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SOCIAL DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION:

*GUIDELINES FOR AN ACTION PLAN IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, HOUSING
AND EMPLOYMENT**

SELA

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F O R E W O R D

This study is foreseen in Project I.2 of the Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2008, approved during the XXXIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council of SELA.

First of all, this analytical document summarizes the main programmes, decisions and bodies related to the social dimension of integration which have been adopted or created by the various integration groups existing in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to the four traditional subregional integration processes, the study also takes into consideration more recent initiatives such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA). Special emphasis is made on the most outstanding limitations and obstacles that so far have prevented these programmes from being more effective. Secondly, the analysis focuses on specific areas (health, education, employment and housing) and other related aspects to social issues, underscoring the progress made within the regional integration schemes and considering some ideas for the guidelines to create a regional programme on social dimension. Finally, the document presents its conclusions and recommendations.

This document, as drafted by the Permanent Secretariat of SELA, and its proposals will be submitted for consideration of participants in the Regional Seminar for Consultation on this issue, which will be held on 16 and 17 July 2008, with the participation of representatives of social organizations and specialized organizations with a regional scope.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Subregional integration organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have created mechanisms, and adopted decisions and agreements, which are fundamentally aimed at addressing various aspects related to social development. Except for MERCOSUR, the other subregional integration organizations included, from their very foundation, specific objectives and goals in the social area.

During the first half of the nineties, subregional organizations mirrored the economic reforms that were being implemented in their Member States, which were mostly influenced by the multilateral financial organizations and by the agreements adopted in the World Trade Organization (WTO). As authorities in the countries started to pay less attention to various social development areas, integration organizations began to reduce their influence on policy-making as regards issues such as labour, education, migration, social participation and public policies for income redistribution in the region – which is considered as the one with the greatest inequities in the world.

Social and environmental issues were not included in the economic reforms of the nineties. At the time, authorities considered that concentrating goods and capital in those sectors prone to make investments and promote savings would improve social well-being, particularly for the poorest working sectors, by adding value to social welfare, creating jobs for those sectors and increasing their income, thus promoting social equity. (Kuznets, 1995; Robinson, 1976).

But while those policies brought about macroeconomic balance and a relative modernization of some productive sectors, they also generated a high concentration of economic power as well as greater inequities in income distribution. Moreover, they limited choices as regards State economic policies and, in many cases, according to some analysts, they even weakened the legitimacy of democracy in the region.

By the late-1990s, the growing dissatisfaction with the results of the reforms implemented within the framework of economic liberalization gave rise to serious questions about the viability of such reforms to improve development levels. And this paved the way for proposals which, in general terms, sought to outline long-term projects that could serve as the basis for designing State policies that should transcend governments and count on the broadest possible support of society.

This was also reflected in the integration processes in LAC. The declarations stemming from the subsequent Presidential Summits of integration organizations began to grant an increasingly important role to the participation of social actors. Thus, the existing consultative bodies in the integration organizations (such as the Economic and Social Forum in MERCOSUR, the Labour and Business Consultative Councils in the Andean Community, the Consultative Committee of SICA, and the Joint Consultative Group of CARICOM) gained relevance and, to a certain extent, were taken into account in decision-making. Other important participation bodies emerged, such as *We are MERCOSUR*, and subregional networks of NGOs, indigenous groups, cities and municipalities were created, among other bodies.

Nevertheless, the region witnessed a phenomenon similar to the one seen in the coordination mechanisms or National Agreements in force in some countries of the region, in the sense that the general guidelines established in them were not of a binding nature for defining public policies. This means, that these bodies for participation of social organizations have not had efficient coordination channels with decision-making organs in the regional integration process.

Another important aspect that should be noted in analyzing the issue of social dimension of integration in LAC is that the subsidiarity principle is one of the criteria governing social policies promoted by integration organizations (particularly in the Andean Community and SICA). According to this principle, communitarian bodies must take action only to perform those tasks that can be accomplished in a more effective way than through national mechanisms. Thus, the subsidiarity principle includes those activities that can be coordinated or executed at the communitarian level in order to add substantial value to national policies, which are basically outlined and implemented within each country.

Generally speaking, the progress made as regards the development of the social dimension of integration is still limited. There is not a clear definition about the objectives and the role of social issues in the integration

process. Although some projects have been materialized – basically in the areas of health and education – there is not a well-defined and consistent strategy which can be considered as an essential element of the region's development strategies. Moreover, there is a high degree of dissatisfaction among social organizations in the region – even among that that form part of official consultation bodies – with respect to their impact on the analyses and definition of development policies and regional integration.

In addition, the results as regards joint social policies – for instance, social charters or their inclusion in negotiation clauses – show limited progress. And the proposals and contents of the declarations stemming from the Presidential Summits that are regularly held by subregional organizations are rarely accompanied by action plans for immediate implementation that allow to fight social backwardness in the region.

One must also bear in mind that the globalization process and the current international economic scenario have a strong impact on the countries' internal social and economic policies and dynamics. For this reason, one of the main challenges faced by our governments is coordinating their external agenda (globalization and economic and free trade negotiations) with their internal agenda (reduction of poverty and social inequities and exclusion). In this connection, integration organizations and the countries themselves are faced with the challenge of strengthening their coordination mechanisms in order to adopt common positions vis-à-vis third countries and giving priority to their need to have compensation funds as a fundamental element in those trade agreements that they may enter into with developed nations.

More precisely, over the last few years, emphasis has been made on climate change and its adverse impacts as a global environmental factor that contributes to social inequities and exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean, aggravating poverty levels and foiling the countries' efforts as regards social issues. For this reason, it is urgent to face this challenge and undertake measures to deal with climate change and natural disasters, as part of development policies in the region and its integration projects.

Against this backdrop, it is absolutely necessary to continue to promote and increase the effectiveness of the programmes aimed at ensuring the provision of better basic protection and improving human development indicators for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society.

As stated in the chapter titled “Guidelines for a regional programme on social dimension of integration”, all the subregional integration organizations have undertaken initiatives regarding social issues, which are also reinforced by the commitments individually assumed by the governments of the region in various international forums. Access to health facilities for broad sectors of the population, reduction of malnutrition and children mortality, actions to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other serious diseases, the right to a decent dwelling, better employment quality and access to education, are all included as key elements in all of the final declarations and the objectives of the various organizations.

It would be convenient to select some of these goals and objectives – proposed mostly at the subregional level – and coordinate their implementation within the framework of a regional cooperation programme on social dimension. Obviously, this requires making effective progress as regards coordination among the regional integration organizations, the relevant international bodies working in the area of social development, and SELA. Along with an active participation of representatives of social organizations, this could help to deepen the social dimension of integration in the region.

Thus, the final section of this document includes some recommendations that could serve as the basis for a regional cooperation programme, under the auspices of SELA, on the social dimension of integration in Latin America and the Caribbean. To this end, the organization is expected to become a space for rapprochement of the region in order to discuss and outline proposals with a regional scope aimed at strengthening the social dimension of development. Thus, we would pave the way for the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System to be recognized as the Secretariat for social integration in the whole region.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, numerous analyses dealt with what was called the *social and democratic deficits of integration*. At that time, it was argued that the globalization, regionalization and integration processes were giving too much priority to the economic and commercial aspects and leaving aside the social dimension. The need to incorporate the considerations about the social dimension of integration into the policy-making process gradually gained strength and it was considered to be focused on two axes: social policies and participation of social organizations and movements. In this connection, three ways were suggested to overcome social backwardness in the integration processes:

- The inclusion of social issues in the agendas of integration groups and commitments.
- The design of joint social policies which could result in drafting social charters and/or including social clauses in the various negotiations that were being held within the integration groups or between them and third parties.
- The need to promote and strengthen the participation of social organizations in the integration processes, so as to pave the way for their participation in debates and the decision-making process, as well as the creation of mechanisms for broad political representation.

Over the last few years, greater emphasis has been given to the social dimension in integration processes. This is evidenced in the political statements issued at presidential summits, in the creation of specialized agencies, and in the design of joint programmes and actions to fight poverty – which have been generally defined as complementary to domestic policies. However, no significant progress has been made as regards social issues yet.

Our region is still besieged by persistent high poverty rates, which have been further increased by the recent increases in food and energy prices, and by the chronic trend to greater inequity in income distribution and access to public services. The high inequity levels prevailing in the region are evidenced by the fact that more than 50% of income goes to the richest 20% of the population, whereas the poorest 20% does not account for even 4.8% – the highest rate recorded in the most equitable country of the region. In general, most of income goes to 2% or 3% of the population.² Such inequity is aggravated by the high levels of unemployment and informal jobs characterizing the social situation in the region.

The problem is not only the persistence and even worsening of inequities, but that they increase poverty and restrain economic development.³ For this reason, the World Bank recommends to make greater investments in sectors such as infrastructure, education, labour and social protection.

According to some analysts, it must be noted that the economic policies applied in the region in the last decades of the 20th century – which in many cases were outlined and imposed by the multilateral financial organizations – left little margin for reducing inequities through greater investments in sectors such as education, health and housing; and in practice, these services were considered as merchandise. The trend to privatization of health and education institutions and pension funds created top-class services for few citizens and marginalized large sectors of the population.

Within this framework, existing integration organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean (CAN, CARICOM, MERCOSUR and SICA), and other more recent initiatives such as ALBA and UNASUR, have granted greater importance to the social dimension of the integration and development processes. To different degrees and by using different modalities, various bodies of these organizations – from technical secretariats to political decision-making bodies – are dealing with an important number of aspects related to social development.

² Rojas Aravena, Francisco and Altmann B., Josette, “Multilateralismo e integración en América Latina y el Caribe”, International Seminar on Paradoxes of Integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC-FLACSO- Fundación Carolina, 13 and 14 December 2006.

³ World Bank, in “Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with History?” by De Ferranti, David; Ferrerira, H. G. Francisco; Perry, E. Guillermo; Walton, Michael; World Bank, Washington D.C., 2003.

In spite of the recent efforts made by integration groups, there are still serious limitations partly due to the lack of supranational mechanisms to imprint a binding effect on common social policies agreed upon. In addition, both at the domestic and subregional levels, those mechanisms have been understood as partial solutions for the problems resulting from the opening-up and deregulation of the countries' economies,

For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to continue to promote the programmes aimed at providing greater protection and improving human development indicators for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population, and to make them more effective. Such programmes must be considered as key elements of the countries' social policies and must be underpinned by subregional projects, within the framework of the existing integration groups. But they must also be supported by a cooperation programme with a regional scope. Within this context, health, housing, employment and education are social issues that deserve top priority and coordination among the integration organizations in the region.

The final section of this document contains some considerations – general and specific recommendations – which could serve as the basis for defining the aforementioned regional cooperation programme on the social dimension of integration in Latin America and the Caribbean. In order to implement such programme under the auspices of SELA, it is necessary for this organization to become the space for regional rapprochement *par excellence* in which government officials and political authorities working with social issues can meet with directors of integration secretariats and relevant international organizations, as well as members of the corresponding commissions of regional Parliaments.

II. SOCIAL DIMENSION IN INTEGRATION ORGANIZATIONS

This first part of the study contains a descriptive analysis of the social dimension in each one of the existing integration organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. It summarizes the main institutional mechanisms and the agreements adopted, the existing channels for participation of social actors, and the mechanisms for citizens' participation in the corresponding regional parliaments. These three aspects will be analyzed for the Andean Community (CAN), The Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

1. ANDEAN COMMUNITY (CAN)

a) Institutional mechanisms and agreements adopted

Since its foundation in 1969, the Andean Community has dealt with social issues. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the most significant decisions of mandatory compliance, as well as the contents of the main agreements adopted within the framework of Andean integration. The decisions are the most relevant measures. Since they are supranational, legally binding communitarian norms, member countries must adapt their national legislations to comply with those decisions. As shown in Table 1, social and labour issues have prevailed throughout the whole Andean integration process, followed by health-related issues. In the late nineties The CAN started to deal with border problems and education-related issues, and it was in 2003 and 2004 when the Andean Community approved its first decisions regarding its social development plan.

TABLE 1. DECISIONS MADE BY THE ANDEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS IN THE SOCIAL AREA

<i>Decision and date</i>	<i>Measure</i>
601, September 2004	<i>Creation of the Integral Social Development Plan (PIDS).</i>
594, July 2004	<i>Inclusion of the issue of integration in academic programmes.</i>
593, July 2004	<i>Creation of the Andean Council of Ministers of Education and cultural policies.</i>
592, July 2004	<i>Creation of the Andean Council of Ministers Social Development.</i>
584, May 2004	<i>Substitution of Decision 547, instrument on labour security and health.</i>
583, May 2004	<i>Substitution of Decision 546, Andean instrument on social security.</i>
558, June 2003	<i>Inclusion of the issue of integration in secondary education programmes.</i>
553, June 2003	<i>Guidelines for designing the Integral Social Development Plan.</i>
548, June 2003	<i>Creation of the Andean cooperation mechanism in the area of consular assistance and protection and migration affairs.</i>
547, June 2003	<i>Creation of the Andean instrument on labour security and health.</i>
546, June 2003	<i>Creation of the Andean instrument on social security.</i>
545, June 2003	<i>Creation of the Andean instrument on labour migration.</i>
541, March 2003	<i>Approval of the guidelines for an Andean plan for border regions.</i>
528, July 2000	<i>Conversion of the Hipólito Unanue Convention into the Andean Health Organization.</i>
502, June 2001	<i>Creation of the Binational Centres for border Assistance (CEBAF).</i>
501, June 2001	<i>Definition of Border Integration Zones (ZIF).</i>
459, May 1999	<i>Adoption of community policies for border integration and development.</i>
449, February 1999	<i>Adhesion to the Andean Integration System and functions and organization regulations of the Hipólito Unanue Convention.</i>
445, August 1998	<i>Adhesion of the Hipólito Unanue Convention to the Andean Integration System.</i>
287, March 1991	<i>Intra-subregional trade related to the cholera epidemic.</i>
148, 1979	<i>Adoption of the regulations of the Andean instrument on social security.</i>
116, 1977	<i>Adoption of the Andean instrument on labour migration.</i>
113, 1977	<i>Adoption of the Andean instrument on social security.</i>
68, 1972	<i>Creation of the Council for Health.</i>
39, July 1971	<i>Creation of the Council for Social Affairs.</i>

The agreements, however, provide general guidelines aimed at complementing national policies. Since the signing of the Cartagena Agreement, there has been a lot of talk about the fight for poverty reduction and social justice, listing, time and again, various dimensions of relevant social issues on which the member countries should take action, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. ANDEAN AGREEMENTS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Organ and date	Purpose of the agreement
<i>Andean Presidential Council, 2006 and 2007</i>	<i>To deal with structural causes for migration, poverty and social exclusion, and to ensure environmental protection.</i>
<i>General Secretariat, September 2005.</i>	<i>Resolution 957, approval of the Andean instrument on labour security and health.</i>
<i>Special meeting of the Andean Council of Foreign Affairs, 21 September 2004, New York.</i>	<i>The PIDS envisages an extension in coverage of services: in the area of health, in order to ensure greater fairness and to bridge social gaps; in the area of education, with the purpose of improving the relevance and quality of academic contents, and increasing the use of new information and knowledge technologies. In the area of employment, to reduce uncertainty and instability through productive reconstruction and transformation of the labour market through a technology-based productive revolution. To overcome deficiencies as regards training of labour force and businessmen, in view that dysfunctional social practices and deficits in basic services and infrastructure hamper productivity. To ensure that the financial opening-up remains under control and does not increase vulnerability to external economic fluctuations, which aggravate poverty and weaken the State's social investment.</i>
<i>XV Presidential Council, Quito, July 2004.</i>	<i>Draft project of the PIDS, which included the results from five national preparatory workshops, as well as the meetings held by the Ministries of Labour, Health Education, Agriculture and Environment.</i>
<i>Working Advisory Council, 2003.</i>	<i>Andean instrument on labour migration, social security, and labour security and health.</i>
<i>XIV Andean Presidential Council, Quirama, Colombia, 2003.</i>	<i>Definition of criteria aimed at identifying proposals, guidelines for action and procedures for designing the PIDS, as a complement to national development plans and on the basis of consultations with social authorities of each member country; convergence of social policies that allow for social cohesion, fight against poverty and marginality; development of the social agenda of integration. Promotion of Border Integration Zones with third countries bordering with the Andean Community, which would open up the possibility to rethink this new issue, with the fresh impulse of the CAN-MERCOSUR agreement.</i>
<i>Council of Labour Ministers, December 2002.</i>	<i>Tripartite Agreement on Labour Institute and Observatory – Advisory Council of Labour Ministers and Andean Business and Labour Consultative Councils.</i>
<i>Andean Charter for promotion and protection of human rights, Guayaquil, July 2002.</i>	<i>It includes economic, social, cultural and development rights; indigenous people's rights, African-origin communities, groups requiring special protection: children, women, migrants, handicapped people, elderly people, displaced citizens, refugees, sexual minorities, and people deprived from freedom.</i>
<i>XI Andean Presidential Council, Cartagena, May 1999.</i>	<i>It agreed to outline a social agenda and a communitarian development and border integration policy to improve living standards, and to facilitate the mobilization of people, goods and vehicles in border zones.</i>
<i>Andean Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers, Cartagena, May 1999. It defines border integration and development policy.</i>	<i>Principles: confidence, peace, stability, security, solidarity, cooperation, economic complementarity for mutual benefit. Guidelines: It forms part of the Andean agenda, and is based on bilateral actions, national and subregional policies; it includes border zones as spaces for integration; it respects cultural identity in border zones and promotes their links for understanding and cooperation; it delimits Border Integration Zones. Objectives: to improve living standards and border institutional development, facilitate free movement of people, goods, capitals and services, foster development in border integration zones, ensure basic social infrastructure, and strengthen dialogue, consultations and local cooperation. Institutional framework: Under the direction of the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers, which coordinates the High-Level Working Group that proposes programmes and plans and will be supported by binational mechanisms and the IDB-CAF regional consultative group.</i>
<i>Andean Presidential Council, Galapagos Declaration, 1989.</i>	<i>Includes border development, consideration of the reality lived by indigenous people and their rights, design of binational projects and creation of neighbourhood committees.</i>
<i>Establishment of Conventions.</i>	<i>1970, Andrés Bello Convention, to preserve cultural identity, develop projects in the areas of education, science and culture. 1971, Hipólito Unanue Convention, for cooperation in the area of health. 1973, Simón Rodríguez Agreement, for social and labour issues. 1983, José Celestino Mutis Andean System on agriculture, food security and</i>

	<i>environmental protection.</i>
<i>Cartagena Agreement, 1969, Art. 123, joint social actions.</i>	<i>To eradicate poverty and ensure social justice; to strengthen cultural identity and citizenship values; to promote full participation of people in the integration process; to take care of the needs of poor rural areas; to undertake programmes in the areas of health, social security, housing, education and culture.</i>
<i>Arts. 130, 131, Ministers in the social area, as an enhanced committee, adopt social programmes.</i>	<i>To improve the quality of primary education; raise technical level and coverage of professional training; recognize higher education certificates to facilitate provision of services; promote participation of rural and semirural communities in the development process; support small-sized enterprises, associative micro-enterprises and businesses in general; ensure well-being for working classes; harmonize policies to promote women's participation in the economy; support children and family, and assist ethnic groups and local communities.</i>

The definitions of the social agenda were made subsequent to the readaptation of the subregional integration that gave rise to the Andean Community and the Andean Integration System.

The Andean Presidential Council, the supreme organ of CAN, recognizes the need to include into the integration process a social agenda that promotes the values of freedom, justice, equity, dignity, equal opportunities, participation and democracy; to promote poverty reduction and attention to the necessities of poor sectors; to ensure full participation of citizens in reaping the benefits of integration; and to design social, labour, educational and cultural policies to build on an Andean identity and foster integral development for people. To this end, it is necessary to adapt the agreements, to formulate and implement a strategy for the social agenda of CAN to count on broad definitions of social, educational and labour issues, and to outline programmes, projects and activities with a subregional scope that may enrich and complement member countries' policies as regards the fight against poverty and social exclusion.⁴

The Community's most important decision in the social area has been the establishment of the Integral Social Development Programme (PIDS). The PIDS specific objectives are: to contribute, from the integration process, to fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequity in order to take full advantage of the social benefits of integration; to enrich national social policies through exchanges of experiences and mutual learning; and to contribute to the continuity of public policies in member countries. The programme has three areas of action: actions of a social nature which are necessary to achieve full operation of the enhanced market and to make progress in the integration process; programmes, projects and activities with a communitarian scope which serve to complement and add value to social policies in member countries; and the creation of bodies to democratize the integration process and make it more participative.

Unlike the approach that had prevailed in many measures under the paradigm of the open regionalism – which supposed that economic growth, investments and exports would automatically lead to an improvement in well-being for the population – the broader approach of the PIDS shows that without economic growth it is impossible to reduce poverty levels but such reduction is not an automatic consequence from growth. Instead, poverty reduction requires social policies and measures that ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population will actually enjoy the fruits of economic growth. It also shows that the currently weak relation between economic growth and poverty reduction is due to the concentration of income and wealth distribution. Therefore, the programme stresses that it is equally important to achieve both is the stable and sustained economic growth and a correction of the distortions caused by the inequality of opportunities prevailing in Andean countries' societies.

The PIDS recognizes the importance of having efficient social protection mechanisms for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population, but it additionally stresses that any strategy to overcome poverty and social inequity must go beyond the mere execution of actions aimed at mitigating their consequences and manifestations. It further considers that since the fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequity is an important element of the social policy, it cannot be limited to such protection, but it also has to involve other dimensions such as: productive employment, labour rights, sustainable use of biodiversity resources, development of rural and border zones, food security, health, culture and education. It also indicates that the coverage and quality of health and education determine the opportunities of the people to participate in

⁴ XIII Meeting of the Andean Presidential Council, *Elementos a ser considerados en la elaboración del Plan Integrado de Desarrollo Social Andino*. Proposal made by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

society as citizens who fully exercise their rights and faculties to take part in decision-making within the context of an integration process.

With respect to the mechanisms for implementing the social policy in Andean integration, as seen in Table 1, there have been two main types of mechanisms: the ministerial councils (on social issues, health, labour, social development, cultural and educational policies) and the social agreements.

b) Channels for social actors' participation

From its very beginning, the Andean integration process recognized the need of ensuring the participation of actors other than government officials. In order to promote such participation, councils and committees have been created, which have encouraged both the organization of subregional sectoral bodies and the presence of national groups in some Andean processes or organs (see Table 3). During the stage of substitution of imports in the Andean integration process, the central actors were businessmen and workers. With the implementation of the social agenda during the stage of open regionalism, the councils as traditional channels for participation have been accompanied by working groups and networks involving indigenous communities, consumers, municipalities, as well as academic and social organizations.

TABLE 3. SOCIAL ACTORS RECOGNIZED IN ANDEAN REGULATIONS

<i>Creation</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>
<i>Decision 674, September 2007</i>	<i>Consultative Council of indigenous communities instead of an indigenous group.</i>
<i>Decision 585, May 2004</i>	<i>Andean Consultative Council of municipal authorities.</i>
<i>June 2007</i>	<i>Network of academic institutions and social organizations for implementing the PIDS with analysis and execution of projects.</i>
<i>Decision 539, September 2003</i>	<i>Civil society participation group for the defence of consumers' rights.</i>
<i>Decision 524, July 2002</i>	<i>Working group on indigenous people's rights.</i>
<i>Decisions 441, 442 and 464;1983</i>	<i>Creation and operation of the Business and Labour Consultative Councils.</i>
<i>1969</i>	<i>Economic and Social Committee (CAES) with employers and workers.</i>

After the dissolution of the Economic and Social Committee (CAES) – which gathered together business and workers – the business and labour Councils were requested to assist in coordination actions, in their capacity as advisory organs to the Cartagena Agreement, and received official financing. Subsequently, their action was subject to the discretion of the ministers, even though regulations for their participation were approved. However, their organizational system became gradually stalled, and in the 1980s the Councils were not regularly requested to work, with the argument that there was a lack of financial resources.⁵

In its first stage, the Andean integration process also encouraged the participation of national labour organizations in the activities of various integration organizations and programmes. Several labour unions and business representatives participated, for example, in the sectoral industrial integration programmes (automotive, metal-mechanical, petrochemical, iron and steel, textile and pharmaceutical sectors) or in the programmes for agricultural and agro-industrial development when they were considered as one of the axes of integration. The process also encouraged the creation of subregional sectoral organizations such as the Confederation of Andean Private Entrepreneurs, the Andean Association of International Road Transport Contractors, the Andean Association of Airlines, the Andean Association of Tourism, the Andean Confederation of Farmers the Andean Confederation of Cattle Raisers, the Andean Confederation of Fruit and Vegetable Growers, and the Andean Commission of Jurists, among others.

Since the 1990s, the CAN General Secretariat promoted actions aimed at ensuring greater participation of the various social actors in the integration process. It reactivated the Business and Labour Consultative Councils, encouraged non-governmental actors to participate in communitarian policy-making, and fostered

⁵ See Beethoven Herrera, “La participación sindical” in Jorge Reinel Pulecio and Andrés Franco, *Sociedad civil e integración en las Américas*, Bogota, Universidad Javeriana-Fescol, 1997, pp. 27-36.

the creation of new consultative bodies within the framework of the Andean Integration System to channel the participation of other social sectors.⁶

The decade of the 1990s saw the emergence of initiatives such as the group of indigenous communities, aimed at promoting their collective rights, interculturality, sustainable use of biodiversity resources, rural development and food security; as well as the creation of the Andean Network of Cities and the Network of Academic and Social Institutions, for the execution of the PIDS along with the Andean Council of Ministers for Social Development, the national committees, and the officials in charge of various issues included in the PIDS.

More recently, in the wake of the Andean fair of micro-entrepreneurs, the corresponding network has been promoted as a mechanism for dialogue and contact among small-sized producers in the subregion.⁷ In addition, meetings have been held among representatives of social organizations for the dialogue between the European Union and Latin America, with the fifth EU-LAC meeting in 2008 focusing on the issues of poverty and social cohesion.

In addition, during the II meeting of Ministers for Women Empowerment of the four CAN countries, plus Chile and Venezuela, held in April 2008, the Andean Network for Women was created. The network groups together women empowerment institutions in Andean countries and is aimed at linking its activities to the levels of Presidents, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministers in charge of social issues, in order to make progress towards gender equality.

c) Mechanisms for citizens' participation in the Andean Parliament

The Andean Parliament is the Community's legislative body. It was established in the 1970s, as a space for deliberations in charge of controlling subregional integration, with a role in social issues (See Box 1).

Box 1: The Andean Parliament

Created on 25 October 1979, the Andean Parliament is the Andean Integration System's communitarian deliberative body that represents the inhabitants of the Andean Community. Its representatives are chosen by the National Congresses and in the near future will be elected through direct, universal vote, as stipulated in the Additional Protocol to the Constitutive Treaty, signed in April 1997. The representatives of Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru are now being elected directly by the people of those countries.

Its functions are to participate in the legislative process of putting forward to the bodies of the System draft provisions of common interest. It also promotes the harmonization of member countries' legislations and the growth of cooperative and coordinated relations with the Parliaments of the Andean countries and of third countries.

in April 1997, The adoption in April 1997 of the Protocol Modifying its Charter and of the Additional Protocol on Direct and Universal Elections of the representatives, which adapted the instruments establishing the bodies to the provisions stemming from the Trujillo Presidential Summit and set the procedures for direct, universal vote to elect representatives.

Its headquarters are located in Bogota.

Source: www.comunidadandina.org

⁶ Wagner Tizón, Allan, "Development, competitiveness and inclusion: For an Andean social agenda", presentation by the former Secretary-General of the Andean Community, on the occasion of the International Seminar "Development, equity and integration", organized by COMFAMA and UNESCO in Medellín, 15 September 2004; The social agenda of Andean integration: Towards a communitarian strategy for social cohesion. Presentation by Ambassador Allan Wagner, former Secretary-General of the Andean Community, during the seminar "Promotion of Social Cohesion: Experiences in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean".

⁷ On 14 April 2008, the micro-entrepreneurs' network gathered with 18 micro-entrepreneurs of Peru, five of Colombia and 15 of Bolivia.

The Andean Parliament promoted the Andean Social Summit, the first session of which was held in Cúcuta, Colombia, in March 1993, and in April 1994, in Caracas, focusing on the need for a social rights charter.⁸

Based on the results of the Summits, the Andean Parliament – in its tenth session held in La Paz, from 28 to 30 September 1994 – adopted the Andean Social Charter, which was submitted to the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995.

As part of its responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of the Social Charter, it held the second Andean Social Summit in Quito in February 1999, according to a proposal made by the Andean Labour Council to adapt the Charter to the new subregional reality.⁹

The basic contents of the Social Charter are summarized as follows: (see Box 2).

Box 2: Contents of CAN's Social Charter

- 1.- *Strengthening of democratic government systems to make them more representative, participative and efficient, through full, universal respect for human rights.*
- 2.- *Social Integration and eradication of extreme poverty by reallocating a substantial part of national public investment and fostering communitarian economic participation.*
- 3.- *Participation of women, application of the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination, and promotion of national laws on violence against women.*
- 4.- *Compliance with the commitments envisaged in the convention on children's rights, which provides for the elimination of the causes for children marginality, earmarking no less than 20% of resources of international cooperation to social programmes, and drafting a subregional family code.*
- 5.- *Ratification and compliance with convention 169 of the ILO on the rights of indigenous communities; participation in policy-making and development programmes for those communities, and preservation of the multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural nature of the region.*
- 6.- *Decentralization of services in the areas of health, nutrition, agro-alimentary security, prevention of diseases; improvement of national legislative commissions working in the social area and consumers' rights.*
- 7.- *Environmental protection and preservation, environmental education, coverage of housing deficit.*
- 8.- *Exchanges as regards literacy programmes, rural and distance education, endowment of infrastructure for education, duty-free educational and cultural material.*
- 9.- *Information, as well as economic and credit support to micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises so that they can access Andean markets.*
- 10.- *Recognition of workers' right to an employment with a decent salary, freedom to choose their preferred activity or work, access to professional training, free transit in the countries of the subregion, organization and participation, gender equality in treatment to men and women, maternity and family rights, compensation in privatization processes, information and protection in case of changes in the conditions of their working place, social security and study, protection to handicapped people.*

In addition to the Social Charter, the Andean Parliament has supported organizational efforts and promoted the participation of specific social sectors in the Andean integration process. Border authorities of the two most dynamic and populated Andean nations created legislative assemblies on both sides of the border. In the case of Colombia and Venezuela, the assemblies were working in 1987 in the midst of a serious crisis due to a border dispute over the Gulf of Venezuela. In the case of Colombia and Ecuador, the delegations established border assemblies in Ipiales and Tulcán in August 2003, with the intention of analyzing the communitarian, national and binational situation on the border, instruments to face problems, as well as the institutional agendas and the actors involved in border development.

In addition, the session of the Eighth Commission of the Andean Parliament focused on issues related to women, children and family. It gathered in June 1991 with parliamentarians and representatives of organizations for women of the five member countries, reviewed the operation of the commission and

⁸ For this occasion, a proposal was drafted for an "Andean labour Platform" *Globalization, integration, social dumping and social clauses*, Caracas, Cuadernos electrónicos, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1998, pp. 221-231.

⁹ Gorriti Juan José, "Lineamientos generales del plan de trabajo de la presidencia del Consejo Consultivo Laboral Andino para el período 1999-2000", Lima, mimeo, June 1999.

committed itself to facilitating their participation in the definitions of integration.¹⁰ It also analyzed the convenience of separating the issues related to women from those related to children and family, since treating them together reinforces the idea that the family, the domestic issues and children's care are the sole responsibility of women and makes it difficult to pinpoint specific problems. It also decided to make efforts to unify subregional legislations concerning retirement and maternity leaves and to undertake a campaign to fight to the violence against women.¹¹

The ninth period of sessions held in Caracas in September 1992 renewed the commitments to overcome discrimination against women and decided to propose the creation of a department for women in the Board of the Andean Pact as well as a subregional Consultative Council. Such department was aimed at raising awareness among the rest of the technical departments as regards the effects of integration policies on the women's situation, and to outline strategies aimed at fostering their participation in political, economic and social development programmes.

The Consultative Council would be made up by women's organizations and representatives of governmental and non-governmental labour and ethnic organizations working with women's issues.¹² Recently, the Andean Parliament – along with the World Bank, the Union of Black Women, the African-Venezuelan Network and the Andean Committee on Services – took the decision to contribute to the eradication of social exclusion, poverty, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance against African-origin communities in Andean countries and indigenous communities.

2. COMMON MARKET OF THE SOUTH (MERCOSUR)

a) Institutional mechanisms and agreements adopted

Unlike SICA and the Andean Community – where social dimension has been taken into account since their very foundation – the Asunción Treaty establishing MERCOSUR in 1991 does not provide for a specific instance for the treatment of integration-related social issues. There is an indirect reference to this issue in the text of the Treaty where it considers that the enlargement of the dimensions of present national markets through the integration constitutes a fundamental condition for the acceleration of the processes of *economic development with social justice*. Similarly, another reference is found where it expresses the conviction about the necessity of promoting the scientific and technological development of the State-Parties and to modernize their economies for the enlargement of the offer and the quality of available services and goods to improve the *living conditions* of its inhabitants.

The institutional structure and the methodology established in the Asunción Treaty correspond to a political-ideological context that promoted an integration model compatible with the policies governed by the Consensus Washington, taking into consideration the specific characteristics of each Party-State. Thus, the existence of a social dimension in the integration process is not actually considered in the text of the Treaty. The social space is relegated to labour aspects until 1994 in the Sub-group "Labour Relations, Employment and Social Provisions," subordinated to the Common Market Group (CMG).

As a matter of fact, in 1994, the Ouro Preto Protocol – which establishes the current institutional structure of MERCOSUR – creates the Social and Economic Consultative Forum (FCES). The FCES starts operations in 1996 and becomes the body that represents the economic and social sectors of Party-States. Nevertheless, it has been questioned because it is a closed space that turns out to be limited for the large number of civil society actors, and because it is rarely consulted by the CMG and its opinions are not actually taken into account.

¹⁰ Ramírez, Socorro, "La sostenibilidad de la integración de las Américas. Una mirada de género", in Jorge Reinel Pulecio and Andrés Franco, Op. Cit., pp. 49-63.

¹¹ Ayala Alexandra, "Apuntando a la integración andina" in *Mujer / Fempress*, Santiago, N° 118, 1991, in Socorro Ramírez, *Ibid.*

¹² Parliament Andean – UNIFEM-UNICEF, 1992, in Socorro Ramírez, *Ibid.*

An important step is taken in 2000 with the signing of the Charter of Buenos Aires on Social Commitment in MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile. In the Charter, the presidents expressed their conviction *“that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving a better quality of life, eradicating poverty, and eliminating discrimination and social exclusion;”* and recognized *“the primary responsibility of the state in formulating policies to combat poverty and other social ills and to support efforts by civil society directed at this goal.”*

In December 2000, through Decision No 61/00, the Common Market Council (CMC) created the Meeting of Ministers and Authorities in charge of Social Development of MERCOSUR (RMADS, Spanish acronym). This body is entrusted with the task of making proposals to the CMC, through the Common Market Group, on measures to coordinate policies and undertake joint actions to foster social development in Party-States. The space for debates, searching of consensus and definitions of joint strategies provided by these meetings has been called *“social MERCOSUR”*.

Thus, the group began to move towards a new definition of social issues and a new space for this dimension in its integration process, which would begin to play a greater role as of 2004. Mainly, as of 2004, the issue of the institutionalization of the social dimension began to form part of the agenda with renewed force, and the group began to design proposals and actions in this connection.

In this stage, authorities considered it fundamental to move ahead towards the conceptual construction of social identity within MERCOSUR, establishing some consensus in this regard, in addition to political and methodological agreements, with the following aspects standing out:

- The importance of the social dimension for an integration process to have a real vocation for integral human and social development;
- The undeniable relation between the economic and social dimensions in the process;
- The central role of the State;
- A notion of social aspects that does not consider them from a merely compensatory point of view;
- The importance of leadership of civil society, as well as the development and strengthening of its capacities and social networks, through various forms of organization; and
- An agreement on the definitions of social economy, food and nutritional security, child labour and child sexual exploitation (Acts No 01/04 and 02/04 of the RMADS) – which are considered to be high-priority issues on MERCOSUR’s social agenda.

It is important to underscore some central axes dealt with in the meetings that took place in 2004, which continue to be valid:

- The promotion of socio-productive activities;
- The creation of spaces for convergence with other institutional and social actors, in addition to the RMADS;
- The cooperation among Party-States to ensure compliance with the commitments taken on as regards the issues of child labour and child sexual exploitation;
- The evaluation and exchange of experiences in the areas of food and nutritional security, minimum income programmes, as well as management and coordination of public policies; while recognizing the importance of adopting the principles of territoriality, decentralization and intersectoral actions, as the foundations for designing and implementing programmes;

Also in 2004, MERCOSUR defined a series of priorities related to the issue of institutionalization of the social dimension in Act No. 02/04 of the RMADS meetings, which are worth mentioning:

- The formal commitment as regards the institutionalization of the social MERCOSUR;
- The search for financing from international organizations to support social MERCOSUR’s actions;

- The reinforcement of the social MERCOSUR's institutional framework in each one of the countries through their respective ministries and permanent national representatives,¹³ in order to create a network to support the Pro-Tempore Secretariat in organizing works, and complying with its responsibility to maintain continuity and memory of the group, and to coordinate technical tasks within the group;
- The establishment of a schedule and methodologies for convening meetings, as well as appointing officials to accomplish tasks in accordance with deadlines;
- The definition of competences for the preparation of a global work agenda (...) and a Two-Year Plan of Action;
- The compliance with the mandate given to the social MERCOSUR to assign top priority to the fight against poverty and extreme poverty, as well as other issues to be included in the global work agenda;
- The treatment of social issues based on an integral vision of the implementation of public policies which implies coordination (...) among various governmental and MERCOSUR agencies related to health, education and labour areas, so as to have a strategic influence on the design of public and economic policies;
- The definition of the format for the meetings of the technical group;
- The design of a plan of action with short-term and long-term goals, its areas of action, high-priority issues and appointment of officials responsible for actions; and
- The institutionalization of the Statistical System of Social Indicators (SEIS, Spanish acronym), *“in order to attain systematization and homogenization of statistical data, to have a uniformed view of socioeconomic realities in MERCOSUR for improving decision-making”* (Act No. 01/04 of the RMADS);

In 2005, the group continued with the guidelines established in the previous year and it begins to get closer to accomplishing some of its goals. The ministers recognized and underscored *“the similarities as regards social public plans and policies being developed in the countries, in spite of their corresponding geopolitical and demographic differences; as well as the need for coordination of policies and cooperation on technical aspects, training and exchanges of experiences”* (Act No. 02/05 of the RMADS). In this regard, MERCOSUR approved its 2005-2007 Biennial Plan (See Box 3).

Box 3: 2005-2007 Biennial Plan

The Biennial Plan establishes the concept of social protection and promotion as a guiding principle for its actions. The Plan defines this principle as a “series of public policies in broad coordination with civil society, which foresees answers mainly for those sectors with the highest level of vulnerability and risk, where the main purpose is to promote opportunities that allow for the inclusion of the family and the community within a sustainable development model that takes due account of rights, obligations and equity, and promotes social cohesion in accordance with the territorial principle. Thus, this concept is aimed at turning MERCOSUR into an ‘inclusive space’ that strengthens citizens’ political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the territorial principle” (Act No. 01/05 of the RMADS).

The Plan includes three inter-related levels:

- i) The creation of a Permanent Social Secretariat (SSP, Spanish acronym), as an operational body that coordinates, jointly with the National Committees, compliance with the agreements reached by the RMADS¹⁴ and promotes the exchange of experiences and horizontal cooperation among Party-States and Associate States in the area of social policies;*
- ii) The adoption of a conceptual and methodological framework for social MERCOSUR; and*
- iii) The preparation of social indicators for evaluating the Biennial Plan.*

Source: Annex IV of Act No. 01/05, and Annexes IV and IX of Act No. 02/05 of the RMADS.

¹³ In this connection, it should be underscored that the Eastern Republic of Uruguay created a Ministry for Social Development during the current administration of President Tabaré Vázquez.

¹⁴ The SSP was headquartered in the Republic of Paraguay for its first two years of operation. As of June 2007, it will be based in the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

MERCOSUR authorities also proposed in 2005 to establish National Coordination Committees, as focal points for working with the Permanent Social Secretariat (SSP). These committees “*shall attempt to establish coordination relations with other State institutions taking part in the design of social policies and included in other MERCOSUR bodies, particularly the Groups of Ministers of Education, Health and Labour*” (Act No. 01/05 of the RMADS).

In 2005, MERCOSUR authorities also started to promote the coordination of actions with other forums and regional blocs. And last but not least, they proposed the creation of a MERCOSUR Social Fund, as well as the participation of RMADS representatives in the discussions related to the recently-created Structural Convergence Funds of MERCOSUR – particularly in dealing with Social Cohesion projects.

The year 2006 was particularly important for the development of the social dimension within this integration process, because authorities began to define and implement social policies and its coordination mechanisms, as well as the spaces for participation of civil society in the bloc.¹⁵

The X RMADS meeting, held in Buenos Aires in July 2006, had some important results, such as: “*(...) the discussion on the MERCOSUR Social Institute (IMS, Spanish acronym); the publication ‘The Social Dimension in MERCOSUR’;*¹⁶ *and the definition of high-priority axes (fight to child and teenager sexual exploitation; food and nutritional security; social economy, generation of jobs and income)*”. These issues were debated in the MERCOSUR Social Forum, held in Foz de Iguacu during the second half of the year, which provided the RMADS with its first opportunity to hold a dialogue with civil society organizations.

The issue of how to strengthen the institutional framework for social dimension gains greater importance on the agenda of the meetings, with ministers stating that “*(...) social aspects will have great political relevance in MERCOSUR, particularly as regards the materialization of actions, if the institutional reform grants priority to this issue.*” Then, a very important proposal is made to create a Regional Social Policy Council, as a policy-making organ to oversee its technical body: the MERCOSUR Social Institute, whose structure was designed during 2006 as well.

In 2006, MERCOSUR authorities also prepared the matrices for the horizontal cooperation basket and decided to prepare two projects to fight poverty – one of which focuses on the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay triple-border zone and would be financed by the Fund for the Structural Convergence of MERCOSUR (FOCEM).¹⁷

Finally, in compliance with a mandate given by the presidents in July 2006, the group created a technical group within the framework of the RMADS to prepare a Strategic Plan for Social Development.

The MERCOSUR Social Institute was created through Decision No. 03, adopted by the Common Market Council in January 2007. This is an important step in the institutionalization process of the social dimension. The Decision establishes that the Institute will, temporarily, respond to the RMADS until a new political decision-making body is created.

¹⁵ In July 2006, under the Pro-Tempore Presidency of Argentina, the group held its First Meeting for a productive and social MERCOSUR. This social summit took place in Brasilia in December 2006.

¹⁶ Compilation of technical and political documents on social policies in each one of the Party and Associate States, and their status in MERCOSUR.

¹⁷ These projects concentrate on the following thematic areas: children (child sexual exploitation, child pornography, and child labour), food and nutritional security, job generation and productive options projects (employability, partnerships, networks, solidarian economy, employment and income generation).

The Institute's general objectives are:

- To contribute to the consolidation of the social dimension as the fundamental axis for development in MERCOSUR;
- To contribute to overcoming asymmetries;
- To provide technical cooperation in the design of regional social policies;
- To systematize and update regional social indicators;
- To compile and exchange information about best practices in social matters;
- To promote mechanisms for horizontal cooperation; and
- To identify financial sources;

The labour bodies¹⁸ created within the framework of the institutional structure of MERCOSUR, as well as those related *strictu sensu* to the social dimension, which were previously established, do not have decision-making powers. (See Box 4). In all the cases, as can be seen, they work through recommendations or draft resolutions that must be submitted to the organs on which they depend. *All of them are of a tripartite nature*: in addition to governmental delegates, representatives of the main business and union organizations of each country must participate in them.

Box 4: The labour dimension in the foundation of MERCOSUR

In May 1991 – one and a half months after the signing of the Asunción Treaty – the Labour Ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay issued the Montevideo Declaration proposing the creation of a Working Sub-group on labour issues within the structure of MERCOSUR. At that time, a proposal was made about the possibility to adopt a Social Charter for MERCOSUR. In November 1991, the Common Market Group created the Working Sub-group 11 on “Labour Issues”, which was later renamed as the “Sub-group on Labour Relations, Employment and Social Security.” In 1995, it was reorganized through Resolution N. 20/95 of the Common Market Group, as the Working Sub-group 10 on Labour Issues, Employment and Social Security.”

Labour regulations in MERCOSUR have been established by the bodies of the bloc with competence in the area. In view of their tripartite nature, since their establishment, there has been a consensus about the need to have a regional legislation on this issue (Godio et al., 2004).

These regulations have had two fundamental objectives: first, the regulatory harmonization at the regional level and the establishment of a minimum set of rights within MERCOSUR and, secondly, the design of regional guidelines for the convergence of national policies on certain issues and for coordination of common lines of action in the four countries (Ferreira, 2002; Sardegna, 1995).

There have been different results according to the chosen objectives and methodologies.¹⁹ The most important advances have been seen in the Working Sub-group No. 10 (SGT10) on Labour issues, Employment and Social Security.²⁰ Some concrete results include the Socio-labour Declaration and the Multilateral Agreement on Social Security of MERCOSUR. In the area of the Socio-labour Commission of

¹⁸ For instance, the Meetings of Labour Ministers, the SGT10, the Socio-labour Commission, the High-Level Group for Employment and the Economic and Social Consultative Forum, which will be dealt with later on.

¹⁹ The objective of harmonizing regulations at the regional level is attained by using three different methodologies:

- To raise national regulations to a regional level and propose harmonization of some national regulations;
- To come down from the international level to the regional level and propose joint ratification by the four countries of labour international treaties and other international or continental treaties or protocols;
- To work directly on a regional instrument with a control or follow-up mechanism of its own (Ferrerira, 2002).

²⁰ In the work agenda of the SGT10 for 2006, we found the following issues: strengthening of the Observatory of the Labour Market of MERCOSUR, plan of action to facilitate the movement of workers within MERCOSUR, strengthening of labour inspection systems, harmonization of regulations on hygiene and security at work, regional plan on labour inspection, regional plan for eradication of child labour.

the bloc, mention should be made of the approval of the Presidential Declaration on Eradication of Child Labour.

The year 2004 marked the beginning of a process of institutional redefinition in this dimension, after the meeting of the Regional Conference on Employment, under the Pro-Tempore Presidency of Argentina, with the creation of the High-Level Group of the MERCOSUR Strategy for Employment Growth (GANEMPLE).²¹ GANEMPLE is coordinated by the Labour Ministries and made up by delegates of the Ministries for the economic, labour, industrial and social areas, with the technical assistance of the Labour Market Observatory of MERCOSUR.

Finally, with respect the channels established by MERCOSUR for participation of social organizations, the Protocol of Ouro Preto of 1994 defined two types of mechanisms: i) the FCES, an exclusively institutional space for the participation of economic and social sectors and ii) the possibility of participation in preparatory meetings of the working sub-groups and respective commissions attached to the CMG, as well as in specialized meetings and the Ad Hoc Groups.

b) Channels for social actors' participation

In this connection, mention must be made of the creation of the Consultative Forum of Municipalities, Federated States, Provinces and Departments of MERCOSUR. It is important because it begins to take into account the fact that the decentralization processes undertaken in the region granted to subnational governments a higher degree of competences and responsibilities. These issues formed permanent part of the negotiations in MERCOSUR. But those officials in charge of public policy-making for development of their territories, and increasingly undertook international actions, did not have formal mechanisms for participation.

An important regional proposal, which promotes citizens' participation and influence on the integration process, "WE ARE MERCOSUR", was submitted by the President of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, at the presidential Summit of June 2005 (See Box 5).

Mention should also be made of the formalization of the Social Summits held in Córdoba and Brasilia, in July and December 2006, respectively.

Box 5: "WE ARE MERCOSUR"

We are MERCOSUR" is aimed at involving citizens in the regional integration process. The initiative was undertaken in the second half of 2005 under Uruguay's Pro-Tempore Presidency of MERCOSUR. It is being developed with the special advisory of the Presidency for Civil Society of Brazil, the Special Representative's Office for Integration and Social Participation of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Argentina, Uruguay's General Direction for Integration Issues and MERCOSUR, Paraguay's General Secretariat of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and the Ministry of Integration and International Trade of Venezuela.

The initiative was designed as a response to the demands for increased participation in the regional integration process expressed by social organizations and local governments. It is an expression of the political will to democratize MERCOSUR, by creating new spaces for civil society and local governments to hold debates, formulate demands and participate in decision-making processes.

The initiative is aimed at obtaining tangible results in showing the benefits of MERCOSUR for the citizens. It is a program for actions by the public and private sectors, which makes emphasis on the dimensions of the productive, social, political and cultural MERCOSUR, so as to complement the commercial dimension that was privileged in some segments of the integration process.

The priorities of this Initiative are:

- *To make strides towards the creation of the MERCOSUR citizenship*
- *Democratize MERCOSUR*

²¹ Created by Decision No. 46 of the Common Market Council, in 2004.

- *To undertake a MERCOSUR strategy for promoting growth and employment*
- *To firmly express the commitment of the five countries with the regional integration process*
- *To analyze the role of MERCOSUR in the world and to make MERCOSUR citizens living in other countries feel as part of this process*

c) **Mechanisms for citizens' participation in the MERCOSUR Parliament**

The MERCOSUR Parliament was established on 6 December 2006 to replace the Joint Parliamentary Commission. It is the organ representing *par excellence* the interests of citizens in the Party States.

The MERCOSUR Parliament operates in various thematic areas, according to the competences of each one of its ten commissions: Legal and Institutional Matters; Economic, Financial, Trade, Fiscal and Monetary Matters; International, Interregional and Strategic Planning Matters; Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Sports; Labour, Employment Policies, Social Security and Social Economy; Sustainable Regional Development, Territorial Order, Housing, Health, Environment and Tourism; Citizenship and Human Rights; Domestic Affairs, Security and Defence; Infrastructure, Transport, Energy Resources, Agriculture, Cattle Raising and Fisheries; and Budget and Domestic Affairs.

The purposes of the Parliament are as follows:

- To represent the peoples of MERCOSUR, respecting their ideological and political plurality.
- To guarantee the participation of social organizations actors in the integration process.
- To contribute to consolidate Latin American integration by deepening and enhancing MERCOSUR.

With respect to the election of its members, it has been foreseen that parliamentarians will be elected by the citizens of the corresponding Party States through direct, universal and secret vote.

Until December 2010, the Parliament will be made up by eighteen parliamentarians from each Party State. Until then, the national Parliaments will decide upon the modalities for appointing their corresponding parliamentarians from among the legislators of the national Parliaments of each Party State, nominating the main parliamentarians and an equal number of deputies. The popular election of parliamentarians through direct, universal and secret vote is foreseen for the year 2014.

3. **CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)**

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was founded on 4 July 1973 under the name of Single Market and Economy with the signing of the Chaguaramas Treaty aimed at creating a common market. (See Box 6)

Box 6: Member States of CARICOM

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Granada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, and Trinidad & Tobago. Haiti is the member that most recently joined CARICOM (4 July 1997). Its incorporation to the common market will be carried out in stages. Haiti is the second English-speaking country to join CARICOM as a full member, after Surinam, which adhered in July 1995.

Observer Countries:

Aruba, Colombia, The Netherlands Antilles, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico.

Associate Members:

Anguila, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands. This status has a barely practical significance.

a) **Institutional mechanisms and agreements adopted**

In its preamble, the Chaguaramas Treaty expresses the subregion's concerns about social issues. As a matter of fact, full employment and improved standards of work and living, and an effective regime for

utilizing the institutions designed to enhance the economic, social and cultural development of Caribbean peoples are some of the aspects mentioned in the Treaty's considerations for the creation of the group. However, its objectives are basically of an economic nature.

The institutional structure foreseen in the original Treaty of CARICOM did not envisage or mention the creation of instances for participation of social actors, or the creation of a secretariat in charge of social issues. Nevertheless, it did establish as part of the institutions of the Community the Conference of Ministers of Health, the Permanent Committee of Ministers of Education and the Permanent Committee of Ministers of Labour.

Throughout its history, the Treaty has been amended through Protocols that have adapted the terms of the agreement to the international political and economic reality.²²

In 2001, these modifying Protocols were approved by the Member States, thus adopting the new text of the Revised Chaguaramas Treaty. It specifically deals with the challenges faced by the region as regards globalization; makes emphasis on competitiveness and productivity as long as they are based on respect to food security norms, diversification of the productive structure and increased well-being for the population as well as labour standards. It also refers to the need for social actors to have greater participation in the decision-making processes. Nevertheless, it does not envisage mechanisms or channels for such purposes.

Unlike the original treaty, the objectives set forth in the Revised Treaty of 2001 do make explicit references to social goals. Among other objectives, it is aimed at improving labour and living standards; and making full use of labour forces and other productive factors.

It is important to stress that, in 1993, prior to the revision of the Chaguaramas Treaty, the *Charter of Civil Society for CARICOM* was adopted. This charter contains a series of rights that must be recognized within the Member States, including women's, children's, family and workers' rights. The charter also includes the recognition of the role of social actors by the governments, and its primary objective was to ensure that these considerations were accepted and applied in the various countries of the region.

In the institutional structure of the Caribbean integration group, there are four councils. (See Box 7)

Box 7: Bodies supporting the institutional structure of CARICOM

- *The Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED). It is in charge of promoting trade and economic development of the Community and particularly, among other responsibilities, IT monitors the operation of the Community's Single Market and Economy.*
- *The Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR). It has the responsibility of defining relations among CARICOM and third countries or international organizations. It coordinates foreign policies of its Member States and, whenever possible, it adopts joint positions for the Community on important hemispheric and international issues.*
- *The Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD). It is aimed at promoting social and human development, particularly by developing in the areas of health, education and sports.*
- *The Council for Finance and Planning (COFAP). It is fundamentally in charge of coordinating economic policies as well as financial and monetary integration among Member States. Under the direction of COFAP, the Committee of Governors of Central Banks will help the Council to perform its duties.*

As can be seen, there exists an institutional body in charge of the social dimension, which is embodied in one of the directing bodies of CARICOM's Secretariat: The Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD).

COHSOD holds regular meetings. A central issue to which attention has been paid recently is integration of labour markets, as a fundamental part of CARICOM's single market. To this end, the Council has proposed

²² In 2000, CARICOM outlines the establishment of the *Caribbean Single Market and Economy* (CSME) as its central objective. Its basic axes are: free movement of capital and labour force (Romero, 2007). Within this context, the Community planned to have a single economy by the year 2007 – a goal which has not been fully accomplished but continues to be the Community's central objective.

a series of activities for the development of human resources as an essential element for an effective use of labour capacity within an integrated space.

Another subject dealt with by the COHSOD is that some of the Member States do not have institutionalized structures for social dialogue. In view of this reality, it urged those countries to achieve concrete results and make efforts in this connection.

In the area of labour standards, the COHSOD deemed it necessary to establish a “social floor” in the Community and in CARICOM’s Single Market (CSME). Such floor would be a structure to build on national standards. Such structure could be built on the basis of the recommendations of the Council to adopt the eight major conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) related to the freedom of association, the right to collective negotiations, the elimination of the forced labour, the eradication of child labour, the elimination of discrimination at work, and the conventions on migration.

Education, science and technology, and in the area of health, prevention of HIV/AIDS,²³ are other key issues regularly dealt with by the COHSOD.

Social issues were given top priority by CARICOM countries during the XXVIII Meeting of Heads of State and Government of CARICOM, held in Needham’s Point, Barbados. This meeting identified areas that could not only contribute to deepen the economic integration process, but also to development and to promoting people’s well-being. They are clearly stated in the official communiqué “A Community for All,”²⁴ which was signed by the Presidents.

The communiqué states that the goal of the Caribbean integration process is, first and foremost, to enhance the well-being of all of the citizens of the countries. To this end, functional cooperation plays a fundamental role in the development of activities in areas such as education, health, sports, culture, sustainable development and security. In the Declaration, the Heads of State expressed their determination to make functional cooperation a priority within the Community.

In 2003, CARICOM established a working commission that received the mandate to outline a series of recommendations in order to adapt the regional structure and institutionality to the new processes, and to propose new guidelines for regional governance. Two years later, the Community submitted the report *Regional Integration: Carrying the Process Forward*.

Based on this report, a technical working group was set up to make specific proposals to renew governance in the region. Coordinated by Vaughan Lewis, professor of the University of the West Indies, in October of 2006, the working group submitted its results in a report titled *Managing Mature Regionalism*. It must be noted that a representative of the private sector organization Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC) participated in the working group, but no representatives of the labour sector or civil society organizations were invited to participate or at least they do not appear in the list of experts consulted.

This proposal – which is aimed at restructuring the Caribbean Community and recommends the creation of a Caribbean Commission to oversee the integration process – upholds the issue of human and social development as one of the central axes of integration and includes a commission that would be in charge of the matter.

The report recognizes that regional governance cannot continue to be the sole responsibility of the State, but it rather requires the participation of non-state actors of the private sector, labour unions and social

²³ The project currently underway in the social area is the *Pan-Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS* (PANCAP), which forms part of the regional strategic framework defined by CARICOM. HIV/AIDS is considered to be a major threat faced by this subregion; consequently it has drawn a lot of attention as a social issue.

²⁴ Declaration on Functional Cooperation, issued by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community on the occasion of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Conference, held from 1 to 4 July 2007, in Needham's Point, Barbados.

organizations. The report states that in order to accomplish the CSME, it is necessary to have a new architecture for integration which is more flexible and has greater supranational power, and for this purpose it is urgent to overcome the conflicts between the “nationalist” and the “regionalist” views, by looking for mechanisms to make these two views compatible. Consequently, the report proposes an approach favouring collective decision-making as regards regional issues.

b) Channels for social actors’ participation

Since the 1990s, there have been institutionalized consultative mechanisms in CARICOM in order to ensure participation of social actors.

Under the modality of *social partners*, CARICOM established a mechanism which initially grouped together representatives of the business and labour sectors, and was subsequently enhanced to include a representative of the Caribbean NGOs. The *Joint Consultative Group* included the *Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce* and the *Caribbean Congress of Labour*. The Group determined that its members could be convened to participate as consultants in its various meetings and commissions. In July 1995, the Meeting of Heads of State approved the inclusion of a representative of an NGO, the *Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC)*, in the consultative group.

This network of social organizations²⁵ was established in view of the need to have a channel for dialogue with CARICOM. Its main objectives are to seek for alternative mechanisms for development and to coordinate the formulation and promotion of joint social policies in the whole Caribbean region. In practice, the CPDC, as the representative of social organizations, has been requested to submit reports and opinions on various issues, has been granted right to speak in various meetings and has expressed its viewpoints.

The CPDC has also participated in various working groups set up within the framework of the Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM), which also held consultations with different representatives of social organizations to outline a Regional Negotiation Strategy. Nevertheless, it must be noted that its structure does not foresee a channel for dialogue for these social actors but It does have a mechanism for the business sector.

The 2006 report on a new regional governance deals with the restructuring of the Caribbean institutional framework, but the proposed organization chart does not include the Consultative Council and does not provide for any formal organizational body to replace it so as to allow for deepening and institutionalizing the participation of social actors. The current substitute organs are the *Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians (ACCP)* and another body with a general scope aimed at other non-governmental actors.

²⁵ It is made up by organizations of Barbados – where its headquarters are located –, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, St. Vincent, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

c) Mechanisms for citizens' participation in the Caribbean Parliament

In the case of the Caribbean, the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians (ACCP) was established in an effort to foster political integration (Duncan, 1999). The idea emerged in 1989 and was implemented in 1994. The Assembly was conceived as a space for consultation and debate. It has received little support from the countries, which have focused their attention on national political developments.

The objectives of the Assembly are to promote the participation of citizens in the integration process of CARICOM, to achieve greater coordination of foreign policies, and to contribute to the development of common policies as regards economic, political, social, cultural, scientific and legal issues, among others. Its functions are basically focused on consultation and deliberation, and it has the authority to receive and make recommendations to the various bodies of CARICOM in charge of regional integration.

The ACCP has held two meetings, the first one in Grenada in 1999 and the second one in Belize in November 2000. It was expected to hold annual meetings, but financial problems have prevented it from holding them on a regular basis. Nevertheless, other bodies have reiterated the need to strengthen this organ in order to promote the dialogue on the regional integration process between the communities and the social organizations.

In CARICOM's 2003 report on its restructuring, the following recommendations were made as regards the ACCP:

1. To strengthen this body and maintain continuity of its functions as regards deliberations and consultations.
2. To include parliamentarians from the government and from the opposition among its members.
3. To evaluate the possibility to create the category of observers in order to ensure participation of social organizations.

The 2006 report added a fourth recommendation to include the presence of experts who can provide advisory to this organ in the various areas it is considering.

4. CENTRAL AMERICAN INTEGRATION SYSTEM (SICA)

The Central America Integration System (SICA) is the institutional framework for regional integration in Central America. It was created in December 1991 with the signing of the Tegucigalpa Protocol, which amended the Charter of the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), subscribed in Panama on 12 December 1962 by the Republics of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Later on, Belize joined the organization as a full member. The Dominican Republic participates as an Associate State. The organization formally started operations in December 1993, and has its headquarters in San Salvador, Republic of El Salvador.

a) Institutional mechanisms and agreements adopted

In the case of Central America, the social dimension of integration is currently expressed in the 1995 Treaty on Social Integration, which created the Central American Social Integration Secretariat (SISCA). The directive organ of SISCA is the Social Integration Council (CIS), made up by the ministers coordinating the social cabinet in each one of the member countries. The projects being executed form part of the "Guidelines for policies and strategies for social development and integration" for the period 2000-2020.

Out of the 103 projects that SICA was executing or had concluded by 2007, the following are under the direction of SISCA:

- Regional Project in HIV / AIDS for Central America.
- Project on Health and Employment in Central America.
- Support to the Social Integration Council.
- Health and Nutrition in Human Development.
- Diagnosis of Addictions in Meso-America.

- Prevention and Control of Vector-Transmitted Diseases.
- Model for Health Security.
- Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV / AIDS.
- Model for Medical Arbitration.
- Update in Prevention and Rehabilitation of Disabilities.
- Financial Cooperation within the framework of the Spanish Consultory Fund.

As can be seen, most of the programmes are aimed at the sector of health. Just like in the case of the Caribbean, the problem of HIV / AIDS has been assigned top priority.

During the first five years of the 1990s, the central concern of the Central American governments was focused on consolidating the institutional framework of the system. Thus, in 1991, SICA established the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN); in 1992, it created the Central American Court of Justice (CCJ), whose By-Laws were agreed to in Panama; and in 1994 it signed an agreement for creating the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) during the Ecological Summit held in that year.

During the second half of the 1990s, the governments made emphasis on the concept of “sustainable development” promoted by ALIDES. In this connection, in 1995, they signed the Treaties on Social Integration and the Treaty on Democratic Security, and established the Consultative Committee of SICA. In this phase, the governments attempted to increase rationality of the institutional framework for the system, as evidenced in the Declaration of XIX Presidential Summit of Panama, in 1997.

Since then, the Member States of SICA count on three key mechanisms to comply with their commitments in the social area:

- i. The Treaty on Central American Social Integration, signed by the Presidents on 30 March 1995, which establishes in Article 9, paragraph 3, that: “Those SICA institutions that deal with fundamentally social functions will have a direct relation with the Social Integration Subsystem.”
- ii. The establishment of areas comprising the social subsector of the integration system (Health, Nutrition and Social Security; Housing and Human Settlements; Education, Culture and Sports; Labour and Social Funds; and Local Development), which was created with the XIX Declaration of Central American Presidents in Panama in 1997.
- iii. The establishment of the Consultative Committee of SICA in 1995.

It is important to note that the Central American presidents who signed the Treaty on Central American Social Integration (San Salvador Treaty) in March 1995 were encouraged by their conviction about “the importance an active participation of the various groups of civil society in building social integration in the Central American Isthmus, as well as the need to involve those sectors in a permanent and creative way in the efforts to ensure equity, justice and development for our peoples.” They also took account of “the need to establish an institutional legal framework in the social area, based on the notion that the human being is the central and fundamental subject of development (...)”²⁶

The Treaty on Central American Social Integration is aimed at organizing, regulating and structuring the social subsystem which includes the social areas of SICA. It establishes that the social integration process will be promoted through coordination, harmonization and convergence of national policies and of other SICA policies. Nevertheless, while this social integration process will be conducted as part of the framework for legal and institutional order of SICA, it will take into account “the realities, characteristics and evolution of each one of the countries (...)”²⁷

It should be pointed out that one of the objectives of the Treaty is to encourage decentralization and economic and administrative deconcentration in the design and application of social policies (Article 7).

²⁶ Treaty on Central American Social Integration, San Salvador, 30 March 1995.

²⁷ *Idem* 31.

Similarly to the provisions of the Integral Program for Social Development (PIDS) of the Andean Community, the Central American States committed themselves to identify and jointly deal with the social problems of a regional nature, and to make strides towards the gradual and progressive harmonization of their social policies; to promote horizontal cooperation by taking advantage of economies of scale and various strengths in the social area; to establish mechanisms for cooperation and exchange of methodologies, resources and technologies among member countries; and to strengthen local governments while promoting organization of communities. A noteworthy commitment refers to the improvement and strengthening of the allocation of resources in the areas of social investment and spending to overcome structural factors for poverty.

The institutional organization of the subsystem for social integration includes the bodies specified in Box 8.

Box 8: Subsystem for Central American social integration

1.- Organs:

a) The Social Integration Council: It will be comprised by the Minister Coordinating the Social Cabinet in each country. It will have, among others, the following functions: To promote coherence of the agreements signed by Central American bodies dealing with social issues; to promote and follow up the social agreements adopted in the Meetings of Presidents; to mobilize institutional, human and financial resources that are necessary for the execution of regional initiatives.

b) The Council of Ministers in the Social Area: Made up by the Meeting of Ministers in charge of each one of the social areas, who will deal with specific issues within their competence, and by the Intersectoral Meeting of the Ministers in charge of these areas, who will coordinate decisions related to Central American Social integration.

c) The Secretariat for Social integration: It is the technical and administrative body of the Central American social integration process. It will regulate the budget and administrative organization, and will define the functions and attributions of the Secretariat for Social Integration. Its functions are: To oversee compliance with the objectives and goals of the programmes and projects defined in this connection; to conduct the activities entrusted to it by the Council for Social Integration (it will have capacity to make proposals on social issues); and to serve as a liaison mechanism as regards the actions carried out by the sectoral Secretariats of the Social Subsystem.

2.- Advisory Body: *The Advisory and Consultation Body is made up by the spouse of the President or a personal assistant appointed by the President, who will attend regular Presidential meetings or Special Meetings if it so desires.*

3.- Institutions:

Those SICA institutions that deal with fundamentally social functions will have a direct relation with the Social Integration Subsystem. Particularly, they will monitor compliance with the objectives of this Treaty by the following institutions: a) The Institute on Nutrition for Central America and Panama (INCAP); b) The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI); and c) The Central American Institute on Public Administration (ICAP).

4.- Consultative Committee: *The Consultative Committee on Social Integration (CCIS) will be made up by various outstanding sectors of the region engaged with Central American social integration efforts.*

In spite of this progress in the institutionalization of Central American social integration, the need for a functional, legal, territorial and bureaucratic unification of the General Secretariat led to important changes at the XIX Summit, held in Panama in 1997. On that occasion, the Presidents considered that the international situation and the commitments assumed in the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) made it necessary to introduce substantial changes in the Central American institutional system in order to efficiently face the new challenges and to enable Central America to successfully compete in the new world order. (See Box 9).

Box 9: Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development

At the Central American Ecological Summit for Sustainable Development, held in Nicaragua In October 1994, the Central American Presidents adopted the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES), as the regional strategy for integral development of the region, with emphasis on people and social equity as fundamental aspects of the integration process.

ALIDES is a comprehensive Central American initiative that addresses political, moral, economic, social, and environmental issues, which included an Action Plan that the Presidents hoped would become a model for other regions.

This regional initiative considers sustainable development as part of an integral approach that includes four high-priority areas: democracy, sociocultural development, economic development and sustainable management of natural resources, and improvement of environmental quality.

The social objectives of ALIDES are: 1) To eradicate legal or de facto discrimination against women. 2) To reduce extreme poverty rates by creating new jobs. 3) To ensure an appropriate reinsertion of displaced people and refugees within a safe and stable environment in Central America, while protecting their rights as citizens and improving their quality of life with equal opportunities. 4) To include the notions of subsidiarity, communitarian solidarity, co-responsibility and self-management in the policies to address poverty reduction, through development, communitarian participation and economic and administrative decentralization of the State.

Source: Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) Managua, Nicaragua, 12 October 1994.

The Presidents considered that the changes in the Integration Agenda and its bodies and institutions would lead to stability and improvement of democratic regimes in Central America, participation of the social organizations, open regionalism, fight against corruption and poverty reduction. Generally speaking, they sought to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development of the region, appropriate use of natural resources and rationalization of public costs.

The presidents decided to establish a Unified General Secretariat and three Area Directions: for economic, social and environmental issues. The Social Direction is made up by: i) the Secretariat for Social Integration in Central America (SISCA); ii) the Central American General Secretariat for Education and Cultural Coordination (SG-CECC); and the Central American Council for Sports and Recreation (CODICADER).

Based on the restructuring of the unified General Secretariat, the thematic axes of the social area would be: 1) education, culture and sports; 2) health, nutrition and social security; 3) housing and human settlements; 4) labour and social prevision; and 5) local development.

b) Channels for social actors' participation

One of the most significant achievements seen in SICA are the efforts made by the most representative social organizations in the subregion to participate in the integration process. After its formal inception in 1995, it led a work of reflection, analysis and formulation of regional policies, as a result from a dialogue among various actors at the regional level. Thus, it promoted efforts to evaluate the system and its participation, underscoring challenges, actions, strategies and proposals of these sectors as regards regional integration, and ways in which civil society could participate and have an influence on the integration process.

Participation of social organizations began with a meeting of groups and actors committed to regional integration at that time, namely the Central American Intersectoral Cooperation Council (CACI) and the Civil Initiative for Central American Integration (ICIC). These efforts granted legal institutionality and practical life to the Consultative Committee of SICA. According to the Tegucigalpa Protocol, this organ "is made up by representatives of the business, labour, academic and other active sectors in the Central American Isthmus, as well as the economic, social and cultural sectors engaged with integration efforts".²⁸ It also has the function of providing advisory to the General Secretariat on the organization's policies for conducting its programmes.

It was renamed in the Guatemala Protocol as the Consultative Committee for Economic Integration²⁹ and defined as a "*Sectoral Committee of an exclusively consultative nature*", made up by "*representatives of the organized private sector with regional ties to SIECA*"³⁰, which changes its definition in the Tegucigalpa Protocol. ALIDES and the CCAD recognized it too as a mechanism for participation of social organizations; in the social Integration treaty it is identified with the name of Consultative Committee for Social Integration

²⁸ Article 12 of the Tegucigalpa Protocol.

²⁹ Article 37, 5, Guatemala Protocol.

³⁰ Article 49, Guatemala Protocol.

(Article 9, 4, TISCA), as well as in the Framework Agreement for Democratic Security (Article 47, TMSD), whose decisions are made through the Secretary-General, pursuant to the Tegucigalpa Protocol. (See Box 10).

Box 10: Consultative Committee of SICA (CC-SICA)

The highest authority of the Committee is the Plenary Assembly, currently made up by 26 networks, a Directorate of seven members elected by the Assembly and an Executive Direction. In 2005 its structure was modified with the purpose of incorporating the national chapters as a means to strengthen the relation between the national and the regional levels, and to improve the flow of information and proposals. Similarly, there are Sectoral Committees dealing with various issues within the areas of work of this organ. Historically, the participation of the private sector and the labour unions has prevailed in the Committee, with little presence of other types of civil society organizations. At present, it includes representatives of small-sized enterprises and producers (7), labour sector (4), business chambers (6), academic sector (3), community groups (5) and an organ of the decentralized sector.

In accordance with the current central axis of SICA, it is fundamentally based on the European Union-Central America Partnership Agreement. In this agreement, the main initiatives are aimed at the promotion of consultations with civil society and the preparation of proposals. In March 2007, the II Central America-Europe Civil Society Forum, “Prospects towards a Partnership Agreement”, was held in Tegucigalpa, and generated a broad analysis and a series of proposals from civil society (www.sica.int/cc-sica), with the following standing out:

- *The need for negotiations to be fully transparent, for which it is necessary that social organizations and the general public have access to all documents;*
- *To establish mechanisms that allow for follow-up and evaluation of the impacts of this and other agreements, so that civil society can participate in the follow-up, monitoring and social audits.*
- *Inclusion of social and political issues, such as human rights, quality of life, equity and solidarity, strengthening of democracy, among others.*
- *To stress the importance of cooperation for development, for which it is necessary to deal the issue of trade from the perspective of development.*
- *To include a proposal on a Framework Programme on Cooperation for Development.*
- *To strengthen the institutional framework of SICA and to broaden the participation of civil society.*
- *To include the political dialogue.*
- *To include programmes and projects that allow for developing and strengthening capacities of social organizations.*
- *To immediately implement the agreement signed in Rome in 2003 for establishing a joint consultative committee between the CC-SICA and the European Economic and Social Committee.*

SICA has also established other mechanisms so that social organizations with regional coverage can access information on the negotiations (www.sica.int). On the one hand, it agreed to guarantee access to the information generated in the regional services organized during each round of negotiation with the EU. On the other hand, the General Secretariat of SICA has asked for contributions and agreed that, to the greatest possible extent, these organizations can request hearings with the negotiating team. In its Web portal, SICA has uploaded a link titled “Process of Information and Consultation at the Regional Level with Central American Civil Society” – a process that is coordinated by national organs and that has included forums with social organizations, as was previously seen.

Similarly, both representatives of social organizations and members of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) participated in the “Special Forum on Harmonization and Alignment of Regional Cooperation for Central America”, which was held in Vienna in May 2006. One of its conclusions was the need to strengthen the functions of planning, follow-up and evaluation, which must be based on the participation of social organizations.

c) **Mechanisms for citizens' participation in the Central American Parliament**

PARLACEN was created as an integral part of the new integration system that was established in the region in the last decade. It was formally established in 1991 and defined as a deliberative forum to make recommendations as regards different aspects of common interest. In view of the Central American situation by the late 1980s and the early 1990s, one of the central issues of its agenda was pacific coexistence.

The Parliament is made up by 20 deputies per country who are elected in general elections, in addition to the former presidents and vice-presidents of the region. For this reason, at present the national representations include between 20 and 22 people, who perform their duties during five-year mandates (the current one goes from 2007 to 2012). Full members of PARLACEN are El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Dominican Republic; observer countries include Mexico, Puerto Rico, Taiwan and Venezuela. The Parliament is also studying the possibility to include Belize. Parliamentarians hold a monthly two-week session in Guatemala and the rest of the month they conduct activities in its corresponding countries. The Parliament has offices in each one of the countries, except for Costa Rica, which is not participating in this organ since its legislative branch has not ratified the treaty yet.

PARLACEN does not have legislative power. It has a board of directors which is elected on an annual basis from among its members. At the present, it has the following permanent commissions in operation:

- Agricultural and Livestock Affairs, Fishing, Environment and Natural Resources.
- Municipal Development and Citizens' Participation.
- International Relations.
- Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
- Integration, Trade and Economic Development.
- Monetary and Financial Matters.
- Tourism.
- Health, Social Security, Population and Labour and Union Matters.
- Peace, Citizens' Security, Human Rights and Ethnic Groups.
- Legal Affairs, Communitarian Rights and Regional Institutionalality.
- Women, children and family.
- Politics and Political Parties Affairs.

There are also parliamentary groups representing the various ideological positions of the different member countries. At present, five ideologies are represented in the Parliament, namely: democratic alliance, democratic centre, Central American democratic convergence, left parties, and democratic integration.

In the Panama Summit of 1997 –which started the discussion on a restructuring of the integration process in Central America – concrete proposals were made to reform PARLACEN, and in February 2007, during the Meeting of Presidents of Central America and Dominican Republic, an agreement for the reform of the Treaty Establishing PARLACEN was signed. The reforms include:

- Granting the Parliament legislative power in the area of regional integration and with respect to regulations for harmonization of laws promoting integration.
- The faculty to express opinions as regards any regional instrument.
- The possibility to form part of commissions that are established for the purposes of dispute settlement, in case any country of the region may so require it.
- Approval of its budget and reports.
- Knowledge about SICA's budget and its budget execution.

These proposed reforms are currently in the process to be approved by the legislative branches of member countries.

5. Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA)

The first mention of ALBA was made by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at the III Summit of the Americas in Quebec in 2001, to refer to Simón Bolívar's ideology. Later, he announced its creation during the III Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), held on Margarita Island, Venezuela, in December 2001.

It was initially planned as an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA); hence, its initial name as Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, which later turned into the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean and now, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas.

It was formally set up in December 2004 under an agreement entered into by Caracas and Havana including countervailing trade conventions and exchange of goods and services according to their needs and capacities. Later, it was joined by Bolivia (2006), Nicaragua (2007), and lately, Dominica, early this year.

ALBA was formalized by the *Joint Declaration* and the execution of the *Agreement on the Implementation³¹ of ALBA*. The latter contains political and social guidelines, particularly actions in the health sector. At present, oil and gas are at the core of this dynamic strategy.

This initiative comes from complementariness principles against a multidimensional (economic, political, social and cultural) backdrop of its own (endogenous), based on supportive, reciprocal cooperation to bridge the gaps among its member nations.

Lander (2007) has stated that ALBA may be referred to both in a wide and strict sense. The former includes a number of far-reaching proposals that are effectively projects of the Venezuelan foreign policy but not agreements among member states. The latter specifically refers to the deals made by the countries that make up its regional policy.

In a strict sense, the following instruments have been executed in addition to the aforementioned initial agreement entered into by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004:

- Agreement between the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the President of the State Council of Cuba on the Implementation of ALBA (Havana, December 2004).
- First Strategic Plan agreed upon in the First Meeting on the Implementation of ALBA (Havana, April 2005). It establishes cooperation among Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia in development of social initiatives, such as the different missions in Venezuela, as well as a literacy programme in Bolivia.
- PETROCARIBE Energy Cooperation Agreement (Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela. June 2005).
- Conversion of the Overall Convention on Cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela into an instrument of ALBA (Caracas, October 2005).
- Adhesion of the Republic of Bolivia to ALBA (Havana, April 2006).
- Agreement on the Implementation of ALBA and the Peoples' Trade Treaty (TCP) (Havana, April 2006).
- Adhesion of the Republic of Nicaragua to ALBA (Managua, January 2007).
- Grand-National Project at the V ALBA Summit (Barquisimeto, Lara State, Venezuela, April 2007).
- ALBA-Haiti Cooperation Framework Agreement (Barquisimeto, Lara State, Venezuela, April 2007).
- Adhesion of the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica to ALBA at the VI ALBA Summit (Caracas, January 2008).
- Charter of the ALBA Bank (Caracas, January 2008).
- Presidential Summit, Food Security and Sovereignty: Food for Life (Managua, May 2008).

Unlike other cases, it has been said (Lander, 2007) that there has been tension inside ALBA due to the countries' concomitant membership of this entity and other organizations. This is the case of Nicaragua,

³¹ www.alternativabolivariana.com.

which continues to be a party to SICA and takes part in the Free Trade Agreement among the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic (NAFTA-DR); Venezuela and MERCOSUR, as well as Bolivia and the Andean Community.

a) Institutional mechanisms and agreements adopted

The Strategic Plan initially agreed upon in the First Meeting for the Implementation of ALBA (Havana, April 2005) can be viewed as the cornerstone of ALBA. On that occasion, a number of actions for bilateral Cuba-Venezuela cooperation were taken. Later, it stretched to Bolivia with the development of social initiatives (such as the multiple missions in Venezuela), in addition to a literacy programme in that country.

This recent initiative fosters endogenous development and places emphasis on food security. In this connection, a summit was held in April 2007 in Caracas. Later, there was another related meeting with Central American and Caribbean countries in Managua in early May 2007. Thus far, its main efforts boil down to the energy issue and its centrepiece is the organization of PetroAmérica through PetroSur, PetroCaribe and PetroAndina. Additional projects include the ALBA Bank and, lately, the Bank of Agricultural Input, an Agricultural Special Fund and a Think Tank to strengthen farming.

In the practice, some actions announced are the following (Correa, 2006):

- Bilateral Macro Business Rounds: Governments facilitate talks among businesspersons in order to strengthen trade and investment relations among the member states.
- Offsetting or Structural Convergence Funds to reduce unbalances. Any countries in need of special, differential treatment are identified.

According to some analysts (Oliva, 2007), ALBA has five hubs:

- Energy: Oil as the major financing resource.
- Human development: Health, education and sports programmes.
- Infrastructure.
- Communications: Key role of TV channel Telesur.
- Finance: Financial cooperation strategies and, most recently, the organization of the ALBA Bank.

In practice, the point at issue is the implementation of state policies governing the economy in order to foster development of member states. Therefore, strategic alliances are established in a preferential manner through public companies and joint management companies.

In this regard, its characteristic features (Serbin, 2007) include a new format that “favours cooperation, solidarity and complementary advantages.” Also, its fundamental matrix resides in the socialist definition of member governments.

One of ALBA’s most significant proposals in the social area is the “Social Charter for the Americas,” aimed at bolstering a new institutional order. Based on that, 21 subjects are dealt with, including, among others:

1. Oil and energy.
2. Armed forces.
3. Foreign debt.
4. Transport and infrastructure.
5. Finance, loans and investments.
6. Natural resources.
7. Land, food sovereignty and land reform.
8. Migration and identity.
9. Participatory, leading democracy.
10. Gender.

In addition, there are projects directly linked with education, science and technology, health and the media.

b) Channels for social actors' participation

ALBA is a recent mechanism that includes a strong social content involving social organizations and actors. As stated elsewhere (Serbin, 2007), ALBA has grown in the context of a novel relation among progressive governments that believe in the liberating views of their founding fathers and encourage multiple grassroots organizations and movements with "any integration is possible" as slogan.

At the very beginning, ALBA was viewed as a Venezuelan, Bolivarian proposal that involved the struggle of progressive political movements and social organizations against the FTAA. In 2003 and 2004, the First and Second People's Bolivarian Congresses were convened. In addition, in 2004 and 2005, national and regional forums "Building ALBA from the Peoples," were held in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Asunción, San Salvador and Santiago. At these consultation meetings, topics related to social economy, education, grassroots movements, gender, indigenous and peasants' movements, human and trade union rights, among others, have been discussed. These events are within the framework of the initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat of the Organization of the People's Bolivarian Congress, one of the main purposes of which is the discussion of the *Social Charter for the Americas*³².

The V Summit was held in April 2007, in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, concomitantly with the First Meeting of Social Movements in Support of ALBA. The ALBA Presidential Council (Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia) was organized at the summit. The official structure includes a Secretariat and the ALBA Council of Grassroots Movements. However, at the very beginning, the ALBA-TCP Treaty emerged without the formal participation of social organizations and movements.

c) Mechanisms for citizens' participation in legislative bodies

No parliament entity has been envisaged yet in the ALBA current structure. However, one of the objectives of the Venezuelan Parliament Group of PARLATINO is to introduce and promote such structure in the debates. Further, it encourages, in the context of the so-called Bolivarian parliamentarianism, the social and street parliamentarianism, for the purposes of increasing citizen's participation.

6. Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)

From 2000 through 2008, when the formal treaty on the organization of UNASUR was signed, all South American nations gradually came closer together, including the four member states of the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru); the five member states of MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela), and Guyana, Suriname and Chile.

Subsequent rapprochements allowed for signing on 22 May 2008 in Brasilia, its Constitutional Charter.³³ UNASUR helped redefine the sense of integration and favour social issues as part of the building of cross-border regions around energy projects and projects involving physical and inter-ocean connection.

The South American rapprochement that may lead to the subcontinent integration started to be envisaged with two processes. Firstly, the creation of the CAN-MERCOSUR free trade area. Since 2005, it covers 80 percent of the tariff universe in the region and consolidated itself at long last. Secondly, a South American free trade area initially boosted by Brazil and tackled at the Presidential Summits of the 12 member states.

With regard to the latter process, for the first time in almost two centuries of independent life, all South American presidents were convened to work on a common perspective. Six Presidential Summits were needed to establish UNASUR. (See Table 4).

³² <http://www.venezuela-oas.org/ProyectoCartaSocial.htm>

³³ <http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3010>.

Table 4. South American Presidential Summits

<i>1st Summit, Brasilia, September 2000.</i>	<i>Lays the foundations for a South American economic space through the IIRSA projects aimed at physical connection based on streamlining of the energy, transport and communications infrastructure.</i>
<i>2nd Summit, Guayaquil, July 2002.</i>	<i>Insists on the relationship between infrastructure and development and conditions it to five principles: geo-economic perspective, social sustainability, economic effectiveness, environmental sustainability and institutional development.</i>
<i>3rd Summit, Cuzco, December 2004.</i>	<i>Defines seven topics to guide convergence: economic complementation, infrastructure and decentralized development, environment, energy integration, regional funding, consideration of asymmetries and social cohesion. Decides on the establishment of the South American Community of Nations (CSN).</i>
<i>4th Summit, Brasilia, October 2005.</i>	<i>This first CSN summit agreed on exchanging experiences on facilitation of trade, complementation of productive chains and integration of border areas.</i>
<i>5th Summit, Cochabamba, April 2006.</i>	<i>Political dialogue on South America's physical and energy integration. Creates the commission of senior officials to pursue institutional convergence.</i>
<i>6th Summit, Margarita Island, April 2007.</i>	<i>Creates UNASUR to replace CSN; sets the institutional guidelines: Pro-Tempore Presidency, Technical Secretariat, Secretary General, headquarters in Ecuador. Entrusts the council of delegates with the preparation of the constitutional agreement.</i>

The social issue emerged as early as in the First Summit. Then, it was stated that political stability, economic growth and promotion of social justice in each of the 12 South American countries will depend on broader and deeper cooperation and an extensive network of common interests. It was also stated that poverty and deprivation threaten the institutional stability in the region. Therefore, public programmes and initiatives aimed at fighting malnutrition and giving access to education and basic health services are most needed to heighten human development indexes in each country.

South American borders are worth mentioning. Based on the Declaration stemming from this Summit, they should stop being an isolation and separation component and become a link for the transit of goods and people, thus paving the way for cooperation.³⁴

The Second Summit insisted on the relationship between infrastructure and development. The Third Summit involved explicitly the social issue as part of seven priorities. The Fourth Summit identified political understanding and economic and social integration of the peoples in the region as the core of the then South American Community of Nations (CSN), as well as promotion of social cohesion, social inclusion and social justice, as part of the eight areas of priority action.

Four out of the 30 items of the Declaration are focused on social and participation issues: 1) encouragement of a programme to eradicate dengue; 2) making progress in overcoming social inequalities. Experts and individuals responsible for government programmes on social development, fight against poverty and social emergency, recommended some steps to be taken; 3) assessment of instruments on common recognition of professional degrees and university diplomas: 4) participation of society, and dissemination of integration and the South American reality by different communication, educational, informational and cultural means. The Fifth Summit found that the process is an alternative to prevent globalization from deepening asymmetries and increasing economic, social and political deprivation. It is also an alternative to capitalize on development opportunities. Further, it conceded that, for a feasible South American Community of Nations, a new integration model should be designed, including the trade area and a broader economic and productive coordination, as well as new ways of political, social and cultural cooperation, both public and private in nature and other organization forms.

The Strategic Commission for Reflection, entrusted with the design of a new integration model, stated that the South American Community should be based on significant national objectives and actions with an immediate impact, with an emphasis on reversion of the huge social deficit in the region. For such purpose,

³⁴ Lampreia, Luis Felipe: "The Summit of South America and Brazil", in Venezuela Analítica, 23 January 2001; Vacchino Juan Mario "The South American Summit and the development of the utopia", *Integration: It is now or never*, CELA, Edition No. 61, January-April 2001.

it suggested a new South American social agreement to promote integration with a human face, in line with the producing agenda and mirrored in specific goals of social development.³⁵

The Sixth Summit, also known as the “oil summit”, agreed on the replacement of CNS with UNASUR. The three top items on the agenda – establishment of the Bank of the South; Organization of Gas Producing and Exporting Countries of the South (Oppegasur), and biofuels to diversify the South American energy matrix – show the varied views of political and integration models existing in the sub-region.³⁶ Finally, actions with a social impact were agreed upon. It was reasserted that integration is aimed at improving peoples’ wellbeing through complementariness, solidarity and social equity.

In January 2008, the meeting of South American Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Cartagena and hosted by the governments of Bolivia, which holds the Pro-Tempore Chair, and Colombia, the host of the First Summit, made headway with the discussion of the constitutional charter. Brazil took on the organization of the constitutional UNASUR Summit instead of Colombia.

In less than one decade, South American countries have come closer together with substantial results.³⁷ For instance, in addition to infrastructure projects and energy agreements, in 2006, 10 countries in the region initialled an agreement on the exemption of 90-day tourist visas and the issuance of a common identity card for South American citizens.

Physical and energy integration is still substantially viewed as a technical, political business. So far, it has not been regarded as a socio-economic effort at building cross-border regions and macro-regions involving the downtrodden of multiple countries.³⁸ This shortcoming should be overcome if UNASUR is to turn itself into an organization where actions on political, social and economic complementation will take precedence over those encouraging competition among participating countries.³⁹

The parliament sector held a meeting between the MERCOSUR Joint Inter-Parliament Commission and the Andean Parliament in September 2005, within the context of the Fourth South American Summit, and discussed an institutional, political, social, trade, and foreign policy agenda for CAN-MERCOSUR convergence aimed at the establishment of the South American Community.

The leaders of indigenous organizations spoke up in 2006 for a different way of South American integration, different approaches instead of the prevailing development model and different ways of participation in decision making.

³⁵ Basombrío Ignacio, The situation of the South American Community, *Diario Gestión*, Lima, 27 August 2007.

³⁶ http://www.infolatam.com/latam_lula_paraliza_los_proyectos_chavez_banco_del_sur_y_opec_del_gas.

³⁷ Cardona C. Diego, “Has the South American Community of Nations a future?”, in *Foreign Affairs* in Spanish, April-June 2005; Political Perspectives of the South American Community of Nations. Input to a New Multilateralism. Presentation by CAN Secretary-General Allan Wagner at the Andean Parliament Forum entitled “The South American integration: facts and economic, social and political perspectives,” Bogota, 21 July 2005; The South American Community and regional integration: An Andean outlook. Presentation by CAN Secretary-General Allan Wagner during a work breakfast with the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Ambassadors accredited to Peru, Lima, 9 March 2005; South America: The challenge of social inclusion. Presentation by Chile’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Alejandro Foxley at the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South American Community of Nations, Santiago, 24 November 2006.

³⁸ Ramírez Socorro and Vieira Edgar, Policy Paper, “Cross-border development: Horizons for Colombia,” in www.colombiainternacional.org. Integration group for the project “Inclusion of Colombia in a changing international system,” Bogota, Fescol – National University of Colombia, Javeriana University, Rosario University, Andes University and Nueva Granada University – San Carlos Diplomatic College, CEPEI, Bogota, 2004; Ramírez Socorro, “The Andean and South American integration: An outlook from Colombia,” in *Cátedras de integración Andrés Bello*, Bogota, CAB, 2007, pp. 57-100.

³⁹ Rojas Penso Juan Francisco, *Analitica.com*, 30 August 2007.

The proposals included overhauling of the projects on the Initiative for Integration of the South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA) “based on the consultation and prior, free, informed consent of peoples, in order to ensure that its 11 multimodal axes that pass throughout South America with giant programs of road, energy, hydro-ways and communication connection do not turn out to favour only exporting capitals and prevent their potential impacts on population transfer, ethnocide of voluntarily isolated people, destruction of local producing uses and degradation of Mother Nature.”⁴⁰.

Based on their Charter, member states have reasserted that they are determined to build a South American identity and citizenship and develop an integrated regional space in the political, social, cultural, environmental, energy and infrastructure ambits in order to strengthen the Latin American and Caribbean unity. In furtherance of Article 2 of the Charter, the Union seeks, in a participatory manner agreed by consensus, to make room for its people’s integration and union in the cultural, social, economic and political fields. The political dialogue, social policies, education, energy, infrastructure, financing and the environment, among others, will be a priority to remove socio-economic inequality, achieve social inclusion and citizen’s participation, strengthen democracy and reduce asymmetries within the framework of the States’ reinforced sovereignty and independence.

III. GUIDELINES FOR A REGIONAL PROGRAMME ON SOCIAL DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION

The complex situation facing Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), featuring high indices of poverty, informal jobs, unequal income distribution and social exclusion, poses a challenge to build strong economies to attain sustainable development and social equity.

Both social backwardness and the issues related to climate change and energy are perhaps the areas where joint regional policies are most likely to be developed. Such joint policies should provide for common goals, as well as exchange of experiences and information, and implementation of regional cooperation mechanisms.

Faced with a scenario of deficit and social challenges as explained above, a number of proposals and recommendations have been outlined that may help overcome such hurdles. In this connection, specific initiatives may be implemented to help strengthen the social dimension of integration in LAC.

Following is a summarized comparison of some major social development indicators, including health, education, housing and employment in LAC and industrialised or high-income countries. Closing the “social gaps” separating our region from developed nations is largely dependent on the governments’ efforts, and particularly on cooperation actions and programmes implemented regionwide.

1. Some indicators of the relative situation in LAC in the areas of health, education, housing and employment

Table 5 below lists some indicators showing the situation in the area of health in LAC. Life expectancy at birth – one of the key health indicators in our society – has improved steadily over the last few years in the region. The traditional gap between male and female life expectancy at birth is shown. Additionally, average life expectancy at birth in the region is still seven years lower than in high-income countries.

⁴⁰ Cochabamba Summit (Bolivia). Appeal and proposals from the viewpoint of indigenous peoples and original nations. South American Community of Nations: “Living Well” without neo-liberalism. Cochabamba, 7 December 2006. Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI, headquartered in Quito); National Council of Ayllus and Markas from Qollasuyo (CONAMAQ), Bolivia’s Single Trade Union Confederation of Working Peasants (CSUTCB), Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of East Bolivia (CIDOB), Peruvian National Confederation of Rural Communities Affected by Mining (CONACAMI), Confederation of Ecuador’s Kichwa Peoples (ECUARUNARI- CONAIE), Colombia’s National Indigenous Organization (ONIC), Coordinator of Mapuche Territorial Identities (CITEM Chile), Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Female Peasants (Bolivia), Peru’s Confederation of Peasants (CCP), National Agricultural Confederation (CNA Peru), National Union of Aymara Communities (UNCA, Peru), Commission of Guaraní Kayawá Indigenous Rights (Brazil).

Table 5: Health Indicators

	2000	2001-2003	2004-2006
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>			
Female life expectancy at birth	74.9	75.4	76.1
Male life expectancy at birth	68.4	68.9	69.7
Overall life expectancy at birth	71.5	72.1	72.8
Per capita health spending (current US\$)	..	226	299
Private health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	3.7	3.7
Public health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	3.2	3.3
Total health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	6.8	7.0
Infant mortality rate – number of infants per 1,000 live births	28.7	..	22.8
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	..	..	87.5
Low-weight births (%)	..	..	9
HIV prevalence (as a percentage of the total population from 15 years to 49 years of age)	..	0.539	0.572
<i>High-income countries</i>			
Female life expectancy at birth	81.1	81.4	82.3
Male life expectancy at birth	75.1	75.5	76.4
Overall life expectancy at birth	78.0	78.3	79.2
Per capita health spending (current US\$)	..	3,047	3,856
Private health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	4.4	4.3
Public health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	6.6	6.9
Total health spending (as a percentage of GDP)	..	11.1	11.3
Infant mortality rate – number of infants per 1,000 live births	6.4	..	5.6
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	..	..	99.3
Low-weight births (%)	..	..	..
HIV prevalence (as a percentage of the total population from 15 years to 49 years of age)	..	0.359	0.357

Source: World Development Indicators (2008).

Health spending represents one of the most noticeable gaps between LAC and high-income countries. Average health spending in the region in 2004-2006 was almost US\$ 300, while in high-income countries it was almost 12 times higher. At first sight, this could be attributable to the fact that per capita income in high-income countries is higher than in LAC. However, health spending as a percentage of GDP in developed countries is four percentage points higher than in LAC.

Infant mortality – another typical health indicator – decreased to an average of 22.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in LAC in 2004-2006. This index is still quite above the rate of 5.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in industrialized countries. Noteworthy is that such a gap may be attributable to the fact that in LAC only 87.5 percent of births are attended by skilled health personnel and in suitable health premises. On the contrary, virtually all of the births in the developed nations are attended by skilled health personnel.

Another significant health indicator is the percentage of the population who are carriers of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). In LAC, such a percentage has climbed over the last few years, while in high-income countries it has diminished slightly. In this connection, it is necessary to highlight that prevention and education campaigns are vital, and that the differences between LAC and high-income countries regarding effective massive information and education campaigns are substantial.

Education in LAC is another priority in the regional agenda. Table 6 below shows some education indicators in LAC and developed countries.

Table 6: Education indicators

	1999-2000	2001-2003	2004-2006
Latin America and the Caribbean			
Spending per student, primary education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	12.7	12.4	11.4
Spending per student, secondary education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	14.8	15.5	14.1
Spending per student, higher education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	37.1	36.3	..
Adult illiteracy (as a percentage of the population above 15)	..	..	10.1
Youth illiteracy (as a percentage of the population between 15 years and 24 years of age)	..	..	4.0
Student-teacher ratio, primary school	25.8	24.5	24.0
Student-teacher ratio, secondary school	19.7	18.6	17.6
High-income countries			
Spending per student, primary education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	18.1	18.4	19.2
Spending per student, secondary education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	23.8	24.2	24.8
Spending per student, higher education (as a percentage of GDP per capita)	31.7	30.0	..
Adult illiteracy (as a percentage of the population above 15)	..	..	1.3
Youth illiteracy (as a percentage of the population between 15 years and 24 years of age)	..	..	0.7
Student-teacher ratio, primary school	17.3	16.7	16.0
Student-teacher ratio, secondary school	14.4	14.0	13.5

Source: World Development Indicators (2008).

In 2001-2003, Latin American and Caribbean spending per primary school student averaged 12.4 percent of GDP per capita, while high-income countries spent 18.4 percent. This figure is in contrast to higher education spending. In LAC, education spending per university student is almost three times the education spending per primary school student in terms of GDP per capita. However, in high-income countries higher education spending is less than double the primary education spending in terms of GDP per capita. This is a very significant fact, as it mirrors the inconsistent education spending in LAC.

In LAC, both adult and youth illiteracy rates are high when compared to those in developed countries. Another leading education indication is the student-teacher ratio. In LAC, the number of teachers per student has been on the rise, but the ratio continues to be significantly higher than in industrialized countries.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recently assessed the status of education in LAC, and the findings were published the “Social Panorama of Latin America 2007.” According to the report, “the higher or lower number of years of study is not the only source of educational inequality. The quality of the education received by children and young people is largely dependent on their economic resources. This is linked to the educational environment of the household, the effects of which include the existence of a home environment more or less suited to reinforcing the learning process. As attainment at the primary and secondary school levels has become more widespread, disparities in educational quality now plays a major differentiating role in the transition to post-secondary education, which provides the key to decent jobs and sufficient wages. The quality of education therefore becomes a focus in the intergenerational reproduction of opportunities for well-being.” Consequently, the educational problem goes beyond access to education, and therefore public policies aimed at attaining quality education are needed. In this sense, regional cooperation plays a vital role in strengthening educational systems.

Regarding employment, Table 7 below shows some indicators to compare the situation in LAC and industrialized countries.

Noteworthy is the major difference between the share of women in the labour force in LAC and high-income countries. While the share of women in the labour force in the region has been increasing, it is significantly lower than the share of men, and is quite below the share of women in industrialized countries. On the contrary, the share of men in the labour force in LAC is higher than in industrialized countries. There are many likely reasons behind such a difference, including discrimination, wage differences, changes in birth rate patterns, retirement and social security systems, among others.

Table 7: Employment Indicators

	1998- 2000	2001-2003	2004- 2006
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>			
GDP per employed person (GDP per capita in constant US\$ of 1990)	5,989	5,977	6,350
Women share in labour force (as a percentage of female population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	52	54	56
Men share in labour force (as a percentage of male population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	85	85	84
Overall labour force (as a percentage of overall population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	68	69	70
Women unemployment (as a percentage of women share in labour force)	12	12	12
Men unemployment (as a percentage of men share in labour force)	7	7	7
Total unemployment rate (as a percentage of the total labour force)	9	9	9
Vulnerable employment (as a percentage of total employment)	..	34.7	31.8
<i>High-income countries</i>			
GDP per employed person (GDP per capita in constant US\$ of 1990)	21,324	22,242	23,741
Women share in labour force (as a percentage of female population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	62	63	64
Men share in labour force (as a percentage of male population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	81	81	80
Overall labour force (as a percentage of overall population with ages ranging between 15 and 64 years)	72	72	72
Women unemployment (as a percentage of women share in labour force)	7	7	7
Men unemployment (as a percentage of men share in labour force)	6	6	6
Total unemployment rate (as a percentage of the total labour force)	6	6	6
Vulnerable employment (as a percentage of total employment)	..	..	..

Source: World Development Indicators (2008).

In aggregate terms, labour force in LAC is smaller than in high-income countries, which can be attributable almost fully to the low share of women in the labour force. Even more dramatic is the situation regarding the employment rate, which is directly linked to women unemployment as well. In LAC, women unemployment amounted to 12 percent, while men unemployment averaged seven percent in the period 2004-2006. Consequently, a significant proportion of the gap between the unemployment rate in LAC and industrialized countries is due to the situation of women unemployment. Effective inclusion of women in labour markets is a crucial economic and social challenge facing the region. Similarly, LAC shows a very high proportion of vulnerable employment. While average vulnerable unemployment fell in 2001-2006, it remains high and poses a social challenge both at the present and in the future, as people employed in such situation are usually excluded from retirement systems and deprived from virtually any social protection.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the region has made headway in some labour indicators over the last years, particularly in unemployment rates. However, some serious challenges have still to be dealt with in order to curb informal employment, create decent and well-paid jobs, provide social protection to workers and improve regulations protecting workers' rights.

Regarding the situation of housing in LAC, in Table 8 below some indicators are summarized and compared to those in high-income countries.

Table 8: Housing Indicators

	2000	2005
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>		
Improved sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	74.97	77.05
Improved rural sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the rural population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	45.84	48.61
Improved urban sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the urban population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	84.68	85.67
Improved water sources (as a percentage of the population having access to improved water sources)	89.19	90.94
Improved rural water sources (as a percentage of the rural population having access to improved water sources)	69.69	72.96
Improved urban water sources (as a percentage of the urban population having access to improved water sources)	95.28	96.00
<i>High-income countries</i>		
Improved sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	99.95	99.91
Improved rural sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the rural population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	..	..
Improved urban sanitation facilities (as a percentage of the urban population having access to improved sanitation facilities)	99.97	99.97
Improved water sources (as a percentage of the population having access to improved water sources)	99.35	99.44
Improved rural water sources (as a percentage of the rural population having access to improved water sources)	97.69	98.46
Improved urban water sources (as a percentage of the urban population having access to improved water sources)	99.77	99.77

Source: World Development Indicators (2008).

While access to improved sanitation facilities has increased in LAC, both in rural and urban dwellings, indicators in the region are quite inferior to those in high-income countries. In LAC, the gap between the rural and urban sectors is wider.

Less than half of rural dwellings in LAC had sanitation facilities and less than 75 percent had improved water sources available. In urban areas, indicators are higher, as in 2005 improved sanitation facilities and improved water sources were available only to 85 percent and 96 percent of urban dwellings, respectively.

As a matter of fact, a lot is still to be done in LAC to ensure dignified dwellings for all the inhabitants in the region. Many Latin American and Caribbean dwellings are highly vulnerable and precarious. In this area, the efforts undertaken under regional integration programmes have made little progress. However, beyond the issue of resource availability, this is the area where a greater cooperation among LAC countries is necessary to exchange experiences and propose joint solutions.

2. Experiences with projects related to the areas of health, education, housing and employment in regional integration

a) Health

Initiatives in the area of health have been put forward in all subregional integration organizations. These initiatives have been strengthened with the commitments assumed individually by governments in the region at different international venues such as the UN Millennium Development Goals, Summit Meetings between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union, Ibero-American and UNASUR Summit Meetings, among others. Access to health services for broad sectors of the population, reducing malnutrition and child and mother mortality, actions tending to stop HIV/AIDS from spreading, malaria, tuberculosis, and other serious diseases, are fundamental issues included in final declarations at these meetings and they

also form part of the commitments assumed by the participating States and the different organizations within which these meetings take place.

Actions in the area of health care in border areas, epidemiological surveillance, the establishment of binational networks for health services in border areas, the development of prevention programmes, and the extension of their coverage are also topics that are part of the purposes of the different bodies that address social issues in the integration bodies.

Within the Andean Community (CAN), health and education are the most developed areas in terms of social matters. The Health Council was created in 1972. At that initial stage of the Andean process, health was related to the definitions of labour health and security as a contribution to social equity and workers' protection. During a second stage, specific health policies and instruments were developed with a broader perspective. After the Hipólito Unanue Convention was transformed into the Andean Health Body in 2000, health ministerial meetings in the Andean region became the organ that defines policies, sets priorities and follows up resolutions and mandates.

The objective of this Andean Health Body is to coordinate and support efforts made by member countries, both individually and collectively, to improve health of their peoples. The Body covers five strategic areas: i) integration in health; ii) epidemiological surveillance and environmental health; iii) drug policy and health technology; iv) human resources; and v) health promotion and protection.

The projects that have been launched by the Andean Health Body include:

1. The Andean Epidemiological Surveillance Network. This entity is aimed at disseminating information in a succinct fashion on Epidemiological Surveillance throughout the 142 Statistical Territorial Units of the Andean Community.
2. PAMAFRO. This is a project that joins the efforts of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela to reduce malaria in the areas of higher incidence.
3. Andean Drug Portal
4. Andean Portal for Health Technology Evaluation. The Subregional Technical Commission for Health Technology Evaluation was created by Resolution REMSAA XXVII/420. This Commission has developed a Working Plan that will be submitted in year 2008 for its approval. This plan includes the comparative analysis of policies, current legal frameworks and the co-ordination thereof, as well as a study on the gathering of information about the situation, progress and perspective of Health Technology Evaluation in each country, as an input for the design of the project to establish the Information Network and set each country's priorities.
5. The Andean Subregional Committee for the Fight against Tobacco.
6. The Andean Contingency and Response Plan to the probable Influenza pandemic.

Besides their significance as central dimension of health policies, the following elements reflect some attainments achieved by Andean integration in terms of health:

- The effective participation of local authorities, along with national officials and coordinators, and with experts from international organizations linked to the issue, in the strengthening of surveillance, and the response to emergencies resulting from different epidemics or natural disasters.
- Plans for border areas have continued due to their community approach.⁴¹ The inclusion of the intercultural element in some cases has to be highlighted, since it is essential in border areas where countries share indigenous ethnic groups or communities of African descent.⁴²
- Andean definitions of health go beyond contingencies and shape policies and rules, tending to the co-ordination of services. They have been also accompanied with the setting-up of committees with

⁴¹ For instance, the case of Pasafro and, more specifically, of Pamafro in the Andean Community.

⁴² Projects in the Wayuú Community (border between Venezuela and Colombia) are examples of a health model that considers interculturality.

specific plans or health and epidemiologic campaigns, including proposals related to the climate change.

- With the Integral Social Development Plan (PIDS), existing since 2004, social issues such as health and education were defined in a broader fashion. Coverage and quality were prioritized as determining factors for social participation and decision making concerning the social dimension of integration.
- Efforts are being made to improve services through human resources, evaluation and inclusion of health technology, and the setting-up of subregional information networks which have an immediate and coordinated response to community programmes and campaigns.
- A consistent, integral and far-reaching, shared policy on drugs has been implemented since 2002. This policy is intended to support the compliance with the eighth Millennium Development Goals concerning availability and access to drugs. This effort includes stimulus to production and quality improvement of generic drugs, as well as a common negotiation strategy on brand and input markets, diagnosis and follow-up, among others. It is worth stressing the call to participate in the Andean negotiation strategy for access to drugs. This strategy made some achievements⁴³ and unified criteria.
- Open-mindedness in terms of the reflection on health in relation to economy, macro-economy and health legislation, service trade, negotiations of free trade agreements, and other subjects in the Andean agenda. Andean countries have national negotiators that have been specifically trained to intermediate in this area.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in turn, gathers Ministers of Health in a specific conference to design guidelines for the health sector in the Caribbean region. At present, the body responsible for health policies is the Council for Social and Human Development (COHSOD), which is responsible for fostering human and social development in the Community. This body, under the motto “The region’s health is its wealth”, agreed to establish functional cooperation areas which make it possible for health to help meet the other goals of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, using regional health institutions and other associated agencies. The project is known as PANCAP,⁴⁴ and it is being developed within the framework of the 2001 Declaration of Nassau on Health.

In 1994, CARICOM member states adopted the Caribbean Charter for Health Promotion, under a mandate stemming from the 13th Conference of Ministers of Health of the Caribbean Region.

Since the approval of this Charter, a variety of initiatives has been implemented, aimed at promoting the health sector within the region. The implementation of these initiatives has been developed in three phases, which are possibly overlapped. The first phase consisted of raising awareness of the relevance of the mandate principles for the wellbeing of the Caribbean peoples. The second phase defined health promotion as the central implementation strategy. The six strategies included in the mandate were used to identify actions tending to attain goals in eight priority areas. Efforts also were aimed at achieving synergies between the health sector and other sectors. Initiatives like School Health and Family Life Education Project, Project Lifestyle for Schools, Healthy Hotels and Health and Tourism Projects, and Healthy Communities were launched during this phase. Currently, health promotion is an area of interest and capacity building for implementation is being stressed.

One of the most important efforts in terms of health within CARICOM is the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP). This initiative was created in February, 2001 and supported by the Declaration of Nassau on Health. The initiative is intended to intensify response against HIV/AIDS in the region and it is an extremely significant economic and social challenge for this subregion.

In the Central American Integration System (SICA) Presidential Summit, held in March, 2007, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the Central America Plan, Health and Peace toward Development and

⁴³ This process and its results are described in the book *Diez Países Latinoamericanos y un Propósito Común por las Personas que viven con el SIDA (Ten Latin American Countries and a Purpose for People living with Aids)*.

⁴⁴ Pan Caribbean Association against HIV/AIDS (<http://www.pancap.org/>).

Democracy. The health issue is responsibility of the Council of Central American Health Ministers (COMISCA) through the Secretariat for Central American Social Integration (SISCA).

COMISCA is the political body of the Central American Integration System in the area of health and its functions include leading the regional health sector and identifying and prioritising health problems in the region. These problems are addressed jointly by the Agenda and the Central American Health Plan.

Responsibilities of COMISCA include: i) being the rector body of the Regional Health Sector, identifying and prioritizing health regional problems; ii) adopting and issuing resolutions required for the attainment of goals; iii) approving legal instruments intended to govern COMISCA bodies and their reforms; iv) considering recommendations made by health international entities; v) requesting studies, research works or reports on those topics it considers necessary; vi) coordinating through the Secretariat for Social Integration with other SICA bodies to know and promote decisions that influence health sector in Central America; vii) coordinating with the Councils of Ministers of the Central American Social Integration Subsystem and with the Meeting of the Health Sector in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

The 103 projects within the framework of the *Guidelines for Policies and Strategies for Social Development and Integration (2000-2020)* are a reflection of the concerns about the health issue. Twelve of these projects are led by SISCA and they refer to different aspects of the health sector, particularly HIV/AIDS.

Their general framework is the *Health Initiative of Central America*, which includes the following initiatives:

- Regional Programme on Food and Nutritional Security (PRESANCA).
- Agriculture-Environment-Health Intersectoral Plan.
- Regional HIV/AIDS Project for Central America, which has included the strategy for the reduction of HIV drug prices, as well as another project aimed at the prevention and control of STD/HIV/AIDS, with special attention to migrating population.
- Health and Work Project in Central America.
- Health and Nutrition in Human Development, aimed at children and mothers.
- Central American Addiction Diagnosis.
- Prevention and Control of Vector-Transmitted Diseases.
- Medical Arbitration Model.
- Updating on Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation.
- Health Security Model.

MERCOSUR, in turn, has established the Health Information System. This is a forum where macropolicies and strategies concerning the health sector in the region are discussed. Health ministers of each Member State, by means of agreements, choose the priority subjects for the region. The subjects are dealt with through technical groups, intergovernmental commissions, technical committees and nuclei or *ad-hoc* groups.

Some of the committees that have been created are the following: The Intergovernmental Commission for Surveillance and Control of *Aedes aegypti* Infestation and the Transmission of the Dengue Virus; the Intergovernmental Commission for the Promotion of an integrated Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health; Intergovernmental Commission for the Control of Tobacco; the Intergovernmental Commission for the Promotion of a Policy for the Fight against HIV/AIDS Epidemics; the Intergovernmental Commission on Environmental and Workers' Health; the Intergovernmental Commission on Risk Management and Vulnerability Reduction; and the Intergovernmental Commission on Health and Development. It is also worth mentioning the *ad-hoc* group on drug policy; the drug price bank; the committee for the review of the international health regulations; and the Programme for Surveillance and Control of Transmittable Diseases – measles, chagas, cholera, and yellow fever.

UNASUR adapted some experiences of CAN that led to the approval of the health agenda in compliance with the South American Summit of Cochabamba, held in December 2006. At that moment, the parameters that would allow for articulating the South American network for surveillance and response to public health

problems were established, the international health regulations were developed, and instruments and procedures for the provision of health services in the region were coordinated. It is worth mentioning that given the convergence dynamics in the health sector, UNASUR is advancing a dengue eradication programme among its member countries since the Second Summit in 2002.

In the ALBA proposal and in the initiatives developed within the framework of the Treaty of the Peoples (TCP) put forward by Bolivia in 2006, similar goals are set out.

The ALBA Social Commission addresses both health and education areas. In this regard, in the *Grandnational Plan for the Development of the Health Mission of ALBA Member Countries*, the recovery and implementation of public health systems are included, as well as the supply of instruments for research aimed at taking advantage of the biodiversity resources in the region. Training professionals in Medical Science and their different specialities, applied to health sector, is also being considered under ALBA-TCP.

ALBA is responsible for the so-called International “*Milagro*” Mission (free-of-charge eye surgeries), with the cooperation of Cuba. Under this Mission almost one million of patients in Bolivia, Nicaragua, a number of countries in Central American and the Caribbean, and countries in South America have been treated. This initiative has also provided services to population sectors that require medical diagnoses, medicines, vaccinations, prostheses, and physical, gynaecological, and geriatric care, among others.

In the “*Barrio Adentro*” Mission in Venezuela, more than 23,000 Cuban health workers participate and cover a population of more than 17 million people. In 2006, 3,328 Venezuelans were studying Integral General Medicine in Cuba.

Furthermore, the agreement signed in January 2006 between Bolivia and Venezuela provides for training 5,000 Bolivians in Venezuela in several specialties in the health area, with this training being paid by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In the agreement signed by ALBA-Haiti, health cooperation agreements were established with the Central American country. The Cuban Medical Brigade, with 1998 health workers, had examined more than 6 million patients in Haiti for August, 2007. The new Latin American Medicine School (ELAM) was opened in Cienfuegos, Cuba, within the framework of ALBA, and provides medicine courses of study for Latin American people. Cuba has also contributed with three eye clinics in Nicaragua and one in Panama.

b) Education

Education is one of the most sensitive social areas on which governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have focused their projects. Through international forums and encounters, besides the commitments assumed at the level of international regional organisations, governmental authorities have set other goals in order to improve educational coverage and access. Experts consider that quality education and eradication of illiteracy are fundamental elements of any strategy aimed at reducing social inequality.

In this connection, broad programmes are being implemented. These programmes are aimed at progressively eradicating illiteracy; universalizing preschool education; improving basic education quality and extending its coverage; improving high school and higher education; improving curricula contents; increasing the use of new information and knowledge technologies; creating the conditions for cognitive development and research; facilitating learning other languages; and stimulating the study of other cultures, among other goals.

In the Andean Community (CAN), education and health are the most developed social subjects. Andean institutional structure in the area of education is developed within the Integral Social Development Plan (PIDS) that was created by presidential mandate and adopted in the Summit of Quirama.

In the area of education, priorities have been focused on the promotion of the new integration in school curricula and on the coordination of educational policies, whereas in the cultural sector, the development of industrial cultures, the preservation and protection of the material and immaterial cultural heritage, and the strengthening and promotion of cultural diversity have been privileged.

CAN has two specialized institutions for the educational area: i) the Andres Bello Convention (CAB, 1970) (although it currently covers other Latin American and Caribbean countries and Spain), which has had an impact on the definition of educational and cultural policies by integration bodies and has contributed to the co-ordination of the action of education and culture ministries, and science and technology bodies; and ii) the Andean Simón Bolívar University (1985).

Special mention must be made of the recent creation of the Andean Community Law University Network (RUDCA) and the first meeting of Law faculties and Schools of the CAN member countries, held in last June. In addition, the “Andean Academic and Social Organization Network” (RAOOS) was established.

In the area of education and culture, CAN has adopted a number of significant decisions, which include: i) the incorporation of the topic of integration in school programmes and educational contents of the Andean Community Member Countries (D-594); the creation of the Andean Council of Ministers of Education and People Responsible for Cultural Policies (D-593); iii) the replacement of Decision 460 on the Protection and Recovery of the Cultural Heritage of the Andean Community member countries (D-588); and v) the protection and recovery of cultural assets of the Archaeological, Historical, Ethnological, Paleontological and Art Heritage of the Andean Community (D-460).

This effort has been translated into concrete activities for the integration of the subregion and, in particular, in border areas. Some of the actions taken include homologation of basic and high school education and the establishment of equivalences at higher education level. These actions have favoured student movement; boosted university role as an driving force for integration by promoting the association of universities through working networks; postgraduate studies in integration subjects; the Andrés Bello Integration Study Programmes to include the contents as transversal axes in curricula and education; the defence of tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage, facilitating the appraisal or shared origins, the exchange of transborder coexistence and cooperation community experiences; and comparative analyses of constitutions and legal frameworks of member countries in the areas of education and culture, environment and communications, science and technology, as well as the rereading of national histories from a perspective of regional integration.

By the same token, CAN has established the Network of Academic and Social Entities for the implementation of the Integral Social Development Plan (PIDS) together with the Andean Council of Ministers for Social Development, national committees, and entities responsible for different subject areas of the PIDS. In the area of higher education, the Simón Bolívar Andean University is also devoted to this sector.

CARICOM has established the Permanent Committee of Ministers of Education, with the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) being responsible for addressing matters related to education in the Caribbean region. CARICOM has also reached an agreement with the University of the West Indies (UWI) to analyze and disseminate information about topics related to integration.

There are also other institutions related to CARICOM that support the undertaking of activities concerning social matters, including, particularly, education: the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the University of Guyana (UG), the University of the West Indies (UWI), and the y Caribbean Law Institute / Caribbean Law Institute Centre (CLI / CLIC).

CBD prepared a strategy in 2004 aimed at reducing poverty. This strategy set as one of its priorities the Millennium Development Goals and the assistance to Caribbean countries in the attainment of their social goals and, in particular, educational goals.

SICA's educational institutional structure basically relies on two specialized organs:

i) The General Secretariat for Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination (SG-CECC), which was established in 1975 and is aimed at promoting cooperation, coordination and joint work of Ministers of Education. The Secretariat functions include cooperation between ministries, universities and other educational institutions; the development of multilateral and national research programmes; the preservation of the cultural heritage; granting scholarships and promoting the exchange of students;

fostering information exchange, publications; supporting the reciprocal protection of copyrights; and promoting the making of inventory of cultural assets.

ii) The Central American University Higher Council (CSUCA), created in 1948, which is made up of Central American public universities. Its directive body gathers rectors and presidents of student federations of confederated universities and its purpose is to share the advantages of university educational programmes, the setting of academic networks, and the promotion of research reflection spaces.

The General Secretariat for Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination (SG-CECC) is divided into a Council of Ministers of Higher Education and a Council of Ministers and Authorities of the Cultural Sector. CECC has designed strategic plans in the educational and cultural areas for 2005-2009, which establish the principles that will guide Central American integration actions within the sectors of culture and education.

The Central American institutional framework has also developed a high level of specialization and it currently has the following institutions: the Central American Council (CCA); the Central American Agency for Accreditation of Postgraduate Studies; seven systems in the academic sector: the Higher Education Network of Central America (REESCA); the Regional System of Student Life (SIREVE); the Regional System of Postgraduate Studies (SICAR); the Central American System for Evaluation and Academic Coordination (SICEVAES); the Central American University Editorial System (SEDUCA); the Central American Documental Information System (SIDCA); and the Central American System for University-Society Relations (SICAUS); as well as two programmes in the educational sector: the University-Entrepreneurship Programme for Sustainable Development (PUEDES) and the Cooperation Programme for Evaluation, Improvement and Accreditation of the Quality of Education in Central America.

At the Meeting of Central American Presidents held in March, 2007, Ministers of Education were entrusted with the development of regional projects, which include:

- Improvement of education quality;
- Action Plan for Occupational Training and Labour Insertion;
- Care for Disabled Minors (inclusive education);
- Bilingual Intercultural Education;
- Central American Network for Professional Development and Teaching Research;
- Central American Academic Secondary Education Studies;
- Regional Programme on Occupational Training and Labour Insertion.

Capacity building and digital technology counselling programmes are being recently developed through SISCA.

The issues of education and culture are dealt with in MERCOSUR through the Common Market Council (CMC), the highest body of this subregional integration scheme, specifically through the meetings of Ministers of Education (RME) (Dec. CMC N° 07/91), which first gathering was held in 1991. This body counts on a support structure through the Regional Coordinating Committee; the Regional Coordinating Commission for Basic Education (CRC-EB); the Regional Coordinating Commission for Technological Education (CRC-ET); and the Regional Coordinating Commission for Higher Education (CRC-ES). CMC's work is also supported by Project Managing Groups for the areas of school libraries, MERCOSUR educational terminology, system of educational indicators, diversity education in MERCOSUR countries and equitable education, as well as specialised structures for the topic of Information Systems and Communication (SIC) (Dec. CMC N° 15/01); the Consultative Committee of the Fund for the Educational Sector of MERCOSUR (CAFEM) (Dec. CMC N° 05/06); and the Meeting of National Accreditation Agencies (RANA).

The Meeting of Ministers of Education (RME) is the highest decision-making body of MERCOSUR Educational Sector (SEM) and it is responsible for defining the policies that will be implemented in the educational area in support of the regional integration process. The Regional Coordinating Committee (CCR) is the body responsible for providing integration and cooperation policies in the area of education,

advising RME, and coordinating the development of SEM actions. Three Regional Area Coordinating Commissions (CRC) were created. These Commissions address three specific areas: basic education, technological education and higher education.

SEM has designed a Plan for 2006-2010 and its mission consists of developing a common educational space, through coordination of policies that articulate education with the MERCOSUR integration process, by fostering mobility, exchange and the shaping of a regional identity and citizenship, with the view to achieving a quality education, with special focus on the more vulnerable sectors within a process of development with social justice and respect for cultural diversity.

The meetings of Ministers of Culture (RMC) were also developed within this sector (Dec. CMC N° 02/95). This subject area also includes support entities such as the General Coordinating Committee of Cultural MERCOSUR (RCCG); the Technical Commission on Libraries of MERCOSUR (CTBM); the Technical Commission on Capacity Building (CTC); the Technical Commission on Cultural Legal Framework (CTLCM); the Technical Commission on Heritage (CTP); and the Technical Commission on Cultural Industries (CTIC). Furthermore, MERCOSUR counts on the Forum of Cinema and Audiovisual Authorities of MERCOSUR (FACyA) and the Forum of Directors of National General Archives of MERCOSUR (FDAGNM).

MERCOSUR has developed a Web site exclusively devoted to educational topics, "Educational MERCOSUR," which presents information and documentation of all educational stages and a bank of practices and statistics.

In UNASUR the topic of education is generally dealt with since the First Summit. UNASUR points out that political stability, economic growth and the promotion of social justice in South American countries will depend on the broadening and deepening of cooperation in education. Poverty and marginality are threats for institutional stability in South America; therefore it is urgent to implement programmes that have an impact on access to education and to basic health services in order to improve social indices.

The *Higher Education Workshop for ALBA* was held in April, 2008 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where the design of the ALBA Education Constituting Declaration was discussed, identifying priority areas that will be addressed by the ALBA-Education Grandnational Project, agreed upon at the 5th ALBA Summit, held in April 2007. This important project includes:

- Grandnational Plan for the development of the literacy mission in ALBA member countries based on the Cuban programme "Yo sí puedo" (I can). In this regard, with the implementation of this initiative, Bolivia expects to become a free-illiteracy territory by the end of 2008, when all its population will have learnt how to write and read.
- University education plan that will prioritize social medicine, social work and similar careers.
- Social education common programme for productive work.

c) **Housing**

Having a decent home is a fundamental human right recognized internationally as well as in several Constitutions or national legislations. However, in our region arbitrary evictions occur and many live out in the open, without optimum conditions to protect themselves and living with dignity.

This scourge involves all sectors of society: the State, since its inherent obligation is to guarantee the right to a home, governments, as responsible entities for developing housing projects, and social organisations, because they must act actively and present suitable proposals aimed at overcoming this social problem.

In the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Housing Technical Unit of the Central American Council of Ministers of Housing and Human Settlements (CCVAH) was installed on 3 June 1992. The purpose of this entity was to consolidate management of the housing sector and human settlements at the regional level, promoting the institutional strengthening of public and private sectors in each Central American country, obtaining financial resources under suitable conditions for plans, programmes and

projects of interest for the countries in the region, and building capacity and providing the technical assistance required for this purpose.

Its functions include promoting the integration of public policies and the exchange of experiences; fostering external cooperation; stimulating efficiency, specialization and coordination of the different national housing plans; promoting a regional capital market for this sector and the coordination of human settlement growth with social, economic sectors, and the preservation of the environment.

This is one of the areas in the Andean Community which does not have specific policies or instruments to address the problem. However, CAN set up the Andean Consultative Council of Municipal Authorities (Decision 585), which later led to the Andean Network of Cities, a space that came from the cities themselves. This Network is intended to serve as a catalyst for the concerns about the urban environment and housing in CAN member countries.

CARICOM, in turn, has implemented only a few initiatives related to housing development, which have been rather symbolic. In December 1999, more than 15 three-bed houses were delivered to Montserrat through the cooperation of CARICOM member states. The reason of this donation was to demonstrate support and solidarity of the region to Montserrat after the eruption of the Langs Soufriere Volcano.

In the case of MERCOSUR, the Structural Convergence Fund and, in particular, its Social Cohesion Programme contributed US\$ 7,500,000 for the construction of 3,000 homes for low-income families in Paraguay. There are also mutual support cooperatives for the construction of homes, supported by the cooperative movement of MERCOSUR and the mechanism of Mercociudades as a reflection and exchange space on the urban problem within this group.

As to the construction of homes within the framework of ALBA, several initiatives have been launched in this area. Venezuela and Uruguay signed an agreement for the installation of 13,193 housing kits; Venezuela, along with Cuba, finances the construction of 14,000 polyvinyl chloride (PVC) housing units as part of the mixed projects of the petrochemical pole located in Cienfuegos. Furthermore, Venezuela announced in 2007 the donation of 500 prefabricated homes for the victims of Noel storm, a vessel loaded with fuel and more than 60 tons of food and medicines.

It would be advisable to analyze the convenience of having measures implemented by LAC integration entities, which could lead to a regional proposal for all states and integration processes to make decisions and adopt projects that promote the development of the housing construction sector. One of the subjects linked to the issue of access to homes in LAC is related not only to the availability of homes, but also to the payment capacity to rent the existing housing units, above all for the lowest-income population sectors. Therefore, the possibility could be analyzed that expenses associated to a home be proportional to the income level of the population, establishing a system of subsidies for the poorest sectors of the population.⁴⁵

In order to meet the ambitious goal of each person in our region having a decent home, suitable legislative measures and policies are required, which are inserted in each country's development plans. To this end it is necessary to adopt a national strategy supported on regional cooperation programmes with concrete goals (including the right to land) and that is related to other similar sectors (agriculture, environment, energy, etc.), especially taking into consideration interests and needs of the less privileged citizens.⁴⁶

d) Employment

Concerning employment, the report prepared by the ILO on the "2007 Labour Outlook. Latin America and the Caribbean" points out that the region is expected to get off to a good start in 2008, but a number of challenges in the labour world still persist. The economic growth in the region has had an impact on the reduction of poverty and inequality, as well as on the improvement of labour market indicators,

⁴⁵ Golay, Christopher and Özden, Melik, "El Derecho a la Vivienda", Programme on Human Rights of the Europe-Third World Centre (CET), Geneva, 2007.

⁴⁶ Ibid 49.

especially the drop in urban unemployment rate and the moderate increase of wages and salaries. However, the evolution of real wages and salaries has not followed the same growth pace as labour productivity. There are still 17 million people unemployed in the region's urban areas and huge gaps persist in the major labour indicators per gender, age and ethnic origin (people of African descent and indigenous people). With respect to the quality of employment, LAC still has a deficit of decent jobs, a predominance of informal work and lacks concerning social and health protection and pensions.

The situation described above exists in spite of the fact that the development of more effective labour policies and jobs, through the dialogue between all social actors and cooperation of governments, has been a constant feature of governments and regional integration entities in LAC. Similarly, efforts have been deployed to apply the social responsibility of companies with a view to generating decent and productive jobs for everybody in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Andean Community, for instance, established the Consultative Council of Ministers of Labour (CAMT), which was created upon agreement of the Andean presidents (2000) and is intended to promote social-labour dimension of the integration process through an effective articulation of its actions with Labour Ministers of the subregion, as well as with the other bodies and institutions of the Andean Integration System. CAN periodically organizes the Andean Regional Conferences on employment. The 4th Conference was held in Santiago de Chile, on 15 and 16 January 2008.

Matters related to employment (social labour) in CAN are broad and complex; they involve topics related to migration, employment promotion, training and capacity building, social security, personal insecurity, work health, among others.

In each one of these areas, CAN has developed significant initiatives among Andean countries. In the employment promotion area, the "Andean Subregional Programme for Employment Promotion" is intended to gather, evaluate and systematize experiences from Andean countries in this areas and to establish a community framework to promote the making of policies to foster employment with special emphasis on the urban informal sector, and the promotion of micro business and small and medium-sized business. Concerning labour training and capacity building, the "Subregional Coordination Programme of Methodologies, Criteria and Priorities on Labour Training and Capacity Building" was developed with a view to generating a process of exchange, dialogue and discussion on labour training and capacity building among Andean countries in order to define policy community criteria that contribute to improve employment in the Subregion. In the area of social security, the Andean Social Security Instrument was adopted (D-583 and 546) to update and improve the regulatory framework and social security systems of Andean countries; concerning labour migration, the Andean Labour Health and Security Instrument (D-584 and 547) was approved. This entity is intended to reduce or eliminate workers' health damage by implementing control measures and through the development of the activities required to prevent work-related risks.

In the case of the institutional framework specialized in labour and employment issues, CAN has established two important consultative entities: i) the Andean Labour Consultative Council (1983), which gathers the highest level delegates, directly elected by the organizations that represent the labour sector of each Member Country; and ii) the Andean Business Consultative Council, made up of four delegates elected among the highest leading bodies of business organizations that represent each Member Country. Both councils express their opinion before the Andean Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, CAN Commission or CAN General Secretariat, upon request of these bodies or on their own initiative, on programmes or activities of the subregional integration process of their interest.

Another institution specialized in social and labour issues in the Andean integration System is the Simón Rodríguez Agreement. Participating in it are representatives of the Consultative Council of Labour Ministers and the Andean Business and Labour Consultative Councils. Its main objectives are: i) 1. To propose and discuss initiatives related to social and labour issues; ii) To define and coordinate communitarian policies on promotion of employment, workers' training, security and labour health, social security, and labour migration, among others; and iii) To propose and to outline actions for cooperation and coordination among member countries in the social and labour areas in the Andean region.

The Simón Rodríguez Agreement is made up by three main organs, namely: the Conference – comprising the Minister of Labour of the Member Countries of the Andean Community, the Coordinators of the National Offices of the Andean Business Consultative Council, and the Coordinators of the National Offices of the Andean Labour Consultative Council –, the Specialized Working Commissions, and the Technical Secretariat.

Other important bodies are the Andean Labour Observatory (OLA, Spanish acronym) and the Andean Labour Institute (ILA, Spanish acronym).

Since 2005, the Andean Community has promoted labour and education projects, related to the certification of competences, title validations, skills and training of human resources for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in the area of management and labour force training. In addition, it has created a network of Andean offices for provision of integral employment services.

Within the Andean Integration System (SAI), the Simón Rodríguez Agreement, through the Andean Labour Observatory monitors social and labour policies in the subregion's countries. In turn, the Andean Labour Institute systematizes statistical data, regulations and documents, as references for undertaking social and labour actions.

In the case of MERCOSUR, its labour regulations emerged from its various organs with competence in the area. Thus, the Common Market Council (CMC) of MERCOSUR has developed a specialized institutional framework for labour and employment-related issues. In principle, the meetings of Ministers and Authorities for Social Development (RMADS) (Dec. CMC N° 61/00) established the working commissions on social economy, eradication of children labour and children sexual exploitation for commercial purposes (CTETI); as well as the working commission on the statistical system of social indicators (SEIS). In addition, they established the Social Institute of MERCOSUR (ISM) (Dec. CMC, N° 03/07).

In addition, the CMC also provided for the meetings of Labour Ministers (RMT) (Dec. CMC N° 16/91) and the High-Level Group on MERCOSUR Strategy for Employment Growth (GANEMPLE) (Dec. CMC N° 46/04).

With regard to the Common Market Group (GMC), the Working Subgroup N° 10 for “Labour, Employment and Social Security Issues” (SGT N° 10) was created. It has three thematic commissions: i) Labour Relations (CTRL), ii) Employment, Migration, Qualification and Professional Training (CTEMCFP) and the Observatory of the Labour Market in MERCOSUR (OMTM) and iii) Labour Health and Security, Labour Inspection and Social Security (CTST).

Another institutional body created by MERCOSUR with competence in labour and employment issues, among others, is the Economic and Social Consultative Forum. MERCOSUR also established the Social and Labour Commission (CSLM) and the Administrative Labour Tribunal (TAL). Another achievement in labour matters is the work conducted by the Observatory of the Labour Market in MERCOSUR.

For its part, in 1993, CARICOM signed a Social Charter with a series of rights considered to be fundamental. It deals with employment, workers, women and children's rights.

Since its inception, full employment has been a major concern for CARICOM authorities, who have also focused on the improvement of living and working conditions, and the effective use of the institutions established for economic, social and cultural development of Caribbean peoples. For this purpose, CARICOM created the Permanent Committee of Labour Ministers.

The creation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) has involved significant transformations and changes in the Caribbean labour market, in order to guarantee free transit of people throughout the Community. This has led to progress in the preparation of communitarian standards in the areas of employment, recognition of labour unions, employment categories and conditions, labour security and health, equal job opportunities and treatment, and free movement of professionals, among other issues. However, there are still many problems that must be overcome in order to move ahead towards a community with free movement of people and harmonized legislations on labour matters.

The COHSOD believes that the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) must promote an economic structure that helps to establish common labour standards based on the adoption of the key conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO): freedom of association; right to collective negotiations, elimination of forced labour, abolition of children labour, elimination of labour discrimination, and conventions on migration.

In the case of the Central American Integration System (SICA), the issue of employment is dealt with through the Central American Social Integration Secretariat (SISCA), which regularly convenes officials in charge of various social and labour issues. There is a series of institutions – many of them of a merely consultative nature – which play a crucial role in the process of analysis and drafting of proposals on labour issues and that are subject to the decision-making bodies of SICA. The most important of these institutions is the Central American Confederation of Workers, which also counts on the Central American Institute for Social Studies (ICAES). The Central American Council of Social Security Institutions (COCISS) and the Central American Institute for Social Studies (ICAES) also provide direct support to the process to prepare proposals and communitarian standards on employment and labour market in Central American integration.

3. Other aspects of social dimension

The social dimension of integration encompasses different scopes and subject matters. Social topics, together with climate change and energy issues, are probably those with the greatest possibility for designing joint policies in the region, that imply not only the exchange of experiences and information with no negligible impacts in terms of social development but also the establishment of common goals and plans to accomplish concrete actions.

Apart from social postponements in LAC, such as those analyzed in the previous section on education, health, employment and housing, there are other spheres or areas with a direct link to the level of development of the social dimension of integration, which currently deserve special attention. Following are some of the areas where the implementation of initiatives and actions to strengthen the social dimension of integration in Latin America and the Caribbean would be recommendable.

a) Higher institutionality levels

One of the gaps detected in the development of regional integration refers to the degrees of institutionality required for the further deepening thereof. In this regard, it would seem that granting a higher level of formalization to the instances and entities in charge of broaching the social problems in the subregional integration organizations in the social dimension would be indispensable. This would facilitate compliance of presidential and ministerial agreements based on the design and approval of specific proposals and a systematic evaluation and follow-up process regarding the instrumentation thereof.

The periodically-held presidential summits and the integration entities themselves have granted an important role to the social dimension of development and, therefore, integration. Nevertheless, it still represents a challenge for the existing schemes' efficient coordination of the process to comply with the commitments, the coordination of policies with a direct and indirect effect on said purposes and the evaluation of compliance thereof. For this purpose, the entities in charge or responsible for the social dimension must have the highest possible degree of political relevance and hierarchy and they must have the necessary resources to watch over the implementation of their proposals or decisions.

On the other hand, it is also true that granting a higher degree of institutionality to these processes, in itself, would not automatically improve the social situation in the region, if the governments do not act in a coordinated fashion, not only internally at the subregional integration instances but also at international forums in which standards and agreements are discussed and negotiated and which have implications on the economic and social policies and performance of the participating countries.

b) Coordinating the external agenda with the internal agenda and regional integration

It is evident that foreign variables bear an increasingly greater weight on the domestic policy of developing countries and especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean. Definitely, globalization and the growing integration of world economics have had a direct impact on the domestic policies and evolution of various nations. To this must be added that, according to some analysts, national governments and especially developing countries show a certain trend towards the loss of policy spaces.

In light of the foregoing, one of the fundamental challenges for LAC governments and for subregional integration processes refers to the necessary articulation of the external agenda (globalization and economic and free trade negotiations) with the internal agenda (overcoming poverty, inequalities and exclusion).⁴⁷

In this regard, efforts should be made to design region-wide coordinated responses not only among the Latin American and Caribbean States but between these and the social players, in order to face, amid better conditions, the consequences of constructing an international order – which will probably be strengthened through economic and trade agreements outside the scope of multilateral frameworks.

To sum up, regional integration must be perceived as a strategic political project that must give the region a more outstanding presence and greater negotiating clout at the various international forums.

The lack of minimum common guidelines governing the negotiations carried out by the Latin American and Caribbean countries at the signing of free trade treaties with industrialized countries has a strong impact on social development. For the purposes of offering better conditions for the development of social programmes, it is imperative for subregional integration organizations to establish certain minimum common guidelines for international negotiations that would safeguard development interests and social equity of its members.

In order to accomplish the foregoing, the social impact must be properly measured and domestic mechanisms and policies guaranteeing compensation to the sectors that would be hurt with the enactment of FTAs or other international trade agreements must be defined. Said treaties must be analyzed in geopolitical terms as development projects for the countries and for regional integration, considering among other criteria the manner of insertion in international economics defined thereby and also the influence of the commitments derived therefrom on the institutional and social fabric of the Latin American and Caribbean nations.

For this, it is indispensable to delve deeper into the study of the social and labour-related impacts implied by the signing of these treaties. Although it is true that the time periods thereof – whether it be with the United States, the European Union or Japan – may contribute to broaden the scope of the region's exports to these markets and may enhance the presence of direct foreign investment in the region as well as foster a certain level of institutional learning, the impacts must be more comprehensively evaluated, for instance on health (through the broadening of the time periods for test data on drugs and agrochemical products); in the rural sectors (by opening up the agricultural sector and permitting the entry of subsidised products); access to education (if this sector is not included in the list of service exceptions) and in the field of workers in the informal economy (by strengthening the scopes of application and reinforcement of intellectual property rights).

No less important than the aspects mentioned is that one that refers to controlling the movement of certain financial capitals, the elimination of which is a requirement for the signing of said FTAs. The PIDS of the Andean Community, for example, considers that one of its main challenges in the social arena consists in “ensuring that the financial opening-up of our economies have adequate controls in place that do not lead to

⁴⁷ “Development, competitiveness and inclusion. Towards an Andean social agenda” presentation by Ambassador Allan Wagner Tizón, former Secretary-General of the Andean Community on the occasion of the International Seminar on “Development, equity and integration”, organized by COMFAMA and UNESCO, Medellín, 15.09.2004.

vulnerability due to external economic fluctuations, which could aggravate the poverty of the majority and further debilitate the State's social expenditure."⁴⁸

c) Social participation and sense of identity

The majority of subregional integration organizations have institutional mechanisms to facilitate the broadest possible participation of representatives from society. Nevertheless, in practice the organizations and social players have had little influence thereon, above all in decision-making processes.

For the purposes of avoiding duplication of efforts, and especially to maximize the active participation of social organizations in the construction of the regional integration process, it would be recommendable for the resulting experiences to be shared among all the existing integration entities; that the efforts be coordinated and that the social organizations, the subregional schemes and the governments of the region cooperate with each other. The final objective of this exchange and cooperation process at the regional level should be a growing participation by increasingly broader sectors of the Latin American and Caribbean society in the design and application of commitments and the evaluation of how effective integration has been in LAC.

But there is consensus in what is needed to implement permanent dialogue mechanisms for the drafting of integral proposals and the definition of the priorities in social and labour-related policies, within the framework of the integration processes in LAC. In this regard, training and teaching programmes on this subject matter are required for the regional organizations and social networks. Such programmes should include the discussion and drafting of integration follow-up and evaluation methodologies⁴⁹ and the core aspects of the social dimension thereof. Likewise, it would be convenient to foster relations among the region's social organizations and academic experts, in order to provide more precise and objective analyses and information on the challenges posed by integration and development in the current regional situation.

The foregoing would reinforce the capabilities of the social organizations to participate and draft concrete and viable regional integration proposals, especially for the social dimension thereof.

d) Development of cross-border plans

Regional integration is directly linked to the interconnection among the political and production centres of the countries in the region. However, in order to advance towards a more inclusive integration, the social issue must be strategically considered in the redefinition of the notions of territory, development and integration itself.

The regions could build their own collective integration scenarios and formulate their own cross-border plans with the social issue as their axis, not only in terms of policies and plans but also including the players involved.

This perspective may help to compensate or solve the effects of resulting inequalities, particularly in areas with lower levels of development, such as cross-border zones.⁵⁰

In this regard, reinforcing local capabilities in these border areas could compensate for the scarce presence of the State and revert situations of marginality and violence. Not doing so would imply running the risk of increasing these scourges, as well as pushing forward the social precariousness of the population. Cross-

⁴⁸ PIDS.

⁴⁹ See Active Democracy Network www.sociedadcivil.net / www.democraciactiva.org.

⁵⁰ Ramírez Socorro and Montufar César (coordinators), "Colombia - Ecuador: so close and yet so far", Bogotá, IEPRI of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia – Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, March 2007; Ramírez Socorro, "The ambiguous regionalization of the Colombian conflict" in *Nuestra guerra sin nombre (Our Nameless War). Transformations of the conflict in Colombia*, Bogota, IEPRI – Editorial Norma, April 2006, pages 121-170.

border development and the creation of cross-border integration areas would seek to generate – among other things – a space of greater cohesion among the countries, based on the integration of neighbouring regions.

On the other hand, the traditional superimposition and spontaneous trans-border relations characteristic of cross-border areas, and inter-government agreements entered into in the exercise of state sovereignty, create situations that tend to be treated differently at the local, national and subregional levels, among which there are also strong divergences. Therein that cross-border issues must be assumed as a subregional construct that would increase the interdependence among neighbouring countries, would help in deepening integration thereof, and would enhance the living conditions of the populations.⁵¹

In general, the immediate needs, the spontaneous nature of day-to-day relations and a lack of permanent dialogue and agreement channels predominate in these areas and hinder the construction of a broader vision that would put local issues in context regarding national, regional or global dynamics. A common vision and interests have not been built vis-à-vis joint development and cross-border integration.

The possibilities for physical integration constitute an opportunity for undertaking important development strategies that would generate agile cross-border regions, capable of inserting these areas into the entire scope of regional integration and have an effect on international insertion. It is worthwhile mentioning that these projects must come hand in hand with sustainable environmental management and the active participation of the local authorities and social organizations involved.

e) Effects of climate change and natural disasters

The consensus is that all nations shall be affected by climate change. The Stern Report⁵² points out that climate change will have an effect on the access to water supplies, the production of food, health and the environment. But in spite of the importance this subject should have in the national agendas for development with social equity, in practice climate change is still not a priority in the region and is classified as merely an environmental and not a development-related problem.

It is estimated that climate change generated by human activities shall diminish agricultural productivity in the tropical and subtropical regions; reduce the amount and quality of water sources in the majority of arid and semi-arid regions; increase the incidence of malaria, dengue and other vector-transmitted diseases in tropical and subtropical regions and shall damage the ecologic systems and biodiversity. Besides, the rising sea levels due to the increased temperature projected could provoke the displacement of dozens of millions of persons living in lowlands and endanger the existence itself of small insular states.

The 2007-2008 Human Development Report, entitled "The struggle against climate change"⁵³ points out that social inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean are factors that increase the impact of climate changes and generate greater inequality and poverty. It identifies five sensitive and severely affected areas for human development in our region:

- Increased sea levels will bring about more intense tropical storms and cyclones. A sea level increase of barely 50 centimetres would mean the loss of more than a third of all the beaches in the Caribbean region, thereby affecting the tourism industry. The ingress of salt water into drinking water supply systems would also put the supply of sweet water at risk.

⁵¹ Ramírez Socorro, "Cross-border integration zones: challenges for the Andean and South American Communities", *Integration and cross-border social development*, Series Social Integration and Frontiers, Bogota, N° 1, CAB, pages 51-95; Ramírez Socorro, (2005), "Cross-border integration areas: advances and setbacks", in *Aldea Mundo*, Centro de Estudios sobre Fronteras e Integración (CEFI), Universidad de los Andes, San Cristóbal.

⁵² Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, published in the United Kingdom on 30 October 2006. Drafted by economist Sir Nicholas Stern.

⁵³ UNDP 2008.

- Increasing health problems, in particular the massification of dengue cases that has been affecting millions of persons in the region – especially in Brazil, Honduras, El Salvador and Venezuela – could reach epidemic proportions.
- Loss in agricultural productivity would increase the direct deleterious effects and have a direct impact on not reducing poverty.
- Access to drinking water, in particular due to the thawing of the ice cap and the reduction of glaciers in the Andean region. The retreat of glaciers threatens to diminish the availability of fresh water for millions of persons.
- The collapse of fragile ecosystems, as witnessed through the massive discoloration of coral reefs in the area of the Caribbean.

In order to face this challenge, international cooperation is of the utmost importance for the transfer and funding of new technologies to enhance the coverage of basic services with low greenhouse gas emission levels and in order to include climate change adaptation schemes in poverty-reducing national and regional strategies.

Subregional integration schemes in LAC show growing concern over climate change, and the implementation of structures and instances to pay attention thereto are under way. Inasmuch as the impacts thereof endanger economic and social development and also increase the vulnerability of the poorer sectors of the population and their means of subsistence, developing a process of all-encompassing consultation of all the social organizations is of the utmost importance, in order to create a common strategy aimed at facing the economic and social impacts of climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean in an integral manner, and on the basis of regional cooperation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Except for MERCOSUR, other subregional integration mechanisms (SICA, CARICOM, CAN, ALBA and UNASUR) have explicitly included since their creation specific goals and objectives pertaining to social issues. Similarly, SICA, CARICOM and CAN have created organs responsible for handling this issue. Yet, the social dimension of integration began to lose relative importance in the first half of the 1990s, when commercial and economic issues started to grab people's attention and gained top priority in the activities carried out by integration organizations.

It is important to highlight that during the first half of the 1990s, subregional integration organizations reflected the economic reforms taking place in their member countries. Authorities began to worry less about different social matters, and integration organizations followed suit and did not significantly participate in the formulation of policies pertaining to labour, employment, migration and social participation, and much less in public policies aimed at achieving a more equitable distribution of resources in the region of the world with the most uneven income distribution.

Growing discontent with the results of the reforms implemented in the framework of economic liberalization started to generate – particularly at the end of the 1990s – serious doubts regarding its strength as an alternative to improve the level of development in Latin American and Caribbean countries. But people began to realize the negative effects on democracy and the stability of the system caused by the worsening of uneven resource distribution and rising poverty. Hence, proposals and debates began to emerge attempting to create a new *consensus* to increase the relevance of institutional development, social protection networks, and a *sense of identity* for development policies.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ With respect to international organizations, these proposals were summarized in the World Bank's *Comprehensive Development Framework*, and ECLAC's *Equity, Development and Citizenship, Reintroducing the Development and Globalization Agenda*, both of which took off at the end of the 1990s.

In general, the goal was to define long-term projects that could support the design of State policies that went beyond governments, and projects that were supported by a large portion of the population. The goal was also to establish a comprehensive approach on development that took people's initiatives into consideration so that a large portion of the population felt recognized in public policies. By doing so, it was expected that the people would adopt these public policies as their own policies (sense of identity), therefore achieving higher participation levels.

In order to achieve this goal, international financial organizations such as the World Bank started to promote national dialogues and coordination entities tailored to different circumstances and requirements, and these entities were eventually established in several Latin American countries. The results were satisfactory because such dialogue entities are important gathering and debating venues where specific segments of the population participate – which could not otherwise express their opinion.

Nevertheless, these valuable regional efforts to achieve national coordination were shadowed by the pressure created by unmet social demands, and by the difficulty to manoeuvre in economic policy decision-making, created in most cases by international financial commitments.⁵⁵ Hence, fundamental economic policy decision-making continued to take place mainly without taking coordination into consideration.

National Agreements excluded social actors from the decision-making process, and this helped to generate growing scepticism towards these agreements' viability and social actors' effective participation in defining development strategies. This reality was also evident in regional integration mechanisms. But social actors were progressively given more significant roles in the declarations issued in subsequent presidential summits. Thus, entities existing within integration organizations (MERCOSUR's Economic and Social Forum, Andean Labour and Business Consultative Councils, SICA's Consultative Council, CARICOM's Joint Consultative Group, among others) were taken into consideration, and other bodies for participation emerged, such as "We are MERCOSUR" (*Somos MERCOSUR*), subregional NGO networks, indigenous groups, city and municipal networks, among others.

Despite these achievements, integration organizations experienced a phenomenon similar to the one experienced by coordination mechanisms or National Agreements. Namely, the general guidelines established by these entities were not binding when defining public policies. In other words, these groups for participation of social organizations have few articulation channels with decision-making power.

Subsidiarity is another important aspect that has governed the social policies promoted by integration organizations, either implicitly or explicitly (in CAN and SICA). According to this principle, community entities must intervene only when the goals they seek can be better achieved via community intervention than via national actions.

In general, the region's integration schemes still retain an extremely centralist nature where the Ministries of Foreign Affairs are basically in charge of the decision-making process, and the Secretariats of said organizations are in charge of the proposals. Common market and trade have traditionally been favoured, while social and cultural topics, as well as other topics related to the democratic institutionality and legitimacy of the process have been completely forgotten. Until today, the social aspect of integration is still in the discussion phase, and this is precisely why it is imperative to move it to the declaration and implementation phase.

Similarly, we are still lacking a clear definition of the objectives and role of social issues in the current integration dynamics. Although some projects have been materialized in the health and education areas, we still lack a well-defined strategy in this regard. Some important initiatives seem to respond to an economic and social scenario different from the current one, and their materialization and effectiveness are notoriously deficient. Frequently, social mechanisms that are part of integration processes ignore sensitive topics pertaining to equality, structural causes of poverty, certain central issues of labour matters related to social security, and sustainable development.

⁵⁵ Ruiz Caro, Ariela, "National coordination and strategic planning: elements for a 'new consensus' in Latin America", Series *Gestión Pública* N. 28, ECLAC, Santiago, Chile, December 2002.

The aforementioned is also related to the fact that the proposals and contents of the declarations issued in presidential summits are often made by subregional organizations and hardly ever include immediate action plans pertaining to social matters which, based on specific mechanisms, allow for tackling the social backwardness suffered in the region.

- Several initiatives have been implemented, and are currently underway, in the area of health by all subregional integration organizations. These initiatives have been reinforced by all commitments individually undertaken by Latin American and Caribbean governments in different international forums, such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, presidential summits between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union, as well as the Ibero-American presidential summits. All of them have included in their final declarations and the different objectives and goals their search for access to health by broad sectors of the population, decrease of malnutrition and infant and maternal mortality rates, as well as the reduction in the spreading of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other serious illnesses.

In general, plans to coordinate surveillance and response to public health problems have been implemented, prevention programmes, and programmes to enlarge the coverage of health care services have been carried out, international health regulations are being developed, and instruments and procedures pertaining to the rendering of health care services in the region have been harmonized. Similarly, projects have been designed to provide health care in border regions, conduct epidemiology surveillance, and create binational health care services networks in border areas.

Nevertheless, the situation regarding health security and access to high-quality health care services for the entire Latin American and Caribbean population is still precarious. There is a lack of systematization in the efforts undertaken by regional integration schemes, and, above all, a lack of mechanisms to follow up and evaluate the implementation and achievements of health-related goals and objectives.

- With regard to education, all existing Latin American and Caribbean subregional integration groups have set goals to improve education coverage, access and quality. Common education and cultural policies have also been defined by integration organizations, and education and culture ministries, as well as national science and technology institutions, have achieved better coordination. Yet, in spite of the fact that some regional education-related progress has been achieved in the past few years, there are notorious shortcomings in the quality of education. Different problems pertaining to low-quality education and other difficulties faced by the Latin American and Caribbean education system (school retention, failing and dropout rates) are, in part, a reflection of a situation with deeper roots in our societies: social inequality.
- With respect to employment, all Latin American and Caribbean integration processes have aimed at developing more effective labour and employment policies through dialogue with social actors and governments, and by making businesses apply social responsibility, so that more decent and productive jobs can be generated for the entire population.

Some of the Latin American and Caribbean integration schemes apply rules that allow workers and professionals to have free movement and residence, and these integration schemes have gone a long way in harmonizing domestic labour legislation. The adopted instruments regulate the movement of migrant workers within the community region, thereby guaranteeing their right to settle in any member country based on employment grounds. Similarly, progress has been made regarding the establishment of common socio-labour rules. Yet, urban areas in Latin America and the Caribbean still host 17 million unemployed people, and there are significant gaps in employment indicators such as gender, age and ethnicity. With regard to the quality of jobs, informal economy is pervasive throughout the region and there is a lack of social, health care and pension fund protection.

- Lastly, housing programs is the area in which Latin American and Caribbean integration schemes have made the least progress and materialized the smallest number of projects. Notwithstanding, several

meetings have been held and declarations issued regarding the need to guarantee decent housing to all human beings, in accordance with the international agreements adopted by governments in the region.

On the other hand, the results achieved in other aspects pertaining to the social dimension, namely the establishment of joint social policies – for example issuing social charters or including them in negotiation clauses – have not shown significant progress either. CARICOM was the pioneer in approving a Social Charter, but it has lost validity. In the past few years, SICA has discussed the need for drafting a Social Charter, but it has not yet materialized it. MERCOSUR and the Andean Community have recently put forward proposals to create new mechanisms to deal with social issues, but their results have been rather limited.

In general, there are some factors that prevent the materialization and especially the efficiency of the objectives and undertaken commitments pertaining to the social dimension of Latin American and Caribbean integration. Some of these factors include:

- First, there remain institutional barriers related to a deficit in the integration system and its current structure, and other barriers that are inherent to each country. As previously mentioned, institutions with competence in the discussion and analysis of social problems of integration mechanisms lack decision-making power within the structure of their respective areas. Furthermore, it is necessary for government entities with competence on social matters to achieve appropriate coordination of policies so as to avoid overlapping of functions, which in some cases makes it more difficult to implement social programmes.
- A second limiting factor is that regulations created in the integration sphere do not have a direct application in member states. Some groups, such as the Andean Community, have issued Decisions pertaining to Labour Migration, Social Security, and health care in the work place. However, no regulations have been passed to govern these decisions.
- Third, there are constraints related to the capabilities, especially in the areas of management and influence of the different regional, national, public and private actors involved. This also poses limitations regarding the democratization of the integration process because it prevents relevant actors from truly participating in the definition and implementation of integration policies and programmes (Geneyro and Vázquez, 2007).
- Fourth, there remain asymmetries between national legislations and the policies and programmes adopted by subregional entities, as well as different perceptions of decision-makers about the nature and objectives of the integration process and how social matters fit into its framework. Despite the creation of Social Agendas with a regional approach – such as the PIDS of the Andean Community, or the recent creation of MERCOSUR's Social Institute – it is necessary to overcome the current perspective on the social dimension of regional integration which still has a strong domestic bias.
- Fifth, it is necessary to strategically enlarge the current reflection on the social dimension of the Latin American and Caribbean integration process by incorporating other contents (macroeconomics, legal aspects, trade, negotiation of free trade agreements, and other topics in the agenda) so as to achieve a more comprehensive approach on different social matters pertaining to development and integration.
- Finally, there are limiting factors associated with financing common activities pertaining to social development. This is due to a lack of resources in some cases, and in other cases to a lack of a true political will to make decisions that will guarantee financing for this type of activities. Proposals such as MERCOSUR's Structural Funds (FOCEM), whose first pilot projects are currently underway, as well as the creation of the Bank of the South and ALBA, could help overcome these constraints.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to comply with the ambitious objectives that make social inclusion part of development, it is necessary to adopt comprehensive measures and policies that coherently incorporate social programmes into each country's economic development plans and to the work priorities of different integration schemes. This

entails adopting a strategy with concrete goals and including indicators to evaluate the progress of said goals, particularly taking into consideration lower social strata.

Within this context, it is necessary to continue to promote and increase the efficiency of programmes aimed at providing more protection and improving human development indicators for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society. The aforementioned must be important components of all countries' social policy, and must be supported by subregional projects – within the framework of the existing integration schemes – and by a cooperation programme with regional scope. Following are some general and specific considerations that could serve as the basis for defining such regional cooperation programme on the social aspect of the Latin American and Caribbean integration process.

- General recommendations:

1. The topics with the highest potential to design joint regional cooperation projects, particularly within the framework of the current regional integration schemes, are probably cumulative social backwardness, climate change and energy. Such projects must entail not only the establishment of policies and common goals, but a systematic exchange of experiences and information, and the design of technical and financial cooperation programmes and of concrete action plans with regional scope.
2. In this connection, social organizations must be further encouraged to participate in the design and development of social policies and programmes that are part of the integration process, so as to promote social inclusion and strengthen the reliability and legitimacy of regional institutions. In addition to strengthening the participation of social organizations in the different integration entities currently in place, more articulation channels with decision-making bodies must be created.
3. Sharing comprehensive information, experiences and research on the challenges posed by achieving regional development with social equality, and particularly in the social dimension of integration, is required to continue furthering the creation of strategies that will allow achieving sustained economic growth and social equality supported by the advantages derived from regional integration.
4. The design and implementation of common policies and programmes within the social dimension of development and integration cannot be considered as a complement to current economic and international insertion strategies. In this regard, it is necessary to take into consideration the economic and social impact of the commitments undertaken as part of the multilateral and international negotiations in which Latin American and Caribbean countries take part. Based on the aforementioned, it is imperative for Latin American and Caribbean integration organizations to promote the establishment of certain minimum common guidelines governing international negotiations with third parties.
5. In its capacity as a Latin American and Caribbean organization for consultation and coordination, SELA could serve as a forum for debate and proposals pertaining to the development of the social dimension of regional integration and its connection to negotiations with third parties. Serving in this capacity, SELA can aim at comprehensively prioritizing the social agenda of the region within the positions undertaken by member states in negotiations with third parties and at the WTO.
6. Border issues demand binational or subregional long-term attention. For this reason, social aspects in border issues make it necessary to increase the flexibility of concepts that are closely linked to the traditional notion of sovereignty, territory and nation state. It is also necessary to share national sovereignties and introduce supranational rules and authorities, so that community integration organizations can function effectively and border issues can be handled appropriately.
7. In view of the huge challenge posed by climate change and natural disasters – which affects in particular the most vulnerable social sectors – it is necessary to include environmental considerations in regional development and integration policies. This would entail collective planning efforts, implementation of proposals and management of funds where subregional integration schemes, specialized organizations and social organizations play a key role.

8. When designing regional cooperation programmes that target specific social topics or areas that are of interest to social actors, governments and subregional integration organizations, it is imperative to include concrete goals and actions to be developed, as well as to prepare methodologies to conduct follow up and evaluation of compliance with the proposed objectives.
9. Issues related to health care, housing, employment and education could be social topics worthy of priority and coordinated attention from regional integration organizations, and should become central thematic areas of said regional cooperation programme on the social dimension of the Latin American and Caribbean integration process.
10. Finally, it is recommended to further reflect on the solidarity criteria included in projects currently implemented within the framework of ALBA, and that could be useful for the rest of the programmes on social issues in other regional integration schemes. On the one hand, projects foreseen by ALBA go in tandem with measures aimed at developing and protecting the peoples where said projects will be implemented, taking into consideration the environment and the population's living conditions. On the other hand, immediate action programmes are also implemented to overcome social deficits and to guarantee the success of the projects to be conducted.

- Specific recommendations:

1. To coordinate a forum for debate on initiatives and proposals to improve income distribution, which SELA considers as an fundamental key issue for the social dimension of Latin American and Caribbean development and integration, and which is practically absent from current regional integration schemes. By doing so, the other subregional and international institutions concerned with social matters should work with SELA to call for a regional consultation meeting in order to exchange experiences and evaluate proposals aimed at improving income distribution throughout the region.
2. It is advisable to design, within the framework of SELA, a training and education plan for subregional social organizations and networks regarding social matters, public policies and the social aspect of integration. This plan is a requirement to make these actors assume their central role in the design of Latin American development and integration strategies.
3. An institutional body should be created to facilitate the permanent exchange of information and analyses on cooperation plans and projects on health care, education, employment and housing being implemented by different subregional integration schemes. In this regard, SELA should play a key role as the entity in charge of articulating and disseminating such information and analyses.
4. Bearing in mind that issues pertaining to education quality are essential to further the well-being of the population, generation upon generation, it would be advisable to hold regular meetings, within the framework of SELA, to explore different perspectives on this type of problems faced by the mechanisms that currently exist within Latin American and Caribbean integration schemes, as well as by other international organizations such as UNESCO.
5. With regard to education, regular events should be held, within the framework of SELA, to exchange knowledge about the education reform processes currently being implemented in several countries throughout the region that seek to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their education systems, strengthen school management models, and promote knowledge and dissemination of certain values shared by the different Latin American and Caribbean peoples.
6. Similarly, regular discussions should be held, within the framework of SELA and other relevant organizations, on the main domestic and subregional policy initiatives applied to deal with the problem of school retention, failing and dropout rates in Latin America and the Caribbean.
7. With respect to health, SELA and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) should organize a regional consultation meeting to analyze the most relevant cooperation experiences among Latin

American and Caribbean countries concerning programmes on access to health care services for large sectors of the Latin American and Caribbean population.

8. In view of the great importance of mothers' and children's health to further social development and reduce poverty in the region, SELA should explore, along with PAHO and other organizations, the possibility to disseminate information at the regional level about the most important experiences that countries have had regarding programmes to reduce malnutrition and maternal-infant mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean.
9. Along with other relevant institutions, SELA should make progress in the discussion, proposal and approval of a regional programme aimed at establishing regulations throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region pertaining to sanitary and phytosanitary measures.
10. A regional debate must be promoted within the framework of SELA and with support of the SELA-IBERPME Programme, to make proposals that include defining common economic policy criteria to promote the creation of productive employment in the region. This will require achieving a more dynamic and permanent exchange of information and knowledge among countries and integration organizations, with the participation of the International Labour Organization (ILO).
11. Employment projects and programmes should mainly target young people, and enlarge the coverage of social security mechanisms, which should also include workers of small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as independent workers.
12. It is particularly important to design regional actions that link labour and education issues and pertain to the certification of skills and validation of degrees, and management and business training and education of human resources in small- and medium-sized enterprises. In order to achieve this, SELA could coordinate a specific cooperation project with UNESCO, SEGIB and the SELA-IBERPME Programme.
13. Labour training and education must be increased through regional programmes that emphasize development of cross-sectional skills and continuous training that helps to adapt to changes in the labour market. In this connection, the SELA-IBERPME Programme and other specialized bodies could be significantly relevant.
14. Immediate actions should be undertaken to start generating general ideas aimed at creating a regional housing strategy to be implemented in stages, upon prior consultation with all social pertinent organizations. This initiative should foresee effective coordination among responsible entities, authorities created under subregional integration schemes, and mechanisms that could guarantee their financing.
15. For such purposes, it would be important to identify and prioritize problems linked to housing development, which could and should be handled with a regional perspective.
16. Similarly, it is important to develop a regional platform to improve security in human settlements, enhance territory development and implement actions related to risk management in ongoing plans and programmes in this area.
17. It would be advisable to have regional integration mechanisms propose measures in order to create a regional proposal, so that all States as a whole adopt decisions to make housing expenses proportional to income, establishing a subsidy system for the poorest strata of Latin American and Caribbean populations.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Golay, Christophe and Özden, Melik, "The Right to Housing", Human Rights Programme of the Europe-Third World Center, Geneva, 2007.

18. In view of the importance of the Social Dimension of Integration for SELA Member States, the Permanent Secretariat, with the support of subregional integration organizations and other regional and international institutions, will submit an Annual Report to the Latin American Council on the progress and initiatives undertaken in this area.

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