

**TOWARD THE  
INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE  
FORUM OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS OF  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE  
CARIBBEAN:  
THE CREATION OF A  
PERMANENT TECHNICAL  
SECRETARIAT  
(PRO TEMPORE SECRETARIAT )**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today more than ever before, there is clear evidence of the challenge inherent in bringing about optimum conditions for social development among the inhabitants of Latin America and Caribbean, as well as in the quest for solutions in keeping with our particular complex reality. The sharing and dissemination of successful experiences in the honing of social policy, as well as developing and spreading schemes of horizontal cooperation in tune with the needs and common problems of the region's governments are an invaluable asset for achieving societies that have greater equality and prosperity. To attain these goals, it is necessary to consolidate the already existing links among Social Development Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean and to likewise establish a venue in which horizontal cooperation in social development can be generated and, where successful, may also be reproduced.

In rising to this challenge, UNESCO has assigned priority status to developing projects of horizontal cooperation in social development among the governments of Latin America. To this end and as an important activity forming part of the program of Social and Human Sciences for Latin America and the Caribbean it has been decided to form and institutionalize the *Forum of Social Development Ministers* of the region. Hence, both UNESCO as well as Mexico have identified said institutionalization as a shared or common objective, enshrined in the spirit, which motivates this document.

Consequently, UNESCO launched the initiative of a meeting of the region's Social Development Ministers, which was convened in Quito in July 2001 in order to address the problems of poverty and social policy in Latin America. The selfless enthusiasm of the Ecuadorian Government and of the other participating nations' governments resulted in the commitment to continue holding these meetings periodically so as to maintain a constant exchange of ideas and experience in the field of social development. The subsequent ministerial meetings held in Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro were an expression reflecting that firm commitment, which still stands today – on the part of the participating countries as well as UNESCO – anticipating that this activity will be approved by the General Conference to be held in Paris in November, 2003, as “good practice” to be developed by countries and regions in other parts of the world such as CARICOM nations, and the governments of Africa.

At the present time and in order to provide continuity to the work done at the last Ministerial Meeting held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2002, it is imperative to discuss possible ways to amplify and expand the Forum of Social Development Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean. In effect, the Forum has great potential which should be further exploited and, at the same time, those aspects which to date have hindered its harmonious and continued development should be corrected. At the Rio meeting, approval was given to the document submitted by Mexico proposing a formal structure to consolidate the existence of the Consultation Forum of Social Development Ministers of

Latin America and the Caribbean. At that point, the Forum had already been formalized at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting, held in Mexico City in November 2001 but it still lacked a specific institutional scheme. Thus and during that 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting, the participating countries agreed to meet every six months and to establish the Forum as a privileged body for dialogue, discussion, and cooperation on issues of social development.

Since then, several countries have reiterated their interest in proceeding with the institutionalization of the Forum and in the more in-depth handling of each issue it decides to deal with, as well as to begin to use the Forum as a venue for orchestrating horizontal cooperation projects - bilateral as well as multilateral. At the present time, said institutionalization should be considered as an invaluable catalyst for regional horizontal cooperation and dialogue to bear fruit and finally result in making a positive contribution toward combating the poverty and inequality existing in the region. Therefore, it is essential that the Forum become effectively constituted as a functional framework capable of promoting the *efforts* of the different public, private, national, and regional institutions devoted to social and human development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting, Rio (June, 2002) and the Brasilia Meeting of Working Groups (November, 2002):**

Previously held by Mexico, the Chair of the Forum passed to the Government of Brazil as the host country for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2002. Following analyses of the results of the Meeting of Working Groups held in Mexico in May, 2002, it was decided in Rio that one of the principal themes for the next Meeting would be *Best Practices for Overcoming poverty and Inequality*. It was likewise agreed to hold a second Meeting of Working Groups in Brasilia in order to address the problems as regards the instruments used for measuring and evaluating poverty-elimination policies. This was done with a view to the future establishment of a measuring methodology that would serve as a reference point for the Forum when addressing other matters of interest such as evaluation of the impact of social policies, the designing of policy instruments for overcoming poverty, or, budgetary allocation for social expenditure. In Rio, it was also confirmed that Chile was to organize and host the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting, to be followed, in turn, by Peru.

In November 2002, the second Meeting of Working Groups was held in Brasilia in order to follow up on what had been agreed in Rio and to lay the groundwork for the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting. In Brasilia, an analysis was made of the different methodologies as regards criteria for measuring poverty in the region, on the basis of documents submitted by various of the countries members of the Forum. Based on the foregoing, a document was drawn up for submission at the next Meeting, to be held in Chile.

### **Results and Challenges: Where do We Stand?**

From the first Meeting of Working Groups held in Mexico City in May 2002, it was affirmed that the institutional adjustments generated by political shifts in government administration in Latin America in some cases encumber proper continuity of commitments assumed and agreements entered into by preceding administrations. In this regard, different shifts in government and the resulting changes in the heads of the ministries involved - as well as the creation or elimination of bodies responsible to the Forum - generate uncertainty and

confusion regarding tasks agreed upon. Thus, that first Meeting of Working Groups pointed out the existing flaws hindering 'positive development and coordination among the participants. It also pointed out that communication problems were the main obstacle preventing' the groups' dynamics from functioning properly. The Ministers in attendance concurred on the need to define a single research theme, agreed upon at Ministerial Meetings, in order to allow sufficient time during the working meeting for more in-depth coverage of the experiences of each country.

In this same context, it was also suggested that at subsequent meetings of working groups, an analysis would be conducted, not only of the successful experiences in social development but also of those whose established goals were not achieved, thus highlighting the feasible mechanisms for managing and executing social programs, as well as the negative effects stemming more from economic situations or tendencies than from problems of program planning or implementation. The purpose of the foregoing was to draw and learn from empirical evidence and experience, as well as from feedback on existing circumstances and thus make fresh progress conducive to improved decision making and policy work in social development matters. Consequently, consideration is being given to the need to place issues in an order of priority agreed by the Ministers and based on a scheme aimed at designing social development policies and programs attuned to the Latin American context, thus doing away with the old habit of addressing issues that were too general in nature and where national experiences cited had no original bearing on the common problems and issues that truly needed to be addressed.

Likewise stressed was the absence of constant and ongoing communication among the members of the Working Groups, which adversely affected coordination on the part of the Technical Secretariat and encumbered the preparation of the required documents. Consequently, there was agreement on the need to have a mechanism of dialogue among the Ministers to ensure the success of future work in organizing the issues and themes to be developed at future gatherings of the Forum. As a result, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Mexico submitted a proposal regarding the internal structure of the Forum, which called for the official appointment, by the Ministers, of a representative duly accredited before the Technical Secretariat of the Forum. The latter, in turn, would be designated as the operational authority of the Forum and would be headed by an official from the country holding the incumbent Chair of the Forum and therefore in charge of organizing the next Ministerial Meeting.

Notwithstanding and despite the approval and establishment of the new Forum structure at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Rio, the old problem persisted as regards national government shifts and ministerial changes hindering continuity, communication, and the organization of working-group gatherings and subsequent Ministerial Meetings. For example, although it had been decided to hold the next Ministerial Meeting in the City of Santiago de Chile at the end of 2002, the shift of government in Brazil - host of the previous Ministers' and Working Group Meetings - that occurred almost simultaneously with the ministerial changes in Chile posed obstacles for organizing that next Ministerial Meeting. In other words, the advent of those changes in the countries responsible for organizing and coordinating the following Ministerial Meeting have become translated into problems of communication and coordination. However, these problems could be corrected through improved dynamics in the institutional operation of the Forum.

On the other hand, we should mention that another of the significant challenges identified at previous Ministerial Meetings is the need to have financing alternatives for the

preparation and holding of subsequent Meetings of Ministers and Working Groups. There are cases where the current economic conditions of some countries prevent them from attending these types of events, particularly the working group meetings. For example, the Central American countries unable to attend the Working Group Meetings in Mexico and Brasilia included: Nicaragua; Honduras; El Salvador; and, Costa Rica. To date, a permanent solution to this problem has not yet been found; hence, *ad hoc* financing on the part of UNESCO and other member countries will be resorted to for the following meetings. Another option already emphasized but not yet studied in depth is to seek financing for Working Group Meetings by approaching international organizations with a view to supporting countries that lack the financial resources to ensure their attendance.

In order to rise to and meet some of the aforementioned challenges, this Proposal, which is hereby placed at the consideration of the participating countries, provides for modifying the structure of the Forum, in two specific aspects: a) the creation of a Permanent Technical Secretariat composed of representatives from various countries for ensuring continuity to efforts already undertaken and effective communication among Forum members; b) to focus the dynamics of the Working Groups on the attendance of representatives of already existing sub regional groups so as to achieve the participation of more countries in an orderly fashion and without involving excessive expense.

With regard to the first aspect, the specific method of operation of the Technical Secretariat will have to be discussed and approved by the attendees of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Chile so as to ensure better coordination and communication in preparing for future Meetings. Nevertheless, a possible scheme of operation is being placed at the consideration of the attendees and it is hoped this scheme will be in line with the original objectives of the Technical Secretariat.

### **Why a Permanent Technical Secretariat?**

The current structure of the Forum was a significant achievement and constitutes the first step toward its institutionalization, however, this only means that further steps need to be taken to improve its operation. As stated on previous occasions, the Proposal is based on subsection "L" of the *Declaration of Social Development Ministers of Latin America for Overcoming Poverty* signed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of Social Development Ministers of Latin America. The commitment established under this subsection is to design a working agenda, which identifies common priorities, and objectives that enable the swift incorporation of actions and schemes of cooperation that will contribute to achieving the goals established at different international summits. Similarly, this reintroduces the commitment assumed under the *Declaration of Social Development Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean* issued at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Rio and which pledged to address more concrete issues as regards setting out better practices in social policy to reduce poverty and inequality.

### **General Outline**

Concerning the documents to be studied at future working meetings, the Permanent Technical Secretariat of the Forum shall continue with the commitment to define parameters for the preparation and submission of said documents on the theme agreed to

by the Ministers. These parameters shall consider data homogeneous to the region, presentation formats, comparable information, and the use of similar methodologies.

Similarly, the Permanent Technical Secretariat of the Forum shall continue to be responsible for ensuring compliance with agreed instructions. In the event of noncompliance with said instructions, it was accorded at previous meetings that the Technical Secretariat shall decide upon the content of the final version of the document prepared for the Ministerial Meeting.

In order to program and punctually meet attainment of the objectives and goals proposed at each Ministerial Meeting, it would be expedient for the Permanent Technical Secretariat to continue to take charge of designing an activity operation schedule. This schedule would provide for precise and detailed follow-up in time and manner, to each activity to be executed, as well as the designation of tasks and Ministries, or responsible authorities.

In addition - and in order to strengthen collaboration of the countries within the Forum, it is proposed that the Permanent Technical Secretariat also contribute to the design and development of initiatives of horizontal cooperation in social development. Thus, through assistance projects and reciprocal technical visits, collaboration can be promoted among Forum members, which, in turn, would contribute toward the efficient planning and execution of social policy. In this context, the Permanent Technical Secretariat constitutes the ideal medium for coordinating and encouraging requests for and offers of this kind of cooperation among Ministries of the region.

As regards Working Groups, this Proposal seeks to guarantee the systematic participation of more countries; taking advantage of the work and meetings which, throughout the sub region, are, for example, held periodically under the auspices of Mercosur, or indeed the Andean or Central American region.

The actual structure of the Forum accorded by all the countries attending the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Working Groups held in Mexico (May, 2002) and later confirmed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Rio is shown herein below. The only modification placed at the consideration of the attending countries is the new creation of a Permanent Technical Secretariat as an essential and indispensable element - and the indication that preferentially, subsequent meetings of Working Groups be attended by representatives of already existing sub regional groups.

#### **Forum Structure:**

Pursuant to subsection "g" of the Agreements signed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting and to the Declaration and Agreements emanating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting where it was agreed to hold meetings every six months and where more concrete objectives were established such as the submission of a proposal on criteria and methodology for measuring poverty, it is hereby proposed to modify the original structure of the Forum in order to facilitate and ensure its proper operation. This is likewise with a view to institutionalizing the Forum and increasing its usefulness as an authoritative body designed to propagate the exchange of experiences, knowledge, the generation of opportunities for horizontal cooperation in social development, and the struggle against poverty and inequality. Therefore, Mexico, and the Office of UNESCO of UNESCO in Mexico, hereby submit this new Proposal regarding the internal structure and operational

mechanisms of the *Consultation Forum of Social Development Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean* for its subsequent discussion and eventual approval at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting to be held in Chile in 2003.

## **I DEFINITION**

The *Consultation Forum of Social Development Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean* constitutes a medium for reflection, consultation, and cooperation among the region's statesmen and women in charge of social development. The *Forum* represents an ideal framework for seeking solutions to social problems in Latin America and the Caribbean. This body's main objective is to strengthen existing ties of cooperation in social development by exchanging experiences on programs that have proved to be efficient in reducing economic and social inequalities, thus enriching the decision-taking process among those responsible for implementing social policy.

## **II STRUCTURE**

The organization of the Forum shall be structured as follows:

### **A) CHAIR**

### **B) NEW PERMANENT TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT**

### **C) WORKING GROUP**

### **A) CHAIR**

The Forum shall designate the host country for the next Ministerial Meeting and the Forum Chair shall pass automatically to the Head of said country's relevant Ministry. The Forum Chair shall follow a six-monthly rotating system.

The Forum Chair carries with it a series of important responsibilities for the holding country and these include the following:

- Organize and chair the Ministerial Meetings that, at least once every six months, bring together the member-countries' Ministers in charge of social areas. ( Now, one year)
- In conjunction with the Technical Secretariat, draw up a working program of preparatory meetings and the agenda for the Ministerial Forum.
- Coordinate the results of the *Conclusions of the Chair*- a document adopted by consensus at the Meetings and which constitutes the most important tool for providing follow-up to the directions of the *Ministerial Forum*.
- Follow up on the document approved at the Ministerial Meeting one year from its agreement.

### **B) NEW PERMANENT TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT**

The fundamental objective behind the idea of a new Permanent Technical Secretariat is to perfect the existing institutional scheme, particularly as regards continuity and proper coordination from one Ministerial Meeting to another. Hence, it refers to a scheme conducive to strengthening and ensuring continuity of the Forum.

The Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be the operative body of the Ministerial Forum. Its central purpose shall be to act as a direct and permanent liaison among the Forum member countries.

The Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be a collegiate body comprised of representatives from various Forum member countries. Its composition shall, at all times, include one official designated by the Head of the Ministry holding the Chair and duly accredited before the Forum. The continuance of said official shall be strictly limited to the duration of the Chairmanship of the country he or she represents. The Permanent Technical Secretariat shall also include various representatives from other countries designated and duly accredited by their corresponding Ministries. In this regard, a possible scheme is proposed which will have to be discussed at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting.

The Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be comprised of a total of three members, one each representing the following Ministerial Meeting host nations: host country of the last or previous meeting; host country of the upcoming meeting; host country of the following meeting. This system ensures that all of the countries involved in the recent past, present, and short-term future organization of the Ministerial and Working Group Meetings are also responsible for their own coordination and proper communication with the other member countries. To cite an example, were this system in force for the Ministerial Meeting in Chile, the Permanent Technical Secretariat would be composed of accredited representatives from Brazil, Chile, and Peru.

At each Ministerial Meeting, the host country of the following meeting shall be designated by consensus, which means transfer of the Forum Chair and accreditation by the chosen country of an official who shall then ascend to the Permanent Technical Secretariat as an official representative. Similarly, in addition to the permanent members, any country wishing to participate voluntarily in the works of the Permanent Technical Secretariat may do so, as long as this is requested at the Ministerial Meeting preceding its incorporation. In said event, the status of voluntary members shall continue up until the next Meeting.

In all cases, the Ministers involved shall designate a liaison official who, on their behalf, shall act as a Technical Secretary.

Together with the representative of the next host country and regardless of the institutional formula chosen at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Chile, the other members of the Permanent Technical Secretariat shall ensure proper communication with the other participating countries and shall support the host country by providing the necessary information for organizing the Ministerial Meetings as well as the Working Group Meetings, particularly in the event of any unforeseen ministerial or governmental change which might temporarily interrupt the planned preparations and activities. Consequently, members of the Permanent Technical Secretariat must maintain close and constant communication. In all cases, the Secretariat members should, among themselves, decide upon a clear division of work so as to prevent tasks from being duplicated or executed in an uncoordinated manner.



The principal function of the Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be to establish communication and specify different aspects of the cooperation mechanisms, as well as to oversee the development of thematic research relating to social issues drawn up by members of the Forum.

UNESCO shall act as an organizational authority for technical coordination and information systematization among the countries comprising the Permanent Technical Secretariat.

The specific responsibilities of the Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be to:

- Oversee the periodicity of communication, which benefits the work, and the atmosphere of cordiality among the members of the Forum.
- Define precise and detailed guidelines for execution of the works of each country on the theme or issue selected by the Ministers.
- Coordinate the Working Group Meeting prior to each Ministerial Meeting.
- Systematize the conclusions of the Working Group Meeting in the form of a document to be presented at the upcoming Ministerial Meeting. This document should have the following features:
  - Summary and analysis
  - Majority and minority opinions
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations
- Seek new economic opportunities and follow up on requests for funding and financial support sent to international organizations, inviting them to participate in discussing the topics on the agenda of the Ministerial Meetings.
- Contribute toward and propagate horizontal cooperation among the different Forum member countries.
- In conjunction with the Chair, prepare the programs for the Ministerial Meetings.
- Together with the Chair, oversee the regulatory criteria of the Forum.
- Encourage the participation of Forum members in regional and international conferences.
- Be a dynamic liaison for the initial exchange of experts, know-how, or concrete projects of horizontal cooperation. In this regard, any member country of the Forum may consult with the Permanent Technical Secretariat to determine what other country of the region might be a useful ally in helping to deal with a particular problem or deficiency related to social development or policy.
- As regards the matter of consultation and communication, the Ministry of Social Development of Mexico has provided an Internet web page for consultation on the issues addressed by the Forum and those developed at the Working Group Meetings. Notwithstanding, the Permanent Technical Secretariat shall be solely responsible for sending the latest information on Forum progress so it may be added to said web page.

### **C) WORKING GROUP**

Referring to subsection (i) of the basic agreements signed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting and given the usefulness proven by the Working Group Meetings of Mexico and Brasilia, it is suggested that the structure of the Working Group be defined as follows:

- The Working Group shall be comprised of representatives who are experts on the topic or issue defined by the Ministers at the previous Ministerial Meeting. Each country may designate its representative, however, it is recommended that whenever possible, he or she also be a participant in the Working Groups representing already existing sub regional groups, namely, Mercosur, Andean Pact, Mexico, and Central America - which will be added to with the Caribbean region and others, once fully incorporated in the Forum. In this way, advantage can be taken of the periodic meetings and communication effected at a subregional level to prepare the reports or documents to be presented for discussion at the Working Group Meetings. This will achieve not only better communication and the short and medium-term inclusion of all the countries of the region but will also help to reinforce continuity of the Forum. As to the effectiveness of the Working Groups, the deployment of a representative of a sub regional group of countries will ensure the participation - albeit indirect - of all the countries in the preparatory documents and discussions for each Ministerial Meeting and will make such participation easier, and less costly.
- The Working Group shall meet at least once, between each Ministerial Meeting.
- These Working Group Meetings shall conduct an in-depth discussion of the topic or issue defined by the Ministers and shall receive input based on the experience of each of the region's countries in programs related to the topic or issue in question: obstacles; successes; and, failures.

At the start of every Ministerial Meeting, each Minister shall appoint a delegate as a liaison official before the Permanent Technical Secretariat of the Forum in order to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between the countries and the Forum Chair.