

WELL-DESERVED THANKS AND SOME REFLECTIONS THE ROUND TABLE FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY (MCLCP*)

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Round Table for the Fight
against Poverty

It is fourteen years since Supreme Decree DS 001-2001-PROMUDEH was passed. It established a formal agreement between the Peruvian state (represented by the transition government of President Valentín Paniagua) and a variety of Peruvian civil society organizations to build a forum, whose aim was to help both the government and the country safeguard the neutrality of social spending during the 2001 elections, and to contribute to lay the foundations for a long-term public policy for tackling poverty.

Father Gastón Garatea Yori took on the task of approaching the organizations to enquire whether they were willing to take part in such a forum, before taking on its chairmanship. He was followed by Javier Abugattás Fatule, who as Deputy Minister represented the Ministry of Finance on the Round Table's first Executive Committee, and who always played a very important part in building a smoother relationship between the state and civil society.

Throughout these years and across all the regions of the country, many people from the most varied of backgrounds have contributed to the work of the round table and helped to achieve its vision of a life with dignity for all Peruvian women and men at all times and in all places. As we express our gratitude to Gastón and Javier, we wish both to thank and acknowledge all of those who, past and present, have worked with us in this effort to build a Peru free from poverty through dialogue and consensus.

MCLCP for the Spanish 'Mesa de Concertación para la Lucha Contra La Pobreza'. The term 'concertación' carries the meaning of a 'concerted effort', which is not clearly conveyed in the translation 'round table'.

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

An anniversary is a chance to look back to original convictions and initial challenges, and the main mile-stones along the way, to re-think the tasks we have ahead of us as government and community organizations and the role of the round table in these new times; especially now that the new local and regional government representatives are to be appointed to the round tables across the country.

1.- Original challenges and convictions

It is well known that at the beginning of the millennium Peruvian society suffered a profound crisis which touched every aspect of the country's life. Some of the most serious challenges civil society and government had to face in late 2000 and early 2001 undoubtedly include: the need to address poverty in all its magnitude, the deep gaps and inequalities that have characterized Peru's history, the long-established practice of trafficking with people's needs through political patronage using public funds and indeed, the very fact that in Peruvian culture this practice was considered legitimate.

The creation of the round table and the interest in participation in it arose from the deep conviction that this situation had to be changed and that doing so involved assuming an ethical perspective with a rights approach, based on the recognition and affirmation of the principle that all human beings are equal in dignity. From such a perspective, poverty and exclusion become a constant call to action.

It also involves a further conviction: that both government and community must work together, including economic and political bodies, for progress to be made. And for this to be possible, it needed to be done through dialogue and consensus, rather than confrontation and imposition. It was a bid for democracy, civic participation and decentralization.

It is worth mentioning that these convictions are in accordance with those declared in successive international commitments established by the United Nations and ratified by Peru.



“The round table provided a forum for the process of building trust between the state and civil society and for strengthening transparency in public administration”

2.- Itinerary

In the history of the round table, the first achievements of the process of dialogue and consensus were as follows:

- The National Round Table was set up and the “Social Charter” approved (2001). This reflects the view of human development placing the human person at the center, as the focal point for joint work between state and civil society.
- The round table was organized as a national, decentralized system of dialogue and consensus-building, through the installation of first regional and subsequently provincial and district branches, in advance of the decentralization process. The regional and local round tables were established and set about their very first task which was to formulate the draft versions of “concerted development plans” for their jurisdictions and carrying these out through “participatory budget pilot operations”. These tools were included and formalized in the amendment to the 1993 Constitution which was approved in 2002, and in the legislation for decentralization contained in the latter.
- The round table provided a forum for the process of building trust between the state and civil society and for strengthening transparency in public administration. One of the earliest results was (and remains) access to the SIAF through the “customer-friendly enquiry system” (2002 onwards), which was agreed and validated by the round table.

- Another major mile-stone was the support and accompaniment the round table gave to the formulation of the “governance agreements”. It was the first time this had been done, and it was a joint effort with national scope during the 2002 regional and municipal elections and has been repeated since then in the elections in 2006, 2010, 2011 and most recently in 2014. These agreements are based on the concerted development plans, the state policy of the national agreement, and the priority activities for children, strategic budget programs, risk management and the promotion of civic participation, transparency and accountability.
- Using an approach based on rights, the round table has been particularly concerned with the *efficiency* of state action to guarantee public access to the goods and services necessary to ensure these, and with the way in which state action contributes to social *equality*, and that Peruvian women and men take part in the process. This has meant making the link between rights, plans and budgets, and safeguarding the conditions in which public funds are disbursed and services provided.
- The round table supported and/or promoted several civic campaigns to encourage people to take part in democratic and decentralized administration (“Get organized, participate and decide”), campaigns supporting the victims of violence (“Walk for Peace” and the *Quipu* of Remembrance), older adults (Non-contributory Pension), and priority for causes concerning children (“Girls and boys first in the national budget”, “A million friends”, “Good Treatment”, “Vote for Children”).



“Walk for Peace” and the *Quipu* of Remembrance), older adults (Non-contributory Pension), and priority for causes concerning children (“Girls and boys first in the national budget”, “A million friends”, “Good Treatment”, “Vote for Children”). This last campaign in 2014 delivered 702,000 signatures collected during the Good Treatment campaign to

the National Elections Board, and announced its acknowledgement of people and entities from all over the country engaged in the protection of citizens’ rights.

- The round table has promoted the increase in public funds for guaranteeing universal rights by addressing “priority activities” for children and the use of “spending classification” to make visible and protect public spending on children

(2005-2006). This opened the way to budget programs and results-based management (2007 onwards) and at the same time to a variety of initiatives for improving the quality of public information regarding both expenditure and the measurement of people's standard of living.

- The round table consolidated mechanisms like “concerted monitoring” through which both state and civil society –united by common objectives for protecting key rights – monitor public policies in areas such as maternal and newborn health, the fight against stunting and anemia and better learning; and the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (PNAIA) 2012-2021.
- The round table has produced a number of alerts, proposals and recommendations for improving state action at national, regional and local level, to guarantee people's rights and avoid the misuse of public funds.
- The round table has supported and facilitated citizens' watch activities.

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3.- Old and new challenges

Times have changed worldwide and in Peru, setting a new scene for tackling old and new challenges.

The economic situation

Peru's economy is greatly influenced by the international situation. This is major constraint to the achievement of the objectives agreed within the round table. Everything points to the fact that the world is moving into a cycle of an economic slowdown and faces the risk of a severe recession, according to the most pessimistic analysts. The IMF recently lowered its October 2014 forecast for world economic growth despite expectations for more growth in the United States and the fall in the price of oil. Foreign economic deceleration has political repercussions.

Several countries are seeing civil unrest, feeding the climate of uncertainty and instability.

One of the most negative effects of an international slowdown on Peru is the fall in the price of its raw materials exports. This is already happening, although prices are still above the average for the last ten years. This is partly offset by the fact that Peru is a net importer of oil, as the price for oil has fallen sharply on the international markets.

The changes in the international context have been noticed by the economic operators, and private investment has fallen since 2013. Peru's economy clearly slowed throughout 2014, more than the economic authorities expected; and public investment has not managed to offset this, less still as 2014 was an election year and a number of government officials were brought before the courts, accused of corruption.

The poverty gap

This context undoubtedly affects the chances of tackling poverty, be it monetary, Basic Unmet Needs, hunger (chronic infant malnutrition, anemia) or other deprivations, which – like it or not - still affect much of the population of Peru, despite the progress made in various regions and towns since 2000 to date.

These are objective gaps which have not yet been closed in the country. Some are old, such as those found in gender, children and rural populations, especially in the Amazon, and those with people with disabilities. Other gaps are new or emerging, as a result of changes: life expectancy for example, which leads to an increasing older population.

The expectation gap in poverty and wellbeing

Besides the objective gaps associated with unmet needs or rights to access and quality that are not guaranteed by state services, it is also important to take into account the “expectations gaps”.

The survey (ENAH0) used to measure monetary poverty, UBN poverty, the calorie deficit evident in households, inequality (of income and spending between households) and the working conditions of various sectors of the community, also measures people's own perception of their poverty.

The results of the survey are crushing: nine out of ten people interviewed saw themselves as poor. This is beyond the five of every ten Peruvians living in households suffering from monetary poverty, UBN and/or evident calorie deficits. These findings speak of a very severe “expectations gap”.

We have to see that a growing separation between expectations for wellbeing and the reality experienced can lead to a climate of frustration, which at the same time is a potential factor for mental depression and social upheaval, which can take the most varied forms of violence and aggressiveness.

Charting the course: from commitment to action

In 2015 Peru set out on a journey, which at regional and local level involves moving on from assuming the commitments of the recent elections to taking action for improving the standard of living of all Peruvians in the diverse local and regional contexts in which they lead their daily lives.

For the organization of the round table as a forum for dialogue and consensus-building, the task for the first three months of the year is to install the Regional Executive Committees with the active participation of the new authorities and the community organizations that are already taking part, and the necessary task of finding new allies and partners. This must be followed by the conformation of the local round tables.

The work agenda must include the development of tools to formalize and put into practice the commitments assumed in the governance agreements and to organize the working parties required, for drafting proposals and monitoring the priority social, economic, environment and/or institutional issues where they want to see progress.

At the same time there are national commitments which must not be neglected: the Good Start school year campaign and the Qali Warma citizens’ watch; the work on stunting and especially on anemia, which has increased in many areas of the country. One of the issues to address here is access to safe water and the use of multi-micronutrient supplements.

With regard to sustainability, the round table must review the commitments made for economic development, especially in rural areas, and risk management in a context of climate change. This should be relevant to the profile of the regions and within them, with their diversity and local characteristics.

We hope to accompany the regional and local process with several capacity-building activities for the people and organizations on the round table, to strengthen its synergy as a national and decentralized system for dialogue and consensus-building. By bringing to the national public agenda the key issues in line with the round table's work since it was constituted in 2001, we will be able to build a country with justice, where people live with dignity.

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