

III. The Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean



III. THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN¹

1. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT²

A Mixed Picture

An appraisal of the 1990's results in the region sets the initial conditions and provides the context for the Millennium Development Goals and their challenges. This context is contradictory: encouraging because of the deepening of democracy and its institutions; significant gains in macroeconomic stability; and a remarkable liberalization of the economies; but discouraging because of the slow growth; only a modest reduction in poverty; persistence of high inequality and exclusion; and the magnitude of social discontent. Given the close relationship between the political, economic and social determinants of development, if these negative tendencies persist they could affect the advances already made.

How can such a contradictory picture be explained? Efforts to improve macroeconomic stability and implement structural reforms bore fruit in the first half of the decade. Inflation dropped to single digits; the budget deficit fell from 5 percent to 2 percent of the gross domestic product; tariffs were reduced from more than 40 percent to 10 percent. Over 800 government companies were privatized between 1988 and 1997; capital flows rose from US\$14 billion in 1990 to US\$86 billion in 1997; and volumes of trade and investment increased considerably.

Unfortunately, these gains did not translate into greater economic development nor into poverty reduction. Average annual real GDP growth was only 3 percent in the 1990s (1.5 percent per capita) and productivity fell, although to a lesser extent than in the previous decade.

On average, poverty fell only by around 10 percent,³ while the absolute number of poor people rose due to population growth. These figures summarize the past decade and do not reflect the serious setbacks to growth and poverty reduction that resulted from the crises of the early years of this decade.

If poverty is defined by the percentage of the population earning less than two dollars a day (at purchasing power parity), the region is entering the 21st Century with almost one-third of its population (180 million people) living in poverty.⁴ Indeed, as may be seen in figure 1, even

1. This chapter was prepared by Mayra Buvinić and Carlos Eduardo Vélez.

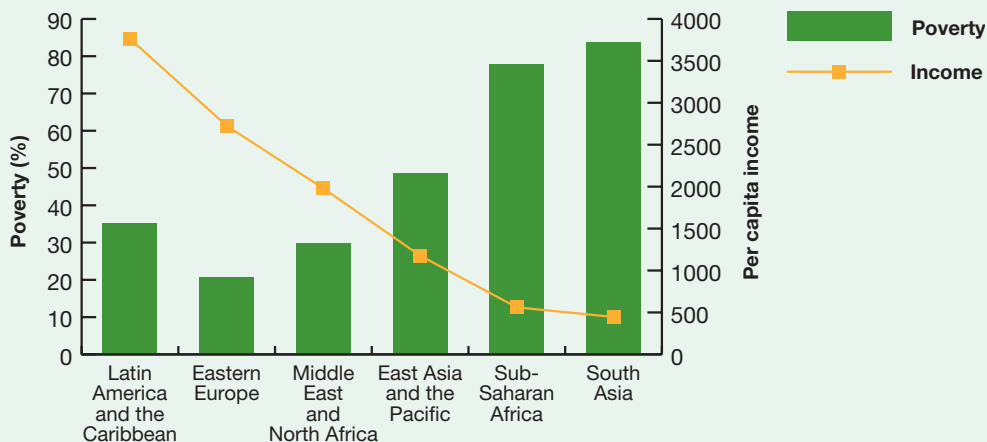
2. This section is based on C. Bouillon and M. Buvinić, 2003.

3. This reduction was not uniform between countries. In a sample of 17 countries, poverty rose in six and fell by over 20 percent in three.

4. Estimate of household surveys in the region. Income of two dollars a day in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) is considered suitable for poverty comparisons, given their relative level of development. The base year is 1985. The poverty profile of the region was done using this poverty line. The one- and two-dollar indicators are used for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals.

though per capita income in Latin America and the Caribbean is greater than in all other areas represented (in most cases more than double), the percentage of poor people is greater than in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

FIGURE 1. POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN COMPARED WITH OTHER REGIONS OF THE WORLD



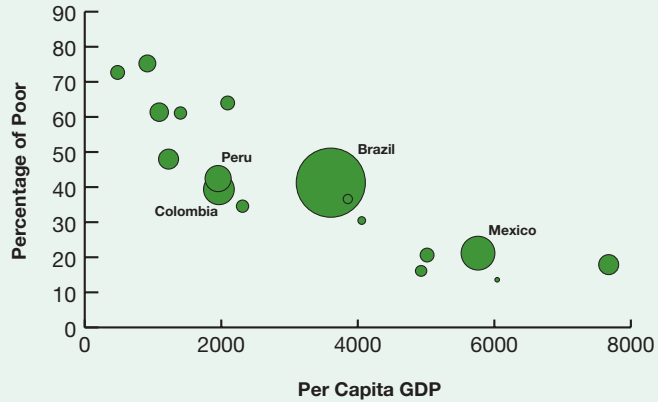
Source: IDB, World Bank.

While the incidence of poverty is greater in the less developed countries, most of the poor are found in middle-income countries. Indeed, the highest poverty rates are found in low-income countries, such as the highly indebted poor countries (HIPC countries). However, the largest number of poor people is found in larger middle-income countries. As is shown in figure 2, around 70 percent of the total number of poor people in the region live in the five most populated countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, the situation would have been worse without the reforms and the gains in macroeconomic stability (provided by low inflation and moderate fiscal deficits). It is estimated that the reforms contributed an extra 1.3 percentage points to economic growth between 1991 and 1993 (the period of greatest reform). Per capita income is greater than it would have been had the reforms not been implemented.

Behind the poor performance of the economy is the fact that the reforms were sometimes implemented only half-way or poorly, lacked adequate institutional support, were applied in an adverse international financial context, and especially that they ignored the objectives of equity and good governance. This came on top of high levels of inequality and exclusion in the region, hindering growth and limiting its benefits for poverty reduction.

FIGURE 2. POVERTY, DEVELOPMENT, AND POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

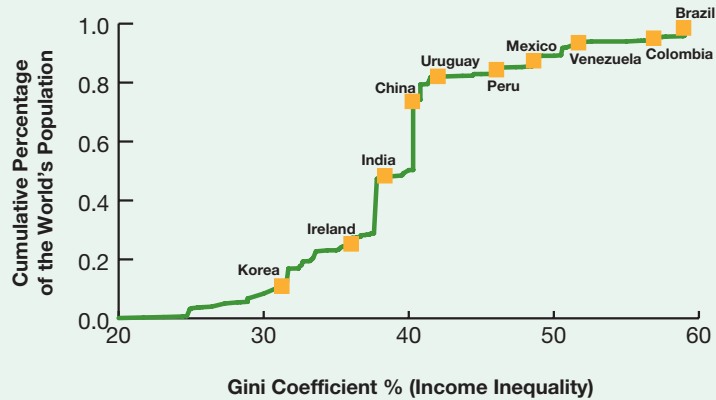


Note: The size of each sphere is proportional to the number of poor in the country.

Income Inequality, Poverty and Exclusion

The region has one of the worst income distributions in the world. At the end of the 1990s, the wealthiest 20 percent of the population was receiving 60 percent of disposable income, while the poorest was receiving only 3 percent. Figure 3 shows how, within the cumulative income distribution of the world’s population, the countries of Latin America are concentrated at the highest part of the curve—above the 80th percentile. During the 1990s, income inequality increased in all but four countries in the region.⁵ The regional average of the Gini coefficient grew by 3 percent. Behind income inequality, there is great inequality in

FIGURE 3. INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT. 1999



Includes 108 countries. 1993–1999 Data.
Source: World Bank Indicators 2002.

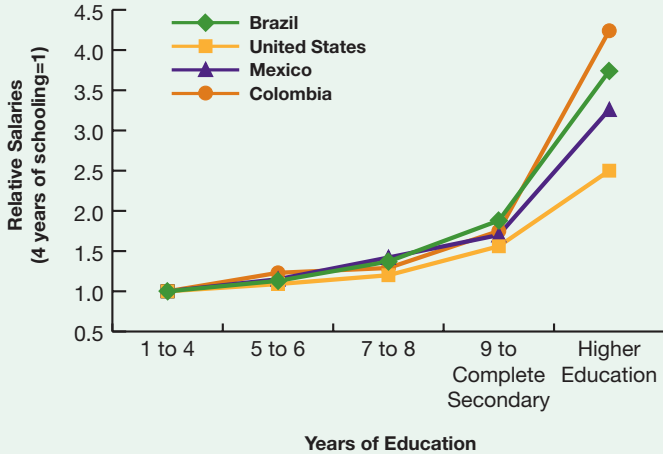
5. Other estimates confirm this increase in inequality; according to ECLAC (2002), income inequality rose in eight countries in the region, fell in four, and remained steady in four.

the distribution of assets, including education, land, and credit. According to recent studies, average schooling of the lowest 20 percent of the population is four years, while that of the richest 20 percent is ten years.

This unequal distribution of education and other assets (land, technology, and so forth) however, does not completely explain the region's excessive inequality and its increase during the 1990s. Skill wage differentials are also especially high in the region, and grew during the 1990s (see figure 4).⁶ During the past two decades, worldwide technical progress biased toward skilled labor has increased its demand and heightened wage inequality between skilled and unskilled workers. In addition, the supply of skilled labor in many countries in the region has not grown sufficiently.

The benefits of reform have not reached relatively less developed regions, and given the lack of policies to compensate for regional disparities, regional integration has tended to exacerbate geographical inequalities. Agricultural trade liberalization has tended to accentuate inequalities between farmers with and without access to productive resources.

FIGURE 4. LABOR INCOME BY QUALIFICATION: BRAZIL, COLOMBIA AND MEXICO COMPARED WITH THE UNITED STATES



Source: Bourguignon, Ferreira, and Leite [2002a] and Vélez and others [2002b].

Excessive income inequality partially explains the lag in poverty reduction. As noted previously, while the level of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean is moderate in relation to the rest of developing countries, it is excessive given its level of economic development, and that is directly associated with the excessive income inequality of the countries of the region.⁷ Indeed, as shown in figure 5, eleven out of thirteen countries of the region show poverty levels above the continuous line that indicates the poverty level to be expected at their level of development.

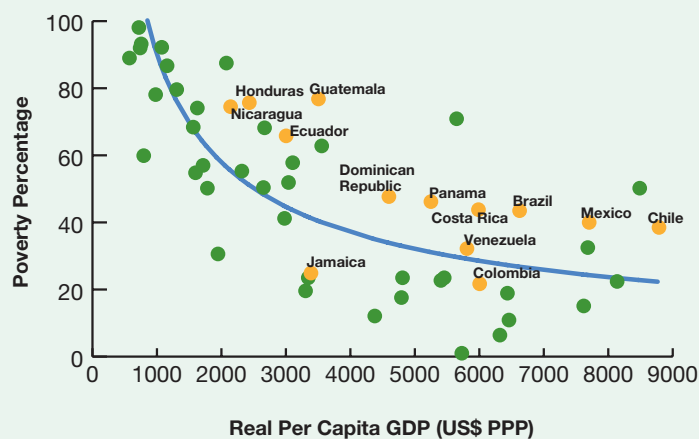
6. See Bouillon, et al. (2002), Ferreira et al. (2002), and Vélez et al. (2002) for the cases of Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia, respectively.

7. As already described in figure 3.

For example, in the case of Brazil (one of the countries with the highest inequality rate in the region) the poverty level observed is 15 points higher than the level expected for a global sample of countries. For Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua the poverty “excess” is even greater, and reaches 35, 24, and 20 percentage points, respectively.

Augmenting the problem of inequality is the social exclusion that is both cause and effect of inequality. Exclusion extends the concept of inequality from individuals to groups. Populations that are socially excluded due to gender, age, race, ethnic origin, disability, HIV/AIDS, or migratory situation,⁸ and so forth, live under conditions of poverty, and suffer from multiple disadvantages, stigma, and discrimination.

FIGURE 5. EXCESS POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN WITH RESPECT TO THE REST OF THE WORLD



Source: World Development Report, (1999/2000), Barros (2002)

Disparity in Social Development

In contrast to the modest results achieved in reducing poverty and the persistence of the problem of distribution, in the past decade the region has taken major steps toward improving average social indicators. The well-known United Nations Human Development Indicator (HDI), which combines key indicators of welfare, such as life expectancy at birth and literacy, reflects it well when it shows that the average for the region (which was 0.78 in the most recent report in 2003) is comparable to that of Eastern and Central Europe and only surpassed by the average for developed countries. Moreover, the gap between both groups of countries has diminished.

Why does progress in the social indicators fail to translate into less poverty and faster growth in Latin America? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the advance signified by

8. This includes the population displaced by internal conflicts, as in the case of Colombia.

III. THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

the HDI, because it is an aggregated average, conceals disparities in human capital, social conditions, and living standards between poor and rich countries, between regions in the same country, between rich and poor, men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous groups, Afro-descendants and others, and between urban and rural populations. The index does not capture the high levels of inequality and exclusion in the region, which allow advances in average well-being to be recorded without changes taking place in the welfare of the poor and excluded.

Although it seems paradoxical, advances in social indicators can coexist with setbacks in poverty reduction. The social gains reflect long-term investments, the results of which are seen with significant time lags, and are difficult to change in the short run. Over time, social advances ought to translate into societies that are more resistant to cyclical poverty and short-term negative effects.

Indeed, the averages for the region partially conceal a marked inequity in both indicators of result and access to social services. Such is the case in health, for example, as exemplified in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. A sample of those countries indicates that, on average, the rate of access to health services is 34 percent for the poorest quintile and 94 percent for the richest quintile.⁹ Such levels of inequality in access, in turn, translate into severe gaps in indicators of results in the area of health, such as indicators of child malnutrition and maternal mortality. The simple average of the malnutrition rate in children in the poorest quintile for this same group of countries is 6.3 times greater than that of the richest quintile. It should also be noted that there is great heterogeneity between countries, inasmuch as this rate ranges from 3.6 in the least unequal cases to 10.1 in the most unequal countries. With regard to efforts to reduce maternal mortality, one example is the case of Bolivia, where coverage of institutional births in 1998 was only 39 percent in the poorest quintile, compared with 95 percent in the richest quintile. With regard to immunization, the percentage of children aged 0 to 2 immunized against diphtheria, tetanus, and polio in the richest quintile is nine percentage points higher than in the poorest quintile.

These health results closely correlate with inequity of access to potable water and sewerage. Indeed, for a sample of four countries the percentage of homes with sewerage in the richest quintile is twelve percentage points higher than in the poorest quintile. The disparities are also evident in access to potable water; the difference between the richest quintile and the poorest is 33 percentage points. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the rate of growth in access to potable water has been equal between rich and poor.

Something similar is true in the case of education. In this area the difference between rates of school attendance between the richest and the poorest quintiles is six percentage points (98 compared to 92 percent).

9. For detailed information see Chapters VII and VIII.

With regard to the problem of social exclusion, it is clear that social indicators are worse for excluded groups. One example is that of rates of child mortality, which for some ethnic groups in certain countries are double those of the corresponding figures for descendants of Europeans. Another example is that of data on education of indigenous girls. In Guatemala, for example, the education of indigenous girls displayed the least advance of all groups (men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous), even though the greatest progress was made in average education of women. What is more, in recent decades the education gap between indigenous and non-indigenous girls grew by over two-and-half years, on average, rather than decline (Duryea et al., 2001). Hence it is clear that advances in average social indicators can coexist with increases in social welfare gaps between individuals and groups. Another example is that of changes in child mortality in Bolivia. In the 1989-98 period, the average rate of child mortality fell by 30 percent; however, the difference in rates between rural and urban areas increased. In 1989 the rural rate was 1.42 times greater than the urban rate. In 1998, although both rates dropped, this difference rose to 1.80 (Medici, 2003).

Poverty and the Environment

One of the most noteworthy features of the region's socioeconomic development is the close relationship between poverty and the environment. Natural resources are the main means for making a living in rural areas, and hence secure access to the resources of the countryside play a critical role in satisfying the basic needs of the population for food and income generation. The degradation of soil and water resources directly threatens the subsistence of communities, making the poor more vulnerable. In urban areas, the degradation of the environment affects the quality of life of the poorest who have less by way of basic infrastructure (water and sanitation, solid waste disposal, quality of housing) and are more exposed to urban pollution and environmental hazards.

Consolidation of Democracy

Perhaps the most remarkable fact in the region has been the consolidation of democracy. The democratic regimes that were established in the previous decade made significant changes in terms of citizenship rights, the consolidation of the rule of law, the regulatory capacity of the State, and the decentralization of government functions, bringing government closer to citizens. There still remains a democratic deficit, which is sometimes expressed in authoritarianism, clientelism, corruption, and "capture" of institutions by individual interests. That is the reason, along with high inequality and exclusion, why the region has not attained more reasonable degrees of social cohesion.

This complex and contradictory environment, characterized by the heterogeneity of situations between countries, between regions within a country, between persons belonging to different groups, and between individuals, frames the challenges for the Millennium Development Goals in the region.

2. CHALLENGES OF THE MDGs IN THE REGION: POVERTY AND DEALING WITH THE INEQUITY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

On Average, Where is Latin America?

The UNDP Human Development Report (2003), which analyzes where the world stands in terms of meeting the eight Millennium Development Goals, shows the average advance of the region in attaining six of the seven regional goals (the eighth goal involves international aid). The region has already reached the goal of gender equality, if measured (as sought by the MDGs) by the proportion of girls in primary and secondary education, and it is on the way to reaching the primary education goal ahead of time. It is also well on the way to reaching the other four goals: reduction of hunger (malnutrition rates), reduction of child mortality, greater access to potable water, and greater access to sanitation. In contrast to this apparently good news, the region is seriously behind in terms of the goal of reducing poverty by 50 percent, and that means that it faces a great challenge for meeting the MDGs.

These projections share the widespread problem of the quality and reliability of data on poverty and welfare. In particular, for various social indicators, such as rates of infant and maternal mortality, more disaggregated regional data sources make less encouraging projections on the progress of the region in terms of the MDGs, and they call for special efforts to be made (to change present trends), not only for the goal of reducing poverty, but also if the aim is to meet the Millennium Development Goals for social indicators.

The call for such efforts intensifies when the overall objectives of the Human Development Report are adapted to the specificities of the region. The overall objectives for social indicators provide a partial vision of the degree of progress of the region. Such is the case, for example, with the goal of gender equality in education, which is not a valid measure of the target of gender equality for Latin America (because gender inequalities are found not in education but at subsequent stages of the life cycle, in the transition between school and work and in markets). In addition, inequalities exist within ratings points, which are concealed by regional averages and which ratify the need to make efforts to change current trends in order to meet all the MDGs.

Two Challenges: Reduce Poverty and Ensure Equitable Social Development

The region faces two challenges in terms of meeting the Millennium Development Goals. First, there is the challenge of reducing poverty, which demands that it make special efforts to maintain a positive (higher than the recent trend) growth rate and a substantial reduction in income inequality and social exclusion.

Second, while the region could perhaps reach most of the remaining goals by improving averages, the high levels of inequality and exclusion lead to the fear that large portions of the poor population and excluded groups would be prevented from reaching these levels of well-being. As the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report rightly observes, the appearance that there is no major challenge of social development in Latin America may be in agreement with the letter but not with the spirit of the goals agreed upon.

An exploratory exercise for the target of reducing child mortality in the case of Brazil exemplifies how the MDGs can be met in the region whether or not the spirit of the Millennium Declaration is met. Child mortality could be reduced by preventing child deaths in the richest four states of the country, thereby reaching 80 percent of the target in 2015, but increasing the (already wide) gap between rich and poor states by over 15 times. On the other hand, if efforts are focused on the poor states, the goal could be achieved by 100 percent, thereby reaching equity in child mortality rates (PAHO, 2003). Hence the region ought to emphasize the importance of the challenge of social progress by reformulating the indicators for targets 2 to 7 to a higher level and including the equity dimension in monitoring each of them.¹⁰

Links between the MDGs

Without making progress on other dimensions of gender equality and improving the well-being of the poor and excluded, the region would not be able to reduce inequities in asset distribution and meet the poverty reduction goal. Nor would it be able to return to sustained growth. The links between investment in the human capital of the poor, poverty reduction, and greater growth are close. Likewise close are the links between inequality, poverty, and obstacles to growth. High inequality lowers growth rates and slows the positive impact of growth on poverty reduction. This and the social exclusion prevailing in Latin America make it possible for average social indicators to increase without affecting (improving) the well-being of the poor and excluded.

Increasing the averages of the social goals in the MDGs as a result of increases in the point ratings of the poor, which implies a better point rating distribution, is essential for growth and for meeting Goal 1, poverty reduction. Unequal distribution of education levels in the region is one of the main channels by which inequality affects development. Low-income families cannot invest in their children's education, even though such an effort produces social and economic benefits. This unequal distribution of education is closely connected to low levels of productivity and to the fact that a large portion of the labor force works informally, and is a decisive reason why the economies are not very competitive.

Consequently, redistribution policies in the region can become complementary to economic growth. Indeed, efficient redistribution policies (in higher yielding human and physical assets)

10. That is, minimum targets for the poorest groups in the population.

help leverage the impact on poverty through growth. This in turn would help broaden the tax base and would loosen the possible efficiency costs of redistributive policies. The persistence of inequality in the region also suggests that there are considerable costs or political obstacles to redistribution. Hence the priority task in the future will be the identification of a set of policies to redistribute resources and assets while minimizing the political costs and possible distortions in economic incentives to growth.

Progress in indicators of gender gap reduction is likewise critical for reaching Goal 1, as well as for reaching Goals 2 to 7. Although there is still no reliable disaggregated measure of individual poverty by gender (all current measures of poverty relate to households rather than individuals) the greater poverty in female-headed households observed in the region suggests the importance of focusing on women in order to reduce household poverty. Perhaps more important, empirical evidence shows that investing in women in poor households has high returns in terms of increasing child welfare and reducing poverty as greater health care, education, and incomes of women in poor households are positively linked to child welfare. They are powerful and efficient vehicles for breaking the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage between parents and children and for combating structural or "hard" poverty in the region. Investments in women are likewise central (for obvious reasons) for reaching the other MDGs (as has been stated by the heads of the multilateral development banks and the International Monetary Fund) especially the goals of reducing child and maternal mortality and containing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Regionalization of the MDGs

Besides dealing with the two main regional challenges of reducing poverty and ensuring social development (on average), the MDGs impose two additional challenges for fulfilling the spirit of the Millennium Declaration:

1. *Defining and monitoring equitable social development goals (MDGs 2 to 7).* This implies reaching the goal by improving the equity of the rating distribution of progress across indicators, that is, improving the well-being of poor countries, relatively less developed regions, excluded groups and poor people (for which disaggregated data are needed).
2. *Recalibrating the social development goals (MDGs 2 to 7) for the region.* Such a calibration would take two main forms: first by raising the level of targets when they are very close to the current region situation, as is the case of Goal 2 for primary education, which can be raised to making secondary education universal (agreed upon at the Summit of the Americas). Second, complementing the indicators defined in the overall MDGs with indicators specifically relevant to the region (developed in the next chapter). That can be done, for example, also in the case of MDG 2, by complementing indicators of access to education with educational achievement indicators.

Institutional Conditions

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals assumes the adoption or ratification of basic principles and certain requirements and elements. With regard to principles, in Latin America the MDGs demand societies that are more socially cohesive, ruled by an explicit social contract between government and citizens. That means a transparent government guided by results, that can be held accountable, that promotes solidarity and equality, and that has informed ("empowered") citizens with clear rights and responsibilities.

Institutional development, public sector reform, and strengthening statistical capability are requirements. Today no one questions the central role of institutions, and the region is far below where it ought to be in indicators of confidence in government institutions. Deepening institutional reforms is hence a fundamental part of any development agenda, including achieving the MDGs, which themselves demand institutions ruled by measurable results. The major areas of institutional reform may be grouped into those that improve the democratic system, the rule of law, the relationship between the State, market, and

BOX 1.
PRIORITIES FOR INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

<i>(A) Democratic System</i>	<i>(B) Rule of Law</i>
(a) legislature	(a) judiciary
(b) electoral and party system	(b) access to justice
(c) public administration	(c) fight against corruption
(d) oversight and monitoring bodies	(d) alternative conflict resolution measures
(e) decentralization of political power	(e) normative, substantive, and procedural modernization
(f) civil society	(f) citizen security
<i>(C) State, Market, and Society</i>	<i>(D) Public Administration</i>
(a) professional quality of economic management institutions	(a) civil service
(b) market regulation institutions	(b) fiscal capacity and efficiency and transparency of spending
(c) institutions for the design of active and inclusive policies	(c) policy coordination
(d) consensus-building institutions	(d) management of public services
(e) environmental governance	(e) greater use of information institutions and communication technology

society, and management of the public sector (see box 1). The MDGs also demand effective institutions in the social sector, which means notably improving inter-institutional coordination, the efficiency of public spending, and appropriation of social policies by citizens.

The reform of public administration requires adequate fiscal policies, including setting up an effective tax system to provide the public revenues needed for good governance and for attaining the MDGs. Priorities in the region are fiscal management and discipline; a more effective tax collection system with a larger tax base for certain taxes; and balanced government spending to benefit investment in human capital and expanded opportunities

BOX 2. **KEY ELEMENTS HIGHLIGHTED AT THE** **REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MDGs, JUNE 2002**

Ownership of the Development Goals. Development goals must be adapted to the specific reality of the region as a result of an extensive interaction of governments with civil society, the poor, and the private sector. This requires broad participatory mechanisms where the voice of beneficiaries and social actors may be translated into national objectives.

Budgeting of the Development Goals. The development goals agreed upon in venues of participatory dialogue must be incorporated into public budgetary processes so that their attainment and sustainability may be assured. This assumes the design and implementation of multi-year budgets to ensure continuity and coherence in the planning of government spending and at the same time protect the poor from economic cycles and disruptions.

Management by Results. The ownership of the goals by the countries and the systematic allocation of social resources would not be sufficient without a public administration whose performance is based on achieving results rather than carrying out operations. A results-based management approach should be put into practice in the public sectors of the region to result in flexible operating organizational structures and implement the crosscutting development framework envisioned by the MDGs.

Monitoring of Efforts and Results. The designing of policies and social monitoring of government actions aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social equity must be based on better informed decisions. This demands putting in place broad information systems, which in a timely and reliable manner will be capable of monitoring not only the results of public policies but also government efforts and funding.

for the poor and excluded. It likewise means increasing efficiency, expanding social spending (in countries where it remains a low proportion of total spending and of GDP), protecting it (from crisis and fiscal cutbacks), and maximizing its distributional impact.

Finally, the MDGs demand that the governments of the region improve their systems of poverty statistics and social indicators, as well as their capacity to monitor quantitative goals and measure the results and impacts of policies.

The Regional Conference on the MDGs (held at the IDB in June 2002) also highlighted four key elements: ownership by the countries, incorporation into national budgets, management by results, and monitoring through exhaustive information systems.

As was seen in Chapter I, the Bank has been committed to the fundamental issues of the MDGs and has aided the countries through its operations.

In sum, the Bank must enhance institutional support to countries to promote monitoring of social indicators and the evaluation of programs to increase the effectiveness of development policies. In keeping with the Millennium Project, it should increase analytical ability to support countries in identifying policies that can facilitate reaching the MDGs, and, finally, enhance the design of social programs through comprehensive approaches to poverty reduction and intensify coordination between donors.

3. CONCLUSIONS

During the past decade, the region has achieved major advances in most of the MDG social indicators, such as primary education and reduction of child mortality. Nevertheless, advances made in the area of poverty were less encouraging.

Two additional key challenges for the region would be the pursuit of equitable social development and the recalibration of the social targets for the region. With regard to the former, emphasis must be placed on improving the well-being of the poorest regions, excluded groups, relatively less developed regions, and poor people. With regard to the latter, the region must raise the level of the targets in those cases in which they are very close to the current situation and use supplementary indicators that are especially relevant to the region. These two points will be taken up in detail in the following chapters.

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