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*The May issue of the Global Cooperation Newsletter is devoted to Latin America—one of the regions where the ICSW has been focused on improvements in well-being, better coverage of social protection programs and promoting inclusive growth. Latin America has been instrumental in introducing innovative social protection schemes, often combining employment-related benefits with non-contributory benefits embedded in legislation, thereby covering a substantial proportion of families and helping children and older persons. Some lessons learned may be of interest to our readership.*

*The feature article is presented by the ICSW President for Latin America Nelsida Marmolejos, the Director of DIDA (La Dirección de Información y Defensa de los Afiliados a la Seguridad Social) of the Dominican Republic and covers some key social policy issues in the region. The article on the important role of 'think tanks' in Argentina, which bridge the gap between the knowledge and social protection policies is written by Gala Díaz Langou and Olivia de Achaval from the Centre for the Implementation of Public Policy for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), based in Buenos Aires.*

The Editor

## INSIDE

In search of greater equality in Latin America region

6

Bridging gap between knowledge &amp; social protection policies

10

## Towards the World Conference on Social Work and Social Development 2016: in search of greater equity in the Latin America region

By Nelsida Marmolejos

Looking for practical solutions to address the vulnerabilities and perils they face daily, thousands of men and women have joined forces in an effort to achieve the improvement of their living conditions and well-being, upholding equity and social justice. The empowerment of people, meaningful involvement and participation became the key words for many civil society organizations striving to improve social development outcomes. The adoption by the United Nations of the new 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda makes it imperative to find solutions that are responsive to the complexities, needs and capacities of individual countries, solutions that combine the economic, social and environmental dimensions while putting the highest priority on the eradication of poverty and on reducing inequality, while also aimed at saving the planet.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2014, over 2.2 billion people — more than 15 per cent of the world's population — “are either near or living in multidimensional poverty”. Millions of people receive income below the meager amount of two dollars a day. At the same time, inequality is on the increase, with incredible concentration of wealth in the hands of a very few. While each country has primary responsibility for its own socio-economic development and for finding appropriate responses to existing problems, the policy advice of international organizations can facilitate a better policy mix. In this light, the adoption of ILO Recommendation 202 (2012) regarding national floors of social protection definitely gave a boost to national efforts to find better



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social protection options.

### Latin America: growing social challenges and the quest for solutions

In 2015 the population of Latin America was approximately 630 million people. It has become a predominantly urban region — more than 80 per cent live in big cities and other urban areas. While the poverty situation has improved across the region, the poverty levels are still very high: according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in the 19 countries of the region there were 167 million of people living in poverty, with 71 million among them in extreme poverty.

Latin America was one of the pioneers in developing innovative ways to address the scourge of poverty. Important initiatives in the social protection area that were developed across the region became well known — *Bolsa Familia* and *Brazil Sem Misera* were introduced in Brazil and proved their effectiveness. The programs like *Oportunidades* in Mexico, *Asignacion Universal por Hijo* in Argentina and many

other schemes are helping to alleviate the plight of poor people.

The above-mentioned programs in Brazil have grown from covering 3.6 million families in 2003 to 13.8 million in 2012, while a solidarity-based pension system in Chile went from 560,00 beneficiaries in 2008 to 1.1 million in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

Social protection policies in Latin America reflect different national circumstances and vary considerably. However, a recent study has identified a number of common characterizes within the region, such as: the recognition of the importance of reducing inequalities and realizing social, economic and cultural rights; the recognition of the role of the State in correcting market asymmetries; the need to increase and maintain social investment in response to economic crises; the adoption of comprehensive poverty reduction policies; and taking account of disparities based on gender, age and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

Approaching social protection as a human right, Recommendation 202 advocates the extension of social protection to all, thereby addressing vulnerability and inequality in society. Universal and inclusive social security has been recognized as an appropriate and effective way to guarantee the delivery of basic social services. The reality on the ground in many Latin American countries, however, often prevents universal social protection, first of all because of the wide-spread informal sector as well as the precariousness of manual labor.

The exiting informal arrangements are a factor in the deregulation of the labor market, impeding efforts to get a decent work for thousands of people in our societies. In this sense the entrenched informal sector has become an obstacle in achieving the objectives of ILO Recommendation 202. The adoption of agreed global agendas and the

specific provisions on social inclusion that they contain have prompted Governments to come up with their own plans for promoting social inclusion. This development has helped to strengthen awareness of the social dimensions of citizenship, which have become a factor in transforming the social policies of Governments.

As a combination of these developments, social security has been expanded in many Latin America countries in significant ways. Inclusive policies have facilitated the apprehension of the positive effects of social investment, strengthening rights-based elements in these programs. The evidence collected by ECLAC shows that, in recent years, countries in the region have improved the effectiveness and scope of their taxation policies, increasing as a result their social spending. According to the above-mentioned ECLAC report, the public share in social expenses increased from 49.3 per cent 1991-1992 to 65.7 per cent in 2011-2012. In terms of the GDP share it increased from 12.9 to 19.2 respectively.<sup>3</sup> By sector, the public spending allocations on social security and social care has increased from US \$185 per capita, (or 4.5 per cent of the GDP) in 1991-1992 to US\$ 469 (8.2 per cent of GDP) in 2011-2012. As a result the coverage of the population by health care and pension schemes has substantially improved, reaching the level of 67 per cent of the urban population in 2012<sup>4</sup>.

1. Extreme poverty and human rights. Note by the Secretary-General, Doc. A/69/297 11 August 2014, pag.16

2. Simone Cecchini, "Social protection, poverty and inequality: a comparative perspective", *Journal of Southeast Asian Economies*, vol. 31, No 1 ( April 2014), quoted in the UN Secretary-General note, Doc A/69/297

3. ECLAC Tendencias de los gastos e ingresos públicos con mayor incidencia redistributiva/ Panorama Fiscal de América Latina y el Caribe 2015: Dilemas y espacios de políticas. Page 83

4. ILO's 2013 Labour Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean (20 years) / Executive Summary, Page 12

There has been increased evidence that the countries that allocate substantial funds to social spending are also countries that can demonstrate significant achievements in reducing economic informality, and therefore, poverty. In this context one could mention Uruguay, Chile, Brazil and Costa Rica, where the number of employees contributing to pension funds is about 80 per cent of the total. Building up social capacity has a positive effect in encouraging individuals to participate in pension schemes, eventually strengthening pension funds and their own security.

The region provides very encouraging examples of effective social security policies, aimed at improved coverage and poverty reduction. Argentina, having introduced family allowances, reduced poverty by almost 20 per cent; in Brazil, rural social insurance covers up to 80 per cent of the population in rural areas. The introduction of "Renta Dignidad" in Bolivia contributed to the reduction of poverty by 6 per cent, while in Uruguay the universal basic pension was introduced for all persons over 65 years old.

In the Dominican Republic inclusive public policies in the social area brought about increased purchasing capacity on the part of Dominicans – while in 2007 health care spending consumed 35 per cent of family income, in 2014 it fell to 22 per cent. The program *Solidaridad* (Solidarity) provides citizens with benefits and subsidies, in a transparent way, covering such areas as electricity, gas for domestic use, assistance to older persons and people with disabilities, and others. The program covers about 873 thousand households, with benefits provided to more than a million poor people. According to ECLAC data, extreme poverty has been reduced in that country by half – from 16 to 8 per cent. More than 3 million beneficiaries enjoy the *Health Subsidized Regimen* in 2015, with the aim of increasing the number by 4000 people; 100,000 young

children and 50,000 domestic workers were included in this program.

The quality public services aimed at providing meals to schoolchildren have been expanded, significantly, decreasing the fixed costs of families regarding food. The social protection scheme also includes support provided by the Ministry of Education throughout the school year to students in the schools with extended hours (from 8 am to 4 pm). The free benefits include breakfast, lunch and a snack, apart from the books, uniforms, shoes and backpacks.



### Solidarity

Vulnerability to shocks, poverty and the inequality prevalent around the world, particularly when people lack social protection, often foster individualism and attitudes of indifference, even in the presence of social perils, thus undermining the solidarity indispensable for social action. In the XXI century we are witnessing numerous scientific and technological breakthroughs, but at the same time we can't leave unnoticed the dehumanizing trends in society, when consumerism becomes a supreme value, as emphasized by Frei Betto<sup>5</sup> in his statement "Dignity and Human Values" during the preconference in Brazil.

Today, more than ever, in the face of huge challenges, we need to foster universal support for people in need, as well as solidarity for organizations dealing with social work. It is not only about feeding people or providing them with shelter and health care. It is more than that; it is about social changes that would enable citizens to have a dream, a life project. We must create a world where civil education has its firm place, where a person can expand his horizons and go beyond his expectations.

We must promote social re-engineering, so that international solidarity can set stronger roots, be creative and foster values based on social work oriented towards the needs of local communities.

We should not depend on some passing fads regarding solidarity; rather we must prevail in advancing our vision and values. Facing the increase of poverty, individualism and consumerism, we must strengthen the civil society organizations that we belong to. Belonging to a global organization such as the ICSW enables us — in the globalized world in which live — to have a say in the influential international organizations that have a positive impact on our daily work. Working not for the sake of material benefits, but because of the importance of the course of action chosen, we can move forward. This sense of belonging is important, as it enables us to build a decent future with the participation of all of us in the organization, at all levels, allowing our voices to be heard at home and at the international forums.

### **Towards Seoul**

Looking for an exchange of experiences, as well as to develop common proposals and guidelines for action, we convened an important international forum in the Dominican Republic in December 2014 aimed at discussing ways and means for making the

social protection systems on the continent more equitable and humane. The Governments, civil society organizations and international organizations present at the Forum drew up lines of work and agreed on some basic principles aimed at continuing to work on social protection floors, responding to the needs of the population and taking into account the existing domestic economic conditions. The discussions continued in March this year in San Paulo, Brazil at the Forum sponsored by SESC, CBCISS and ICSW, which aimed at discussing the issues of dignity and values in the context of the forthcoming Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development in Seoul.

The human dimension of social policies prevailed during the interesting and productive discussions, enriching the vision of the participants and paving the way for some conclusions and recommendations. The San Paulo Forum underscored the importance of dignity in all aspects of social development and social work, emphasizing the essential links between dignified existence and citizenship, the paramount role of education in articulating a long-term life vision and in finding a sense of purpose in life. It was stressed that the humanization of health care requires compassionate approaches and attitudes built upon individual engagement, not charity. Given the longevity trends, ageing with dignity and active ageing are vitally important in the contemporary world. These and other reflections of the participants facilitate our understanding of the dignity discourse, even though they do not exhaust all manifestations in today's world.

5. Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo, better known as Frei Betto, a Brazilian Roman Catholic Priest, writer, political activist, Philosopher, liberation theologian and Dominican friar. Book "Sobre A Esperança Dialogo".

## Bridging the gap between knowledge and social protection policies: the role of think tanks.

By Gala Díaz Langou and Olivia de Achaval

In past years, social protection has emerged as a major new approach in efforts to reduce poverty and inequality around the world. Social protection strategies form a crucial element in effective policy responses to adverse economic conditions, addressing not only the vulnerabilities caused or exacerbated by recent crises but also increasing preparedness for risks stemming from the uncertainties of the future. There is a historic window of opportunity to strengthen the role of social policies in Argentina and Latin America, fostering the development of integrated social protection strategies that are responsive to local contexts and ensure the realization of human rights.

While the exact proportion or characteristics of people living in poverty in Argentina is not known, evidence suggests that there is a huge number of people living in vulnerable conditions, if other variables besides income, such as housing, health, education and employment, are taken into account. Given the commitments made by the State under the human rights covenants, the existing situation represents a serious infringement of the economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) that the State has committed to protect.

More worryingly, the income gap in the country is growing even wider, especially affecting three groups that are being left behind: **infants in their early childhood, youth and women**. This critical assessment reflects on the existing violations of the rights of Argentinians and the serious lack of forward-looking strategic thinking.



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Figuratively speaking, the violation of human rights in this time represents a mortgage on our future.

### The role of think tanks

The **Centre for the Implementation of Public Policy for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC)**, based in Buenos Aires, strives to promote policies aimed at creating a more just, democratic, and effective State committed to improving the quality of life for all Argentines. To do so, the Centre has nine research programs that bring together top professionals and experts in each field to promote, design and implement public policies in the areas of social development, economic development and public management.

**CIPPEC** has consistently been ranked among the most important think tanks in the region<sup>i</sup>; the latest published data identifies

i. For example, according to the ranking done at the Pennsylvania University Think Thank Project

CIPPEC as the best think tank in Argentina and one of the three most important in Latin America. In Argentina, CIPPEC has become one of the most recognized and respected research and implementation-oriented think tanks, developing over 150 evidence-based, policy-oriented research projects. These projects are implemented at the national level, in Argentina's 24 provinces and in more than 100 municipal counties. Working at both the national and the local levels has provided CIPPEC with the opportunity to position itself strategically vis-à-vis policymakers, various organizations and other key stakeholders throughout the country. In addition to generating knowledge and data, CIPPEC's research projects are traditionally accompanied by comprehensive dissemination and advocacy strategies. Since its creation in 2008, CIPPEC's Social Protection Program has worked to strengthen a comprehensive federal protection system that promotes welfare policies and social development in Argentina and has achieved impressive results. For our country to move onto a sustainable development path, it is necessary to address the structural challenges that account for the current social deficit, which implies inequalities in distribution and development strategies, specially affecting the most vulnerable groups. It is crucial to go beyond short-term solutions through the establishment of solid institutions aimed at innovative interventions that are able to sustain inclusive processes and development based on a universal approach.

### Work Strategy on Social Protection

#### Issues

The next four-year strategic plan for the Program of Social Protection embraces a vision of a more cohesive Argentina, where full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is guaranteed, with special attention to groups whose rights have been

infringed. The agenda of the program focuses on **three main themes**: *vulnerable groups*, *cross-cutting issues* and *enabling conditions*. The work on vulnerable groups focuses on the three groups that are most affected by the current situation in the county: *children*, *youth* and *women*. In this context, the program is strengthening its focus on **early childhood**, capitalizing the work done in a large-impact project named "Early Childhood on the Agenda" ([cippec.org/primerainfancia](http://cippec.org/primerainfancia)), in promoting the adoption of a universalist and human rights-based approach and supporting governments and policy makers with concrete tools.

Regarding **youth**, the Social Protection Program is developing an initiative that constitutes a cross-cutting effort covering, several of the institution's areas so as to work on a certain policy issue, representing CIPPEC's main priorities to impact upon the new governmental Administration. The initiative on youth is being implemented between 2016 and 2017, and focuses at promoting the implementation of a comprehensive youth policy aimed at upholding the rights of all young people in conditions of equity. Specifically, the Program is working on improving the quality of youth employment, enhancing their sexual and reproductive rights and promoting the responsibility for the provision of care.

Finally, the **gender agenda** is being addressed, with a strong focus on preventing discrimination against women (especially in the workplace), promoting women's leadership, recognizing care as paid work, enhancing their sexual and reproductive rights and reducing maternal mortality rates. The window of opportunity for advancing in this area relies on the promised revitalization of the National Council of Women by the new Administration and the decisive commitment that Argentina has demonstrated adopting the SDGs agenda.

The **cross-cutting themes** focus on **four** key areas. Firstly, on **eradicating poverty and reducing inequality**. Many countries in the region have made progress in their poverty eradication efforts, and there are enough lessons learnt to inform and support the development of a solid anti-poverty strategy for Argentina. In addition, the country has pledged to reduce the proportion of people living in poverty and to establish social protection floors. Argentina has achieved some progress in this area, from which these two dimensions can continue improving.

Another priority issue of the Program is **food security**, with particular emphasis on **malnutrition**. It is necessary to strengthen efforts to address malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency, which have multiple harmful health consequences, such as anaemia in a great number of women in child-bearing age, with enormous risks for themselves and their children. At the same time, Argentina is facing an obesity and overweight epidemic and it's about time that the Federal Government, with an Administration that has a vast experience in this subject, takes serious action on the matter. The regulation of the food industry and food services are main departure points in this fight.

The Program also advocates the need for placing a **national policy for care** on the public agenda. In 2015 the enactment of the "National Policy for Early Childhood Care" Law got broad support in the country. Building on that achievement, there is an urgent need to establish a national forward-looking action plan aimed at the creation of a comprehensive, quality system to deal with early childhood. This area includes rethinking the current regulatory framework and overcoming the fragmentation of the responsibilities and funding mechanisms that exist in the country. It is necessary to continue promoting a clearly defined system

that really responds to the huge deficit that exists in our country in this field. It has been proven that an effective system of care not only improves the situation of dependent populations (children, the disabled and the elderly), but also improves the conditions of women, creates more jobs and promotes the further development of the country as a whole.

Finally, the Program will continue working to promote national policy responses for people experiencing homelessness. Despite the scarcity of available data, homelessness has been a growing concern in Latin America, especially in Argentina. The policies that address this problem have their limits: they are few and are largely based on a charitable approach. The program's main aim is to accumulate further evidence and evaluate the lessons learned over 3 years of experience in the field. The support of other Latin American countries has been essential in the scholarly and policy discussion that took place in Europe (under the auspices of Eurosocial II, where the Social Protection Program was a partner<sup>ii</sup>) aimed at highlighting factors that characterise the multidimensional nature of poverty.

Finally, the last priority area that the Social Protection Program intends to address is the study of the **enabling conditions** necessary for the above two sets of proposed policies to be translated into specific actions. These refer to two core issues.

On the one hand, it is necessary that CIPPEC works to overcome the shortage of data and fill the **information gaps** in the social field. In this light, the Program will support the reconstruction of The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC),

ii. EUROsocial is a programme of the European Commission for cooperation between Europe and Latin America. Its objective is to contribute to changes in public policies that improve social cohesion through peer-to-peer learning and experience exchanges between counterpart institutions in the two regions.

proposing the regular, reliable and robust collection of information and the identification of gaps that statisticians must address, helping to foresee the social challenges of the future. It is important, for example, to develop and promote improved approaches to data sets that facilitate multidimensional poverty measurements in order to understand this phenomenon to the fullest possible extent and to enable a more nuanced set of policy responses in the relevant national mechanisms. It is also vital that, from the first step in this reconstruction, the principles of easy access to public information and data are established as main guidelines.

In addition to rebuilding household surveys, the Program will seek to ensure quality dimensions in data collection in 2020, when a **census of the population and housing is conducted**. Furthermore, it proposes to work on the necessary institutional framework for a strong social protection system. Accordingly, the Program is working with governments at the national, provincial and local levels, which seek to strengthen this area. It has been also promoting (in coordination with the Advocacy Monitoring and Evaluation Program) integrated social information systems, along with monitoring systems and the evaluation of social policies. It is hoped that by 2018, some of the most relevant national social programs will have been assessed and evaluated. Finally, it is expected that analysis of social investment made in recent years is included transversally in all of the main themes mentioned.

### Approaches

It is proposed that the main policy directions described above should be addressed through three different modes, which are not mutually exclusive and will continue the work done since 2008: building alliances with **government structures**, **conducting applied research** and building

### collective knowledge.

Given the recent changes in the political Administration of the country, the present situation provides an important opportunity to **work together with the State structures**, following the implementation of key policies. Such is the case of the early childhood and youth policies. In this connection, it is proposed to capitalize on the experience in public administration gained by the principal researchers involved in the Program.

**Applied research** has been a key feature of the Program since its birth, and even though it has amassed a vast amount of information on the subject, there are still many areas that remain to be investigated and where the existing lacunae and paucity of information limit advocacy possibilities, even though they are very much required.

Finally, the Social Protection Program is committed to maintaining a line of work that constitutes a hallmark of the Program's activities: the **dialogues**. For instance, regarding care, it intends not only to reaffirm its partnership with the UN system, but also broaden the agenda based on the above topics, targeting primarily policy-makers. For example, a community of policy-makers and stakeholders dealing with early childhood development issues at the national and provincial levels has been approached to facilitate the discussion of the main challenges that arise in the implementation of the agreed policies.

The Program has a key role to play here acting **as a bridge between the national agenda and the existing agreed global policy documents**, with which the country has made progress in recent years. The Social Protection Program has gained experience in this type of work from the various networks and alliances in which it has taken part, especially from its role in the

Eurosocial II Programme and in the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, developing enabling actions in order to achieve sustainable development.

### Partners

Consistent with its main strategy, the Program participates in many international and local networks, promoting cooperation and maintaining the acquisition of new knowledge.

As a founding member of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, the alliance bringing together about 90 civil society organizations aimed at promoting the establishment of social protection floors globally, and participating in its Core Group, the Program is involved in the planning and implementation of the Coalition's activity on a constant basis. The Coalition played a key role in getting social protection included as a key component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In order to discuss further the linkages between the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and social protection systems and the relevant implementation policies, focusing on advocacy at the national and regional levels, the CIPPEC's Social Protection Program will host a forum during the last week of June that will bring together more than 15 participants from various regions of the world. In addition, CIPPEC is a member of the Inter-American Social Protection Network (IASPN), a community of practice for national social development ministries and agencies.

At the national level, The Social Protection Program has participated in a series of roundtable discussions on the SDGs hosted by Argentina's International Network for International Cooperation (RACI). These brought together civil society and government representatives with a view to build awareness and discuss the inclusion in future policy of the new development goals,

as well as their subsequent monitoring and evaluation.

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We strongly believe that "think tanks", such as CIPPEC, have a key role to play in the ongoing struggle to make human rights not only a lofty goal but a reality, both in Argentina and in the region. In order to be able to meet the challenges ahead it is necessary to strengthen collaboration with other stakeholders, including governments, in the inception and implementation of better and stronger public policies that can guarantee the fulfillment of those rights. Making sure that people are at the center of development efforts is a goal of paramount importance, which requires integrated and coherent policies at all levels.

### A new Guide to strengthen the role of educators on social protection

On 26 -27 April the ILO office in Lima, Peru, organized a workshop on education for social protection, inviting education experts dealing with the subject from Uruguay, Mexico, Colombia and Peru.

The key objectives were not only to promote the exchange of pertinent experiences in Latin America on social protection education and establish a network of experts in the field dealing with the subject, but also to discuss main parameters of a Guide on developing and implementing national social protection education policies.

The Guide is still a work in progress and aims at exploring the means for promoting a culture of social protection, including working with teachers at schools and organizing public education campaigns to highlight the benefits of social protection in society.

## The useful resources and links – the find of the month

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recently released two major studies focused on Latin America in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The publication, entitled *The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: An opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean*, addresses a

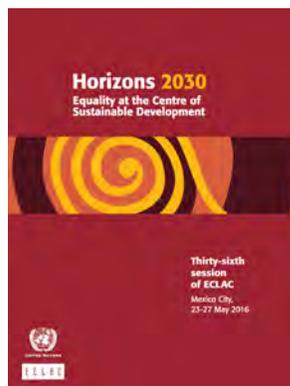
wide range of issues, identifying the SDGs as a planning tool for countries at the national and local levels. The 2030 Agenda is seen by the authors as a civilizing agenda that places dignity and equality at the center. Both far-sighted and ambitious, its implementation will require the engagement of all sectors of society and the State. Accordingly, representatives of governments, civil society, academic institutions and the private sector are invited to take ownership of this ambitious agenda and to discuss and embrace it as a tool for the creation of inclusive, fair societies that serve the citizens of today as well as those of future generations.

For more details:

<http://www.cepal.org/en/node/37170>



The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals  
An opportunity for  
Latin America and the Caribbean



A report entitled "*Horizons 2030: Equality at the center of sustainable development*" was presented by ECLAC to its member States at its thirty-sixth session, in May 2016, providing an analytical complement to the 2030 Agenda from a structuralist

perspective and from the point of view of the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The proposals made in the report stem from the need to achieve progressive structural change in order to incorporate more knowledge into production, ensure social inclusion and combat the negative impacts of climate change. The reflections and proposals for advancing towards a new development pattern are geared to achieving equality and environmental sustainability.

For additional details:

<http://www.cepal.org/en/node/37174>

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