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HUMAN CAPABILITIES, DEVELOPMENT
AND PUBLIC POLICIES

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Since its foundation in the 1990s, at the initiative of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Latin American Network of Observatories of Human Resources in Health has focused mainly on the description and analysis of issues related to the labor market and the educational background of professionals who provide health services in the public sector and, in a complementary way, in the private sector. Some topics of particular relevance to public policies have been highlighted in studies published by the Network: the unequal distribution within the national territory, the precariousness of employment contracts, the high rate of turnover of professionals in the workplace, the internal and international migration of doctors and nurses, the adaptation of educational curricula to the priorities of health care policies, etc.

In recent years, the little success achieved by State policies to generate an adequate number of jobs and secure strategic positions to professionals in the health system of each country has been a common point of discussion in several countries. It has been suggested that the State lacks ability to attract, organize and retain human resources in these key positions. This deficiency is apparently less related to problems of a fiscal or a funding system nature than with the bureaucratic capacity of the State. Therefore, it is not an issue that only regards the public health system, but rather the loss of effectiveness of the State actions as a whole.

In different countries and according to different sectors of activity, the State has not found suitable solutions to provide greater administrative efficiency to the management of its human resources, which necessarily involves several aspects such as valuing the workforce, creating stimu-

lus to retain health professionals, improving career structure and recruitment processes, and so on. There are other political, social and economic constraints linked to this State's inability in Latin America which are not yet well understood, but certainly related to the overly long period during which public policy focused more on strengthening the private sector than on the State's regulatory and service delivery capacity.

However, a new scenario of growth and income distribution policies emerges in the 2000s. In many Latin American countries, a virtuous combination between economic growth and reduction of social inequalities has been observed, as the titles of some recent articles on the subject announce (see bibliography attached). The social and economic achievements reported in these articles result from the combination of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth and certain well-conducted income transfer policies as part of the poverty eradication program. However, these achievements are clearly limited due to the State's inability, but also the lack of a long term development strategy, something that should be on the political agenda of many governments to allow the next step of this journey.

The aforementioned State's inability becomes more severe when taking into consideration the circumstances in which Latin America is entering a truly favorable economic, social and international conjuncture, compared to the past two decades. Due to these auspicious circumstances, it is expected that the development strategy will be on the agenda of national governments.

It is worth mentioning in this case that the authors of the "new developmentalism" stress that the capability of the State is decisive in itself, but it needs to be combined with an institutional base acting: 1) on relationships with market players; 2) along civil society participation channels; 3) towards strengthening the "human capability", as advocated by the human capability approach of Amartya Sen. According to this approach, health, education and social participation enjoy special prominence not only as preconditions of the development process, but also as its ultimate goals, since it strengthens the exercise of the citizens' freedoms as a possibility of freely choosing what to be, to have and if to take part in the civil voicing of preferences.

That is why the new features and possibilities of the socioeconomic context in Latin American require a broadening observation focus by the Network Observatory of Human Resources throughout Latin America. Indeed, the observation of objects can no longer be restricted to human health and its relationship with the sector policies. The objectives of the analysis proposed here seek to meet the needs of both the State's capability and the actions undertaken in each country to promote human development, i.e., conducting studies focused on specific topics such as health, education, labor, social security, environment and socioeconomic conditions in general in order to diagnose the human capability progress in different Latin American countries.

Based on Amartya Sen's idea of justice, the concept of human capability is currently a theoretical assumption to various mainstream development theories in Brazil and other Latin American countries. According to this philosopher-economist, human capability is both the purposes and key conditions to development, where it is important that public policies enhance the way the aforementioned conditions are part of not only the means but especially the ends pursued by national development. Good health and education conditions and the citizen's engagement in public debates are goals in themselves, because they broaden people's freedom so they can choose how they want to live. But also they represent skills that favor productivity and creativity and therefore become development inducing factors.

It is well known that Sen considers essential to remove the variation measures in GDP from its position of centrality in developmental assessments. The real purpose of development should be to increase personal freedoms, so that each can achieve the life goals they have reason to value. This is the true meaning of his "development as freedom" proposal, based on a liberal matrix connected with the thought from Adam Smith.

According to the review of social data from several countries, Sen stresses in his studies that the progress made on health and education indicators have enabled certain economic reforms to achieve better results for the economy in a subsequent period. Thus, based on the finding that education and healthcare can be productive enough to increase economic growth, the argument to give greater emphasis to these social arrange-

ments in underdeveloped economies gains strength, without having to wait for the prior enrichment of such societies (SEN, 1999).

New developmentalism has emphasized not only this prerequisite, associated with the outcomes of policies commonly known as “social”, but also the innovative dimension of the State’s institutional resources, to the extent that these elements are capable of setting unprecedented directions in development from the historical and cultural context of each country, thus excluding the possibility of imitating the political-economic path followed by other countries.

The two assumptions mentioned, the State’s capability and human capabilities, are articulated as follows by Peter Evans, one of the most prominent theorists of the new developmentalism:

(...) the 21st century development will depend on generating intangible assets (ideas, skills, and networks) rather than on stimulating investment in machinery and physical assets oriented to the production of tangible goods. This makes investment in human capabilities (which include what is traditionally known as “human capital”) more economically critical. At the same time, new development theories assume that economic growth depends on political institutions and the capacity to set collective goals. The capability approach sets out the political argument most firmly, arguing that only public interchange and open deliberation can effectively define development goals and elaborate the means for attaining them (EVANS, 2008, p. 3).

Regarding the human capabilities included in these assumptions, two critical remarks are relevant and will be presented here very briefly and preliminarily. The first concerns to the human preconditions of the State’s capability and the second refers to certain characteristics of the accelerated growth process accompanying development.

The argument on the first issue can be formulated as follows: the concept of human capabilities, which Evans and Sen have as focus and ultimate goal of development, cannot be restricted to the field of citizenship, but must immediately be applied to State agents. However, this is not just an educational or technical qualification of bureaucracy in order to deal with the administrative procedures of development projects. It is necessary to emphasize that State agents must also be endowed with skills

to face “public debate and honest deliberation”. If the State consists only of a technically qualified/well prepared bureaucracy but lacking such skills of political and citizen nature, it is unlikely that its agents can adequately participate in discussions with representatives from the civil society and business community about the directions and the development process.

Such qualities could be required of the bureaucracy in general, but maybe it’s enough being narrowed to a fraction of State agents raised to the status of managers and directors. But surely, the more these skills are spread throughout the state bureaucracy, the better the outcome for the presupposed process of “participatory development”. The need for a Neo-Weberian bureaucracy which would stand out only for its technical and educational abilities seems to be clearly insufficient when compared to the final outcome coveted by new developmentalism. In Brazil, for example, it is not plausible to redevelop a State technocracy similar to that which coordinated the projects of the “Brazilian Miracle” in the 1970s.

The inevitable conclusion is that the goal of promoting debate and public deliberation skills should apply to both State agents as to citizenship in general, assuming, of course, that in this context, State agents nurture Republican interests. Therefore, it is appropriate to ask how Brazil will create sufficient objective and subjective conditions so that development policies begin to be implemented in compliance with the assumptions stated here, that is, based on the adequate capacity of the State to discuss and deliberate with society.

These are examples that make it imperative to establish a “capital regulation” by the public policies for development, in accordance with certain concepts originally formulated by Karl Polanyi, whereby the boundaries of reproduction of a capitalist economy must be set by State measures, assuming that work is not a true commodity. In other words, the regulation of capital is not a mere political alternative, but rather a requirement for the protection of human capabilities, not only as workforce, but in all its diversity. In line with this requirement, it is worth emphasizing the need to create a special interpretive framework for the promotion and protection of human capabilities within development policies in Latin American countries that complies with the valuable concepts of justice elucidated by Amartya Sen.

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