



Organization of
American States



SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

OEA/Ser.E
CVC/FV-3/11
3 November 2011
Original: Spanish

VIRTUAL FORUM ON POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from October 14 to November 4, 2011)

1. INTRODUCTION

This summary presents the main observations and recommendations from the virtual consultation **Summit Talk: Poverty and Inequalities**, held between October 14 and November 4, 2011, and coordinated by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the OAS Department of Social Development and Employment. In addition, the results from an *Online Survey*, which was conducted between October 14 and 31, 2011 with the objective of identifying the main challenges of social actors on the subject, are presented.

The virtual consultation had 105 participants from 27 countries, representing 79% of the OAS Member States. Active participation from representatives of multilateral organizations, academia, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), CSO networks, the private sector and afro-descendant organizations is highlighted.

In addition, 132 persons from 27 countries responded to the *Online Survey*, representing more than 70% of the OAS Member States. Representatives from civil society organizations, advocacy organizations, research organizations and think tanks, grassroots organizations, the private sector, international organizations and local and national governments participated.

The Forum, as well as the Survey, allowed for a rich regional dialogue in which the main challenges of the region on the subject of poverty and inequalities were highlighted. Within the debates there was a special focus on the themes of extreme poverty and social protection, social inclusion, creation of employment opportunities, as well as the institutionalization of social policy. The statistical results of the *Online Survey* are presented as an annex to this document.

The results of the virtual dialogue, which collect the main points made by the participants can be found, are presented below.

2. MAIN COMMENTS AND CONCERNS FROM PARTICIPANTS

In the *Summit Talk* dialogue, participants highlighted that poverty is a multidimensional and intersectoral phenomenon, and that poverty and social exclusion weaken democratic governance.

Among the main challenges identified, was the lack of basic needs, as well as the lack of working, economic and social opportunities to live a decent life. Furthermore, it was emphasized that this situation will worsen if the challenges of education, health, access to public services and generation of productive employment are not addressed. The high rate of infant mortality and chronic malnutrition were particularly emphasized along with the persistent problems of high rates of illiteracy in indigenous communities and the need to strengthen job training strategies.

Even though participants considered the role of the State to be indispensable in addressing these challenges, they commented that corruption and the lack of institutional credibility and strength will weaken their ability to act and make an impact, thus making it necessary to strengthen social accountability.

According to the results of the *Online Survey*, the reduction of extreme poverty, the creation of employment opportunities and the improving the access to and quality of education are seen as the most urgent challenges caused by poverty and inequalities in our region. Similarly, the strengthening of fiscal revenue and social investment as well as attention to the environment are at the bottom of the list.

It was also evident that more than 81% of the sample consider that improving the access to and quality of education is within the 4 most efficient programs and policies in responding to the challenges presented. At the same time, over 72% of the sample signaled the importance of social inclusion and participation policies, while only close to 11% of the sample highlighted the efficiency of conditional cash transfer programs.

On the other hand, it was emphasized the need to balance the State's commitment and actions with those of civil society organizations so as to respond to the challenges of poverty and inequalities in the hemisphere. When asked about the entities that were responding to these challenges, 78.03% of the 132 responses indicated NGOs, with other responsibilities being assumed by government agencies, whether national or federal (57.58%), and provincial and municipal (41.67%) as well as international organizations and cooperation (55.30%). It is evident that this requires a balanced effort between the different actors and sections of society,

Lastly, the survey shows that, within the Millennium Development Goals, the eradication of poverty and extreme poverty remains the most urgent challenge of the continent, followed closely by achieving primary education and reducing child mortality under 5 years. It is followed in order by the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, improving maternal health, promoting a global partnership for development, ensuring environmental sustainability and finally the HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The following section includes the results from the virtual dialogue and reflects the main points raised by participants.

3. PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

In order to overcome the challenges previously mentioned it has been proposed:

- Strengthen coordination between social and economic policies within the framework of a state that has a crucial and irreplaceable responsibility in development strategies, and which should be supported by each social actor. Interagency coordination strategies to overcome poverty, with a cross-cutting focus, are essential for this objective.
- Generate, promote and strengthen partnerships, cooperation and coordination among social actors, along with government officials, academia, international agencies and the private sector for sustainable social development, poverty reduction and integration of groups traditionally excluded from development. In this context, it is necessary to create conditions for access to development for all inhabitants of the Americas and to avoid the duplication of efforts. These conditions should be based on the fundamental principles of justice, service, honesty and truthfulness in order to achieve consistent and coherent alliances.
- To promote greater political participation of citizens, it is crucial to influence the development of government policies, legislation and programs that are aware of the needs of the societies they serve and relevant to the realities of the same. States should allow citizens to organize and enjoy the principles of autonomy and self-determination. Effective social policy requires planning and collective construction.
- The decentralization and municipalization of social policies implies a larger role in the implementation of specific program relevant to the specific needs of each community.
- Include people affected by poverty and exclusion at the center of the strategies, as active agents of their own development, and not as passive agents from government policies. In a framework of co-responsibility, it is expected that citizens take their commitment to engage, development and organize themselves to participate effectively.
- Stimulate policies for the redistribution of resources and income to ensure that everyone will have opportunities for growth, as well as provide tools for individual development.
- Promote the implementation of universal policies to cover health care and education as these are fundamental to reducing poverty.
- Social protection programs must contain components such as the generation of micro enterprises and job training.
- Foster efforts to generate employment opportunities through cooperation and policy coordination with the private sector. In addition, encourage the development of micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Regarding health, it is essential to strengthen nutrition programs, especially those based on access to food within each community.
- Poverty and inequality can be reduced through the reform of the Justice and Security systems, as well as through the promotion of culture, and sustainable practices aligned with the environment.

- In a framework of cooperation to meet the challenges proposed, it is necessary for each sector to assume specific responsibilities within a framework of cooperation and alliances for achieving common goals. In this sense, some of the main roles of the different social actors are detailed:
 - Private Sector: Corporate social responsibility, fostering partnerships with communities to draw upon special skills proper of their culture and traditions.
 - Government support for the generation of employment opportunities, as well as for independent own-regulating entities and bodies.
 - Social actors as agents for government oversight, advocates for the development and promotion of transparency, as well as participants in the design of policies through channels such as roundtables involving the productive sectors within their environment.
 - Help to ensure an equal exercise of rights and opportunities for everyone.
 - Work with grassroots communities to implement social policies and empower the communities being served.
 - International organizations should abandon actions of paternalism and welfare. There should also be a harmonization in international cooperation and dialogue between agencies.

ANNEX I

Summary Statistics of the Virtual Survey on Poverty and Inequalities

Table 1: Country of the Survey participants

Institution's Country	Number
Germany	1
Argentina	12
Australia	1
Barbados	2
Bolivia	6
Brazil	3
Canada	3
Chile	5
Colombia	23
Costa Rica	3
Ecuador	5
El Salvador	3
United States	9
Guatemala	2
Haiti	1
Honduras	4
Jamaica	1
Mexico	20
Nicaragua	1
Panama	5
Paraguay	4
Peru	10
Regional (Americas)	1
United Kingdom	1
Dominican Republic	2
Trinidad and Tobago	3
Uruguay	3
Venezuela	6
Total	140*

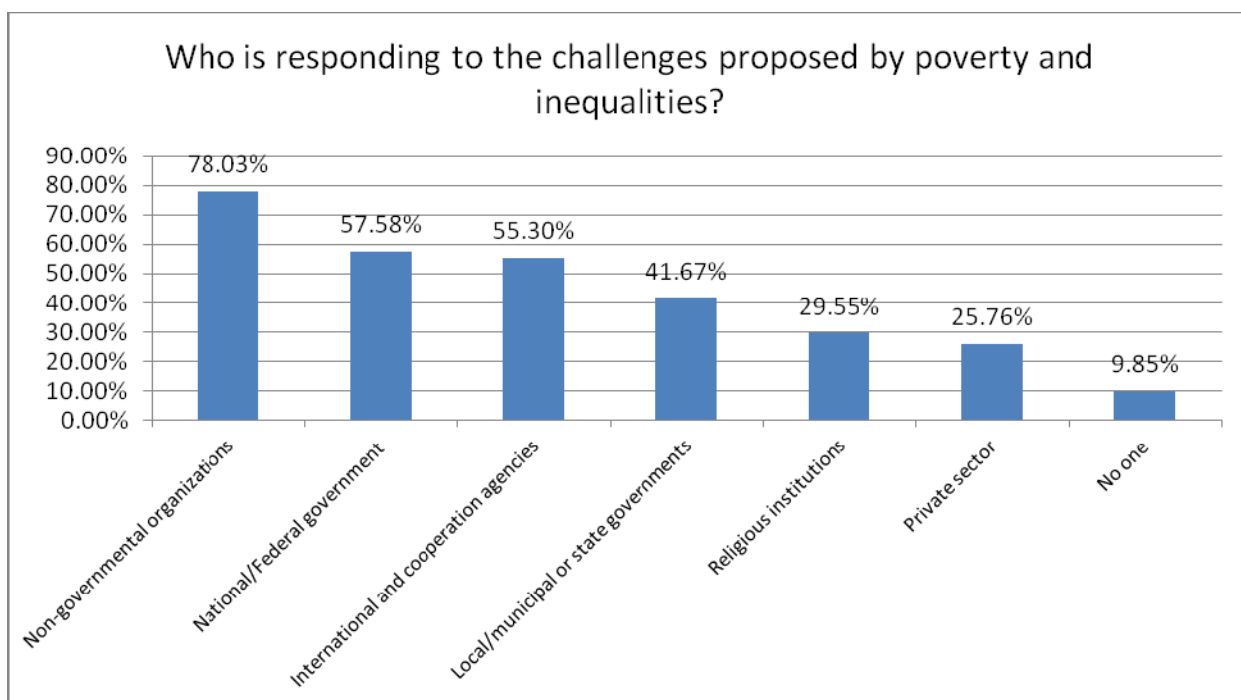
*Some of the participants mentioned more than one country

Table 2: Answers to the question: “Which are the main challenges to reduce poverty and inequality that require immediate attention? Please ORDER THEM from 1 to 14 (1 representing the most urgent and 14 the least)”

Main challenges	Moda	Mediana	Promedio	Importancia*
Reduction of extreme poverty	1	3	4.72	1
Generation of employment opportunities	2	3	4.80	2
Improvement of access and quality of education	1	4	4.81	3
Implementation of social inclusion and participation policies of groups in a vulnerable situation (indigenous people, afro-descendants, people with disabilities, older persons, migrants, etc.)	1	5	5.48	4
Promotion of economic development	1	6	6.02	5
Improvement of access to health	3	6	6.27	6
Access to basic services	2	6	6.50	7
Promotion of citizenry participation in decision-making processes	7	7	7.05	8
Implementation of gender equality policies	12	7	7.23	9
Effective protection of human rights	1	8	7.29	10
Promotion of programs for youth	11	7	7.67	11
Strengthening of fiscal revenues and social investment	13	8	8.01	12
Care for the environment	13	10	8.94	13

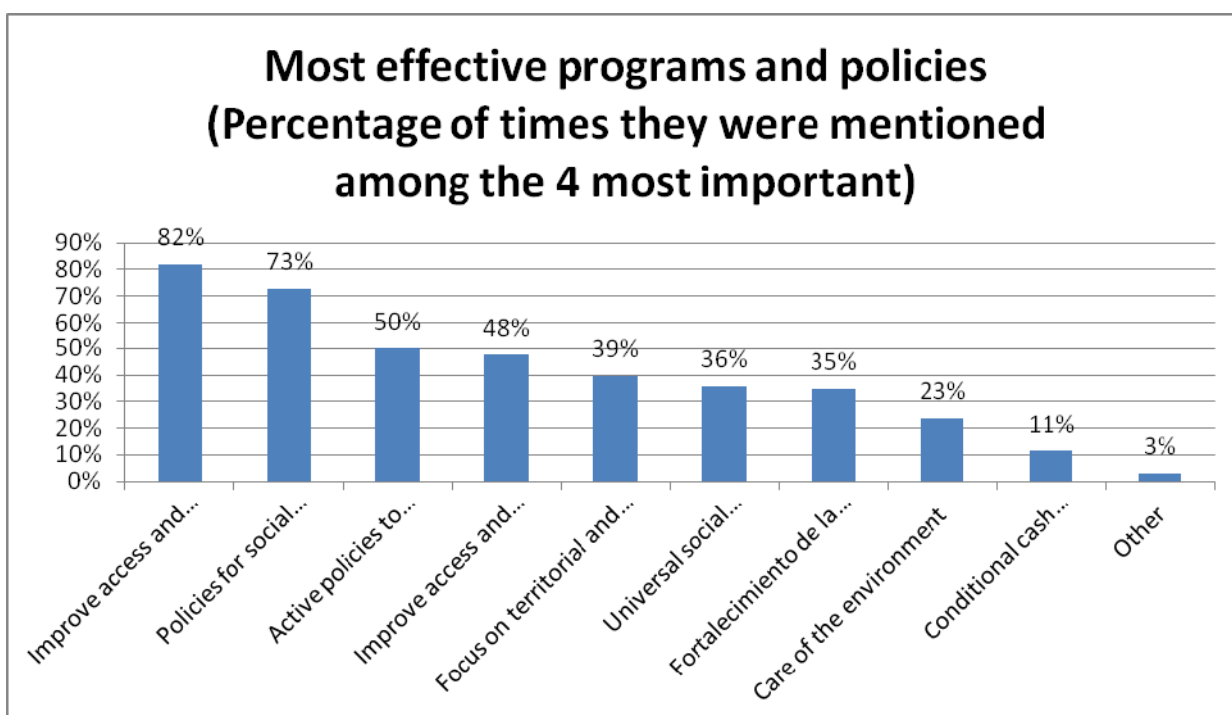
*Orden de importancia considerado según promedio de las respuestas

Table 3: Answers to the question: “From the perspective of your organization, who are responding to these challenges?”



Who is responding to these challenges?	Number	%
Non-governmental organizations	103	78.03%
National/Federal government	76	57.58%
International and cooperation agencies	73	55.30%
Local/municipal or state governments	55	41.67%
Religious institutions	39	29.55%
Private sector	34	25.76%
No one	13	9.85%

Table 4: Answers to the question: “Select (in order of importance, 1 being the most important and 4 the least) up to 4 of the following policies and programs that you consider to be the most effective in addressing the challenges proposed by poverty and inequality”



Most effective programs and policies	N°1	N°2	N°3	N°4	Percentage of times mentioned	Score*
Improve access and quality of education	32	24	32	20	81.82%	284
Policies for social inclusion and participation	29	27	25	15	72.73%	262
Active policies to improve and increase employment	22	18	9	17	50.00%	177
Improve access and quality of health systems	3	19	19	22	47.73%	129
Focus on territorial and vulnerable groups issues	16	13	13	10	39.39%	139
Universal social protection systems	16	12	12	7	35.61%	131
Fortalecimiento de la institucionalidad social	6	10	8	22	34.85%	92
Care of the environment	0	4	11	16	23.48%	50

Conditional cash transfer programs	6	5	3	1	11.36%	46
Other	2	0	0	2	3.03%	10

*Calculates by assigning 4 points to the first place, 3 to the second, 2 to the third and 1 to the fourth place.