

Rural poverty in Mexico. An approximation from Food Sovereignty approach

Pobreza rural en México. Una aproximación desde la teoría de la soberanía alimentaria

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the suitability of the Food Sovereignty approach to address rural poverty in Mexico, starting from the argument that actions of current public policies have not been accurately designed for rural populations. It contains seven sections including an introduction and the conclusions of the study.

The first section analyses some of the most important definitions of poverty in order to theoretically contextualize the problematic. Then, it is introduced the origins of Food Sovereignty concept in order to understand its purpose, social background and suitability to design an anti-poverty policy for rural livelihoods. The third section analyzes the available poverty data for Mexico (1992 to 2012) to contextualize the problematic, showing the “state of poverty”. The following section analyses the two main public programs designed for rural populations, Oportunidades and Procampo, explaining their successes and failures in order to show their unsuitability to address poverty in rural contexts. Finally, the fifth section explores the Food Sovereignty, through its six key pillars, as an effective way to improve the design of anti-poverty strategies that includes the rural context.

Keywords:

Mexico - Public policy - Food Sovereignty - Rural Poverty

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RESUMEN

Este artículo discute la idoneidad del enfoque de Soberanía Alimentaria para abordar la pobreza rural en México, a partir del argumento de que las acciones de las políticas públicas actuales no han sido diseñadas con precisión para las poblaciones rurales. Contiene siete secciones que incluyen una introducción y las conclusiones del estudio.

La primera sección analiza algunas de las definiciones más importantes de la pobreza para contextualizar teóricamente la problemática. Luego, se presentan los orígenes del concepto de Soberanía Alimentaria para comprender su propósito, antecedentes sociales e idoneidad para diseñar una política de lucha contra la pobreza para los medios de vida rurales. La tercera sección analiza los datos de pobreza disponibles para México (1992 a 2012) para contextualizar la problemática, mostrando el “estado de pobreza”. La siguiente sección analiza los dos programas públicos principales diseñados para las poblaciones rurales, Oportunidades y Procampo, explicando sus éxitos y fracasos para demostrar que no son adecuados para abordar la pobreza en contextos rurales. Finalmente, la quinta sección explora la Soberanía Alimentaria, a través de sus seis pilares clave, como una forma efectiva de mejorar el diseño de estrategias contra la pobreza que incluye el contexto rural.

Palabras clave:

México - Políticas públicas - Soberanía Alimentaria - Pobreza rural

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INTRODUCTION

The debate about defining poverty seems endless, but each approach has been useful to link the concept with some basic characteristics such as the lack of opportunities to generate autonomous income, including access to markets and financial services, and the failure of the state to cover basic needs. In the last decades, the efforts for eradicating poverty has been driven by “empowering” people, that is, providing them the appropriate tools for enhancing their agency capabilities to demand better public policies. The belief that the suitable provision of basic services such as education, health and nutrition, would permit poor people to establish a basic floor of capabilities in order to perform completely their citizenship. Nevertheless, while it was possible to improve the social needs rates in the cities, the levels of poverty reduction remain stagnant in rural societies.

According to FIDA (2010) despite the steady decline of the rates, in the so-called “developing world” around 3,100 million people still live in rural areas, this represents about 55 percent of the global population. Besides, it is widely believed that this group of population will reach its maximum peak in the following decades and then it will be exceeded by urban population.

The efforts for eradicating poverty have not had an important impact on rural societies. While during the period of 1990 - 2010 the prevalence of people living in extreme poverty has reduced by 50 percent, there are still 1,200 million people living under this problematic, and about 75 percent of this people -around 900 million people- lives in rural areas (FAO, 2014). This fact not only shows the failure of the “pro-poor” policies through the world, but also emphasize the necessity for a new approach to address poverty that includes actions for rural populations.

The rural poverty is narrowly linked to food insecurity and hunger. Due to its nature, livelihoods of rural population are commonly based on subsistence agriculture or small scale farming, and although there has been a boom in non-farm activities and self-employment, their incomes hardly cover their basic needs, including food (FIDA, 2010).

In México, the rural population decreased mainly as a result of rural-urban migration² during the last decades. While among the years from 1950 to 1970, this group of population represented between 57 and 41 percent, respectively; during the nineties it dropped below 30 percent, and finally in the 2010, rural population reached 22 percent of the total population (INEGI, 2010). In other words, there are more than 26

2 According to Gijón and Reyes, the phenomenon of migration began in the thirties decade as a result of strategies undertaken by population to tackle economic and social crisis in rural areas. This and further information can be found in their *Desarrollo rural, migración internacional y escasez de mercados financieros en México*. Trace [Online] 52 | 2007, 45-62. Available at <http://trace.revues.org/581>

million people living in rural areas in Mexico, and according to the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), extreme poverty is more generalized here than in urban areas.

According to the Multidimensional Measurement of Poverty 2014³, there are more than 55 million poor people living in Mexico (two million more than in 2012), corresponding to 46.2 percent of the total population, from which around 17 million people live in rural areas, being equivalent to 61 percent of rural population (CONEVAL, 2015). That is to say that six out of ten people living in rural areas is poor, whilst in urban areas only four of every ten people live under this condition.

The fundamental difference between rural and urban poverty in Mexico lies in the access to basic services and the income structure. While urban populations have greater access to health, education, and social programs, rural populations have to find alternatives to deal with this condition, the most common is the subsistence agriculture. In other words, localities highly marginalized have not access to public programs, because its lack of social infrastructure.

The main program to address poverty in Mexico is *Oportunidades* -currently known as *Prospera*-, which has sought through improvements in health, nutrition and education levels to enhance the wellbeing of six million families⁴ living in poor areas where exist minimum access to basic education and health services (DOF, 2014). This program has contributed to increase those indicators between 30 percent in the case of education and 35 percent in the assistance to health services, and has successfully diversified the diet of its beneficiaries (WB, 2010; 2014).

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However, these efforts have not been sufficient to eradicate poverty in the country. According to CONEVAL's data, the reduction of poverty levels has been stagnated during the period that *Oportunidades* has been implemented. From 1992 to 2014 the Poverty Income has practically the same levels, for instance, in 2014 the percentage of population living in poverty (20.6 percent) was similar than in 2002 (20 percent), or even in 1992, when 21.4 percent of Mexican population suffered from this condition (CONEVAL, 2015). There are a number of interpretations on this, including structural

3 An individual lives under poverty if presents at least one of the following social deprivation established by CONEVAL: "current per capita income, average educational gap in the household, access to health services, access to social security, quality and spaces of the dwelling, access to basic services in the dwelling access to food, degree of social cohesion". More details can be found at: <http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Medicion/Paginas/Medicin%C3%B3n/Que-es-la-medicion-multidimensional-de-la-pobreza-en.aspx>

4 This data represents a big improvement in the target population because in its beginnings, *Prospera/Oportunidades* benefited 150 thousand families.

factors which definitely affect the well-being of poor people but not show the entire problematic or institutional weakness that has not permitted an optimal performance of anti-poverty policies.

Mistaken decisions on public policies for farmers and small producers have been the cornerstone of the rural poverty in Mexico, according to Berdegué et al (2015). Moreover, the anti poverty policies have not been connected with productive activities, which has hampered the synergies between human capital and autonomous income generation. Additionally, the social policies have not been designed to work at long term, that is that they are usually “temporary, assistentialist and unrelated to the productive development” (Berdegué, et al, 2015: 6).

Besides, these policy decisions have not had the same impact on the population. Their efforts and resources have been concentrated in one sector, for example, while just 6.9 percent of public spending was directed to highly marginalized localities, industrial farmers receive more resources to encourage their competitiveness (Fox and Haight, 2010; Robles, 2012, 2014; Berdegué, et al, 2015). Also, despite that small scale producers are concentrated in the less developed states in the country (73 percent of the Productive Units are located in Southern Mexico), they do not receive support to complement their productive activities which could help them to reduce their risks and encourage their capabilities, in fact, according to some experts, from the total of resources that small scale producers received from the government in recent years, about 58 percent are labeled as a part of the “social component” (Robles, 2012, 2014; Berdegué et al, 2015: 7-8).

Consequently, while poverty is more generalized in rural areas, the “pro-poor” policies are not planned to eradicate this flagellum there. Their actions are basically designed to mitigate the collateral effects without offering a long-term solution. The lack of social infrastructure such as clinics or schools that are necessary to be beneficiary of some programs show the urban bias in public policies and offer a possible reason of this problematic. Therefore, better-planned strategies for the poor in rural areas that connect social and economic policies offer a possible solution.

In this sense, as a product of a wide social mobilization due to the disagreement with the mainstream production methods in the agricultural systems, the food sovereignty approach was finally introduced by *La Via Campesina* in 1996, offering a feasible perspective to design more inclusive policies for rural populations. In other words, the main goal of the food sovereignty is to achieve dignity and social justice not only in agricultural policy-making but also in the entire production chain through respect, organization and deliberation (La Via Campesina, 2008: 147-148). Its utility in the fight against poverty lies in its six key elements⁵: It focuses on food for people; Supports sustainable livelihoods; Compatible with the nature; Localize food systems; put the control locally; and Promotes knowledge and ancestral skills (Nyéléni, 2007).

5 The synthesis report of The Forum for Food Sovereignty can be found at Nyéléni web page: <http://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article334>

Therefore, the food sovereignty approach might provide a complementary long-term strategy to address poverty in rural areas due to its inclusive nature, respect for the environment and economic fairness. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that this approach should resolve in order to be effective: a) the uncoordinated bureaucratic structures, which weaken the actions of public policy in general, and b) an excessive deliberative process which could increase the costs of the strategy.

I. WHAT DOES “POVERTY” MEAN? UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTUALIZATION

The debate about what is poverty continues without consensus. However, this concept has been commonly related to the lack of opportunities in terms of income-earning and access to markets. Its meaning is also close to the so-called “state failure” in terms of its incapability to provide basic infrastructure to the entire population, which is more visible in rural territories but still perceptible in some urban areas. In this sense, poverty is also related to social deprivations such as the lack of access to health and education. In other words, it is an obstacle for people to fully exercise their citizenship.

The analysis of different approaches of poverty will help to better understand the specific circumstances in which anti-poverty strategies are based and the possible solutions to be taken to make them really effective. In this section, it will be analyzed some of the most important approaches of poverty, including its meaning and the way of measurement depending on each specific approach.

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a) Income

One of the most used approaches is the so-called *income poverty*. It is “based on household income and expenditure surveys”, which has become in a quantitative method to analyze poverty (WB, 2001: 16)⁶. Some of its most important strengths lie in the fact that (1) “allows inferences about the conditions and evolution of poverty at the national level” due to the fact that it is based on “nationally representative samples”; and because (2) this approach permits to “obtain a broader picture of well-being and poverty, investigate the relationships among different dimensions of poverty, and test hypotheses on the likely impact of policy interventions”(WB, 2001: 16). That is to say that this method provides national representativity and helps to better understand the poverty determinants by measuring the amount of earned money and the quantity used for consumption.

6 According to World Bank's approach, “consumption is conventionally viewed as the preferred welfare indicator, for practical reasons of reliability and because consumption is thought to better capture long-run welfare than current income” (WB, 2001).

Nevertheless, it is “not problem free”. Although the poverty income approach provides a quantitative tool for analyzing this problematic among households, it presents at least two key inconsistencies. Firstly, this measure does not show the entire problem of poverty due to the fact that is not disaggregated by individuals, for example “it does not allow direct measurement of income or consumption poverty among women” (WB, 2001: 18). Secondly, the lack of standardization in the surveys⁷, make comparisons difficult among countries and its analysis is commonly based on a number of assumptions on the household behavior and the way that errors have to be taken (Dasgupta, 1995; WB, 2001: 17-18).

The *poverty line* has been institutionalized in the development studies through the world. It is related to “the critical cutoff in income or consumption below which an individual or household is determined to be poor” and “[it tests] for the ability to purchase a basket of commodities”, this line has been useful for measuring poverty across the world (WB, 2001: 18). Over the years, the poverty line has been adjusted by using the World Bank’s purchasing power parity (PPP), resulting in its beginnings in a line equal to \$1.08 US dollars and nowadays it was adjusted to \$1.9 US dollars in order to reflect the real purchasing power in the world’s poorest countries (WB, 2001, 2016).

Calculating the percentage of population which lives under this situation is the most usual way of measure. Nevertheless, due to differences among countries in terms of the cost of some goods and the clear necessity of take into account the socioeconomic context, this line might not show faithfully the regional differences, for example those reflected between rural and urban areas (WB, 2001: 18). Moreover, policy makers have used these indicators for justifying anti-poverty programs which have not actually helped vulnerable people (WB, 2001: 18).

b) Education and health

Another form for measuring poverty is the education and health method which are found commonly together in the analysis because is the easiest way to understand it; for instance, while “enrollments reduce poverty and mortality, [...] basic health care increases enrollment and reduces poverty” (WB, 2001: 5). Over the years it has been widely used Mortality as a proxy for “consumption poverty and ill-being”, the main reason is that these studies have found that “in the poorest areas one child out of every four born dies before the age of 12 months”. Life expectancy is another useful data to calculate poverty through the years, however, its measure is not conducted directly, which could bring misinterpretations (WB, 2001: 18).

That is to say the data used for this kind of analysis are usually obtained through censuses made over long periods of time in which a possible repetition (grade

⁷ According to the World Bank (2001), some surveys ask respondents about their food spending habits on a monthly basis and others on a weekly basis.

repetition) in the system can emerge, giving to these indicators some grade of inconsistency for measuring poverty. Additionally, these indicators can be different among countries, periods of time, and data quality which make difficult a consistent poverty measurement.

In terms of education, enrolment rate is the most commonly used variable because school attendance is the closest indicator for measuring it. Nevertheless, they are low quality because they only represent a proxy and can be affected by grade repetitions, showing a completely distorted image of the education rates. Not to mention that there is insufficient worldwide data to allow comparison by region (WB, 2001: 18-19).

c) Multidimensional measurement

The most remarkable strength of the Multidimensional Measurement is the fact that incorporates the social basic needs in its definition. This approach has brought to the debate the necessity of taking into consideration different variables depending on each context and it is being adopted in many countries and multilateral organizations through the world (WB, 2001: 19).

Among the most used approaches of this measurement are: a) the welfare function, which according to some authors, “includes various dimensions of well-being and defines poor people as all individuals below a specified minimum level of total welfare” (Tsui 1995, 1997; Bourguignon and Chakravarty 1998, as quoted in WB, 2001: 22). b) The composite index such as the human development index, which impose [arbitrarily, according to some studies] weights to every dimension of the welfare function (UNDP, 1999; Ravallion 1997, as quoted in WB, 2001: 22).c) Alternative aggregation rules, which gauges “who is poor in any one of the dimensions”, its strength and weakness is closely related, while gauging more than just income, it can misinterpret the fact that even having a high income, it is poor for lack of any other dimension such as health or education (WB, 2001: 22).

The greatest weakness of this method lies in its arbitrary number of indicators for measuring poverty. There is no consensus about the most accurate way to establish who is poor, that is when someone is poor in any one of the dimensions or when it is poor in all of the dimensions. Also, the problem is that if an indicator improves, another could worsen, and in the final measurement only the average is reflected, or the data availability for making comparisons not only among people, but also between these and nonmarket elements (WB, 2001: 19, 22).

The best way to deal with some of its inconsistencies is having each final result (percentage and absolute value) for each dimension, that is “focus[ing] on deprivation in different dimensions, and in particular, on the multiple deprivations experienced by the income-poor” (WB, 2001: 19).

d) Vulnerability

This approach is related to the incapacity of people to face risks, for example, natural disasters, economic crises or chronic health problems. For its measurement, it is usually used a) physical assets, b) human capital, c) income diversification, d) links to network, e) participation in the formal safety net and, f) the access to credit markets. The first one assesses the individual's capacity to self-insurance, where the most important thing is not only "the value of the assets, but also their liquidity". The second indicator is closely related to the level of education that an individual has achieved and its capacity to manage risks. The income diversification is commonly used in rural contexts with nonfarm incomes due to the fact that their variation is lower than farm income, however they can be misleading because more diversification is "not necessarily less risky, [...] this needs to be evaluated in the context of the household overall risk strategy" (WB, 2001: 20).

The links to networks refers to all types of social relation (social capital), such as those among groups of families, jobs and partnerships, and which "can be a source of transfers in cash or kind in the event of a calamity", depending on the trust degree. This can lead families to face more risks, however, there is few available information. The participation in the formal safety net reduces vulnerability throughout social security or different types of transfers. Finally, the access to credit markets measures vulnerability in terms of "consumption smoothing", that is balancing the spending and saving their living expenses (WB, 2001: 20).

The necessity to evaluate by measuring the same households in a number of years and then analyze the provided information, and the fact that "people's movement in and out of poverty are informative about vulnerability only after the fact", represent its biggest weaknesses (WB, 2001: 19; ILO, 2004).

Further discussions about the pertinence of having a suitable indicator to measure vulnerability have agreed that a single indicator based uniquely on household assets is not desirable, because could not show the real dimension of the problem, "the exposure to risk" (WB, 2001: 19). In other words, "a scenario with many small and one large fluctuation may yield the same coefficient of variation as a scenario with equal moderate fluctuations. Yet poor people are likely to be hurt more by the first scenario" (WB, 2001: 20).

II. FOOD SECURITY, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE HUMAN RIGHT TO FOOD: UNDESTANDING THE ORIGINS

a) Human Right to Food

In the fight against hunger the international regulatory framework is provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)⁸, where the human right to food was established and incorporated into the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The article 25th declares:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their own health and wellbeing and that of their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control (UN, 2016).

However, it was until the 90 decade, that an approach of human rights was implemented in the policies for combating hunger, during the so-called “third generation rights”. The UDHR helped to spread the human rights approach and connecting them (Gordillo, 2013: 4).

Specifically, the right to food helps to guarantee life, dignity and enjoyment of other human rights. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) adopted the General Comment No. 12, explaining the right to food in a holistic way, which implies an adequate provision of food and a minimum standard of quality, to achieve the dietary needs for every person and in accordance with their cultural values (CESCR, 1999), but emphasizes the normative content of article 11, paragraphs 1 and 2:

The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. The right to adequate food will have to be realized progressively. However, States have a core obligation to take the necessary action to mitigate and alleviate hunger [...] even in times of natural or other disasters (CESCR, 1999: 3).

Therefore, despite States are the main responsible for guaranteeing the right to adequate food for their population, due to the fact that they are the signers, it was also declared that all members of society have a key role in the realization of this human right (CESCR, 1999). That is to say, it was recognized the nature of the obligations that States should have with their citizens and their role in the fight against food poverty.

8 According to the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) “was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected”

b) Food Security

The social mobilization that guided the fight against hunger, even before this had been established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has also been accompanied by several intergovernmental agreements. According to the World Food Conference held in 1974, “every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop and maintain their physical and mental faculties”, establishing the origins of the food security concept (FAO, 1996; Gordillo, 2013: 2).

Later on 1996, during the World Food Summit, the concept was clarified: “food security exists when all people, at all times, have a physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”, and underlined the multidimensional nature of the concept: “the availability of food, access to food, the biological use of food and stability [of all elements over time]” (FAO, 2006; 2008). This definition was reinforced by the fact that it would be necessary that “a peaceful, stable and enabling political, social and economic environment is the essential foundation that will enable states to give adequate priority to food security and poverty eradication” (FAO, 1996), which reaffirmed the key role of the States by promoting socially inclusive and democratic values, as well as protecting all human rights.

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Nowadays, its multidimensionality has been specified in the following dimensions: food availability, food access, utilization, and stability. The first one refers to “the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid)”. The access is related to “the adequate resources (entitlements ⁹) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet”. The third one explains the importance of “an adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met”. Finally, the stability is closely related to reduction of every kind of vulnerability that individuals, families, or population could face during their lifetime (FAO, 2006, 2011). Therefore, when all dimensions are covered it can say there is food security. In terms of power relations in the production chain and international trade, the food security is a neutral concept which has provided acceptance through governments in the world, but it has also been criticized by organizations of agricultural workers and small-scale producers (Gordillo, 2013).

9 According to FAO (2006), “entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).”

c) Food Sovereignty

As a result of a dissatisfaction with the concept of Food Security (due to its neutrality in terms of power relations) agreed by member states in the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996¹⁰, different ONG's and OSC's presented the declaration "Benefits for some or food for all", in which were emphasized the necessity to consider the political economy of the food security in order to eradicate hunger and poverty through the globe (Gordillo, 2013: 3-4). That is, they identified the elements that weaken the accomplishment of the goals established in the WFS such as the lack of an approach based on human rights, a model mainly based on agribusiness, and the lack of a sustainable approach of the mainstream agricultural model (Gordillo, 2013: 3). This is, briefly, the background in which the food sovereignty approach was launched as a concept to combat hunger and poverty, by taking into consideration the political economy of the food system.

Therefore the concept of *Food Sovereignty* was established by "La Via Campesina"¹¹ in 1996 as:

[...]the right of the people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own agricultural and food systems, [...] putting those who produce, distribute and consume at the heart of systems rather than markets or corporations (La Via Campesina, 2008: 147-148).

Additionally, the food sovereignty lies on six fundamental pillars that mutually complement each other¹²:

a) [It] focuses on food for people. b) Supports sustainable livelihoods. c) Localizes food systems. d) Puts the control locally. e) Promotes knowledge and ancestral skills and it is f) Compatible with the natural environment (Nyéléni, 2007).

Thus, this concept shows the policies against hunger in a "more socially responsible form" emphasizing the necessity to take into consideration the "asymmetry of power" among actors and scenarios involved into the food systems, highlighting the right to determine them more collaboratively, and proposing a more sustainable way to produce food from agricultural workers. In other words, the main goal of the food sovereignty is to achieve dignity and social justice not only in agricultural policy-making but also in the entire production chain through respect, organization and deliberation. In this document is analyzed its importance for designing more inclusive anti-poverty policies.

10 More details on the World Food Summit can be found at <http://www.fao.org/WFS/>

11 According to its webpage La Via Campesina is an "international movement that groups millions people interested in defending sustainable livelihoods to encourage social justice and dignity". Full information related to its work is available at: <http://www.viacampesina.org/es/index.php/organizaciainmenu-44>

12 The synthesis report of The Forum for Food Sovereignty can be found at Nyéléni web page: <http://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article334>

III. THE STATE OF POVERTY

The global trends show a constant decreasing in the number of people living in rural areas, according to IFAD (2010) the majority of rural population live in the so-called “developing world”, and represent at least 55 percent of the global population, that is, 3,100 million people. In the case of Mexico, this phenomenon has a similar behaviour but it is mainly due to rural-urban migration. During 1950 and 1970, rural population went from 57 to 41 percent of the total population. While in the 90s, it decreased until represent 30 percent, for 2010 the National Population Census showed that this group reached 22 percent of the total (INEGI, 2010). That is to say that about 26 million people in Mexico still live in rural areas.

In previous sections it was argued that anti-poverty strategies have had some positive impact for urban populations, and in some extent have impacted in rural areas, but the progress has been not significant. An analysis of the available global data about poverty¹³ shows that despite the efforts made to eradicate it between 1990 and 2010, the number of rural population living under this threshold represents 75 percent of the more than 1,200 million poor people in the world that is 900 million people (FAO, 2014). Therefore, these data support the idea of a failure in anti-poverty strategies to address rural poverty and claim for a new approach that reduces the gap between urban and rural populations by improving the well-being of rural population. Mexico is not an exception to this scenario.

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a) Multidimensional Poverty in Mexico

Since 2008, the CONEVAL is measuring the multidimensional poverty in Mexico every two years with available data taken from the Socio-economic Conditions Module of the National Survey of Income and Expenditure of the Households (MCS-ENIGH) provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). The measurement, according to the 36th article of the General Law of Social Development (LGDS) has to take into consideration the social rights and the economic well-being:

the CONEVAL should establish the guidelines and criteria to define the definition, identification and measurement of poverty in Mexico, taking into account at least the following indicators: current income per capita, average education lag in the household, access to health services, access to social security, quality and living spaces, access to basic housing services, access to food, and degree of social cohesion (DOF, 2004; CONEVAL, 2014: 27).

13 It is necessary to recall that according to the World Bank, an individual is poor if she/he has less to US\$1.9 per day to meet him/his basic needs (WB, 2001; 2016).

Figure 1. Multidimensional Poverty



SOURCE: CONEVAL, 2014.

Based on this statement, the *Figure 1. Multidimensional Poverty*, shows that a person is *Poor* if she/he lacks of at least one of the social indicators listed above and her/his incomes are not sufficient to acquire the necessary goods and services she/he requires to meet her/his needs (CONEVAL, 2014: 37). If they present one or more of the social deprivations but they have an income which is higher than the Well-Being Line (WBL) is classified as *Vulnerable by Social Deprivation* (CONEVAL, 2014: 41).

Additionally, an individual is considered *Vulnerable by Income* if they do not have any social deprivation but their income is lower or equal to the WBL, and finally, they are considered *Not Poor and Not Vulnerable* when their income is higher than the WBL and they do not present any social deprivation (CONEVAL, 2014: 41).

The Figure 2. Extreme Multidimensional Poverty illustrates that a person lives in extreme poverty when she/he lacks of three or more of the mentioned social indicators and her/his incomes are not sufficient to acquire the necessary goods and services she/he requires to meet her/his needs. Furthermore, the *Moderate Poverty* is the segment of the poor multidimensional population that is not included within the extreme multidimensional poor population (CONEVAL 2014: 37, 43).

Table 1. Multidimensional Poverty (National)

	2008		2010		2012		2014	
	%	Million People						
Poverty	44.5	48.8	46.1	52.8	45.5	53.3	46.2	55.3
Moderate Poverty	33.9	37.2	34.8	39.8	35.6	41.8	36.6	43.9
Extreme Poverty	10.6	11.7	11.3	13.0	9.8	11.5	9.5	11.4
Vulnerable by Social Deprivation	33.0	36.2	28.1	32.1	28.6	33.5	26.3	31.5
Vulnerable by Income	4.5	4.9	5.9	6.7	6.2	7.2	7.1	8.5
Not poor and Not Vulnerable	18.0	19.7	19.9	2.8	19.8	23.2	20.5	24.6

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SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM CONEVAL ESTIMATIONS BASED ON MCS-ENIGH, 2008, 2010, 2012 Y 2014.

In the urban context, the poverty numbers show a similar trend (see Table 2. Urban Poverty). According to CONEVAL, in 2008 there were more than 32 million poor people living in areas classified as urban¹⁵, reaching 38.4 million poor people in Mexico in 2014, which represented 39.1 and 41.7 percent of the total urban population. The extreme poverty in these geographical areas also increased during the same period. Beginning with 5 million people and finalizing with 5.7 million people, extreme poverty represented 5.9 and 6.2 percent of the urban population in 2008 and 2014 respectively. In terms of people vulnerable by social deprivations, the urban population follows the national downtrend. It has decreased since 2008, when 27.7 million people were considered vulnerable by social deprivation, representing 32.9 percent of urban population. In 2014 the number of people with one or more social deprivations was reduced to 22.7 million people, that is 24.6 percent of urban population.

15 The concept of "urban" is related to localities with more than 2,500 people, according to INEGI. More information can be found here: http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/poblacion/rur_urb.aspx?tema=P

Table 2. Urban Poverty

	2008		2010		2012		2014	
	%	Million People						
Poverty	39.1	32.9	40.4	35.6	40.6	36.6	41.7	38.4
Moderate Poverty	33.2	27.9	33.7	29.6	34.3	30.9	35.4	32.6
Extreme Poverty	5.9	5.0	6.7	5.9	6.3	5.7	6.2	5.7
Vulnerable by Social Deprivation	32.9	27.7	27.8	24.5	27.6	24.8	24.6	22.7
Vulnerable by Income	5.6	4.7	7.4	6.5	7.6	6.9	8.8	8.1
Not poor and Not Vulnerable	22.3	18.8	24.4	21.5	24.2	21.8	24.9	22.9

SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM CONEVAL ESTIMATIONS BASED ON MCS-ENIGH, 2008, 2010, 2012 Y 2014.

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The state of poverty in rural areas¹⁶ is more generalized than in urban areas. According to Table 3. Rural Poverty, the number of people living under this problematic has fluctuated between 15 and 17 million people since the first multidimensional measurement in 2008. Poverty is more generalized because six out of ten people living in rural areas are poor, that is to say 60 percent of rural population. Although the extreme poverty was reduced by one million between 2008 and 2014, the number of people vulnerable by social deprivation was from 8.4 to 8.8 million people during the same period, fluctuating around 30 percent of the rural population.

Therefore, according to the multidimensional approach, in 2014 of the 120 million Mexicans, there were more than 55 million poor people, of which 38 million live in urban areas and the other 17 million more live in rural areas. However, the prevalence of poverty is 20 percentage points higher in rural areas than in urban areas, supporting the necessity for a new approach that contributes to reducing the gap between urban and rural populations through improvements in their well-being.

16 In Mexico, the concept of "rural" is related to localities with less than 2,500 people, according to INEGI. More information can be found here: http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/poblacion/rur_urb.aspx?tema=P

Table 3. Rural Poverty

	2008		2010		2012		2014	
	%	Million People						
Poverty	62.4	15.9	64.9	17.2	61.6	16.7	61.1	17.0
Moderate Poverty	36.2	9.2	38.5	10.2	40.1	10.9	40.5	11.3
Extreme Poverty	26.2	6.7	26.5	7.0	21.5	5.8	20.6	5.7
Vulnerable by Social Deprivation	33.1	8.4	28.9	7.7	31.9	8.7	31.7	8.8
Vulnerable by Income	0.7	0.2	1.0	0.3	1.3	0.3	1.2	0.3
Not poor and Not Vulnerable	3.8	1.0	5.2	1.4	5.3	1.4	6.0	1.7

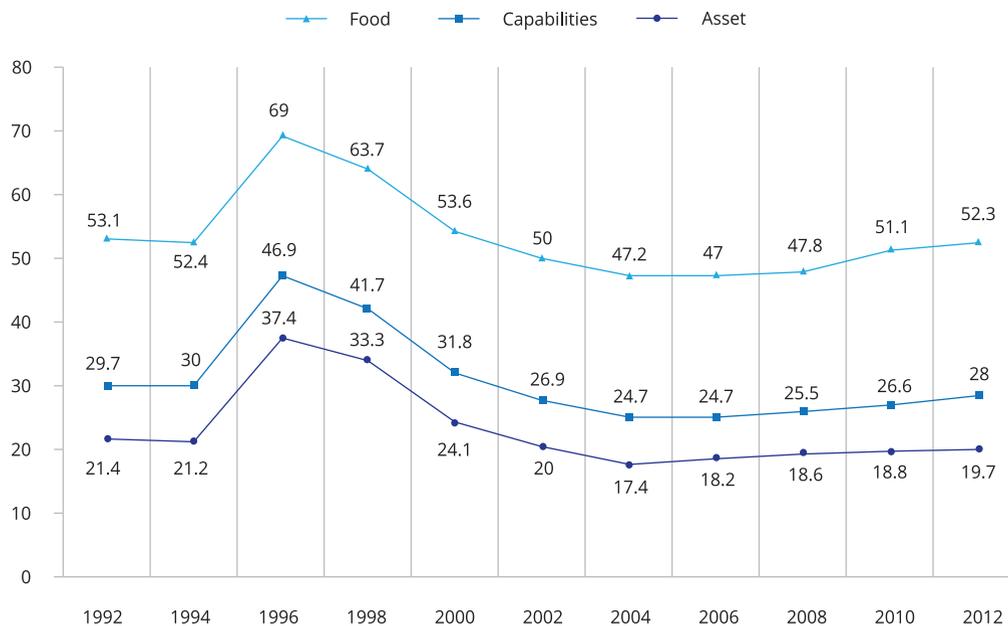
SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM CONEVAL ESTIMATIONS BASED ON MCS-ENIGH, 2008, 2010, 2012 Y 2014.

b) Income Poverty in Mexico

In order to have relative continuity in the poverty measurement, CONEVAL uses this approach by comparing the incomes of people with monetary values represented by different lines: food, capabilities and asset. The first one is related to the inability to buy a basic food basket, even if the families use all their available income just to acquire it. The capabilities poverty is related to the insufficiency of income to acquire the value of the food basket and make the necessary expenditures in health and education, even if the households use all their income just for these purposes. Finally, the asset poverty is related to the income insufficiency to buy the food basket, and make the necessary expenditures in health, clothing, housing, transportation and education, even if households use all their income just for acquiring these goods and services.

According to the *Graph 1. Poverty Income (National), 1992-2012* the reduction of poverty levels is stagnated during the last two decades at the national level. For instance, in 2012 the prevalence of asset poverty was of 52.3 percent (61.3 million people), practically the same percentage than in 1992, when 53.1 percent (46.1 million people) of population suffered from this condition. Moreover, the capabilities

Graph 1. Income Poverty (National), 1992-2012. Percentages



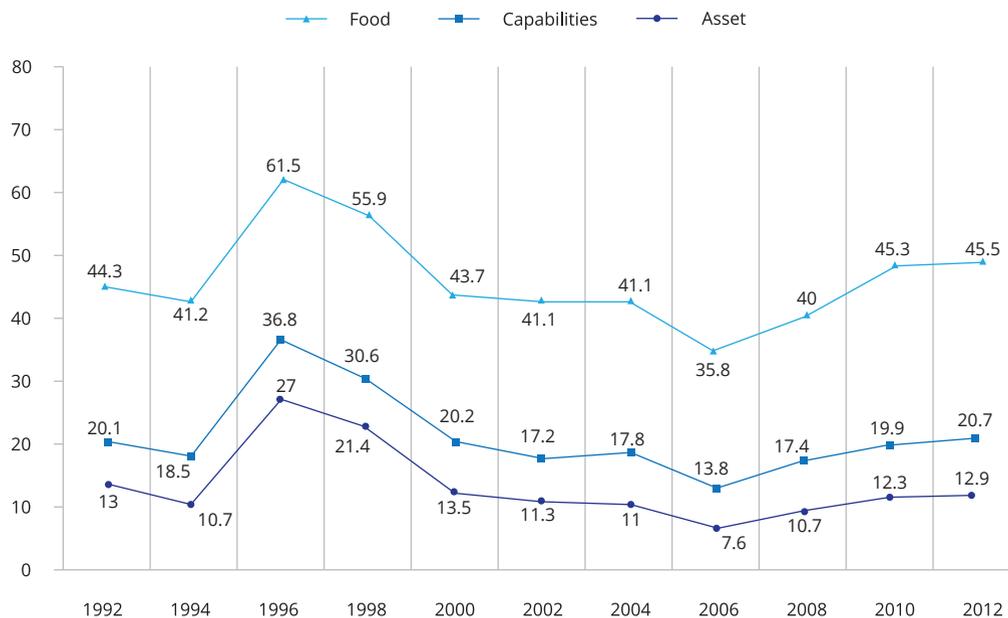
SOURCE: CONEVAL ESTIMATES BASED ON ENIGH 1992 TO 2012.

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poverty represented 29.7 percent (25.7 million people) in the early nineties, and 28 percent (32 million people) of the total population twenty years later. Finally, the food poverty followed the same tendency, during the same period, representing 21.4 percent (18.5 million people) in 1992, and 19.7% (23 million people) in 2012. These data represent the general results in the fight against poverty in Mexico during the last two decades, excluding the period of economic crisis suffered by the country to mid-nineties, when poverty rates increased up to 15 percentage points in each poverty line.

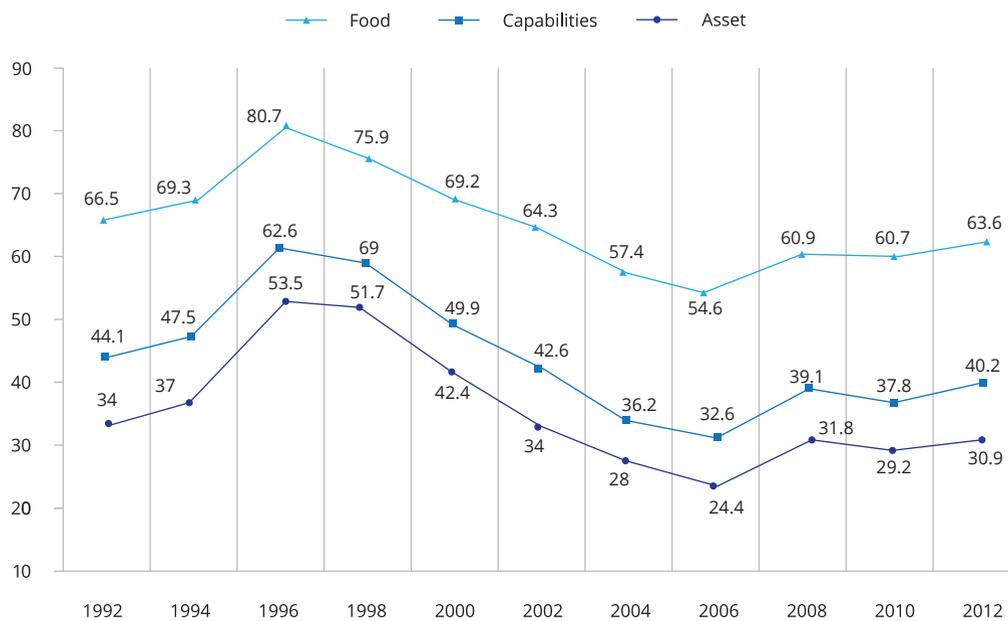
This phenomenon in urban areas has practically followed the same pattern. *The Graph 2. Income Poverty (Rural), 1992-2012* shows that while in the early nineties the food poverty reached to 13 percent (6.8 million people) of urban population, in the 2012, the prevalence was of 12.9 percent (9.4million people). The capabilities poverty line represented 20.1 percent (10.5 million people) of people in urban localities at the beginning of the period, and 20.7 percent (15.1 million people) in the last year of the period. Finally, the asset poverty showed the same behavior, 44.3 percent (23.1 million people) in 1992 and 45.5 percent (33.3 million people) in 2012. As it can see, the prevalence of poverty in urban areas has even increased in the last twenty years, challenging the assertions that indicate progress in the fight against poverty.

Graph 2. Income Poverty (Urban), 1992-2012. Percentages



SOURCE: CONEVAL ESTIMATES BASED ON ENIGH 1992 TO 2012.

Graph 3. Income Poverty (Rural), 1992-2012. Percentages



SOURCE: CONEVAL ESTIMATES BASED ON ENIGH 1992 TO 2012.

According to *Graph 3. Income Poverty (Rural), 1992-2012*, in the case of rural areas, the tendencies not only are similar but also the prevalence is higher than in urban population. The asset poverty in rural population reached to 66.5 percent (22.9 million people) of rural population in 1992, and 20 years later to 63.6 percent (28 million people). That is an increase of more than 5 million people during the same period. Moreover, the capabilities poverty line registered 44.1 percent (15.2 million people) of the rural population in 1992, and 40.2 percent (17.7 million people) in 2012. In other words, there were an increase of 2.5 million people between 1992-2012. Finally, the food poverty represented 34 percent (11.7 million people) of rural population in 1992, and 30.9 percent (13.6 million people) in 2012. That is to say that almost 2 million people more were unable to buy the basic food basket at the end of the period of study.

Therefore, as the Poverty Income Evolution data shows, the reduction of the rates is stagnated since 1992. The levels of poverty, according to income approach, are practically the same at the beginning and end of the study period, both in national and regional (urban and rural) levels. Nevertheless, data also shows that the prevalence of poverty is higher in rural areas. For example, the percentage of people unable to acquire a basic food basket (food poverty) reached 30.9 percent in rural areas, while this same indicator represented of 12.9 percent for urban areas in 2012. The answers to this problematic might be several, from structural conditions that evidently have impacted on the population's well-being, to the institutional failure and weakness that has neglected the performance of anti-poverty policies.

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IV. PUBLIC POLICIES FOR RURAL POPULATIONS IN MEXICO. THE BALANCE.

The main public programs to address rural poverty by improving human capital and productive capacities in Mexico are Oportunidades (1997) launched during the government of Salinas de Gortari 1988-1994 as Pronasol; and Procampo/Proagro launched in 1994. This section will analyze both programs to explain the poor results showed before in the combat against poverty due to the unsuitability of the actions of the anti-poverty strategies for rural societies.

a) The human Development Program - Oportunidades.

Launched in the late eighties during the government of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), the National Program of Solidarity (PRONASOL, also known as SOLIDARIDAD) was the first version of a program created for modifying “the relations between civil society and state, giving priority to the regional development in marginalized areas” (UNACH, 2012: 10; Gordillo, 2016: 20). Its upgrade would be reflected with the Education, Health and Food Program (PROGRESA 1997-2001), which would have as a main objective: “Provide support to families living in extreme poverty in order to build their members' capacity for achieving higher levels of well-being and providing them with more opportunities to do so” (UNACH, 2012: 10, Gordillo et al, 2016: 54).

OPORTUNIDADES, the new version of the program would seek to eliminate the intergenerational transmission of poverty, reflecting the need to change anti-poverty policies (UNACH, 2012: 10).

According to their intellectual authors, OPORTUNIDADES was designed on the idea of enhancing the investment in human capital of beneficiaries' children, improving health and nutritional status of families and increasing their income and consumption. To achieve this, they implemented a "conditional cash transfer mechanism" (CCT), as a way of guaranteeing full freedom in beneficiaries spending decisions and ensuring an improvement in their well-being through their own efforts and initiative (Levy, 2006: 1, DOF, 2007: 3). Additionally, the direct transfers not only would increase the household's income in the short run, but also they would articulate the variety of social policies in order to guarantee an income for beneficiaries in the long-run, that is OPORTUNIDADES was design as a "transient program" (Molineux, 2006: 433-434; Levy, 2007).

Likewise, in terms of institutional design it would include a "close coordination [among] the institutions and sectors involved, and the [incorporating] participation of the three levels of government in such a way as to expand families' access to greater development opportunities [...] through coordination with other social development actions and programs" (DOF, 2007: 3).

The prestige of the program is related to the performance of the health, education and nutrition indicators, which have improved mainly due to an "unusually high degree of presidential support and inter-ministerial collaboration with an increasing annual budget", without detracting the "*pláticas* (lectures) effect" that have modified to some extent the beneficiaries' behavior (Hoddinott and Skoufias, 2004: 54; Molineux, 2006: 433; Levy, 2006 and 2007). For example, the implemented actions have helped to improve school enrollment, attendance and, in general, the levels of education in more than 30 percent among beneficiaries' children, the rates of health assistance services in 35%, as well as the nutritional levels of all those inscribed in the programs (Hoddinott et al, 2000; Hoddinot and Skoufias, 2004: 31; Molineux, 2006: 434; Winters and Davis, 2007; WB, 2010 and 2014).

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Notwithstanding its relative success regarding the above three indicators, the poverty rates, as it was shown in the previous section, have remained practically in the same levels since 1992 (CONEVAL, 2015), when income poverty was officially measured in Mexico. That is to say that the main social program designed and developed on the idea to break with the intergenerational transmission of poverty in Mexico has been ineffective after two decades of being implemented.

The explanations can be several, but an inadequate implementation and a lack of contextualization of the challenges seem to stand out. Firstly, the authors created a National Coordination for operating the program, because they were conscious about the vices that the program would face and that have characterized public policies in Mexico during decades such as "bureaucratic inertia, information gaps

about the program and other ministries, and political infighting for resources” (Levy, 2006: 92). Nevertheless, this new body could not afford the mentioned vices, mainly because “there were no changes on personnel and administrative restructuring”, neglecting the optimal performance of the program (Levy, 2006: 93).

Secondly, although OPORTUNIDADES was theoretically “novel” for many reasons, included its new targeting methods (Levy, 2006: 33), it was empirically more difficult to incorporate the most marginalized rural communities, first, because these communities are characterized by a limited access of health and education services, which is a basic requirement for receiving the benefits of the program; and second, the focalization process had as result the social fragmentation within communities, because excluded people felt that their needs were “insufficiently” considered to be beneficiary of the program, generating discord among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Skoufias, 2005: 2; Molineux, 2006: 435; Gordillo et al, 2016: 38).

Finally, some studies argue that the lack of a productive component in the program, specifically the fact that investments are basically made in beneficiaries’ children rather than in boosting the productivity in adult members, that would help households to overcome their economic vulnerability, have delayed the eradication of the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Gordillo, et al, 2016: 31).

b) The Direct Rural Support Program - Procampo

The main objectives of the program were political, due to the resistance that the economy’s liberalization presented in some sectors; economic, because it would provide cash to producers for potential losses due to the economy’s liberalization¹⁷; and social, because would help to address poverty and reduce the emigration (Sadoulet et al, 2001: 6; Winters and Davis, 2007: 2; Gordillo et al, 2016: 23). Considering the above scenario, PROCAMPO was officially launched in 1994 under the Presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), and despite it would be valid for 15 years, the government decided to extend it to the present (DOF, 1994; Sadoulet et al, 2001: 6; Winters and Davis, 2007: 4).

According to the Decree, the purpose of PROCAMPO was “transferring resources to support rural producers’ economy, who are eligible and meet the conditions” established in the decree, including having used the land for sowing any of the eligible crops¹⁸, livestock, forestry or an approved environmental program. Also, it would improve beneficiaries’ competitiveness, modernize the marketing systems, promote the transition to higher value crops and encourage soil conservation (DOF, 1994; Sadoulet et al, 2001: 6; FAO, 2011: 15). Nevertheless, since 1996 PROCAMPO started to give direct payments per hectare regardless of the land’s productive activity (FAO, 2011: 16).

17 In 1993, the governments of Canada, the United States and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which would begin operations in 1994.

18 Eligible crops: cotton, rice, safflower, barley, beans, corn, sorghum, soybeans and wheat (DOF, 1994).

Over the years, PROCAMPO has had contrasting outcomes, from its widespread coverage to the overconcentration of its benefits in a small number of farmers. On the one hand, since its launching, the program has been considered “less regressive” (compared to others programs), due to it has supported “producers who had never benefited from pre-NAFTA price support programs due to lack of marketed surplus”, helping farm households (particularly poor) to increase to some extent their income and behavior by promoting agricultural productive activities (Sadoulet et al, 2001: 7-8). Besides, the qualification certificates of the program would provide warranties, giving them some flexibility whit cash (Sadoulet et al, 2001: 8).

Despite the positive points listed above, PROCAMPO is still a regressive program as some experts affirm: “the compensatory payments are regressively distributed in the farm sector, as they are proportional to the area that had been planted in the crops” (Sadoulet et al, 2001: 7). That is to say that despite the coverage (2.7 million direct beneficiaries), the program gives more benefits to large producers, even when 78.1 percent of the list of beneficiaries was concentrated on farmers with less than 5 hectares (Gordillo et al, 2016: 54). Moreover, although the most beneficiaries are located in Southern Mexico, the subsidies for agricultural activities are concentrated in four states in the North (Gordillo et al, 2016: 33).

Additionally, only 14% of the beneficiaries were able to change their production patterns (from basic grains to others more profitable), that could be explained by the “beneficiaries’ concern about the duration of the projects or a desire to continue receiving support from the program” (Gordillo et al, 2016: 33). This fact was a clear sign of the limitations of the program, which by including many goals, it weakened its instruments to be successful.

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Therefore, despite OPORTUNIDADES and PROCAMPO have been a cornerstone in the design of conditional cash transfer programs in rural Mexico, they have been ineffective in improving their productivity and reducing poverty steadily since their inception in nineties decade. They have not been connected to provided an integral response to rural poverty (social and productive), despite they share, to some point, characteristics in their target population.

The foregoing validates the necessity for a new approach that helps to reduce poverty prevalence in Mexico, which, as has been demonstrated through income and multidimensional approaches, has practically remained at the same levels during the period of study.

V. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY APPROACH: IMPLICATIONS AND OBSTACLES

The rural Mexico is mainly forest and community, two aspects usually neglected by the public policies, according to Merino (2011). That is, of almost 200 million hectares of the national territory, around 73 percent (142 million hectares) is forest

and 70 percent of these are collective property (Gordillo, 2011). Additionally, the rural livelihoods are closely related to agricultural activities, specially to small-scale farming and family farming¹⁹, which are characterized by limited access to land and capital. Rural people, however, complement their incomes usually with non-agricultural activities such as temporary jobs, rural tourism and a range of craft work (FAO, 2012; 2014; Gordillo et al, 2016: 5). According to Schneider (2009) and FAO (2012), this kind of activity is highly important to rural populations not only because its contribution to the development of their territories and communities in a sustainable way, but also because it helps to promote their cultural heritage and create safety social nets.

The small-scale farming²⁰ represents almost 70 percent of the total of production units (UP) in the country, that is, 2 million 762 thousand 782 production units, and they are mainly located in Southern Mexico, states that have been identified with low levels of productivity and high degrees of poverty (more than 60 percent of rural population lives in poverty, as shown in Table 3, and Graph 2 from Section III) (Gordillo, 2011: 1; Robles, 2012: 61; CONEVAL, 2014; Gordillo et al, 2016: 6). Additionally, this kind of production units, employ almost 85 percent of the contract labor and 88 percent of the family labors in the primary sector (Berdegué et al, 2015: 4; Gordillo et al, 2016: 6).

Although small-scale producers would be highly relevant for achieving sustainable development in rural areas, they have been historically neglected from public policies that encourage their productivity, condemning them to remain in poverty. In other words, despite there have been some strategies to overcome poverty in the country, this have not been designed to faced the rural context and its problematic, such as institutional deficiencies and misdirected subsidies (Robles, 2012, 2014; Berdegué et al, 2015).

Thus, deficient public policies that have been focused more on social support (the so-called “*assistentialism*”) than in stimulating their production capabilities, have stagnated the poverty reduction, making more evident the necessity of a new approach that provides a sustainable and socially inclusive way of development for rural societies. In this document that “new approach” –due to its complementarity to mainstream anti-poverty strategies- is the Food Sovereignty approach, which offer an interesting way of empowerment and poverty alleviation by placing the local actors at the center of public policies.

19 According to FAO and BID(2007), this kind of production's unit represents more than 80% of agricultural exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean, at country level provides between 27%and 67% of total food production, in terms of agricultural land represents between 12% and 67% of the total, and it provides between 57% and 77% of agricultural work in the region.

20 The small-scale production units are those agricultural exploitations of up to 5 hectares.

a) Key elements of the Food Sovereignty for rural poverty alleviation

As it was already stated in section II, the Food Sovereignty was introduced by La Via Campesina in 1996 as a way to demand the right of peoples to decide the way of their food is produced and distributed, emphasizing the key role that local agents (from production to consumption) have throughout the entire food system (La Via Campesina, 2008: 147-148).

The usefulness of food sovereignty approach to combat rural poverty lies in its six pillars, which were proclaimed in Nyéléni 2007 - The Forum for Food Sovereignty that took place in Sélingué, Mali between 23rd and 27th February 2007²¹: 1) Focuses on Food for People; 2) Values Food Providers; 3) Localizes Food Systems; 4) Puts Control Locally; 5) Builds Knowledge and Skills; and 6) Works with Nature. These six elements might contribute to design a more sustainable and socially inclusive strategy to address poverty, mainly in rural populations.

First, *it focuses on food for people*: despite the decreasing trend in food production, the countryside has had the capacity to satisfy the dietary needs of the population in the country, or at least it has produced enough food to do so, however a series of problems related to their distribution, storage and hoarding has neglected this human right. As a proof of this, the Service Information of Agro-Food and Fisheries in Mexico (better known as SIAP, for its acronym in Spanish), provide data to suggest that the current domestic production would be sufficient to feed the country, a fact that is reflected in the Food Balance Sheets of FAO²², which indicate a supply of food energy (3,072 kilocalories per person per day), enough to satisfy the needs of Mexican population.

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Nevertheless, the poverty data provided by CONEVAL in section III show that food poverty reduction has stagnated in the last 20 years, specially in rural areas where the rates remain over the 30 percent of the total population (see Graph 3). This phenomenon can be explained when the National Survey of Supply, Food and Nutritional Status in Rural Areas (ENAAEN for its acronym in Spanish) is analyzed. For instance, the ENAAEN shows that in 21 percent of the surveyed localities, fruits are not sold regularly, and in another 13 percent vegetables are not often available. In the case of dairy products, meat, chicken and cold meats, these are not available in 10 percent of the localities (INSP, 2008).

Additionally, despite the small-scale farming represents the predominant production units in the country, they receive less than \$3,200 million pesos from the four programs designed for them, that is five percent of the sector budget (Robles, 2012: 59). Moreover, according to Robles (2012) from 2003 to 2012 the resources designated for rural sector are concentrated on social purposes instead of productive ones,

21 The report is available at <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article334>

22 Food Balance Sheets can be consulted at <http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/FB/FBS/E>

which would imply an incentive to generate autonomous incomes by increasing the capabilities of rural people.

The food sovereignty approach, in this sense, would help to reorient the public policy efforts to improve the productivity of small-scale farmers, by strengthening their capabilities to produce and working as a complement of the social component that is part of the anti-poverty policies. A public policy based on this approach, not only would ensure the local food production and would permit to collocate the surplus in suitable markets but also would allow diversifying their diets, having as a result, an improvement in their well-being.

Second, due to the food sovereignty *supports sustainable livelihoods* and is *compatible with the nature*, it would be key for sustainable development. Over the years, several ecosystems have been modified in the name of economic progress, however the environmental degradation is also a cause of poverty and inequality. Also, the demographic explosion has increased the demand for food, causing air pollution and depletion of all kind of natural resources. For instance, it is estimated that about 37 percent of the national forest cover has been lost, more than 80 percent of fisheries have reached their limit of maximum exploitation, and 45 percent of the national territory has some type of degradation (SEMARNAT, 2006; Carabias, et al, 2012, as cited in Gordillo et al, 2016: 6).

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Moreover, according to the Institute of Studies for Democratic Transition (IETD for its acronym in Spanish), there is only 50 percent of the original vegetation of the country, around 73 percent of water bodies are polluted due to the overuse of agrichemicals in industrial agriculture (2012: 106-107), which implies a greater impact due to the climate change.

Notwithstanding, if a program is implemented based on the food sovereignty approach, it could encourage the sustainability of the natural resources by targeting the key elements on small-scale producers, who have distinguished by making use of conservation practices and soil improvement, and due to their use of polyculture systems that help to mitigate the climate change (FAO, 2012).

Therefore, this public policy package should include not only training courses to improve beneficiaries' skills on ecological conservation but also it should have a component that permit them capitalize these skills in economic social terms. In other words, a public policy based on the food sovereignty, might help to reduce the environmental impact, and at the same time, might provide economic and social incentives in local population to manage their natural resources in a more sustainable way.

Third, the fact that it *localizes food systems and puts the control locally* could help to develop the territories and empower their people. The territory is not only a geographical area, it is also a space where groups of people share history, culture, beliefs and norms, and where they coordinate strategies to revalue their resources based on a specific territorial identity (Schejtman, 2009: 82; Fonte & Ranaboldo, 2007: 12, 15).

The territorial development concept is key for formulating strategies that empower local agents in the decision-making and implementation process and permit a better distribution of the benefits (Fonte & Ranaboldo, 2007: 11).

Nevertheless, a long centralist tradition in public policies in Mexico, has weakened their effectiveness to eradicate poverty, especially for rural population. The anti-poverty policies designed and implemented during late eighties and nineties were designed as compensatory, transitory and detached from productive activities (see discussion on *Oportunidades* and *Procampo* from section IV). Therefore, they were not able to develop capabilities and productive opportunities at a local level, which according to Berdegué et al (2015: 6), caused more migration than induced the development of the territories. Moreover, it was introduced a modernization process biased by regions, sectors and classifying them as viable or nonviable, that has as a result, a severe institutional weakness and social exclusion (Berdegué et al, 2015: 6).

Thus, when the food sovereignty approach takes into consideration the local agents such as producers, consumers, and institutions, not only it would be giving the opportunity to “exploit the comparative advantages that provides the local attributes of a territory which can be expressed as natural resources, cultural products and landscape” (Schejtman, 2009: 93), but also it would help to develop the capabilities such as technical and organizational knowledge, assimilation of technologies and innovation that an integral anti-poverty policy should provide, to improve the autonomous income of the rural people (Schejtman & Berdegué, 2004).

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Additionally, it would permit to solve the institutional fragmentation caused by searching sectorial solutions for structural problems, the incoordination and dispersion of physical and economic resources, the underestimating the importance of social capital, and a blind faith in self-regulation of the markets (Berdegué et al, 2015: 6-7). In other words, the food sovereignty approach would facilitate the development of the territories by strengthening the capabilities of local governments and citizens through the decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes of anti-poverty programs, without excluding participation of extra-territorial agents and institutions in these experiences. Besides, more social participation could increase cooperation among regions, which could connect the variety of regional markets, where local people could increase their well-being by selling goods, providing services, or even, joining efforts to demand better social infrastructure.

Fourth, and one of the most interesting points of the food sovereignty approach, is the *promotion of knowledge and ancestral skills*. Considering that rural communities share in their territories not only natural and economic resources but also history and cultural identity, it is important to include these aspects in a public policy that aims to improve the welfare of the population. According to Fonte & Ranaboldo (2007), “the cultural identity can be expressed in a range of tangible [for example: archeological sites, architecture, landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity, and among others] or intangible [language, music, art, ancestral skills, etcetera] signs”, which can be valued (to obtain an economic benefit) through a suitable development strategy based on the territory (p.10).

Fonte & Ranaboldo (2007) explain that the valorization of the cultural identity is an economic process that can be easily adapted to poor and marginal territories, for at least two reasons: 1) because these territories still preserve their cultural identities due to the practically zero impact of industrialization and globalization processes; and 2) because these experiences are more suitable for rural communities due to their characteristics (p.10). This adaptation process could imply not only the conservation of the knowledge or ancestral skills, but also an alternative to generate incomes that help to eradicate poverty in the regions.

Thus, the empirical evidence²³ associated to this kind of development demonstrates, that the package of services and products are defined and executed by the communities themselves, and the promotion and [often] funding are made by public-private partnerships. The added value that offer this kind of [economic] activity lies in its originality (they are exclusive or very difficult to reproduce), its quality (because they are linked to the communities), and its opportunity to generate non-agricultural employment, improve and diversification of capabilities and local knowledge (Fonte & Ranaboldo, 2007: 13).

Therefore, the promotion of knowledge and ancestral skills are key elements for the designing of a more inclusive and sustainable anti-poverty strategy, which also respects the variety of values and beliefs, and creates opportunities to take advantage of these elements and translate them into economic resources.

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b) Main obstacles of Food Sovereignty approach

During the content of this document was discussed the possibility of the food sovereignty to complement, or even, as an alternative approach to eradicate the urban bias in anti-poverty strategies. It has analyzed the usefulness of the key elements of this approach, starting from the deficiencies and weaknesses that public policies for countryside have shown in the last decades²⁴. However, while it is true that food sovereignty might be useful for improving the well-being of rural populations in the long term, it is also true that has to face some difficulties over the road for achieving its purposes.

For instance, it is highly probable that despite some improvements with the institutional coordination, some bureaucratic inertia would be still present during the process, at least in the beginning of the implementation stage. Nevertheless, the real participation of local population during implementation and monitoring stages could help

23 Some of the most famous examples are: the indigenous craftswomen from Jalk'a de Sucre in Bolivia; the cuisine, the landscape and the architecture of the peasants from the Isla Grande de Chiloé in southern Chile, the Guelaguetza in Oaxaca in southern Mexico, among others. These and other documented experiences can be found in the webpage of the Rural Territorial Development with Cultural Identity (RTD-CI) project from RIMISP - Latin American Center for Rural Development, available at <http://rimisp.org/proyecto/desarrollo-territorial-rural-con-identidad-cultural/>

24 See previous discussion in section IV.

to improve the coordination gradually until reduce it at its minimum. Also, it would be necessary to train the civil servants and try to involve them in different process like the design of implementation in order to inculcate them a real commitment with the development of the communities.

Other example of the difficulties that could face an anti-poverty policy based on the food sovereignty approach is the fact that incorporating democratic processes during different stages of the strategies such as planning or design, could increase the costs (economic and human) of the program, making it not only more expensive, but also slow.

Although it is desirable more local participation (agents and institutions) to improve the governance itself, it is also necessary to find the best way to expedite the processes, avoid distorting them and reduce the operation costs. Additionally, it is important to take into consideration that this approach is thought as a medium and long-term strategy, in order to be able to correct and refine it over time.

Consequently, if these obstacles are effectively overcome, the food sovereignty approach can be a perfect amalgam to complement mainstream anti-poverty policies with more inclusive approaches that consider the wide range of particularities of Mexican rural livelihoods. In other words, this approach would help to reduce the urban bias in poverty alleviation programs by recognizing the realities of the territories.

CONCLUSIONS

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The debate on how poverty is defined and measured seems to continue in force. There have been several contributions to the terminology that helped, to some extent, to establish some general characteristics of the concept. For instance, poverty is now closely related to the lack of opportunities and poor capabilities to generate autonomous income, including an equal access to markets and financial services such as credit, and the relative poor capacity of states to ensure the satisfaction of basic needs.

The importance on this definition is due to its use for designing and implementing public policies for poverty alleviation. That is to say, it is used the theory in the daily life. In this sense, the main efforts have been driven to provide poor people the appropriate tools for enhancing their agency capabilities to demand better public policies, that is to say by empowering them.

It was widely believed that an adequate provision of basic services such as education, health and nutrition, would permit poor people to establish a basic floor of capabilities in order to perform completely their citizenship, however, despite some of these social indicators improved, mainly in urban areas, the levels of poverty reduction remained stagnant in rural societies.

As an evidence of this fact, some international organizations for development have provided information that shows that despite the reduction in the number of poor people during the period of 1990 – 2010 through the world, there are still 1,200 million people living in poverty, and about 75 percent of these people (around 900 million people) live in rural areas (FAO, 2014). Showing clearly that anti-poverty programs have not been sufficient to address poverty in rural populations. Moreover, when the Mexican case was analyzed, it was found that the prevalence of poverty in rural societies is still high. For example, the last multidimensional measurement of poverty (2014) showed that more than 60 percent of the rural population live under poverty (discussed in section III, a). This fact is also replicable when the income approach is used, this method showed that the levels of poverty have stagnated in rural populations for more than 20 years, that is to say that at the beginning of the period (1992) 34 percent of rural people were not able to acquire the basic food basket (food poverty), 44.1 percent did not have sufficient income to acquire the food basket and invest in their health and education (capabilities poverty), and 66.5 percent suffered from income insufficiency to buy the food basket, and make the necessary expenditures in health, education, clothing, housing, and transportation (asset poverty). While at the end of the period (2012) these poverty lines were practically in the same levels: 30.9 percent of the people still lived with food poverty, 40.2 percent suffered from capabilities poverty, and 63.6 percent of rural population suffered from asset poverty (discussed in section III, b).

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These levels have remained since nineties, when two of the main programs for addressing rural poverty were launched in Mexico. Oportunidades and Procampo, have been, however, extremely important to prevent that more people widen poverty numbers during this period, but insufficient to address rural poverty and, in some cases, they caused more inequality and social exclusion (discussed in section IV).

For instance, Oportunidades helped to increase the nutrition, education and health levels by implementing a conditional cash transfer approach where beneficiaries had to attend health workshops and take their children to school and medical appointments, regularly. This program, however, was responsible for some social exclusion and fragmentation among communities due to its target method and selection, where the process was obscure and it was not considered the realities of the rural context, according to some studies. Besides, some experts have argued that other of its weaknesses lies in the fact that does not provide a short-run solution, which could help to face the vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries' families in the present, while they wait to capitalize the investment in their future generations.

Procampo, on its part, has been considered one of the less regressive programs for increase production capabilities in rural Mexico. This fact is due to its wide coverage (2.7 million beneficiaries). Procampo benefited producers who had never been benefited from programs previous to liberalization of the Mexican economy. Nevertheless, this program increased the inequality gap (between industrial producers and small-scale farmers and between the Northern and Southern regions), and it did not permit the transition from traditional grains to higher-value products.

Moreover, other of the main critics to social and productive programs has been the fact that they have been disconnected between each other. In fact, some authors argue that bad decisions on public policies for farmers and small producers have been the cornerstone of the rural poverty in Mexico (Berdegué, et al, 2015), and that the anti poverty policies have not been connected with productive activities, which has hampered the synergies between human capital and autonomous income generation. Therefore, if this connection is fixed, it would signify an investment both in short-and long- runs.

Consequently, this situation (failure of the pro-poor policies) made evident the necessity for developing a new approach that not only considers the necessity of this complementarity between social and economic sectors, but also takes into consideration the particularities of rural societies, as food sovereignty approach suggests.

In this sense, the food sovereignty approach was a result of a wide social mobilization as a result of the disagreement with mainstream methods of food production. According to its authors (La via Campesina), this approach offers a feasible perspective to design more inclusive policies for rural populations, due to its nature. In other words, the main goal of the food sovereignty is to achieve dignity and social justice not only in agricultural policy-making but also in the entire production chain through respect, organization and deliberation. Its utility in the fight against poverty lies in its six fundamental pillars: a) It focuses on food for people. b) Supports sustainable livelihoods. c) Compatible with the nature. d) Localize food systems. e) put the control locally. f) Promotes knowledge and ancestral skills. Therefore, an anti-poverty strategy based on this approach could work as amalgam between productive and social sectors, in which not only would improve human capabilities of beneficiaries, but also their productive skills.

Therefore, the food sovereignty approach might provide a complementary long-term strategy to address poverty in rural areas due to its inclusive nature, respect for the environment and economic fairness. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that this approach should resolve in order to be effective: a) the uncoordinated bureaucratic structures, which weaken the actions of public policy in general, and b) an excessive deliberative process which could increase the costs of the strategy.

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