



The Shared Societies Project

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The economics of a Shared Society: the case of Peru

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I was asked to think aloud about the relationship between the concepts of social cohesion, economic development and interculturality.

I should state, from the beginning, that these terms have great complexity and can be analyzed from different perspectives. Therefore, I've decided to start this presentation with brief conceptual notes intended to contribute to the understanding of the connections which exist; then to set out at more length the case of my country, Peru, as an example of the challenges we have for the future.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL COHESION AND ITS RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT.

Although, social cohesion is not a precise concept, it can "be defined as the combined effect of the magnitude of gaps in well-being between individuals and between groups, the mechanisms that bind individuals and groups to the social dynamic, and the sense of membership and belonging to society felt by such individuals and groups."¹

As can be seen, the institutional aspects have the same relevance as perceptions, behaviours and individual values.

A second meaning that can be taken from the definition is that we are dealing with a concept that involves different dimensions –political, economic, territorial and social – and it is related to the fight against poverty, inequality and exclusion in its different expressions.

Social cohesion is based on an idea of a fair society, and greatly depends on the quality and legitimacy of its institutions.²

¹ CEPAL. Social Cohesion. *Inclusion and sense of belonging in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Santiago de Chile, CEPAL, 2007.

² Feres, Christian y Snahuja, José Antonio. *Social Cohesion and European Union – Latin America relations*. En: Cotler, Julio (editor). *The Social cohesion in the European Union – Latin America agenda*. Lima, IEP, 2006. p. 34.

The idea of social cohesion expresses the challenge, identified previously by the sociologist, Emile Durkheim, that faces a modern and complex society, to achieve and maintain the social solidarity needed to bind its members.

How to build social cohesion in a country?

First of all, by understanding the sense of the concept as well as its interactions with welfare and development, essential goals of governmental organizations.

The creation of economic value in a country depends, certainly, on the physical infrastructure and natural resources it has. However, no one can deny that human and social factors play a key role in the equation.

Due to the subject of my presentation, let me focus on social capital and its relation to development. Is it possible to generate economic value with significant deficits of confidence among the members or groups making up the society? Is it possible that Government carries out to the full its role of promoting wellbeing and development when its institutions show low levels of trust? Is it possible to build development in societies that are not able to pursue their identities?

The answer to these questions reveals a terrible paradox. Growth can't be exclusive. Growth, to be sustainable, has to be inclusive.

Therefore, state policies must identify not only the deep structural divisions but also those that exist inside the society and, through the execution of public policies, bring about their healing.

This leads me to the second theme. States must ensure that all people have full citizenship. To advance in that direction implies that the rights in public policies as well as the standards for the quality of the institutions confer a minimum level as a guide to progressive equality of opportunity.

It is not about choosing between rights or options that favour exclusively economic growth. It is about seeking synergies so that economic growth spreads out in a sustainable way in "a framework of policies which, by promoting social citizenship, contribute to political stability, narrow social gaps and legitimise democracy through a general increase in wellbeing".³

To achieve social cohesion is an essential part of the foundations that gives sustainability to economic development. But at the same time, the economic development process, itself, generates conditions for the loss of solidarity ties and exerts influence on traditional communities.

³ CEPAL. Op. Cit. p. 27.

The focus on rights and the search for a civil, political and social citizenship represent the answer that democratic states have generated to face simultaneously both challenges.

By contrast, a vision that focuses on economic growth, but neglects the institutions or does not develop policies for the different dimension that social cohesion involves, could, in the medium and long term, result in a non sustainable and unfair development.

Without social cohesion, the economy must face conflicts derived from the huge social divisions and the lack of a shared identity or a generalized feeling of not being part of the wellbeing enjoyed by others, a minority.

Without social cohesion, the dynamic of a modern economy can contribute to aggravating such a scenario and affect the bases of society. Therefore, the state and society can not assign to the economy the sole responsibility of achieving social cohesion. Likewise, it has to acknowledge that a health economy is a requirement to strength social cohesion.

Now, I would like to focus on one of the many aspects of the theme that we have come to discuss which is of great importance for my country: identity and the feeling of belonging.

A key function of any State is to establish and offer such a bond of belonging. The most common way to do it is through the construction of the nation. So identity is turned into national identity. Unfortunately, sometimes we have turned this search into a nightmare. I'm talking about the extreme nationalisms which have brought to humanity violent and fratricidal fights.

I must remember the words of Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics: "The sense of identity may be the source not only of pride and happiness but also of strength and confidence."

Nevertheless, Sen states, "a sense of membership, strong – and exclusive– can in many cases entail for a group a perception of distance and divergence with respect to other groups ... it may exclude, inflexibly, a lot of people while receiving warmly others."⁴

Following this idea, we can state that the twenty-first Century appeals for the building of a sense of identity which is inclusive and open, leaving to one side projects which cause violence.

⁴ Sen, Amartya. *Identity and violence*. Buenos Aires, Katz, 2007. p. 23-25.

What does this mean to Peru? When, in recent surveys my compatriots were asked regarding their feelings with respect to our country, almost half stated that they feel pride for Peru, almost a third said they felt love and 29% affection.

They identified as factors that create a sense of pride for Peruvians: our natural resources and landscapes, our history represented by the world famous ruins of Machu Picchu; and the gastronomy, which itself is the result of the mix of multiple cultures and regions, and that now is one of the most admired in the world.

Nevertheless, a fundamental component of our country doesn't have a key position in this relation yet: our multiculturalism. We are a country where dozens of languages are spoken and in which live the direct descendants of the people who lived in our territory before the sixteenth Century. In these circumstances, it is urgent to equip ourselves with an intercultural perspective when we talk about social cohesion.

2. THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL COHESION FOR MULTICULTURAL COUNTRIES, SUCH AS PERU

Peru is a multicultural and multilingual country⁵. It has a diverse indigenous population⁶ of millions of people, and it is one of the Latin American countries which has the largest proportion of indigenous peoples⁷.

It is worth mentioning that the lack of specific data in Peru related to this population is due to the fact that the census normally takes in account only the linguistic factor and not self-ascription to refer to indigenous people.

Farther Peru is a country where there is a significant connection between ethnicity and poverty

Indigenous peoples, particularly in rural areas, experience deficits in those factors that define poverty such as health (water and sanitation, available and appropriate health services), education (access and quality), basic infrastructure (electricity, communications), production (technology, credit), labour market and working conditions.

⁵ The Political Constitution of Peru of 1993 acknowledges some collective rights of native groups such as the right to ethnic and cultural identity, bilingual and intercultural education. Moreover, Quechua, Aymara and other native languages are recognized as official languages in the areas where they predominate.

⁶ The different native groups have their own languages as well as world views and political, economic and social systems with roots in the characteristics of their natural and social environment.

⁷ In Latin America and Caribbean, there are up to 40 millions indigenous people distributed in more than 400 ethnical groups. 90% of the indigenous population of Latin America are concentrated in Peru (27%), Mexico (26%), Guatemala (15%), Bolivia (12%) and Ecuador (8%). Within the respective societies, indigenous populations make up a large part of the country population: Bolivia (67%), Peru (45%), Guatemala (40%), Mexico (30%) and Ecuador (20%). These percentages are approximate and vary according to the criteria and methods used in the census.

In Peru, the historical indifference toward indigenous issues, the reduced budgetary resources allocated to deal with the matter and the inadequate public policies formulated for indigenous people are some of the existing problems that are intensified by the evident weakness that is experienced by the institutions charged with solving these problems.

In this regard, exclusion is maintained and reproduced through demeaning labour relations, conditions of poverty, acts of social and official discrimination, and the experience of disrespect and marginalization.

Beyond the poverty and weak political will to focus on indigenous people's problems from the perspective of interculturality, I must assert the complex nature of the process of integration or social cohesion which, in countries such as Peru, demand a better understanding that identifies the causes, dynamics and logics of historical reproduction of poverty and underlying exclusion, in the current context of globalization⁸.

Economic growth is definitively a necessary condition, but under no circumstances, a sufficient condition for development. Development may extend its impact more widely if it is joined to the implementation of public policies which provide equality of opportunities. The viability of alternatives for a sustainable development depends not only on the economy but also the determination of local elites to assume a bigger social responsibility.

In Peru, without doubt, **exclusion is not only economic and political but also cultural**, therefore to talk about social cohesion involves advancing toward a model of intercultural relations that avoid inequity.

From this point of view, the achievement of genuine equality of opportunities – beyond cultural, ethnical and socio-economic differences – requires formulating strategies and alternatives to guarantee that structural cultural differences are made visible. Without that, it becomes impossible to experience civic liberties and extend the meaning of cohesion offered by democracy⁹.

On the other hand, we are witnessing the beginning of a socio-cultural and political revitalization of indigenous peoples in the America Continent, with diverse forms of expression related to their needs.

Unfortunately, the real aspirations of groups are frequently overestimated or ignored by those promoting them.

⁸ Globalization is "the growing influence of financial, economic, environmental, political, social and cultural processes of a global scope in "processes" of a regional, nation and local character", as defined by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) in its book "Globalization and Development".

⁹ If, in a society different cultures collide and furthermore, one of the cultures makes up a large proportion of the population, but is subordinate to the other, it creates a huge potential for social conflict which on not a few occasions in history has given rise to protracted confrontations and civil wars.

Social Cohesion is not brought about by aiming to “modernize” indigenous peoples without taking into consideration their voice, by avoiding their participation or omitting their right to consultation in the decision-making process.

Avoiding the participation of indigenous peoples in issues which affect them directly could raise, as a parallel, the delaying or even cancellation of initiatives, even though they are well intentioned.

One of the situations which gave rise to greater tension and violence in Peru was the event which took place on June 05th, 2009 in the cities of Bagua and Utcubamba located to the northeast- resulting in 33 deaths and 1 missing person. This event shook up the country and highlighted the urgent need to institutionalize intercultural dialogue in the decision-making process of the Country.

I firmly believe that in my country the great delay that has happened in implementing the right to consultation is based on a generalized ignorance of the social purpose of this right.

The right to consultation is a state mechanism that seeks to process the cultural differences within society through dialogue.

The State is itself obliged to consult indigenous peoples since it understands the importance of the collective and individual cultural identity; because it knows that societies without identity are sick and infertile; and because it understands that development is based on the cultural identity of the peoples.

On the other hand, the possibility of political participation in the democratic process by indigenous organizations is a determining factor to contribute to the success of a peaceful and socially sustainable change. This can only be guaranteed by the equal participation of indigenous people in the social process and a multicultural State.

Therefore, **it also requires a State that protects cultural diversity, and makes interculturalism¹⁰ a permanent component of public administration.** Only in this way, we will find better proposals to promote intercultural dialogue and lead us to consensual results at all levels that deal with government.

Likewise, intercultural education must encourage the coexistence of people of different cultural backgrounds. It deals with creating connection with the unknown

¹⁰ The intercultural approach assumes that all the cultures have equal conditions related to value and validity.

person by intercultural learning and, through it, guaranteeing a social process for peace.

Consequently, in countries such as Peru, a pending issue for the public agenda is the implementation of the approach of interculturalism in public policies, aimed at guaranteeing the full enjoyment and exercise of the rights of indigenous peoples as well as of all sectors of society.

3. BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND INTERCULTURAL STATE AND SOCIETY.

Facing this situation, the Ombudsman's Office, the institution that I have the honour to direct, seeks to contribute to the building of social relations of equality of opportunity among different cultural groups, based on State policies that seek for the same outcomes; as well as to acknowledge on equal terms the value of these cultures; therefore looking to establish the basis of a true democracy for all Peruvian people.

Gradually, the Peruvian society is acquiring more awareness of the need to respect, value and protect the cultural diversity that exists in the country. For that, it is necessary to turn this concern into true political will, and that political will into institutions.

In this regard, the Ombudswoman Office has issued recommendations to the Peruvian State for the **strengthening of the institutions of the State in this matter**, which involves providing it with the resources and necessary legitimacy to properly fulfil its role.

As can be observed, the problems related to the rights of indigenous peoples are large and require the commitment and engagement necessary to become fully operational. To progress in this field involves combining equality in treatment, on the one hand, and the respect of difference and identity, on the other hand.

It is my conviction that **we have to give priority to the establishment of a sincere intercultural dialogue between the States and indigenous peoples**, to the extent that it deals with the appropriate mechanism to fulfil the fundamental rights and the generation of social cohesion.

Now more than ever, it is necessary that states establish dialogue and the practices of good governance to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of indigenous peoples, in the interest of our common obligation, to protect the human dignity of all people.

Thus, we will build a united and fair society, where its members have an open and inclusive sense of belonging.

But above all, as Amartya Sen has pointed out, a society where its members celebrate cultural diversity to the extent that it is chosen with as much liberty as possible by the people involved, and where the cultures are not boats which pass each other in the night without lights¹¹, but are reference points for a dialogue intended to build a common future of prosperity.

Thank you.

(end)

¹¹ Sen, Amartya. Op. Cit. p.201, 202 y 209.