

Social Policy Dialogue - Pilot Phase

(Project ATN/DCF-5558-RG)

Executive Summary of the Evaluation Report

by Marcia Rivera

I. Purpose, Methods and Terms of Reference of the Evaluation Undertaken

- 1.1 This evaluation was commissioned by the Social Program Division, Sustainable Development Department (SOC/SDS) of the Inter-American Development Bank. It seeks to assess the achievements and limitations of the pilot phase of the **A Social Policy Dialogue**,[@] and to make suggestions and recommendations for a second phase, both in terms of the work done in the three cases where the project was conducted (Guatemala, Ecuador, and Dominican Republic), and in possible new ones.
- 1.2 As stated in the terms of reference, the evaluation sought to assess:
 - the level of participation of beneficiaries
 - the level and quality of consensus achieved
 - the formulation of strategies by participants and its relation to the project objectives and activities
 - the capacity to continue activities beyond the Banks intervention
 - the fulfillment of goals, objectives, and strategies contained in the original project
- 1.3 Initially, the project consultant reviewed all the documents generated by the project, including background materials prepared for President Aylwin's visits, mission reports, studies on the three countries, newspapers' accounts of the visits, and others. In Washington, IDB officials linked to the project were interviewed at length and field visits to Ecuador and the Dominican Republic were scheduled. Telephone interviews to Guatemala and to President Aylwin's advisors were also made. A permanent and fluid flow of information took place between Ms. Rosario Medero, Project Coordinator at the IDB, and the consultant throughout the evaluation period.
- 1.4 The consultant spent three days (16 - 18 February) in Ecuador, interviewing personally or over the telephone (where a face to face meeting was not feasible) 22 key people who had participated in the projects activities or had helped to get off the ground.
- 1.5 In the Dominican Republic the consultant observed the National Dialogue convened by the President of the country and talked with

many of those who had attended activities organized in the context of President Aylwin's visit.

- 1.6 A very first draft of the report, highlighting findings, was discussed with the following IDB officials in March: Waldemar Wirsig (Manager, SDS), Mayra Buvinic (Chief, SDS/SOC), Walter Soto (RE3/SO3), Ada McMahon (RE2/SO2), and Rosario Medero (SDS/SOC).

II. Project Description

- 2.1 This project was conceived as a follow-up activity to the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development and the Beijing Conference on Women, both of which took place in 1995. It is also within the context of the IDB's Eighth Replenishment, which enables the Bank to facilitate and stimulate dialogues between the State and Civil Society. With the Cooperation of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an innovative project was designed to initiate social policy dialogues in three countries, with former Chile President, Patricio Aylwin, as anchor to the process. Harvard's Conflict Management International Group, was to provide support in the conduction of the meetings. The idea was to help countries establish the basis for a process that would enable them to achieve a national consensus in relation to major social and gender problems, and to establish priorities and define policy strategies.
- 2.2 In the pilot phase this report evaluates, the project was to organize activities in Guatemala, Ecuador and Honduras. With the consent of the Danish Ministry, Honduras was left for a second stage of the project and substituted for the Dominican Republic, because of the electoral process that was to take place, and that could interfere with the project. A first activity to be scheduled was a visit by President Aylwin, as dialogue facilitator, with meetings, workshops, and conferences being organized throughout a one-week period. The second activity envisaged was a two-three day small gathering - forum or workshop with some 15 -20 participants carefully selected to represent a diversity of sectors. An important theme would be selected to serve as basis of the discussion that sought to generate a common framework of analysis and consensus on possible policies to be pursued. It was expected that follow-up activities would be generated from the experience, as it actually was.
- 2.3 In the very short time and with the modest resources of the project, a great deal has been accomplished. Though the results of this exercise can only be judged in the medium and long term, the short term impact and the lesson learnt have been quite important, as the next section of this will demonstrate.

III. Synthesis of activities undertaken by the project

- 3.1 Before scheduling President Aylwin's visit, substantive preparatory work had to take place. Resource people at the IDB were identified

to form part of the project team. Background materials - statistics, analysis, profiles of key figures, institutions, and groups in each country - were prepared using the Bank's own data resources and local consultants hired for the purpose. Additionally field missions were organized to coordinate agendas, secure local counterparts, ensure meetings with top level government and business people, and work out a press strategy. In synthesis the following activities conducted were considered in this evaluation.

Guatemala

- 3.2 The first visit by President Aylwin was to Guatemala (12-19 April 1997). He met with the President, various ministers, parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, of political parties, NGOs, the Church, the negotiators of the Peace Agreements, and grassroots groups, (mainly from indigenous communities, human rights, and women's associations). Two conferences where he was a keynote speaker were organized (with more than 300 participants in each). Discussion's sessions were scheduled with different groups in several municipalities. In each session, he insisted on the importance of dialogue and consensus building for securing long lasting peace and social development. His presence was well received by the media.
- 3.3 The situation in Guatemala is evidently still quite fragile, reason for which the second round of activities envisaged in the project has not been yet scheduled. The country could benefit from the project's activities promoting long lasting peace and political stability, a precondition to social development. The forum of a workshop should take place when the local context can permit.

Ecuador

- 3.4 In Ecuador, the project benefitted from Guatemala's experience. Two preparatory missions to the country were undertaken in August and September 1997 where the agenda and the country strategy were completed. Mr. Aylwin visited the country from September 27 to October 4, 1997, and had meetings with government authorities, trade unions, business leaders, Church hierarchy, and NGOs. He visited indigenous communities and was a keynote speaker in a conference attended by more than 300 people. His visit was well reviewed by the press.
- 3.5 Later, the forum/workshop took place at IDB headquarters in Washington D.C., with 14 participants coming from Ecuador, and representing business, labor, women and youth groups, government, the military and the church. Mr. Aylwin presided over the sessions with the support of his advisors and the CMI Harvard group who served as moderators. A small group of IDB staff also participated providing information and analytical guidelines. The debate concluded with the preparation of a consensus document on the challenges of education in the country and some suggestions of policy guidelines.

- 3.6 The initiative proved to be so successful that the group has continued to meet back in Ecuador. Another workshop was organized on their own to discuss Social Security problems and a consensus document was prepared and sent on behalf of the group to the National Assembly that is considering amendments to the Constitution.

Dominican Republic

- 3.7 Preliminary missions took place in July and August, and Mr. Aylwin visited the country between the 6-10 of October. Around twenty working sessions took place with different actors, institutions and groups. The Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra served as host to a conference attended by more than 200 people where President Aylwin talked about dialogue and consensus building as key elements in developing policies to counter poverty and achieve social development. Again the press was very favorable. During the week different media published 31 articles.

IV. Challenges and difficulties that the project met

- 4.1 As was envisaged, many challenges and difficulties had to met while working at the country level. This included: the need to deal with the fragmentation of the political debate and of its institutions, the sensible issue of identifying key social actors to participate in the policy dialogues, the persistent separation between economic and social debate, the tremendous weakness of a gender perspective in policy debates, and the lack of experiences of collaborative work between governments, civil society, and the business sector.
- 4.2 Furthermore, other types of difficulties arising of the innovative nature of the project, included dealing with the natural propensity of governments to control discussion agendas, which posed in several instances the need of using human and financial resources in flexible ways to ensure the projects independence. Another difficulty we found was that of achieving focus and thoroughness in the discussions. Since participatory instances are so scarce in the region, people tend to be very vague and are often reluctant to come to precise or concrete propositions. Achieving consensus needs a kind of practice that is not present in most countries. Besides, there is always an unresolved tension between dialogue vs. results. People tend to expect immediate results and most often fail to recognize the complex nature of processes involved in social policy formulation.
- 4.3 Lastly, there was the concern of parallel initiatives. Both in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic governments convened their own National dialogues after the IDB's initiative was launched. This required extremely subtle management by IDB staff so as not neutralize both initiatives but rather find ways of making them complementary while recognizing the difference.

V. General conclusions and project achievements

- 5.1 The overarching major conclusion that this evaluator reached is that the program is indeed an innovative way of helping countries to establish the bases for a participatory process of discussing social policy issues, reaching consensus among a wide variety of social actors, and setting a national agenda of priority and strategies. It can also help to increase citizens' awareness and monitoring activities of progress toward meeting the Social Summit and the International Women's Conference goals. The pilot phase has been an important and fruitful learning process for all of those involved, including the Bank's staff.
- 5.2 Regarding **the participation of beneficiaries**, the evaluation found that the outreach of the program of activities was excellent; the project provoked interest by key actors of the society, received very good press coverage - thus increasing manifoldly the sphere of influence of the project - and attendance at public activities was very good.
- 5.3 As for **scope and quality of the consensus** reached we would need to make some comments. First, the participants themselves considered (in formal written evaluations and through interviews conducted by the evaluation) that the exercise was very valuable, and that in many cases, it was the first time they attempted to reach consensus on social development problems with different actors. The evaluator considers that having people believe that dialogue is a mechanism that societies have for achieving a consensus on social policy and securing democratic governance was a major contribution of the project.
- 5.4 A careful examination of the document produced by the Ecuador group on the issue of education, professional training and governance, generated at the Washington workshop, raises some concerns. First, we believe that themes should be more focused. Attempting to make difficult correlations between complex processes with a group of people from very different personal and academic backgrounds can end in simplistic analysis and un-substantive consensus. The document produced, has a good inventory of problems and policy suggestions, but we cannot expect it to be a blueprint for future action. It requires different levels of discussions bringing in experts, along with the group and a lengthier and more thorough process.
- 5.5 There seems to be **capacity to continue** in all three countries where the project activities were conducted. That is most clear in Ecuador, where all of those interviewed expressed their willingness to continue participating and contribute time to the process. They envisage doing a monthly meeting and the IDB Representative is willing to serve as host, while the group has asked Cornelio Marchan from Esquel and he has agreed to act as coordinator. In the other two cases, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, both government officials and key actors express their desire of participating in the forums that have yet to be scheduled.
- 5.6 Regarding the **fulfillment of goals and objectives**, it should be said that time allocated for each stage of the project has been

greater than initially planned. Due to its experimental character we are not concerned with that, but the fact should be taken into account for the next stage. All the goals and objectives of the project will be met when the two remaining activities are completed.

5.7 As we said before, the full impact of this project will only be evident in the medium term. However, concrete, tangible, results have already been achieved. Among these, the following are worth highlighting:

- **Preparation of social pacts and consensus documents, and the will to continue the process.**

5.8 In Ecuador, where the two major stages of the project have been completed, the Dialogue Group has continued to meet, discuss, and reach agreements. On January 30, they submitted a consensus proposal to the Constitutional Assembly for constitutional reform on the issue of social security. The group has expressed willingness to continue a program of activities that includes further discussion of key social policy issues, the organization of larger workshops and seminars, the design of strategies to implement suggested policies and meet established goals, and a dissemination effort toward the population.

- **The identification of key social actors and the creation of a fluid exchange within a framework of respect, flexibility and pluralism.**

5.9 In the three countries the project was able to correctly identify the key social actors and create among them a climate of trust, respect, and mutual recognition, which is a necessary step in the progressive construction of representativity. In countries where social and political fragmentation has increased dramatically and there is a veritable explosion of NGOs and grassroots groups. This is a major contribution.

- **Validating a participatory approach in the design and implementation of social policies.**

5.10 The project, in all three countries, has contributed to disseminating the idea that governments, civil society and the private business sector have to come together, in a joint effort, to agree on an agenda to tackle the eradication of poverty, social disintegration, the creation of employment opportunities, and the full incorporation of a gender perspective in social policy. The press widely covered President Aylwin's visits to the countries, and his statements stressed the view of the need to foster citizens' participation and joint ventures between the public and the private sector to promote social development. This is an important message for the region, and coming from a Bank-sponsored project more so.

VI. Lessons learnt

6.1 The project is rich in lessons. Among others, the following should be kept in mind in the design of the next phase of the project.

- **Incorporating gender concerns and perspectives into policy debates is more difficult than originally envisioned and requires specific and clear strategies.** A concrete suggestion is that local consultants, which proved to be a great asset to the project, be required to incorporate a gender perspective in their analysis, instead of commissioning two separate papers. Also, that a greater effort is placed in having gender concerns be discussed in all the meetings, not only in those with women.
- **President Aylwin and his team are key elements of the project;** their role as facilitators was rated excellent by participants. However, one may want to think of other key national or regional figures for some follow up activities, along with him. He and his team are great door openers for the project, and perhaps his major role should be initiating the process in other countries or regions.
- **The support by Inter -American Development Bank** is crucial for this project. Without it, credibility, trust, and long term expectations would be impaired, and key social actors might not be as keen in participating. The Banks support is essential in providing substantive and trustworthy statistical information, analysis, and research experiences, and in providing personnel with a vast experience in the countries where the dialogues took or will take place. The IDB's in kind contribution has been and needs to be greater than originally anticipated.
- **The recruitment of local consultants** proved to be very fruitful; as they could make concrete suggestions about key actors, institutions, problems, visions, and could provide useful profiles of local people.
- **Follow up is essential.** The project has to ensure that once a discussion group is set up and can work effectively, it is helped to sustain the work. Flexibility is a requirement, to design follow up activities well suited to a country's needs.

VII. Suggestions for second phase

Ecuador

- Continue to support the program by contributing to the establishment of a coordination unit that can convene meetings, organize workshops, commission background technical papers and sustain the dialogue effort.
- Help strengthen representativity of the group by incorporating

other individuals and by furthering the dialogue within the different sectors represented. There is willingness to engage in this process by participants.

- Take up other key issues. Those considered by participants whom we interviewed as key ones are: poverty, employment policies, training schemes, internal security, external debt, democratization of the state and the reform of the judiciary system.
- Design a gradual and progressive dissemination strategy to let people know about the progress being made in the dialogue group. This could include publication of papers, summaries of debates, and others.
- Sponsor an annual conference where President Aylwin or other democratic leaders of the region can verify progress made by the group. This would provide visibility to the initiative and garner support for a participatory approach to the design and implementation of social policies.

Guatemala and the Dominican Republic

- Complete the process by scheduling when possible the two forums that are the second major activity of the program.

In Guatemala the suggestion is that a major theme from the peace agreements be taken as basis for the discussion, and that it is held in Guatemala itself to endorse and give visibility to the yet fragile peace process. The role of the Harvard Conflict Management Group is extremely important there.

The forum for Dominican Republic can either take place in the country or in Washington. Major themes that were presented to me as key ones are health and education.

- Design a follow up plan along the general lines of that of Ecuador, taking into account their particular needs and conditions. In the Dominican Republic local contact for follow up can be Monseñor Agripino Nuñez, Chancellor of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, who is recognized as a capable, consensus minded and a well-respected person by all sectors.

Other countries

The evaluation report suggests a series of criteria that should help to select other instances for the exercise in the next phase. It is important to consider that countries should have a maximum need for the project (in the sense of requiring assistance in consensus building processes) and a minimum of conditions to ensure that the program is feasible (for example, well-established NGOs or social movements, an interested business sector that recognizes its social responsibility, and a government willing to engage in the program).

It is suggested that a major effort be made to do three or four new case studies in the next phase of this project, and to consider the possibility - discussed with many Bank officials, government representatives, and NGOs, of doing the exercise at the provincial, state, or municipal level to be able to have a basis for comparisons. New countries suggested are Honduras - postponed from last year, and Paraguay, while a municipal case might be that of Campana, Argentina, a small industrial city in the very crossroads of Mercosur, faced with great challenges and a local government, business sector, and civil society groups interested in working together in a participatory development plan for the municipality.