

# Global Future



## **Transforming Latin America**

*Roberto Rojas, Costa Rican Minister of  
Foreign Affairs and Culture*

## **Fighting Poverty in Latin America**

*David de Ferranti, World Bank Vice President for  
Latin America and the Caribbean*

## **Latin America**

**The struggle for democracy**

## **Democracy requires diversity**

*Israel Batista, Secretary General,  
Latin America Council of Churches*

# Global Future

Second Quarter, 2002

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**Global Future** is published quarterly by World Vision to encourage debate and discussion on development issues.

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ISSN 0742-1524

## Closer to democracy?

**DEMOCRACY** in Latin America and the Caribbean got a shot in the arm last autumn with the passage of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in Lima, Peru. Thirty-four countries came to an agreement on a document they hope will usher in an era of greater democratic freedom.

Even now, months after the signing, hopes remain high that the principles hammered out in Lima will take root and flourish. Still, some who felt such a document was long overdue find themselves unable to shed doubts that its promises will be realised for all peoples. Different this time, however, was that civil society had a voice in the process, and this could prove significant, especially if it continues to play a part in implementing the ideals penned in Lima.

As many contributors to this edition emphasise, however, implementing these principles must go beyond elections every few years. Real democracy must provide avenues for all people to have a hand in the process on a more regular basis. 'We here in Otavalo are striving to promote a participatory society in which we confront and debate ideas openly, and where differing views can actually help us find the best solutions to problems,' says Mario Conejo, mayor of Otavalo, a canton in Ecuador's Ibabura Province. (See his article on page 10.)

Global Future occasionally devotes an entire issue to one region. This edition focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean. Readers on our regular mailing list will receive this issue in English. However, a special Spanish-language version is being printed and distributed in Latin America. To obtain copies, please contact our Global Future e-mail address: [global\\_future@wvi.org](mailto:global_future@wvi.org).

— Randy Miller



# Strengthening the roots of democracy

Manfred Grellert

**THE APPROVAL** of the Democratic Charter of the Americas last September reflects a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of democracy for the Latin America and Caribbean region. The Charter establishes a definition of democracy that goes beyond representation. It is a definition that underscores the promotion and protection of human rights, and includes a greater and more effective participation by civil society. The challenge ahead will be to translate that which is now on paper into a daily reality for each Latin American.

There are two basic aspects of democracy, both of which are important parts of the concept. First, a democracy must represent the interest of its citizens. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan affirmed in *The Economist* in 1999 that '...states are now widely understood to be instruments at the service of their peoples, and not vice versa.' Truly democratic representation must include all citizens, not just those who have influence or economic might. Neither should it represent only the interests of the majority.

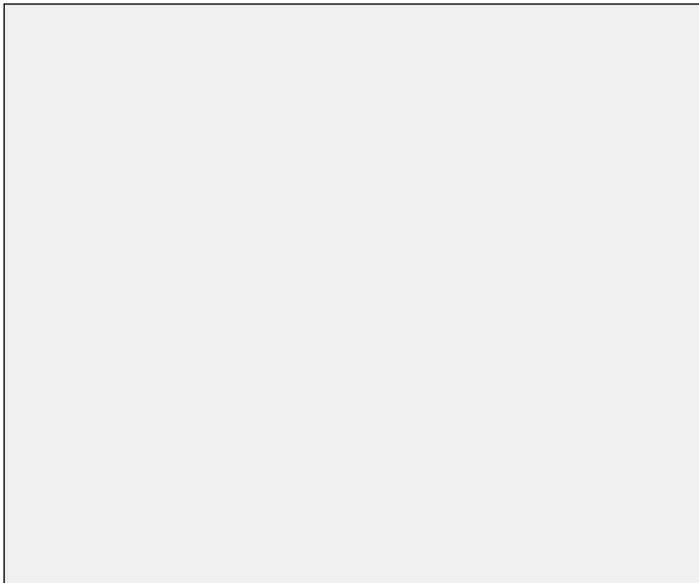
## Attention to minorities

True democracies therefore must pay careful attention to minorities, the marginalised and the excluded. This should be the case not only regarding political and civil matters, but also regarding economic, social and cultural issues. The free trade negotiations, for example, are discussed largely

without taking into account the negative impact that may result in the lives of the majority of the population. There must be a consistency of approach or the notion of a democracy is greatly undermined.

Similarly, a state that tolerates the marginalisation of a large percentage of its population cannot really be characterised as democratic. The construction of democratic societies depends upon the level of real access citizens have to their fundamental human rights. A renouncement of violence, the construction of cultures of

JUAN CARLOS ULATE, REUTERS PICTURE SERVICE



peace, and the search for greater social justice help pave the pathway to democracy.

Secondly, a democracy must be participatory. In addition to the right to vote, citizens must be allowed to consult their elected officials regarding decisions and policies that are likely to affect them. This type of active participation is vital for the development and consolidation of a truly democratic system.

Needless to say, states cannot continue to be founded on structures that are centralised or based on patronage. We must reach greater degrees of decentralisation, representation and credibility. A greater political and management role for local

**True democratic representation must include all citizens, not just those who have economic might.**

government would help boost and consolidate civil society. In this way, the participation of its citizens can grow into new areas, and the breadth, depth and stability of democracy will be enhanced as a consequence.

Recognition of the right to participate implies an obligation on the part of states to create favourable conditions in which this participation can take place. Democratisation, however, is a responsibility that is shared with other actors, such as the political parties and the media, as well as civil society. The international community also plays an important role as a promoter and defender of democracy. We must together seek to create a new global ideology that has a more human face, and one that supersedes the market. The world must embrace the concept of the primacy of human rights, both in the political arena as well as in discussions about trade and structural adjustment.

This is a challenge that belongs to all of us. ■

*Manfred Grellert is Vice President for World Vision's Latin America and Caribbean Region.*

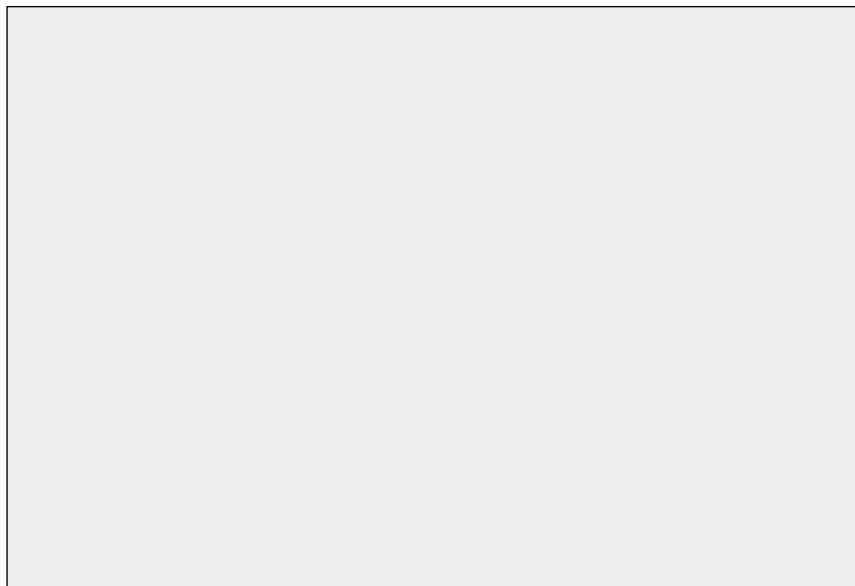
# Transforming Latin America through democracy

Roberto Rojas

**THE APPROVAL** of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in Lima, Peru, last September stands as an historical moment for our hemisphere.

This Democratic Charter symbolises not only the will of the Member States of the Organisation of American States—because it jointly promotes and protects the democracy of the American continents—it also culminates a work process, which is in itself a true democratic exercise.

plete definition of democracy, which, along with its traditional elements—such as constitutionally guaranteed citizens' rights and periodic elections—includes new components such as gender equality, the struggle to eradicate poverty, respect of ethnic and cultural diversity, workers' rights, the importance of education as an effective means of contributing to democracy, protection of the environment, and the constitutional subordination of all state insti-



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*Organisation of American States Secretary General Cesar Gavira (right) speaks during an inauguration session of the OAS meeting in Lima, Peru, 11 September 2001.*

Thirty-four countries, motivated by a sincere commitment to democracy, worked arduously for three weeks to produce a rich, consistent document, whose approval by the General Assembly marked the beginning of a new phase for the OAS.

## A definition of democracy

The Inter-American Democratic Charter is an extremely important instrument. First, it gives us a com-

tions to the legally established civilian authority.

Above all, this Charter devotes entire chapters to both human rights and holistic development and the struggle against poverty. Because, in reality, democracy is simply a system of government and form of social co-existence. It is a means of serving an ultimate goal, which is the well-being of all human beings. We must never lose sight of the fact that democracy is

at the service of people, and that democracy is precisely the system of government that permits better enjoyment and protection of human rights.

For that reason, we are delighted that this Charter reaffirms in its preamble and its articles the importance of continually developing and strengthening the Inter-American system of human rights for the purpose of consolidating democracy, and the will of the member states of working toward that goal.

## At the service of the citizens

Just as democracy is a means to the ultimate goal of well-being for the people, the state and the government are structures that likewise must be at the service of the citizens. Therefore, when the democratic order of a country is altered, and the human rights of the citizens are affected, the state sovereignty principle must give way to the international community's interest in protecting the people. And this is precisely the other main virtue of the Democratic Charter: to establish mechanisms for the collective safeguarding of democracy in the hemisphere.

To this end, the Inter-American Democratic Charter signifies substantial progress in the collective defence of the well-being of the citizens in that it provides us with a broader definition of democracy. This will allow the community of American states, therefore, to react in the face of attacks against democracy that go beyond the traditional coup d'état, as established in the present OAS Charter and in other relevant instruments. The Inter-American Democratic Charter is, in short, a proclamation of the American states that democracy matters, and that the OAS is preparing itself to respond adequately to the new challenges of the times.

Likewise, the OAS must also be proud that this Democratic Charter has been drafted, for the first time in the history of the organisation, by taking into consideration the opinions of

civil society. In the meeting of secretaries of state and accredited NGO representatives in the general assembly held in San Jose, Costa Rica last June, NGOs admonished us that the Democratic Charter was not so democratic in that the drafters of the instrument had not consulted with civil society.

Thus, the mandate of the San Jose resolution on the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which recommended that the Charter project be presented to the public in order to obtain the opinion of the civilian population, is uniquely important. We must congratulate the Permanent Council for its wise decision to facilitate access to this instrument through a portal opened on the Web for that purpose by the OAS, and also for the diligent way in which the Working Group chairmanship conveyed to the government delegates the many opinions received through that portal.

Costa Rica conducted its own consultation with civil society on 9 and 10 July. This consultation was useful to us in obtaining input that subsequently was incorporated into our proposals, and much of which was ultimately included in the final text. We are pleased that many other countries also conducted their own consultations, which likewise enriched the debate and the final outcome. For this reason, the Inter-American Democratic Charter reflects a genuine democratic experience, in which not only the 34 Member States of the OAS converge, but also thousands of inhabitants of the region.

### **A long way to go**

Despite the significant progress the Democratic Charter represents, there is still a long way to go in the difficult maturation process of the Inter-American System. To begin with, we still need to improve and strengthen the Human Rights Protection and Promotion System. It is urgent to provide greater resources to the Inter-American Court and Commission so that it can handle the growing work-

load. To this end, we should begin to take the necessary steps so that these two bodies will be able to operate permanently. The Human Rights Protection and Promotion System is really the greatest guarantee for safeguarding human dignity and the principles that characterise a democratic state which, through its laws, upholds the rights of the citizens.

Likewise, we must step up our efforts to eradicate poverty in the American continents. It is appalling that in Latin America, in which millions of people continue to live in abject poverty, US\$30 billion goes for military expenditures. Even more surpris-

### **The state and the government are structures that must be at the service of the citizens.**

ing is the fact that these annual military expenses, far from diminishing from their levels at the beginning of the past decade, have been steadily rising.

At this juncture, characterised by the opening up of trade, cultural and political frontiers, as well as by a growing integration among the nations, there should be no room for thinking about the possibility of armed conflicts among countries of this hemisphere. The threats to security we face today have their origins in poverty, ignorance, crime, corruption and the lack of opportunities for developing the human potential of our citizens. In short, they originate in the lack of democracy, as the Charter correctly states.

In particular, it is clear that military spending does not necessarily contribute to achieving the security of our countries. On the contrary, as long as military expenditures continue to consume resources that ought to go for human development, that spending may actually be contributing to the climate of internal tension that

stems from poverty, exclusion and ignorance. Moreover, a greater military offensive could easily lead to a tendency of preferring to resort to arms rather than strategies of conflict resolution, which diplomacy and international law provide to resolve differences between nations.

### **New approaches to security**

History has demonstrated that democracy is not built on military power, just as it has demonstrated that democracies do not usually go to war with one another. Therefore, it behooves us to debate and conceive of new approaches to security in which the focus of action is on the well-being of the people and the building of democracy.

This is the challenge the Organisation of American States has before it: to realise that the security of our countries lies within our democracies. Hence, we must strive earnestly to put into practice the values and principles contained in the Democratic Charter. To the extent that the priorities of our governments are education, the struggle against poverty, the responsible, wholesome exercise of the public power, and the respect and promotion of the human rights of all people, we will build peaceful, developed, secure societies. To the degree that we achieve this, we will no longer need to rely on arms or armies to keep us secure. Most importantly, neither will we need to apply the democratic clause established by the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Let us focus our efforts now on building the democracy we desire. The Inter-American Democratic Charter shows us the way—it is a road we know is not easy, but it is one which we cannot avoid. ■

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*Roberto Rojas is Costa Rica's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture. This text was adapted from his presentation before last autumn's 28th meeting of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States.*

# Fighting poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean

David de Ferranti

**OF THE WORLD'S** major developing regions, Latin America and the Caribbean is the one closest to America's shores. This has resulted in close integration of most of the region's economies with that of the United States. When the United States is on a roll, this is good news. But during an economic downturn in the United States, such as that beginning in 2001, Latin America and the Caribbean—and especially their poor—suffer consequences.

The U.S. slowdown, combined with sluggish economies in Europe and Japan, and deepened by the September 11 terrorist attacks, has driven down growth across the

Americas. International prices for coffee, sugar, copper and other commodity exports important to Latin America have dropped. Businesses are losing money, employees are losing jobs, farmers face low prices, governments are under pressure, and credit flows have fallen. Economic growth—the vital engine in the fight against poverty—dropped from 3.8% in 2000 to below 1% in 2001, with some countries in negative territory.

Even before this slowdown, about 170 million people were living in poverty, defined as living on less than US\$2 a day, in Latin America and the Caribbean. That is about one-third of the region's population of 510 million.

So even if U.S. and regional recovery is around the corner, poverty will remain a stubborn challenge, especially when one considers that the population of Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to reach 700 million in 25 years. So what's the right way to fight poverty in these circumstances?

History has taught some lessons. Since 1970, progress in reducing poverty has been uneven. The proportion of poor fell quite dramatically in the 1970s, then got stuck in the so-called 'lost decade' of the 1980s, to decrease again, this time more gradually, in the 1990s.

The most dramatic reductions in poverty

have coincided with economic growth. As a general rule, poverty declines when economies grow. Chile is the clearest example, as steady growth there has been accompanied by a reduction in poverty from 45.1% of the population in 1987 to 21.7% in 1998.

But even with economic growth, there is evidence that the extremely

***The poor want leaders who emerge from their own communities, and who remain committed to those communities.***

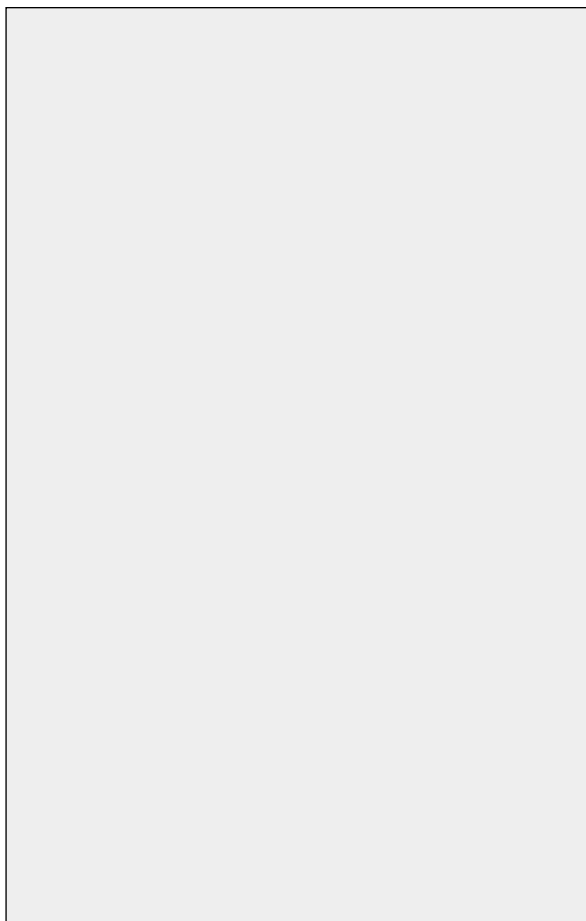
poor—about 70 million people living on less than US\$1 a day in Latin America and the Caribbean—do not automatically reap benefits. In some cases, such as those of remote communities in the rainforests of Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, or that of people living on the altiplano of Peru or Bolivia, it is in part because they live far away from centres of economic activity.

A recent study, 'Voices of the Poor', based on interviews with 60,000 poor people in 60 countries, also offers lessons. When asked, the poor themselves said they needed more access to opportunities, a more empowered voice in policy decisions and public institutions, and a greater sense of safety and security. In practical terms, this can mean, for example, legal title to a piece of land, which a farmer needs in order to secure a small loan. The study found that poor people want leaders who emerge from their own communities, and who remain committed to those communities. Many poor people also emphasised that they live in fear, and do not have confidence in the ability or commitment of the police to protect them from violence and crime.

**A comprehensive approach**

In the light of these lessons, many policymakers and experts are re-

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thinking their approaches to development. Over the years, development practitioners have agreed and disagreed on a wide range of strategies to address the poverty problem. Emphasis has shifted from export-driven growth, to import-substituting industrialisation, to 'basic human needs', to building infrastructure, to getting the macroeconomics right, among others. Now, in the first decade of the 21st century, these earlier experiences have resulted in a focus on the need for a comprehensive approach that includes three fundamental pillars, namely the economic pillar, the social-political-cultural pillar, and the environmental pillar.

Under the economic pillar, the goal is to foster a healthy, growing economy with a welcoming investment climate, in which jobs are created and incomes raised. These, in turn, generate tax revenues to finance public action to help fight poverty. Accomplishing all this requires sound macroeconomic policies, a realistic exchange rate, governments that function well, with sound judicial systems and effective checks on corruption. A healthy financial sector with solvent banks is important, as is a network of roads, and a telecommunications sector that delivers digital-age connectivity.

The second pillar captures the concept of empowerment. Societies are dysfunctional when large numbers of people are excluded. People cannot climb out of poverty unless they have a chance to participate, to have a voice and a vote that gives them a measure of control over their own destiny. To be able to take action themselves to improve their lives, the poor—especially women, indigenous people and Latin Americans of African origin—need basic tools, including access to education and health services, democratic processes, and safety-net programs in times of crisis.

The environmental pillar encompasses the idea of sustainability in its broadest sense. Achieving a significant reduction in poverty is of limited

value if it is not permanent. It is undermined if it is accomplished at the cost of destroying the physical environment, or depleting natural resources that will be needed in the future.

This rethinking of how best to fight poverty is also the result of positive experience at the grass-roots level. It is drawn from the many examples of development projects that have worked, delivering incontestable results and benefits for poor people.

### **Replicating success**

In some cases, local success can be replicated more widely. In education, for example, enrolments of over 90% for primary schools across Latin America offer evidence that home-grown reforms have delivered success. In El Salvador, a pilot programme,

### ***In Brazil, health workers no longer wait for the sick to show up at clinics, but go into the communities.***

now adopted by many other countries, has replaced a top-down educational approach with vibrant, re-born schools whose management actively involves local communities and parents. The result: rising test scores.

Studies show education is the key to escaping poverty and competing in a global marketplace. To encourage poor parents to keep their children in school, low-income families with young children in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica and other countries now receive grants to supplement their meagre resources, provided their children stay in school. No school, no money. Does this work? Absolutely, evaluation studies confirm. Now, the challenge is to raise the quality of the education offered to these children.

Or take health care. Immunisation and communicable disease programs have been revitalised across the region, and new public-private part-

nerships launched against HIV/AIDS in Brazil, the Caribbean and elsewhere. In Brazil, health workers no longer wait for the sick to show up at clinics, but go into the community to identify people who need services, such as pregnant women, and make sure they get help. Bolivia and Peru have begun programmes that pay only when public clinics can prove they are providing prenatal and well-baby services. In Colombia, subsidised health insurance coverage among the poorest rose from almost nothing to over 40% in the late 1990s. Mexico has extended basic health coverage to 10 million people scattered in rural villages.

Countries are also targeting a long-standing constraint to investment on the part of farmers, small urban entrepreneurs and households—their lack of secure title to their land. At least 10 countries, including Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and Nicaragua, are simplifying arcane procedures for property registration, and delegating implementation to the local level.

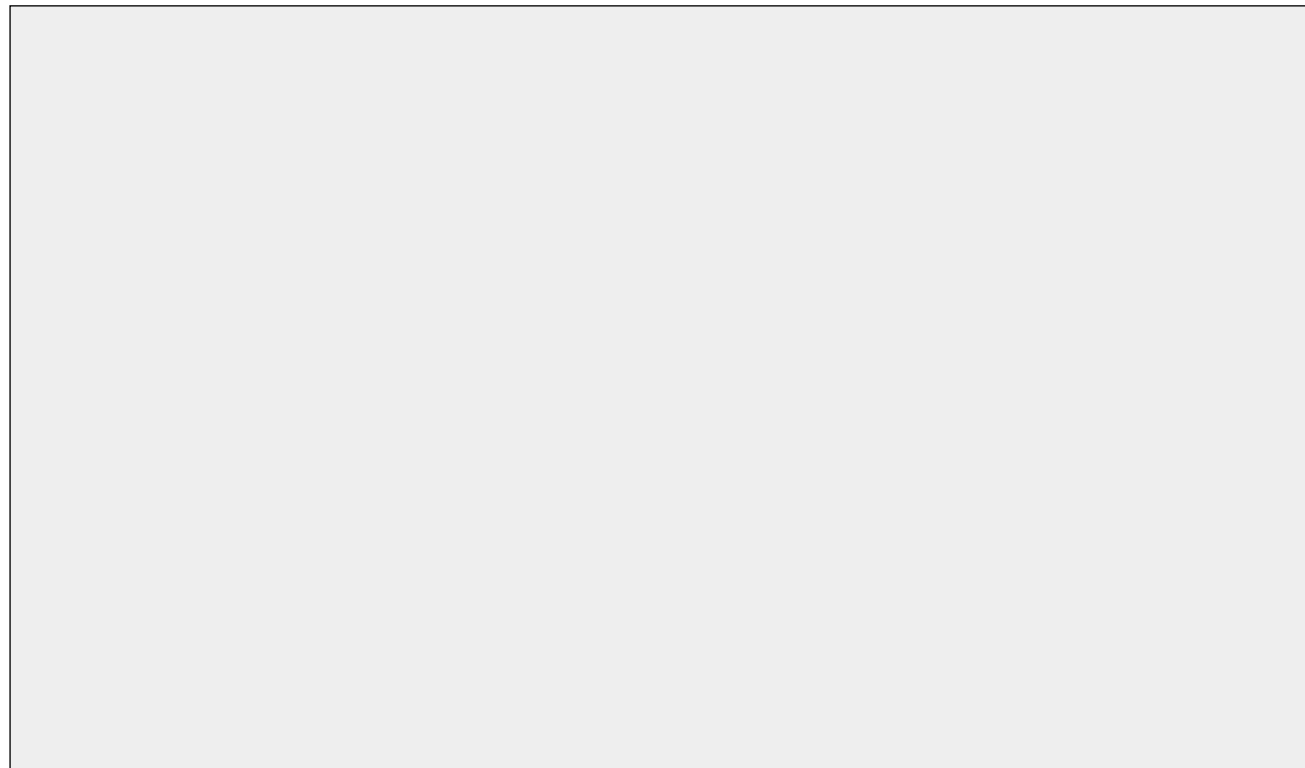
Support and solidarity from the northern part of the Americas is an important factor in the prospects for the war on poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Voluntary efforts play a vital role, especially at the local level. These must be complemented by action by governments on the policy front.

### **Access to northern markets**

Part of this 'rethinking' of development—based on the observation that declining poverty is correlated with economic growth—has led to the conclusion that Latin America and the Caribbean need greater access to markets in the north, including markets in the United States and Canada. Also needed is greater trade access among developing countries themselves, including among Latin American and Caribbean countries.

This necessary condition emerges from the finding in a recent study that those countries that increased their integration into the world economy





since 1980 achieved higher growth, longer life expectancy, better schooling—and reduced poverty.

But for Latin America to take full advantage of the potential that trade offers, the rich countries must be willing to undertake meaningful trade opening, including putting agriculture and textiles on the World Trade

### **Success in the struggle against poverty depends on all of us, working in a climate of trust and confidence.**

Organisation negotiating table. These are the sectors that matter most to many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Labour-intensive enterprises, such as clothing, footwear and agricultural markets, are extensively protected in both rich and developing countries. Protection in agriculture comes through production and export subsidies and price supports, which are running at close to US\$1 billion per

day in OECD countries, more than five times the level of all development aid.

Complete liberalisation of merchandise trade and elimination of subsidies could add US\$1.5 trillion to developing country incomes in the ten years following the liberalisation, according to a recent study.

Latin America and the Caribbean are part of this picture. Trade liberalisation would make a big difference to the region. Another study based on 1995 figures estimates that global merchandise trade liberalisation would add a total of US\$35.7 billion a year to incomes in Latin America and the Caribbean. The same study shows that about a third of total gains for developing-country incomes from trade liberalisation would accrue to Latin America and the Caribbean. These two studies suggest that the region would stand to gain between US\$357 and US\$500 billion in the ten years following such a trade liberalisation.

While trade opening is a necessary condition, it must be accompanied by increased development assis-

tance, targeted at the poorest countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, to build their human capital and strengthen their ability to compete in the global economy. In addition to aid, the poorest countries need debt relief, too, with the savings directed to effective poverty reduction programmes.

Success in the struggle against poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean depends on all of us, working in a climate of trust and confidence, combining sound diagnosis with effective action. Most of the burden of the task falls on the shoulders of people in the region, hence the importance of local efforts being 'owned' by local communities, and national plans owned by the countries implementing them. Outside formulas applied without such local ownership won't work. But solidarity from outsiders, including voluntary organisations, bilateral donors, and international financial institutions, is quite a different thing, and it is essential. ■

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*David de Ferranti is the World Bank's Vice-President for Latin America and the Caribbean.*



# Restoring human rights and democracy in Latin America

Roberto Cuellar M.

**JUST A FEW YEARS AGO**, citizens of the Americas were calling out for nations of this hemisphere to 'return to democracy.' This process has begun to take hold. In some countries, this was done through dialogue and bringing together opposing factions. In others, it took place with the help of international peace organisations. And in others, it occurred through a painful process that brought transition but left open wounds.

The overall picture today is less discouraging than it was 25 years ago. Although much remains to be done, we have made good progress in the protection and promotion of human rights. There is more room for exercising free speech. And we have witnessed more elections and formal expressions of democracy.

In all cases, the restoration and consolidation of democracy in the region has been sustained by the development of the doctrine of human rights, and by promoting and defending those rights. Those were key factors in making that transition, particularly in the strengthening of civil society, reforming the state, and institutionalising the election and re-establishing electoral bodies.

Unresolved problems remain, however, such as the endemic vulnerability of the economy and the exclusion of certain social sectors from the benefits of progress. Added to these are threats to democracy today, such as a new breed of authoritarianism, a crisis in the political party system, and the emergence of populism, which foments corruption and degrades political activism.

Over the past 25 years, different social sectors organised themselves to defend and procure rights. These include the most general and basic, such as the right to life and funda-

mental freedoms, to more specific ones, such as gender equality and respect for ethnic and cultural diversity. Early pro-democracy struggles against authoritarianism were led by a galaxy of non-governmental human rights organisations. As a result of

## **Ensuring and enforcing human rights requires dialogue among key actors now more than ever.**

their actions and their own development, human rights organisations have grown and become consolidated as social networks, often specialising in a particular area. In several countries of the region today, human rights organisations observe and monitor electoral processes, demand accountability and fight against corruption.

## **Free elections**

Further, the reform and modernisation of the state over the past two decades included more changes favourable to human rights. One of the earliest and most significant of these was the re-establishment of free elections. Another important element has been the creation of human rights advocacy agencies. Today, reforms in the administration of justice and education include the issue of human rights. Unfortunately, they have yet to show significant results. In some countries, important efforts are being made in re-educating the military and police forces so that they respect ethnic diversity and ensure gender equality. Recently, with governmental consent, several corruption control commissions and truth commissions were created (where clarification is urgent-

ly needed). Compliance with state obligations regarding economic, social and cultural rights, however, is lacking, resulting in growing social gaps, as well as a trail of poverty, tension, insecurity and social breakdown.

The international human rights community was very active during the last quarter century. The number of instruments adopted in this regard, many of which have been ratified over the past decade, has grown significantly. Several world conferences (Beijing, Stockholm, Vienna, Durban) marked commitments to a common agenda. Investments in bilateral and multilateral cooperation in human rights objectives have been maintained, and have come to be considered part of the investment in development. Some serious international conflicts have found their solution under the protection of human rights, and those responsible for crimes against humanity are being tried. Much of the international co-operation was aimed at supporting the development of elections, as they are an indispensable prerequisite for government legitimacy and credibility, and often a condition for receiving technical and financial aid.

Ensuring and enforcing human rights requires dialogue among key actors now more than ever. We must objectively identify areas of progress, stagnation and setbacks, and discuss solutions in which each actor—civil society, the state, the international community—assumes responsibility for its part. As stated earlier, electoral democracy appears to be technically assured. But we must continue to struggle against authoritarianism in both its old and new forms, and go forward from formal democracy to participative democracy.

Democracies can only be sustained by the approval of the people, and that approval can only be attained and sustained when ordinary citizens are receiving ongoing benefits and when they have the power to decide on the political destiny of their society. It is inconceivable that a system

will remain unscathed when voters are chronically discontented.

Formal democracies need ways to provide citizens greater opportunities to participate in their society. Many traditional politicians, however, maintain that there is no need for this—that formal, electoral politics and democratic procedures are sufficient. Citizen groups do not dispute the need for electoral politics. But they recognise a need for something beyond this in order to bring about full participation and representation in a democracy.

One of the key lessons learned from the discussions on the Inter-American Democratic Charter Project—which began in San Jose, Costa Rica, within the 31st period of sessions of the General Assembly of the OAS, and which ended in Lima, Peru, during an extraordinary OAS session (September 2001)—is that there is a false dichotomy between representative democracy and participative democracy.

Our hemisphere is comprised of many Americas, characterised by their

diversity. Women, children, poor people and ethnic groups (in some cases not minorities) frequently are excluded from the dynamics and practice of political participation in all of its forms. Democracy is not exclusively representative or participative. In other words, it must be sensitive to the inequalities and inequities that are so prevalent in our countries. ■

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*Roberto Cuellar M. is Executive Director of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IHR).*

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## Democracy and indigenous peoples

*Patricio Zhingri-T.*

**FOR LATIN AMERICA'S** indigenous peoples, true democracy involves participation that is egalitarian and equitable, excluding none, and entrusting the majority with decision-making power free of external pressure. This age-old philosophy has been handed down for generations by our elders and leaders.

Nevertheless, although some of these principles can be found in many of our constitutions—even here in Ecuador—in everyday practice, they simply are not followed. Yes, 'democratic participation' is often touted by those in public office and the dominating class. And people do participate in elections. But voting, by itself, is not enough to fulfil the democratic principles our elders hoped we could live by. In elections, oftentimes, money rules. The candidate with the most propaganda or the one who gives away the most gifts usually wins.

For indigenous peoples in Latin America, true democracy is often elusive, at best. If we indigenous peoples have recovered some of our rights as human beings, if we have gained any ground, recovered some of our land, participated in elections, enjoyed

some of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, it is due largely to the struggles and uprisings that have occurred over the past 500 years. But it has cost us. Many paid with their lives, and thousands have endured persecution and witnessed the repression of their leaders. In light of this, we have to ask, is this how true democracy is supposed to look?

In Ecuador, for example—and not only for indigenous peoples, but for most of the poor, who make up more than 85% of the population—there is no participation. And the situation is even worse when it comes to decision-making in the country. Decisions about such things as the national budget or basic rights for indigenous peoples are made by a select group at the top that includes bankers, entrepreneurs, politicians and the governments in power. In fact, the same is often true at local, provincial and county levels, where we see the same neo-liberal system in force.

### Beyond the ballot box

Since indigenous peoples alone comprise 45% of the country's population, we believe we should have a say in how things are done, beyond merely a vote at election time. We should be able to participate in the decision-making process every day.

Our struggle will continue, not only for indigenous peoples, but also for other excluded social sectors and the poor. Since the Ecuadoran indige-

nous movement is one of the most important at this historical juncture, we believe it is vital that we carefully create and present specific, viable proposals regarding how to implement our rights and participate fully and with equality in the democratic life of the nation.

In recent years, we have enjoyed favourable exchanges with our sister peoples in other countries with whom we continue to nurture the dream for unity voiced by leaders such as Rumiñahui, Atahualpa, Tupac Amaru, Tupak Katari, Dolores Cacuango, Simón Bolívar and José Martí. These visionary individuals dreamed of a continent with no borders and no poverty, one in which there would be equality, fairness and participation by all—in short, a continent where there would be true democracy.

Under the present neo-liberal system—which has had its day—we truly believe there will never be genuine democracy. That system will always be exclusive, racist, imposing, overbearing, and constantly persecuting its opponents. Thus, we will continue to fight against it on behalf of social justice for all. True democracy with equal participation will only come about through a change in structure. ■

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*Patricio Zhingri-T. is Director of Communications for ECUARUNARI-CONAIE.*

# Citizen participation in the electoral process

Jaime Tercero Guadamuz

**NATIONAL ELECTIONS** provide a great opportunity to assess a nation's democratic development. An election involves nearly all of the institutions of a country, due to its multi-disciplinary nature and the thousands of organisational tasks carried out at the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral phases. Close observation of the dynamics of an election allows us to assess the soundness of state institutions, the political maturity of a society's main actors, the level of involvement of the civilian entities and, in general, the adherence to democratic rules. It is an opportune moment for evaluating citizen participation and the level of citizen confidence in the political system and the nation.

Nicaragua elected a new president last November. In those elections, 2.5 million voters participated, and three political parties submitted candidates: the Constitutionalist Liberal Party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front,

and the Conservative Party. More than 9,500 voting stations were opened, and 11,000 electoral foreign and national observers were present. In addition to the president and vice-president of the country, national and departmental representatives were elected to the National Assembly and the Central American Parliament.

The climate was tense during the elections. Citizens were fearful about the outcome, as polls all indicated a close race. None of the candidates appeared to be ready to lose. The president even promised to declare a state of emergency if any disturbances erupted.

## Efforts by civil society

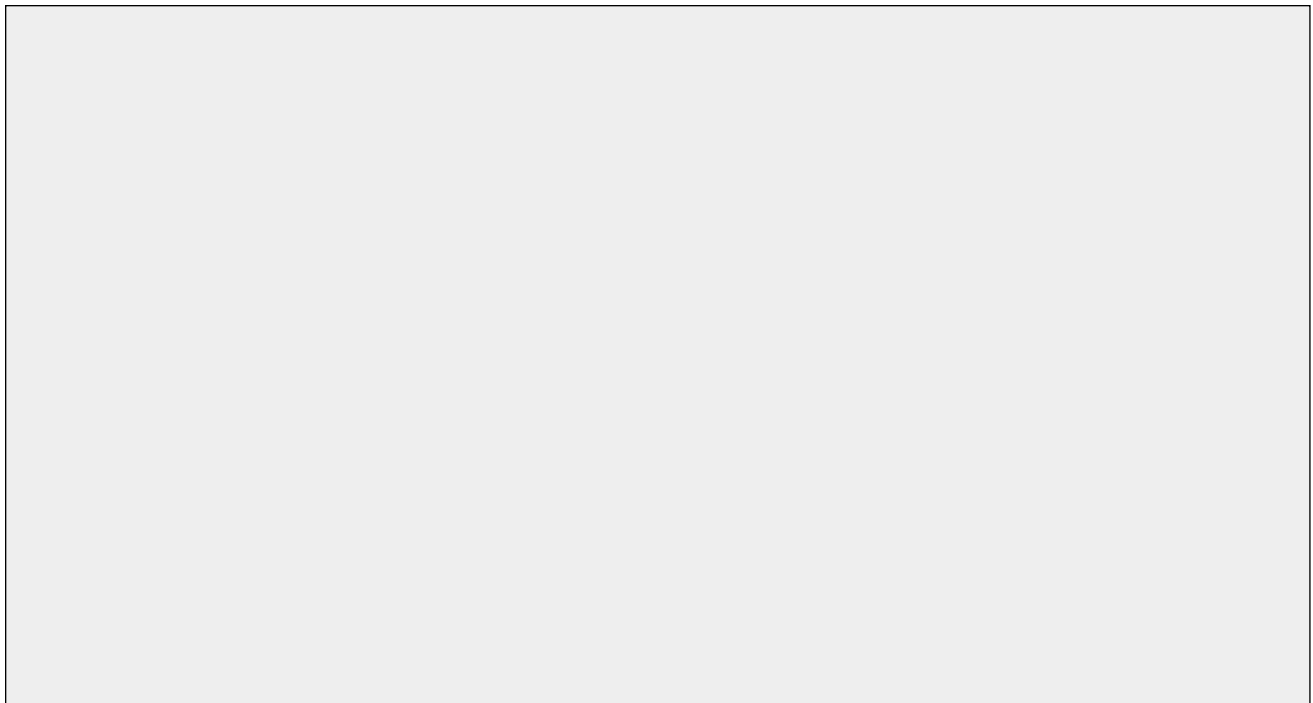
One of the things that helped diffuse tensions leading up to and during the elections were efforts by members of civil society in leading workshops and voter education initiatives. These individuals and organisations

sought to promote a climate of peace, regardless of the results of the electoral race. The emphasis in all of these workshops was on the need to create a peaceful environment in communities during the electoral and post-electoral periods.

To everyone's relief, the elections ended in an atmosphere of peace. The Liberal Constitutionalist Party received 56% of the votes, the National Sandinista Liberation Front received 42%, and the Conservative Party received 1%. To be sure, the work of peace promotion carried out by civil society organisations played a part in the civil-mindedness achieved in those elections.

Involvement by civil society in an election process can make a difference, as we observed last fall in this situation. Participation by the general population was very high. Our hope is that we can learn from these experiences and not only improve the electoral process, but also find ways to strengthen and enhance democracy, in general. ■

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REUTERS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY OSWALDO RIVAS

# Making national changes from the local arena

Mario Conejo

**INDIANS ARE LAZY**, dirty, ignorant, stupid, thieving; whites are intelligent, cultured, honourable and clean. Such are the stereotypes those of us in Ecuador have endured for centuries. They have been ingrained in our society since the colonial period.

There are still sectors of our society in which people believe that intelligence is related to the colour of one's skin. Sadly, some of us on the receiving end of these discriminatory attitudes have come to believe these things, ourselves. We have developed an inferiority complex. We have learned to see ourselves through the eyes of our 'masters.'

Images and attitudes like these are damaging from a human perspective, of course. But they also thwart democracy. Equality and full participation in society—prerequisites for any functioning democracy—are impossible as long as such prejudice and bigotry exist. For years, such attitudes

have kept true democracy from thriving in Ecuador. But, in some communities at least, things are beginning to change.

In Otavalo, I know from personal experience that, as these attitudes change, democracy becomes stronger. In Otavalo, a canton in Ibabura Province, we are well aware of our differences. But we Indians and mestizos are becoming more and more aware

***We Indians and mestizos are becoming more and more aware of the fact that in our differences lies great strength.***

of the fact that in our differences lies great strength. And that, if we unite and clearly define our objectives, we can build a better society. My being elected mayor is the result of an

awareness process that has taken place in Otavalo over the past several years. Statistics here show that we have the backing of whites, mestizos and indigenous peoples, giving us a consensus for exploring new and better ways to manage ourselves.

We here in Otavalo are striving to promote a participatory society in which we confront and debate ideas openly, and where differing views can actually help us find the best solutions to problems. Right now, we have developed a way of operating that reflects what we want for our town and our families. In the first phase we had general meetings. Following this, we worked with the those elected as representatives of various committees. We then formed a town development council.

Otavalo could be an example in our country as we move toward a more participative democracy, where opportunities to voice opinions are provided for anyone who has something to offer, and where the various peoples have a right to promote their cultures and traditions. As a mestizo, I am well aware of my background, and am proud of both my Indian and my Spanish ancestry. And, since I love both parts of my heritage, I respect them. Only people who respect themselves can respect others.

We must go forward in these processes in the local arena. As democracy broadens its scope, we will transform our culture and our behaviour. I believe it is possible for us to establish a system at the national level that will enable us to build a new kind of society, and a much sounder democracy in which we are all free to express our identities. ■

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*Mario Conejo is a member of Pachakutik, an Ecuadorian indigenous political movement. He is also the mayor of Otavalo, a canton in Ibabura Province, Ecuador.*

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# Poverty erodes democracy

Wilma Salgado

**SINCE ITS RETURN** to democracy just over three decades ago, Ecuador has had to cope with a fluctuating economy. A debt crisis in the 1980s was followed by a somewhat stable period in the mid-1990s, when living conditions were slightly improved. Since then, however—particularly since 1998—we have had to cope with the worst economic crisis ever, accompanied by a dramatic increase in poverty, which has contributed to an erosion of democracy.

Democracy, as we had once hoped it would, has not succeeded in solving our national problems, especially corruption and poverty—although the latter problem has structural roots that can be traced to the colonial era. This crisis has been intensified by mismanagement of economic policy. Additionally, Ecuador has been subject to agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other inter-

national organisations, which have been co-perpetrators of this situation through pressure they have exerted to ensure that neo-liberal policies are applied.

## Accomplices to the crisis

We must find new forms of organisation so that all citizens can become actively involved in shaping their destiny. The need for such reform is even more urgent when we consider that, under the complicity of the governments and the consent of the international entities, the large bank debtors and accomplices to the current crisis seek to liquidate their debts while the state continues to operate the way it once did under the corrupt management of the former bankers, who today are fugitives from justice. All of this has caused a phenomenal rise in poverty: from 56% in 1998 to 69% in 1999.

We must denounce every act of

corruption. If we do not, we become accessories to the crisis. But censure is only part of the citizens' duty. True participation goes beyond that. It presupposes social organisation, the pursuit of alternatives for correcting problems, and active participation in deploying solutions.

The ecology and human rights movements are examples that should

***We must find new forms of organisation so that all citizens can become actively involved in shaping their destiny.***

be emulated. We also have a Civilian Corruption Control Commission and citizen groups monitoring foreign debt, which foster citizen participation. Of course, these are elementary forms of participation, which we continue to promote. We cannot allow the IMF, which so many at the international level have questioned, continue to impose its policies on us. ■

*Wilma Salgado is an investigator for the Andean People's Action Centre in Ecuador.*



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# The news media and 'citizenisation'

José Ignacio Lopez-Vigil

**FOR MOST PEOPLE**, talking part in democracy often means little more than slipping a ballot into a voting box every few years, then waiting for the next elections. That representative democracy—for whatever relative value it may have—would lose its meaning if it were not effectively supervised, monitored, and backed up by a participative democracy, in which

media play a crucial role. They provide the word and the public image, without which citizenisation would not be possible. One way people become fully engaged citizens is by speaking in public. To put it one way, if you do not exist in the mass media, you do not exist, for that is the space that permits you to build a public presence.

The news media, therefore, con-

obligations and accept the oppressor's ruse: a little bread and a little circus.

Meanwhile, there are many small, local media that have managed to escape the grip of the large news chains. They are giving the floor back

**The mass media today provide a platform for citizen building and for the exercise of democracy.**

to the people, allowing them to express their views, which might take the form of anything from requesting

a song to announcing a social service. But these things must not be underestimated, because when people gain self-esteem through the public media, when they speak, when they make a presentation, their importance in the eyes of the community grows. Also, when people express their opinions in an interview, when they speak publicly and discuss issues, and when they make demands, they are exercising their citizenship.

As citizens here in Ecuador increase their awareness, they become agents of development. The indigenous movement, with its positive and negative aspects, is extremely

important in this country and in this understanding of citizenship. We still have a long way to go, but at least some noise is being made, from street demonstrations to journalism, that is more attentive to the needs of the people. ■

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WORLD VISION PHOTO BY MARCO CEDILLO COBOS

the citizenry is genuinely involved in politics. To accomplish this, we must have citizens who are truly informed and involved in local and international issues. Yet our countries, for the most part, are made up of inhabitants who carry identity cards in their wallets, but lack a citizen conscience.

## Informed citizens

How do we go about 'citizenising' our population? True citizens are informed citizens. Therefore, the news

tribute powerfully to the citizenisation of our countries: It is the public voice and image that allow you to voice your opinions. The mass media today provide a platform for citizen building and for the exercise of democracy.

Obviously, many broadcasting stations have sold out to the consortiums and the trans-national companies which, far from building citizenship, tend to anaesthetise the public so they forget about their rights and

# Violence and exclusion in Latin America

David Westwood

**LATIN AMERICA** is a violent region. Studies point to the fact that, in almost all the Latin American countries, violence is amongst the first five main causes of death; it is now the main cause of death in Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, and Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The murder rate in Latin America has placed the region in second place in the world, second only to sub-Saharan Africa, a region characterized by lengthy armed conflicts.<sup>2</sup> These levels of violence are corrosive and threaten the gains that have been made across the region in terms of democracy over previous years.

One might ask why the rates of violence are so high. There is no easy answer. Some place the blame on the nature of the Conquest, forgetting that violence predates the arrival of the Spanish. Others point to possible genetic causes—that it has something to do with the Spanish or indigenous blood. More recently, greater emphasis has been placed on the links with poverty and underdevelopment, unfulfilled basic needs and social inequality.<sup>3</sup> The truth is that violence in Latin America and the Caribbean is caused by a whole range of issues. Issues that are not only the generators, promoters and facilitators of violence, but that are themselves exacerbated by violence, effectively creating a downward spiral that grows stronger and stronger.

## Violence of poverty

Violence manifests itself in many guises. On a first level, there is the violence of poverty, social inequality and lack of opportunities. Around 37% of the region's popula-

tion (around 185 million people)<sup>4</sup> currently lives below the poverty line. We also continue to have the worst income distribution in the world.<sup>5</sup> The informal sector employs some 47%<sup>6</sup> of the urban population and a further 8.5% of the population is unemployed.<sup>7</sup> These factors combined lead

***On one level, there is the violence of poverty, which results in social inequality and lack of opportunities.***

to an economic and ensuing social and political marginalisation of an ever-growing number of people.

The armed conflicts and violent legacy of the past create environments in some countries that are conducive to violence, where the lack of effective human development policies,

are complemented by the availability of small-calibre weapons, and a whole generation of people trained for violence.

Discrimination and neglect constitutes another form of violence, as large sections of the population continue to suffer due to issues of race, gender, sex and age, to name but a few. Amongst those most marginalized are the indigenous, those of African descent, and women. Sexism and a patriarchal system are strongly reflected in the statistics on domestic violence; between 30-50% of women in Latin America, depending on the country, suffer from psychological violence, and between 10-35% are affected by physical violence in their own homes.<sup>8</sup>

Another form of violence is the denial of citizenship to children and youth. Although legally recognised as subjects with rights, they are still not really considered to be social actors but rather as still 'belonging' to their parents. Of the 185 million children and young people in the region, some 6 million suffer violent abuse and another 80,000 die each year in their own homes.<sup>9</sup> They also experience abuse, murder and sexual exploitation on the streets. Children begin to



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able to find new and better ways to promote equality in the midst of diversity, of building more inclusive democracies where people feel they have a genuine stake—democracies in which governments are accountable and rule in the interest of all their citizens, and where the drive for economic growth is a be-all and end-all in and of itself, but where it is stimulated in a manner in which its benefits are shared throughout society. ■

*David Westwood is World Vision's Policy and Advocacy representative for Latin America and the Caribbean. This article is based on a broader study carried out by World Vision in Latin America and the Caribbean entitled 'Faces of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean.'*

reproduce the violence that affects them in their families, in urban gangs, and later on as adults.

Unfortunately, violence also permeates the very structures of the state, either by omission—that is, allowing the perpetration of violent acts with impunity—or directly, through violations committed by officials themselves. In Central America, to give but one example, members of the national police forces committed nearly 40% of all cases of violence against minors monitored and reported by one regional NGO.<sup>10</sup> Corruption still looms large as a problem across the region. Institutions traditionally responsible for social control, like the family, the educational system and the church, are becoming increasingly eroded.

### Complex task

Needless to say, there is an urgent need in Latin America and the Caribbean to work on the lasting construction of a culture of peace as the alternative to the current culture of violence. This is a complex task in at least three basic levels:

\* The first level involves providing a response to the immediate effects of violence, including legally ensuring the rights of citizens, processing cases of violations and providing reparation for the victims.

\* The second level involves the transformation of the structures that sustain and reinforce violence. Since violence is rooted in poverty and social inequality, the goals of eradicating poverty and seeking social justice are directly linked to the mitigation of violence and the building of peace.

\* The third level consists of changing people's perceptions, values and behaviour. It requires, among other

### **Another form of violence is the denial of citizenship to children and youth, who still 'belong' to their parents.**

things, that children and youth, as the main victims and potential agents of violence in the future, be free to develop and dream, staying out of harm's way, sustained and guided in a positive and peaceful direction within their families, schools, churches and communities.

The international community, the governments, and the different sectors of civil society must play a leading role, with co-ordinated efforts in the struggle against violence, using all resources and facilities available to carry out this huge task that demands shared responsibility. We need to be

1 Roberto Brice-Leon, *Violence and the Right to Kill: Public Perceptions from Latin America*, Universidad Central de Venezuela

2 Buvinic, Morrison & Shifter, *Violence in the Americas; a Framework for Action*, IDB, 1999

3 Roberto Brice-Leon

4 Based on total population figures from the UNPFA, 1998

5 Bernardo Kliksberg, 'The social situation of Latin America and its impact on the family and education', Inter American Institute for Social Development (INDES), distributed at the conference on 'The Struggle Against Poverty in Latin America' between the protestant churches and the IDB, Washington, DC, April 2000

6 CEPAL, 'The Equity Gap, A Second Assessment', 2000.

7 R Franco y K Heynig, 'Equidad en America Latina; Una Asignatura Pendiente', CEPAL 2001.

8 UNICEF, 'Stop Violence Against Women and Girls', 1999

9 UNICEF, 1999

10 'Casa Alianza, an NGO working in advocacy and rehabilitation of street children.' Statistics published by Casa Alianza and UNICEF in 1999.



# Are the WB and the IMF change agents?

Contributed by Interforos-Honduras

**APPEARANCES** can be deceiving when it comes to democracy. Especially when outward signs, such as regularly held elections, give the appearance of a well-run society with fair representation of all its citizens.

In the case of Honduras, for instance, one might think that democracy is operating smoothly and effectively. After all, every four years, since 1980, we hold elections to choose municipal authorities, representatives and the president. Despite this, democracy has not translated into equitable development for most Honduran citizens. Compounding the situation are certain external factors—ostensibly intended to foster a fair and equitable system—that sometimes have the opposite effect.

While striving in recent decades to improve its electoral system, Honduras also has tried to adhere to recommendations from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Toward this end, the country has applied a number of structural adjustments to its economy. These adjustments, although they have produced acceptable macroeconomic indicators, have not brought about expected results in the lives of ordinary people. Instead, poverty has flourished. According to the World Bank, itself: 'Despite an improving economy, the poverty levels remain high. Depending on the source referenced and the definitions, between 50% and 60% of the Honduran families are poor.'<sup>1</sup>

One of the concerns is related to the participatory approach advocated by the WB and the IMF, and to some extent by the governments. From our point of view, the invitation they make to the civilian population to participate has the unwholesome purpose of legitimising their proposals, which often reveal a lack of creativity when

it comes to exploring truly new directions. In our case, the whole process of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (ERP, Spanish acronym) has been wrapped in a myth of participation.

We are astonished by the hasty assumption that by privatising the little bit that is left of our national assets, we attain better service and greater benefits for the people. The issue of the economic model is not even permitted to be discussed by the international financing institutions (IFIs). Critics of the current model are asked to offer a viable alternative, when actually, the essence of their criticism is that there needs to be broad discussion, based on the fact that development must seek equitable distribution.

## Little progress

Outside of the formalities and the rhetoric concerning participation, the IMF and the WB have shown little progress, while they continue to call the shots. 'If the economic growth rate is not reached . . . , the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will not make the payments in accordance with the agreed schedule', according to Gustavo Alfaro, minister of the presidency, who added in his recent statements that in order to arrive at the culmination of the HIPC initiative, 'we must simply adhere to the programs spelled out by the International Monetary Fund.'<sup>2</sup>

What is contradictory is that in the entire ERP document it is never explained how to achieve the economic growth, which is ambitious anyway and well above the historical growth rates. In some parts of the country, it is estimated that if this growth rate of the GNP is not reached (an average of 5.5% for 2001-2015), the goals of poverty reduction

set forth in the document will have to be cut in half.

In public appearances, government officials try to portray themselves as being independent of the WB and the IMF. However, it is obvious that the standards were already defined and that there was little space for considering any avenues other than theirs.

At the national level, there is a need to transform the IFIs, which thus far seem to be authoritarian and sympathetic to their largest contributors. An accelerated process of denationalisation of our economies is underway, and those institutions play a key role in this. For example, they promote the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Puebla-Panama Plan, without taking into account the negative effects they could have on countries such as Honduras.

In Interforos,<sup>3</sup> we believe that the IFI's reform should not be limited to financial issues. The fragility of the democratic processes in countries like Honduras calls for effective participation in order to bring about positive change in the lives of the poor. These institutions need to open themselves up in a positive way to the proposals for change.

True democracy must allow room for serious discussion of ways to address our most pressing social issue: finding a solution for alleviating the poverty of our majority. The IFIs must respect that desire. ■

<sup>1</sup> Assistance Strategy for the Country (CAS) of the GBM for Honduras, Report No. 20072 HO, 27 January 2000. p. 3

<sup>2</sup> El Heraldo, Tegucigalpa, 3 December 2001, edition # 6843 p. 16

<sup>3</sup> INTERFOROS is a Honduran civilian organisation that draws together a variety of national networks and forums, with an active participation in the discussion about Poverty Reduction Strategy.

# OAS in defence of democracy: a look at the past decade

Viviana Krsticevic

**ARTICLE I** of the Democratic Charter, approved on September 11, 2001 in Lima, Peru, states that ‘the nations of the Americas have a right to democracy, and their governments have the obligation to promote it and defend it.’

Unfortunately, this has not been the reality in the region.

Despite great progress made over the past decade, democracy in Latin America remains fragile. Protecting democracy has been one of the key objectives of the Organisation of American States (OAS) since its inception. However, efforts to promote democracy in the region have been weak and unsystematic. This inability became evident when the Windsor General Assembly, 2000, was unable to take a solid position toward the Peruvian electoral fraud and political crisis, even though an electoral mission of OAS to that nation had clearly asserted that it was necessary to take a vigorous position in that matter. Additionally, OAS was unable to effectively face the institutional

crises in Ecuador and Haiti. In other words, OAS historically has not been a body that delivers effective mechanisms to guarantee democracy in the Americas.

## Multilateral response

In the early 1990s, the American States signed the Santiago Commitment and adopted Resolution 1080 on Representative Democracy, thus setting up a mechanism for multilateral response to the threats of coup d’état. This mechanism, nevertheless, is based on an institutional definition of democracy that does not include aspects related to guaranteeing human rights, and is not receptive to the challenges that many of our nations have faced since it was issued. The Protocol of Amendments to the Charter of OAS, known as the Washington Protocol, which became effective in 1997, set forth a series of sanctions on member states whose democratic governments were overthrown—among them, suspending their right to participate in OAS

General Assemblies and Consultation Meetings.

As indicated above, Resolution 1080 has serious limitations, which finally rendered it ineffective in terms of guaranteeing a democratic continent. It is worth noting that the lack of political will by the states to get involved in the institutional crises of other governments turned the system

## Despite great progress made over the past decade, democracy in Latin America remains fragile.

into a weak card that can only be played in the least critical situations. However, there have been honourable exceptions in which states, facing a high political cost at OAS, have exposed their peers.

In light of the weaknesses in these instruments, it was obvious that they would have to be reformulated or that new mechanisms would have to be created. However, the lack of commitment by the states for using Resolution 1080, compounded by the historical tradition of non-involvement in the internal affairs of other governments, made it difficult to believe that the states in the region would be willing to accept a qualitative analysis of the situation by the political bodies of OAS.

Even though all signs pointed in the opposite direction, the political changes in Peru and Mexico helped foster the approval of the ‘democratic clause’, adopted at the Third Summit of the Americas in April 2001. In this setting, the presidents of the Americas dedicated themselves to preparing an Inter-American Democratic Charter in order to strengthen the collective mechanisms for the defence of democracy. With this initiative, the states in the region decided to redefine the concept of representative democracy in order to go beyond the requirement for clean elections, plu-

WORLD VISION PHOTO BY MARCO CEDILLO COBOS



rality of parties, and the alternation of different parties in power.

At this point, representatives of civil society recognised an opportunity to assist in the process of ensuring and strengthening democracy in the region. Last spring, the International Coalition of NGOs—a network of over 300 NGOs in the region—insisted on transparency in the process of development and implementation of the Democratic Charter, and offered a comprehensive definition of representative democracy.

### Representative democracy

Their definition was centred around concepts such as representative democracy and participative democracy; the relationship between democracy and human rights; the scope of specific rights, such as freedom of expression and economic, social and cultural rights; tolerance as a fundamental value for democratic coexistence; the role of OAS in

observing election processes in the countries, and the possibility of penalising those that tried to thwart the democratic processes.

Despite these efforts, it was determined that the kind of in-depth discussions necessary would not be possible with so little time in Costa Rica, and the approval of the Democratic Charter was postponed for an Extraordinary General Assembly, held in Lima, Peru, on 10-11 September 2001. In the meantime, representatives of civil society were invited to participate in the debates. In addition to sending a document stating the NGO's position, CEJIL, together with the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, the International Human Rights Law Group, and Derechos y Democracia, held meetings with several ambassadors in order to discuss their positions and explain the concerns and opinions of civil society concerning the Democratic Charter.

The approved Inter-American Democratic Charter represents a step forward in the collective guarantee of Resolution 1080, which had been limited primarily to responding to coups d'état. However, one of the remaining major criticisms of the Charter is its failure to establish mechanisms that guarantee the participation of civil society and other actors independent from the Inter-American System.

The assurance of democracy in the region demands further progress in order to enforce the commitment expressed on paper in the OAS resolution. In order for this to happen, it will be necessary to include actors who can enrich the discussion in order to guarantee that democracy will bear fruit throughout the entire continent. ■

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*Viviana Krsticevic is Executive Director of the Centre for International Justice and Law (CEJIL).*

# Citizen participation: challenge for Central American politics

Miguel Gutierrez-Saxe

**THE MILITARY CONFLICTS** tearing Central America apart 20 years ago are over. None of the authoritarian regimes in power in 1978 are in power today. A few years ago in Central America, democracy was the exception. Today, every country on the isthmus is experiencing a surge in democratisation. Nevertheless, one of Central America's greatest challenges continues to be strengthening the representative components of our democracies.

Studies show that most Central Americans feel removed from the political parties in the region, with the notable exception of Honduras. According to results of a study published in *Latinobar-metro*, between 79% and 87% of the interviewees in the seven Central American countries feel that the politicians have 'little or no' concern for problems the people are interested in. Moreover, without exception, people have little confidence in the political parties. That lack of identification with and trust in the political parties coincides with a significant voter abstention rate in all countries of the region except Honduras.

As is true elsewhere in the world, in Central America certain political parties monopolize the presidential and legislative elections, although several countries of the region have broken those monopolies for local elections. The region has relatively old party systems, which tend to be stable, bipartisan systems, such as those found in Honduras and Costa Rica. On the other hand, newer party systems tend to be multi-partisan and unstable. Such is the case with Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama, where there are three or more viable parties, and volatility is usually greater than 40%. That is, from one election to the next, two out of five voters

change the party they vote for. There are no significant barriers hindering party registration. In fact, in countries such as Honduras and Guatemala, the requirements are not very stringent at all. Similarly, the grounds for revoking registration are minimal: failure to participate in an electoral round, or failure to obtain a small required number of votes.

Nonetheless, the regulatory framework for political parties does not favour partisan systems open to new actors, and oversight by the citizens. The political parties themselves display varying degrees of internal democratisation and, generally speaking, they have been quite reserved about their democratisation of political life. They exhibit resistance or downright opposition to auditing of private finances their leaders receive; the possibility of independent candidates for president and vice-president; and external monitoring of their internal election processes.

## Elite activity

Unfortunately, generally in the region, politics is still seen as an elite activity, divorced from the daily concerns of most of the population. At the same time, citizens remain wary of the electoral processes, and sceptical of the idea that they could be efficiently conducted and produce results that would clearly reflect the people's will expressed at the polls.

Nevertheless, there has been a rise in citizen participation in electoral processes outside the political parties. This civilian non-partisan participation in electoral processes has come about only recently in Central America, both in countries like Costa Rica—with a longstanding democratic tradition—and, as well, in those who have just begun to open up to democracy, start-

ing in the 1980s and 1990s. This kind of participation takes on different forms depending on the national circumstances. That is, the level of legitimacy reached by official bodies that organise and carry out the electoral processes, the degree of organisation of civilian society, and the development of public opinion, and the extension of the essential citizen freedoms.

Still, the electoral rules in the region have placed significant barriers to non-partisan citizen participation. For example, in the region there is no legal framework to allow the participation of civilian organisations in the elections, except in Guatemala. In most cases, initiatives of citizen participation in elections have occurred outside the legal framework, taking advantage of loopholes or omissions in the electoral laws or partial sets of regulations. It is also important to note that most actions of citizen participation in the elections have been aimed at observation of the electoral process, control and denunciation, although, to be sure, the situation varies from country to country. Finally, a number of the civilian organisations that participated in the electoral processes maintain relations with political parties or churches. One cannot affirm, therefore, that most cases are genuine citizen initiatives. However, their emergence is important for several reasons:

—It is a form of citizen participation that has been developed in consolidated democracies.

—It may be an indicator that the citizens are becoming more active.

This participation may also constitute a mechanism of accountability to the citizens over the partisan and institutional players of the electoral process, which could help in its development and improvement. A better citizen control of these activities could have an influence on the parties and entities in charge of the electoral processes. ■

*Miguel Gutierrez-Saxe is Co-ordinator of Estado de la Nación in Costa Rica.*



# Educating for democracy

Jorge Valencia-Bautista

**WITH THE APPROVAL** of the Convention of Children's Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, global society took a fundamental step in its quest to put into effect the respect for the rights of every person, regardless of age.

The Convention immediately became the international treaty with the largest number of adherents in history. Paradoxically, it is also one of the most difficult instruments to enforce, due to cultural inertia in various regions in the world regarding how children and adolescents are perceived.

When talking about the rights of children, we need to discuss education. And when we talk about education for democracy, we are referring to a process of orientation and facilitation of attitudes and actions that enhances the presence of values intrinsic to a form of social organisation.

Let us start with concrete definitions. Education is understood as the development or enhancement of a child's intellectual and moral capacity. This is one out of several, but is helpful for us to have a frame of reference of the concepts to be dealt with.

## From the people

When we speak of democracy, we may assert that the general consensus is to assume that this is a political system based on the recognition of the principle that all authority stems from the people, and which is characterised by the people's participation in the administration of the state. It guaran-

tees the individual's basic liberties (expression, gathering, association), as well as free election to positions in government and the people's control of governmental management.

If we then make an attempt to join both concepts and their meanings, we could propose that education for

## The UN Committee expressed concern regarding the high rates of dropout and failure in the schools.

democracy is the encouragement of the development of a child's intellectual and moral powers, oriented toward exercising his or her right and responsibility to participate—in proportion to his or her age and possibil-

ities—in the administration of the state, enjoying, for this purpose, the freedom of expression, of gathering and of association.

## School discipline

Article 28 of the Convention of Children's Rights, in section 2, provides that 'the party states shall adopt such measures as are adequate to make sure that school discipline is administered in a way compatible with the child's human dignity and in accordance with the present Convention.' In other words, it is not just a matter of fulfilling plans and study curricula, but of building an educational system that is oriented toward the formation of citizens that, at present, will enjoy and exercise their rights and take the responsibility they are entitled to.

Unfortunately, the reality of education in Mexico is far from attaining such standards of efficiency and quality. In October 1999, the United Nations' Committee on Children's Rights, the entity in charge of monitoring the extent of compliance with the Convention in every country that has ratified it, issued a series of observations and recommendations to the



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Mexican government in order to effectively move forward in its fulfilment.

### High dropout rates

With regard to the state of Mexico's education system, the UN Committee expressed 'its concern regarding the high rates of dropout and failure in primary and secondary schools, and concerning the prevalence of inequalities in access to education between rural and urban areas.' The report is even more critical when referring specifically to Indian children, stressing the 'scarcity of bilingual educational programmes available to them.'

The Committee recommended that Mexico continue with its efforts in this area 'through strengthening its educational policies and system so as to reduce regional inequalities in access to education, and to reinforce

both ongoing programmes to avoid dropouts, and vocational counselling for students who have left the school.' Likewise, the Committee urged Mexico to adopt 'effective measures to improve the general situation in terms of public education of minors who belong to the most vulnerable groups, placing a special stress on bilingual educational programmes for children who belong to indigenous groups.'

Given this information, we may conclude that the conditions for education to become an effective tool in the formation of well-rounded citizens equipped to contribute to a well-functioning democratic system remains a challenge in today's Mexico.

The Congress of the [Mexican] Union recently adopted, within Mexican legislation, an approach toward making the Convention on Children's Rights a reality in our nation, with the approval of the Law for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents. This legal instrument takes on, in article 32, the spirit of the Convention concerning the right to education. It does the same in articles 38 through 42 in terms of their right to participate. Thus, there is no legal hindrance to favouring the modification of education as a basic formula in the construction of a genuine democracy.

### Authority from the people

Democracy, understood as authority stemming from the people, goes beyond mere partisan competition and places itself as the need to foster and encourage mechanisms and

spaces of participation and decision-making of society in all matters that are of its concern. This involves, of course, the inclusion of children, not only from the classroom, but also from all those settings in which they develop and interact.

Thus, education for democracy, and the usefulness of the former to reach the latter, is something that cannot be understood without incorporating the notion of participation and decision-making by children and adolescents.

### **More sectors of the population are taking a more critical look at the actions and methods of the political class.**

Beginning 2 July 2001, official propaganda tried to convince people that democracy had arrived in our nation by decree, or else by the exercise of electoral democracy. However, more and more sectors of the population are taking a more critical look at the actions and methods of the political class. This is reflected both in electoral results and in social mobilisation, and in the proliferation of organisations for the defence, promotion and attention to fundamental rights.

There can be no true democracy as long as a whole sector of the population, which makes up almost half of it (approximately 40% of Mexico's population is under 18), continues to be kept on the margin.

A fundamental component, then, is participation, but a form of participation that comes from education and information. Both are essential for the full exercise of rights guaranteed by law. ■

*Jorge Valencia-Bautista is Executive Director of the Mexican Organisation for Children's Support (COMEXANI).*

# Helping small farmers cope

Funke Oyewole

**INTERNATIONAL** commodity prices today are highly volatile, and inability to manage this volatility remains a major challenge for small-scale producers in developing countries.

Price volatility affects the lives of millions of small-holder producers who earn their livelihood from primary commodities. At the farm level, uncertainty in commodity prices makes it difficult for producers to allocate resources efficiently, limits their access to credit to purchase productivity-enhancing inputs, and leads them to employ low-yield, low-risk production technologies, thereby lowering their average incomes.

Marketing boards and distorted

policies aimed at ensuring stable prices to producers by insulating them from international market prices have now largely been dismantled, and small producers are now exposed directly to market volatility. The International Task Force (ITF) on Commodity Risk Management was convened in 1999 to evaluate ways in which small producers in developing countries can manage the risks associated with volatile commodity prices. The ITF is a partnership of the World Bank, international institutions, producer and consumer organisations, and private sector entities. The Commodity Risk Management Group (CRMG) in the World Bank acts as the ITF secretariat.

## Market-based tools

The ITF proposed making market-based tools to insure against price volatility (e.g. futures and options) available to small producers in developing countries. The ITF proposal calls for a market-based commodity price insurance-price floor for producers (and exporters) and price ceiling for consumers (and importers). The ITF believes that insurance would facilitate producers' access to credit and reduce the cost of capital, help devel-

***Inability to manage price volatility remains a major challenge for small-scale producers in developing countries.***

op effective local marketing institutions, and establish a more transparent trading environment.

Market-based tools exist in high-

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income countries, but small agricultural producers in developing countries are, in general, unable to access these markets because the size of contracts traded on organised exchanges far exceeds the annual value of production of individual small- and medium-sized producers. Small producers in developing countries lack knowledge of these instruments, and suppliers of these services are unwilling to engage with small-scale producers, where there are high transaction costs, credit issues, and performance risks. The goal of the ITF proposal is to find ways in which the risks and costs can be limited and controlled.

### **An attractive proposition**

A range of case studies has been developed by the CRMG to evaluate the feasibility of the ITF proposal. These include coffee, cocoa, sugar, rubber and copper in Central America, Africa and Asia. The outcomes of these case studies indicate that price insurance for farmers in

developing countries is feasible. However, intermediation between clients and suppliers is essential in order to make developing country clients an attractive proposition to suppliers, and to provide clients with technical assistance for price insurance transactions.

The case studies have confirmed that there are potential local counter parties in developing countries who are interested in price insurance services and the substantial potential benefits beyond the direct assurance of a minimum price guarantee. Experience from the case studies indicates that two principal ways of delivering risk management products to small producers exist: a) as part of a transaction that also involves the

physical commodity, or b) as a completely separate transaction involving local financial institutions.

In the first method, the success of the proposal depends on locating a 'constriction point' in the trade chain—a point through which all the commodity and the cash flows need to pass. As it does so, performance and other risks can be controlled. However, many commodities have characteristics that limit this—either because of some feature of the physical commodity, such as storability, or through the way it is traded. The challenge of the ITF has been to identify how to work within these limitations and still successfully deliver the risk-management product to the small farmer.

Constriction points can arise in different ways—a sugar producer who tries to avoid his local mill will find that the journey time to a more distant mill is enough for the sugar content in his sugar cane to fall. It can also

occur when the producer is getting something more for his commodity than just the world market price, and in the case of parts of the Nicaragua test case, this is the situation.

Two types of test cases are being developed in Nicaragua. In the first case, a coffee co-operative is aiming to maintain a minimum price it pays for purchases from its members, regardless of any falls in the market. In the second part, a number of different groups, including co-operatives, are examining ways in which the delivery of risk-management products can be attached to the delivery of credit.

The fact that the co-operative has

### **Local financial institutions may play a key role in the delivery of price insurance service attached to a loan.**

Fair-Trade sales, and also has encouraged its members to concentrate on organic and quality coffees, means that, in aggregate, it can offer a higher price to farmers for their output than can those without access to such markets. So any farmer defaulting on loans to the co-operative by delivering his coffee elsewhere risks not only selling at a lower price, but also not being able to deliver to the co-operative in future years.

### **A key role**

In the second type of delivery process, local financial institutions may have a key role to play in the delivery of price insurance service attached to a loan, as they have already established credit relationships with individual producers, and have acquired a great deal of relevant knowledge about the client.

In the cases conducted in El Salvador and in the second part of the Nicaragua case, it was clear that an instrument that would lock in a minimum price could result in enhanced access to credit. In fact, in El Salvador,



the strongest interest in such an instrument came from financial institutions themselves as they understood its usefulness in enhancing the borrower's ability to repay credit. It is the existence of the insurance that makes the borrower a better risk, rather than the expansion of the debt to include the insurance worsening that risk.

In Mexico, a programme of price risk management is in an advanced stage of development. However, in addition to this product, a joint price and production, or revenue insurance, is in the initial stage of development. If successful, it is hoped that this will open opportunities to develop similar types of instruments in other countries.

The case studies showed that the design of the insurance instrument must be tailored to the specific marketing strategies of producers. For example, in El Salvador, Mexico and Nicaragua, different co-operatives and producers have different sales strategies for marketing their coffee. Some deliberately aim at nearby sells, whilst others will spread the sales over a period in order to benefit from an average price, including any late-season price rises as availability increases.

The design of the insurance product must also be simple in order to ensure a clear and unambiguous understanding on the part of producers. It is critical that producers have a clear understanding of what they are buying. An awareness-raising and education programme will be necessary in all test cases. Links are being established with parts of the NGO community to implement an educational programme.

### Perceptions of risk

Progress has been made in developing a better understanding of producer perceptions of risk, and the value they attach to its reduction. In Nicaragua, a survey was conducted to evaluate producer attitudes toward risk and their willingness to pay for risk mitigating instruments. Results of

the survey suggested that producers perceive coffee price risk to be a substantial problem in their farming operations, ranking it highest in a list of risks they face as a farm household. More than one-quarter of all respon-

### *The prices of many commodities, such as cotton and coffee, have fallen to levels not previously seen.*

dents were willing to pay for risk-mitigating instruments at a rate comparable to commercial rates.

Liberalisation has brought demonstrable benefits to agriculture in many countries, including greater efficiency and a higher proportion of export revenues. Risk management strategies

can be used as an integral part of the liberalisation process in order to allow producers the opportunity to use markets to replace those pre-liberalisation supports that they valued, at a price they can pay. In this way, it is possible to build support for liberalisation, and to avoid the worst backlash that has been seen when it has been mishandled.

Market-based price insurance cannot modify the long-term downward trend that exists in prices of many commodities, and can address only the problem of short-term volatility around this price

trend. Currently, the prices of many commodities, such as cotton and coffee, have fallen to levels not previously seen. This fact may limit producers' interest in the short run. But recent work in Africa, for example, has found that the recovery of cocoa prices is leading to an increase in interest in the programme as producers worry about the possibility of a return to low prices. Even in low-price conditions, certain producers have indicated interest in using a price insurance instrument, and their willingness to purchase market-based price insurance seems likely to increase under more favourable market circumstances. ■

*Funke Oyewole is Senior Programme Officer, Commodity Risk Management, Rural Development Department, for The World Bank.*

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# Democracy requires diversity

Israel Batista

**ECUMENICALISM**, democracy and citizen participation are three basic principles that ensure people can live together with solidarity in the face of growing social exclusion.

Exploring the full manifestation of those three principles is complicated, since most Latin American countries have a serious problem of excluding certain sectors of society. When that occurs, we cannot have true participation, democracy and ecumenism.

As long as there are no mechanisms permitting dialogue and consensus, and while access to the decision-making circles and power are denied to the majority of the citizens, protest and social explosion will be the only strategies people have at their disposal to make themselves heard.

Churches, however, can provide

spaces for recovering the meaning of life and human dignity. Churches have their contradictions. We don't practice ecumenism, as we ought. At times we actually encourage fragmentation. We need to correct that problem in the family, the neighbourhoods, communities, and churches and in society as a whole.

## Out of diversity arises unity

Diversity is fundamental for participation, democracy and ecumenism, because out of diversity arises unity. What is important is to distinguish between that diversity and fragmentation. Such division results when we are not capable of working on the same mission, when I am not capable of recognising that another—whom I may think different from me—is also a

child of God, and that we are all part of the church. We must work together in the mission, in the calling and in service, respecting one another's differences. This recognition is part of a mind-set of tolerance we ought to practice, acknowledging that there is a religious plurality.

The church in itself is a voice, it is a social presence, and if we make effective use of it, it can be strong. There is where the concept of citizen participation comes in. I am not saying that Christians cannot be involved in politics. They can. But they must do so responsibly, without using the church for corrupt purposes, as has occurred in some cases. What I want to emphasise is that the church, as such, ought not support a specific political party. The church has its own voice, which is consolidated and respected by society. We must shake off the attitude of self-exclusion from national problems. That must change. It is time that we got involved ethically and morally. ■

*Israel Batista is Secretary General of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI).*

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# Sign and model

Harold Segura C.

**AT FIRST GLANCE**, the 'Body of Christ' model used by writers of the New Testament to describe the church might seem rather simple, even naive. The apostle Paul teaches: 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it' (1 Cor. 12:12, 27, RSV). Since Christ is the head of the church, each member enjoys equal status, with the right to participate fully in God's actions on the earth.

## Real participation

Thus viewed, the use of this model is neither simple nor naive, since it suggests a corporate life marked by equality and real participation on the part of each member. This lesson was directed at the newly formed Christian churches of Asia Minor in the first century. At that time, a special meaning was attached to the Greek concept of democracy. Unfortunately, Greek society at the time—a society which embraced slavery—reserved democracy for only a small segment of its population. The Greco-Roman society was pluralist, but only from an ideological standpoint, because it was actually exclusive, despotic and imper-

ial. The dignity of women, slaves, children and others was not recognised.

Into this setting, the Christian 'body' metaphor was introduced. It was not, as is sometimes assumed, an irrelevant message restricted to the realm of religion. The 'body' metaphor was a declaration of equality among the members, leaving the supreme authority exclusively to Christ. Also,

**The 'body' metaphor was not, as is sometimes assumed, a message restricted to the realm of religion.**

the use of the term 'body' to depict the church encouraged all members to participate actively in pursuit of the harmonious development of the body as a whole. Hence, this lesson of equality and participation—imparted in the midst of an inequitable, autocratic society—proved to be liberating news in which democracy took on its truest meaning.

It is not strange then, that the New Testament boldly declares, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in

Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28, RSV). Early Christianity gave people a new identity that was based on their relationship to Christ. Thus, the message would become a catalyst for social renewal. Slaves would be treated as brothers and sisters. Women would be valued as much as men, children as much as adults, gentiles as much as Jews, the have-nots as much as those who possess this world's goods. This is not a feigned democracy, but the genuine democracy of the Spirit, which proceeds from God, who has made everyone in 'his image and likeness', and who, by faith, has joined us together in one body.

## A just society

From the very beginning, the Christian faith did not prescribe any particular social, political or economic system. Rather, it opted for the proclamation and defence of those values that provide the foundation of an egalitarian, caring and just society. Those values were to be incarnate in the internal dynamics of church life. The church, as the Body of Christ, from the onset was called to be a sign and a model of that new society. That is the great challenge to those of us who call ourselves Jesus' followers. ■

*Harold Segura C. is Director of Church Relations for World Vision's Latin America and Caribbean Region.*

**WORLD VISION** is a Christian relief and development partnership that serves more than 75 million people in nearly 90 countries. World Vision seeks to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in the pursuit of justice and human transformation.

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