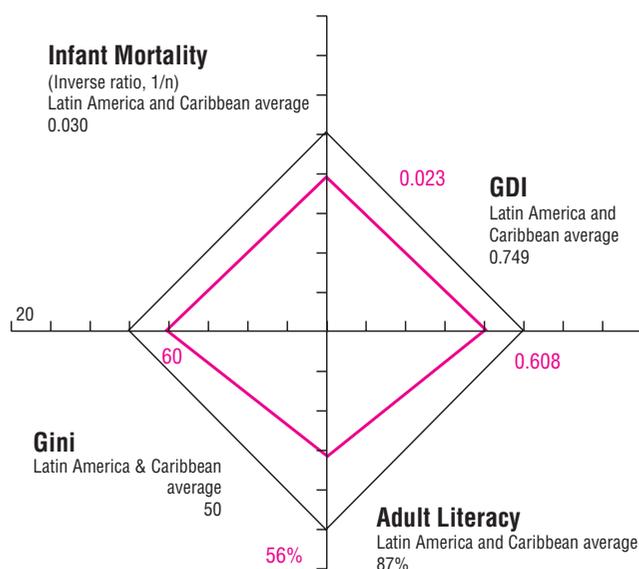


• LUISA EUGENIA MORALES



*The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue. Source: Infant mortality: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; Adult literacy: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; GDI (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; GINI: World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).*

ABSOLUTE POVERTY: 59.3%

Faced with this situation, the government programme for 1996–2000 set the goal of modernising the state to establish a more efficient and competitive economy. It also sought to change from a system of state welfare to the application of specific subsidies and to demonopolise its activities. This led to privatisation of state enterprises and services (railroad, electricity, postal service and telecommunications). The results are increased unemployment and suspicion since the process lacked transparency.

Only 3.4 million people in Guatemala are formally employed. This means that eight million people work informally or simply lack employment. Working conditions continue to worsen and there are many obstacles to unionisation, such as threats of dismissal and loss of employment.

The rate of union membership averages 2.9% of the labour force with more men than women members. Women's productive participation is limited by illiteracy, low educational levels, lack of technical and professional capacities, and scant legal protection. This shows exclusion and discrimination of women.

The National Problems Department at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala has indicated that the country's economic policy channels the benefits of economic growth toward the privileged sector. Restrictive monetary policy, together with privatisation, have reduced sources of employment. A vast sector of the Guatemalan population has been forced to turn to the informal economy for subsistence and has to face regressive taxation, since most of the income from taxation is derived from indirect taxes.

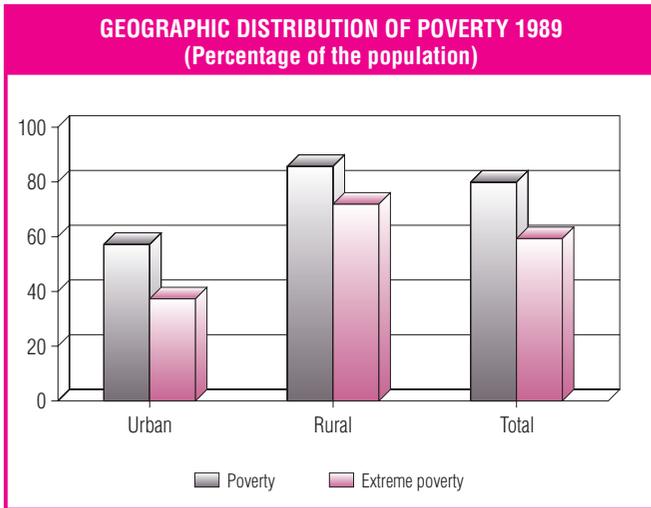
The eradication of poverty and the achievement of better living conditions for the population goes beyond state modernisation and requires that the state perform social functions that are essential to a poor country with major economic and social contrasts. (Graphic 1)

A MODERN SOCIETY DEMANDS GOOD EDUCATION

In Guatemala, both coverage and quality of the educational system are extremely poor. The absence of education is to be regarded as a factor of exclusion and social marginalisation of

Of the total Guatemalan population, 79% live in relative poverty and 59.3% live in absolute poverty. This faithfully reflects the level of fulfilment of the Copenhagen commitments achieved by the state through policies, programmes and projects to generate employment, achieve gender equity and move toward the goal of eradicating poverty by the year 2000. The most critical indexes in this respect are found in the northwest (Quiché and Huehuetenango) and in the north (Upper and Lower Verapaz) where poverty levels reach 93.7% and 91.3% respectively.

GRÁFICA 1.



Source: General Secretariat for Planning (SEGEPLAN), National Government Program 1996–2000.

broad sectors of the population from socio-political and economic structures.

The illiteracy rate is 18.2% in urban areas and 81.8% in rural areas. The overall illiteracy rate for women is 42.7% compared with 28.3% for men. The school dropout rate is high: for each hundred children entering first grade, fewer than 30 reach sixth grade.

When the peace agreement was signed in the country, educational reform was set as a priority for the process of democratic consolidation. The context of this reform was to be a redefinition of philosophies, values and practices within the national educational system. Under Item 3, the agreement on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples sets out the need for a pluricultural framework that responds to problems at a national level and thus makes it possible to effectively transform the educational system. (Graphic 2)

The government has made efforts toward improving education (with the support of international cooperation). Starting with a concept of greater equity and equality, it has sought to reduce the lack of coverage, especially at pre-primary and primary levels, with emphasis on rural areas and education for girls. It has also sought to reduce illiteracy and improve the quality of education. The current social mobilisation to push for increased budget allocations to education reflects the gradual involvement of civil society with the state in matters of education in Guatemala.

The formal education system is responsible for providing the tools for comprehensive development of the population. The evolution of budget allocations to the Ministry of Education, however, reveals little improvement. This indicates that the government is giving inadequate consideration to the role of the educational system. This has an impact on levels of schooling achieved and on coverage and progress of incorporating women into the formal educational process.

Positive public declarations by the government indicate that there is political will to face educational problems. The significantly low budget allocations for education, however, limit the plans, programmes and projects that would be needed to achieve educational goals.

In quantitative terms, the country has seen some improvement, but it should be remembered that there are aspects inherent to Guatemalan society that limit access to the formal educational system. These include wide dispersion of the population in rural settlements, multi-cultural factors and early incorporation of boys and girls in productive work.

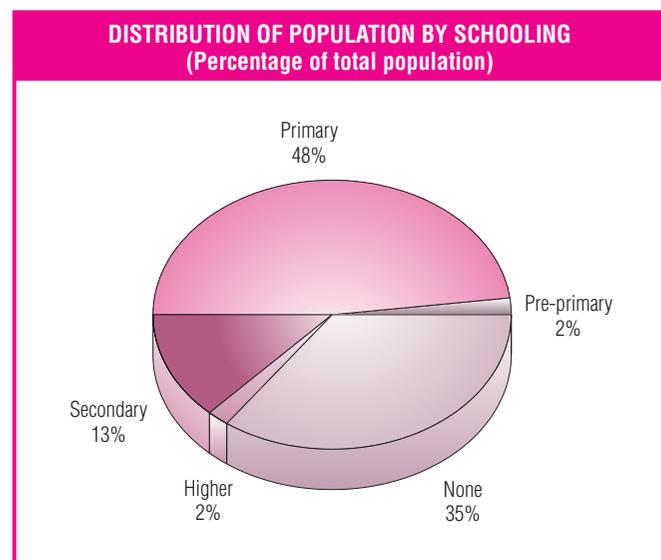
EXERCISE OF CITIZENSHIP

The serious economic crisis that affects most Guatemalans has made access to goods and services more unequal and prevented people for attaining an adequate quality of life. This presents a significant drawback to exercise of citizenship by Guatemalan men and women.

There is progress, however, in opening up fora for participation. This in turn has resulted in a stronger and more comprehensive concept of the exercise of citizen rights, which goes beyond a legal conception and sees participation in electoral processes as merely the start of an overall political impact.

For a long time, the great majority of Guatemalans lived in poverty and exclusion from the educational system. Added to this was almost four decades of life under an authoritarian and repressive system. These factors limited the possibilities of formal and informal educational systems to grasp the meaning of «living in democracy», to construct it and to enhance it.

GRÁFICA 2.



Source: SEGEPLAN, prepared on the basis of the Tenth National Population Census and Fifth Housing Census of the National Statistics Institute.

TOWARD A NEW MILLENNIUM

The new millennium marks significant challenges: reconstruction of the country's political life; satisfaction of the legitimate demands of broad sectors of the population to improve their quality of life; and reduction of the gap between those who have everything and those who lack the most elemental goods and rights.

The current system of injustice, with its economic, political, cultural and gender exclusion, has shown itself to be untenable in the search for full employment, eradication of poverty and achievement of gender equity (commitments taken on for the year 2000).

While politicians define their strategies for access to the government, the population is defining its own agenda for social demands. During the 1999 electoral process, various organisations

representing different social sectors listened to the candidates and made them sign commitments responding to the economic and social demands and needs that have been ignored by past governments. The minimum agendas that have been defined will serve as banners in the struggle for participation. The politicians cannot be left to impose their agendas on citizens. The search for quality of life is the main demand and the principal task of the new millennium.

- Social Initiative for Guatemala, its members are AVANCSO, ASINDES, CECMA, BEIJING COMMITTEE, and SCHOOL OF ECONOMY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS, GUATEMALA and INIAP.
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