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Development, poverty and education in Mexico

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Resumen

Este trabajo analiza el desarrollo, la educación y la pobreza en México, por la íntima correlación existente entre ellos. El desarrollo implica acceso a beneficios básicos, como educación, alimentos, servicios de salud, vivienda, empleo y una justa distribución de los ingresos; la educación es el conjunto de acciones e influencias institucionales cuyo fin es cultivar y desarrollar en el individuo aptitudes, conocimientos, competencias, actitudes y comportamientos, lo que permite el despliegue de las capacidades que tienen que ver con la autonomía y libertad de hombres y mujeres; por último, la pobreza, amén de la carencia y exclusión que contiene, es una negación de oportunidades y opciones para dicho desarrollo, lo cual limita las capacidades personales.

Palabras clave: desarrollo, capacidades humanas, educación, pobreza.

Abstract

Development, education and poverty in Mexico

This work analyses development, education and poverty in Mexico, due to the close relation among them. Development implies access to basic resources, such as: education and nourishment, health services, housing, employment and a fair income distribution; education is the set of institutional actions and influences whose aim is to cultivate and develop in the individual aptitudes, knowledge, competences, attitudes and behaviors, which allow the capacities related to men and women's autonomy and freedom to unfold; finally, poverty, altogether with scarcity and exclusion, is a denial of opportunities and options to said development, not the expansion of personal capacities because of lack of education.

Key words: development, human capacities, education, poverty.

Introducción

Development implies access to education, food, health services, housing, employment and a fair distribution of incomes. When comprehending the process of development we have to ponder the cooperation and diffusion of liberties and capabilities; although economic development is essential, it is insufficient to assure a reduction in the shortages. Poverty is a denial of opportunities and basic options for human development, as well as the absence of certain elemental capabilities for self-development.



Human capabilities have to do with the autonomy of men and women as a basic need that allows them to be confident enough to act and partake in the culture and society they are part of. In this sense poverty is also the no expansion of the capabilities; Amartya Sen suggests the notions of capabilities and functioning. Capabilities refer to the freedom to choose, as a relevant issue in human wellbeing, they are the opportunities to opt for the sort of personal and social life, and include the abilities to reach those chosen conditions of life. The capabilities have a direct relation with freedom; as we use the capabilities the conditions to exercise the rights are created.

The functioning are the desirable sets of different aspects in the conditions of life, which can or cannot be reached. For a person to achieve wellbeing it will depend on the functioning they reach, from the basics, such as having food and good health, until the most complex, such as self-esteem, autonomy, identity and intervention in communal life. People's levels of life may be valued not only by means of their average incomes, but also through the capability to lead a way life that is significant for them. This is not achieved without education, understood as a set of actions and influences whose end is to plant and develop in the individual intellectual aptitudes, knowledge, competences as well as attitudes and behaviors in the framework of a determined moral.

This work analyzes development, its relation with poverty and how education might encourage the unfolding of the capabilities of the people for the full development of human being.

Development

According to the Declaration on the Right to Development, speaking on development implies "an inalienable human right by means of which every human being and all of the peoples are authorized to participate in an economic, social, cultural and political development where all of the human rights and fundamental liberties might be fully realizable..." in the same declaration it is established that accessing the basic services, such as education, health, food, housing, employment and a fair distribution of incomes generates equality in opportunities (UN, 1986).

'Growth', 'development', and 'maturation' are three terms kindred in the context of ontogeny, with important differences according to the reference frameworks wherefrom they are approached

‘Growth’ is part of the biological sphere and makes reference to qualitative aspects, such as the increment of body mass in an organism’s vital cycle. This increment is determined by inheritance, yet also the environment, where nutrition has an outstanding role. Such growth is a regular process of continual rhythm, whose greatest expression is maturity.

‘Development’ instead refers to qualitative aspects, supported on physical growth; it is understood as a progressive evolution of the structures of an organism and of the functions these structures fulfill, oriented toward superior behaviors and of greater quality. Development is related with a new functional differentiation: the more development the more complexity and diversification of the functions of an individual.

Changes in the growth of man are sequentially generated, in phases or periods described by evolutive psychology. In accordance with the phylo-genetic argumentation, the human species has a longer period of development, which enables great adaptive and plastic capability. In the development of all of the species there are critical periods, yet man, for instance, during infancy is able to compensate and restructure, by means of their personal activity, the experiences that have to do with certain lacks. In this sense, development is not something given, but a construction process where—basically in childhood—the affective factors have an important role in the psychical evolution, and even in the physical evolution of human beings.

On its own, maturation implies the appearance of morphologic changes and specific biologically derived behaviors from no intervening learning. Thus understood, it is a necessary part however insufficient for human development, as the interaction of learning and maturation give place to development (Diccionario, 2003: 385).

In the 1940’s the economy of development begins to be discussed, mainly paying attention to material wealth, i.e., the increment in the volume of production of goods and services. Such a theory supposes that an increment in the aggregated product, as the growth of gross domestic product per capita may be, would reduce poverty and would increase the general wellbeing of the population. This utilitarian asseveration started from the reasoning that every production produces revenues, therefore: the more revenues the more profits or economic welfare. Then the connection between more production and less poverty seemed to be strong and logical, so much that economists were convinced that it was enough to support growth so as to reach the ultimate objective of development (Griffin, 2001: 25).

Thus far, the discussion on other alternatives of development has been inexistent and the debate was rather centered on the ways to accelerate the production of goods and services. Nonetheless, it has been recognized that an increment in production turns out to be insufficient, let alone decrease, but reduce poverty and reach development. This in the idea that the luck of the individuals is directly linked to national development, where the people's wellbeing depends on the degree of development achieved by the countries, which at the same time has to do with the increments of production (Unceta, 2001: 412).

Amartya Sen distinguishes two conceptions of development. He calls one of them BLAST (*blood, sweat and tears*) and the other GALA (*getting by, with a little assistance*). In the former case, we face a development conceived as a cruel process, based on strict moral principles; in a paraphrase by Churchill: "blood, sweat and tears". In the latter, development is seen as an "essentially amicable process, where the cooperation between friends and to oneself is underscored"; mutual help that might be understood as "the characteristic interdependence of the market" (Sen, 1998: 591).

One has to bear in mind that in the terrible history of hunger in the world, the capabilities of human beings have frequently been used for adaptation and production; however, the possibilities for development do not always exist. Nowadays, the importance of human capital for economic development is widely recognized. The fact that emphasis is made on human capital as the development of dexterities and productive capacity of the entire population has contributed to soften and humanize the idea of development; if it is understood as "the enlargement of the population's capacity to perform activities chosen freely and valued" (Sen, 1998: 591) it would not be adequate, thereby, to consider people as instruments of the economic development. Well now, every process of development is not independent from the extension of capabilities of human being (Sen, 1998: 592).

Since it is unavoidable to carry out a valuing when making judgments on progress and development, Sen suggest utilizing the notion of value in order to facilitate their critical analysis and public debate. Then, the valuing of the quality of life, as well as the different abilities and capacities of human being must be openly and publicly debated as part of a democratic process; another less transparent option would be a wrong way, mainly if an idea of development related to human liberties and reasons is supported. In short, on the comprehension of the process of development, Sen expresses: "we adhere to an approach that exalts the cooperation, protagonism and diffusion of human liberties and capabilities" (Sen, 1998: 602).

As from 1990, the UN Development Program yearly publishes a report on Human Development, where the concept is explained and the responsible for the design of the policies for development are showned how the strategy may be translated as operational terms. Hence, the success and fast institutionalization of the concept of human development is due, one the one side, to the ideas underlying that have allowed another perspective and vision of the human phenomenon and, on the other, to the favorable reception it had in UN.

The Report on Human Development soon spread because of its interesting style, without sacrificing the academic rigor, which called the attention of a great number of the readers. Said edition was devoted to define and measure human development and present HDI. The absence of the 'automatic link' between economic growth and development of human capabilities was defended; the following year the 'sensible-to-gender' HDI was introduced, an Index of Human Liberty was elaborated and the existence of a high correlation between human liberty and human development was demonstrated, a situation that generated objections from developed countries.

Human development has "injected an element of competence in the market of ideas and has managed to break the monopoly of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in respect to the orientation of strategies of development". On the other side, some facts that remain unrecognized are: the distinction between the economic and social sectors is artificial, social expenditures constitute a fundamental way to potentiate capabilities, the improvement of these capabilities is the ultimate objective of development and that social expenditure is actually a form of investment on human capital that yields high revenues (Griffin, 2001: 38). On this last point, the World Bank recognizes that development has to do with people and not exclusively with gross national products (GNP).

Previously, and for long, the main indicator of the level of development was per capita income. The changes in this income were the most important indicator of progress in relation to development. The economic wellbeing was subject to the measurement of money, yet social scientists raised their voices and supported that such an idea of wellbeing calculated on money was limited.

Later, Meghnad Desai, Amartya Sen and other proposed the Human Development Index (HDI). When UNDP takes it and includes it into its Report on Human Development, it immediately becomes an alternative indicator of development broadly accepted. Nevertheless, it is clear that HDI and per-capita GNP do not measure the same; the former measures the "level of human capacities", whereas the latter is an "indicator of usefulness, of personal or economic wellbeing" (Griffin, 2001:38).

Wellbeing and capability are not the same. HDI aspires to measure the people's capacities in the framework of the liberties they enjoy; whilst per-capita GNP measures the subjective enjoyment obtained from consumption. Rather then excluding, they turn out to be complementary as they provide different information.

HDI comprises four parts: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rates, school registrations (primary, secondary and higher) and the real income measured in terms of parity of acquisitive power. In this index income is not utilized as an indicator of personal wellbeing, but as a maximizing element of human capabilities. It is a key point in comprehending human development; even if the highest incomes maximize capabilities, they do it at a decreasing rhythm (Griffin, 2001: 38).

In Mexico, according to UNDP, HDI is 0.790, so it holds the 51st place at worldwide level.¹ In agreement with data from the National Council of Population (*Consejo Nacional de Población*) there are differences in the development by regions. For instance, in the capital city of the country this index is 0.878 and in southeast, particularly in Chiapas 0.698.

According to Griffin, a high percentage of income is not a guarantee of a high level of human development. If it is agreed that the objective of each development policy has to be an increment of human capacities, the strategy of development will have to be broadened to incorporate many a dimensions, besides the growth of GNP. One of these dimensions is the distribution of income, where "a greater inequality reduces the average of capabilities, partly as it keeps people with low income from the material means to improve their capabilities" (Griffin, 2001: 32). At the time HDI adjusts itself when the gender perspective is incorporated. For instance, UNDP has adapted an HDI able to project the differences between women and men in aspects such as life expectancy, degree of literacy and incomes.

The value of HDI shows what the distance a country must transit in order to achieve certain objectives, for instance, a life expectancy of 85 years of age and a generalized access to education and income.

¹ Cfr. "Human Development Index", source: Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano 2001, PNUD, in *Guía del mundo. El mundo visto desde el sur*, 2004, Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Montevideo, p. 62. The publication of HDI corresponding to 2005 places Mexico in the 53rd place.

Poverty

Poverty is not the correspondence between needs and satisfiers. This notion of poverty is sketched by authors from the so called Scandinavian school, such as Manfred Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde and Martín Hopenhayn, who state elements of analysis to understand wellbeing, development and the very poverty. They start from a reevaluation of some traditional ideas in relation to human needs; they consider that an explanation that differences between the needs from their satisfiers is missing. According to these authors, the needs are few, universal and permanent; those which change, in agreement with cultures and epochs, are the satisfiers, which are of diverse nature. They propose two taxonomies of needs according to the axiological categories that express diverse dimensions for human realization: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, creation, identity, freedom and leisure. Existential categories that comprehend aspects of wide acceptance: being, making, existing and having. In any case, needs express a constant tension between lack and potency, where conceiving needs only as a lack implies a personal and group potentiality; they can even be configured as resources. The need to participate is potential of an effective participation; likewise the need of affection potentiates the possibility of giving affection (Manfred, Elizalde and Hopenhayn, 2001: 81).

Goods are the means through which an individual potentiates the satisfiers in regards to their needs. In this sense, the usual concept of poverty is limited for it only refers to the circumstances of the individuals located under a threshold of determined income. In fact, any basic human need that is not adequately satisfied unveils poverty. Therefore, it is proposed to speak of 'poverties' instead of poverty. Each kind of poverty generates pathologies, as it surpasses critical limits of duration and intensity. For instance, the lack of employment alters the satisfaction of fundamental needs, it causes familial and identity crises, low self-esteem and vulnerability (Griffin, 2001: 38).

Poverty is considered as lack of freedom and autonomy. World Health Organization (WHO), in the framework of the theory of basic needs (Doyal and Gough, 1994), states these are historical, universal and objective, socially constructed. Health and autonomy are the basic components of wellbeing and denote universal needs. Health defined as the state of total physical, mental and social wellbeing; autonomy as the capability to state objectives and strategies convenient for the proper interests. There are variables that will impact on the

degrees of autonomy, such as the levels of understanding the person has of their own, the culture where they coexist and what is expected from them, the capacity to state alternatives for themselves, and the objective opportunities that favor them (Álvarez, 2001: 84). WHO, in its sectorial approach, gathers two elements: health as experience of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and the autonomy that expresses the capability of the person to decide on their own the individual and social destiny; it takes into account the cultural referents of wellbeing, at the time it estimates the conditions concordant with human dignity.

From this perspective, poverty is a denial of the basic opportunities and options for human development, as well as the absence of certain elemental capacities to obtain minimal acceptable levels of personal realization. A person is poor when they lack opportunities to obtain minimal acceptable levels of personal realization, which involves physical aspects such as: being well nourished, having a good health, living in an optimal manner; also social achievements rather complex, such as taking part in communal life, however.

The criterion of capability balances the concepts of absolute and relative poverty, since a relative privation of incomes and product might lead to a total absence of the least human capabilities (UNDP, 1999). Capabilities linked to the autonomy of men and women, as the basic need that allows them to be self-confident enough to act and participate in the culture and society they are part of. In this autonomy, ideas that enable understanding it come together: a) the comprehension that people have of themselves, their culture and what they are expected to do; b) the psychological capacity to generate their own options; and c) the favorable objective opportunities to assume an action or not to do it. This autonomy is closely related to formal education (Dieterlen, 2004: 89).

Separately, lack perceived in a socio-cultural manner is not necessarily authentic material poverty; the subsistence economies that satisfy the basic needs by means of self-supplying are not poor in the sense of being deprived from something. Nevertheless, the ideology of development claim they are for they do not take part of the market economy decidedly and do not consume the products of the market, even if they are satisfying those needs through self-supply mechanisms (Vandana, 1995: 44).

This perception of the phenomenon turns out to be interesting as for the change of perspective, as it makes it evident that “the paradox and crisis of development come from the erroneous identification of the culturally-perceived poverty with the real material poverty, and the erroneous identification of the growth of production of goods with the best satisfaction of the basic needs”.

From here, the old assumption that “by means of the development process the availability of goods and services would be automatically increased and poverty would be eliminated, is nowadays strongly challenged... even if it still guides the ideas of development in the centers of patriarchal power” (Vandana, 1995: 44).

For UNICEF, poverty, even beyond quantitative indicators, is a frustration of the human experience, a deteriorated quality of life. For this organization, the prevailing idea of poverty devaluates the transcendence of psychological, ethical and social needs that man experiences in the relations established in the groups, communities, institutions and human organizations. Needs, such as self-esteem, the significant relation with others, the experience of growth, the participation in the definition of their own life and the others’ shape essential parts of the basic needs; these altogether with the biological ones move human behavior and, under certain conditions, are imperative (Unicef, 1977: 9, 19).

In XX century, poverty affects slightly more than 2.8 billion people. Only in Latin America it grows at 20 percent a decade, which means that 200 million people are poor and 80 million are in an indigence situation; this is to say, they are the poor of the poor (Álvarez, 2001: 11). Those extremely poor are those

individuals who cannot acquire sufficient nutrients to [...] preserve health and performance capacity. The required level of food intake is established at 2250 calories a day per adult and 35.1 grams of daily proteins (Levy, 2001: 44).

This as a consequence of a deficient development; because of this, Xavier Gorostiaga observes that the bad development generated by globalization might be substituted by another model which he calls “geoculture of development”, a civilization with priority in the quality of life, sustainability, simplicity, equity and shared happiness. This alternative development is the integration of partial, multiple and accumulative utopias based upon endogenous projects, with a broad alliance of ethical values and common interests (Gorostiaga, 1996).

In Mexico, the number of poor people increased to more than 50 million people in the last six years. During the 1988-1994 period of the federal government the reference figure was 27 million of poor people; for the next administration (1994-2000), this figure increased to 40 million, while during 2000-2006, the official figure of poor people was 47 million people. According to the data of the 2000 National Survey on Income-Expenditure of the Households, three sorts of poverty were determined: alimentary, of capacities and patrimonial. Hence, 24.2 percent of the total population with incomes below 15.4 and 20.9 MXN a day per person in rural and urban areas was placed in the entry of alimentary poverty;

in poverty of capacities one finds 31.9 percent of the Mexican who have incomes insufficient to afford alimentation, education and health expenses; in patrimonial poverty one finds 53.7 million of Mexicans, this is, those who do not have sufficient incomes to afford clothing, footwear, housing and public transport. In spite of the number of programs appointed to assist this scourge, the number of people suffering poverty increased, particularly on the rural zone. Specifically from 2004 to 2005, the number of people in condition of indigence grew in more than a million (Muñoz, 2006: 44).

By the end of 2006, the National Council of Evaluation (Coneval), decentralized organism responsible for measuring poverty, made it evident that in the 2004-2005 period the combat on it was “not significant”, since the number of poor people grew. Said organism revealed that virtually 19 million people in Mexico have insufficient incomes to afford the basic consumer basket, and 25.7 million cannot access the least requirements of alimentation, health and education (Muñoz, 2006: 44).

Notwithstanding, in agreement with the World Bank “Poverty in Mexico, an evaluation of the conditions, tendencies and the strategy of government”, in the country there have been advancements in terms of the population’s human capabilities in nutrition, health and education. It is stated that, even if between 1996-2002 extreme poverty was reduced in 17 percentage points, to 20 percent, only one percentage point below the level prior to 1994, some of the factors that contributed to the diminution were the growth of international remittances for the people in extreme poverty in rural areas. It is verified, once more, that poverty is associated to social exclusion, in particular of indigenous communities. An instance of the aforementioned is that 44 percent of the indigenous groups are to be found in the poorest income quintile; these groups make up 20 percent of the people in extreme poverty and suffer the greatest levels of privation as for access to basic services, education and health.² The main challenge is still inequality and poverty, where lacks persist in entries such as employment and education.³

² *Cfr* “La pobreza en México, una evaluación de las condiciones, las tendencias y la estrategia del Gobierno” (Poverty in Mexico, an evaluation of the conditions, tendencies and the strategy of the Government) at <http://www.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/bancomundial/extspaises/1>

³ In this respect functionaries of the International Monetary Fund, such as Rodrigo Rato, managing director of the World Bank, and Augusto de la Torre, new economist for Latin America. The former argues that Mexico requires to improve education to allow the country to benefit from its potential; the latter states that in order to solve inequality and poverty it is necessary to achieve a more including economic growth, at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/10/17/index.php?section=economia&article=026n1eco>.

In such a context, education has a fundamental role. In the further in the text we analyze the correlation established between lacks and education, which tends to form 'human capital' to be inserted into the processes of production. In particular tertiary education is approached since it is in this final stage of formation where the student consolidates part of their development (cognitive, intellectual, professional), which might become an important variable in overcoming conditions of adversity, inequalities and exclusion. Although and even that in Mexico the idea that the more education the more development and diminution of lacks is clear and valued, instead of fostering and strengthen the educational system is weakened as the subsidies are reduced since the market demands education to be accounted as another good.

Education and poverty

From the political discourse arguments are created to encourage education among population as a strategy of growth, economic development and social progress. In this respect, in the two last decades of the XX century, public policies that evidence substantive changes in the way of interpreting education as strategy in economic, human and social development have been applied in Mexico. Hence, despite the compromise of the federal government of consolidating a State policy to finance higher education and increase the resources so as to reach a direct investment of 0.63 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008, there is evidence of restriction because of the possibilities the fiscal incomes have, which marks the need to diversify the sources of income, even if it is needed that the State will not give up its responsibility of financing tertiary education in Mexico; however, new alternatives have to be found. It is necessary to make the current model of financing more equitable, at the same time to broaden the funds that reach other subsystems. In State Universities, out of every 3 MXN of ordinary subsidy, two are provided by the federation. It is desirable that the participation of the State governments in funding higher education increases (Poy 2007).

Nowadays, higher education in Mexico is one of the main ways of access to modernization; it is conceived as a "national enterprise to generate human capital and greater social integration so as to stimulate and guarantee long-term economic growth and a greater participation of youths in education" (Brunner and García, 2006: 13). In the last fifty years, the participation in tertiary education considerably increased; the population group between 19 and 23 years of age that attends to and benefits from it changed from one to 26.2 percent.

As for financing in 2002, the expenditure on higher education, both in institutions and subsidies to families, is located at one percent of GDP, which represented the highest percentage of the 28 member States of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This level of expenditure equaled 4.7 percent of the total public expenditure that includes federal and state financing. In this framework, the federal expenditure on higher education institutions reached 0.85 percent of the GDP in 2002, according to data from the Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP*) disclosed in 2006. In real terms, between 1995 and 2002, public expenditure on higher education grew 72 percent, however, in spite of the substantial increment in enrolment (42 percent), the expenditure per student grew 21 percent in the same period, being 6074 USD in 2002, slightly above OECD average (Brunner and García, 2006: 23). Said year public expenditure on higher education was split between direct subsidies to institutions (94.4 percent), credits to students (2.3 percent) and grants for students (2.8 percent).

For the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior, ANUIES*), the assignation of 0.58 percent of GDP to higher education, after the negotiations with the Legislative Power, is not enough, but it is distinguishable as consensuses were reached between the negotiators and willingness from the authorities and legislators in the face of the problem was displayed. Because of this, some additional 8.206 billion MXN in resources for said educational level were achieved, which represents slightly more than 0.07 percent of GDP, compared with the proposal of the federal government of 0.51 percent.⁴

For the Model of Additional Assignation to the Ordinary Federal Subsidy of the state institutions an increment of 1.5 billion MXN was obtained; as for the Fund of Support for the Structural Reforms of those universities an increment of 1.2 billion MXN was obtained; for the modernization of higher education there was an increment of 100 million, the same for the Program of Improvement of the Teachers. As for the Fund of Investment of Public State Universities the amount of 65 million MXN was obtained. In order to reach the 1.5 percent of GDP promised by federal government for higher education, the annual increment has to be of 0.15 percent to reach this goal within six years' time and so reaching a coverage of 30 percent at national scale and not below 20 in each of the 32 States of the country for 2012.⁵

⁴ Cfr. "Insufficient, the budget for higher education ANUIES", in *La Jornada*, January 16th 2007, Mexico.

⁵ Idem

In this scenario and according to the rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, education is the main mechanism through which Mexico will be able to leave social inequalities —such as poverty— behind, given that it is its ‘primordial function’. Inequality is a complex phenomenon Mexico is immersed in, and it is ever growing and critical. In the face of this, education becomes the instrument and mechanism to leave this distressing social process that might reach the most delicate and serious consequences behind. Education will help Mexico have a, non-distant, future of more balanced conditions so efforts to foster it, such as the programs of grants boosted by SEP, are stimulant and encouraging (Olivares, 2007), despite they only represent 2.8 percent of the public expenditure on the entry.

The previous lines in the context of Mexico, where barely a lustrum ago half of the population lived in poverty and a fifth in extreme poverty. Nearly a fourth of those who suffer extreme poverty live in the urban areas of the States of the center of the country. Before this, the expenditure on programs destined for the populations that lives in such conditions represents 1.3 percent of GDP, compared to 0.7 in 1990. The programs that consider transfers to poor population are headed by the one called Oportunidades (*Opportunities*) —formerly Progresas (*Progress*) — where, as from its creation in 1990, there was an average increment of 8.4 percent; later it was increased to 9.8 percent after 2000.⁶ In Mexico, even if poverty as in other parts of the world, is an important challenge as it is associated with social inequality and exclusion markedly on indigenous groups, there have been advances in respect to human capacities of the population, such as education, nourishment and health.⁷

Well now, a question on education and the relation it has with poverty is the fact that it is another construction of the language, wherefrom it is established, starting from a deep-seated idea, that education indeed becomes a privileged way to transcend poverty. Said education-poverty relation is somehow expressed in the sentence: ‘Education is a way toward a better way of living’. Undoubtedly, this phrase makes sense, given the contribution knowledge makes on each individual in relation to the way of interpreting and acting in their personal and social life. In it the possibility of an upward movement in the structure of society is implicit.⁸ At discursive level, the issue takes political overtones when it is stated that:

⁶ Cfr. “Poverty in Mexico, an evaluation of the conditions and tendencies and the strategy of the government”; report presented by the World Bank, July 2004. <http://wbln1018.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECADocByUind2ndLenguaje/58371FC96202347985256EDF005BBB99?OpenDocument>.

⁷ Cfr. <http://web.worldbank.org/>

⁸ Cfr. World Declaration on Education for Everyone, derived from the meeting of 150 countries in Jomtien Thailand, March 1990; also “Education and Knowledge: axis of the productive transformation with equity”, Cepal and Unesco joint document, 1992.

For the Mexicans, a public laic education, compulsory and gratuitous, becomes the par excellence means for personal, familial and social improvement. At the same time, society entrusts to school the strengthening of ethical and civic values that grant harmonic coexistence and that confer us identity as a nation (SEP, 1996).

Even if in this relation between education and poverty there are some who estimate the alleged fact of 'being educated' as a contribution *per se* to decrease poverty, in other perspective it is associated that people who live in lack conditions are more willing to receive, regularly, a deficient, low-quality education. The truth is that education is configured as an indispensable variable in the processes of economic and human development of the nations; however, there are partial visions that insist that "the strategies to fight poverty should devote the utmost attention to generate income as the main solution for the problem" (Bazdresch, 2007). Income matters, yet it is not everything for a 'good' and quality life.

In this discussion theories that approach the issue have been suggested, such as that of human capital, whose educators and liberal politicians argue that the educational systems have the function of: a) socialization; b) acquisition of abilities, dexterities and training; and c) certification; which generate social mobility. Therefore, the assignation of resources will be made according to social needs. The more education the better 'human capital' understood as the knowledge, socialization and certification of the learning of the members of a society, who might be in conditions to compete for incomes and positions in the economic-social structure. It starts from the supposition that the educational systems fulfill a distributive function, as they prepare for the different roles of a social division of labor. With more education the potential of the labor force is powered, thereby, productivity (Bazdresch, 2007). This theory suggests that the phenomenon of poverty is expressed because people do not acquire basic cognitive abilities to be inserted into productive life; otherwise, as there is not education, there is no unfolding of human capital.

The theory of rational election is based on a criticism to the State of welfare, provider of education for everyone, which does not alter the liberal presuppositions as for education is a mechanism to overcome poverty, yet the twist occurs when the responsibility to decide what action to take in relation to how to spend the taxes destined to education is put upon the individual. According to the theory of rational election, poverty is a personal issue; the State would not have to try to solve personal lacks, particularly in the educational sphere, which supposes an action and desire of the individual. The answer to the question is to direct to the

individuals the income necessary for them to choose how and where to use it to receive education. This supposes leave education to the dynamics of the free market, displacing its cost to the users (Bazdresch, 2007). This proposal is based upon the idea of overcoming poverty through education, only that now it is an education people would be willing to pay for.

In Mexico, this would imply taking into account that two million of compatriots, between 6 and 14 years of age, do not attend school, which represents circa eight percent of the children and teenagers in said age range, and that seven percent of the total population is indigenous, where 26 percent of the illiterate people in the country is concentrated. Data such as these allow us to state that, on the one side, “the poor have fewer educational opportunities because they are poor”, and on the other, “they have fewer educational opportunities as they are offered an impoverished education” (Bazdresch, 2007).

Education and development

One of the reasons why in 1987 the Nobel Economics Prize was granted to Robert Solow was because of the proposal of the model of growth he created in the 1950's, a situation that ever since boosted an increasing interest from the governments to support education at all levels, prioritizing the basic level and foster research and development activities. It is clear that the human capital of the developed countries is superior by far to that of developing countries; low levels of accumulation or income in poor countries generate low saving levels, which at the time create reduced levels of investment in education and research; this become low levels of instruction, culture and, consequentially, productivity (Loría, 1994: 47).

As from the last decade of the previous century it was noticed that higher education followed a ‘neo-positivist’ profile, while there is a stressed tendency towards individualism, to fraction, and separate knowledge, in views of leaning to the professionalizing purposes, although in this the humanist sense of universities dilutes (Ornelas, 1990: 307). Modern university, even if worried about educating technicians, “cannot only become a factory of doctors without science and conscience, without a sense of their values as men whereupon the social responsibility of the citizen has not been created. In the specialist thus formed, man would be smothered, overshadowed by the concern of efficiency” (Prieto, 1990: 238).

All of the above places education and research in the foremost term, yet permeated by an indispensable humanism. Let us remember that this appears as a reaction before the threat of mankind against itself. Nowadays we live a period when the threat against its existence is grave indeed, but besides there is another that is a threat against its spiritual existence. In the industrial society man is increasingly becoming a thing, in an eternal customer. Man progressively becomes the organization-man and is at risk of losing the very essence of his humanity, being alive (Fromm, 1982: 54).

The misunderstood economic and social development which has privileged the unlimited progress with the promise of generating more happiness for the most people and personal freedom without constraints has shown its inviability (Fromm, 2004: 21). Because of this it is necessary to review and heed other interpretations of man, life and society.

From here indeed that UNESCO, in the vision of education for the XXI century diffused in Delors Report in 2003, makes emphasis in going beyond learning to learn and learning to do; it is about, besides the aforementioned, of learning to coexist and learning to be, heavily-rooted philosophical and ethical notions which have been relegated for long. Learning to be becomes the vital experience of Socrates' historical teaching: "acknowledge who you are", and before which other thinker by the name Agripine (Epicteto, 1986: 26) replied: "I will never be an obstacle for myself". Ignorance, lack of human development, becomes an obstacle for a person on their own and for the community as a whole.

Because of this it is understandable that the new dynamics where education has taken a new direction in what has been called change of paradigm at worldwide level, given the motivation for the use of technology to set the basis of the formation of the professional profile suitable to be later incorporated to the links of the chain: production-research-education, as the World Bank proposes. Altogether with this the debate is joined the renewal of contents of higher education tied to the productive sector and evaluation; it is suggested, facing science and technology, that said contents respond to an inter- and multidisciplinary perspective which enables a polyvalent formation, in agreement with the demands of the current world.⁹

Education is still seen as an instance to generate 'human capital' and its insertion into the schemas of production. Nonetheless, the contradiction is the diminution in the subsidies to it at all levels, particularly in tertiary education, as

⁹ Policies that both the World Bank and Unesco foster for current education in all of the member states.

it was previously analyzed. It is unquestionable that when the person edifies through education and the different branches of knowledge derived from art and science, the full 'blooming' of human being might be achieved, as Aristotle and his followers thought. This is, the human development which not only considers culture and education, but also alimentation, health, labor and recreation, and part of the capabilities of the individual to reach said end indeed. Such development will not be possible without integral attention to these entries, not to mention transcending the conditions of poverty as it limits human blooming when education is also poor. It is a vicious cycle, likely to be broken and overcome as long as the personal, communal and institutional actions are oriented in the same sense: education contributes to development and this to transcend, although gradually, the phenomenon of lack and inequality.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of poverty implies and impacts mainly on the basic needs of nutrition and health; from here the correlation that is established between lacks and diseases and ailments which the people who live in poverty conditions suffer, such as gastrointestinal infections, associated to the lack of goods and services such as potable water.

Human capabilities have to do with the autonomy of men and women as a basic need that allows them to be self-confident enough to act and participate in the culture and society they are part of. In this sense, poverty is also stagnation and limitation of the capabilities. Not only can the levels of life be valued by the average incomes, but also by the capacity to be able to live a sort of life which is meaningful for them. All of the above is not achieved without education, understood as a set of actions and influences whose end is to edify and develop in the individual intellectual, knowledge, competences aptitudes as well as attitudes and behaviors in the framework of a determinate moral.

In the first place, it is required to retake the concept of autonomy; that every person takes responsibility for their own life, which will be possible precisely by means of education. This implies a strengthening of civil society in a coordinate action with political power. In words by UNDP, this process "requires an equitable growth, but also that the poor have political power (...) with steady and deep forms of governance at all the levels of society" (PNUD, 2004: 27-28).

Even if the needs are few, universal and permanent, the satisfiers change in agreement with the cultures and epochs. In such a context, autonomy has an important role in the capacity to state objectives and strategies convenient for the interests proper to a project of life.

Finally, even if the current agendas of development have common points, there are not heterogeneous models, because cultural diversity broadens the possibilities of election, it is “one of the sources of development, not only understood in terms of economic growth, but also as a means of access to a satisfactory intellectual, effective, moral and spiritual existence” (Unesco, 2001). This will be possible with more education and culture, along life and for everyone without exceptions.

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