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RETHINKING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL POLICY IN FRONT OF THE MILLENNIUM GOALS. CHANGING PROGRAMS AND SPEECHES AS ALTERNATIVES TO THE OFFICIAL MESSAGE

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Abstract

This article focuses on Mexicans, socially perceived as poor, and the impact of social policy in force in the second decade of the 21st century, focused on improving the living conditions of the population, living in poverty and facing the national democratic process, which represents the alternative of change to the national conditions in Mexico. A country with social inequalities, where the lack of guaranteeing equal living conditions through institutional frameworks that guarantee opportunities and access to common satisfiers is evident. Therefore, in the midst of a democratization process, the State seeks to address the levels of precariousness. In the midst of the recognition of the basic needs to be met among those who are reviewing the renewed social policy of the 21st century, the need to strengthen the living conditions of the excluded is prioritized and in its consolidation process it would guarantee attention to poverty through institutional channels. This is the case of the social development law, which deals with a problem of productive order from a State vision. An analysis is carried out that seeks to identify the relationship between the effectiveness of current actions to combat the lack of attention to basic needs and the institutionalized discourse, which, according to the social research approach, strengthens the interest in conducting studies on social precariousness as a group characteristic; fueled by the political discourse, exalted by the government in turn of the poor first. In this case, it is the message that strengthens the need to analyze the way, in which poverty is measured based on the recognition of poverty lines, as an instrument that allows knowing the number of people in that condition, according to the levels of dissatisfaction of food needs and due to the low level of economic income (inability to consume a basic set of food goods) for rural and urban environments. Therefore, it seeks to measure the lack of food needs, without considering the causes of inability to generate minimum income levels to consume basic foods.

Keywords: legal framework, social development, poverty, social policy, democracy, discourse, Mexico.

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1. Introduction

The Mexican neoliberal state has postulated, as part of its administrative effort and intervention in the internal market, that public spending prioritize attention to the social precariousness and poverty, in which millions of Mexicans live [1]. This takes place from the beginning of the instrumental policies of the Mexican State that recognized the lack of palliative instruments to address the problem of poverty and its causes. In this sense, the *World Economic Forum* had recommended to the Mexican Government to strengthen the quality of education and health services as auxiliary mechanisms [2]. While institutionally, the Mexican State has formulated the need to make a continuous effort with constant increases in public spending, aimed at assisting the income poor [3]. Various studies have historically demonstrated this and showed that as of 2010 the number of poor increased [4]. While the report, presented by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy in Mexico, showed in 2010 that more than 50 % of the national population lived in

conditions of income poverty [5]. In this way and under this principle of socialization, it has sought to favor the most disadvantaged groups, in the midst of recognizing the cyclical effect of intergenerational poverty.

Globally, the *Millennium Development Goals* and the *United Nations Development Programme* have urged nations to establish institutional mechanisms to care for the poor, underprivileged and socially excluded, analyzing the root causes of poverty [6].

The Mexican State has not only ratified but also reformed its commitments to care for the poor as a way of coping with the increase in the number of people, living in poverty. This article aims to show that the welfare social policy that helps the conditions of the population, living in poverty, does not allow evidence of an improvement in the causes of intergenerational poverty in the face of the national democratic process, which represents the alternative of change in the discourse of the present, away from the national needs to reduce poverty in countries like Mexico.

2. Materials and Methods

This study is based on a qualitative research approach. Data from secondary sources were used through research reports on the subject, magazine articles and books. As well as official sources that monitor or analyze the levels of poverty in Mexico and allow to generate a reflection on the subject under investigation.

The Social Development Law, published in the Official Journal of the Federation on 20 January 2004, had a decisive influence on the institutionalization of a project of attention by the Mexican state through public investment in projects and actions, aimed at low-income citizens, which benefited movements and groups, which have been strengthened by articulating mechanisms with self-management capacities.

In this article, we analyze the impact of social policy on direct benefit groups and how administrative and operational structures influenced the country's representative democracy.

Contemporary political history in Mexico narrates how governments made changes in the exercise and administration of public spending, which proved incapable of satisfying national demands, their failure propitiating a new project, called "first the poor", a banner in the 2018 presidential elections.

The possible correspondence between democracy and poverty is reviewed and analyzed, assuming that the impact of social policy on democracy is the result of rhetorical discourse processes of attention to the poor as a focal group.

This is relevant in the context of a new government where social policy is based on projects that focus on the vulnerable, making them representative groups and the basis of the structures.

3. Results

3.1. Democracy and social policy in Mexico at the beginning of the 21st century

The construction of democracy in Mexico, conceived as the development of a regime through participation, which promotes the protection of political and civil liberties, free elections and, in the midst of acceptable contests, the interests of groups, is based on the political-electoral reform of 1977 [7]. The democratic exercise reached its peak in national life and materialized with the triumph of the "government of change in the year 2000" in the midst of an electoral contest that resulted in the triumph of Vicente Fox Quesada, and allowed groups, considered antagonistic, and those who held power to coexist in a single model of political alternation.

From then on, and from the exercise of the powers of the executive, what was once called "a new governmental regime" was promoted, which would promote attention to the least favored groups in Mexico.

This gave rise to a system of government administration that sought to defend public investment among groups under a scheme that fostered empathy among representative groups.

In the midst of the so-called welfare policies in Mexico, the "*Oportunidades*" programmer – which derived from a predecessor programmer, promoted by President Ernesto Cerdillo

Ponce de León in 1997, was launched as the government's instrument for improving the living conditions of the poor, demonstrating its effectiveness through the results obtained and the state's interest in the growing number of people, living in poverty, in a democratic exercise that favored the paradigm of a new Mexican state [8].

"The strategies, contained in the National Development Plan, are aimed at empowering political and economic actors to participate in the reforms that will be promoted; it seeks, through these strategies, to establish alliances and commitments with social, economic and political groups... so that the construction of our future is a shared task".

The new institutional life, in addition to being relevant for the Mexican state, allowed for the existence of new actions in response to groups, created in the last decade of the twentieth century, advocating for a new state structure that favored access to information, transparency and accountability. It is therefore considered a decisive phase in the construction of democratic life, the fundamental element of which demanded compliance, sanctions and relevant regulatory frameworks for those who hold the power to administer public resources.

In this context, the idea was favored that power groups under different currents would participate in the exercise and discussion of the distribution of public resources.

It was in the discussion exercises on earmarked resources from 2002 onwards that the social policy agenda became evident, and with it, the first investment results of the current social policy.

However, in the centralized administration, the levels of public spending would become the discourse of the electoral party options for subsequent periods. This turned social policy and the discourse on the poor into a project of local instruction, listening and promotion of public programmers and actions.

By 2006, social policy would continue with the same expectations and the same interest in paying attention to the poor as a group of electoral sympathizers. At the same time, national life was being shaped in the midst of efforts to generate equilibrium with high public investment projects and redistributive impacts, focused on social groups.

3. 2. Attention to poverty and results

The normative framework of social policy became the means, by which the improvement of the conditions of those considered poor would be aided, prior to the identification of observed and measured deficiencies [9].

In this way, from 2001 onwards and with the lack of mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of social policy, the federal government, through the executive branch, created the Technical Committee for Poverty Measurement (CTMP), with the aim of building a theoretical framework for research on poverty in Mexico, and to recognize the number of people in this condition [10]. By this means, the control and execution of actions for the establishment of criteria and indicators was initiated, which allowed the recognition of people, living in poverty, from a procedural vision for the identification and measurement of poverty from a multidimensional approach.

Considering the need to establish measurement instruments to determine the number of poor people, in 2002 the CTMP officially defined the poverty lines (PL) to quantify and identify people, living in hunger [10]. However, it was officially on 20 January 2004, when the General Law of Social Development (LGDS) was decreed and the CTMP was granted powers to make recommendations to the federal executive on current social policy.

The CTMP became the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy (CONEVAL) on 25 August 2005 [11], institutionalizing the attention and evaluation of poverty reduction programmers through the use of information, generated by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), and based on income as the first indicator of poverty, assisted by other indicators, such as average educational backwardness in the household, access to health services, access to social security, quality and space of housing, access to basic services in housing, access to food and degree of social cohesion.

With the General *Law of Social Development* (LGDS), the exercise of social rights would be guaranteed, in favors of social equality, through the recognition of minimum resources, which privilege the development of the most vulnerable Mexicans.

The normative framework is established, so that poverty attention programmers are not kept under the same name and are generalized to Social Development and Poverty Overcoming Programmers, with their own rules of operation, based on guidelines and criteria, established by the CONEVAL.

However, the LGDS did not define poverty. Instead, it attributed its definition as a power to CONEVAL. Nevertheless, it established that the total budget, allocated to Social Expenditure, could not be less than the previous one. And it must be increased at least in the same proportion as the expected growth of the Gross Domestic Product (Art. 20, LGDS). This condition benefits a regressive dose in the level of expenditure in favors of poverty-related spending.

In this way, Oportunidades (2001) – with its own social programmer reference, Progres-a (2000) – would become a programmer with a redistributive vocation and special attention to the problem of poverty, subject to constant evaluation by the CONEVAL, with the possibility of external organisms to evaluate the results on poverty in Mexico (Art. 81-82, LGDS). Meanwhile, the exercise of obtaining the data, denoting the poverty conditions of Mexicans, was controversial, despite the efforts, the figures revealed that poverty had increased and that the forecast of the demographic count had also failed, showing a decrease in the population, a fact that some specialists considered was due to emigration for lack of employment opportunities in Mexico [12].

Nevertheless, in 2005, 33 billion pesos (1.1 billion USD) were spent on the problem of poverty. In 2004, 25 billion pesos were invested [13], which represented a 25 % increase from 2002 to 2004 and a 54.4 % increase in the number of beneficiary families. The growth in school scholarships reached 5 million families [14]. In 2008, the number of people, living in extreme poverty, decreased from 11,859,300 to 10,412,600, a reduction of 2 % of the population.

3. 3. A new definition of poverty

Some studies about of poverty, have divided the level of deprivation of Mexicans into: food, capabilities and patrimony; food poverty was defined as the inability of households' disposable income to meet the Basic Food Basket (BFB) through income in rural and urban areas; capabilities poverty referred to the insufficiency of households' disposable income to acquire the BFB and to make the necessary expenses in health and education, dedicating the total income for these purposes, resulting in long-term capabilities poverty; and of wealth, as the insufficiency of household disposable income to acquire the basic food basket (BFB) and to make the necessary expenditures on health, clothing, housing, transport and education, when the total household income was used exclusively for the acquisition of these goods and services, generating the LP of wealth [15].

As of 2008, and despite the fact that Mexico was experiencing one of the greatest international economic crises, the change in the rules of operation of federal resources, as well as the modification of the main beneficiary of basic programmer, such as “*Oportunidades and the Popular Insurance Programmer*”, focused on greater participation of female heads of household, would make it possible to meet and partly guarantee the commitments, acquired in the “*Millennium Development Goals*”.

However, in 2012, the data show that more than 50 million Mexicans were living in poverty and more than 60 million people received incomes below the welfare line [16]. These data reflect an increase of 7.47 % of the population in this condition, according to CONEVAL's multidimensional measurement; however, in the case of the population that receives an income below the welfare line, the panorama is even more discouraging, with an increase of almost 11 percentage points with respect to 2008.

According to the report “*Measuring and analyzing poverty in Mexico. Memoria's 2006–2018*”, between 2010 and 2012, despite the fact that the national economy grew, that is, despite the fact that wealth was generated, its distribution did not allow for a reduction in poverty. Even under the multidimensional methodology, it was observed, that the population with income below the welfare line was 60.6 million [17]. So, 7 million more than the total number of poor people, from which can be inferred the high degree of precariousness of the labor market in Mexico. Only

through the action of contingent programmer to combat poverty can the magnitude of the social imbalance be reduced, although this does not reverse its growing trend.

Thus, by 2014, there was an increase of two million in the number of people, living in poverty, while the 2016 measurement indicates a return to 2012 levels (53.4 million people, living in poverty). The 2012 results showed that poverty in the country still affected almost half of the population (53.3 million people), while extreme poverty affected one in ten people (11.5 million people). Saw an increase of two million in the number of people, living in poverty, while the 2016 measurement indicates a return to 2012 levels (53.4 million people, living in poverty) [18].

According to the 2016 Multidimensional Poverty Measurement, the percentage of people in poverty decreased compared to 2012 from 45.5 to 43.6 % (an increase of approximately 68 thousand people in absolute terms) and that of extreme poverty decreased from 9.8 to 7.6 % (with a decrease of 2.15 million people).

On 15 June 2018, the CONEVAL Steering Committee approved the update of the methodology, which, apart from the identification of people in extreme precariousness, incorporated a change in the denomination of the Economic Welfare and Minimum Welfare Lines to Income Poverty and Extreme Income Poverty Lines [19].

In this sense, the identification and recognition of the levels of expenditure was related to the conditions of labor income and expenditure on consumption of basic goods. Among the main contributions, made by the ENOE (2017) and its use by the CTMP (2018), was that the recovery of labor income was reflected in the decrease in the percentage of the population with labor income below the Extreme Income Poverty Line between the first quarter of 2015 and the second quarter of 2017 [20].

The improvement, observed in both indicators, slowed during the rest of 2017, due, among other factors, to the increase in the cost of the food basket. Finally, in the second quarter of 2018, a recovery was again observed in both indicators. The gradual recovery of the percentage of the population with *labour* income below the *Extreme Income Poverty Line* has not been able to reach the levels, observed in 2005, when the series began. In the second quarter of 2006 this indicator showed its minimum level, 32.6 % of the population had a *labour* income below the cost of the food basket; in contrast, in the second quarter of 2018 it reached 38.5 % of the population, which means an increase of 5.9 % in 12 years. ENOE (2017) [21].

3. 4. The ‘poor first’ social policy in 2019

One of the most effective arguments in the search for messages that are expected to be effective in the acceptance of the metric of legitimization of the federal government from 2019 onwards has been the argument of “first the poor” as a vehicle for acceptance of the institutional efforts, emanating from the Mexican government.

In this way, the processes that seek to strengthen the idea of this effort have become a current project of communication and organization of the forms of attention to the needs of the poor. However, the development of social policy has become an alternative project of discursive attention: direct economic resources in terms of a differentiated classification of programmers and mechanisms that are not subject to verification and monitoring.

In other words, the process of generating social policy actions contributes to a local and procedural development of the rhetoric of the discourses; attending to poverty because it becomes a persuasive project of acceptance of a political project and organization of the structure with an urgent need for legitimization. Formalizing the processes of applying benefits to the population, living in poverty, constitutes a mechanism of direct attention outside the institutional mechanisms of verification and management of public resources, which is currently not public knowledge.

Limitations. As we have already mentioned before, the study was based on the analysis of secondary data. So, the resulting exercise was achieved in the midst of existing sources and through the institutional framework. Therefore, one limitation was that the researchers were unable to collect strong, direct evidence through a primary data point of view. However, the evidence of the studies carried out that served as the basis for this study present an alternative knowledge of the situation of poverty, in the particular case of countries, such as Mexico. For future research and to

advance the importance of studies on poverty and precariousness in the political scene, it would be useful for any researcher to apply primary and secondary data approaches.

4. Discussion of results

The development of policies to address the condition of poverty and social precariousness is one of the basic programmers of attention in developing countries. National projects that propose specific actions to address the problem of social precariousness constitute a viable mechanism for legitimization and acceptance of the government in power by representative groups.

This is the case of poverty as a current problem, created in the satellite context of nations; strengthened by conditions of lack of income, low productivity, poor quality education and health services, which generate precarious living conditions and income limitations.

In view of the above, addressing the problem of poverty as a socio-economic characteristic of income among the population and represented as a group, constitutes a mechanism of recognition of the forms of attention to group interests, making rhetoric the means of promoting political development.

Through the rhetoric applied, contributions have been made to normative frameworks; changes have been attributed to the forms of resource distribution and even modifications have been made to the organizational structures in the Mexican system. The General Law for Social Development is evidence of this and therefore favors it in the midst of a long-term national project.

The social policy exercises, focused on the population living in poverty in Mexico, since 2002 have shown the government's efforts to meet the demands of the population and have turned social policy into actions of interference to support the group that perceives it as necessary to its rational expectations. In the democratic arena, it generates group followers among those who perceive the need for interference as real.

5. Conclusions

The article aimed to reflect on social policy in the case of Mexico, as a project for the execution of public actions in favor of the population in conditions of poverty. However, the exercise of assessing the effectiveness of social policy has undergone permanent changes in the measurement instruments, used to quantify the number of people in precarious conditions, together with changes in the official discourse that perceives it as part of the political opportunity; of acceptance of political leadership among the masses and with it, of the changing mechanisms, used to identify and target government efforts, particularly public spending. All this, as part of the same contextualization of public spending. In this sense, it was from the first decade of the 21st century that social policy in Mexico has been institutionalized in the midst of recognizing the problem of extreme poverty and with it, the legal frameworks to provide minimum protection and guarantees of survival that allow to recognize them not alien to the perfectibility of applied processes but to the paradigms of the public sector from a known approach of intervening State.

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