

Chapter I

The scope of social cohesion

Given the need to dispel the ambiguity that frequently surrounds the term “social cohesion”, this chapter will set out the definition of the term as used by ECLAC. The relationship between the obstacles hindering its achievement and certain significant features of the current stage of Latin American and Caribbean development will then be briefly examined. The chapter will close with some reflections on the issue from the perspective of citizen rights.

A. What is social cohesion?

1. Preliminary considerations

By virtue of its many connotations, the idea of social cohesion is difficult to encapsulate in a single definition. It tends to evoke a yearning for community in the face of globalization and profound transformations, which many people associate with increased social fragmentation and a loss of stable relationships. Critical reflection defines it in opposition to the corrosion of State legitimacy and governance, the widening of social gaps, the emergence of self-referential identities, excessive economic rationalization, the similarly excessive trend towards individualization and the weakening of the public sphere. The list of definitions is long, and the ideas it conjures up range from the nostalgic (the “lost community”) to the propositional (“what to do?”). In the latter case, the idea of social cohesion is invoked in an effort to maximize the symbolic richness of multiculturalism, the promise of the information society and the diffusion of democratic ideals in order to develop systems capable of creating new mechanisms of social inclusion and citizen participation.

The concept of social cohesion also tends to be absorbed by others of proximate genus, such as equity, social inclusion and well-being. This is the case with the agenda of the European Union, whose agreements on social cohesion are basically a broad set of policies and indicators aimed at reducing the income gap and providing greater access to employment, education and health care.¹ Consequently, there is no clear definition of the concept – probably because the very tradition of social citizenship that characterizes European societies assumes that social rights entail an intrinsic relationship between social inclusion and the provision of mechanisms to integrate individuals and give them a sense of full membership in society.² According to this view, social cohesion implies a causal link between the mechanisms that provide integration and well-being, on the one hand, and a full individual sense of belonging to society, on the other. Inclusion and belonging, or equality and belonging, are the cornerstones of the idea of social cohesion in societies organized around the principles of the welfare State.

Definitions from the natural sciences provide other perspectives. Physics furnishes us with a simple definition based on the combination of three variables that link the elements of a set: the distance between the elements, the level of integration between them and the whole, and the force that binds them together. If this definition is applied to human society, bearing in mind both the differences and the similarities between the two fields, cohesion may be defined as the combined effect of the magnitude of gaps in well-being between individuals and between groups, the mechanisms that bind individuals and groups to the social dynamic and the sense of membership and belonging to society felt by such individuals and groups.

From a sociological standpoint, social cohesion may be defined as the level of agreement reached by the members of a social group regarding their sense of belonging to a common endeavour or situation. This definition emphasizes perceptions rather than mechanisms.³ In this field, the best-known, most fertile classical contribution is that of Emile Durkheim,⁴ who argued that the simpler the division of labour in a society is, the stronger the bond between individuals and the social group will be. This bond is a result of mechanical solidarity, which arises from segmented similarities based on territory, traditions and group customs. The social division of labour that modernity brings with it erodes and weakens such bonds, as does the increased

1 For more information on Laeken indicators, see chapter II.

2 Recent changes resulting from restrictions emanating from the welfare State, as well as the situation of many immigrants, now cast some doubt on this relationship.

3 Definition cited in Spanish-language version of Wikipedia [online] http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohesi%C3%B3n_social.

4 Durkheim's position is reproduced here on the basis of Robert Alun Jones (1986) and Durkheim's 1893 work *Division of Labour in Society*, cited by Jones.

autonomy of individuals in modern society. In such a context, cohesion is part of the social solidarity that is required in order for the members of a society to remain bound to it with a force comparable to that of pre-modern, mechanical solidarity. This requires stronger, more numerous ties, and must even include bonds based on common ideas and feelings, leading to what Durkheim calls “organic solidarity”.⁵ These ties create individual obligations, exert functional pressures that temper selfishness and enable individuals to acknowledge their dependence on society.

Far from fading, Durkheim’s misgivings regarding social cohesion in the face of modernization and the progressive division of labour seem to have been confirmed by the dynamics of globalization that will be summarized in the following section. The sociologist’s words echo with renewed force today: erosion, debilitation, and rapid transformation of the ties that bind individuals to society.⁶

Social cohesion may thus be understood in terms of both the effectiveness of instituted social inclusion mechanisms and the behaviours and value judgments of the members of society. Inclusion mechanisms include employment, educational systems, rights and policies designed to encourage equity, well-being and social protection. Behaviours and value judgments include issues as diverse as trust in institutions, social capital, belonging and solidarity, acceptance of social rules and the willingness to participate in deliberative processes and collective endeavours.

2. Towards a definition of social cohesion

As mentioned earlier, the concept of social cohesion is often confused with others. One tentative way of distinguishing it is to adopt the Aristotelian approach, which defines objects based on proximate genus and specific difference. Social capital – understood as a symbolic societal asset consisting of the ability to manage rules, networks and bonds of social trust which strengthen collective action, pave the way for reciprocity and progressively spread throughout society – resembles cohesion, and can largely be described as a stock upon which social agents can draw to make society more cohesive.

⁵ In order for organic solidarity to emerge, the collective consciousness must also leave a part of the individual consciousness – the part that deals with special functions the collective consciousness alone could not tolerate – untouched; the larger this region of individual consciousness is, the stronger the cohesion arising from that particular type of solidarity will be.

⁶ Ottone and Pizarro (2003, pp. 93-103) analyse the linkages between equity, equality and social cohesion in the light of current trends in modernity, while also addressing certain aspects of the individual’s relationship to changes in the idea of progress in developed countries (pp. 104-134). For more on Durkheim, see box IV.3.

Another proximate notion is that of social integration, defined as the dynamic, multifactoral process whereby individuals share in a minimum standard of well-being consistent with the level of development achieved by a country.⁷ This restrictive definition views integration as the opposite of exclusion. In a broader sense, integration into society has also been defined as a common system of efforts and rewards, which levels the playing field in terms of opportunities and delivers rewards based on merit.

The idea of social inclusion may be viewed as an expanded form of integration. Rather than emphasize a structure to which individuals must adapt in order to fit into the systemic equation, it also focuses on the need to adapt the system in such a way as to accommodate a diversity of actors and individuals. Inclusion requires not only an improvement in conditions of access to integration mechanisms, but also an effort to increase the self-determination of the actors involved.

The idea of a social ethic also includes an essential aspect of social cohesion, emphasizing common values, agreement on a minimum set of rules and social norms, solidarity as an ethical and practical principle, and the assumption of reciprocity.

These concepts are part of the “semantic universe” of social cohesion. Viewed in this light, the specific difference that sets social cohesion apart is the dialectical relationship between integration and inclusion, on the one hand, and social capital and social ethics, on the other. Consequently, there is a distinction between social inclusion and social cohesion, inasmuch as the latter includes the attitudes and behaviours of actors, without being limited to those factors.

Social cohesion may thus be defined as the dialectic between instituted social inclusion and exclusion mechanisms and the responses, perceptions and attitudes of citizens towards the way these mechanisms operate. This definition, which will be used throughout the rest of this analysis, offers a number of advantages. First, it links different dimensions of reality which usually follow separate paths: social policy and the value of solidarity diffused throughout society; synergies between social equity and political legitimacy; transmission of skills and empowerment of citizens; socio-economic transformations and changes in social interaction; socio-economic changes and collective social changes; promotion of greater equality and increased recognition of diversity – be it gender-related, ethnic or racial; socio-economic gaps and the sense of belonging. While social cohesion is not a panacea, and it is not being suggested here that it can be fully realized, it is an essential part of a systemic approach to development.

⁷ Definition cited in Spanish-language version of Wikipedia [online] http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohesi%C3%B3n_social.

Second, rather than succumbing to an overly functionalist bias that would frame the issue merely as a question of adapting to a systemic structure, this definition includes what Alain Touraine calls “the actor’s dimension”. The approach adopted here combines survey information on the perceptions and value judgments of citizens – which reflects the degree to which they trust, adhere to and support a political system and socio-economic order – with an analysis of the relevant socio-economic conditions in terms of social cohesion. These conditions are measured chiefly by studying the dynamics of socio-economic and sociocultural gaps, protection and vulnerability, and access to knowledge.

Third, social cohesion, in the terms described above, is both a means and an end. As an end, it is an object of public policy, to the extent that policies attempt to ensure that all members of society feel themselves to be an active part of it, as both contributors to and beneficiaries of progress. In an age of profound, rapid changes resulting from globalization and the new paradigm of the information society (Castells, 1999), recreating and ensuring a sense of belonging and inclusion is an end in itself.

Social cohesion is also a means, however, in more ways than one. Societies that boast higher levels of social cohesion provide a better institutional framework for economic growth and attract investment by offering an environment of trust and clearly defined rules (Ocampo, 2004). Moreover, long-term policies that seek to level the playing field require a social contract to lend them force and staying power, and such a contract must have the support of a wide range of actors willing to negotiate and reach broad agreements. In order to do so, they must feel themselves to be a part of the whole, and they must be willing to sacrifice personal interests for the good of the community. The formation of the social covenants needed to support pro-equity and pro-inclusion policies is facilitated by a greater willingness to support democracy, become involved in issues of public interest, participate in deliberative processes and trust institutions, as well as a stronger sense of belonging to a community and solidarity with excluded and vulnerable groups. This subject will be analysed further in the final chapter of this book.

B. Problems relating to social cohesion at the current turning point in the development process

It is no coincidence that social cohesion has become an object of ever-increasing interest and concern for governments and in international forums, given the apprehensions shared in the new venues of globalization regarding the changes taking place in the international economic order and production

structure, as well as the cultural mutations produced by the expansion of the information and communication society. In this regard, certain decisive features peculiar to Latin America and the Caribbean, which raise questions as to feasibility of social cohesion in the region, should briefly be noted.⁸

1. It is difficult to achieve sufficiently high growth rates to generate the resources necessary to promote greater well-being and combine growth with social equity. The region's overall economic performance over the last two decades, measured in terms of its growth rate, has failed to produce the desired increase in opportunities of well-being for the population as a whole. Low growth rates are associated with low rates of formal job creation, and the best mechanism for promoting social integration and overcoming poverty is thereby weakened. Insufficiently buoyant economies also limit social mobility and constrain State budgets, preventing social policies from having their desired effect, which is to ensure that everyone feels effectively entitled to social rights. Given the above, adequate economic growth is indispensable to the achievement of greater social cohesion.

In addition, as ECLAC noted almost two decades ago, as Latin America has failed to combine growth with social equity, its development process suffers from an "empty box" syndrome.⁹ The region has the most unequal income distribution in the world, and this feature has, with few exceptions, worsened under the effects of globalization.

This disconnect between growth and social equity, as well as the impact of increasingly unstable growth in the form of the greater poverty and vulnerability associated with unstable household income, has had a negative impact in terms of social cohesion. Growth and increased access to information and communications have also created expectations of greater well-being, but these expectations clash with the concentration of wealth. This perception of social injustice, combined with unfulfilled expectations of social mobility and access to resources and consumption, erodes confidence in the system, weakens the legitimacy of democracy and exacerbates conflicts.

2. Measures must be taken to address serious constraints in the labour market. In addition to its age-old structural diversity, which is a reflection of historically segmented access to resources and to the production system, the region is now facing employment-related changes such as growing unemployment, a widening wage gap, an increase in informal employment and various forms of precarity. These trends stand in contrast to the fundamental role assigned to work in modern life, where it plays a pivotal role as a social

⁸ This section is based on Hopenhayn (2005), particularly chapters 5 and 6.

⁹ See Torres (2006), p. 311.

integrator, a source of individual purpose, an important outlet for citizen participation and an engine of material progress. However, as Zigmunt Bauman notes, “work” is no longer a reliable spindle around which to wind and develop definitions of self, identities and life goals” (Bauman, 2002). If this important cohesive mechanism has entered a phase of restricted access, limited durability and diminished capacity for the creation of collective actors, what other mechanism exists to recreate the foundations of social cohesion?

3. There is a disconnect between material assets and symbolic ones. The prevailing development wisdom holds that material and symbolic assets supplement one another, and social cohesion can be linked to that relationship. Today, the region appears to have reversed the equation. Increased access to education and long-distance communications networks has led to an exponential increase in symbolic assets for most of the population in the form of information, images, symbols and the encouragement of aspirations. At the same time, unstable growth, inequality and limited access to employment have made material assets difficult to obtain. This can either exacerbate the impact of the gap in expectations, or mitigate the conflicts arising from unequal access to material goods by providing broader access to symbolic assets.

The gap between access to material goods and access to symbolic ones leads to other asymmetries: more education but less employment; increased expectations of autonomy but fewer productive options for their realization; greater access to information but less access to power or decision-making bodies; greater prevalence of civil and political rights, and of democracy as a system of government, with no matching increase in effective entitlement to economic and social rights. These gaps have a stronger impact on those who are less fortunate in socio-economic terms and erode confidence in the future, the culture of merit and “deliberative democracy”. Social cohesion in the region is thus called into question.

4. The denial of others is an age-old mark of incomplete citizenship in the region. In Latin America, conquest, colonization and development are intertwined with a persistent refusal to grant full rights to groups marked by racial, ethnic or cultural differences. Given the region’s multi-ethnic, multicultural nature, indigenous persons, persons of African descent and other social groups are subjected to various forms of discrimination or exclusion.

To this day, gender, understood as the cultural expression of sexual differences, dictates what is permissible for women and men in a manner which gives rise to beliefs and practices that promote multiple hierarchies that discriminate against women, despite significant achievements in certain areas, such as education.

In some respects, different forms of discrimination are also interconnected. The extreme exclusion suffered by indigenous women in the labour market is one example of this phenomenon. They are at a disadvantage compared to both men – indigenous or non-indigenous – and non-indigenous women. The risk of poverty and the difficulty of escaping it are generally greater for women than they are for men; indigenous women face a greater risk of poverty and are negatively affected to varying degrees by their geographic location. For example, indigenous women in Guatemala have the country's lowest average income, followed by indigenous men, whose average income is even lower than that of non-indigenous women. Non-indigenous men enjoy the country's highest average income (Sauma, 2004).

These phenomena place the tension between multiculturalism and citizenship, and between gender and citizenship, at the centre of the story of inclusion and exclusion. A culture based on the denial of others also denies social and civic ties of reciprocity. Groups which are discriminated against not only have less access to education, employment and monetary resources, but are also excluded through a lack of political and cultural recognition of their values, aspirations and ways of life. This age-old denial of others also injects a value structure into the political culture and daily life that strengthens inequality and social segmentation. Socio-economic exclusion and cultural discrimination are therefore mutually reinforcing phenomena.

5. While cultural changes encourage greater individualism, it is unclear how they recreate social ties. The primacy of the private sphere over the public sphere, and of personal autonomy over collective solidarity, is a product of both the economy and the media culture, as well as the heightened role of consumption in social life. Several authors have noted that these phenomena coincide with the decline of utopias, collective endeavours and the sense of belonging to a community. These trends have led to a search for ways to recreate social ties, from small family circles to society at large. The problem is not individualism per se, but rather an excessively individualistic culture in which relationships with others circle back to the self. From that perspective, working to achieve social cohesion means working to recreate social ties, the “adhesive” which, to quote Bauman (2003), sustains the hope that “tomorrow we shall meet again”.

6. The increased complexity and fragmentation of social actors makes the convergence of common aspirations more diffuse. The traditional collective actors – syndicates and trade unions – which once played a leading role in political negotiations are becoming more and more fragmented, and new organizational trends and flexibilization are segmenting their interests and demands. New actors whose interests extend beyond the scope of the labour market have also emerged, such as women, ethnic

groups, youth, landless *campesinos*, environmentalists and neighbourhood groups, among others.

Electronic networks have also raised the profile of actors that had formerly been virtually invisible to the world at large, thus leading to a proliferation of movements and conflicts that transcend national borders. This diversification of channels through which demands can be aired and addressed has had a taxing effect on the system traditionally responsible for mediating conflicts between the political system – government, political parties, legislative bodies – and civil society. Areas of cultural self-affirmation that used to be confined to private negotiation and were limited to small groups and territories have now become the business of civil society, of an “outward-looking” dialogue and of the political and public activities associated with similar demands. Demands for recognition of diversity and identity have been added to traditional demands for greater social inclusion and well-being. Women have focused attention on the link between equality and difference, noting that diversity should not be a cause of inequality and that differences should be respected and valued (Ferrajoli, 2002). The relationship between politics and culture has become stronger, but also more problematic (Calderón, Hoppenhayn and Ottone, 1996, pp. 47-57).

7. The symbolic order is less clear, and there is less certainty regarding minimum social rules, due to a heightened awareness of the influence of de facto powers – which are neither representative nor public – as well as the opportunities available to the public, the information available on public and private corruption, a perceived lack of transparency regarding decisions and measures that affect everyone, discrimination in access to the justice system and a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between merit and rewards. These issues erode the symbolic order, understood as clear adherence to a normative framework of reciprocity and respect for the law. And this, in turn, works against social cohesion, which is defined in opposition to a normative crisis and is closely related to the idea of a social ethic.

8. A gap exists between what is de jure and what is de facto. Equality is a legal standard and a value, not a fact; it is not an assertion, but rather a prescription. This explains the structural difference between normativity and effectiveness (Ferrajoli, 2002). As will be shown in chapter IV, opinion polls reveal a loss of confidence in the justice system and other public institutions such as the police and the legislative branch. This mistrust may originate from the gap between legal equality and social inequality, between what is de jure and what is de facto, or between formal entitlement to rights and the failure of the judicial system or of public policies to ensure effective ownership of such rights. In many countries, there is also a widespread perception that the justice system favours the rich and discriminates against the poor, that citizens

are in fact divided into different categories, that there is no such thing as equal treatment from a judicial standpoint, and that many offences – particularly financial crimes, although common crime is also included – go unpunished due to a lack of effective, even-handed punitive and enforcement mechanisms. This lack of faith in the justice system undermines social cohesion by creating a perception that there are no clearly defined rules of the game and no effective reciprocity with regard to rights and obligations.

In summary, the problems existing with respect to social cohesion are multifaceted and call for a systemic approach capable of fostering socio-economic inclusion, recognizing diversity, improving punitive and enforcement institutions, and strengthening civic culture and solidarity, among other objectives.

C. Social cohesion, citizenship and belonging

A sense of belonging to society is an essential component of the various definitions of social cohesion. It is ultimately a subjective factor, consisting of the perceptions, value judgements and attitudes of the members of society. Accordingly, although this issue seldom figures in ECLAC studies, it will be addressed in this analysis.

A strong “micro” sense of belonging may coexist, however, with a “macro” environment in which social cohesion is in serious jeopardy; that is, cohesion may exist within a community while, at the same time, society at large is losing its structure. Part of the current literature uses the term “polarization” to describe this phenomenon. The population of a country is said to be polarized when the members of sizeable social groups identify strongly with one another but feel distanced from other groups (Gasparini and Molina, 2006).¹⁰

One almost emblematic case in the region is that of national societies with large indigenous populations, or societies in which minorities define themselves as peoples. These groups may well enjoy high levels of internal cohesion, when the ties binding individuals to the community are strong and collective values enjoy wide acceptance. From a broader perspective, however, the societies surrounding these groups are fragmented by socio-economic and cultural gaps between groups marked by ethnic and racial differences, or by ethnic minorities that wish to be governed by their own rules and traditional justice systems, which may represent a challenge to the full sovereignty of the nation-State. Consequently, certain groups with a strong sense of identity

¹⁰ Gasparini and Molina (2006) have authored an empirical study on the link between the distribution of income, institutions and conflicts, as well as their effects on polarization in Latin America and the Caribbean.

may be in conflict with society. The fact that indigenous and Afrodescendent groups are precisely the ones that have suffered the most, in terms of cultural discrimination and social exclusion, also contributes to the problem.

The intensive development of the culture industry has also transformed many groups – particularly those made up of young people – into veritable “urban tribes” possessed of a very strong sense of belonging, as well as their own linguistic and aesthetic codes. These codes, however, provide a distorted view of those outside the group. The diversification of these cultural components segments society while tightening bonds within specific groups. In another sense, the perpetrators of urban violence also possess certain rules of belonging, rituals and internal cohesion mechanisms, although this clearly represents a problem from a social-order perspective (Calderón, Hopenhayn and Ottone, 1996). Hence, cohesion is not a positive value in and of itself; it must be approached in the general context of social harmony and the values upon which such harmony is based.

This brings a related concern to mind: individual and civic freedom is an inherent part of the various choices that underlie the diversity of social identities everyone can and should enjoy. Belief in social identities with totalizing pretensions is a denial of the diversity of social identities; it is reductionist, and can ultimately be used to justify violence (Sen, 2006).

A sense of belonging to society depends on many factors and can be encouraged from many quarters. Common ground can be strengthened by using and caring for common spaces, such as the city and the environment; by agreeing on certain values for coexistence, such as tolerance for diversity and reciprocal treatment; through greater participation in decision-making mechanisms and the public expression of aspirations and worldviews; by fighting domestic violence; by humanizing the main venues of socialization – family, neighbourhood, work and school; and by providing broad access to cultural products.

Some societies possess a strong religious component, which provides both a common set of values and a sense of belonging while excluding those who do not share the group’s beliefs. This is not the case in the region, where the dynamics of modernization and the secularization of the State have, to varying degrees, pushed the sense of belonging into other spheres. One such sphere, which has become a decisive factor in current agendas and debates thanks to the progress of democracy and the rule of law, is the idea of modern citizenship. This concept undoubtedly calls for a shift towards the full universalization of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, which will require an effort to ensure the rule of law, respect for civil liberties, political representation and greater access to opportunities for well-being, productive use of capacities and social protection.

Entitlement to social rights is a manifestation of an effective status as a genuine member of society, implying as it does that all citizens are included in the development dynamic and enjoy the well-being such development provides. It represents an effort to check economic inequalities through deliberate State action, since such inequalities, once they pass a certain point, make a true sense of belonging impossible for many members of society. It also implies recognition of all of society's members, with no distinction as to gender, race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic class or geographic location. In this regard, being poor is not simply a socio-economic issue, but also a denial of citizenship, as it entails a lack of social rights and the ability to participate in development.

Unlike civil and political rights, social rights require greater social progress and equality. A society of equals is a just society. According to John Rawls (1971), this means that a society should be able to guarantee universal access to certain social goods, such as rights, liberties, a decent income and power to participate in collective relations. Similarly, Norberto Bobbio (1995) argues that, since the market lacks any sense of distributive morality, the inequitable logic of capitalism should be counterbalanced by the political will to encourage equality of opportunities and compensation for effort, establishing a "civilizing minimum" for everyone. This does not mean that all inequality should be suppressed, but rather that an ideal society is one in which institutions act according to principles of justice, and individuals apply those principles to their values and behaviours. A full sense of belonging to society should therefore include solidarity on the part of those who are included towards those who are excluded.

Consequently, the point where citizenship and belongingness intersect is the same one where instituted social rights meet social solidarity. Social cohesion requires an increased willingness to give up benefits in order to reduce the exclusion and vulnerability of groups living under worse conditions. It is not only an ethical value, but also a practical one, to the extent that individuals believe that they stand to gain more by adhering to a "we" and that what is good for the community is good for individuals, since it ensures greater security and protection in the future (Hirschman, 1970). There is a positive, mutually reinforcing dialectic between improved social rights and greater collective solidarity.

Citizenship, however, includes not only entitlement to rights, but also respect for the procedural rules of democratic institutions and the rule of law, as well as a greater willingness to participate in public affairs. There are two aspects to a sense of belonging: access and commitment. Citizens are passive when they are mere recipients of rights, but they become active when they contribute to social cohesion. Citizenship as belongingness therefore includes

civil-society mechanisms capable of strengthening relationships of solidarity and social responsibility, both within and between groups; a widespread, pluralistic culture capable of improving harmony and communication between actors defined by their differences; acknowledgment of the diverse range of social affiliations and identities assumed by individuals and citizens; and the progressive adherence of social groups to interactive networks through which they can participate in deliberative mechanisms.

Finally, at the intersection between equality and difference, greater equality of opportunities must be combined with policies of recognition. Belongingness is based not only on greater equity, but also on greater acceptance of diversity. A society cannot internalize the concept of a “we” if it acts as though certain collective identities were invisible, if it practices institutionalized or informal discrimination against groups on the basis of social, geographic, gender, age or ethnic differences, or if it perpetuates social disparities rooted in ethnicity, gender, age or religion.

D. Economic, social and cultural rights as viewed in the light of social cohesion

There is a positive relationship between the full exercise of citizenship and social cohesion, inasmuch as the former includes, or is intended to include, rights that combine the political (participation, deliberation, a voice) with the social (access to goods, income, services) and the communicational (culture, identity, visibility).

Reference has been made to the key role of social, economic and cultural rights in the development of a sense of belonging, which is itself an essential component of social cohesion. If these rights are universal and binding, they provide both a minimum standard for State policy and a set of progressive guidelines that require the State to manage, redistribute and organize resources in order to democratize access to services and opportunities.

This is not to say that a dichotomy exists between rights-based development and options that focus on economic growth. On the contrary, optimums and synergies must be identified to place economic growth within a framework of policies which, by promoting social citizenship, contribute to political stability, narrow social gaps and legitimize democracy through a general increase in well-being.

Rights are indivisible, in both an ethical and a practical sense, in that they reinforce one another to promote greater social cohesion, defined as a dialectical relationship between socio-economic inclusion and citizen

cooperation. To the extent that economic, social and cultural rights (hereinafter referred to as social rights) require States to promote greater integration into employment, education, information, knowledge, and social protection and interaction networks, they enhance the ability of citizens to participate in public institutions, public dialogue, civil organizations and cultural exchanges. Conversely, greater equality in the exercise of political and civil rights in a republican sense – citizen participation in public affairs – increases the presence of groups that have been excluded from decisions that affect distributive policies, thereby improving their ability to translate political citizenship into social citizenship.

Unlike civil and political rights, which are established through political will by means of a political act, social rights are part of a process; they require increased and improved human, physical, institutional and financial resources in order to make the transition from *de jure* to *de facto*. It is difficult to maintain that social rights are as enforceable as civil and political rights, as this would force the State to guarantee entitlements that depend on available funding and appropriate institutions. From a financial standpoint, there is a difference between determining the level of social entitlements to be granted and creating political rights such as liberty, privacy or free and informed elections.

The limited enforceability of social rights is compounded by other difficulties, such as the development of an appropriate statutory framework permitting the full exercise of those rights, the restrictions imposed by the market, the limited availability of State funding and corporate modalities of access to social goods (Gordon, 2003, p. 5). The enforceability of social rights is gradual; it increases over time, and requires a system capable of perfecting institutions, broadening the provision of resources and assets, and addressing social demands, in order to redistribute resources for social protection and inclusion in a more equitable manner.

Rights must be ranked according to priority, given the scarce resources available. The minimum universal standard should gradually increase; therein lies the progressive nature of social rights. Ideally, such minimum standards should be established democratically through an informed political consensus-building process in order to reduce tensions regarding enforcement between judicial and political bodies. Society “must agree on a minimum economically feasible standard of rights for all of its members. This standard should be based on clear rules and objectives in order to ensure that it is enforceable and actionable” (De Roux and Ramírez, 2004, p. 25).

There are two dimensions to the transition from *de jure* to *de facto* social rights. One consists of the available policies and programmes, which provide

institutionalized services and establish public policies. The other dimension – a legal one – consists of the ability to demand services. A similar distinction must be made between the individual claims filed by subjects of the law, acting as such, and collective minimums based on a progressive approach that takes into account the State's ability to offer entitlements. These two questions are not only of a different nature, but may come into conflict. Tensions also arise between individual attention to social rights and the expansion of their coverage. In dichotomic terms, “the greater the individual attention paid to a right, the more its effective universality must be sacrificed” (De Roux and Ramírez, 2004, p. 40), especially given the scarce resources available.

Two complementary efforts must therefore be undertaken to promote synergies between the entitlement to rights and social cohesion. One involves social policies, and the other involves policies that directly or indirectly provide access to education, employment and other goods for the groups most deprived of these assets. The *de facto* component in this case consists of deliberate action to reduce poverty and exclusion, democratize opportunities for well-being and improve equity.

The second, and equally important, dimension is of a legal nature. It involves the enforcement of rights and reinforces another aspect of social cohesion by exerting a levelling effect with regard to the justice system, restoring confidence in this fundamental institution of democratic society and the rule of law. Enforcement has a direct impact on social cohesion, as it allows every citizen to feel that he or she is an actual part of society rather than a member in name only; in other words, it enables individuals to view themselves as full citizens.

In advocating full enforcement, it is argued that social rights are goods or services that are essential to dignity, autonomy and liberty and, as such, are prerequisites of democratic participation. The creation of mechanisms – such as education, health care and a minimum wage – to make social rights fully enforceable from a legal standpoint sends a clear political signal that strengthens the commitment of everyone to the well-being of everyone. When they are embodied in a consistent, functioning corpus of laws, such rights set binding standards for society as a whole, and identify which situations will not be tolerated by society. Within this framework, the use of legal instruments helps society take ownership of values such as solidarity and reciprocity (Abramovich and Courtis, 2002; Courtis, 2007).

Care should be taken, however, not to exaggerate the importance of the judicial aspect of social rights. Proceedings before judicial bodies, and the actions of the judiciary itself, are defined by their own institutional peculiarities, as well as the place the judiciary occupies in the division of

powers. Judicial proceedings are limited in scope; dealing as they do with specific cases, they can hardly be expected to cover every element at stake in a social conflict. Moreover, the many factors that come into play in the development of a social policy can only be partially addressed when they are analysed and adjudicated within the framework of a judicial process that, by its very nature, tends to overlook a vast array of interests which can or should be taken into account when designing a policy. Even when judicial proceedings involve collective interests, they revolve around a dialectical confrontation between two opposing parties. This diminishes their ability to consider all of the interests at stake in the original conflict. Rulings are limited to a decision as to which party should prevail in the process at hand; one wins, the other loses. Consequently, the enforcement of rights and the development of large-scale, long-term social policies should be entrusted to the political branches of government, which should not be supplanted by the judiciary (Abramovich and Courtis, 2002, p. 249).

Policies should be based on solid agreements that consider all of the interests involved, without becoming entangled in zero-sum games. Wherever possible, social policies should avoid judicialization, providing for the enjoyment of rights regardless of whether or not they are formally guaranteed. Hence the importance of providing entitlements as a matter of social policy, creating mechanisms that make it possible for beneficiaries to claim such rights within the framework of social institutions. Certain recent social policy reforms, such as users' bills of rights, take on full meaning when they are considered in the light of their underlying legal guarantees. The health-care entitlements provided in some parts of the region can be analysed from this perspective; these entitlements are defined by the development path of the health-care system in which they were developed, as well as the economic, financial and political constraints facing each country (Sojo, 2006).

The complex, progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights calls for the development of certain indicators to measure their achievement. Such indicators should be based on targets and standards. Rights that cover a range of entitlements should be enforceable, and accountability mechanisms should therefore be developed to protect and promote those rights and put them into practice (Artigas, 2005, and Drago, 2006).

Finally, it should be noted that enforceable rights, reflected in social policies and procedural mechanisms, require an informed and involved public. The public must, in the words of Hirschman (1970), have a voice. This is particularly important for those who have less information and less of a voice, as they are the ones who are most excluded from relational networks. Complementary policies must be implemented to increase their access to information about how to exercise their rights, as well as to the deliberative

bodies that establish government and State policies on the distribution of resources. An order based on social rights must seek to achieve a balance between powers and influences in order to avoid the vicious circle whereby those who suffer the greatest level of social exclusion are also the politically weakest members of society. Social cohesion is therefore both a premise and an achievement.