earlier has suffered serious deterioration, and thus there has been a chronic lack of housing for the poorer sectors: according to estimates by the Ministry of Housing, by the year 2000 this deficit will reach 20,000 houses if none are built in the meantime.

The changes in the wealth redistribution policies of the mid–seventies were seen in successive laws and decrees which liberalised the rented housing market and pushed up the prices of housing in the central and coastal areas, which is the best supplied with services. In Montevideo, this produced the displacement and geographical segregation of the groups most affected by the economic policies, recession and unemployment, and maintained the segregation in cities in the interior affected by a chronic shortage of adequate housing for the poorest sectors. The population census of 1996 showed that in ten years the population of the neighbourhoods of Montevideo mainly inhabited by the middle salaried sectors had reduced by 11%; the population of the coastal zone where the higher income bracket are concentrated remained the same; and only the peripheral areas where the majority of the precarious settlements are found increased in size, going from a 10% growth in the “old” neighbourhoods to 70% in the most recently occupied semi–rural areas.

This displacement towards the urban periphery and the increase in the population of precarious settlements has still not stopped, and this has produced permanent effects on the physiognomy of the cities and the living conditions of the less privileged sectors, increasing inequality in several ways (the precariousness of the housing, less access to basic infrastructure, and other services, and to the areas where the sources of employment are found; and more especially, the high levels of public insecurity). This situation indicates the need to build other categories to measure the complex phenomenon of poverty and vulnerability, beyond those referring to income or basic needs.

Meanwhile, in the work market, two elements combine to produce higher rates of unemployment and limited employment in the poorer sectors: the concentration of young population and the lower than average educational levels that characterise them. On the one hand, as the youth unemployment levels in the country are far higher than average –the over–representation of the young amongst the poorer sectors contributes to generating rates of unemployment that are higher still, while the greater educational

disadvantage of the sector could explain another part of this higher rate. In 1993, open unemployment stood at 8% in Montevideo and 7.8% in the urban interior; but the rates for the poorest fifth were 15.5% and 14.5% respectively. Given that this year average unemployment stood at 13%, it is possible these rates have increased and even contributed to producing an increase in the number of poor homes.

On the other hand, limited or restricted employment is also one of the characteristics of the poor or more vulnerable sectors. The high incidence of underemployment, of precarious work and jobs in domestic service, requires, by definition, greater percentages of workers with restrictions than the urban average –which stood at about 26% in 1994. This is especially the case for women in these sectors, given that their main source of employment is in domestic service and nearly all of them suffer from restrictions which also imply a strong lack of protection. The informal nature of this type of work itself is added to by the fact that the social security coverage for them is less than for other workers.

Lastly, women suffer specific forms of vulnerability. The precariousness of their housing, the public insecurity and overcrowding, indicate risks, in particular for female children and adolescents, in everything related to sexual assault, abuse and exploitation. Despite the indicators which show that there is a higher than average proportion of –reported– sexual abuse cases which end in pregnancy, neither the health nor education services, carry out specific prevention programmes for this age group in these sectors.

The vulnerability of mothers with small children –especially if they are the head of household– is increased in these sectors, especially in relation to the possibility of getting a job. The difficulties normally characteristic of seeking paid employment in this sector is added to by the lack of sufficient public services to deal with small children. According to a UNICEF report from 1992, in the best of cases, nursery establishments (for 0–5 year–olds) in neighbourhoods with 25% or more homes with unsatisfied basic needs only attend to 20% of the children in this age group.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Salaries and employment have been the main adjustment variables used in the macroeconomic policies. They are also used to define the risk of falling into poverty, given that only the market form of economic relations are taken into account. It was the need to top up household income that led to the increased numbers of earners in the salaried sectors, contributing to the incorporation of women and young people into the employment market.

In line with the new employment policies, the collective bargaining that used to be carried out by branches of the working population, with the State convocation of Salary Councils (with representatives from the business sector, unions and the State), has been transferred to the enterprises themselves, reducing the negotiating capacity of salaried workers and the real chances for union action (a fact which affects a large proportion of the female

workforce employed in small companies or with no union organisation to back them up).

The «productive reconversion» has, to date, closed more sources of employment than it has opened, especially in the most protected work sectors; and as a result, the percentage of restricted jobs increased until in 1995 this affected nearly a third of the EAP (a proportion which is seen to have grown even more if enterprises with less than five employees are included in the calculations). Employment in manufacturing has fallen as a proportion of the total and the new sources of jobs are –in order of importance– the agro–industries, forestry, tourism and certain consumer services, most of which are characteristically seasonal or have poor working conditions, and there has also been an increase in self-employment and small businesses.

Some of these new sources of work appear to prefer to recruit women and young people –and in some cases women with their children– to carry out intensive labour which demands certain skills and qualities. Also, to a certain degree, adult women are being replaced by young people of both sexes in some of these. Reports have been received on agro–industries and forestry companies which exploit child labour by using the children of its female employees in cleaning operations. This news indicates that specific changes need to be made in how the information on economic activity is being represented, in order to monitor the possible existence of a child workforce despite the legislation against this.

The female rates of activity have been increasing in a sustained manner over the last 20 years (at present around 45% of women over 14 years–old are working), coinciding with the deterioration of salaries and household income; while the rate for men has fallen slightly since then in Montevideo. In the middle age bracket the feminine rates have reached 70% in certain age bands with the most pronounced increases amongst married women. Some 60% of women are employed in the services sector.

This greater participation has not meant improvements of other kinds, as the forms of discrimination described in other contexts continue to exist: the incidence of part–time work, piece work, seasonal and precarious tasks is greater amongst women than men; most of the posts they hold are low in the hierarchy, and they also suffer higher levels of unemployment (around 55% of the total unemployed are women).

The greater participation of women in the work market, in the framework of greater restrictions on maintaining the standard of living of the home and given the deterioration of State services, has not meant a reduction in their domestic tasks – in fact, the increase in size of the population of people aged over 65 years–old could in fact indicate an increased workload for the adult women dealing with them. Meanwhile, the services available have not kept in step with the new demands generated by these high levels of participation in the labour force.

But where discrimination becomes most noticeable is in making comparisons. While the average per hour value of male work is 80, that of women is 59.7. Meanwhile, even though women on average have more years of education than men, and the women with more education are highly over–represented in the EAP, the

most unfavourable relation between male and female earnings is in the category of professionals and management (55.1% of the male income), while the most favourable corresponds to office work (80% of the average male income). Lastly, the law for equal opportunities at work was only implemented last year, after being approved in 1989 – which shows how little attention has been paid to this type of discrimination in the government agendas over recent years.

SOCIAL POLICIES AIMED AT COMPENSATING FOR STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The various government teams have maintained a high level of coherence in their economic direction and some advances have been made in State reform, scorning redistribution measures and resorting to credit or the public debt to cushion the cost of the adjustments. These teams show a great concern for locating the country in the regional and international context (the Southern Cone Common Market – Mercosur) in a competitive manner, on the supposition that the «productive reconversion» and State reforms will make higher levels of prosperity attainable, and that this will help overcome the situations of exclusion and marginalisation which exist today.

The information on spending and investment, or loans obtained is disperse and insufficient, making it difficult to assess the amount of attention given –by the resources assigned– to social policies aimed at the sectors most affected by the predominant economic orientation. The nation is clearly lacking wide–ranging long–term State policies on more than one aspect, like in guaranteeing better levels of integration or equity; and there are also difficulties in implementing programmes and projects with similar objectives. A few advances on the issue of focused policies have been produced recently, but until then, there were only a few welfare type measures in place.

Nearly two years after the Strengthening of the Social Area (FAS) programme was created –basically funded by loans from the IDB– the majority of the programme offices are still in the diagnostic and planning stages and have a high level of independence in deciding which projects to implement in their corresponding areas. No information has been offered on the more general programme definitions –if they exist– nor on the contents of the different projects, and there is also no data on which of these have reached the implementation stage, their coverage or resources.

A recently created organ –the Social Cabinet made up of ministers from the social areas– appears above all to aim at reporting and co–ordinating between areas, given that the administration is still predominantly sectoral. However, taking into account the way it is made up, perhaps this would be the most suitable organ to define a true State policy on this type of issue, because at the moment there are difficulties in defining the objectives, tasks and needs of social policies on a government level.

Other difficulties in achieving favourable results with the

planned measures, appear to be based on the institutional structure of the State, which overlaps and duplicates similar –if not identical– objectives in different units of management spreading the decision–making on certain problems in an irrational manner. Similarly, separate sectoral units, which are totally disconnected despite dealing with the same group of the population, continue to be the norm. Maybe because of this, the State apparatus is finding it difficult to pass from the universal criteria to others based on a more focused outlook, decentralisation, the integration of human and material resources from many sources, and including the participation of the recipients themselves – an element demanded by the multilateral organisations. The policies of subsidies and redistribution through social spending, count on institutions and bureaucratic frameworks which are not adapted to focused policies aimed at development by a well–identified group of beneficiaries in defined periods.

In the case of children, it is known that poverty –and vulnerability –are highly concentrated amongst children and adolescents, and that this is the accumulated effect of at least two decades –whereby it could now be seen as a structural characteristic of Uruguayan society. The fact that this has not been granted adequate government priority means there has now been a negative social accumulation which will be difficult to reverse. In this case, the State lacks a defined policy which would begin to remedy this situation in an integral and lasting manner; and all the initiatives which have appeared in the last two years have continued to be partial.

The recent implementation of a public education reform is a sign of the beginning of an educational policy which will generate long–term effects. And even if this seems to encourage the selectivity of the formal education system, it also puts a special emphasis on achieving better social equity and plans a long–term scheme to make public nursery education (from age 3 to 5 years) universally available for the most vulnerable sectors. The majority of the departmental administrations who have greater powers have started programmes to attend to needy children offering free meals and nurseries, generally with support from UNICEF. This external aid goes to show there are large gaps in the national administration dedicated to this sector of the population. In Montevideo there is an early–years education programme to offer integral daytime care to this type of child, but as this is not a typical function of the municipal authorities, this supposes extra expenditure which makes it difficult to guarantee broad coverage. There is also a parliamentary initiative for the creation of a National Children's Fund – which will mean a change of direction for already existing public funds – but this is still being discussed by a parliamentary commission.

Given the relative consolidation of the sustained exclusion process and its concentration on the youngest age groups, these initiatives do not appear to be enough. A far broader «emergency» policy is needed which, on the basis of a global programme definition, can integrate all the dispersed resources in order to obtain results within the shortest time span possible. The total number of children born each year in Uruguay –according to Pellegrino, A., in informal conversation– barely reaches the number of those born in a single maternity hospital in Caracas –showing

that quantitatively the problem would be quite easy to tackle, if the political will and appropriate paths could be found for this.

Something similar is happening with the young people of working age from the poor and vulnerable sectors, for even though there are more programmes being implemented, their coverage is still very low. There is also a lack of political definitions at a higher level and the development of a true general plan with multiple objectives if they really wish to impede the reproduction of marginality by these age groups. Another sign of the lack of co–ordination (and perhaps of the misuse of the resources and capacities) is the fact that, in a period when ever larger groups of young people are in a vulnerable situation, the offer of night classes in the public education system –which allowed them to re–train and improve their employment opportunities– has been cut back.

Also the policies aimed at improving the housing situation of the more vulnerable sectors appear to have receded in comparison with twenty years ago, when the Banco Hipotecario (the State Mortgage Bank) monopolised public policies on the issue, across the income sectors. At present, the Housing, Territorial Ordering and Environment Ministry, has responsibility for the policies aimed at the low–income bracket. The social housing it constructs provides a basic module that the beneficiaries themselves must expand on, and these schemes are concentrated in areas where the land is very cheap, far from the majority of services and sources of employment.

As for the policies aimed at promoting greater gender equity, there is also no officially accepted State policy to guide the sectoral initiatives adopted on an official level. The Institute of the Family and Women was created without the necessary decision–making power, while it has very few resources with which to carry ahead wide ranging policies on the issue. During the last year, a Special Commission on Women's Rights was created in the Culture Ministry, committed to revising the general and particular norms and to update these. In both cases, it seems to depend on the political will to come up with proposals which can be transformed into long term policies.

In the processes implied by structural adjustment, State reform, socio–economic and productive change, which occur in relatively short time spans, the policies referring to access to information, transparency and accountability, become more important to strategy than when the transformations are slow. In the Uruguayan case, the important changes of the last decades in relation to the increase and concentration of poverty, the constant expansion of teenage pregnancy, the different fertility rates between women of the various social strata, the increasing numbers of «illegitimate» children, the changes in marriage patterns and the make up of homes and families, etc. merit the existence and diffusion of sufficient official data on the issues.

When trying to evaluate the results of State intervention –or its non–intervention– in these processes of change, another type of problem emerges. For as in the other cases there is no State policy on this (an element which could be seen to indicate the level of backwardness of the Uruguayan State in relation to its «modernisation», and the difficulties current governments have in achieving this). The National Institute of Statistics is not capa-

ble of providing this, and despite its efforts to produce sufficient suitable information, it has had great limitations in achieving this. There is no integrated system of indicators produced in a continuous form on a wide gamut of aspects, and the many registers kept for the purposes of other offices are not taken advantage of, or improved and incorporated into a single system. In more than one case, the production of information depends on the individual whim of one official, whereby there is a serious lack of continuity on issues which should be constantly monitored.

The lack of information includes total blanks: there is no way of breaking the groups down according to racial minorities or disabilities; no information is available on the situation of childhood in relation to employment, abandonment, abuse, exploitation or sexual abuse; no adequate information is developed on the sexual exploitation of women (prostitution, «white slavery»), sexual and domestic violence.

Government management and the way in which public resources are used is only made known in reports produced by the technical organisms of the government treasury, and these are not easy to get at. Moreover, this information appears to be inadequate for guiding the social policies themselves, or for achieving broad consensus on issues which assure the involvement of various social actors. The socio-economic changes, the demands of civil society, the widening of the citizenry, appear to require a level of State accountability which the old structures have difficulty in providing.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF SPENDING AND INTERNATIONAL AID

It does not appear easy to make concern for the increased social disintegration and inequalities flow together with interests related to the structural adjustment process. Given that they appear to be tied together, and that no one doubts little can be done without the generation of wealth (and there appears to be consensus on this), it is worth asking if Uruguay –like other countries– is not merely carrying out an experiment «in the field», by trying to join the two concerns together. It is important to ask if the new-fledged social policies are adopted on the basis of strong convictions to the respect, or if they are to a large extent due to the foreign commitments of the country and, as a result, the weight continues to be in one of the two components which are spoken of as complementary for human development; if it is possible to mix up which posture will be most confirmed in future.

Standing at this cross-roads –and given that the main bars to productive development are the low levels of investment that can be achieved in the country– the support from multilateral and bilateral aid appears to be crucial. However, there are some difficulties in the adequate and efficient use of this type of resources. Firstly, the HDI values in Uruguay mean it is not eligible for many multi – and bilateral aid programmes, whereby it receives increasingly smaller foreign donations to help fight citizen poverty, diminish inequality or encourage citizen participation. This implies that the majority of what is received or used

towards one of these ends generates further debt. Secondly, the Uruguayan regulations referring to foreign debt are complicated and somewhat out of date; it is not easy to know who is responsible for decision-making on certain aid, nor who should take the initiative within the State itself. This is translated into the obtaining of funds from foreign aid based on sectoral strategies, giving rise to a lack of co-ordination and coherence in development aid related policies.

The lower access to resources, the lack of an adequate set of regulations and the lack of sufficient knowledge to get this, appear to generate difficulties for making this aid an important component in attending to the problems of socio-economic inequality. However, Uruguay should be in conditions to diversify the aid it receives. For example, in the commitment known as the «20/20» agreement, between developed and developing nations, the developing nations must dedicate 20% of their budget to basic social services as a pre-condition for receiving a further 20% for the same ends from the sum destined to co-operation in the donor countries. It would be interesting to try and arrange that co-operation to Uruguay fit in with the spirit of this commitment; although the percentage of the State budget for this type of services has fallen dramatically.

Despite this, it is still unclear who will implement these types of commitments in the State, and how, allowing certain policies to be developed. In the same way, up until today, the commitment assumed by the Uruguayan government in Copenhagen, to develop and put into action a plan to eradicate poverty, amongst others, is still awaiting resolution.

CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

The absence of a global State policy to recompose the levels of integration in a social fabric damaged by relatively recent poverty and marginalisation no doubt represents a movement backwards in relation to previous achievements, restricting the exercising of full citizenship even further for some sectors of the population – indeed, maybe this has already happened. Certain forms of organisation in the most vulnerable sectors, as in some of their own support networks suggest there are alternative forms of participation which do not fit in with the dominant patterns. On another front, recent collective expressions, where groups of citizens have not supported the proposals of the political parties, could be interpreted as a quest for autonomy on the part of the citizenry. This and other indicators, allow us to sustain that Uruguayan society –or at least a large part of it– is moving towards greater capacity for winning and exercising their citizenship, as will be seen later on. It is on the State level where the most difficult hurdle has to be overcome, between the centralisation seen in the political decision-making and the need for the State to lose «weight» and restrict its functioning, propelled by decisions of the same type.

We can foresee greater autonomy in initiating collective projects on the margins of participation –or at least a movement towards this. These are new forms of exercising citizenship which

mark themselves off from the old ones and suggest novel demands in relation to daily life or the rights of those who have a restricted citizenship. In some way, these novelties appear to make more rapid progress than the demands absorbed by the State apparatus and the government teams, making them aware of the need to find new forms of articulation between the State and civil society.

To give just one example, the women's movement has been working on a series of demands which are related to the backwardness of the State, both in the fulfilment of the commitments it made prior to the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing, as with the Plan of Action approved there. Although in some incipient form this movement has been positioning itself as a valid consultant for a series of political and State agents in recent years, and that in more than one case different sectors of the State have gone to it for reference, either by recognising the need of its participation in seeking solutions to certain problems, or in developing certain specific action on gender perspectives. **And this is a sign that the novelties could be starting to move into State ambitions.**

This action by the women's movement means that today there is a National Monitoring Commission for the Plan of Action on Women, made up of a very wide spectrum of local and national organisations with the aim of monitoring the policies –or the lack of them– in relation to women, and to make the commitments already signed by the nation into reality. The main objective is to monitor the situation and, at the same time, provide a common aim for the multiplicity of existing women's groups and organisations. And this supposes not only articulation with the State, but also with other social sectors. At the moment, this Commission is in a position to mobilise an important number of women nationwide having arranged the organisation of similar co-ordinating bodies on a local or departmental level –groups whose work could be reflected in the municipal authority policies.

The country appears to owe itself a «long sincere look» at how to deal with solving the problems it has with poverty, social disintegration and other manifestations of inequality. There is a particular lack of «official» recognition of the relationships between the present macroeconomic policy and the unequal distribution of its costs and benefits; along with a lack of concern over the differential impact on women and men. However, perhaps the most important problem today is in the society itself, which appears to be split between two different conceptions of the nation – a fragmentation which is also expressed in the difficulties it has in finding a way forward which will repair part of the damage, without betting on a form of prosperity which will be still far too long in coming and which will not necessarily expand alone. In order to start down

this road, maybe all that is really lacking is a statement of common political will, which has the task of finding broad consensus in order to overcome the many discrepancies.

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