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“SOCIAL POLICIES FOR THE URBAN  
POOR: THE ROLE OF POPULATION,  
INFORMATION SYSTEMS”

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# **Social Policies for the Urban Poor: The Role of Population Information Systems**

**Paper Prepared for the UNFPA Country Support Team for Latin  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

According to estimates from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, there were 211 million poor individuals in Latin America in 1999. Due to the high levels of urbanization, nearly 65% of the population below the poverty line lives in urban areas. Social policies to ensure access to sanitation, health services and education, as well as to counteract violence and substandard housing are very important issues in almost all Latin American large cities.

Some of the most important questions regarding those policies are the following: Is the distribution of resources in different places consistent with the distribution of the population and with the level of poverty? Have the targets been well defined? How many people are excluded from the program? The answers to such questions depend on the understanding of each policy design and implementation. However, those answers also depend on good information systems and population data.

Information systems are essential because they are the lenses through which social policies are seen, conceived and presented in the public arena. Not only are information systems a necessary component of all social policies but also the outcomes of these policies are influenced by the data used to support them. Population data is a key element of urban social policy information systems, both because it is needed for the generation of coverage indicators, and because census data are the only universal database not biased by particular institutional conditions of data production.

In sum, the extension of coverage for the poor can be significantly influenced by the information systems available, even when governments really intend to overcome the existing social and institutional barriers for provision of the social service. Training of intermediary level personnel, development of early warning indicators, and the provision of information capable of addressing the issue of where to act are the most strategic elements of the information agenda for social policies in Latin America's large urban areas.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The community of population studies represents a small but very important player in what we may call the social policy information community in Latin America. It is possible that currently the most general tasks of this group are to make poor people visible and promote their inclusion in databases. This demands not only a strong commitment to the provision of accurate and adequate data, but also a clear understanding of how social policy works and how easily information systems underestimate the poor, through different institutional features and technical mechanisms. UNFPA is in a strategic position to support this idea of "targeting social policies to the urban poor" because of its sound experience on how to work with demographic information systems and on how to address the poor in different areas (and with different cultural backgrounds).

From a general perspective, one may argue that the traditional mission of UNFPA in Latin America – of providing family planning and reproductive health services – is now more needed in other places, such as Central Africa and Southern Asia. However, even in this new demographic scenario, important population and development issues still arise. The slow economic growth of most developing countries is not reducing poverty and inequality, particularly in Latin America (World Bank, 2000; Cepal 2001). Poverty is a phenomenon that seems to be related to different population dimensions, including migration, age structure and family arrangements (UNFPA, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, most social policy studies (from a political science or economic background) are based on what one may call an "offer perspective". Those studies are focused on the financial and operational

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<sup>2</sup> "There is generally agreed that widespread poverty has significantly influenced on, and is in turn influenced by, demographic parameters (population growth, structure, movement and distribution), and also that the eradication of poverty will contribute to achieving early population stabilization" (UNFPA, 1996: 596).

aspects of the policy, working with elements such as budget, bureaucracy, number of employees, number of people benefited, and cost and efficiency. However, a population approach may provide a unique "demand" perspective: the understanding of the people who are theoretically the object of those policies (their number, composition, location, values, etc.). This bottom-up perspective can highlight those poor and/or highly segregated people who are not being benefited by social policies.

On the one hand, we want to stress the argument that different population dimensions – family structure, life cycle, age structure, population distribution, reproductive behavior, etc. - can strongly influence the outcome of different social policies even in an urban environment of low fertility rate. On the other, it may be argued here that most social policy strategies for developing countries heavily demand detailed social and demographic information in order to work properly.<sup>3</sup>

In this document, we first present some key information on poverty in Latin America. Secondly, we discuss some general theoretical approaches for the relationship between poverty and social policies and its consequences in terms of information systems. Then, we discuss some of the consequences of the recent trends in social policies in developing countries for Population and Development Strategies (PDS), stressing the issues of policy decentralization, policy targeting, and action through participatory projects and non-government organizations (NGOs) (section 3).<sup>4</sup> Finally, this issue is addressed from the point of view of public information systems, and how those issues are related to a population and development agenda (sections 4 and 5).

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<sup>3</sup> The REDATAM project, developed by Celade in Chile (Centro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Demografía), is an important example of demographic information systems for small areas. See [www.eclac.cl](http://www.eclac.cl).

<sup>4</sup> The social policies to be focussed on are education, health, housing, sanitation and urban infrastructure. We will not discuss the policy of social security, since the issues of aging and retirement plans are already the object of an important debate among UN agencies (Martine, Hakkert and Guzmán, 2000).

## 1. URBAN POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA

At the beginning of the 21st century, poverty remains a major issue in Latin America. According to estimates from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cepal, 2001), there were 211 million poor individuals in Latin America in 1999. This figure corresponds to 43.8% of the population of the region in the same year. Although this proportion has declined in the 90s, it is still higher than the poverty level of 1980 (40.5%). Furthermore, when considering only the extremely poor – those who cannot meet their basic dietary needs – the figure for 1999 amounts to 89 million people, or 18,5% of the total population.

In terms of rural-urban distribution, the number of poor people living in urban areas reached 134 million in 1999, according to the same estimates. This means that 65% of the Latin American poor population was living in urban settlements. This proportion has grown since the 70s, following the general urbanization trends. Such dynamics have been called the urbanization of poverty (Arriagada, 2000).<sup>5</sup>

Urbanization and urban concentration in metropolitan areas refer to an often neglected issue in the development agenda (Clark, 1996). Many development initiatives have a “rural background” in terms of how both public policies are conceived by the poor, and projects and proposals are designed and implemented. This can be partially explained by the persistent understanding that big cities are not the center of the social problem in developing countries. Since the theory of modernization, large cities have been seen as “islands of privilege” (Harrison, 1982: 145) when compared to the poor countryside.

In this perspective, comparative studies, such as the one performed by Brockerhoff and Brennan (1998), tried to show that the living conditions in developing countries are better in large cities than in the smaller settlements, although this difference has declined remarkably lately. However, such perspectives miss the point that a series of authors are making about the risks related to the impressive spread of very large cities in developing countries (Hardoy, 1989; Jones and Visaria, 1999; Roberts, 1994; Kaplan 1996; Massey, 1996, UNDP, 1999; ADB, 1997, Arriagada, 2000). The poor population is increasingly settling in large cities and metropolitan areas that lack basic infrastructure and social services. Poverty is also a metropolitan issue, and life in any megacity of any developing country – which means lack of proper housing, inadequate sanitation, heavy traffic congestion, unemployment, violence, pollution and corruption – can be unbearable.<sup>6</sup>

Some countries, such as Brazil, have more than 40% of the population living in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million people, according to the 2000 Census.<sup>7</sup> Buenos Aires and Mexico City are extreme examples of urban primacy, with such cities representing more than 20% of the country's total population (Salas, 1994). The new scale of these metropolitan areas in developing countries poses new problems and dimensions for old problems. For instance, the population of some metropolitan areas in

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<sup>5</sup> “Latin America is the most urbanized area in the developing world. With an urban population of over 75 percent, its urbanization rate is similar to that of highly industrialized countries. Nearly 70 percent of people who live at or below the poverty line live in urban areas. Many live in informal settlements, with limited or no access to basic services. They suffer from substandard housing, insecure land tenure, inadequate access to affordable transportation networks, environmental degradation, and increasing social problems such as urban violence” [www.worldbank.org/urban](http://www.worldbank.org/urban).

<sup>6</sup> The persistent wage differentials between large cities and the countryside are many times described as a market failure, since it is not well explained by economic theory: rural migrants are supposed to move to urban areas with higher wages until this differential disappears (Henderson, 1988). However, it may well hide other non-measured costs associated with the living conditions in large urban areas and/or other action rationale from the point of view of the migrants (Portes, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> The Brazilian Statistical Bureau (IBGE) is redefining the concept of Metropolitan Area so as to cope with this problem. Brazil is probably an extreme example of how urbanized a developing country can become.

the developing world - Calcutta, Mexico City, Lagos, Sao Paulo, Manila, Caracas, etc. - has become larger than that of entire countries.<sup>8</sup>

As far as public policies are concerned, the issue of how to deal with urban areas is not a simple one. In those areas, governments face a permanent trade-off between investing in the economic infrastructure that will improve the economic performance and create jobs (and attract more migrants) or investing in social infrastructure and services that are very expensive. They also demand huge bureaucracies (especially in education and health) and are not appropriately valued by the "elite" and media, since their families are unlikely to live in shantytowns, send their children to public schools or depend on public health care facilities. This issue is discussed in the next section.

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<sup>8</sup> "It can be argued that the most pressing population problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be related to city growth. Cities already harbor almost half of the world's total population. More importantly, nine-tenths of all population growth during the coming years will occur in towns and cities. Between 1990 and 2025, the number of people who live in urban areas is expected to double from 2.28 to 4.74 billion people. That is, all the city growth that has occurred in the history of humankind to this day will be duplicated within a generation. Almost all of this increase will occur in developing countries" (Martine, Hakkert and Guzmán, 2000: 13).

## 2. WHY ARE THE POOR WORSE OFF REGARDING ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES?

In general terms, it is obvious that a lot of people do not have access to public services in developing countries. However, one cannot take it as a general rule. Access can vary significantly among countries, regions and families with the same level of income. In other words, lack of social services is not necessarily the fate of the poor.<sup>9</sup> Following the literature on social movements and institutions, we can devise different explanations of why this happens even in the richest urban areas of Latin America.

A first argument can be built upon the idea that people with a lower educational level have a weaker personal network and are less organized, therefore being less capable of demanding public services from the local government (Burestein, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Briggs, 2001; Jacobi, 1989). When the decision-making process regarding the amount of service provided in each place partially depends on the direct demands of the local population – stated either individually, or through social movements – less educated and illiterate groups have more difficulty to express their needs.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, hypotheses based on social capital and/or a pluralistic political perspective – of which the outcomes of public policies are the result of the action of interested groups (and/or organizations and social movements) – logically result in worse coverage for less organized people (or areas).<sup>11</sup> It is essential to note that the proportion of less educated and organized people in large metropolitan areas of developing countries is much higher than that of developed countries. Furthermore, the resources available are scarcer, emphasizing the already pronounced inequalities.

A second important argument can be developed based on the recent neo-institutional perspectives that stress the role of bureaucracy as an important player that constrains and affects the outcomes of diverse public policies (Evans, 1994; Savich, 1988). According to this view, the characteristics of the bureaucratic body in terms of training, bureaucratic insulation, cohesion, values, etc. may significantly affect public policies in the long run. In most developing countries, the people that are deciding where and how to provide social services for the poor are not themselves poor. They do not necessarily belong to the same ethnic group of the poor, nor do they necessarily understand their social codes, language, behavior, and values. As a consequence, lower-income sectors of the population from shantytowns and/or poor suburbs in developing metropolises may become victims of the prejudices of high- and middle-class public managers, not being perceived as preferential subjects for public policies. This hypothesis seems to be stronger for specific policies, such as sanitation and urban infrastructure (Marques, 2000). It also seems to apply to the regions in which “the inheritance of an institutional culture biased towards inequalities” persists (Werna, 2000). This appears to be the case of countries with a long tradition of authoritarian rule.<sup>12</sup>

A third argument follows the established tradition in institutional economics, stating that stability of the judicial system and of property rights tend to strongly influence economic performance in the long run. Organized legal systems produce lower economic risks (expressed on interest rates) and provide

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<sup>9</sup> This point has been made, for instance, by the Human Development Index project (UNDP, 1999; UNDP, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> In three cities of the Metropolitan Area of São Paulo that we surveyed (Guarulhos, Mauá and Embu), the major information source to decide the location of new municipal schools has been the direct claim by the population. Moreover, the very poor population is largely formed by recent migrants with a weak connection with systems of collective representation (Torres and Marques, 2001). Recent migrants usually do not vote in their newly adoptive city, which makes access to councilmen and other representatives even more complicated.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam (2000) calls it “the dark side of the social capital”.

<sup>12</sup> Elite theories may indicate similar policy outcomes in Latin America. However, it is important to notice that those theories have completely different political consequences in terms of the strategies of how to address these issues.

stimulus for long-term investments (North, 1981; 1990).<sup>13</sup> International organizations discussing developing countries have frequently used this argument, defending the urgent regularization of land property as a precondition for further social and economic development (World Bank, 2000).<sup>14</sup>

It seems to be a fact that laws and regulations regarding different aspects of social life cannot be taken for granted in those cities, especially when such regulations are related to land use. For instance, estimates of the percentage of population living in informal settlements in almost all developing countries' metropolises vary from 30% in Latin American large cities to 80% in African ones (Scheingart, 1989; Lim, 1995). Only a small part of the city - which has also been called "the legal city" - can be to some extent comparable to a city of a developed country and is reflected in the public database on land use (Gronstein, 1986).

Large parts of the metropolises of developing countries refer to some form of irregularity that somehow "justify" the non-provision of social services, or to limit their possibility. It is more difficult to find proper site location for social equipment in irregular or illegal land. Moreover, the State must follow some legal procedures in order to appropriate private land. It takes more time to find proper land for public equipment close to illegal developments and shantytowns. Sometimes the State decides not to invest in these areas due to the risk of losing public investments made in such places - which may be later appropriated by their private owners (Maricato, 1996). Lawsuits against public administrators who do not follow the complex set of standard procedures may be filed in regard to land use regulations.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, real estate databases - generally used for fiscal purposes - are sometimes the only consistent information system employed by many Latin American city governments. When this is the case, residents of invaded areas "do not exist" in the city information system because they are neither included in the records, nor do they pay land taxes.<sup>16</sup> The failure on land use databases also happens because of the complex arrangement of land use regulations: building norms, environmental constraints for land occupation, infrastructure regulation on neighborhood development, zoning, and property rights (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1: Forms of regulation and of housing occupation in large cities of developing countries.**

REGULATIONS ON PROPERTY RIGHTS	
<i>Legal</i>	<i>Illegal</i>

<sup>13</sup> This argument can be found, for instance, in the discussion of the need of micro-credit for the poor in developing countries (Debraj, 1998). Since the property of land is not legal, families cannot use it as collateral for loans, reducing the potential use of these funds for new investments in the home and/or in a family business.

<sup>14</sup> "Only well functioning land markets can provide an adequate supply of housing, and maintaining these markets is another task that deserves attention from the public sector. Providing universal registration and establishing clear property rights to all urban land will require strengthening existing institutions. Ill-defined land rights render land useless and discourage the redevelopment of entire portions of a city. But simply providing security of tenure creates incentives to improve housing and infrastructure dramatically. To avoid adding to the backlog of problem housing and neighborhoods, new developments must meet basic - but not excessive - compliance standards" (World Bank, 1999: 146).

<sup>15</sup> This is the case of the sanitation and education segments. This information has been privately provided by the Secretary for Education of São Paulo, and by the Planning Superintendent of Sabesp, the sanitation company of the State of São Paulo.

<sup>16</sup> Illegal occupation areas, irregular land developments and shantytowns are marginally surveyed, and the data obtained on them is controversial and difficult to verify (Torres and Coelho, 2001). Other administrative data - dependent upon information systems on land, education, health, sanitation, etc. - are similarly biased by the particular conditions of data production, or by its institutional features (see section 4).

<b>REGULATIONS ON LAND USE, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<i>Legal</i>	<b>A</b> Regular housing areas	<b>B</b> Invasion areas
	<i>Illegal</i>	<b>C</b> Slum areas Irregular developments	<b>D</b> Squatter areas Shantytowns

Source: Adapted from Lim (1995: 525).

In summary, lack of social organization, prejudice from the bureaucrats and an environment of informality on land use are basically the main arguments used to explain the dramatic inequalities in the provision of urban infrastructure and social services in these developing metropolises. Despite the different political and theoretical consequences of those explanations, this paper is not intended to discuss which of these elements is the most important for the understanding of urban inequalities. Probably, the explanation varies according to the specific social policy under scrutiny, and the particular historical circumstances of each metropolitan area (Savich, 1988).

It is nevertheless important to stress one particular implication that those elements have for social policies in large cities of developing countries. Full coverage depends on reliable information on both the non-organized population and/or the people living in informal settlements. Even when a government really intends to overcome the existing social and institutional barriers for provision of the social service, the extension of coverage for the poor can be significantly influenced by the information systems available. In other words, even when a particular government (including its related bureaucracy) is committed to the idea of addressing the needs of the poor, this government may have significant problems in gathering the information on the people for whom they intend to address its policies.

### 3. NEW TRENDS IN SOCIAL POLICIES

Broadly speaking, the 90s present an important challenge to a centralized approach to the provision of social service and to its financing due to its inefficiency and/or discriminatory bias towards specific regions, and social or ethnic groups:

“Along with the wave of globalization in trade, finance and environmental issues, another worldwide force is reshaping development efforts everywhere – localization. Localization is the push to expand popular participation in politics and to increase local autonomy in decision making. The impetus towards local autonomy stems in part from another global trend – urbanization (World Bank, 1999: 43).”

However, this trend towards localization can be better understood in terms of three different elements not necessarily present in all social policies with a local perspective. **Decentralization** is the process of transferring fiscal and administrative powers towards sub-national units (Finot, 2001). **Policy targeting** is a way of national or sub-national government addressing resources and/or services for specific social groups and/or local areas.<sup>17</sup> **Participation** is the introduction of new social actors out of the government (such as NGOs) in the process of policy making and/or policy implementation.<sup>18</sup>

Generally, decentralization refers to universal policies such as those of basic health and primary education. Targeting policies, on the contrary, refer to non-universal compensatory programs (food stamps, minimum income, etc.) while participation can be found both as a component of decentralized and targeting social policies. However, it is possible to find decentralized or targeted policies without any participation. In other words, those elements are different features of the issue of localization in social policies, each one with its specific problems, strategies, and different population challenges. We further develop this issue below.

#### 3.1. Decentralization

Decentralization has been considered a major force in recent social policies for different reasons. Decentralization seems to be a better way to reduce political instability in large countries with important regional and/or ethnic divisions (Stepan, 2001). It also seems to increase local responsibility and public service performance due to the greater proximity of the constituents with local elected leaders (Abers, 2000). Additionally, decentralization can be considered an instrument to promote equity when the sub-national governments have the fiscal capacity and willingness to deliver equivalent coverage of services for different country areas (World Bank, 2000). In Latin America, this process has been on-going place since the 80s in different countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Bolivia, as a consequence of both administrative and broader constitutional reforms.<sup>19</sup> In Mexico, decentralization also took place in relation to sanitation and education (Savedoff and Spiller, 1999; Lever, 1999).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In Spanish, this process is being called “focalización” (Arriagada, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> There is also another element in this process: a strong demand for indexes that is reshaping the way government and society are monitoring those policies (see Appendix 1).

<sup>19</sup> “Several of the current processes of decentralization commenced according to a centralized model through a modality of transfer of functions from a central government to designated authorities, as a component of administrative reform aimed at facing the growing inefficiency. These processes consisted both of functional (or horizontal) decentralization as well as territorial (or vertical) decentralization. The most relevant was the latter through which territorial logic was strengthened vis a vis sectorial, a characteristic of centralism. In several countries functions had already been transferred to designated territorial authorities, tasks which were mainly related to the provision of basic infrastructure, education and health. This was the case of Chile, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia.

However, decentralization cannot always be considered as positive. Macroeconomic stability may be jeopardized depending on how the decentralizing process is financed (World Bank, 1999). Decentralization may emphasize long traditions of inequality and segregation within a single geographic area when broader national policies do not protect minorities (Briggs, 2001).<sup>21</sup> The positive or negative effects of decentralization may depend on the local social and political context, as well as on the level of organization and/or of "social capital" of this local society (Putnam 1993).

Another important argument is that the scale of the city matters. Decentralization may produce different outcomes according to city size. Although it is obvious in some cases, such as that of sanitation – where economies of scale imply a better provision of services in large cities – it is not commonly considered for the policy of primary education, where the opposite may occur.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, the case for decentralization seems to be quite rational for small towns. In a small city that is not growing fast – which is the case of several small towns throughout Latin America - the demand for new urban infrastructure is not necessarily important when the sanitation system is already established. Most streets have already been built and paved, and there is no need for major highways and huge urban equipment. Broadly speaking, this kind of city seems to be relatively well prepared for decentralization. Although this argument may be considered problematic for severely poor areas or for fast growing frontiers, it is quite reasonable for the majority of small towns in Southern Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and other large Latin American countries.

Many of these local governments happily embrace decentralization because they will have more command over resources, and will probably be more able to better manage the single health care facility existent in the city, as well as the small number of schools and other social equipment. In a small city, although information systems may be considered important from a regional perspective, most Mayors are able to gather, through their personal network, the required information on the coverage of services and on the inequalities between areas, as well as being aware of the most important neighborhood demands (Seade, 2001).

However, in large and fast growing urban areas, such tasks are rather complex. Many large Latin American municipalities have already been overwhelmed by their traditional duties of providing urban infrastructure, land use control, garbage collection and housing policy. Those cities are spreading fast. Generally, the rate of growth of the population, built-up areas, and the number of automobiles require

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**However with the general recovery of democratic rights, the essential characteristics of decentralization changed: as a result of subnational government elections, processes which had been merely of administrative decentralization, there was a change to political decentralization and this was decisively promoted through constitutional reforms: Argentina and Brazil in 1988, Chile and Colombia in 1991, Bolivia in 1994. It was through these reforms that the political-administrative conformation was redefined in each of these countries, as were the tasks and incomes of each level of governments within these nations. New systems of redistribution were established to compensate for the differences of income amongst territories (Finot 2001:17) according to already laid down or newly established constitutional texts.**

<sup>20</sup> In terms of reproductive health services, decentralization was recently performed in both Mexico and Bolivia with considerable implications for UNFPA assistance (Hakkert and Pruneda, 1999; Hakkert, Quintana, and Jové, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> "The American preference for local decision making is most directly reflected in the key policy areas relevant to inequality, such as land use and public education, that have long been the province of local governments and fiercely protected by them. But our distinctive localism is also reflected in the progressive devolution, over the past decades, of many new social policy making and funding decisions to states and localities (Briggs, 2001:33)".

<sup>22</sup> To the surprise of a considerable number of analysts on regional development in Brazil, many small towns in the western portion of the State of Sao Paulo are presenting better indicators in terms of infant mortality and education enrollment than the Metropolitan Area of Sao Paulo, and the most urbanized areas of Sorocaba, Campinas, Sao José dos Campos and Santos (Seade, 2001).

dramatic investments in transportation infrastructure (highways, tunnels, subways, etc.).<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, the competition for resources within different branches of government may put traditional social policies in a situation of having to strongly fight for funding.<sup>24</sup>

At the national level, social policy decentralization demands highly organized information systems in order to work with efficiency and transparency.<sup>25</sup> The unit of analysis of those systems (state, municipality, neighborhood, etc.) will depend on the policy design. In any case, such systems tend to be heavily dependent on sociodemographic information:

1. Information systems are needed for fiscal reasons. Particularly under decentralization, the federal government needs to control the level of expenditure of each local administration in order to curb the macroeconomic effects that uncontrolled local expenditures may very well produce.<sup>26</sup> The provision of adequate information by the local authorities is often established as a precondition for the states or municipalities to receive federal funds;<sup>27</sup>
2. Information systems are needed in order to curb corruption and/or discretionary criteria (based on political clientele, region, etc.) in relation to distribution of funds. Indicators composed with some demographic variables (i.e. per capita transfers) are generally used to allow comparisons and track the level of expenditure both in space and over time;
3. Information systems are introduced in order to promote a fair distribution of national funds towards different national subunits that are supposed to provide services. In some cases, the national government defines a certain amount of transfer per capita while, in other cases, the criteria of transfer is based on the number of units of the service provided (per student; per medical procedure; etc.);<sup>28</sup>
4. Information systems can generate indicators to be used as a measure of "quality control". Local and national managers demand different indicators of coverage (proportion of households with sewage), infrastructure (hospital beds per one thousand inhabitants) and outcome (infant mortality; proportion of illiterate children from 10 to 14 years old, etc). It allows an evaluation of the coverage and the quality of different services in different places and over time;<sup>29</sup>
5. The adoption of a certain set of indicators in the context of an information system for public policies - as a means to control the budget, the provision of the service, and its quality - may

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<sup>23</sup> **The politics of urban transportation are highly complex. They affect everybody that commutes in a city. Urban transportation is a particularly visible area of public policy, especially for the high and medium economic strata that necessarily use part of this infrastructure (even when they do not use public transportation, hospitals and schools). It is also many times the object of a powerful lobbying from the construction business.**

<sup>24</sup> **That is why some of the decentralizing policies imply the use of compulsory resources for specific social areas (Finot, 2001).**

<sup>25</sup> **"However the general tendency is towards decentralization at least to municipal level (even to submunicipal level, as in the case of Panama). Even in cases –generally federal countries where tasks have been transferred at intermediate level, it is clear that they, in turn must be transferred at some point to municipal level" (Finot, 2001: 17).**

<sup>26</sup> **Brazil is an important case study of how fiscal decentralization can endanger macroeconomic stability (World Bank 1999: p.163-5).**

<sup>27</sup> **In the last decade, the Brazilian Ministry of Health developed a huge database in order to standardize the data available on health decentralization (see: [www.datasus.gov.br](http://www.datasus.gov.br)) while the Ministry of Education started to produce a yearly school census for primary education: "Censo Escolar" (see: [www.inep.gov.br](http://www.inep.gov.br)).**

<sup>28</sup> **Decentralization in Brazil for both health and primary education is based on some variations of those two criteria (Arretche and Rodrigues, 1999; Costa, 1999).**

<sup>29</sup> **UNDP differentiates the so-called effort indicators (infrastructure, expenditure, etc.) from the outcome indicators (such as infant mortality), in an attempt to identify the specific role of a certain government on the improvement of a given policy (Kumar, 1999).**

produce unexpected policy implications. For instance, on the one hand, a simple per capita transfer does not allow direct control of the information on whether the service has really been provided. On the other hand, transfer per unit of service may allocate disproportional amounts of resources towards areas in which the services are better organized, such as large urban centers.

In any case, detailed demographic data play a major part in this process. In order to produce indicators, population forecasts by age groups and for small areas are needed as denominators for the administrative data produced directly by the policy. Indirect estimates of mortality and morbidity can highlight important health discrepancies among regions and social groups – phenomena not necessarily explained by the level of expenditures and efforts of a specific government.

Some uses of demographic data may nevertheless produce different distortions. For instance, when the distribution is based on a previous census, per capita transfer punishes the fast growing municipalities, while benefiting those areas that are losing population.<sup>30</sup> Naturally, when this distribution is based on projections, it may be fiercely contested by local authorities.<sup>31</sup> As a consequence, establishing universal standards of data production, as well as improving the credibility of the information systems on which the social policies are based, is essential for the success and continuity of such policies over time.

In summary, the decentralization of universal policies demands sophisticated information systems to produce transparency, efficiency and equity. Those systems demand a highly organized institutional structure at the national level - to define the schedule and procedures for data collection, the processing and criticism of the information, etc. However, most of these systems are in fact based on combinations of administrative data produced by the federal government (transfer per municipality, for example) with data produced locally under national supervision as well as census data, forecasts, and other complementary sources. Capacity to process, interpret and understand the meaning of such data is critically needed at both local and national levels (World Bank, 2000).

### **3.2. Policy Targeting**

Lately, the case for targeting has been very strong in the social policies of Latin America. There is a general understanding that the economic growth which occurred in the 90s did not reduce the high levels of inequality already existent, and that inequality cannot be exclusively addressed by universal policies (Cepal, 2001; Arriagada, 2000; Rocha, 2000; Lavinás et al, 2000). Accordingly, efforts should be made in order to transfer monetary income to the most needed: the extreme poor who live below the poverty line.

Until recently, targeting the poor was not at all a consensus. In the general framework of privatization and diminishing the role of the state in Latin America, targeting was sometimes understood as a way of eroding universal policies, particularly in the case of the policies for labor protection. It has also been interpreted as mere charity that does not deal with the origins of poverty, but only with its ex-post effect (Santos, 1987). Such criticism has been overcome in the 90s with compensatory programs being implemented by right and left alike, and with national governments putting in place broader programs such as "Comunidade Solidária" in Brazil and "Progresía" in Mexico (Resende, 2000; Cepal, 2001).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> That has happened in the case of Bolivia, in the context of the Law of Popular Participation (Ley de Participación Popular). See Hakkert, Quintana and Jové (1999).

<sup>31</sup> This is the case of Brazil.

<sup>32</sup> "Normally these policies, whether permanent or designed to face temporary problems are aimed at benefiting the most marginalized sectors of the population in a greater way. This is the case, for example, of some assistance programs such as the Education, Health and Food Programme in Mexico "Progresía" designed with integral criteria and whose objective it is to reduce severe poverty and concentration of income— transferring monetary or other resources (goods or services), normally of a limited but relevant amount for the family budget of the beneficiaries, but which are still insufficient so that these households may surpass poverty thresholds." (Cepal, 2001, p. 43).

Although simple in general terms, targeting the poor is a particularly complex problem, especially in large countries and large urban areas. Most targeting policies are defined in terms of a combination of sociodemographic dimensions of income, age, occupation, household condition, race, region and so on. However, the way a program deals with those dimensions may significantly reduce its range of action, and may indeed end up targeting other social groups. Some of the most common problems on targeting social programs using those variables are the following:

1. Due to budget restrictions, the choice of whom to include or exclude in a certain program is rather difficult. In most cases, such decisions imply excluding a lot of the poor.<sup>33</sup> Under such circumstances, the temptation towards discretionary selection may be overwhelming, especially considering the strong Latin American tradition of patronage and political clientele relationships. As a consequence, the decision of whom to include must be based on a set of general criteria, with the best data available, and within a transparent process;<sup>34</sup>
2. The “modus operandi” of the program may produce considerable unintended consequences (Cohen et al, 2001a): long lines and bureaucratic procedures, to name but a few, can make poor people less likely to seek such a service. Furthermore, service provision offices must be placed closer to the target population. Otherwise, the cost of being part of the program may increase considerably;
3. The way a program is publicized may reduce the possibility of addressing the extreme poor. For instance, in order to consider applying for it, poor people must be aware of the program. Being informed implies certain hidden costs, not only because newspapers and other media are not afforded by many individuals, but also because the people that need certain programs may not have the reading and/or cognitive capabilities to understand complex news, posters and mailing. When a program is not well publicized, it increases the discretionary power of government officials in choosing the people who are going to be part of it;<sup>35</sup>
4. Databases on the participants are poorly organized and/or non-existent. Especially in the case of temporary programs. Sometimes local government does not control how often a given person has entered a single program, or how many different programs this particular person or family has been part of;<sup>36</sup>
5. Targeting regions, especially when the spatial unity for the targeting is the state or the municipality, may exclude from a certain program a large number of poor people that live in large settlements that - even with a higher average income - present a substantial level of inequality. This is, of course, the case of metropolitan areas. Although they normally present higher average income than smaller settlements, they also concentrate larger groups of poor people in absolute terms.<sup>37</sup> The idea of targeting smaller areas within big municipalities has yet to be better

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<sup>33</sup> Obviously, a previous issue is to decide if a certain program should be based on a universal or on some targeting criteria. Demographic information can be very helpful for such a decision.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, the selection of areas for Progresía action in Mexico was based on a careful study that identified problem areas in rural, “Indigenous” and metropolitan regions (Garza, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> In recent fieldwork in the municipality of Guarulhos, in the Metropolitan Area of Sao Paulo, we were informed that the local government did not broadcast the opening of new vacancies in the public kindergarten over popular media (radio), a poster placed in front of the school being the only means of communication with the local population. Since kindergarten in Brazil is neither compulsory nor universal, this means that the informal network has been the real way towards getting a place in this kind of social equipment.

<sup>36</sup> The Secretary for Welfare of the State of Sao Paulo is particularly concerned with this issue. Personal interview held on July 2001.

<sup>37</sup> The “Alvorada Program” in Brazil, which intends to provide resources for adult education, is a very good example of that point. The program targets municipalities with low Human Development Index (HDI), according to municipal classification developed by UNDP and other national agencies (UNDP et al, 1998).

developed, and it may demand good local information and the use of other informational tools, such as the Geographic Information Systems (GIS);

6. Targeting specific age groups may also produce unintended bias. For instance, the minimum income programs that target families with school aged children in Brazil (7-14 year-olds) are somehow punishing young mothers with newborns, as well as other poor people in different age groups and family lifecycles (Rocha, 2000);
7. Specific program designs may influence demographic behavior – especially in terms of migration and reproductive behavior. The distribution of resources in specific places and/or for specific age groups may indeed produce unintended demographic responses.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, all these elements indicate that - in order to be successful - targeting programs must be well designed and develop organizational capabilities (Cohen et al, 2001a). The state must also have the capacity of isolating such social programs from the traditional claims for resource control by politicians and local leaders (Tendler, 1997). However, good sociodemographic information and sound analytical capabilities are also heavily needed to support such planning, resulting in effective targeting programs. The definition of who is going to be the target population, where they live, how to address them and how they are going to respond to the program are essential questions strongly dependent on reliable sociodemographic information and training.

### **3.3. Participatory Politics and Action Through NGOs**

The idea of social participation has a significant background in the fields of city and regional planning as well as a long tradition in public administration, especially in the United States and other developed countries (Davidoff, 1965; Friedmann, 1995). In developing countries, on the contrary, participation until recently had not been regarded as a necessary element of a development agenda (World Bank, 1999). This is particularly the case of countries under authoritarian rule.

However, since the 80s, some developing countries have witnessed a boom of different participatory mechanisms introduced in social policies in order to achieve different goals (World Bank, 2000). Generally speaking, the reasons for promoting decentralization (efficiency, social control, equity, etc.) are very similar to the reasons for promoting participation. However, while participation depends on decentralization (or targeting), it is possible to conceive decentralization without participation.<sup>39</sup> The claim for participation can be understood as a step forward in decentralization, so as to include not only the local government but also local non-government players in policy making.

Furthermore, since the influential work of Putnam (1993) on “social capital”, there has been a growing consensus on the fact that participation must be considered as a major element in the understanding of why different social programs have worked, or not, in different regions and countries. Although the concept of social capital – broadly understood as social connectedness - may be considered controversial, the importance of Putnam’s work lies in the provision of empirical evidence for the argument that social networks, social participation and trust have to be considered among the most important elements that explain the speed of development, as well as the linkages between democracy and development.<sup>40</sup>

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**Almost all municipalities that entered the program are in fact very small settlements. Consequently, the program is not benefiting the large illiterate population that lives in metropolitan areas (especially in their poor suburbs).**

<sup>38</sup> Some of the minimum income programs require at least two years of residence for a family to be eligible for application (Rocha, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> This is the case of the health policy in Mexico (Hakkert and Pruneda, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> “The concept of social capital, of social connection or community – has generated enormous, if sometimes confusing, interest from scholars, practitioners, and policy makers over the past decade. The scale and

However, the specific ways through which such non-government players are brought into policymaking can vary widely, with significant impact:

1. Public councils with the participation of representatives of the community are becoming tools to bring society into policymaking. In Brazil, for instance, the laws that define the decentralization process in education and health demand the constitution of Municipal Councils in order to allow the decentralization of resources. Municipal Councils seem to be the major participatory instrument in the Brazilian social policies within a universal framework (Montoya, 2001; Arreche and Rodrigues, 1999).<sup>41</sup> However, it is easy to argue that the mere existence of those Councils does not necessarily mean real participation. For example, the non-governmental representatives in such Councils are not always *de facto* public representatives. Additionally, there is no clear understanding of the circumstances in which such pro-civic norms may really work according to city size, level of education of the population, previous "social capital", etc.<sup>42</sup>
2. Another important group of social policies is directly implemented through NGOs. NGOs can be selected to manage federal funds in order to target specific social groups, such as teenagers, and people with a high probability of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and Aids – prostitutes, drug addicts, etc. (Cohen et al, 2001a; 2001b). Of course the partnership with NGOs can be justifiable for different efficiency and equity reasons, but it may very well produce unintended discriminatory outcomes. It is possible, for example, that social groups less connected with NGOs and/or living in areas with a small presence of NGOs may have limited access to public resources available.<sup>43</sup> Finally, when the selection of NGOs depends on certain abilities related to project presentation and/or technical skills, it is likely that those organizations originating from poorer areas will be at a disadvantage in so far as being granted federal funding;
3. There are also other alternatives of social participation. One of the most fascinating participatory experiences in Latin America is based on the so-called "participatory budget". This experience, first implemented in the municipality of Porto Alegre (Brazil), is exercised through the direct participation of local delegates, who help define the municipal budget, especially in what concerns urban infrastructure (Abers, 2000).<sup>44</sup> Besides the controversial issues regarding the effective participation or not of the majority of the population in the process (as well as the problem of weakening the power of elected representatives in the City Council), it is important to notice that – depending on the information available - the level of public investment in different parts of the city

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variety of interest are thanks in part to the influential work of American political scientist Robert Putnam and the veritable cottage industry of social capital studies and commentaries that his work has helped to inspire – or provoke. The broad notion that various features of social connectedness, such as networks, pro-civic norms, and social trust, can help individuals and groups to accomplish important objectives has gained considerable new legitimacy and attention, both in the United States and other parts of the globe. Recent research has provided considerable empiric support for, and promoted much broader public understanding of, ideas about social connection long taken for granted in key branches of social science, particularly in sociology" (Briggs, 2001: 2).

<sup>41</sup> The Associations of Parents and Teachers ("Associações de Pais e Mestres") are also compulsory organizations in Brazilian public schools in order to define school policies towards the distribution of important resources such as school materials, meals for children ("merenda") and other collective resources derived from private donations or community fund collection through parties and shows.

<sup>42</sup> At that point of the debate, it is clear that the creation of "social capital" is not at all an easy task (Durstun, 2000). What such pro-civic norms can do is to enhance the possibility of some existing social capital producing positive social consequences (Briggs, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> This is the case of recent migrants that may not have their own local social network to help them reach public services offered through NGOs (Portes, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> This experience is spreading to other large Brazilian cities: São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Santo André, Guarulhos, Belém, etc.

may very well be connected to the level of organization of the local population and the quality of their representatives in the participation process.<sup>45</sup>

In other words, there seems to be considerable room for further research to understand in what way these new participatory approaches improve social policies. Although good institutional research has a crucial role in understanding how specific policy mechanisms produce different policy outcomes, sociodemographic research is particularly needed to identify the people who are not being benefited by such programs.

In view of that, some key questions remain. Have the targets been well identified? How many target people are excluded from the program? Is there a significant number of poor people living in areas where the program is not present or misrepresented? Is the distribution of resources throughout different places consistent with the distribution of the population, and with the level of poverty? How can the program include the outsiders, even if they do not have access to the participatory mechanisms?

Of course the answers to these questions depend on a deeper understanding of each particular policy design and its respective implementation. Anyway, detailed demographic information for small areas is also needed in order to produce indicators to monitor such policies.<sup>46</sup> Demand and supply analysis can also be performed with the use of GIS to allow comparison of the distribution of families addressed by a program with the distribution of the place of residence of the target population.

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<sup>45</sup> This issue has been addressed by different program strategies (Abers, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> It is important to notice that many times the real poor live in small areas surrounding the city (shantytowns) only perceived as a unit through the use of data for very small areas such as census tracts.

#### **4. PUBLIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN THE DEVELOPING METROPOLES: ELEMENTS FOR A POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Information systems are the lenses through which social policies are seen, conceived and presented in the public arena. For instance, policy makers of much more organized societies and systems of cities – such as the ones of the European Community – are strongly demanding both macro and local level information about their settlements:

“ There is demand among policy makers at all levels for an assessment of quality of life in Europe’s cities. To meet this demand, there is a need for comparable information. Such information helps to identify priorities, to target actions and to assess progress. Such information is currently very limited. The Commission Communication ‘Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union (COM (97) 197)’ identified this need for comparable information and proposed a two-fold approach. First, the Urban Audit intends to ‘measure the quality of life in our towns and cities through the use of a simple set of urban indicators and a common methodology’. This would be undertaken with a view to these indicators being updated and, in the future, providing an assessment of the impact of urban policies on the development of urban areas. Second, in parallel with this approach, EUROSTAT, in co-operation with national statistical institutes, would process the ‘local’ level information on cities and urban agglomerations and harmonize information systems and definitions.” (Inforegio, 2000: 7).

We have already mentioned that social policy information systems usually demand demographic denominators to produce comparable variables to assess the coverage of different social policies. We have also discussed some issues related to the production and use of indicators for social policy planning. However, it would be interesting to further develop some of these issues focusing on large urban areas in developing countries:<sup>47</sup>

1. The institutional features of different social policies influence the production of administrative data. For instance, forms and reports are many times an extra burden to school principals who have to manage crowded schools with limited staff, equipment and training. The same is true in any crowded medical facility or public office. Furthermore, under decentralization policies, part of the administrative data is used as criteria for fund distribution, which may lead to the temptation of overstating data reports. In other words, establishing reliable administrative data production demands a clear policy perspective, well defined standards and criteria for data production, as well as trained and motivated professionals;
2. Administrative data cannot in any way be used to identify people not covered by a specific program. Although obvious, this simple statement sometimes implies a revolution in the way some programs are seen. This happens because under the influence of modern customer relationship management tools (CRM) sophisticated public administrators often do not understand the simple fact that the majority of the time the real problem is to find the “non-customer” of a particular public service – that is - the poor;<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Part of the comments produced in this section are not based on any particular literature, but built upon my personal experience as a practitioner of social policy information systems for different fields in Brazil (education, sanitation, health, environment and small businesses).

<sup>48</sup> This influence comes from the private sector where banks, credit-card companies and other large organizations are heavy users of CRM tools. Most private sector CRM systems are built upon complex

3. Even when a public database is able to gather information on the very poor, there is a strong probability of having significant amounts of missing data among their registers. The address register of poor people, for instance, is worse because those people misreport it more often due to low schooling and/or because the "street" is new (in an invaded area, perhaps) and there is no zip code for it;<sup>49</sup>
4. Administrative data production is fragmented between different branches and levels of government. Each department and secretariat may have its unique perspective regarding information systems and geographic units for service planning and provision. The education department, for instance, does not necessarily cross-reference its information with other departments, and many times even the geographic units through which data is organized are not compatible;
5. The trends towards localization in social policies (decentralization, targeting and participation) are creating new important tasks and challenges for local governments. As a consequence of such policies, municipalities must be able to plan the provision of the recently decentralized social services (especially education and health), identify targets for compensatory policies and promote participation. In other words, it means that local government must be able to provide services not previously provided, developing its infrastructure, bureaucracy, standards and information systems;
6. In developing countries, traditional demographic databases – especially birth registration - tend also to underestimate the poorest population, making them invisible for several public policies (UNICEF, 1998).

As a consequence, census data is particularly important because it is the only universal database not dependent on one particular public policy. It provides precious information about the people and the areas that specific policies are not able to cover. It is also important to notice that, although important, a household survey does not substitute a census since the size of the samples do not allow strong disaggregated data.

In other words, censuses – especially when they are organized in census tracts and GIS – must be regarded as a remarkable tool for supporting social policies at the local level. If this statement seems to be quite obvious for population specialists and UNFPA officials, it is striking to observe that such handling of information is not at all present at the local level of some of the most important Latin American metropolitan areas.<sup>50</sup>

Due to their appreciation of census data, the population community and UNFPA have an important opportunity to help the organization and use of this unique database for metropolitan areas of the

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database packages such as Oracle. Statistical packages (SAS and SPSS) are also used as a tool for "data mining".

<sup>49</sup> Ironically, having a zip code is a form of hidden citizenship not clearly understood by most database practitioners.

<sup>50</sup> "In most countries, the needed information is available through completed censuses and surveys, and the amount of work required to compile the information is manageable and affordable (...) New technologies have made it easier and cheaper to process data and understand its spatial implications.

If this information exists, why is it so difficult to access? Most cities have local planning offices or economic bureaus whose role is to collect and process statistical information about the city. But the census and survey data routinely collected at the national level are typically not available to local offices, at least not ready in a usable form. In other cases local offices collect basic demographic and production statistics. But this data are transmitted directly to the national capital and is not analyzed locally, either because local economic officers do not have the skills or resources, or because the city's decision makers do not demand the information" (World Bank, 1999: 138).

developing countries. Although UNFPA already supports census development, considerable work must be done locally to promote and improve its use.

#### **4.1. Urban Social Policies and Demographic Dynamics**

There is considerable international literature on how demographic dynamics are connected to different country development processes. It addresses, for instance, the issues of health and demographic transitions, urbanization, education, and labor markets, as well as their general macroeconomic impact of those dimensions (Hirschman, 1958; Kuznets, 1975; Preston, 1977; Caldwell, 1980; Blanchet, 1991, Higgins and Williamson, 1997; Livi-Bacci and De Santis, 1998). Little, however, has been done in order to understand the links between intra-urban demographic dynamics and their impact on social policies and living conditions at the local level (Martine, 2001).

It may be useful to highlight here an element familiar in the field of population studies but not always fully understood by local planners, that is, that different population dimensions can significantly influence the outcome of different social policies:

1. The overall age structure in some areas may have great impact on the demand for different social services, such as housing, reproductive health services, and basic education. Even with a low fertility rate, discontinuities in the age structure can produce, for instance, a very large generation of young people, causing significant stress on labor and housing markets of particular metropolitan areas;<sup>51</sup>
2. In developing cities, population growth rates may vary wildly in different places within a single metropolitan area. Even when the overall rate is low, it is possible to find areas losing a lot of people while others may present significant population growth (Pick and Butler, 1997; Taschner, 2000);
3. In general, population grows rapidly in some specific urban areas - those that have available land where the poor may settle. Unfortunately, most recent migrants do not move to well-structured neighborhoods of Latin American cities. On the contrary, the places with strongest demographic growth are often very poor suburbs and shantytowns, with high levels of environmental risks and lack of urban infrastructure and social services (Torres, 1997b; Salas, 1994; Pearce-Oroz, 2001);
4. In terms of the need for public investments, such phenomena may produce a paradox: local governments may need to continue investing heavily in urban infrastructure for these new poor suburbs, even when the total population is no longer growing. In other words, migration may continue to strongly pressure the metropolitan infrastructure despite a balance close to zero: it happens when the traditional rural-urban migration flow continues while a new outflow of native people or older migrants grows significantly;<sup>52</sup>
5. Mortality and fertility may vary widely in the different neighborhoods and districts of large metropolitan areas (Pick and Butler, 1997). Some dramatic changes may occur both as result of underlying demographic dimensions (age structure of the different places, level of education, etc.) and of the variation in the provision of social services at the local level (sanitation, public security, etc.);

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<sup>51</sup> Currently, this seems to be the case of the Metropolitan Area of Sao Paulo (Bercovich, Madeira, and Torres, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> Although the 2000 census is not yet available, this hypothesis could explain what happened in São Paulo in the 90s. This would be similar to the case of New York in the 70s and 80s, when the overall population was not growing but there was a significant inflow of international migrants and an outflow of white blue-collar workers. (Sassen, 1991).

6. In large urban areas of developing countries, age structure may also vary significantly along with the spatial dimension. Generally speaking, the poor suburbs and shantytowns present higher proportions of children and young population, while more consolidated areas show higher concentration of elderly population (Torres 1997b). Since areas with high proportions of poor population are also those with substantial concentration of special demographic groups – such as very young couples, and single mothers – the public services offered in those places should be differently tailored to address the characteristics and needs of each demographic group;
7. Population density can strongly affect the conditions of the provision of social services. On the one hand, density may allow economies of scale especially in the fields of sanitation and urban infrastructure. On the other, density can produce very crowded public facilities and traffic jams as well as lack of green areas.

As a consequence of this complex set of elements, we can argue that there is no single social policy in a large metropolitan area in developing countries not affected by its wild intra-urban demographic dynamics (Banerjee, 1996). It may even happen after a certain social policy has become universal, because conditions and quality of the service provision may vary significantly according to the demographic distribution of the population, the age structure, and the rate of population growth (Torres and Coelho, 2001).

In summary, the population field needs to develop a new intra-urban approach in order to understand and really be able to support the decrease of inequalities in the provision of social services in large urban areas of developing countries. Such an approach implies a new scale for data analysis that has to move on from data of countries and states to census tracts. It also demands the use of new GIS technologies to allow systematic consideration of the spatial dimensions of the demographic phenomena, as well as of the spatial dimensions of social policies. These issues will be enlarged upon in the following sections.

## 5. SOCIAL POLICY INFORMATION SYSTEMS: PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The most needed indicators for social policies at the local level are generally well known and established in the different social policy fields: school enrolment, sanitation coverage, infant mortality, and so on. Teams in each one of these fields are generally aware of those indicators and are eventually able to assess some aspects of the policy using them. In other words, from the perspective of a single public policy, such as education, there is no need for a composite index to deal with different dimensions of social life.<sup>53</sup> However, local social policy management in large urban areas of developing countries dramatically needs other elements of an information systems agenda.

First, local policy makers need to learn how to deal with the information already available. Sometimes it demands certain trivial abilities such as working with spreadsheet software, downloading basic statistics from the National Statistical Bureau website, comparing different sources of information and coming to conclusions or new hypothesis regarding the present conditions of service provision in a particular municipality or site.

Unfortunately, such capabilities should not be taken for granted, especially in places where the general level of education is low and the wages for skilled professionals are higher in the private sector. Therefore, there is a general need for massive training for intermediary level technicians of different municipal and state Secretariats to improve the use of sociodemographic information in Latin America, not only in the fields of planning – as it is sometimes proposed – but also in the fields of health and education.

Second, besides the ability of understanding and organizing social demographic data, there is a significant need to understand the complex demographic trends that are reshaping every urban scene in Latin American cities (see section 4.1). Poor suburbs and shantytowns are areas that typically present fast demographic expansion (Ward, 2001; Taschner, 2000). As a consequence, detailed information on population growth and distribution at the local level of developing metropolises is essential, for instance, for the provision of adequate/affordable housing.<sup>54</sup>

However, local governments many times don't have proper information on urban areas under strong demographic pressure, not only because of the lack of administrative data – since the public policy has not yet been established - but also because it may be taking place in-between two censuses. Alternative sources such as aerial photographs and satellite images can be a good solution. However, they are expensive for large areas and often difficult to interpret and handle.

In some cases, demographic projections for small areas can be used in order to estimate how quickly a neighborhood is growing. However, such projections are problematic because they cannot be based only on the major components of the demographic dynamics (fertility, mortality and migration). They also need to be built upon some hypotheses about particular urban trends, dependent upon major public and private investments, such as new roads and large neighborhood developments.

In our point of view, the best idea in this field is not the generation of complex projections for small areas that will demand non-existent local expertise. On the contrary, most cities demand simple early warning indicators that can help local policy makers anticipate situations that otherwise may run

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<sup>53</sup> **Composite indexes seem to be much more a demand from branches of the government (the Secretariat for Planning) that need to define priorities for the allocation of resources in different government sectors. See appendix 1.**

<sup>54</sup> **“Will there be enough land to support urban development? Will the prevailing patterns of population and housing density continue into the future or are there alternatives to urban development that require less land? How can agricultural land surrounding cities be preserved without driving the price of land beyond the low- and middle-income households? (...) The first (impediment to address the issue) is the absence of a workable model with which to understand the land market. The second is the lack of accurate and up-to-date information about urban growth”. (Dowall, 1994: 24).**

absolutely out of control (Banerjee, 1996).<sup>55</sup> There is a lot of data being produced daily in a metropolitan area, such as traffic movement, new housing approvals, garbage collection, areas with high level of non-payment of public taxes, and civil registers. These could be treated as early warning indicators of urban processes that are happening connected to demographic growth, change in land use, and decay of specific areas.<sup>56</sup>

Of course some demographic elements – such as age structure and marriage patterns – may also constitute excellent early warning indicators for different social policies. The point here, however, is to deliver a set of indicators for each policy that could be easily understood and locally organized and interpreted. These indicators carry their own set of problems and biases. However, it is easy to understand the need for such variables when we recognize the common situation of lack of information from local government on important urban processes – such as the invasion of public land.

Third, it is important to argue that social policies have general frameworks that do not necessarily deal properly with the simple fact that people move around metropolitan areas with significant transportation costs. Even when the policy is tailored to the situation of the average citizen, it fails to consider that the costs of transportation (as a proportion of the total income) are higher for the poor, making the facility close to home their only possible option.

As a consequence, one of the most important challenges for social policies in these developing countries' metropolises is prioritizing where to act. Since the demand is almost always overwhelming, the definition of where to act generally includes important equity components. Unfortunately, even when the government wants to direct its actions to the poor, it does not necessarily know how and where to do it. Generally speaking, some of the main elements for discussion on different social policies are the following:

1. Social equipment is not necessarily placed where it is most needed. Because of strong intra-urban migrations, it is very common to find – for instance - schools in places without children, and children in places without schools (Torres and Coelho, 2001). Services for illiterate or handicapped individuals are not necessarily offered for areas in which those people really live. However, it is not always an easy task to solve this problem. The urban scene changes rapidly. New social equipment is expensive, and nurses, doctors, teachers, and school principals may object to working in far away suburbs and shantytowns where the poorest people are located. Nevertheless, in any circumstances well organized sociodemographic information can help policy makers deliver better services to the poor as well as enhance collective awareness about the inequalities in the provision of social services;
2. Age structure and other sociodemographic variables, as mentioned, vary according to spatial dimension. As a consequence, social equipment must be adapted to the characteristics of the local population. In the case of basic health care facilities, for example, it is possible to find services directed to old people in areas with high concentration of children, and vice-versa (Torres and Marques, 2001). Transportation costs are high and people end up gathering in crowded health care facilities close to their homes, but not necessarily adapted to their needs (Martin, 1996);
3. Since people with very few resources and educational skills are the ones living in most shantytowns and poor suburbs of irregular land occupation, some of these areas present cumulative effects of lack of social services, lack of urban infrastructure, and the presence of

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<sup>55</sup> “Effective management of regional growth without sacrificing productivity or public health requires a strategic rather than a deterministic approach. It will certainly require new institutional capabilities and management tools. Future institutional responses should include an “early warning” system of continually monitoring and reviewing infrastructure stress and developing strategic capabilities for coping with such stress.” (Banerjee 1996: 62).

<sup>56</sup> The concept of “early warning indicators” is also being developed by the project “Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles” (NKLA) promoted by UCLA. See: <http://nkla.spsr.ucla.edu> .

environmental risks (Wilson, 1990). In other words, it is possible to find people simultaneously living in areas of environmental risks, such as the ones close to landfills, without proper housing, sanitation, education and health services (Torres, 1997b; Torres and Marques, 2001). Many times those areas also present a high concentration of children and single mothers. Obviously, such circumstances challenge the traditional approaches for the provision of social services that are based on different departments and secretariats not necessarily exchanging information. As a consequence, those highly segregated places must be clearly identified and the object of specific public action.

In summary, training of intermediary level personnel, development of early warning indicators, and the provision of information capable of addressing the issue of where to act, are strategic elements of the information agenda for social policies in large urban areas. On the one hand, the population community and UNFPA can be of great value in this field due to their enormous background of data production, interpretation and training of personnel.

They can also be valuable because census data, especially when organized in census tracts with the help of the new GIS technologies, can be very helpful in the identification of size and characteristics of the demand for social services at the local level. It also allows the comparison of this demand with the kind of service provided in each location. With those systems, demographic data can be combined with information on the location of social equipment, physical infrastructure, and environmental conditions (topographic profiles, hydrology, etc.) allowing real identification of areas where public intervention is most needed (Demers, 2000).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Throughout this document, our main argument has been that information systems are a necessary component of social policies and that the outcomes of those policies are significantly influenced by the indicators and information systems used to support them. Furthermore, we argue that demographic data is a key element of all social policy information systems both because it is needed for different comparisons and because census data is the only universal database not biased by particular institutional conditions pervading most administrative data derived from those policies.

Considering those elements and the general Latin American scenario of urbanization and low fertility rate, our proposition for a new population and development agenda is quite straight forward: to provide basic support for the development and use of adequate social policy information systems, particularly in the spreading metropolitan areas. The training, the variables involved and the technical features of those systems can be long debated and are often the object of different policy design and objectives. However, some common elements exist: the importance of technical training, the need for data disaggregation, and treatment of the information in its spatial dimension.

Most important, however, are the ethical arguments that support such an agenda. There is an urgent need to draw policy makers' attention to the invisibility of the poor. In most Latin American countries, poor people are not present in the media, exception made for the criminal section of local newspapers. Neither are poor people major opinion makers. They do not devise and implement social policies. Since they are not really seen by the average citizen, many times they tend not to be seen by the information systems and information analysts that work in the background of all social policies.

In developed countries, it is common to find references to the risks that the advance of the information society may bring to the privacy of the average citizen (Goss, 1995). It is a serious and responsible discussion. However, even considering such risks, we think that it is very important to produce in Latin America different forms of database inclusion. On the one hand, the real poor must be in the database of a compensatory policy, or it will not target them. On the other, when poor people are present in land register databases it means that they had access to this essential urban asset. In any case, universal and non-universal social policies - that always "look through the lenses" of their information systems - must be particularly careful with areas of high level of segregation and/or strong concentration of poor and illiterate people. Otherwise, they will be very easily discriminated by such policy.

## Appendix 1: Index Proliferation

It seems to be no coincidence that the trends towards localism in social policies (decentralization, targeting and participation) occur at the same time as an increasing demand for different kinds of national and local indicators. Especially after the influential yearly publication of the HDI by the United Nations – starting at the beginning of the 90s - there has been a boom in the production of composite indicators for states, municipalities, and even for neighborhoods in different developing countries such as India, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Brazil (UNDP, 1999; UNDP 2000).<sup>57</sup>

Obviously, the perception that some places are developed and others are not is at the heart of the main dilemmas faced by local, national and international development policies in the last century (Debraj, 1988). Unfortunately, the construction of development measures is not always a simple task. This construction implies identifying, measuring and comparing different aspects of what development means, as well as its changes over time.<sup>58</sup>

With the advance of decentralization, the measurement of development became even more central to local and national governments that intend to implement social policies and economic development at the local level. The main reason is that indicators seem to be a very powerful tool not only for planning but also for democratic governments to deal with the public opinion, the media, and with the pressures that come from traditional politicians and powerful local constituents (UNDP, 2000).

There is little certainty regarding which indicator, or indicators, would be adequate or sufficient for different policy purposes (Inforegio, 2000). For instance, the HDI incorporates GDP per capita as one of its components, although combined with two other indicators: population longevity, expressed by life expectancy at birth, and education level, measured by adult literacy rate plus the combined enrollment rate of elementary, middle and higher education levels (UNDP, 2000).

This indicator is therefore a composite index, which aims to measure a country's development level under a broader perspective than the simple relation between national product and population. On the one hand, the HDI – which is part of a long consensus-building process – must not be taken as the definite solution for development measurement issues (UNPD, 1998).<sup>59</sup> Although all the benefits that it brings can be easily recognized, it is important to notice that the adoption of composite indexes also introduces a new set of methodological problems: why exclude given aspects such as housing and environment, for example? Which weight should be attributed to the several variables being considered? What scales should be adopted? All these decisions – invariably mediated by opinion – could influence the ranking of countries and regions subject to evaluation, and could even lead to extensive political and electoral repercussions.

On the other hand, the success of HDI seems to offer new challenges from a wider institutional perspective. When such an indicator – originally conceived as a generic instrument of comparison between geographic areas – is adopted by policy makers as a tool for social policy evaluation, new

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<sup>57</sup> In Brazil there are more than 10 different experiences of index info. production for municipalities (UNDP et al, 1998; Seade, 2001) and for neighborhoods and districts of large cities: São Paulo, Curitiba, Porto Alegre, Santo André, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Campinas and Brasília. Part of this material can be found on the Internet (see: [www.pbh.gov.br](http://www.pbh.gov.br); [www.ipea.gov.br](http://www.ipea.gov.br) ; [www.undp.org.br](http://www.undp.org.br) ).

<sup>58</sup> The classic development indicator is the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. It has been criticized in many ways: it is based on a single dimension; it does not take into account income distribution; it is affected by the variation of the exchange value of national currencies, etc. (Debraj, 1998). Even so, it is easy to recognize the progress that the standardization of this indicator has represented since the 1950s. It is information available to virtually all nations in the world, designed with an easy-to-understand variable, clearly comparable, and related to aspects generally recognized as part of development, such as economic growth and demographic dynamics.

<sup>59</sup> The search for new development indicators is also related to the very controversial issue of measuring “quality of life” (Nussbaun and Sen, 1998).

dilemmas may surface: How can such an indicator be produced for smaller areas? Should short-term changes, typically needed for public policy evaluation, be observed? How should not only the results of public policies but also the efforts put in place by different government branches be measured?

These new and complex problems have only appeared when policy makers and society began to demand indicators tailored for decision making. Some of the general elements that support this last discussion are the following:

1. In theory, to become ideal tools for public policies, indicators should have several attributes rarely available simultaneously: credibility, simplicity, spatial disaggregation, replicability, comparability, periodicity, accuracy, low cost, sensitivity, etc. There are, of course, some incompatibilities among these attributes. For example, it is likely that the greater the precision desired, the longer the time needed to produce the indicator, the bigger the spatial disaggregation, the higher the cost, etc.
2. Most policy timeframes are brief, which means that – in order to be useful – indicators should capture variations within the short term. Also, in order to register the impact of social policies, such an indicator should be based on variables that reflect variations over time (flow variables). However, these variables are more complex to produce (for instance, they demand two moments in time), process and interpret;
3. Since most indicators are averages (education, income, etc.) for specific areas, they may hide important inequalities within areas, as well as segregation situations. That is why UNDP has also developed the Index of Human Poverty, which tries to address these crucial dimensions (UNDP, 1999). In any case, however, the geographic unit of analysis is very important: the smaller the size of the unit, the greater the possibility of identifying particular situations of inequalities and/or segregation;<sup>60</sup>
4. Under democratic rule, a large part of policymaking implies some form of consensus building. As a consequence, the variables used to orient the spatial strategy of a particular social policy must be reliable and very credible both inside and outside government. For instance, the State Legislative Body of Sao Paulo retained the services of the Statistical Bureau of the State of Sao Paulo to produce an indicator for all the state municipalities (Seade 2001). Some Brazilian local administrations (Belo Horizonte, Campinas, and Santo André) have developed methodologies of *participatory indicators*. It means that the difficult choices related to units of analysis, variables, weights, etc. are made in the context of some form of participatory process.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, this index proliferation seems to be part of a positive trend towards a larger commitment of governments in Latin America to a more rational decision-making process. Furthermore, society and the media seem to be now much more aware of the relevance of such instruments, using those indicators to question and challenge social policies.

However, considering the logic of the political process and the role of the media, index politics may unfortunately imply its trivialization and use as political propaganda. It may happen especially within contexts of lower level of information and poor understanding of the meaning of the contents attached to these indicators. That is why responsible data production and institutional empowering of the statistical production units - as well as common sense and good analysis and training - are essential to

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<sup>60</sup> For instance, when the unit of analysis refers to municipalities – which is the case of the HDI-M in Brazil (UNDP et al, 1998) – the analyst may be put in a position of comparing cities of 1,000 inhabitants with megacities of 8 million or more.

<sup>61</sup> We are not aware on any extensive analysis of the impact of participatory indicators in the social policies they are supposed to evaluate. However, it is possible to argue that the same risks regarding participation – related to the possibility of leaving out of the process important social groups – may also be present here.

orient this, on occasion, wild index proliferation into a really helpful way of improving the living conditions of those who are worse off and their social control over public policies.

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