

**NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MEXICO  
ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**XVII ISA WORLD CONGRESS OF SOCIOLOGY  
SOCIOLOGY ON THE MOVE**

**11-17 July 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden,**

***Some thoughts on Mexican social policy regarding the fight against poverty  
1970-1994.***

(preliminary version)

**Susana Bertha Merino Martínez<sup>\*</sup>  
Verónica Villarespe Reyes<sup>\*\*</sup>**

**I. PRESENTATION**

The object of this paper is to reflect on three programs regarding the fight against poverty in Mexico: the Programa de Inversiones Públicas para el Desarrollo Rural [Program of Public Investment for Rural Development] (PIDER), 1973; the Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados [General Coordination for the National Plan concerning Economically Depressed Areas and Underprivileged Groups] (COPLAMAR), 1977; and, the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad [National Solidarity Program] (PRONASOL), 1988. These were the first tailor made programs designed to fight poverty that became an important part of Mexican social policy.

These reflections will provide elements to establish the pertinence and effectiveness of the social policy implemented in the 70s and 80s, when poverty became a problem that deserved the government's attention, due to the fact that it had become a generalized one.

It is worth mentioning that the social policy in force in those decades had been designed in the 1940s only for the benefit of workers employed and organized by the regime, mainly in unions. This situation changed in the 70s due to the presence of a large group of individuals pertaining to the informal work sector, who had no access to the benefits of social security.

Faced with this situation, it became necessary to design a new social policy that would attack the causes of poverty not only mitigating its effects.

---

\* Academic member of the Economic Research Institute, UNAM.  
su562164@servidor.unam.mx

\*\* Researcher in the Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, UNAM.  
reyesvv@servidor.unam.mx

In the present paper I will highlight the objectives of each program, the governmental and private instances that contributed to their design, and if need be, their operational structure.

This will provide the elements to identify, from the point of view of social policy and public management, the scope of said programs and the degree in which they influenced the problems they were meant to solve.

## II. PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy is an instrument to, via social policy, deal with the social conflict situations that are generated in a given society and that cannot be resolved in other spheres. So, the intervention of the government becomes necessary through specific programs<sup>1</sup>, public action programs, such as the fight against poverty ones.

Public policy and social policy have had to be redesigned according to the changes experienced by the economic model, thus becoming "... a space for negotiations and solutions regarding the social conflicts..."<sup>2</sup>, that are generated in a given society, as their design reflects aspects such as: public agenda issues, the degree of pressure exerted by political and social power groups on the State, and the alternatives offered by the latter to face specific problems.

"Social policy is a series of measures and social interventions that are promoted by the State, whose goal is to improve the quality of life of the population, and to achieve growing levels of economic and social integration, especially in the groups that are socially excluded, in the various dimensions in which said exclusion is expressed (economic, political, territorial, social, etc.)"<sup>3</sup>

Social policy "is based and designed", first, from a diagnosis that determines the objectives of the programs<sup>4</sup>, these objectives will give various degrees of social legitimacy to said programs, allowing for their greater or lesser practicability.

It is in the practicability and implantation of the objectives of the programs where Social Management plays an important role, because if it is correctly implemented, it raises the effectiveness and efficacy of the programs.

The Social Programs Management Office faces various challenges, among them the coordination of the same, a field in which several elements are put in play, such as the accomplishment of goals, the optimization of resources, and the multi-institutional and multi-sector nature of the programs. This will lead the social manager to work in a horizontal and coordinated manner with the public

---

<sup>1</sup> López Amador, María de Jesús, Política Pública y Política Social (Public Policy and Social Policy), internal discussion Document, Centro de Educación Continua, Escuela Nacional de Trabajo Social, UNAM, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Op. Cit., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Op Cit., p. 18

<sup>4</sup> Kliksberg, Bernardo,. "¿Cómo formar gerentes sociales?" (How do you shape social managers?), in **¿Cómo enfrentar la pobreza? Estrategias y experiencias organizacionales innovadoras (How do we face poverty? Strategies and innovative organizational experiences)**, Buenos Aires, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo (CLAD), Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1989.

administration agencies, and vertically with the States and municipalities. The social manager will also work in coordination with the civil society and the economic policy.<sup>5</sup>

This is one of the aspects about which I intend to offer some thoughts in the present paper, the other aspect aims to insist on the fact that poverty is the result of an economic model for development, which explains its persistency even though it has been dealt with through multiple programs designed in the past thirty years. In Mexico's case, five of these programs stand out: PIDER, COMPLAMAR, PRONASOL, PROGESA and OPORTUNIDADES.

Since the extinction of the substitution model regarding imports, also called the industrializing model, we can see that the Mexican government started designing programs to fight rural and urban poverty, a situation that still prevails.

### **III. Program of Public Investment for Rural Development (PIDER), 1973.**

The PIDER was created by government officials at the Dirección General de Inversiones Públicas de la Presidencia de la República (General Direction for Public Investment of the Presidency), with the purpose of avoiding "bureaucratic middlemen action" in the management of the Program.

The objective of the program was to give an incentive to rural development and to serve the farmers, to fight the inequities between the city and the countryside, to raise the productive capacity of the 12 million rural poor, which had a per capita income of less than 100 US Dollars a year<sup>6</sup>, while the official figures considered that the minimum acceptable income per family to meet their living expenses, should be 960 US Dollars per year<sup>7</sup> (Argentina paper). It must be noted that, according to the 1970 National Population Census, Mexico had a total population of 53.5 million inhabitants, and that 21.7 million lived in a rural environment.

#### **Operational structure**

This program was designed as an instance of inter-institutional cooperation. Accordingly, its structure depended on a "coordinator committee -central team-, integrated by the Federal Government and the Governments of the States, represented by a 'vocal' (representative committee member)"<sup>8</sup> It operated on a

---

<sup>5</sup> Op. Cit., p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> A US Dollar was worth 22.50 Mexican pesos.

<sup>7</sup> See: Appraisal of an Integrated Rural Development Project - Pider II, Mexico, Report No. 1480a- ME, May 31, 1977, Agriculture and Rural Development Department, Document of the World Bank.

<sup>8</sup> Said structure was supported and sponsored by the Agriculture and Livestock Department, by the promoters of the Agrarian Reform Department, The National Institute for Native Peoples of the Federal Electricity Commission, by the Management Committee for the Federal Program regarding the Building of Schools (CAPFCE), the CONASUPO (government buying and selling organization for subsidized food, clothes and furniture), by the National institute for the Development of Rural Communities and Popular Housing (INDECO), and by the National Fund for the Fostering of Cooperative Farming (FONAFE). María del Carmen Pardo López, *La administración de la política social: cuatro estudios (The management of Social Policy: four studies). El diseño administrativo de programas de emergencia (Management design of emergency programs)*. Tesis doctoral (Ph. D. thesis). Universidad Iberoamericana, México, 1998, p. 161.

regional frame that encompassed whole States of the country, “ ... in areas of approximately 7,000 square kilometers and 100,000 inhabitants, using grouping criteria aspects such as: population extent, density and distribution due to gender and age; quantity, composition and distribution of the workforce; education, health and other public services level indexes; intensity degrees of unemployment and underemployment; income levels in the rural and urban communities; and the relative development degree of each State of the country”.<sup>9</sup>

Based on this diagnosis, special attention was paid to less privileged areas, providing they had the best development potential. In order to operate regionally, it adopted a decentralizing strategy that ended up creating the legal figure of executive representative committee members (vocales) for each State. It would operate with resources assigned by the Federation, based on previously approved programs.

The PIDER had a national and inter-institutional nature, it also had its own resources managed by the President’s Office. The work was organized through a diagnosis; followed by field research, carried out by the work group, which identified the communities that had the potential of developing productive projects that would generate “jobs and income”<sup>10</sup>; a definition of the development strategy, and the elaboration of specific projects. A second phase in the operation of the PIDER was establishing a hierarchy regarding the projects being carried out, namely, “those that were mainly using local labor and materials from the area; the carrying out of complementary works that would allow for the better use of the investments made, and finally, taking care of the most important demands of the population.

There are two instances in its original structure that must be highlighted, the Coordinating Committee, integrated by the Federal Government, the governments of the States (having representative committee members), and a support team through which the investment projects would be carried out. This support team was formed by representatives of the following Departments: Agriculture; Agrarian Reform; Hydraulic Resources; Public Works, and Health and Public Assistance. Other participating agencies were: The Federal Electricity Commission; the Management Committee for the Federal Program regarding the Building of Schools (CAPFCE); the CONASUPO (government buying and selling organization for subsidized food, clothes and furniture); the National institute for the Development of Rural Communities and Popular Housing (INDECO); the National Fund for the Fostering of Cooperative Farming (FONAFE), and the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples. Starting in 1974, the investment projects were also financed with resources stemming from the World Bank and the Inter American Development Bank.

---

<sup>9</sup> Pardo López, María del Carmen, *La administración de la política social: cuatro estudios* (The management of social policy: four studies). *El diseño administrativo de programas de emergencia* (Management design of emergency programs), Tesis Doctoral (Ph. D. thesis), Universidad Iberoamericana, 1988, pp. 149-154.

<sup>10</sup> Op. Cit., p. 157.

In order to oversee and evaluate the carrying out of the investment programs, the Center for Rural Development Research was created. It was in charge of submitting periodical evaluations to the PIDER. Through said evaluations it could monitor and follow up on aspects such as "... the impact on productivity, jobs, market, and the improvement of the education and health indexes, as well as aspects such as biddings, acquisitions, and the obtaining external loans".<sup>11</sup>

During the presidential term of José López Portillo, the program was absorbed by the Programming and Budget Department, so as to "... give more coherence to the various plans and to improve the evaluation, focus and hierarchy systems of the projects to be implemented, ... the centralized management of these resources became more efficient, as they were always granted according to the programs that had been approved."<sup>12</sup>

Besides, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was hired as external advisor, in order to identify "deficiencies in the organization and management phases, so as to correct them immediately."<sup>13</sup>

This re-organization was in keeping with the Administrative Reform promoted by the new administration, a situation that forced the PIDER to adjust to the sectorized model of the new administration, thus neutralizing its autonomy and atomizing its original structure, and consequently, the purpose and results of the program.

### **Results:**

For the first time, the PIDER involved several agencies in both a common objective and program. Notwithstanding, it ended up giving privileges to structures it never meant to favor, such as centralized control, and the implementation of traditional bureaucracy and politics, a situation that delayed the decision making in the various areas that were subject to its benefits.

Even though the results were not those anticipated, it indeed was a first "experiment" in the development of the rural and regional environment, in which the program tried to involve the population that benefited from it and several government agencies, under the coordination of the Public Investment Direction of the Presidency.<sup>14</sup>

### **Balance**

In the balance of the PIDER, it is necessary to recapitulate the problems and obstacles that it faced, which were: the decision making stemming from the President's Office; the lack of commitment on the part of participating agencies; inter-institutional coordination, that delayed the launching of the investment programs; the decisions made obeying to political criteria, as the productive investment (roads, electrification, irrigation) benefited the sectors that were better organized, such as the cooperative farming one, consequently, redistributive investment (of a social nature) took second place; the fact that the various

---

<sup>11</sup> Op. Cit., p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Op. Cit., p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> Op. Cit., p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> Op. Cit., pp. 161-167.

participating agencies lacked sufficient authority and operating capacity; the investment programs that were designed did not correspond to a regional development strategy, and the scarcity of financial resources vis à vis the scope of the needs that the program intended to satisfy.

On the plus side of the balance, the PIDER underscored the importance of working according to the decisions made, in order to tend to a problem concerning rural backwardness of the magnitude presented by the target population, and that had settled in 12,000 villages. This was to be done with a budget of 4.382 billion pesos for the period ranging from 1973 to 1976.

It was the first experience in Mexico regarding work with underprivileged communities. The members of said communities graded the project as excellent technical work, even though there was little participation on the part of the communities.

It ended up being a program to alleviate the “imbalance of the rural milieu”, as with its objective and its resources, it fundamentally became a rival of the Agrarian Reform Department, the PIDER giving the impression that it was a parallel structure created by the President to strengthen and legitimize his power.<sup>15</sup>

In 1980, the administration of José López Portillo (presidential term 1976-1982), renamed the program as *Programa Integral para el Desarrollo Rural*, (Integral Program for Rural Development), becoming a part of the Programming and Budget Department, and reviewing its operational structure. Through the coordination of the three government levels (federal, State, and municipal), the rural communities were organized so that the investments became self-financing and the resources used in a productive way. This meant that the resources were managed in a centralized manner. This new operation dismantled the previous structure, the representative committee members became part of the Comité Promotores del Desarrollo [Development Promoters Committee] (COPRODES), the State Committee disappeared, and so did the State representatives.<sup>16</sup>

During the term in office of José López Portillo, the services of the *Tavistock Institute of Human Relations* were hired to supervise and identify the deficiencies in the organization and management phases, in order to promptly correct them.<sup>17</sup>

The PIDER disappeared in 1983, when its activities were integrated to the budget as programs, establishing a hierarchy according to the permanent employment that was generated, to the use of local labor, and to the implementation of works that

---

<sup>15</sup> Op. Cit., pp. 180-182.

<sup>16</sup> Under the guidance of British scholar Eric Miller, the program implemented a strategy that transformed the planning and operation of rural development in Mexico. Accordingly, the Comités Promotores del Desarrollo Committees for Development Promotion (COPRODES later on called COPLADES) were created. At first, they were only related to the PIDER, later on, they became committees that coordinated the actions of every Federal and State institution in each State. See: Valtierra-Pacheco, Esteban: *Estudio del Arte y la Cultura de Evaluación de Programas de Desarrollo Rural en América Latina (A Study of Art and Culture in the Evaluation of Rural Development Programs in Latin America)*, Cuadernos FODEPAL-FAO, 2003, p. 5, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> The hiring process was made by the Treasury Department, its secretary was Miguel de la Madrid, who would succeed López Portillo as president. Eric J. Miller was among the members of this team.

took advantage of the investments made. For the first time, the PIDER involved several agencies in both a common objective and program. Notwithstanding, it ended up giving privileges to structures it never meant to favor, such as centralized control, and the implementation of traditional bureaucracy and politics, a situation that delayed the decision making in the various areas that were subject to its benefits.<sup>18</sup>

#### **IV. General Coordination for the National Plan concerning Economically Depressed Areas and Underprivileged Groups (COPLAMAR)**

It was created by a presidential decision on January 21, 1977, with the purpose of tending to the needs of economically depressed areas and underprivileged groups, both in the cities and in the countryside.

The objective of the Coordination was the undertaking of actions that would allow the inhabitants of underprivileged rural areas to get organized in order to take advantage of the resources present in their environment, and in so doing, to share in a more equitable way in the national wealth and resources. The COPLAMAR turned out to be a more ambitious agency than the PIDER, due to the fact that it proposed that these groups, which had settled in rural underprivileged areas, had to have access to training, job sources, fair salaries, labor guarantees, fair prices for their products, health and education services, etc., and all this would trigger regional development.<sup>19</sup>

##### **Operational structure**

The general coordination became the responsibility of the President, who would coordinate the activities of the agencies involved.

The coordination had the responsibility to “blend the policies and actions of the agencies and institutions that had a hand in shaping social policies.”<sup>20</sup> It also had to “... submit to the Executive the coordination formulas for public management as a whole, the coordination mechanisms between the entities of the public administration that work on the poorest areas, and to define the areas that are more depressed economically speaking...”<sup>21</sup>

The cooperation agreements between the Executive, the governors and the agencies involved, were designed from a centralized standpoint according to a standardizing format that reduced the possibilities to adjust to specific and diverse circumstances.

Approximately 22,000 individuals collaborated “directly in the integration of the programs pertaining to underprivileged areas. Most of the operation personnel

---

<sup>18</sup> Villarespe Reyes, Verónica and Merino, Susana, “Los programas contemporáneos de combate a la pobreza en México: alcances y perspectivas” (“Contemporary Programs related to the fight against poverty in Mexico: scope and perspectives”), paper presented at the *XXI Jornadas de Historia Económicas*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, september 2008, published in

[http://163.10.30.203:8080/congresos/xxijhe/programa/descargables/villarespe\\_merino.pdf](http://163.10.30.203:8080/congresos/xxijhe/programa/descargables/villarespe_merino.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Villarespe Reyes, Verónica, and Merino, Susana., Op. Cit., p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Pardo López, Ma. del Carmen, Op. Cit., p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Op. Cit., pp. 201-202.

between 1977 and 1979, belonged to the central offices of the agencies that participated in COPLAMAR.”

COPLAMAR was not conceived as a new agency in the organization chart of the Federal public administration, but as an administrative unit that would carry out the coordinating actions regarding the various federal and government owned agencies to which a shared commitment had been assigned.

It did not directly make investments nor did it elaborate projects or execute them. This was the job of the various agencies.

COPLAMAR was supported by research works that allowed it to elaborate a diagnosis regarding the geography of poverty in the country, which was necessary to identify the most important needs of the target population and the planning of activities.

Priority areas were defined, establishing a target population made up of 18 million inhabitants: natives, poor farmers in desert, semi-desert, and mountain areas of Mexico. In 1980, from a total population of 66,846,833 inhabitants,<sup>22</sup> approximately 50% of them lived in an underprivileged situation.

COPLAMAR had 140 offices, 4,700 employees, 2,000 bilingual promoters, 15 bilingual teachers, and 22,000 individuals that directly collaborated in the integration of the programs included in the coordination’s activities, mainly in underprivileged areas.<sup>23</sup>

The inter-institutional collaboration commitment was formalized through various agreements between the COPLAMAR and the Hydraulic Resources Department. The object of said agreements was “agro-industrial development in underprivileged areas.”

The COPLAMAR-CONASUPO agreement involved several agencies. Its purpose was “supplying basic staples such as corn, beans, rice and sugar, at affordable prices to the underprivileged groups in the rural milieu and in the economically depressed areas of the country. The products were to be supplied in adequate and sufficient amounts and delivered in a timely manner.

This supply program encompassed 15,000 communities in more than a thousand municipalities all around the country.

The Secretaría de Asentamientos Humanos y Obras Públicas (Human Settlements and Public Works Department) was in charge of the scope, building process and location of the regional warehouses throughout the country.

The Secretaría del Patrimonio y Fomento Industrial (Patrimony and Industrial Fostering Department) was in charge of ensuring the timely availability of transportation to carry out the Coordination’s tasks, and of the sugar supply.

The Secretaría de Comercio (Commerce Department) ensured the supply of products provided by the program. It also formulated and supervised the execution of the general policies, established the protection mechanisms regarding the consumers in underprivileged areas, and the fostering process concerning the organization of community owned companies. Reform; Hydraulic Resources;

---

<sup>22</sup> IX Population and Housing Census, <http://www.mexicoenestadisticas.com.mx/privado/historicos/hispob.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Barajas, Gabriela, Op. Cit., pp. 75-76.

Public Works, and Health and Public Assistance. Other participating agencies were: The Federal Electricity Commission; the Management Committee for the Federal Program regarding the Building of Schools (CAPFCE); the CONASUPO (government buying and selling organization for subsidized food, clothes and furniture); the National Institute for the Development of Rural Communities and Popular Housing (INDECO); the National Fund for the Fostering of Cooperative Farming (FONAFE), and the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples.

CONASUPO-DICONSA (government agencies. Involved in the buying and selling of subsidized food, clothes and furniture, and the supply of basic and complementary products to rural communities), 'were to be in charge of the system's financial self-sufficiency, through the itemized managing and accounting processes of the investment and current expenses funds.'

Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social-COPLAMAR (the Mexican Social Security Institute-COPLAMAR), was the instrument for the execution of the Social Solidarity through Community Cooperation program that offered '... care for mothers and children, family planning, health education, nutritional orientation, vaccines, and control of infectious diseases. The criteria for the establishment of medical units was implemented by the Mexican Social Security Institute 'taking into account, as a regional average, health care services for 5,000 individuals and 200,000 inhabitants per clinic-field hospital.'

Besides the agreements between COPLAMAR and various agencies, another instance called the Pacto de Coordinación Intersectorial del Sistema de Servicios Integrados de Apoyo a la Economía Campesina en Zonas Marginadas (Pact regarding the Inter-sector Coordination of the Integrated Support Services for the Farmer's Economy in Underprivileged Areas), so that COPLAMAR would make available to DICONSA all the means of transportation it owned to fulfill the latter's supply and gathering activities, as well as for the distribution of the goods that could be deemed necessary."

In all, eleven agencies were organized under one administrative unit: COPLAMAR, which designed an integrated policy to solve the problems of rural deprivation. The number of the agencies involved explains why shared responsibility could not be achieved.<sup>24</sup>

COPLAMAR worked with a budget of 500 million US Dollars during the first three years, and with 4 billion US Dollars over the next two years, even though the resources started flowing in 1980, two years before the presidential term in question was over.

COPLAMAR had 40 employees in one office, whose main activity was the management of the financial resources.

Nevertheless, in 1980, it became obvious that the expectations of the 1977 plan could not be met. So, it became necessary to submit it to an evaluation carried out by the Budget by Programs Department. Said evaluation showed that not having a budget of its own and being subject to the orders or commitments that the various agencies assumed when working in a coordinated manner on a given purpose, even without taking into account the bureaucratic mess that resulted from the

---

<sup>24</sup> Pardo López, María del Carmen, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 201,211, 214, 215, 219.

duties and obligations related to the fact that eleven agencies were forced to work in coordination, COPLAMAR's goals could not be achieved.

### **Balance**

COPLAMAR tried to solve the coordination problems between agencies that had already plagued PIDER, and in this new experiment, resources were assigned to the agency that was responsible for executing the specific action.

With COPLAMAR, the government was actually betting on a structural change "stemming from a management formula" that could hardly generate a change in the economic model.

A concern that was present in COPLAMAR was that the level of poverty could jeopardize political stability and social peace.

A problem at the origin of COPLAMAR was that "it was not under the responsibility of any institution", so, responsibilities were diluted, notwithstanding the interest of the President concerning the success of said Coordination. The reversals of this program evidence, for the purpose of this paper, that power and presidential will are not enough to render effective a social policy; the implementation and the management capacity were its main weak point. Said weakness was derived from its multi-institutional and multi-sector nature, which multiplied the coordination activities to be implemented and the direction in which they should have been oriented: "... horizontally, along with the various agencies of public administration, and vertically with the areas and municipalities, with civil society and economic policy"<sup>25</sup> The efficiency level that could be reached by the social manager that coordinated these issues, would be reflected on the final results of the programs.

In official documents pertaining to PIDER and COPLAMAR, it was acknowledged that the poverty problem could be solved through the adequate functioning of the economic system. That is why they aimed to identify the demands of poor sectors. On the other hand, maybe the most important issue was the political channeling of said demands in order to control a possible social instability. In other words, the political system was looking for its legitimization. Besides, and it is easy to understand why, with the bureaucratic structure created for these very purposes, it was practically impossible to attain an efficient inter-institutional coordination.

COPLAMAR was abrogated by the Presidential Decision dated April, 20, 1983, published in the Mexican Official Gazette. Its functions were distributed to and diluted within various Federal Departments.<sup>26</sup>

One last consideration about both programs has to do with their rationale: the PIDER subscribed to the development theory, specifically regarding the integral

---

<sup>25</sup> Kliksberg, Bernardo, Op. Cit., p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> The Departments involved in the process were: Programación y Presupuesto, de Energía, Minas e Industria Paraestatal, de Comercio y Fomento Industrial, de Comunicaciones y Transportes, de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, de Educación Pública, de la Reforma Agraria y de Salubridad y Asistencia así como el Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS-COPLAMAR). [Programming and Budget, Mines and Government Owned Industry, Commerce and Industrial Fostering, Communications and Transportation, Urban Development and Environment, Public Education, Agrarian Reform, and Health and Assistance, as well as the Mexican Institute of Social Security].

route. That is, it posited that rural poor were poor because they lacked the necessary conditions for development, and, at the same time, it was considered that their poverty was the product of an insufficient national economic development. On the other hand, COPLAMAR was inserted in the marginalization theories that were in vogue at the time, as it thought of the poor -both rural and urban- as products that had not entered the development process nor were they benefited by it. In other words, it posited the poor as the underprivileged by-products of development, be it rural or industrial.

Taking into account that the objective of the programs did not affect the structural bases of the economic model, it is worthwhile to focus on another variable that regards its efficiency and has to do with achieving possible goals, in a complex scenario due to present problems. For example, the handling of said programs by skilled professionals in the management of social problems in scenarios characterized by a conflict in which problems and demands converge becomes necessary; but they must also work along with societies that are more involved in the search for a solution to local problems.

## **V. The 80s**

Notwithstanding the crisis that pervaded the Mexican economy in the 80s, the official discourse kept offering to fight inequality with the instrument of economic and social policies. Even though, in fact, its main concern had been to manage public and social spending, not precisely using the government's monetary resources as a means of re-distributing income.

The adjustment policy that was set in motion in this decade, in the period ranging from 1982 to 1988, was dubbed economic reordering. This meant a price adjustment of goods and public services, the elimination of subsidies and an increase in prices, the reduction of public spending, price liberation, an opening of the economy, and wage and salary control. Said reduction of subsidies in many cases affected the price of basic goods. Economic reordering also meant that short term, the social policy would be reduced to almost nothing, thus, specific social programs would be cancelled.<sup>27</sup> The PIDER was among these programs, and even though it did not disappear as far as its name goes, it did in fact cease to exist, as the new administration deemed it to be costly and inefficient.

According to the preceding policies, the decentralization of the Mexican population and its activities was encouraged, aiming to foster the participation of the States, municipalities and civil society, thus "defining its priorities" faced with a lack of resources situation. That is why the government went back to the 70s model regarding social policy. This was called "programming-implementation"<sup>28</sup>. The fusion of the various programs would bring about the fragmentation of "programming, assignation and evaluation...". No one seemed to notice that the homogenization of the programs would trigger the homogenization of "various needs".

---

<sup>27</sup> Pardo López, Ma. del Carmen, p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> Op. Cit., . 245.

Social participation becomes more important, as, for planning purposes, the modes and kinds of existing participations in the various social groups are taken into account. The preceding situation was determined by internal and external factors. Keeping this in mind, the government endeavored to find “the institutionalization of social participation in the planning process...”, in order to achieve better levels of “co-responsibility, conservation of resources, and the recovery of regional balance.”<sup>29</sup>

It then became necessary to design a new social policy, in keeping with the new economic and social reality.

This restructuring greatly harmed the programs concerning the fight against poverty in the 70s, forcing the State to cut spending regarding social policies in general and to redesign its objectives, target population, operational structure and operating budget. In the framework of this restructuring and adjustment, PRONASOL was designed in 1988. This program fostered productive projects, infrastructure works, and social development programs, where the participation of local governments and of the population that benefited from them was fundamental.

The 80s ended with a great social debt vis à vis the people of Latin America. This is apparent in the relationship that exists between “the minimum income limits that are necessary for subsistence and the situation concerning real income, besides the role played by the salary in the gross global product.”<sup>30</sup>

## **VI. NATIONAL SOLIDARITY PROGRAM (PRONASOL)**

The next administration, under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), faced severe social, economic and political problems that it had inherited from the administration of President Miguel de la Madrid.

Along with these problems, the legitimacy of the official political party’s (the PRI, Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party]) victory of Carlos Salinas de Gortari over Cauhtémoc Cárdenas was very much in doubt. The irregularities that surrounded the election procedure undermined Salinas’s term from the moment he took office.

Due to the preceding situation, it became indispensable to legitimize the presidential figure as well as that of the State. It was in this context that the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad [National Solidarity Program] (PRONASOL) was designed. Its objective was to fight poverty.<sup>31</sup>

PRONASOL was not a fight against poverty program domestically designed, it was designed with the cooperation of international agencies, among them the World Bank, alongside the imposition of adjustment policies.

---

<sup>29</sup> Op. Cit., p. 248-249.

<sup>30</sup> Kliksberg, Bernardo, Op. Cit., p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Villarespe Reyes, Verónica and Merino, Susana, paper quoted.

One of the characteristics of this program was that it involved the participation of the beneficiaries as “managers of their own needs”, along with the decentralization of spending and services. In order to do so, it was necessary to design new ways to tend to the social demands and to the responsibility acquired by the State during the period called stabilizing development.

### **Objectives:**

Among the objectives of the program, we have: granting a minimum of social welfare, and promoting a balanced regional development. The latter would be achieved by respecting the principles, the will of the community, social participation, co-responsibility in the tasks, and transparency in the management of resources.<sup>32</sup>

The target populations were the native villages, the rural underprivileged population, and popular urban groups. The program would take care of issues having to do with health, education, food, housing, services, preservation of natural resources, and the procuring of justice.

In order to promote and implement the above, left-wing social leaders and intellectuals were co-opted due to their credibility and ability to interact with the population.

In 1988, the panorama regarding poverty was as follows: 40 million poor, 17 million living in conditions of extreme poverty, in an approximate population of 78 million.

### **Operational Structure**

The Mexican Official gazette dated December 6, 1988, refers to the creation of the Commission for the National Solidarity Program as “the agency responsible for the definition of welfare and regional development strategies”. The commission was under the authority of the President, which highlights the importance of this program, which tried to be kept clear of bureaucratic hurdles.

The program was managed by a General Coordination that was controlled by the Programming and Budget Department. It had an Advisory Counsel made up by officials from the agencies and bodies that were related to the objectives of the program, by representatives of the most important native peoples groups, by representatives of the social and private sectors, and by specialists in the field of social science that attached themselves to the objectives of the commission. This Advisory Counsel basically served to bear the responsibility of the official publications produced by PRONASOL.<sup>33</sup>

PRONASOL had an Evaluation Committee that monitored the social and economic impact of the program.

For coordination purposes between the President and the governors, Exclusive Development Agreements were established. The Development Planning Committees (COPLADES) were the sphere in which to integrate the Federal, State and municipal authorities, with the purpose of “defining, controlling and evaluating productive projects and infrastructure and social welfare works.” Inside the COPLADES, the Solidarity Committees were created. They were important for the functioning of the program, as they grouped the members of the communities that

---

<sup>32</sup> Pardo López, María del Carmen, Op. Cit., p. 280.

<sup>33</sup> Op. Cit., p. 282.

benefited from the same. Nevertheless, regarding the submission of applications, the Solidarity Committees had to refer to the Programming and Budget Department and to the Social Development Department. Consequently, the so-called decentralization and de-bureaucratization processes were nullified.

Two years after the launching of the PRONASOL project in 1990, the Solidarity Institute was created so as to link, in a more direct way, the President and the various groups organized in the Solidarity Committees.

Last, aiming to institutionalize the program, the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social [Social Development Department] (SEDESOL), was created. Its main objective was to centralize the operation of PRONASOL. Later, it served as a platform for the political campaign of the presidential candidate of the official party the PRI.

In the end, it became difficult to avoid the use of social policy as a political weapon. This use and abuse on the part of the political parties caused some reluctance regarding inter-governmental collaboration, a situation that affected the objectives of the program.

The problems that were identified in the evaluation of the program were derived from its implementation: resources authorization, budget distribution, investment pertinence. These technical errors stemmed from the way in which poverty was both measured and construed, combined with the legitimacy problems of the administration.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. The social balance of the economic policy calls for immediate action, for possible and viable solutions, going from the local to the national sphere, this would allow the government to overturn the consequences of focused social programs, which are, due to their nature, excluding ones. Short term, the deteriorating living conditions of the population need to be taken care of in a democratic space, which would necessarily be an inclusive one. Short term also, it seems that the intervention of the social manager regarding the implementation of the social programs seems pertinent, with the purpose of avoiding one of the problems that were present in the three programs analyzed in this paper.

2. As we can see, in the case of the three programs having to do with the fight against poverty, PIDER, COPLAMAR and PRONASOL, the concern of the President is there, as is the fact of acknowledging that the bureaucracy was one of the obstacles that precluded the success of the same. Nevertheless, the design of the operational structure of the programs generated a pyramidal bureaucratic structure which delayed fulfilling the goals of the program.

3. So that the implementation of the social policy, particularly the programs aiming to solve the poverty problem, may function adequately in the short term, the intervention of the social manager can be crucial, if he/she should fit the following profile: A) The ability to handle complexity, in areas of political and social sensitivity, developed as a result of contact with reality. Also, technical training is of the essence.

B) The capacity to handle social articulation. C) The ability to deal with vested interests in social spaces, identifying common interests and the refusal to cooperate. D) The capacity to develop a management direction that is able to deal with the technological frontier, characterized by a flexible organization regarding issues such as projects, fields of activity, and the mobilization of human resources. A management direction that is willing to innovate and meet the demands of the real world, qualities that are to be expected from the work of an interdisciplinary team. E) The ability and willingness to commit to solving the greater national problems through change and development.<sup>34</sup>

His /her training will allow him/her to articulate the democratization processes and to avoid: authoritarian implementation, respecting the organizational ways and traditions, “horizontal contact between the agents of the programs and the people they serve, and making continuous adjustments to the program in order to suit the needs” of the communities.<sup>35</sup>

The economic and social crisis affecting Latin American countries, Mexico specifically, a nation that is plagued by multiple problems that are the result of economic policies and the international environment, calls for the reconstruction of its social fabric from the basis of civil society, and satisfying and taking care of specific needs in specific areas. One of the professionals that could, first and foremost, implement institutional social care, is the social manager.

---

<sup>34</sup> Kliksberg, Bernardo, Op. Cit., pp. 137-141.

<sup>35</sup> Op. Cit., p. 136.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adelantado, José, *Las políticas sociales*.

<http://campus.usal.es/~dpublico/areacp/materiales/6.2.laspoliticassociales.pdf>

Recuperado el 18 de mayo de 2010.

*Appraisal of an Integrated Rural Development Project* - Pider II, Mexico, **Report No. 1480a**- ME, May 31, 1977, Agriculture and Rural Development Department, Document of the World Bank.

Barajas, Gabriela, *La pobreza en México: ayer y hoy*, **Foro Internacional**, Vol. XLII, num. 1, enero-marzo de 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Cordera, Rolando, (Coordinador). *La política social moderna: Evolución y Perspectivas*. (Informe), Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo Económico de México, Facultad de Economía de la UNAM, noviembre de 2003. <http://www.rlc.fao.org/prior/desrural/gasto/2005/cordera.pdf>. Recuperado el 28 de mayo de 2008.

López Amador, María de Jesús, *Política Pública y Política Social*, Documento de discusión interna, Centro de Educación Continua, Escuela Nacional de Trabajo Social, UNAM, 2007.

Márquez Zárate, Miguel Ángel, *Valores y medios de la gerencia social*, **Revista Defensa Ciudadana**, núm. 43, julio 2008.

Kliksberg, Bernardo, *¿Cómo formar gerentes sociales?*, en **¿Cómo enfrentar la pobreza?. Estrategias y experiencias organizacionales innovadoras**, Buenos Aires, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo (CLAD), Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1989.

Villarespe Reyes, Verónica y Susana Merino, *Los programas contemporáneos de combate a la pobreza en México: alcances y perspectivas*, ponencia presentada en las **XXI Jornadas de Historia Económicas**, Buenos Aires, Argentina, septiembre de 2008, [http://163.10.30.203:8080/congresos/xxijhe/programa/descargables/villarespe\\_merino.pdf](http://163.10.30.203:8080/congresos/xxijhe/programa/descargables/villarespe_merino.pdf)

*IX Censo de Población y Vivienda*, <http://www.mexicoenestadisticas.com.mx/privado/historicos/hispob.htm>