The combat to poverty policy in Mexico, 1982-2005

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Introduction

The combat against poverty in the welfare states is contained in a wide social policy that tries to elevate and maintain the population's general level of life so that the identification and territorial location of the poor, as well as poverty measurement, are secondary issues for designing of the social policy directed to improve the general population's welfare general conditions.

Conversely, for the neoliberal governments, such as the American and a large part of the Latin American, where the fiscal supports are directed to the poor —
defined, geographically localized and censed by the government itself —, the measurement of poverty becomes so important that has turned into one of the main criteria for the evaluation of the government performance as well as the country's development.

For that reason, in Latin America, the debates on measurement poverty approaches and methods have become a tradition that started in 1979, when the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cepal) performed the first measurements of the region.

In general, the countries with neoliberal governments measure poverty — reduced to the lack of incomes to satisfy a family's essential needs1 — in order to operate directed programs, purpose that highlights the importance it acquires for that kind of governments the quantification of poverty with evaluation aims (independently of the method used), as well as the preoccupation for improving the techniques and methods to measure it. Indeed, according to Lerner:

Of all the methods that are used to measure poverty in Latin America, Europe and the United States, the income method or poverty line is the most common. Such method was created by an English man, Meter Twonsend, after that, Mollie Orshansky, an American scientist, made use of it (1996: 123—124).

This work analyses the poverty measurement method that has been used in Mexico, which is consequent with the policy focused on poverty combat, in order to establish the possible comparison points with the methods and policies that are performed in Latin America. Of course, the comparative analysis comes from the frameworks of the present work.

Finally, a no less important issue exposed in the following lines consist on concluding for the need of starting a total strategy to combat the structural causes that generate poverty, more than acting over the symptoms that identify it, which means changing the neoliberal modality — purpose several Latin American countries are focused on already —, to take again the development policies based on the sustained growth, the generation of employment and the distribution of income and poverty, this is, to reach an economic development capable of allowing improving and sustaining the welfare of all the population.

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1 In the countries from the called Third World, in order to measure poverty "is used an indicator based on the possibility of purchase of a minimum basic set that allows the survival, and to that set is added a series of necessary services such as dwelling and transport. This indicator defines the poverty line" (Salama, 2006: 20).
Poverty combat in neoliberalism

Since the decade of 1980, when the neoliberal modality of the capitalism was imposed, the eradication of poverty has become a repeated discourse that has little support in the facts.

Jean Siegler, special relator from the United Nations on the Alimentation Right, in his inform for 2004 warned that, as the result of poverty, currently, 842 million people suffer from hunger in the world and he emphasized: “Hunger kills much more people than any contemporary war or terrorist attack” and he added: “Every five seconds a child under five years of age dies of hunger related illnesses, this is, more than six million children will be dead by 2000”.

Although its perverse effects are sharpening in the dependent countries, without a doubt poverty is a situation that affects the entire world, including the central countries: “poverty persists in considerable degrees, in both countries from the called third world, as well as those in the first world”, notices Pierre Salama (2006: 20). There the importance to eradicate it from everywhere; although the reached results are unequal and in many cases frustrating.

In the fight against the intervention of the State in the economy, as the precedent economy modality of capitalist development proposed, whereas the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as the World Bank (WB), world organisms promoters of the neoliberal strategy that for more than two decades have been recommending the depending nations to undertake structural orientation reforms to the market to leave the economy for the free action of the market forces, boost the commercial and financial aperture, as well as “slimming” the State, way that it was assured it was the only one possible to generate richness.

Accompanying that global strategy, the poverty combat programs under neoliberalism, in general terms, two axioms derived from the neoclassic economic theory are based upon it: a) the public sector has scarce resources to apply to social programs; hence, those resources must be applied in such a way that they have a stronger economic and social impact at the lower possible cost; and b) the latter mean that the productivity of the families’ extreme poverty improvement must be a priority and the best way of doing so is by not pretending to intervene directly in the distribution of incomes and territorial and sector assignation of the production factors (Duhau, 1999).

3 In relation with the distribution of income, the neoliberal economists, sustain: "The poverty problem, that is not the one of unequal distribution of income, although most of the poortologists insist so
The adhesion of the Latin American countries to the neoliberal strategy, initiated with the structural reforms impulse in the 1970 and 1980 decades meant the elimination from the economic activity of the social control and regulation mechanisms. On it side, the impact of the capital market liberation gave the transnational financial capital enough power and capacity as to control the accumulation process in the dependent economies and the agricultural producers of the developed countries — generously subsidized by their governments — to put in the dependent nations their production surplus at dumping prices, affecting the agricultural activities even to their destruction, particularly the food production.

Similarly, privatization of state enterprises that would produce goods and public services to offer them to the population sectors with the less incomes led to the increment of their costs and charges; finally, the disappearance of the mechanisms by which the State intervened in the economy, seriously weakened the participation of the social interests in the orientation of the economic process, particularly the offensive against the State limited their capacity to meet the different aspects of social security.

All these provoked, among other things, higher social and regional poverty levels, as well as the sharpening of the polarization among the different social classes, this without social compensation mechanisms.

This way, soon after two decades from the undertaking of the neoliberal strategy, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the rhythm of sustained growth that is associated to the decrease of poverty and inequity has not been able to recover and even less to sustain; on the contrary, today the region has become an endemic harm in all the countries without exception, since it affects 224 million people, from which 105 million survive from begging (Cepal, 2004).

(poortologistst who should study the works of Meter Thomas Bauer, 1915-2002, one of the most lucid economists of the XX century, and one of the best scholars of richness; of its creation and diffusion), but the one of the incapacity of the poor to, by means of productive work, to generate a sufficient income” (Damm, 2006: 28).

4 In the other Forum "Desigualdad en América Latina: las reformas necesarias" (Inequity in Latin America: the necessary reforms), organized by the Senate of the Republic, the president coordinator of the UN in Mexico, Thierry Lemaresquiere, warned that "Economic inequity in Latin America is a painful reality and a constant in its recent history. This phenomenon, concluded the international functionary, with some exceptions from the South-Sahara Africa is, in average, the highest of the world" (La Jornada, 15 de marzo de 2005: 14). Previously, when inaugurating the works of the international conference "Institucionalización de de la Política Social para la Superación de la Pobreza", (Institutionalization of the Social Policy for the Poverty Overcoming), José Luis Machines, general secretary of Cepal, affirmed that Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal of the world "with its 224 million people suffering from poverty (40 percent of the total population) and close to 105 million in extreme poverty situations" (El Financiero, 29 de septiembre de 2004: 32).
Focalization method

Under neoliberalism, the welfare State institutions have been systematically reduced or destroyed, which increases the deterioration of the social life due to the growing difficulties of a large part of the population to have access to education, health, dignifying dwelling, and, in general, social security, whose privatization has become one of the distinctive features of the neoliberal governments. In this way, facing the subjacent postulates in the paradigm previously dominant — the universal access and re—distributing role of the social policies —, the new paradigm substitutes them for access differentiation via privatization and competence, subsidize to demand and focalization.

Before this situation, and in order to compensate the social costs that from the decade of 1970 the structural adjustment of market orientation brought, in the decade of 1990 it was imposed in many Latin American countries (Bolivia, México, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua), the focalized policy of assistance to the poor, in particular to the extremely poor (Lerner, 1996: 95). The purpose was, among others, more than changing all those things that provoked poverty, to ensure governability, mainly in those countries where it was foreseen that the increasing social deterioration encouraged irritation and radical political action by the population.

In these moments, three decades from the establishment of the focalized programs, directed to the poorest, known also as “social investments funds“ (in Mexico they started in 1990 with the Solidarity National Program), that are created by the called “individualized monetary transferences“ and operates as subsidy to demand, this mechanism cannot modify the structural changes of the poverty.

The programs focused were conceived more to alleviate temporarily the situation of some extreme poor rather than to combat the determinant structural causes of poverty (such as inequity in the distribution of income and richness), from there that they have not been the detonators of a profound process of structural change, or at least of economic reactivation that allowed growth, increment of employment and richness and income distribution.

The focalization method is exclusively sustained in the analysis of the lack of income of the families to acquire in the market a basic foods basket, as well as to acquire the goods and services that allow them satisfying the rest of their needs\(^5\). In this way, the Income method, or Poverty Line, implies two essential

\(^5\) “The method that the governments from Mexico and the United States, as well as CEPAL, use to
steps: to calculate a minimum income, or poverty line, with which all the minimum needs of a family are satisfied. The second step is to identify and territorially locate the households that have lower incomes than those of a poverty line so to configure a region map where the population in extreme poverty of the country live.

So, this method based on income, without taking interest of identifying the determinant causes of poverty, demands a double focalization; know how many and who are the poor and determine where they are located in the territory the possible beneficiaries of the monetary supports from the fiscal resources.

Behind this method is the idea that the poor are so because they are out of the market, as a consequence, the strategy is reduced when trying to incorporate those who are in an extreme poverty situation to the labour markets and merchandises; in the first case, making that their abilities and skills are adjusted to the needs of the productive apparatus in order to employ themselves and get an income that makes them rise their merchandise consumption, this is, to participate in the market as consumers from qualifying their work force and increasing their value in the labour market; in the second, turning them immediately in consumers of goods and services by giving them a conditioned direct monetary subsidy.

The critics to this method of poverty measurements and combat have been diverse and have come from different theoretical perspectives. Amartya Sen (1996), for example, warns that: “the point of view of the poverty that is concentrated in the income, base on the specification of an income in poverty line that does not vary among people can be wrong to identify and evaluate poverty“. Other authors (Boltvinik, 2001, and Fernández, 2003), maintain that the fundamental supposition of that poverty line method — reduction of the satisfaction of the needs to the acquisition of goods and services in the market —, it is arguable because it does not take into consideration other non—mercantile sources and resources that satisfy the families' needs, such as public goods, publicly supplied goods, accumulated patrimony, knowledge, or the available time for non—working activities — cultural, sport — among others.

However, at least in Mexico, the strategy of poverty combat supported in the focused programs persist and with the correspondent figures to the favored households with the monetary transferences of public funds. The federal measure poverty by income is the one of the normative set of food (CAN in Spanish), which consists on a list of products, quantities and prices of each one of them, and is done based on the nutritional requirements and alimentary practices observed. The cost to get it is defined as the line of extreme poverty by the Cepal and alimentary poverty by the Mexican government" (Damián, 2004).
government sustains that it has been able to reduce in several millions the number of poor people in a few years, affirmation that has provoked an intense debate among the different academics dedicated to poverty research and its measurement.

Neoliberal governments and poverty combat in Mexico: from Solidaridad to Oportunidades

Fernando Cortés (2002: 18) assures that there has been a scarce interest from the researchers and institutions to study the determinant causes of poverty and its possible relation with the design and put into practice of the public policies proposed to combat it.

In general, the effort from the scholars as well as from the public sector institutions has been focused on the measurement of poverty and in the evaluation of the focalization policies followed, being less works directed to perform studies that reflect the multidimensional nature of poverty, so that from that conceptualization it would be possible to define the indicators that allow recognizing the magnitude and conceptualization of poverty, from which the strategy that faces efficiently its determinant causes emerges.

With different shades, the governments of Carlos Salinas (1988—1994), Ernesto Zedillo (1994—2000) and Vicente Fox (2000—2006), even being the latter a political party formally different from the previous two, have made the poverty combat their best legitimization play and the policies followed have been based on four basic principles, to know:

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6 Among the antecedents of these programs is: the Programa Integral para el Desarrollo Rural (Pider, 1973-1982) (Integral Program for Rural Development) and the studies done by the General Coordination of the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalized Groups (Coplamar, 1977-1982). For the Pider, that emerges in the government of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), poverty is the result of the disequilibrium generated by the economic strategy that privileged industrialization and exporting agriculture, impoverish the population settled in the agricultural regions of temporal and although it recognized that this situation had provoked strong migratory currents towards the cities, it defined the "objective population" of the program as that settled in the localities of more than 500 and less than five thousand inhabitants (Ordóñez, 1997: 16). But even if the Piber attributed to the State action the causes of poverty, the Coplamar, created by the government of José López Portillo (1976-1982), proposed that poverty has deeper causes: "that respond to many different economic exploitation systems that go from the cacique forms to the external domination that are part of the same and identical despoilment and unequal distribution of the human force process and that the same does to the national economy to an independent economy, that of the regions' economies, which are as fragile" (Coplamar, 1982: 12).

7 Actually, there seems not the be strong reasons to believe that first it is necessary to have a phenomenon measured, so then studies of an explanatory nature can be done. Even it could happen that, in the case of poverty, if its causes are identified at the same time it might be possible to identify the determinants of intensity and social and territorial incidence, which can facilitate the design of
1. The functions of the social policy (financing, design, undertaking, control) can be separated from the government and put into practice by non-state agents (philanthropic or volunteer, informal and enterprise sectors)

2. The State must only be one among other agents that provides resources to the financing of the social services, since, on one hand, there are social sectors that are in conditions of cover the expenses by themselves, and because it is convenient that, in general, having into account that "what is not hard to get is not valued", the receptors of such services provide resources to the extent of their possibilities (co-financing), and costs are recovered by the application of tariffs.

3. It must be seek, as far as possible, the competence among different service providers operate in the sphere of the social welfare, so that the users have possibilities of choosing among different offerers. The supposition that supports this principle is in the virtues attributed to the mercantile concurrence in the assignation of the produced services and goods, as well as in the reduction of costs.

4. The public resources applied to the social welfare sphere must be destined fundamentally to meet the needs of those who are not in conditions of paying for themselves the satisfaction of those needs, and must be applied answering the principles of: focalization (precise identification of the possible beneficiaries), subsidy to demand (turn, as possible, the subsidy in acquisition power), evaluation through the measurement of its effect, exclusive priority to the most needy and equity (understood as the compensation of the disadvantages, by the unequal treatment of those who are socially unequal).

Carlos Salinas de Gortari government

In December 1998, in the middle of a political crisis marked by a strong suspicion of electoral fraud that later on would be confirmed, Carlos Salinas de Gortari an effective strategy to eradicate it, combating the causes, rather than its symptoms.

That is why, without a doubt, it is worth undertaking efforts that tend to forge the concept of poverty, that by the way cannot be defined from the empirical field, but that is indispensable to satiate it within the body of a solvent social theory. If its proceed that way, when recognizing both the theoretical sentences as well as the empirical ones that validate the concept - that is finally a social phenomenon whose causes do not escape this dimension -, then it could be sure that what is wanted to measure is indeed measured and from there, to start the design and undertake policies that orient the actions directed to allow the real overcoming of poverty, further than the proclaimed "achievements" of the conjuncture policies that wear down when the budget resources destined to the focalized poor run out, and that only modify the statistics, without altering the economic and social conditions that cause poverty, its magnitude, intensity and incidence.
El alto costo social del ajuste estructural, por supuesto, no fue privativo de México. En América Latina puede observarse también un acelerado deterioro social a lo largo de la década de 1980. En efecto, de acuerdo con cifras de la Cepal: “Entre 1980 y 1989 la población de la región aumentó 22 por ciento al pasar de 347 a 423 millones de personas contra un ascenso desproporcionado de la pobreza en 35 por ciento y de la indigencia, que se elevó 42 por ciento, es decir, en 1980 existían 62 millones y en 1989, 88 millones de indigentes”. Esta situación explica también la aparición en los años noventa del neoliberalismo, que se convirtió en el central de la agenda pública.

Before the problem’s magnitude and the governmental need for political and social legalizing, poverty and its combat acquired an important place in the designing of the salinist social policy (Valencia and Aguirre, 1998: 65) and from the beginning of his period as President of the Republic, Carlos Salinas de Gortari established as social priority of his government (along with public security, enough purveyance of basic services and the re—establishment of the quality of life in Mexico City), the eradication of the extreme poverty and announces the immediate undertaking of the Social Security National Program, to which one thousand 640 million pesos are assigned for 1989 (Salinas, 1988: 1141).

In the Development National Plan 1989—1994 (PND, 1989), the social policy included four strategic lines, one of them consisted on the “eradication of extreme poverty”9, and from that moment on the actions focused on combating poverty started to be proposed. Indeed, it was said in the PND (1989: 126):

The actions to attend the groups with scarce resources from the countryside and the cities will be selected and specific […] in the handling of resources there will be observed a strict selectivity and it will be supervised that the assignations are effectively canalized to the beneficiaries.


9 The other three strategic lines were: the abundant creation of well paid employments and the increment of the salaries’ acquisition power; attention to the priority demands of the social welfare and protection to the environment.
There were not any impoverished regions or determinant structural factors of the poverty situation, there were poor people only because they had not had the opportunity of leaving that condition and, then, it was necessary to bring them employment, education and health opportunities, factors that would allow them leaving their poverty condition. So, politics did not plan eliminating the cause that originated poverty, rather to combat its social expressions. This way it was acted on the symptoms and the causes that caused poverty were ignored.

Besides, and in order to avoid the state intervention, which was identified with paternalism, the society participation was invoked in chores that traditionally — it was understood — were State responsibility. This way, in his acceptance speech Salinas said:

Social welfare in the modern State is not identified with paternalism, that supersedes efforts and inhibits the character; today, the elevation of the life level will only be a product of the responsible and mutually action shared by the State and the society (1988: 1138).

In any case, for salinism, as well as for the governments that followed, the combat of poverty could have only been successful in the framework of an economic policy promoter of private investment:

When the government — said in that time Pedro Aspe, Hacienda minister — gives its expense to a destiny of a strictly social nature and of purveying of infrastructure, and besides is financed in a healthy way, without driving it farther than public incomes allow, the private sector is stimulated so it invests in productive activities, as it is happening in Mexico (cited by Valencia and Aguirre, 1998: 67).

It was postulated that way, the end of the intervening State and, implicitly, it was emphasized the new stardom of the private capital in the economic politics
set. This proposal, that displaced the State from the economic and social activity, was the origin of diverse tensions to the interior of the ruling group, where the new techno—bureaucracy that ascended to the power along Salinas de Gortari faces strongly with the members of the displaced groups coming from the old revolutionary—nationalism.

When Salinas de Gortari proposed the poverty combat policies, it was emphasized the attention to extreme poverty, establishing for the effect three action lines: a) solidarity for social welfare, b) solidarity for regional development and c) solidarity for production. Similarly, the general attention areas would be: food, regularization of land and dwelling ownership.

From that proposal, the social policy was designed having as a fundamental axis the Solidarity National Program (Pronasol), whose Consulting Council secretary, Enrique González Tiburcio (1992:4) described as: “displays welfare actions oriented to overcoming the internal disequilibrium“ by means of the creation the a floor of social satisfactors that will make it possible to reach “certain equality of conditions“ for the poor population. That, concluded González Tiburcio, is the “fundamental challenge of the new social policy led by Solidarity“.

To that first floor of infrastructure creation was added another one, that by the way, never arrived, of productive projects in the regions where the extreme poor were located.

The importance that Pronasol achieved was remarkable, both for the discourse as well as in the budget assigned to it, to the level that in 1992, the program led to the creation of the Social Development Ministry (Sedesol), whose purpose was to elongate the life of Solidaridad farther the Salinas de Gortari government.

Even if the technocrats closer to the president fostered the structural reforms of market orientation, as well as the commercial and financial aperture through the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), another sector of the bureaucracy from the revolutionary nationalism, as well as certain limping left, grouped at Sedesol and the clashes started between the two groups.

Luis Téllez and Santiago Levy — functionaries from the closer group to Salinas rejected the integral strategy based in the indirect subsidies and conceived poverty linked exclusively to income — they demanded programs of “direct attack to the extreme poverty conditions“; this is, they intended to

10 According to Carlos Rojas (1994: 378-379): "The undertaken effort - with the salinist reforms - allowed incrementing the expense for the social development form 31.6 from the budget in 1988 to 54 percent in 1994".
transform the development programs into direct help — by means of the transference of fiscal resources — to the extremely poor as individuals, more than to the poor communities. In words of Luis Téllez:

The historical experiences in Mexico and the world indicate that it is not very efficient trying to elevate the income of the less resources population through indirect mechanisms, such as subsidies to consumables, support to the market prices or subsidies to credit. It is much more effective — concluded Téllez — to undertake direct programs to attack the extreme poverty conditions (1994: 49).

For Santiago Levy, poverty could have only been solved by means of the market action and, according to his point of view that later would be imposed as the sustenance of the governmental action, Solidaridad had to be a program that would rigorously respect the market lineaments, in congruence with the “general orientation of the economic policy“, which implied incorporating the poor individuals to the labour market offering them training and health (this is, the formation of “the human capital“) as well as make them part of the goods and services market by means of the simple fact of transferring fiscal resources, since, Levy concluded, only that way could the “poverty vicious circle“ be broken (Valencia and Aguirre, 1994: 73).

To compromise with the technocrat sector that had started to be hegemonic in the Carlos Salinas government, but probably even more to avoid the persistent toughness of the attacks the promoter of the integral policy of poverty combat group was being object of, the secretary of Pronasol, Gonzalez Tiburcio (1992: 4), proposed conciliate the commercial and financial aperture with the integral development policy: “in these moments we could say: North America Free Trade Agreement to the outside, but with Solidaridad to the inside“ (González, 1992: 4).

Carlos Rojas, the first titular of Sedesol, insisted on the proposal of combating poverty by means of an “integral strategy“, consistent on seeking that the population had a “basic social floor“, constituted by a series of goods and services in matters such as alimentation, health, education and dwelling, to which the actions of the program would be added in those regions where the population in extreme poverty situations was settled.

The proposal did not finish there, but it rather ended in impelling the production in the poor regions — to generate new employments and incomes — as the best way for the social policy could generate beneficial effects in the long term (Rojas, 1994: 390 and 393).
It was, however, the techno—bureaucracy proposal — the assistance supports focused on the extremely poor population —, the one that at the end was imposed since it was more suitable with the lineaments of the structural reforms of market orientation impelled, precisely, by Carlos Salinas de Gortari since he was the titular of the Ministry of Budget and Programming during the government of Miguel de la Madrid.

As a consequence, the initial project of Pronasol was frustrated and become in Program used politically by the Presidency, since the supports privileged those places where there were a bigger legalizing need for the government, or where the State party had a bigger weakness. With this, the poverty combat program ended with a focalizing project oriented more to the substance rather than to the development of the communities and became into a party weapon; even more, the direct link to the Presidency of the Republic with the public sectors, going above the local governments, even above some groups of regional power, to manipulate the political supports that were required by the salinist governmental apparatus.

Ernesto Zedillo (1994—2000)

This president took up again Pronasol with small changes and marinated the same philosophy, but gave priority against extreme poverty in the rural sector and accentuated the assistance orientation that marked all his social policy, which he inherited to the government of Vicente Fox.

It was precisely after the 1994 crisis, at the beginning of Ernesto Zedillo's government when in the country started to “develop actions focused to specific nucleus of the population and not actions of universal nature“, with emphasis on the administrative efficiency (Meza, 2002: 71) and in the centralized control of the decisions and actions of the Program. However, the creation of parallel institutional structures for the distribution of the monetary transferences implicated in the focalized actions concluded by debilitating the local authorities in favor of

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11 The governmental apparatus, following Santiago Levy, defined the "extremely poor as those whose alimentation expense is inferior to the cost of the CAN" and in consequence, poverty was conceived as a mainly rural problem and that - according to Boltvinik and Damián (2001: 22) from a calculation mistake from Levy - affects a small proportion of the national population, "approximately 20 percent in 1984". After some statistical reasoning, Boltvinik and Damián (2001: 23) demonstrate that: "The Engel coefficient adequate to apply the extreme poverty concept of Levy is of 0.5 or of 0.49, this means that the extreme poverty line, according to Levy's definition, should come from multiplying the cost of the basic set by 2 or 2.4 (divide by 0.5 or 0.49) and not by 1.25 (divided by 0.8) as he did, strongly underestimating the extreme poverty line" in the urban context.
the federal bureaucratic structures, the ones farther from the population, which since then has turned difficult the operation of these programs, many times turned into mere clientele strategies with electoral objectives.

In 1997, Ernesto Zedillo started the Education, Health and Alimentation Program (Progresa), which followed the focalization lineaments as part of the social policies of neoliberal nature directed to combat poverty. With this program, the zedillist government outlined the following objectives:

1. To improve the conditions of education, health, and alimentation of the poor families of the country.
2. To integrate these actions so that the educational achievement is not affected by the poor health or nutrition of the children and juveniles.
3. To ensure that the households have the enough resources so that the children can complete their basic education.
4. To foment the responsibility and active participation of the parents to improve the education, health and nutrition of children and juveniles (Sedesol, 2000: 10).

As it can be observed, in the proposed objectives the impact that the neoliberal modality has over poverty and its social and territorial magnitude is evaded. It is true, it can be that the juveniles increase their education, but under the neoliberal economic modality, that is sustained in the degradation of the costs of work force and the reduction of employment more than technological innovation and the formation of productive chains to strengthen the internal market, nothing insures them finding a job and if they find one, is eventual, precarious and with low remuneration and without social benefits, as it happens nowadays12.

Anyhow, when an economy does not grow and does not create employments, and those it creates are of a bad quality, where there is not a richness redistributive policy, the training for the jobs that are not created, is totally insufficient. To say that in more precise worlds: education, as health or dwelling, must take part of a general policy of economic growth based on the innovation, the creation of productive chains, investment for the development and the generation of well paid employments.

12 "A report from Banco de Mexico evidenced the country's labor market weakness. With information from the IMSS, one of the most trustful indicators on employment evolution, in 2005 the number of beneficiaries increased in 559 thousand 857 people, only a third of the labor demand by the economically active population growth. As these data was analyzed, the report from the central bank indicates that the increment of IMSS affiliates was represented by 18 thousand 103 permanent workers and 541 thousand eventual in the urban areas" (La Jornada, 9 de febrero de 2006: 29). "The distinctive characteristic of the universe of people who are hired temporally affects not only the hired person, who lacks social security and benefits given by the labor law, but also the national economy, since these workers are potentials to incur in tax evasion" (Gutiérrez, 2005: 3A).
The zedillist Progresa parted from the idea, also derived from Solidaridad, that the economic, social and political restrictions of the program emerge from the federal budget available amount and that, therefore, before the problem's magnitude it is impossible to eradicate poverty completely: “The budget is supposed to be fixed and limited, in the sense that is not enough to eliminate poverty completely“ (Sedesol, 2000: 11), for there the need of selecting (discriminating) from among the society to the beneficiaries of the supports offered by the program and of appealing to the participation of the poverty combat of the private organizations created to alleviate the situation of the poor population by means of merely charitable actions.

In summary, Duhau concludes:

Progresa is a program focalized in the combat to extreme poverty, where are combined: complementation mechanisms of the familiar incomes (this is, mechanisms that operate as subsidies of demand), mechanisms of nutritional support, and purveyance of health and health education services; conditioned, particularly the former ones, to the compliment of defined responsibilities by the beneficiaries (1999).

Even when Progresa parted from the partially correct premise — do not start assistance actions merely, but that it is necessary to increase the basic capabilities of the population in extreme poverty conditions “so that with their effort self—sufficiency is reached“ —, ended up being what in the discourse it pretended to deny: to offer assistance supports to combat poverty that do not go further than their presence and at the end do not generate perdurable results that influence the causes that cause it.

From this proposal is derived a series of important dimensions of the program that imply a conception of the poverty problem as the way of combating it: first, even if the differentiation between extreme poverty and moderate poverty in the Progresa ins based on the poverty line method (using as a parameter the alimentary normative basket defined in the Coplamar framework), the logic of the program is supported in an hypothesis about the difference between both degrees that do not refer to income and satisfaction of needs, but to the capabilities implied in both conditions. That way is assumed, in the case of the extreme poor, that their condition implies the incapability of fully displaying their productive capabilities, of assuming risks, of facing the negative externalities and taking advantage of the possibilities that the positive externalities offer; immediately
it is believed that the moderate poor people, although they experience different deficiencies, they can emerge from their condition s by themselves to the extent that the macroeconomic and macro social environment provide the possibilities to use their potential. For that, the former need specific support (with emphasis in the direct subsidies to the demand), on the contrary, the latter do not, and therefore they are excluded from the program.

From the Progresa perspective, poverty is not an income distribution problem, but of and adequate assignation of productive resources. This means affirming that poverty is combated through mechanisms that tend to distribute the income, but other actions directed to enable poor people (give them the opportunities) so they can be productive.

The selection of households in extreme poverty situation — that considering the amount of fiscal resources destined to combat poverty would be the only beneficiaries of the program —, it was done in two stages: in the first one localities of high and very high marginality levels were selected using the marginalization index elaborated by the Population National Council (Conapo) and they were located in the country's geography; in the second stage, there was a census in the households situated in the chosen localities in order to gather information on the origin and amount of their income and the insufficiency in the satisfaction of their essential needs (Sedesol, 2000: 5 and 11, Cortés, 2002: 16).

The Progresa program, since its beginning, established two significant restrictions by their repercussions in the results of their operation: it excluded the urban localities, those with more than five thousand inhabitants; the other restriction consisted in that the program would not be applied to localities lacking educational and health infrastructure, which meant the exclusion of the communities with the highest levels of marginalization, that are precisely those where the poorest households are located, those households that supposedly the program intended to help.

Both the poverty conceptualization and the diagnosis elaborated by the governmental apparatus as well as in the objectives reached, that were derived from both, in the Progresa the poverty determinant structural causes were hidden and, of course, intact. Similarly, it was insisted in the actions of an assistance nature and many times politic—electoral, that had nothing to contribute to modifying the economic, political and social conditions generators of poverty and did accentuate the social discrimination and segregation.
Vicente Fox (2000—2006)

The Progresa program, with some variations and the name Oportunidades (Opportunities), was taken up again by the government of Vicente Fox to become the star program of the governmental action in the strategy of poverty combat.

Among the things inherited by Progresa to the foxist Oportunidades is the priority given to the combat to extreme poverty in the rural environment, at the sacrifice of it in the urban environment and the combat of moderate poverty throughout the country, that, Boltvinik and Damián (2001: 21) affirm, was a mistake, not only an ideological one, but of calculation, that underestimated the magnitude of the urban poverty and did not take care of it.

To order the poverty combat policy, in the government of Vicente Fox the General Law of Social Development13 was approved, which considers that the poverty measurement should be performed by a National Evaluation Council, conceived as a decentralized public organism, with its own juridical personality and patrimony, as well as technical autonomy and management. The Council, in order to avoid the dispersion of poverty measurement criteria, created the Technical Committee for the Poverty Measurement that adopted the concept of total income, which includes the monetary income of the households and the imputed and in specie incomes. The proposed methodology, as a consequence, it is of a monetary character and from those poverty lines are established:

That consist on the specification of a poverty threshold by the monetary valuation of a set of goods and services considered as basic, and that its comparison with the resources the households own to acquire such set, so that if the resources the households owns are insufficient, these are in poverty (Cabrera and Miguel, 2002: 34).

In order to identify the poverty line, the Committee presents three reference thresholds: the first one refers to the impossibility of the households for obtaining a basic alimentary set even using all their resources available (“alimentary poverty“); in the second threshold are those households from the previous level, plus those that cannot cover the necessary expenses for health and education, this is, all the households that do not cover the basic needs of alimentation, education and health (“capacities poverty“); finally, in the third threshold there are the two previous levels plus those households that do not cover those non-

13 Published on Tuesday 20th, January, 2004, in the Federation Official Gazette, First Section: 3.
alimentary expenses considered as necessary in the population's expense patterns, such as dwelling, transport, dress and footwear ("patrimony poverty") (Cabrera y Miguel, 2002: 34 y 35).

The official measurements taken by this method show that between 2002 and 2004, even so rural poverty decreased in the three thresholds, the exact opposite happened with the urban poverty, that has also grown in the three thresholds, which validates the Boltvinik and Damián opinion in the sense that the strategy followed, when underestimating the urban poverty and do not attending it, aggravates it in the end (Table 2).

The method followed by Sedesol to measure poverty and arrive to the results shown in Table 2 has been criticized by different authors, among them, the most severe has been Julio Boltvinik, who centers his critique in two central elements: a) the method used by Sedesol and its Technical Committee, besides presenting internal inconsistencies, is minimalist and therefore, implies an explicit violation of the human rights since it denies the population the right of satisfying all their needs, except the alimentary one; b) even with this method, poverty seems to be decreasing because the National Households Income and Expenses Survey, from 2002 and 2004 are not comparable with that from 2000 and previous years; besides, the household sample in the rural environment is strongly slanted, which makes the recent evolution of the life conditions in such environment is a fairly tale (Boltvinik, 2005b: 32).

From that critique, Boltvinik has design a method called poverty integrated measurement method (MMIP), which has three substantial differences with the official method: a) it is multidimensional, since besides the households' current incomes, it considers the access to free public services, the possession of basic household actives, time availability and the educational levels of their members; b) it is not minimalist, since in each dimension thresholds are established that are based on the constitutional dispositions and on the population struggles, elements that together integrate the prevailing system of basic needs of the country; and c) it is internally consistent (Boltvinik, 2005b: 32).

For the analysis of social stratification based on the welfare level, Boltvinik uses six strata (three poor and three non-poor) that go from the indigent to the high class. Following his method, Boltvinik found the following results: between 2000 and 2004, integrated poverty in the country changed from 79.167 million to 85.016 million people, an increment of 5.85 million people; equivalent to a percentage increment of 7.4 percent.
But the critics to the governmental optimism do not come only from the academic sphere, on the contrary, the observations to the results come from different sectors of the society. The Economic Studies of the Private Sector Center (CEESP) affirms that after more than 20 years of the structural changes of market orientation in the Mexican economy: “poverty is still a generalized harm since more than half the population cannot satisfy yet their basic needs“. In this way, concludes CEESP:

51.7 percent of the population is stuck in patrimony poverty, which indicates those people whose incomes are not enough to satisfy their alimentation, education, health, dress and transport needs“ (El Financiero, 31 de enero de 2005: 15).

On the other hand, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) mentions that Mexico is the country from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with the highest rate of affected children, with the 27.7 percent of the total infantile population of the country (La Jornada, 2 de marzo de 2005: 44); even the Sedesol recognized that at the end of 1994, more than 300 thousand families in the country were in the worst alimentation situation, this is, “one day they eat and there can be days without anything, that is why their members present sharp undernourishment“ (El Financiero, 12 de octubre de 2004: 36); finally, this dependence in charge of the Oportunidades program, accepted that one out of every five Mexicans is in a malnutrition condition (Milenio Diario, 12 de octubre de 2004).

Anyway, it can be said that despite the fact that the Opportunities program has had the highest budget assignations (25 thousand million pesos in 2004 and 33 thousand million in 2005) that any federal combat poverty program and that even it has international financing¹⁴, in our country is loosing the battle against poverty. Indeed, reality reveals that the demand has surpassed the health system, undernourishment is increasing in the indigenous communities and in many other rural and urban localities, which demonstrates that the problem cannot be solved giving money to the households, but the fundamental thing is to have a new strategy where there is settled a different relation between the government and the society to decide how to use effectively the resources available fighting the causes and not the mere poverty symptoms.

In order of facing the critics it has been object of, the Poverty Measurement Technical Committee (CTMP) has proposed to measure the households'

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¹⁴ In March 2005, it was informed that: "The Inter-America Development Bank (IADB) will support the second phase of the Programa de Desarrollo Humano Oportunidades de México with a financing
The policy of combat to poverty in Mexico, 1982-2005 / J. Ornelas

TABLE 2
MÉXICO: HOUSEHOLDS AND PEOPLE ALIMENTARY POVERTY, CAPACITY POVERTY AND PATRIMONY POVERTY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alimentary poverty</td>
<td>3 899 371</td>
<td>3 535 053</td>
<td>20 275 000</td>
<td>18 034 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacities poverty</td>
<td>5 373 030</td>
<td>5 118 430</td>
<td>26 526 848</td>
<td>25 653 956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrimony poverty</td>
<td>10 597 705</td>
<td>10 222 399</td>
<td>51 745 191</td>
<td>48 971 350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alimentary poverty</td>
<td>2 561 647</td>
<td>2 118 961</td>
<td>13 364 511</td>
<td>10 939 687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacities poverty</td>
<td>3 288 204</td>
<td>2 795 790</td>
<td>16 876 498</td>
<td>14 171 246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrimony poverty</td>
<td>5 180 335</td>
<td>5 137 142</td>
<td>25 149 744</td>
<td>22 555 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alimentary poverty</td>
<td>1 337 724</td>
<td>1 416 092</td>
<td>7 210 489</td>
<td>7 094 479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacities poverty</td>
<td>2 084 826</td>
<td>2 322 640</td>
<td>10 950 350</td>
<td>11 482 610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrimony poverty</td>
<td>5 460 563</td>
<td>5 585 946</td>
<td>26 195 447</td>
<td>26 416 229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


welfare by the calculation of the richness they own. The Committee considers richness as a variable identified with better welfare conditions for the households, not only because it is equivalent to instruments for the generation of income, but because, when transferred, allows supplying the lack of income during periods of economic contingency. According to this criterion, a first approximation to the richness levels can be done by means of the employment in population deciles ordered based on their total per capita current income (ICTPC) (Moreno, 2006: 125).

According to the CTMP, considering the statistic information available in Mexico, the best indicator of the life level of the households is the ICTPC, which is integrated with the sum of the monetary and non—monetary incomes of a household, divided between the number of its members

An analysis of the result of the poverty combat programs obtained by determining the richness distribution also generate unfortunate results, which demonstrates that one of the most evident effects of the neoliberal modality,
along with the lack of growth and employment, is the dreadful distribution of richness, that the market does nothing but deepen it permanently.

Table 3 shows different things. In the first place, the pro—cyclic character of richness stands out for all the income strata. Indeed, the highest level of richness are reached all the strata in 1992 and from there, a reduction tales place that is sharpened in 1996, after the 1994—1995 crisis, and even if from that moment there is a recovering phase, is not the same for all the levels. Even more, it is notorious that not even one stratum in 2002 reaches the level that it had in 1992, except the households that are in the decile 10, which is the only one that surpassed, and by far, the situation it had at the beginning of the 1990s.

Another fact that is not surprising but that confirms that the neoliberalism deepens social inequity and that only favors a privileged group of the society is that after the mentioned crisis was overcome, there is a strong tendency towards the widening of the gap between the last decile and all the others, this is, the distribution becomes much more unequal than in 1992. Even, that gap opens notoriously between the tenth and ninth decile, this is, between the sectors of higher incomes, but it is brutal between the last and the first decile.

Final reflections

Countries like Mexico face huge challenges — many of them unknown in the metropolitan world —, that even if at the beginning are discouraging, later in the conviction that they can be overcome turn into stimulus to find viable solutions to the population's big problems in predictable terms.

Those solutions, of course, cannot come from the transnational financial power centers or their messengers (IMF or the WB, among others), since they always have preconceived and formal answers to our problems, recipes that most of the time have been useless. For example, once and over again the IFM and the WB arrive to our countries to remind us that our way of being, corruption and the bad government16 — and now the lack of structural reforms, all referred to the privatization of the energetic sector and to impose the market as a way of economy functioning — are the one possible reasons to explain our situation of

15 The monetary income of this concept includes the work remunerations, the income for own business, for cooperatives, for propriety leasing and transferences. On the other side, the no monetary component comprehends the imputed value of self-consumption, payments and gifts in specie and a calculation of the value of the owned dwelling (Moreno, 2006: 125).
poverty and slowdown, evading the effects of the capitalism without social control and of the neoliberal modality that sharpen the misery levels of our communities.

But neither the corruption nor the bad government — which evidently exist and are a real problem — not even our idiosyncrasy can be explanations of the long social crisis, economic stagnation and social polarization result of the growing inequity in the poverty and income distribution. To these social causes of poverty — which is a multiple, complex and contradictory social phenomenon — we have to add the neoliberal modality that has been imposed in the world since the decade of 1970.

To understand the things this way can allow understanding the critic to that modality from the policies coming from it, in particular those destined to “the combat of poverty“ and to propose any other, or others capable of generating a firm tendency of poverty eradication and achieve the “human flourishing“, as the concept coined by Julio Boltvinik proposes to remove the “entangling“ from the poverty concept, today, “fact and value judgment at the same time“ (Boltvinik, 2005a: 29).

From this point of view, the first task to really get closer to the purpose of eradicating poverty consist on undertaking the critic of the prevailing neoliberal modality and, given the results, proceed to replace it by another one that privileges the economic growth, employment and the distribution of income, deepening the social welfare policy that helps the improve the life conditions of all the population.

This is, at the beginning it should be recognized that under the neoliberal modality of the Mexican capitalism it would be really difficult to eradicate poverty so the economic policy should be re-directed in order to achieve a sustained growth and, at the same time, generate employment and improve the income distribution.

16 The governments of the financial capital have raised to the doctrine rank their appreciation that: "If the poor are poor is because they are lazy and their governments corrupt" And when it is suggested that these governments should increase the help to the emergent countries this argument is reiterated: How can the poor countries demand the support from the developed economies to improve the welfare if their population is lazy and their governments corrupt? With such condemn, they decide to suspend the "help" that, even they promise. For example, the United States has promised in several occasions - as in the reunion when the "Monterrey Consensus" derived from -, to give 0.7 percent of its GDP as help to the development of the backward countries. They have never fulfilled that promise and, it seems they will never even try to do so. But besides that, when they decide to send our countries to the IMF or WB, the message, invariably is the following: "The population must tighten up and the governments achieve the macroeconomic equilibriums", this is, they offer us the only recipe: equilibrium without growth and less distribution, as long it is not of poverty.
### TABLE 3

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24 571.78</td>
<td>17 991.65</td>
<td>6 884.41</td>
<td>8 372.45</td>
<td>10 652.53</td>
<td>14 431.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>35 919.78</td>
<td>25 413.07</td>
<td>11 322.10</td>
<td>14 149.80</td>
<td>18 071.89</td>
<td>26 003.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50 859.24</td>
<td>36 666.83</td>
<td>15 047.65</td>
<td>18 933.31</td>
<td>24 532.04</td>
<td>32 986.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>66 956.65</td>
<td>47 267.01</td>
<td>16 690.83</td>
<td>22 419.97</td>
<td>29 108.82</td>
<td>43 607.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>70 717.75</td>
<td>56 700.22</td>
<td>22 429.51</td>
<td>31 227.88</td>
<td>40 488.11</td>
<td>56 148.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>108 476.98</td>
<td>71 159.44</td>
<td>27 082.84</td>
<td>35 866.18</td>
<td>48 114.20</td>
<td>65 603.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>124 701.75</td>
<td>95 117.84</td>
<td>33 134.75</td>
<td>45 060.37</td>
<td>54 485.22</td>
<td>80 527.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>152 653.76</td>
<td>107 266.91</td>
<td>38 082.53</td>
<td>60 409.39</td>
<td>72 008.10</td>
<td>98 758.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>239 537.34</td>
<td>166 871.68</td>
<td>65 549.41</td>
<td>94 261.64</td>
<td>133 195.96</td>
<td>214 681.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1 076 910.00</td>
<td>388 460.52</td>
<td>222 920.02</td>
<td>315 120.59</td>
<td>505 805.61</td>
<td>1 348 900.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other side, the strategy of combat to poverty cannot be separated from the economic modality or the economic policy in general and, particularly, from the social policy, since both respond to an only vision of the problems and their solution.

In Mexico, the economic policy has been eager to reach the macroeconomic equilibriums, make the market work freely and to elevate the non-oil exportations, however, this policy has impeded having strategic programs that encourage the economy's growth, strengthen the internal market, improve the distribution of income, widen the employment and rise the life conditions of the population.

Similarly, the economy has not been able to reduce the dependence on external saving, since the capital flows coming from the oil exportations, tourism and remittances, in the last times have financed to a large extent both the private consumption as well as the public expense (the incomes to the country due to oil sales in 2005 were of approximately 28 thousand million dollars and only from Pemex depends one third of the fiscal resources; similarly, for tourism that year entered to the country 12 thousand million dollars and the remittances were of 20 thousand 35 million dollars). As a consequence of this dependence, economy and growth have become more vulnerable to the instability of the external capital flows, to the oil exports and tourist services to the American market and the entrance of remittances.

The social policy, on the other hand, has being incapable of correcting the inequities among the population. Indeed, since the end of the decade of 1990 that the focalized compensatory social policy was profiled, that has as an objective to provide food, health and education exclusively to the population in extreme poverty and stimulate the development of the productive capabilities of the economically viable population, has ended in the segregation of other poor sectors and in giving an enormous power to the bureaucracy that in the end is the one that decides who the beneficiaries of the governmental supports are.

On the other hand, from a general perspective, the public expense and the programs destined to social welfare are subordinated to the principle of fiscal discipline and to the one of a distribution of the public expense that uses too many resources to pay the rescues of the bank, highways and sugar mills, which reduces the possibilities of increasing the expense in productive investment and in infrastructure for the development

The insufficiency of the economic policy in general and of the social policy in general, makes that currently in the country the idea that neoliberalism is unsustainable and that is indispensable to overcome that modality to establish
another where the economic policy is an instrument that stops serving the capital exclusively and is directed to stimulate the economic growth, the generation of employment and the better distribution of income and richness is generalized. It is then, about a policy of economic development and social alternative that seeks the resolution of the deep social and regional inequity of the country.

In these moments close to the election for President, is a propitious moment for discussing the existing policies and postponing options where are delineated some strategies that allow stimulating the creation of mechanisms that increase the financing for the generation of own technological capabilities, as well as the construction of infrastructure directed to integrating regional production, distribution, circulation and consumption regional circuits, the technological innovation and the increment of employment.

The discussion of the economic modality, however, should not be attached only to the economic policy. It is necessary that the debate is oriented over an integral strategy, tending to solve the ways of guaranteeing the social control of the economy and of the market to reach the social cohesion indispensable for this real transition.

The most adequate and efficient way to achieving a sustained maintained growth in the internal market seems to simultaneously attack the growth problems and the income distribution as well as the employment, education, health, alimentation and dwelling for all the population. In other words, an alternate economic modality must propose as its priority the growth and use the economic excess in order to start paying the huge social debt with the people of Mexico, who have been subject of the most ignominious hinders.

This implies, among other things, to apply a fiscal policy that tends to improve the equity in the taxes, as well as the productive use of the fiscal resources, this is, the achieve a better investment in activities that generate employment, to purify the credits included in Fobaproa, to reduce its fiscal cost and advance in the reconstruction of the para—state sector that brings back and strengthen the social sense of the economy based in the participation of the State in the economic process.

Similarly, it is indispensable to achieve a higher social participation in the democratic public institutions, at the same time that own institutions directed to

17 Only the debt from the bank rescue is of a trillion 320 thousand 670 million pesos, recognized Mario Beauregard, executive secretary of the Institute for the Protection of the Bank Saving (IPAB in Spanish). And that is not everything; the same functionary foretold a 70-year term to pay the debt to the banks (El Financiero, 28 de junio de 2005: 5).
strengthen the solidarity and social responsibility that consolidate a culture of connivance and collective development are created.

In summary, the key to end with the poverty flagellation seems to be more in the possibility of imposing the economy's social control — of the market — and of the solidarity among the social classes than insisting in only measuring it, or in reinforcing the crusade against corruption and bad government, of course, indispensable to combat eagerly, but at the same time, to avoid keep on believing that these are the determinant factors of our dependency and unequal development situation, of the stagnation and generalized poverty in the country; before that, it necessary to recognize them as part of the excuses argued by the governments of the developed countries and their foreign affairs offices, that have become the IMF and the WB, to deny to our nations the right of breaking the attachments that link them dependently to the capital metropolis.

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