

EXPERIENCES OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN DEVELOPMENT AID IN LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT: This article aims at shedding light on the specific mechanisms of impact assessment applied in the context of development aid experiences in which Latin American countries have had a leading role (as recipients or donors of such aid). Firstly, recent socioeconomic trends in the region are listed. This first section provides information on the sociological setting where the development aid programs to be analyzed have been built. Secondly, available mechanisms of impact assessment are reviewed in order to place the different Latin American experiences, addressed in the appropriate categories. Thirdly, Latin American experiences of development aid meeting the double condition of, on the one hand, having been referred to as «good practice» by international organizations, and, on the other, having applied strict processes of impact assessment, are presented in a systematized and integral manner. Fourthly, this chapter ends with conclusions synthesizing the main trends found in the analyzed projects.

KEY WORDS: Latin America, impact assessment, development aid, good practice.

Experiencias de evaluación de impacto en proyectos de cooperación al desarrollo en América Latina

RESUMEN: El presente artículo pretende arrojar luz sobre los mecanismos concretos de evaluación de impacto que se han aplicado en el marco de experiencias de cooperación al desarrollo en las que los países latinoamericanos han tenido (como receptores o donantes) un rol protagónico. En primer lugar, se hace mención de las tendencias socio-económicas que, en los últimos años, han caracterizado la evolución regional. Este primer apartado aporta información sobre el escenario sociológico sobre el cual se han construido los programas de cooperación a analizar. En un segundo momento, se repasan los diferentes mecanismos de

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evaluación de impactos disponibles en vistas a ubicar las experiencias latinoamericanas que serán reportadas en las categorías más adecuadas. En tercer lugar, se presentan de manera sistematizada e integral experiencias latinoamericanas de cooperación al desarrollo que cumplen la doble condición de, por un lado, haber sido referidas como «buenas prácticas» por organizaciones internacionales y, por el otro, haber aplicado procesos serios de evaluación de impacto. En un cuarto momento, se cierra este capítulo con unas conclusiones que sintetizan las principales tendencias halladas a partir de los proyectos analizados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: América Latina, evaluación de impacto, cooperación al desarrollo, buenas prácticas.

INTRODUCTION

Impact assessment is yet to become a widespread practice in Latin America. However, in recent years, as a consequence of both outside pressure (coming from multilateral credit agencies) and actual inner conviction (related to the methodological formation now available to young professionals and public officers in the region), it has become more popular. Some countries provide a good example of this situation. The case of Chile is the most outstanding at the national level due to the commendable work carried out by the Ministry of Social Development³. The case of Brazil is considered due to the application of these criteria, mainly at the state level (Minas Gerais and São Paulo being the entities that use this sort of methodologies more often).

Advances in the use of this instrument have not aimed exclusively to measure the transforming power of public policies funded with national budget or development banking. On the contrary, it has also been used in order to identify the effects of policies financially supported by the international community of donors. This step forward in the use of evidence-based policy techniques in the analysis of development aid programs has taken place in a context in which Latin America has left behind, at least «generically»⁴, its role as mere recipient of aid in order to acquire a «dual»

³ In Chile, this ministerial office has been prominent (and widely recognized) for a long time in this field in applying *ex ante* and *ex post* techniques. To access a systematized presentation of their work, please check the webpage developed by BB&R at request of the Inter-American Development Bank and of Brazil's Ministry of Planning: www.gestaoplanejamento.com

⁴ Such regional change results from considering the «average behavior» of Latin American states. Logically, in the case of countries with high levels of unsatisfied

donor-recipient status with the involvement of many Latin American countries in *South-South Cooperation* and *Triangular Cooperation* programs.

This article aims at shedding light on the specific mechanisms of impact assessment applied in the context of development aid experiences in which Latin American countries have had a leading role (as recipients or donors of such aid). Firstly, recent socioeconomic trends in the region are listed. This first section provides information on the sociological setting where the development aid programs to be analyzed have been built. Secondly, available mechanisms of impact assessment are reviewed in order to place to the different Latin American experiences, addressed in the appropriate categories.

Thirdly, Latin American experiences of development aid meeting the double condition of, on the one hand, having been referred to as «good practice» by international organizations, and, on the other, having applied strict processes of impact assessment, are presented in a systematized and integral manner. Fourthly, this chapter ends with conclusions synthesizing the main trends found in the analyzed projects.⁵

RECENT TRENDS IN LATIN AMERICA'S SOCIOLOGIC AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

Notwithstanding certain aspects, the scientific community agrees that between 2002 and 2014 social and economic indicators in Latin America have experienced a qualitative leap forward. These positive changes have reflected even in the technical term given by some authors to the cited historic period: *década ganada*⁶ (that is, the «victorious decade») (López and Lustig, 2010; Ocampo, 2011; Angulo, Gaviria and Morales, 2013; Feliz, 2013; García Delgado, 2014). The most significant advances have been recorded in indicators such as poverty, absolute poverty, unemployment and inequity.

Poverty levels have decreased considerably. According to data from the SEDLAC (the World Bank's Socio-Economic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean), in the year 2003, 41.9% of the region's population could be labeled as moderately poor. In other words, 4 out of 10 individuals had less than 4 daily dollars (measured in Purchasing Power Parity) for their

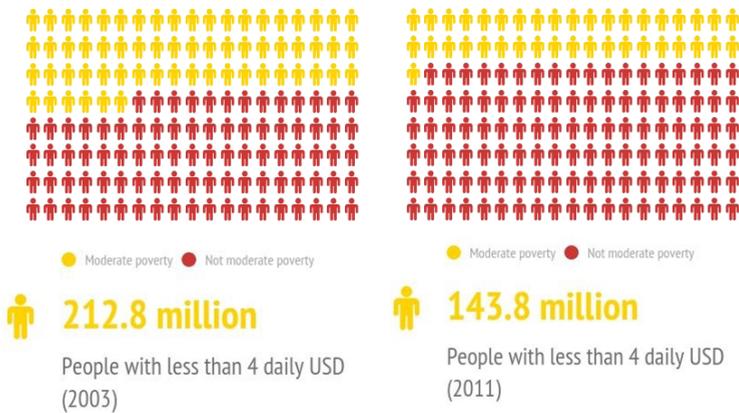
basic needs among their population, such as Haiti or Dominican Republic, the role remains that of recipient of aid.

⁵ Charts and infographics were designed using the software Infogr.am.

⁶ This term emphasizes the antinomy between what happened in the referred period as opposed to the developments of the economic recession that took place in the 1980's as a consequence of the so called «debt crisis».

personal expenses⁷. This percent decreased to 25.8 in 2011. By geographic area, advances in the reduction of poverty have been most significant in this historic cycle in Andean countries (where it decreased to 23.1%) and in countries located in the continental Southern Cone (19%). In comparison, Central American states report much more modest results, in spite of actual improvement (moderate poverty was reduced by only 5.9%). The infographic that follows is useful to visually identify the trends in the reduction of moderate poverty in Latin America during the mentioned period.

CHART 1
PERFORMANCE OF MODERATE POVERTY LEVELS
IN LATIN AMERICA (2003-2011)



Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of SEDLAC.

The SEDLAC reports that, in terms of absolute poverty, Latin America began the referred decade with very high values (24.8% of its population had an income below 2.5 US dollars in Purchasing Power Parity). Countries such as Paraguay (31%), Peru (30%), Colombia (30%) and Argentina (29%) presented values above said thresholds. The structural reforms carried out between 1985 and 2000, and their consequences in terms of labor flexibility, deregulation, free trade and focalization of social policies, were among the main reasons explaining these high percentages.

In the following years, the incidence of absolute poverty changed significantly in Latin America. The region cut extreme poverty by 12.2 percent,

⁷ Threshold values for moderate and extreme poverty are those used by SEDLAC and Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

reaching 12.6% in said indicator. This decreasing trend was displayed, too, by the countries before listed as especially affected by poverty at the beginning of the period. In 2002, Paraguay had managed to reduce absolute poverty to 14%. Peru, Colombia and Argentina reached values of 11%, 18% and 5%, respectively.

A worrying aspect of poverty in Latin America is that its incidence is higher in households with high levels of dependency. In the 2000's decade, advances were substantial in the reduction of child poverty as well. On average, in the 2000-2011 period, the incidence of child poverty decreased by 14% in Latin America: in 2000, 55.3% of the region's children were poor, while in 2011 it had lowered to 41.2%. However, looking at this last percentage, it is evident that child poverty still poses a serious challenge for the region: in 2013, 40.5 % of the total of Latin American children were poor (that is, 70.5 million children). The incidence of child poverty is higher in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru, where, on average, 72% of the children are not able to meet their basic needs. On the opposite, on average, in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay, it affects 19% of the children (ECLAC, 2013). Improvements in the field of poverty came along with positive changes in food security. According to FAO (2014), 61 million people suffered from hunger at the beginning of the past decade. In 2012, the amount had shrunk to 37 million. In spite of the reduction in the number of people lacking the sufficient means to adequately feed themselves, 6.1% of Latin Americans are still affected by hunger.

Among the factors explaining poverty and absolute poverty reduction in Latin America are those linked to macroeconomics (monetary stability, sustained growth, job creation, increase of the minimum wage), foreign trade (the increasing demand from China of commodities that are abundant in Latin America⁸), the expansion of social policies based on the conditional cash transfer model («Bolsa Familia», «Asignación Universal por Hijo», «Juntos», and so on) and expansionary monetary policies in the developed

⁸ Increasing demand caused a raise in the international prices of these commodities. Together with the increase of remittances from migrated workers, this factor accounted for strong economic growth of Latin America in the 2000's decade. Between 2003 and 2012 hydrocarbon (6.1% of GDP growth) and metals (5.6%) exporters were the group of Latin American countries that reported higher rates of growth (that is, on the one hand, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela; on the other, Chile, Peru and Surinam) (ECLAC, 2013). They were followed by exporters of agricultural and agro-industrial products (Central American countries excluding Panama, Uruguay, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Haiti), which, between 2003 and 2008, grew at an average annual rate of 4.9%. Argentina and Brazil also displayed very high GDP growth (between 2003 and 2008, 8.5 and 4.2%, respectively).

world (which favored the arrival of foreign investment in search of better profitability, which they found in the Latin American economy both in real and financial terms). The following chart displays the advances recorded by some countries in the field of absolute poverty reduction during the cited period.

CHART 2
COMPARED DECLINE, IN PERCENTAGE POINTS, IN THE LEVELS OF
EXTREME POVERTY (2002-2013)



Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of SEDLAC.

Naturally, many of the improvements recorded in the data describing both types of poverty have resulted from changes in the job market. In the last fifteen years, according to information systematized by the ECLAC and the ILO (2014), Latin America took a step forward in its fight against unemployment. At the starting point, the countries with the highest rates of unemployment were Venezuela (18%), Argentina (17.3%), Uruguay (16.9%), Colombia (16.6%) and Panama (15.9%). Experts claim that the factors explaining their respective situations do not coincide (Ball, De Roux and Hofstetter, 2013). In Argentina and Uruguay, the reason behind the high rates of unemployment is found in the systemic crisis that took place at the beginning of the century, which later led these countries to depart from neoliberalism in order to embrace back state intervention in the economy. In Venezuela, the high rates were linked to the oil industry strike sparked by Chávez's opposition. The Colombian situation stems from the legal uncertainty caused by the internal conflict. Meanwhile, Panamanian performance was related to the inflexible exchange rate and the capital flight during the previous period.

However, around the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, Latin America reversed its negative performance in this area. In spite of the fact that the decrease in the rate of unemployment has been more intense in

Gasparini, Cruces and Tornarolli (2009) explain that, in general, price changes benefited rural areas, causing the urban-rural income ratio to drop in most areas from the early 2000's and therefore contributing to equality.

some countries than in others, trends (except for Costa Rica and Mexico⁹) show an upturn in the ability of these economies to create jobs. During the first semester of the year 2014, the rates of unemployment had been cut considerably in the countries cited in the preceding paragraph: Venezuela (7.8%), Argentina (7.3%), Uruguay (7.1%), Colombia (10.7%) and Panama (5%). The change experienced in this economic indicator could be attributed mainly to the introduction of expansionary policies, both in monetary and fiscal terms. The next chart displays the advances recorded in these countries in the field of unemployment during the alluded period.

CHART 3
 COMPARED DECLINE, IN PERCENTAGE POINTS, IN THE LEVELS OF
 UNEMPLOYMENT (2003-2014)



Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of SEDLAC.

The situation is different as regards youth unemployment. Between 2003 and 2012, according to the ILO (2013), it declined by only 4.7 % (from 17.6% in 2003 to 12.9% in 2012). For those aged 15 to 25 in Latin America, employment is characterized by another ill particularly difficult to eradicate: informal labor rate, which is reported to represent around 55.7% of the working young. Still another problem in this field is related to the percentage of people belonging to the NEET («Not in Education, Employment or Training») group. The ILO (2013) informs that in Latin America 20 million young people are in this situation (that is, 19.8% of them)¹⁰.

⁹ The ECLAC and the ILO (2014) report that from 2003 to 2014 the unemployment rates of Costa Rica and Mexico increased by 2.7% and 1.3%, respectively.

¹⁰ The members of this group are not only unable to benefit from the positive effects of the market economy, as it may be expected, but they are also «alienated» from politics. As a consequence of the scarce opportunities offered by their environment, the levels of disaffection spike, clearly deteriorating the levels of the quality of democracy.

There is one field where advances were indeed meaningful: inequality. Having led inequality¹¹ rates in the world throughout history, Latin America has improved its performance in this indicator, too. Lustig, López and Ortiz (2011) inform that Latin America has gone down in the ranking, in values of the Gini index, from 0.518 at the beginning of the 2000's to 0.503 at the end of the same decade. This has been a general trend for Latin American economies. The countries that have contributed the most to the decline of the region's average value are Ecuador, Paraguay, El Salvador, Argentina and Peru. The fall would be even greater had not this coefficient raised in four countries: two of them, traditionally equalitarian (Costa Rica and Uruguay) and the other two with a tradition of sharp income differences between the rich and the poor (Guatemala and Nicaragua).

According to Lustig, López-Calva and Ortiz-Juárez (2011, 2013), in most Latin American countries both labor and non-labor income inequality have decreased in the 2000's decade. On the one hand, the decline in labor income inequality is linked to the fall in the premium to skilled labor. Returns to higher education (particularly in secondary and tertiary versus no education or incomplete schooling) have lowered due to the expansion of basic education, which has caused low-skilled workers to become scarcer, allowing them to demand higher salaries (Azevedo et al. 2013).

On the other hand, non-labor income inequality includes three types of sources: returns to capital (interests, profits and rents), private transfers (such as remittances) and public transfers. Returns to capital have not contributed to the reduction of non-labor income inequality. In fact, they appear to have had an unequalizing effect in most countries. On the opposite, both private transfers and public transfers have been equalizing factors. In regards of private transfers, Cornia (2013) reports that in Mexico and El Salvador, in the 2000's decade, remittances helped close the gap between rural and urban areas. In the field of public transfers, cash transfer programs have been a strong redistributive force in favor of the most unprivileged sectors of the population in the region.

The following chart shows the advances recorded in the countries that have improved the most in this field during the alluded period.

¹¹ Latin American presence in the podium of inequality has a long history. Among developing regions, Latin America has always recorded average Gini index values above 0.600 since 1980 (taking into account both of its components: between and within). The highest inequality was reported between 1996 and 2002, when it exceeded the 0.700 threshold. The region that is next in inequality, Sub-Saharan Africa, has never surpassed the 0.560 barrier between 1980 and this moment (Ravallion and Chen, 2012).

CHART 4
 COMPARED DECLINE, IN PERCENTAGE ANNUAL CHANGE, IN THE
 LEVELS OF INEQUALITY (GINI INDEX) (2000-2009)



Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of Lustig, López and Ortiz (2011).

Notwithstanding the optimistic scenario that has been described to this moment, the pending socioeconomic agenda is still significant in the region. The greatest issue lies in the fact that 80 million people are still in a situation of extreme poverty (World Bank, 2013). A no less serious problem is linked to the group called «strugglers» by the economic jargon (Birdsall, Lustig and Meyer, 2014). This term refers to individuals who, despite having left poverty behind, are still to reach middle class levels of income preventing them from being shaken by economic fluctuations and environmental disasters. It is expected that, in 2030, said group will be composed by a third of the region's total population (approximately 600 million people). Their vulnerability finds its roots in a poorly designed tax policy (they are required to pay more taxes than they should, given their income level and the level of the compensations they receive from the state) and in the exiguous quality of educational and health policies. Among other factors, the reason for the latter trait stems from the fact that the Latin American version of the welfare state is not universal (it has also been referred to as «truncated») (Milanovic and Muñoz de Bustillo, 2008; Biderbost, 2010). Access to its benefits is correlated to the individual's socioeconomic level. Membership to middle and upper class guarantees a fast track to public services, which are not available to less privileged groups.

Yet another obstacle lies, as Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) suggested, in the lack of an institutional design ensuring equal access to political and economic opportunities. At all their levels, states should adopt transparency policies, promote accountability mechanisms (horizontal, vertical and social), and incorporate evidence-based government strategies. The fact that criteria like these are nonexistent in government management causes the availability of public goods (education, health, justice, security) to be radically different depending on the sub region and social group. Naturally,

this lack of institutional incentives curtails the creation of wealth in equal conditions and it acts as a limiting/restraining factor for economic growth.

A REVIEW OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES¹²

The selection of a strategy to assess the impact of a public policy (whether it is, or not, linked to development aid) depends on the nature of the program, project or activity in question. Just as in the field of social research data collection and analysis methods are defined on the basis of the addressed reality, in order to identify the impact of policies, techniques must be chosen taking into account their characteristics (beneficiaries, geographical area, time scope, stakeholders, and so on) as well as the final aim of the information to be produced (among others, escalating the project, discontinuing it, recognizing differentiated effects depending on the group or choosing new population targets).

The main objective of impact assessment is to establish if the performed intervention (a development aid policy or program) has encouraged change in the life of the beneficiary in a particular field. In other words, the goal is to generate empirical evidence in order to make informed decisions on the examined policy. To apply such a procedure, it is important to fulfill a number of requirements¹³. Firstly, any impact assessment should be performed in two groups: one of them must have been exposed to the intervention and the other must not. By definition, these two groups have to be equal in all variables (in principle, sociodemographic, and, ideally, psychosocial) except in having or not been influenced by the «treatment» (the policy). Secondly, the impact assessment must include the participation of the different stakeholders involved in the policy (target audience, public officers, cooperation agents, and so on). Carrying out such an activity requires consistent commitment of economic and human resources. Thirdly, it is necessary to describe with extreme accuracy how the impact will be measured (scales, categories, indicators, indexes) and on whom it will be measured (unit of analysis).

¹² This section is presented using as a reference the document produced by J-Pal Europe (2011) at the request of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Union.

¹³ Logically, fulfillment of these requirements must be preceded by a mindful research of scientific literature by those in charge of the assessment, both of strategies used in the past in order to measure the impact of policies in the analyzed field (education, environmental issues, gender, and so on) and of the results obtained in each case.

In recent years, the options available for the impact assessment of public policies have expanded. Each option includes a set of assumptions which should be known beforehand in order to evaluate whether its application is appropriate, or not, in a specific social setting. The methods to measure the effects of the policies can be classified according to two variables that are directly proportional: complexity and reliability. When one of them increases, the other does, too. However, these variables are not the only ones considered when planning an impact assessment. A third variable is related to the cost (in terms of time and money) of executing the assessment. The greater the investment, the greater the complexity of the data produced and the greater the reliability of its results.

The strategies used more often in impact assessments are: (a) Use of experimental Group and Control Group, (b) Diachronic identification of the difference, (c) Statistical matching application, (d) Use of regression discontinuity and (e) Application of randomized experiments. The following paragraphs describe each of them in detail.

The process of building a strategy using an experimental group and a control group matches the idea of scientific investigation held by most people. In this case, the values of one (or more) of the variables are compared between two groups similar in sociodemographic and psychosocial terms, but differing in the reception of the stimulus or intervention (the policy). An example¹⁴ could be helpful to clarify how this mechanism works. An international organization is interested in empowering politically young women (aged 20 to 40) of a given ethnic group native of the Colombian Andes. Eventually, this group is expected to take part in politics through the devices that the national legislation anticipates for all citizens (popular initiative, filing complaints in public offices, presenting petitions and reports at advocacies, and so on). To this end, a 6-month program is executed in one of the towns inhabited by the members of this ethnic group, based on educational (workshops on civil competences) and counseling activities (establishing contact between representatives and political parties and social movements).

A year after the beginning of this program (that is, six months after its end), it is assessed in order to identify whether actual impact matches the expected impact. Through in-depth interviews and surveys, the behavior of the young natives who were able to benefit from the intervention is compared with the other group of women of the same ethnic and age group who live in a close-by town where the program is still to be executed. Among other

¹⁴ The same example (adapted to each case) will be used in the explanation of all the strategies of impact assessment. It is not an actual project. Its use serves only pedagogical purposes.

indicators, information on the number of times they have attended a state agency in order to require/demand a right or present a proposal/idea in the last six months is recorded. If the first group surpasses the second one in frequency of contact with public bodies (understood, in this example, as «political participation»), this difference can be attributed to the execution of the intervention. The mathematical form of this sort of impact assessment is:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Experimental Group Political Participation} - \text{Control Group Political Participation}$$

In order for an assessment of this kind to produce reliable results, the members of both groups to be compared should be as similar as possible. This is the essential assumption underlying this method. Two elements should be anticipated to avoid misinterpretations. On the one hand, if many of the women enrolled in the program are in the older end (aged 30 to 40), and therefore have a longer life experience, scientists could attribute to the program a transforming power which does not actually exist (as older age would contribute to political participation). This is an «observable feature». On the other hand, if, for whatever reason, women of the town where the intervention was executed were initially more politically empowered than their peers from the other town due to their communal history (path dependency¹⁵), and had this not been measured in advance, the results of the impact assessment would not be truthful. This is a «non-observable feature». In other words, when applying an impact assessment strategy of this kind it is essential to measure and act in advance on observable and non-observable features which could be distorting the explanatory power attributed to the executed intervention.

Impact assessment based on diachronic logic (also known as «Before-After logic»), is similar to the prior one except for a difference of temporal nature. In the previous case, scientists measure the variable that they wish to modify at the same time in both groups (the experimental and the control group). In this case, the control group is not simultaneous but prior to the experimental group. It can be either (a) a group of people with the same features as those who will experiment the intervention¹⁶ later on or (b) the

¹⁵ Path dependency (also called path dependence) is a theoretical-methodological perspective used in Social Science to explain present/later institutions or behaviors of a country or social group on the basis of present/previous records of the same subject.

¹⁶ The subtype of impact assessment in which «outcome variables» are measured in different groups and moments implies the repetition over time of an intervention, incorporating, however, a substantial change of some sort at the later moment. In

same group before experimenting it. In the example that has already been mentioned, a situation of the latter type would take place if the political participation of the young native women were measured before and after being subject to the stimulus (the educational and counseling program). Any change could be attributed to the intervention of the political empowerment program. This method lies on the following assumption: that events/processes modifying the outcome variable between the moments of measurement are nonexistent¹⁷. The mathematical form of this sort of impact assessment is:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Experimental Group Political Participation After Intervention} - \text{Experimental Group Political Participation Before Intervention}$$

A variation of subtype (a) of this method applying diachronic logic aims at finding difference in differences. It compares groups (two of them with specific features) and changes in time (in each of these groups as a consequence of the executed intervention). One of them is formed by people eligible for the program (young women of an ethnic group X), and the other one is formed by non-eligible people (young women of an ethnic group Y). Once the differences attributable to the intervention have been identified in each group, results are compared between groups. This method is useful because it neutralizes the influence of variables unrelated to the intervention that may influence the resulting impact¹⁸. The mathematical form of this sort of impact assessment is:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Political Participation Change Rate in the eligible group} - \text{Political Participation Change Rate in the non-eligible group}$$

the cited example, this would imply that the group of young native women on «year 1» was empowered through educational activities only. On the contrary, on «year 2», the group was empowered through both educational and counseling activities. Any difference in terms of impact in favor of the group which took part in the program on the second year would be attributable, applying this method, to having added a «counseling» element to the political empowerment program.

¹⁷ In the example, an event that could interfere in the levels of political participation of the native women is the holding of regional/national elections (preceded by the corresponding period of electoral campaign), which could cause empowerment unrelated to the performed intervention.

¹⁸ In the explained situation, an example of an unrelated variable, as we said before, would be an electoral campaign. The «political empowerment» effects of such an event have been scientifically proved (Hansen, 2008). Had a process of this kind taken place between «year 1» and «year 2», both the women of the ethnic group X and their equivalents of the ethnic group Y would appear to be empowered. However, any difference in the outcome variable in favor of group X could be explained on the basis of its exposure to the stimulus (the political empowerment program).

Impact assessment through statistical matching application is similar to «experimentation-control» logic. It is built on the assumption of working with two groups identical in all their sociodemographic and psychosocial features except for having or not been exposed to the intervention. In this case, the values of the outcome variable are not compared between groups but between pairs of twins. Each individual (young native woman) having received the stimulus is assigned another individual (young native woman) identical in all his or her features except for not having received such an influence. Then, *both* of their performances are compared in the variable to be acted upon (political participation). As mentioned in the case of the analysis using control and experimentation groups, at times the stimulus could be wrongly assigned transforming power if groups differ due to the existence of a non-observable variable (for instance, higher Personal Political Salience¹⁹ among the women participating in the program). This method of impact assessment demands more complex statistical tools. Its mathematical form is:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Political Participation of Experimental Twin} - \text{Political Participation of Control Twin}$$

Impact assessment through regression discontinuity techniques requires comparing the outcome variable between two groups with close (but different) values of a continuous variable (age, level of income, and so on). The difference in these values qualifies them, or not, to receive the stimulus (education and counseling for political empowerment). In the examined case, for instance, the levels of political participation of young native women aged 19 years and 11 months (who did not take part in the program) would be compared with those of women of 20 years and 1 month of age (who did take part in it). Logically, all these women would have to be members of the same ethnic group and inhabit the same town. No individual outside of the small subgroups mentioned qualifies to be incorporated to the process of measuring the effects of the program. The assumption of this case suggests that the levels of political participation of both groups would not differ was it not for the fact that one group was subject to the intervention and the other was not.

This technique has been criticized for two reasons. On the one hand, it makes impossible to visualize, when assessing a program, if there are

¹⁹ This concept refers to the capacity of individuals to link political events to personal meanings. Individuals with political salience pay more attention to politics, and therefore are more able to incorporate effectively civic information (Biderbost, 2014).

specific traits in other subgroups (be they the ones related to the variable used in order to determine the breaking point or other factors: educational credentials, income level²⁰, and so on). On the other hand, although this is not too evident in this example, these assessments are linked to policies in which the existence of a breaking point is usually an incentive for people to «escape» the same by manipulating the values with the aim of being considered «eligible» as beneficiaries. The mathematical form of this sort of impact assessment is:

Impact=Political Participation of Group above the breaking point-Political Participation of Group below the breaking point

In order to carry out an impact assessment through randomized experiments, it is necessary to create, as its name suggests, an experimental group and a control group where randomization has an essential role. Individuals are assigned one group or the other on the basis of a random process. This ensures that, in both groups, individuals will be the same in terms of observable and non-observable features. As a matter of fact, this is the only method guaranteeing that the only difference between both groups is exposure to the stimulus. In the example, all young women (aged 20 to 40) of the ethnic group X in their town would be assigned one group or the other by lottery in order to ensure full compatibility between the two groups. One advantage of this technique is that it allows us to identify the existence of variations between the different population subgroups (women aged 30 to 40, women with less than two children, women who completed primary school, and so on), indicating where efforts should focus when trying to escalate the programs or to replicate them in other spaces. The mathematical form of this sort of impact assessment is:

Impact=Political Participation of Group winning the lottery-Political Participation of Group not winning the lottery

The following table summarizes the main features of existing techniques for the impact assessment of public policies (including those related to development aid). It addresses two issues: (a) how each method relates to complexity, reliability and cost variables and (b) the means used by each tool in order to form experimentation and control groups.

²⁰ In this example, there would be no observable differences in other eventually relevant variables such as the number of children, life experience outside the community, level of political attention (consumption of political news), among others.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF TECHNIQUES FOR THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC POLICIES

LOWER	COMPLEXITY RELIABILITY COST		
Types of impact assessment	Use of experimental Group and Control Group	Traditional non-random assignation of individuals for exposure to the stimulus	Formation of the Control Group and the Experimental Group
	Diachronic identification of the difference	Use of the time variable in order to determine the influence of the stimulus	
	Statistical matching	Creation of comparable pairs of twins between individuals exposed to the stimulus and individuals not exposed to it	
	Regression discontinuity	Assignation according to the breaking point in a continuous variable	
	Randomized experiments	Random assignation of individuals in order to achieve equality of the groups in terms of both observable and non-observable features	
	COMPLEXITY RELIABILITY COST		HIGHER

Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of J-Pal Europe (2011).

THE USE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN THE DETECTION OF GOOD PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT AID IN (AND FROM) LATIN AMERICA

As stated in the introduction, impact assessment of public policies is not a common practice in Latin America. However, in recent years, its use has increased in conjunction with the introduction of new management techniques in the government sector. In the specific field of development aid, this

tool has been successfully applied in Latin America in order to measure the transforming power of diverse programs in different areas (employment, health, food security, and so on) with a view to an eventual escalation of these programs. This section describes three programs fulfilling the next three essential conditions: (a) they respond to pressing social issues in the region, (b) they were born with a specific temporal, geographical and sociological scope and (c) they have included some sort of impact assessment.

The first is «CERTIJOVEN». This program was implemented by Peru's Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion with the goal of producing innovative tools to fight one of the most critical social problems in the region: youth unemployment. It was financed by the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F)²¹, created with the support of the Spanish government and the United Nations. It also received technical and economic support from the ILO.

CERTIJOVEN consisted essentially in providing young people (aged 15 to 29) with scarce financial resources living in urban areas a certificate which included information on three areas that potential employers must be informed of during staff selection processes: identity, formal work experience and criminal records. The Unitary Labor Certification represented an advance in multiple senses. Firstly, it incorporated in a single instrument the information previously reported in three different instruments. Secondly, it was issued in a one-stop shop specialized in the issue, with ad hoc personnel (employment consultants) in charge of its issuance. Thirdly, the lapse of time between its request and its delivery was always shorter than 20 minutes (as opposed to the 10 days required before in order to obtain identical data). Fourthly, it was free of charge (up until then, young people had to pay a fee for each single document).

The beneficiaries were young people in the referred age group residing in districts with high levels of poverty who applied for a formal job for the first time. Young disabled people, single mothers and household employees were also given priority to access the certificate. The program was performed in the departments of Arequipa (South of Peru), Junín (Center), Lima (Center) and La Libertad (North). It was implemented with a promotional campaign featuring a significant audiovisual component that promoted the benefits of accessing the program. The following image displays one of the posters advertising application to the program.

²¹ This fund supported programs creating employment opportunities at the local level, and, at the same time, it enhanced the positive possibilities of migration (in turn mitigating the negative ones). It existed between 2007 and 2013. In 2014, it was replaced with the Sustainable Development Fund (SDG Fund).

POSTER 1
PROMOTIONAL POSTER FOR CERTIJOVEN



Source: International Labor Organization (Lima, Peru headquarters).

According to ILO, United Nations Population Fund, IOM, UNDP (2012), the impact assessment of this policy found that its application improved the employability of young people by 53-58%. In order to obtain this information, an Experimental Group (beneficiaries of employment services counseling who had received CERTIJOVEN) was compared with a Control Group (beneficiaries of employment services counseling who had not received CERTIJOVEN). Two months after the issuance of the document, the first group displayed 83% of employability, while the second group showed 25-30% only. The following chart systematizes these findings.

TABLE 2
IMPACT COMPARISON. EXPERIMENTAL GROUP-CONTROL GROUP

Type of Group	Experimental	Control
Counseling by employment services		
Reception of CERTIJOVEN		X
Employability	83%	25-30%

Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of ILO et al. (2012).

Even though part of the difference could be caused by non-observable features (such as the different levels of involvement of public officers when assisting young people or the execution of the program in districts which, however poor, are part of cities with relatively higher possibilities of finding a job), CERTIJOVEN proved to be an innovative, valuable and replicable instrument. In a region where, despite the economic advances of the last decade, youth unemployment is still a pending issue, creative, simple and non-expensive solutions like CERTIJOVEN could lead change towards greater social cohesion. Moreover, apart from increased employability, other benefits, at the user level, were reductions in the cost and waiting period for issuance; at the employer level, simpler procedures and higher trust in the received documents; and at the state level, more efficient management of resources, improved public service and the incorporation of new technologies.

The second program is part of the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) family. Such programs consist of the State handing a sum of money to vulnerable groups with the condition of fulfilling specific obligations, essentially in education (schooling of minors) and health (periodic health controls). They have been performed innovatively and successfully in Latin America with the purpose of fighting another one of the region's pressing issues: *food insecurity*. «Bolsa Familia» in Brazil, «Juntos» in Peru, «Oportunidades» in Mexico and «Asignación Universal por Hijo» in Argentina are some of the initiatives implemented with this goal.

Probably, the most widely recognized program in this field, due to its role as one of the catalysts of the emergence from poverty of 40 million people, is «Bolsa Familia». Since its inception in 1995²², it has been managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger. Not only

²² This date of creation assumes «Bolsa Escola» as the precedent of present day «Bolsa Familia».

developing countries, but also developed countries, have tried to replicate its results²³ (Delclaux, 2015). This initiative has therefore become a typical «Made in Latin America» export in present day South-South Cooperation.²⁴

In this context of social knowhow transfer from Latin America, Brazil has contributed with technical means to the reproduction of its leading social program in Ghana since 2007. In the African country the initiative goes by the name of Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) and it is still in pilot phase. It is executed with the economic and logistical support of a partnership formed by Europe Aid, UK Aid, FAO, UNICEF, PtoP and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Ghana. It has an annual budget of 20 million dollars. Its beneficiaries, which amounted to 70 thousand in the first stage, have been orphans, seniors and disabled people. VIH patients and self-employed workers of the rural informal sector (farmers and fishermen) are expected to become beneficiaries, too. Every month, they were handed between 8 and 15 dollars. Two types of conditions have been required from beneficiaries of the Ghanaian version of the program. On the one hand, there are those related to the presence of minors in the recipient family: schooling, health care and commitment to not requiring from them the performance of labor activities. On the other hand, there are those conditions linked to enrollment in systems involving a qualitative leap in the «civic quality» of the recipient family: Social Security registration and inscription in the Civil Registry of all its members.

The preliminary impact assessment of this program was carried out by a consortium formed by the University of North Carolina, the University of Ghana and FAO. They applied statistical matching (Handa et al., 2013), by using a technique called longitudinal propensity score matching (PSM) design. Baseline data were collected from future beneficiaries already participating in a more extensive sample of households surveyed for ISSER (the Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana-Legon) and the University of Yale. A total of 699 of these households formed the Comparison Group, which was interviewed in the first quarter of 2010. The data from these interviews was contrasted with those collected 24 months later from the 699 households forming the Treatment

²³ During Michael Bloomberg's term as mayor of New York, the program Opportunity NYC was implemented with the purpose of promoting social inclusion in vulnerable groups.

²⁴ When discussing development aid in relation to Latin America, the region should no longer be regarded merely as a recipient but also as a donor in technical and economic terms. Owing to its double condition, it has been considered appropriate to include in this article this good practice in conditioned cash transfer.

Group, which had already benefited from LEAP. The comparison of twins (one from the Comparison Group and one from the Treatment Group) led them to discover that the first were ahead the second in variables linked to health (enrollment in the national health system, preventive care, food security), schooling (absenteeism in primary school, enrollment and grade retention in secondary school), household economy (savings, ability to pay debts, self-employment, investment in seeds), emotional health (happiness, self-esteem, aspirations in life), and social capital (network creation). The chart that follows systematizes these findings.

TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF IMPACTS IN SOME DIMENSIONS.
STATISTICAL MATCHING

Analyzed field	Positive results
<i>Healthcare</i> Enrollment in the National Health Insurance Scheme Preventive care	90% of the recipients In girls aged 0-5 years
<i>Schooling</i> Absenteeism in Primary School Enrollment in Secondary School	Decreased by 10% Increased by 7%
<i>Household economy</i> Savings Ability to pay debts Self-employment Investment in seeds	Increased by 11% Higher in female-headed households Higher in households with up to four members Higher in households with up to four members
<i>Emotional health</i> Happiness	Higher in female-headed households and in households with a reduced number of members
<i>Social capital</i> Creation of networks	Higher value of presents received and of credits granted to close people

Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of Handa et al. (2013).

Other potential positive impacts on local economy include the transference of economic benefits to households not benefiting from LEAP due to the increased purchase of goods. However, not all the results of the impact assessment of this Ghanaian social policy inspired in «Bolsa Familia» are positive. Experts have found that, despite the high level of enrollment in the National Health Insurance Scheme, the use of its services has not increased substantially. It has not promoted the reduction of medical expenses in the private health sector, either. Another pending issue for LEAP is related to the fact that, owing to both the reduction of the monthly amounts initially planned and to the irregularities in the release of funds (non-payments were recorded in at least 4 months, being «recovered» later in a single transfer for a higher amount), beneficiaries have not been able to increase significantly their consumption capacity.

The third program regarded as good practice which has included an impact assessment was developed in Nicaragua with the support of USAid in 2006 (Hatt et al. 2009). It aimed at promoting access to quality healthcare benefits for informal self-employed workers. In Nicaragua, at the beginning of the initiative, access to social security was rather limited: only 18.5% of its population profited from it. Nicaraguan Social Security had not been designed to provide a formal way of registration for self-employed workers (1.2 million people). Therefore, at the event of poor health, people were faced with trade-offs between investing in food or in healthcare (private health services and drugs).

In order to overcome this situation, the government designed a program which added microcredit institutions to the usual channels of enrollment in social security. The reason for this is that they presumed that potential beneficiaries already had pre-established a link with these organizations, given that they usually turn to them when they need to obtain loans refused by the formal banking system.

The initiative was organized with the idea of making the assessment of different circumstances possible, in order to observe their influence in terms of promoting income and the permanence of subjects in this sector²⁵ of public healthcare. Experts also identified the variables influencing the kind and level of medical/healthcare spending in the private sector of the subjects par-

²⁵ In Nicaragua, public healthcare has a dual nature: there are benefits linked to the non-contributory scheme (those accessible to beneficiaries of the program before their enrollment) and benefits linked to the contributory scheme. The latter includes social security (accessible to subjects benefiting from the described program) and ministerial microsystems for those working or having worked in specific government agencies: Ministries of Defense, Education and Government).

ticipating in the program once they had been able to access their benefits. To this end, they considered factors related to the level of information on the new service provided to the target audience, the amount of money received as subsidy and the type of entity through which the benefit was accessed.

The impact assessment of this program was performed using randomized experiments. To this end, different groups including multiple categories of the factors cited in the preceding paragraph were randomly formed (subjects who had received information on the existence of the program versus subjects who had not; subjects who received subsidies consisting of different amounts of money in order to access the benefits versus subjects who did not receive subsidies; subjects who signed up for the program through traditional channels (public offices) versus subjects enrolled via non-traditional channels (microbanks and the street market)). All the individuals subjected to the study displayed similar social and healthcare traits in order to control (stabilize) other variables that may influence their performance.

The findings of this assessment provided interesting clues to be considered when replicating similar experiences in the future. Firstly, some trends were found in relation to the causes of enrollment in the system. Affiliation was higher among those individuals who, on the one hand, were able to enroll in the system in their workplace, and, on the other, had to pay less to access healthcare benefits (that is, those receiving a higher subsidy). Besides, there were more registrations among individuals who were offered the chance to register at a public office than among those who were offered to do so through a microbank. Potential beneficiaries regarded the latter as a bureaucratic obstacle in the process of incorporation to the system. Access through it was only significant among regular customers.

Secondly, some trends were found in relation to the behavior of individuals benefiting from the system. Members stopped consuming both healthcare services offered by the State outside of social security and benefits provided by the private sector. In spite of having access to a wide range of benefits at low cost, enrolled individuals did not raise their level of healthcare consumption in comparison to the previous period, when they didn't have access to it. They did not increase consultations related to reproductive health, either. Another conclusion was that registration with social security promoted savings because it suppressed expenses previously existing due to medical needs. Its main impact on the consumption of medical services, therefore, was causing users to switch from public and private for-benefit providers to INSS-contracted providers, rather than encouraging an increase in the use of healthcare services.

Thirdly, some trends were observed in terms of permanence in the system of the subjects once their subsidies had expired. The ratio amounted to only 10% of the enrolled individuals receiving a subsidy. Permanence was higher among those with chronic diseases, for whom an alternative like the one referred (public social security at a reduced cost) is always substantially advantageous in comparison to the expenses of healthcare services in the private sector. As was the case with affiliation, permanence in the system was not linked to having accessed it through microcredit institutions. On the contrary, it was higher among those who enrolled at a public office. The next chart systematizes these findings.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF IMPACTS. RANDOMIZED EXPERIMENTS

STATUS: enrolling at the system
Importance of accessing in the workplace (markets) and in public offices
Non-importance of accessing through microcredit institutions
Importance of receiving subsidies
STATUS: affiliated to the system
Departure from healthcare consumption outside social security
Savings due to extinction of previous healthcare spending in the private sector
Non-increment in overall consumption of healthcare benefits
Non-increment in consumption of benefits related to reproductive health
STATUS: permanence in the system
Insufficient (only 10% of its members)
Higher among those with chronic disease
Higher among those having accessed the system through a public office

Source: own elaboration (2015) on the basis of Hatt et al. (2009).

This project constituted a limited but commendable multilateral effort (from the national public sector, development aid, the third sector and the private sector) to advance in the process of dismantling the so-called «truncated» welfare state. In other words, it aimed at bringing to disadvantaged groups benefits that are usually available only to members of the most privileged social classes. On the basis of this idea, some observations can be made:

- a) As the authors of the report on the impact assessment state, projects involving short time spans (for example, with regard to subsidies) are not enough to guarantee long-term inclusion of individuals from the poorest sectors (Hatt et al. 2009).
- b) The inclusion of partners such as microbanks was not successful. Not only did it not favor the goal of the program, but it was an obstacle for it. Most probably, there were failures in the design or in the planning of their role. Perhaps, a better role for them would have been to only inform about the existence of the program and its subsidies.
- c) The design of mechanisms of this type is rather usual in Latin America. Legal concepts such as «monotributo»²⁶ (in Argentina) and the regularization of undocumented immigrants (in Argentina, Chile or Costa Rica) are similar. They all aim at providing a low cost way of registering in social security to social groups with pressing circumstances (the new poor after neoliberal reforms in the case of «monotributo» and irregular foreigners in the case of amnesties). Such methods are truly win-win: on the one hand, the state increases tax income, and, on the other, individuals are able to access benefits that they could hardly profit from on the basis of their consumption capacity.

CONCLUSIONS

There's no doubt that since the beginning of the century, Latin America's economic performance has been positive. National economies have grown steadily (except for Venezuela and Haiti). Social rights and policies have been promoted by right-wing and left-wing governments alike. Old concerns about the achievement of democratic consolidation have given way to the development of strategies aiming at raising the quality of democracy at the national, provincial/state and local levels. Three Latin American countries are part of the G20, the new «club» in charge of global governance. This virtuous combination has favored the attainment of a significant number of Millennium Development Goals, and it has also promoted a new role for

²⁶ This legal form is equal to the figure of the «self-employed worker», but at a lower cost. Thanks to it, by paying a reduced amount of money every month, the self-employed worker is able to contribute for his future pension, benefit from medical care and pay the personal income tax.

Latin America in the field of development aid: that of leading actor in Triangular Cooperation and in South-South Cooperation.

However, there is still much to do. In the economic field, the region must take steps to leave behind a structure very linked to the commodities lottery, which makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in the prices of commodities on which it has very little influence. Diversification and value-added processes are to be put in practice in order to revert this situation.

In the social arena, Latin American countries have to advance toward the design of state policies not influenced by electoral ups and downs. Permanence of the «rules of the game» would cause more predictability not only in the system, but also in household economies. In its speeches, the establishment has stated (with nuances) that inequality is an obstacle for sustained growth, but this is not enough. In order to fight against poverty and inequality in a serious and sustainable manner, it is necessary to include quality standards in public policies and to open the door of state benefits to more citizens.

In the area of politics, government institutions should increase their legitimacy and efficiency. To achieve the former, representative democracy has to be provided with participatory mechanisms. Experiences like participatory budgeting in Brazil should set the tone in this field. Sensible use of new technologies, combined with actions aimed at decreasing the digital divide at the intrasocial and intraregional levels, should be on the agenda. Change must happen in the context of articulating interests with other actors (private and non-governmental). With regard to the later, the impact assessment experiences described in these pages prove that this is not an unrealistic demand. Criteria such as meritocracy or making citizens the center of the actions of public officers are still far from being widely known (and even farther from being common practice). In most districts, government decisions are not made on the basis of evidence, which causes Latin America to lose money and to lag behind other regions of the world.

In Latin America, development aid should follow the steps set by the challenges described in this article. Specifically, its support will be essential in the unconditional transfer of knowhow to the region. Besides, traditional donor countries will find in the new donor countries of the region the perfect partner in several aspects. On the one hand, the resources of new Latin American donors may compensate for the loss of priority of aid policies in the budgets of developed countries. On the other hand, the recent experience of economic development in these countries makes it possible to design, in the most impoverished areas of Latin America, interventions with methodologies that are both empathetic and respectful of the interests

of its beneficiaries. In this line, the three experiences reviewed in this article (CERTIJOVEN in Peru, LEAP in Ghana and the USAid healthcare program in Nicaragua) illustrate that impact assessment techniques are key when analyzing the consequences of development aid in the lives of citizens in terms of consumption and savings, employability, health and schooling, among others. When a program doesn't meet its initial goals, impact assessment provides a way to identify potential inconsistencies in order to revisit the program and take new measures in light of its findings. Eventually, all the actors linked to development aid will benefit from the new outlook provided by innovative techniques such as impact assessment, as it involves attaining greater depth and symmetry in the flow of knowledge and awareness.

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