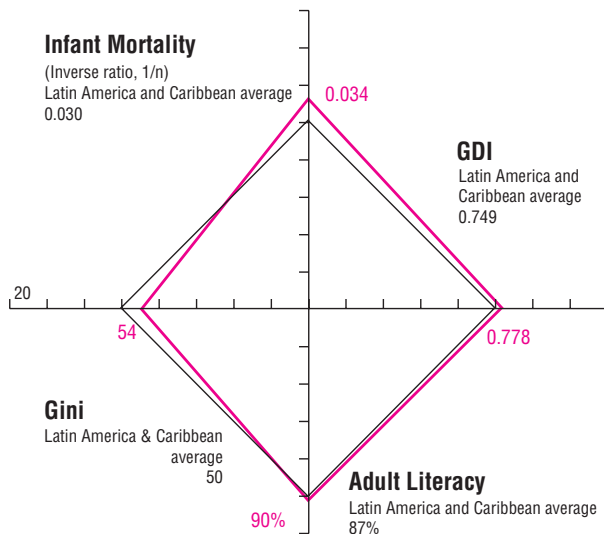


• ARELI SANDOVAL TERÁN

MUCHADO ABOUT NOTHING



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

In the five years since the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, the situation of economic, political and social instability in Mexico in the post-summit period differs from the picture presented by the Mexican government to international organisations. This reflects over 70 years of rule by the same party and the failure of the current economic model after 17 years to promote sustainable social development. Manifestations of discontent, including the Zapatista movement and the appearance of armed groups in Chiapas,

Guerrero and Oaxaca, are only some of the indicators that little progress has been made toward fulfilling commitments made at Copenhagen and Beijing.

During the administration of President Ernesto Zedillo, the government has taken various legislative, economic policy and social measures and has plans and programmes to solve the problems of social development. These measures have not achieved their objectives or done so insufficiently; some have even resulted in greater impoverishment of the population.

The Mexican government has to insure that progress at the formal level is put into practice and reflected in daily life. It must recognise the structural causes of the country's development problems before it can design appropriate solutions. No progress can be made as long as the government blames the profound economic crisis that has affected the country since 1995 for its failures in achieving social goals.

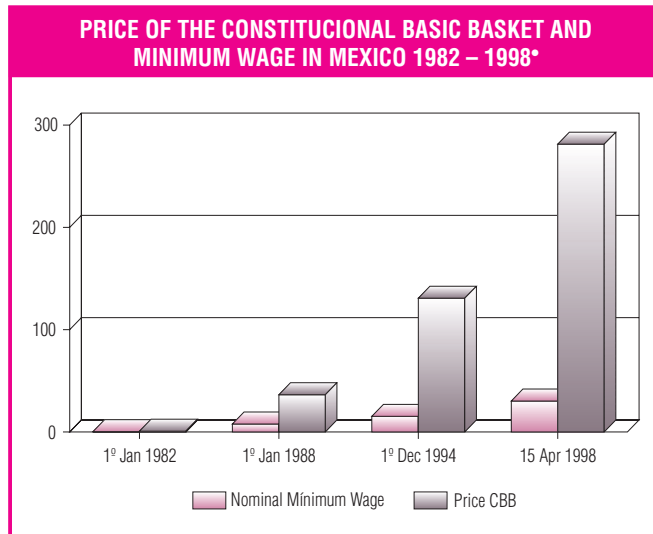
The creation of an environment favourable to social development requires a reordering of government priorities. The accent has been on the protection of major economic, financial and commercial interests to the detriment of the welfare of the population.

Although Mexico implemented anti-poverty programmes after 1995 (the main one being the Programme for Education, Health and Food—PROGRESA), the number of people living in relative and extreme poverty has risen alarmingly, both in rural and urban zones. In particular, the situation of women, children and the indigenous population has worsened. There are specific measures aimed at lessening the impacts of structural adjustment (Commitment 8), but they are insufficient *vis-à-vis* the country's high level of poverty.

- The government acknowledges an approximate figure of 42 million poor people, of which 26 million live in extreme poverty. Of the 32 million children in Mexico, 12 million live in poverty.¹

¹ *Alternative Report.* Research report by the Center for Multidisciplinary Analysis (CAM) of the School of Economics, National Autonomous University of Mexico. *E/Financiero*, August 31st 1999, p.14.

- Salaries dropped 47.6% in purchasing power from December 1994 to August 1999. This is equivalent to more than half the drop in salaries over the past 23 years.²



•Source: Centre for Multi-disciplinary Analysis of the School of Economics, (UNAM), May 1998, with data from the Bank of Mexico and the National Minimum Wage Commission.

Employment has deteriorated in terms of quality and remuneration. Unemployment has risen and consequently, under-employment and the work load of women and children have increased. Meanwhile, the government maintains policies for: creation of jobs—in insufficient numbers and temporary—to compensate for layoffs generated by privatisation; indiscriminate opening of markets that affect the national production; and wage ceilings.

- In 1998, 750,000 jobs were created, of which only 40% were permanent.³ Annually, 1.2 million new jobs are needed to cover demand, but at the end of 1999, less than 500,000 new jobs had been created.⁴

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The status of human, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights continues to cause concern and, in some aspects,

has worsened, *as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights testified when she visited Mexico in November 1999*. Violations of rights stem from: the social cost of the government's economic policy; repression of people's movements showing discontent; and the increased corruption and impunity that obstruct access to justice.

Despite feminist efforts to incorporate gender perspectives in public plans, programmes and policies and various other initiatives opposing inequity between men and women, there are still cases of labour discrimination (obligatory test showing non-pregnancy as condition of employment, dismissals because of pregnancy), exploitation, domestic violence, difficulties in accessing credit, housing, feminisation of poverty, etc. The achievement of objectives set out in the Beijing Platform of Action regarding women and the economy is at risk, since the economic environment does not favour increasing women's access to resources, property and above all, decision-making in spheres related to the economy.⁵

Progress has been made toward reaching government goals for education and health. The government recognises serious regional inequalities, however, to be seen *inter alia* in the high rates of infectious-contagious diseases and suffering linked to malnutrition and reproduction and in the illiteracy and school dropout rates in scattered rural and underprivileged urban areas.

Despite the fact that the percentage of funds allocated to social development has increased, poverty is on the rise. There is a vast disproportion between social spending and the amounts disbursed for military expenses, private bank bailouts, or prompt payment in servicing the foreign debt. For example:

- In 1998, all programmes to fight absolute poverty together added up to 38,101 million pesos, equivalent to 1% of the GDP, 4.3% of the Net Total Spending, 28% of the financial cost of the debt, and 5.8% of the amount allocated to the cost of bank bailouts for that year through the Banking Fund for Savings Protection (Fondo Bancario de Protección al Ahorro – FOBAPROA).⁶
- In 1999, four times more resources were allotted to military expenditure than to overcoming poverty.⁷

In the 1995–2000 National Development Plan, the Mexican government did not establish concrete measures to eradicate poverty; it only expressed the desire in general to *«improve the level of welfare and quality of life of the Mexican people, and in a priority way, to lessen poverty and social exclusion.»*⁸

² *Alternative Report*. UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, cited in 'La Tragedia de los niños mexicanos... según el gobierno'. *Masiosare*, a special supplement of *La Jornada*, a national newspaper, May 2nd 1999, pp.10 and 11.

³ *Alternative Report*. Declaration by Javier Moctezuma Barragán, an official from the Labor and Social Security Secretariat. *El Financiero*, March 30th 1999, p.13.

⁴ *Alternative Report*. Martínez Gallardo, Alejandro, President of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers. *El Financiero*, April 8th 1999, p.13

⁵ Analysis by Laura Frade, in: Training and Community Development Alternatives (Alternativas de Capacitación y Desarrollo Comunitario – ALCADECO) – Feminist Millennium.

⁶ *Alternative Report*. *Separata* (off-prints) on the budget, based on essays by Fabiola Zermeño Núñez, a specialist in analysis of budgetary policies and public finance.

⁷ *Alternative Report*. Special report in *El Financiero*, May 11th 1997, and 'Análisis del Presupuesto de Egresos de 1999' (Analysis of the expenditures budget for 1999), by the PRD Parliamentary Group in the Senate. *Coyuntura 89*, December 1998, p. 56.

⁸ Federal Executive Power, 1995–2000 National Development Plan.

In government reports submitted annually by the President, some goals may be highlighted, such as increasing the number of grants awarded each year or the number of families that benefit from PROGRESA. These measures are merely palliative, however, in quantitative and qualitative terms, since the number of poor people is much higher than the number receiving this support.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

An overall conception of social development is needed, which includes economic, social, cultural and environmental criteria in the design, application and assessment of public policies. To arrive at this conception, the government needs to consider the contribution of civil society and its organisations.

Organised civil society will work toward government implementation of and compliance with recommendations adopted by the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on December 3rd 1999 (E/C.12/1/Add.41) after examining the status of progress on the subject. These recommendations coincide with our proposals. The following should be highlighted:

- The Committee urges the party State to deal with the structural causes of poverty in Mexico and adjust social programmes accordingly. Furthermore, the Committee invites the party State to closely involve civil society in general and the target groups in particular in planning, application and assessment of these programmes.
- The Committee calls on the State to negotiate with international financial institutions and, when carrying out programmes for

structural adjustments, macro-economic policies, payment of service on the foreign debt, integration of a market economy, *etc.*, to take into account their effect on enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, in particular by the most vulnerable groups of society.

- DECA Equipo Pueblo, A.C., member of the collective organisation: Espacio de Coordinación Control Ciudadano-DESC, comprising civil society organisations and Mexican networks working in social development and human rights. pueblodip@laneta.apc.org
- The main basis of this document is the Alternative Report (Informe Alternativo DESC), 'The situation of economic, social and cultural rights in Mexico', submitted to the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in November 1999. The report was prepared by: Casa y Ciudad, A.C.; Coalición Habitat México; Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín; Pro Juárez, A.C. (PRODH); Centro de Reflexión y Acción Laboral de Fomento Cultural y Educativo, A.C. (CEREAL); Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos A.C (CMDPDHAC); Colectivo Mexicano de Apoyo a la Niñez (COMEXANI); Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia, DECA; Equipo Pueblo, A.C.; Defensoría del Derecho a la Salud; Food First Information and Action Network – Mexico Section (FIAN-México); Frente por el Derecho a Alimentarse (FDA); Liga Mexicana de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (LIMEDDH); Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos ELIGE; Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos 'Todos los Derechos para Todos'.