



The Selective Approach to Social Policy in Colombia During the 1990's

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to study the Colombian case in the 1990's where the selective approach to social policy design was used. The article consists of two parts: the first part explains the motives for, and the normative results of, the restructuring of social policy in Colombia during the 1990's. The second part is a critical analysis of the results of this restructuring in terms of its effect on social inequality.

This investigation critically analyzes the selective approach in the design of social policy in Colombia as a means to resolve the problem of social inequality. The principal critique of the selective approach says that, while it does not pretend to deliver goods and services on a universal basis, it in fact produces a merit based social policy system that aggravates, rather than alleviates, the problem of social inequality in Colombia.

In a country like Colombia with very high indices of social inequality, a merit-based system like the one created with the selectivity approach to social policy will increase, rather than decrease, the problem of the initially unequal endowments among the population. Its continued development has been extremely inequitable in Colombia.

Keywords: Social policy, universality and selectivity

1. Selectivity versus universality

1.1 Review of the literature

The objective of this section is to demonstrate the distinction between the concepts of universality and selectivity in social policy design that has been developed through the literature, especially in relation to strategy to resolve problems of social injustice and inequality.

Universal services and benefits are defined as benefits available to all as a right, or at least available to all members of a group sharing common characteristics, for example of age, physical condition, or gender.

Universality is often explained parallel to the concept of selectivity to reinforce understanding of both terms. Selectivity means that benefits are reserved for individuals or groups with specific already existing needs in the social, economic, or political order. From the social point of view, both represent arguments for how to attack the problems of social injustice and inequality. Universality is associated with an institutional model of redistribution,¹ while selectivity often refers to a residual model of social welfare.²

Today the social institutional redistributive approach to social policy outlined in the 70's by Richard Titmuss has become associated with the concept of universality. This approach considers social welfare to be a very important institution, which should be integrated into society to apportion general services outside of the market, and based on the principle of need. It is based in part on theories about social change and the economic system, and in part on principles of social equality. Fundamentally it is a model that incorporates systems to redistribute the availability of resources over the long term.

¹ Titmuss, R., Social Policy, 1974, p. 39.

² Ibid 1, p. 38

Titmuss held the opinion that the selective approach was a residual model of social welfare policy. That formulation was based on the premise that only two 'natural' (or socially given) ways exist to adequately satisfy the needs of individuals: the market, and the family. According to this view, social welfare should only intervene if both the market and the family cannot, temporarily or otherwise, meet individual needs.³

Richard Titmuss also outlined a third approach to social policy design based on personal achievement. According to Titmuss this approach assigned an important functions to social welfare institutions as an auxiliary to the economy. This approach posited that social necessities should be satisfied based on merit, the necessary result of the labour productivity, and the amount of labour, of an individual. It is an approach derived from various economic and psychological theories related to incentives, effort and compensation, and class and group loyalties.

The concept of universality is not new. It has always been present in economic and philosophical thought. One example, from the perspective of an economist, was written by Alfred Marshall, "The science of economics should be at the service of policy by using it-as a science may legitimately be used- to lay bare the full nature and content of the problems with which policy has to deal and to assess the relative efficacy of alternative means for the achievement of given ends."⁴

Marshall affirmed that the state should provide education for all (universal), eliminating the intensity of manual labour by the working class of that time (1873). He said that the resources of the world and the level of productivity then reached were sufficient to provide all that was necessary for everyone to become educated gentlemen. Marshall also defended, as a principal, the idea that society had an obligation to guarantee that no child grow up in ignorance, useful only as a machine, unable to function as a human being, low and limited in thought, in

³ Peacock, A., *The Welfare Society*, 1960, p.11.

⁴ Cited by T.H. Marshall, *Citizen and Social Class*, 1964.

appetites, in feelings, in interests and aspirations, in all aspects below his own neighbours. Moreover, Marshall affirmed, “society should be obligated to children, to aid them so that they can ascend the first stages of their education, and should aid them, if they want, in the rest of the process of ascending.”⁵

Marshall’s justification for universal public education was that the difference in the value of the labour of educated people and uneducated people is, in general, many times greater than the difference in the costs of their respective educations.

For Marshall the importance of educating the working class to attain the level of educated people lay in the concept that the man produced by labour is more important than the product of the man’s labour. This distinction allows us to understand work as something, which enriches people thanks to their knowledge, and not to look upon people as the object of work.

This non-economic conception of work inspired a change of direction from the quantitative evaluation of the standard of living in terms of goods and services consumed to a qualitative evaluation of life in terms of the essential elements of a civilized and cultured life. Marshall accepted economic inequality, but condemned qualitative inequality. For Marshall qualitative inequality, the distinction between “gentlemen” and “others” was unacceptable.

Towards the 1950’s T.H. Marshall began an important discussion around the idea of citizenship and social classes, to refer to individual rights.⁶ Marshall gave force to his thesis about individual rights in his writings on citizenship and social classes in which he explained the concept what for him being a citizen meant.⁷ For T.H. Marshall, citizenship represented an individual’s right as a person to be accepted as a full member of a society. Citizenship status includes, according to T.H. Marshall different rights grouped as civil, political and social rights.

⁵ Ibid., p. 75

⁶ Marshall, T. H., 1964.

⁷ Ibid

For T.H. Marshall the way in which a society relates formal rights to citizenship will be consistent with its class and social inequalities. For T.H. Marshall the concept that society has of formal rights and citizenship will be the architecture of legitimacy of social inequality.⁸

T.H. Marshall distanced himself from Alfred Marshall's acceptance that the competitive market can resolve social inequalities and posited a change in orientation emphasizing rights and duties, which he saw as necessarily included as inevitable characteristics of modern citizenship. He argued that the state's provisions for social welfare represented a new dimension of citizenship, created on the basis of social rights, but also in problematic tension with citizens' civil and political rights.

As the reader can see, in T.H. Marshall's conception of social policy, universality and selectivity are concepts closely related to the definition of social citizenship.⁹

Sheila Shaver defines social citizenship as a guarantee of a certain level of material resources provided on the basis of a right of democratic welfare provided through programmes of the state.¹⁰ Hence, for Shaver, social citizenship refers to the achievement of a minimum standard of living guaranteed by virtue of being a member of a national community and based on political institutions.

Thus, citizenship is a status of equality of honour and dignity in respect to other members of a community. That status should be guaranteed by a welfare state. To be human, T.H. Marshall affirms, your status in terms of honour and dignity should be expressed as a minimum quantity of resources needed to provide the basis to be a participant in civil society and political processes.

⁸ Marshall, T.H. *Citizenship and social class*, 1964, p. 77.

⁹ Shaver, Sheila, 1995.

¹⁰ *Ibid* pg., 1.

According to T.H. Marshal, the concept of citizenship is composed of civil rights, political rights, and social rights, which are defined in the following manner:

- § civil rights are those rights necessary for individual liberty. Personal liberty, freedom of speech, thought and belief, the right to own property, the right to conclude valid contracts and the right to justice. These rights have traditionally been related to the institutional form of Courts of Justice;
- § political rights include the right to participate in the exercise of political power as a full member of a corporate polity, invested with political authority as an elector of that polity. The institutions, which correspond to these rights, are municipal councils, state or departmental assemblies, and national parliaments;
- § social rights are the range of rights for a modicum of well-being and security, to participate completely in the social inheritance and the life of civilized accord and at the standard prevalent in a given society. The institutions most closely connected to social rights are the public education system and social services;

Until this point, this paper has demonstrated a few of the approaches, which exist in the literature around the theme of social policy. In what has been analyzed until now, it remains interesting to see the importance that guarantees as a right of some indispensable minimum level of access to goods or necessities, which, because they possess the character of being indispensable (elemental, basic, indispensable, primary) have been viewed as subjects of universal access.

The object of this article is to demonstrate that, since the literature supports universal access to goods that provide better welfare to the population, the way to provide universal access to that goods should not be selective as Colombian policy was in the 1990's. Selectivity is a medium, which obliges the state to evaluate and differentiate who should, and who should not, have access to said goods through subsidies. What results when these types of mechanisms are implemented is the transformation of social policy into a merit-based system.

1.2 The current state of debate

In the most recent works about political philosophy and social economy key authors have insisted that the search for real freedom is the centre of the theoretical discussion about injustice and inequality. Therefore, selectivity and universality have become pertinent in the discussion over the design of social policy.

Amartya Sen¹¹, in his discussion about development and liberty, has defined the concepts of capabilities, functioning, and commodities. Functioning refer to the diverse conditions of life, the diverse conditions of being and doing that can be achieved, or not achieved. Capabilities refer to our abilities to reach said conditions of life. A realization is an achievement, while a capability is an ability to achieve. Realizable goals, are, in a certain sense, more closely linked to the conditions of life, given that they are different aspects of the conditions of life. In contrast, capabilities are notions of liberty in the positive sense of the term: real opportunities, which can be carried out in real life.

Freedom to achieve different types of lives is reflected in the capabilities of a person. The capabilities of an individual depend on a variety of factors including personal characteristics and social factors. A complete measurement of a person's freedom should go through the person's personal capabilities and pay attention to other objectives of the person, for example social goals not directly related to her or his own life. Human capabilities constitute an important part, but not all, of an individual's freedom. The concept of freedom is not a concept without problems. Sen says, for example, if we do not have the courage to search for a particular form of life, even though we could live that form of life if we searched for it, it could be said that we did not have the freedom to live that form of life with the corresponding capability.

¹¹ Sen, A. The Standard of living, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1.987, p. 36.

Phillippe Van Parijs defines real freedom as that which incorporates three components: security, self-ownership,¹² and opportunity. Moreover he says a really free society would be one in which the following exist:

§ “There is some well enforced structure rights (security).”

§ “This structure is such that each person is the owner of herself (self-ownership).”

§ “This structure is such that each person has the greatest possible opportunity to do whatever she might want to do (leximin opportunity).”

Moreover, Van Parijs¹³ unites within his concept of real freedom the proposition of basic sustainable income, affirming that real freedom is something not to be measured exclusively against rights, but that personal income acquires great importance.

However, Van Parijs affirms that the real freedom that he is concerned with does not refer solely to purchases or consumption. “It is the freedom to live as one would like to live. From this follows the importance of guaranteeing purchasing power independent of work realized by an individual or from that individual’s disposition to work.”¹⁴ Putting this definition of real freedom into the context of universality used here, we could say that to achieve real freedom we should procure for the whole population universal access to a sustainable basic income.

With real freedom the members of a society can, by themselves, achieve a dignified life that permits them to live together satisfactorily with others in society. Van Parijs provides the basis for understanding a universal basic income as an indispensable good for individuals to be able to live, as they would like to live.

¹² Van Parijs Philippe. Real Freedom for All, 1995.

¹³ Ibid p. 51.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 53.

Finally, in this review of the literature of some contemporary authors whose philosophical and economic arguments have contributed to defining the concepts of universality and selectivity in the design of social policy, it is necessary to include the two principles of the conception of justice of John Rawls. In his concepts, like in those of Sen and Van Parijs, the concept of liberty is transcendent:

- § every individual has equal rights with all others to the widest liberty that is compatible with freedom for all.
- § Social and economic inequalities should meet two conditions:
 - They should benefit more the most disadvantaged members of society, and
 - They should be associated with functions and positions open to all, in conditions of equal opportunity.

In my concept, the principles proposed by Rawls explain in some way the necessity of selectivity when it permits the social and economic inequalities of society to always bestow their greatest benefit on society's most disadvantaged people. In this case, with the aid of the most advantaged sector of society, the selective approach would be applied to benefit the most disadvantaged sector of said society. In this way the first principle of equality of fundamental liberties would become compatible with the set of liberties for all which would concur with the principle of universality that has been proposed in this paper.

This short review of recent literature allows us to situate the current debate in terms of universality as the search for real freedom for individuals to choose among different alternative lives (more than as a function of economic liberties and the market) for individuals to be able to reach for themselves a dignified life that permits them to live together satisfactorily with others in society.

What empirical evidence exists for how the universal and selective approaches to social policy design have functioned? In the 1990's Colombia, in the search for alleviation of social injustice and inequality, adopted principles of selectivity as the way to reach universal access to goods and social services.

Section two of this article will look at the reasons for, and the results of, those decisions.

2. The selective approach to social policy design in Colombia during the decade of the 1990's

2.1 Definition of norms of the selective approach to Social Policy in Colombia¹⁵

The selective approach to social policy was conceived by the Colombian government as an interpretation of the Political Constitution of 1991.

“The declaration in the Political Constitution of 1991 that Colombia is a Social State by Right implied that the search for social equity had become a fundamental objective of Colombian society. The content of this was understood to be justice resulting from the recognition of fundamental rights, for better social justice, subject to the principles of distributive justice, of solidarity, of human dignity, of equity and universality. Following this declaration, the constitution ordered that the public social expenditure should prevail in the budget, and that within this preferential attention should be given to children and to the poorest and most vulnerable groups of the country's population.”¹⁶

This new social contract was born in Colombia parallel to the worldwide tendency of globalization, which were inspiring models of open economies. These models facilitated free trade in goods and services among countries, leaving it up to the efficiency of the market to provide for citizens welfare, except for the least favoured. Only in this case did these models expect government to intervene to assist the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

Due to the previous conception, the Colombian government implemented a strategy to combat social inequality based on the selective approach to social

¹⁵ Sarmiento, A. National Planning Department [DNP], May 2001.

¹⁶ Ibid, Chapter I, p. 3.

policy. This can be appreciated in the numerous norms that were implemented at the beginning of the 90's by the National Government in the operations of social expenditures through the strategy of selectivity.

In this direction, Article 30 of Law 60 of 1993 defined selectivity of subsidies as the process by which the government guarantees the social budget by assigning to the poorest and most vulnerable groups of the population, following criteria established by CONPES Social for the identification, classification, and selection of beneficiaries and for the application of social expenditures by the territorial entities.

In the same manner, Law 100 of 1993, in the framework of the General System of Social Security about Health, established a Subsidy Regime, which proposed to guarantee access to the System by the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population through delivery of subsidies for which the system did not have the capacity to pay.

In respect to housing, Law 546 of 1999 also dictates selective norms for the solution of housing problems for the most disadvantaged, ordering that State entities of a mixed character, that promote, finance, subsidize and execute housing plans of socially subsidizable interest, directly or indirectly design and execute urban and rural housing programmes especially for people who earn up to two minimum salaries and for the unemployed.

In terms of public utilities, Law 142 of 1994 refers to the tariff regime to subsidies. It defined as criteria of solidarity that lower stratum of the population would have basic and necessary utility service subsidized by higher stratum, by commercial and industrial consumers, and through the assignation of the resources of the solidarity funds.

For its part, CONPES Social, in its Document 22 of January 1994 titled "Focusing Social Expenditure in the Territorial Entities", made recommendations which were embraced by Resolution Number 65 of March 1994 by which are established Criteria for Focusing Social Expenditure in the Territorial Entities. It established in Article 3 that, after 1994 municipalities and districts should focus

the totality of their resources for education, health, housing, and potable water in geographic areas with concentrations of the poor and vulnerable sectors of the population.

Article 4 of the same resolution defines subsidies of demand as, the resource delivered directly to the beneficiaries, which seek to facilitate access to services offered by public or private entities for the poor and vulnerable parts of the population. These subsidies have as their goal the augmentation of coverage among these groups, and improvement of the quality and efficiency of the service offered to these groups.

Article 5, in the same way, determines that, beneficiaries of social expenditure will be identified through socioeconomic stratification and by the index of socioeconomic classification. Paragraph 3 of the same Article determined that municipalities and districts would adopt, after January 1, 1995, the Socioeconomic Classification Index of Households, Families, or Individuals. This index was delivered by the *Departamento Nacional de Planeación* or DNP (National Planning Department), along with instructions provided in the *Sistema de Selección de Beneficiarios de los Programas Sociales* (System of Selection of Beneficiaries of Social Programmes or SISBEN) which were to be used among other things for the identification of beneficiaries of the Social Security for Health Regime of Subsidies. These dispositions were also embraced and deepened by various Accords of the National Council of Social Security for Health.

Based upon all of this regulation, the government introduced “demand subsidies”. Public money would follow people, and not institutions, in a framework of competition for the delivery of services. The hypothesis is that this would achieve better efficiency, achieve equity in public social expenditures, and provide incentives to give attention to the preferential beneficiaries of social programmes, who are the poor and needy.

Following from a review and analysis of the principles, Constitutional mandates, and legal development of the selectivity strategy, a document of the office of the Social Mission of the DNP concluded that the strategy was valid for social services, and therefore, preferential social expenditure for the poor and

most vulnerable people of the country neither ignores nor contradicts, in the opinion of the DNP, the principle of universality.

Until this point a clearly erroneous conviction on the part of the designers of social policy in Colombia can be observed. Both the idea that a selective strategy does not contradict the principle of universality, and its continuation in the notion that a selective strategy is the way to achieve universality, are in error.

The argument used in Colombia to defend the notion that there is no contradiction between selectivity and universality is based on the erroneous hypothesis that the “focused programmes go from one person until only one person is left to care for (n-1). At the moment in which the totality of people are covered, no one is left to be selected, and hence, the programme is universal.”¹⁷

The critique posited here is based on the empirical evidence of the past seven years of implementation of the selective hypothesis. Universal access to the indispensable goods needed by individuals to improve their welfare, and achieve social justice and equality in a country like Colombia has not been achieved. Moreover, through a selective system in which a person must always demonstrate they are at a certain level of poverty to access the benefits of the system, in principle n-1 can never be reached, since there will always be people excluded who can not demonstrate the level of poverty set by the system as a threshold, although they clearly live in poverty.

Consequently, the argument for selectivity is neither ethical nor even justifiable if access to those benefits is to be considered a universal right. This is especially true in light of the lack of resources available for social expenditures, as will be discussed later.

¹⁷ Sarmiento, A. 1994.

The DNP presents other motives in favour of the selective approach to social policy and the selectivity strategy in the following manner.¹⁸

Non-selective programmes, traditionally called “supply subsidies” are criticized by the DNP because those subsidies were delivered to institutions regardless of the number of people benefiting, regardless of efficiency, efficacy, quality, sufficiency or accessibility of the services offered by those institutions. This happened because, among other reasons, those subsidies were maintained as an aging and stagnant budget mechanism.

From my critical perspective on the selective system, it is just as true that the system, which delivers a subsidy to an individual based on fixed qualifications for access to benefits, delivers those benefits independently of efficiency, efficacy, sufficiency or accessibility in relation to the recipient.

Just as it is true that the blind continuation of any mechanism of social policy whatsoever could become sterile and stagnant, it is also true that the fact that one policy or another became inefficient or dysfunctional does not prove that the policy is inherently sterile, ineffective or dysfunctional. So, for example, the problems that developed with “supply subsidies” do not in themselves prove that those subsidies should have been eliminated and radically replaced with ‘demand subsidies.

What was the cost of this change of strategy? What are the continuing costs of this change of strategy? Did said change of strategy resolve the problems of inequity and inequality?

After seven years during which the selective approach has been implemented in Colombia, the indices of social inequality demonstrate that the situation of injustice and inequality have not improved, but, to the contrary, have worsened.

It would be a mistake to say that the precarious social results presented in Colombia during the 1990’s are the product of the application of the selective

¹⁸ Sarmiento A. 2001, pages 7, 8.

approach to social policy. However, we can say that this approach did very little to alleviate the country's social problems.

Throughout this document we have tried to understand why the selective approach to social policy in Colombia in the 1990's did not contribute to solving the social problems of injustice and inequality. Should we agree that the country should continue to bet on these residual approaches? What scenarios can this country hope for under the continuation of this approach?

For the Colombian government the selective approach to social policy is a key strategy to achieve universal coverage in basic social services. Consequently its social policy of expenditures for 'demand subsidies' through focused social programmes is seen as logical and necessary. Like in the preceding paragraph, it is worth the time and effort to ask ourselves some questions, "how much time is necessary to achieve universality?", "what level of poverty should be permitted in our country before we consider alternative approaches to social policy?"

Selectivity in Colombia requires that the beneficiary fill out a survey and agree to a physical evaluation of her or his conditions of life. This is done through a visit to the home of the applicant as a condition of becoming a beneficiary of the system.

Given that there is no efficient form of information verification, this mechanism necessarily creates of systematic distortion of information on the part of the impoverished homemakers. If they do not always appear to live in the maximum level of poverty, their conditions of life cannot classify them to receive the benefits of selectivity.

In other words, people hide information in order to compete to be classified as qualified beneficiaries of the system. In the event that the benefits that could be accessed through the system became equitable, sufficient and of good quality, the system would immediately be overwhelmed by applicants, as the whole population would claim benefits as their right. The system would become inefficient and corrupt, and would end by benefiting people it was not intended to benefit, and not those with the right to those benefits.

The strategy of selectivity is a strategy that privileges those who possess better information, and better education, neither of which are principal characteristics of the poor population.

Evidence for this statement can be found in the statistics. In Bogotá, where seven years ago it was estimated that the number of people who would be selected as qualified beneficiaries of this system would be on the order of 1,500,000, there are now double that number.

From another perspective, it is necessary to ask ourselves, “what are the costs of administering and executing this social policy? Is it sustainable and efficient in terms of distributing subsidies and providing access to the indispensable goods the people need to achieve improved welfare, or real freedom, as the current literature claims?”

Finally, it is argued by the DNP that the measure of how far we have advanced toward universality is precisely the degree to which we have given priority to those living in the greatest poverty. Thus we are led to the conclusion that this generates the biggest impact possible with the available resources in terms of access and enjoyment of basic social services. Selectivity and focused programmes, in the view of the DNP, allow us to advance more efficiently and more efficaciously to achieve equity, but do not guarantee efficiency.

Following this presentation and critique of the approach to social policy in the 1990's, we need to understand the material results of that social policy in terms of social inequity and inequality in Colombia. They empirically demonstrate the impossibility of improving the indicators as long as a selective approach is the basis for social policy design.

2.2 The evolution of the indices of social inequality in Colombia in the 1990s

The new constitution of Colombia promulgated in the year 1991, established Colombia as a State of Social Rights, which for Colombian society implied having the search for social justice as a fundamental objective. This was understood as the prevalence that recognized as fundamental rights better social

justice, subject to distributive justice, of solidarity, of human dignity, of equity and universality. Resulting from this declaration, the Constitution ordered that social expenditures would be prioritized, and that, within this, preferential attention would be given to children and to the poorest and most vulnerable population groups in the country.

These social conceptions of priority and preferential attention in the Constitution were understood as a mandate for a selective approach to social policy. In June 1993 this led to the creation of the Social Mission. This Mission was attached to the DNP and to the *Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo* - PNUD (United Nations Programme for Development). They were supposed to give special attention to restructuring the institutions of social work and to establishing mechanisms and criteria with which these programmes could be effectively focused on the social development of the poorest and most vulnerable groups of society.

The instrument created to implement the individual focus of social expenditure was SISBEN. Through an information system it was permitted to identify potential beneficiaries of the programmes to be implemented by the municipal, departmental, or national government in the struggle against poverty.

Since its initiation the individual focus through SISBEN has been implemented in 95 per cent of the national territory, and has been incorporated to a significant degree in the municipalities, serving to support the work of social planning.

In respect to health coverage, according to data from the Ministry of Health 9.5 million people had affiliated by the year 2,000 to a programme that barely existed in 1993. Law 100 of that year was instrumental in achieving this.

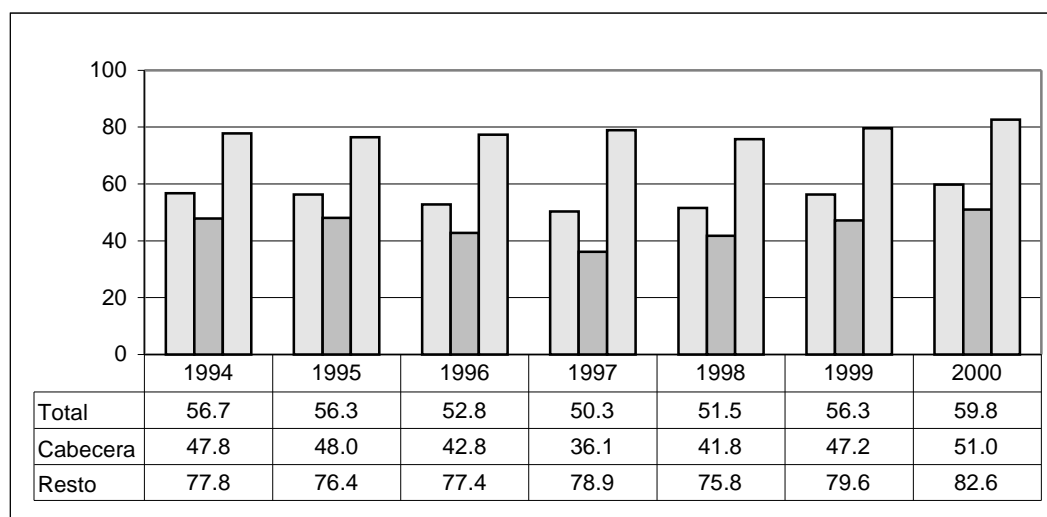
SISBEN has been the instrument used to assign individual subsidies in education, health, social assistance, public utilities, and housing. In 1997 social investment through subsidies was eight billions of pesos, and currently has reached 14 per cent of Colombia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The great effort and significant investment involved in this social policy notwithstanding, during the years 1990-2000 the indices of social inequality have not been satisfactory. Consequently a debate around the effectiveness of Colombian social policy and its instruments has been generated. The indices of social inequality for Colombia do not reveal a very pretty picture (Although there is also a debate about those measures, however that debate is not the object of this article.) According to data from the DNP, in the year 2000 59.8 per cent of Colombia's population fell below the Poverty Line (PL). This represents 24.6 million people.

Income inequality in the country has always been high. According to calculations of the DNP, in 1991 the coefficient of inequality GINI for individuals was 0.5477. In 1998 it was 0.5630. In 1999 it was 0.5561. The GINI for households was 0.5355 in 1991. In 1998 it was 0.5458. In 1999 it was 0.5387. With respect to economic participation by the poorest decile compared to the richest decile, the poorest 10 per cent of the population's income continuously fell during the 1990s. The same pattern occurred with respect to the income of the deciles 2, 3, 4, and 5. In the meantime the income of deciles 6, 7, 8, and 9 improved. The gap between the richest 10 per cent and the poorest ten per cent also grew, despite the fact that economic participation by the richest 10 per cent decreased compared to 1990.

There are other indices of social welfare and social inequality in Colombia. Among them are I-SISBEN (also known as the Index of Living Conditions - *Índice de Condiciones de Vida* - ICV), the Index of Inequality of Sen and the Index of Human Poverty (*Índice de Pobreza Humana*, IPH).

Graph 1. Percent of population under poverty line, 1994-00



Source: Calculate by DNP, based on DANE, National Household Survey, September, 2002. Cabecera means urban; and rest means rural.

I-SISBEN tries to establish the long-term capacity for income generation by families based on information generated by the National Household Survey. This index uses an integrated approach to measuring standard of living, which measures through approximation and averaging based on variables related to housing, occupation, education, and income.

I-SISBEN also registered deterioration in the standard of living between 1996 and 1998, principally in the lower deciles of the population. In the urban municipalities the strongest reduction occurred among households in the first decile, which lost two points on average. While households in the second decile lost one point on average. this reflects the economic crisis the country lived through in the last five years of the twentieth century.

According to NBI, Colombia's poverty situation has improved, although this is contradicted by the PL. The two measures use different methodologies. According to calculations of the DNP in 1993 NBI was 37.2 per cent in Colombia, while in 2000 it had been reduced to 23 per cent.

This overview of Colombian social indicators obliges us to question the effectiveness of social policy based on a selective approach as a means of resolving the problems of social inequality and injustice in Colombia.

We need to ask ourselves after reviewing this discouraging panorama is we should continue on the path of the selective approach to social policy, or if we should examine the path of universality. Can, as was posited theoretically at the beginning of this article, universality become the basis of our social policy design to attack the nexus of problems generated by the social injustice and social inequality in which our country lives?

Table 1. Participation by decil into income*. Data for Colombia, 1991–2000

Deciles	1991	1993	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Decil 1	0.92	0.74	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.58	0.63
Decil 2	2.09	1.78	1.96	1.98	1.95	1.87	1.76
Decil 3	2.94	2.58	2.88	2.94	2.79	2.81	2.67
Decil 4	3.84	3.43	3.82	3.89	3.68	3.75	3.58
Decil 5	4.81	4.41	4.83	4.98	4.69	4.82	4.61
Decil 6	5.98	5.60	6.11	6.38	5.92	6.14	5.90
Decil 7	7.54	7.11	7.78	8.19	7.54	7.92	7.67
Decil 8	9.86	9.50	10.41	10.88	10.17	10.56	10.49
Decil 9	14.08	13.96	15.23	16.09	15.55	16.07	16.12
Decil 10	47.93	50.90	46.36	44.05	47.09	45.49	46.57

Source: Calculated by DNP based on DANE, National Household Survey, September, 2002

* Taken income by unity of expense (All households receipts except domestic services and retired people).

3. Conclusions

The problems of social injustice and social inequality in Colombia were not resolved during the 1990s. To the contrary the indices reflect their deterioration.

In Colombia in the year 2000, 59.8 per cent of the population lived in poverty, while the social policy, which had predominated for the previous decade, did not facilitate a reduction in this indicator.

If it is true that we cannot hold the selective approach to social policy responsible for this, it is also true that the selective approach was ineffective in solving the problem.

Attempting to distribute benefits selectively in a country where 59.8 per cent of the population is poor lacks empirical validity. More universal ways to design social policy should be explored.

Selectivity motivated by efficiency more than equity, in countries with such high indices of poverty, lead to greater inequity, and to greater inequality.

In order to take the path of diminishing poverty, inequity, and social injustice in Colombia, we should look favourably on a non-selective social policy system that will take us in the direction of universal access to those goods indispensable for individuals to reach real freedom, as proposed by Van Parijs.

Without systems of universal access in education, health, and basic income we cannot reduce poverty, social inequity, and social injustice.

Nor does there exist a fair criterion for the selection of beneficiaries for access to social goods and services of a universal character, when 59.8 per cent of a country's population is neither favoured by wealth nor the benefits of education, health, and sufficient income.

If a proposition to use scarce resources more efficiently is chosen, the assignment that results will continue to increase injustice and social inequality. As Sen affirms, the welfare of individuals does not permit interpersonal comparisons. A selective policy is based on using that type of comparison to select those with the same needs, those that could be provided for with more justice by the state in a universal manner.

This work has the firm intention of calling to the attention of the designers of social policy both the theoretical and empirical problems of a selective social policy approach in a country with such high indices of inequity.

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