



Mecanismo de Participación  
de la Sociedad Civil de América  
Latina y el Caribe para el  
Desarrollo Sostenible - MeSCALC

## **The Organizations of the Society Civil Latin America and the Caribbean before the decade of action for the implementation of Agenda 2030 Message to the IV CEPAL Forum- March 2021**

The constitution of the Civil Society Participation Mechanism in the III Regional Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on Sustainable Development in 2018 was an important advance, but still not enough to ensure dialogue in a meaningful way between government representatives and civil society in the Regional Forums. The governments of Latin America and the Caribbean in the current context of COVID-19, have moved further away from complying with the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. The serious situation generated by the pandemic in our peoples is not reflected in most of the countries, in an attitude of dialogue and exchange with civil society, who are the urgent gaps that they must address in order to advance in the 2030 Agenda and reduce the negative impact of the pandemic. According to ECLAC scenarios, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean judged a fall in domestic product (GDP) of -9.1% in 2020, with decreases of -9.4% in South America, -8, 4 % in Central America and Mexico and -7.9% for the Caribbean excluding Guyana, whose strong growth leads the subregional total to a smaller contraction (-5.4%).<sup>1</sup>

Five years after the approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our region shows acute economic stagnation, aggravated by the COVID 19 pandemic that increased poverty, structural inequality and the gap towards the interior of the countries to exorbitant levels and between nations, the regressive distribution of income simultaneously with the fall of the GDP, the increase of the foreign debt, the dismantling of public services and their privatization; coexisting with high levels of corruption in an environment of impunity; with human rights violations, the increase in authoritarian tendencies, the persecution and criminalization of human, economic, social, environmental, cultural and labor rights defenders; the repression and criminalization of citizen protest, as well as the advance of lawfare that promotes polarization and political violence.

The neoliberal policies adopted by the majority of the countries of our region that hinder the achievement of the SDGs, which is why today a radical change in the action of governments is even more urgent, and the implementation of a New Social Contract for the implementation of

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<sup>1</sup> [Contracción de la actividad económica de la región se profundiza a causa de la pandemia: caerá -9,1% en 2020 | Comunicado de prensa | Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe \(cepal.org\)](#)

new models of production and development, which guarantee the realization of human rights and the acceleration of the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda. Now is the opportunity for governments, together with civil society, to consider the changes necessary to avoid deterioration of the planet and recognize the protection of life and the guarantee of human rights, as State policies. From the civil society organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Participation Mechanism before the Sustainable Development Forum, we hope, based on a horizontal and transparent dialogue, better accountability and democratic ownership of the Agenda. 2030, to launch the true and necessary political and social transformations and changes in the development paradigm, the starting point for the progress of sustainable development.

**In this context, we reiterate the need to:**

- 1) Strengthen our democratic systems and face the coronavirus crisis from a human rights-based approach, establishing progressive economic policies, with systems that guarantee prevention measures, without deepening economic deterioration, as is recorded in most countries in the region. For this, national strategies are needed that effectively incorporate non-governmental actors, trade unions and social movements, particularly civil society organizations and the most vulnerable populations. We note with concern that most of the countries in the region are not modifying tax systems to transform them into comprehensive, equitable and transparent progressive systems, or establishing mechanisms to avoid tax evasion and avoidance, capital flight, opacity and indebtedness. Several developed countries have debated and approved taxes on large fortunes, some in extraordinary ways such as Argentina, to compensate for the unequal distribution of wealth, whose gap between rich and poor is widening during the pandemic. The opposition to these advances is still very strong. We are particularly concerned about the setback in relation to past health cooperation, particularly in the distribution of vaccines against COVID 19. With more than four months of approval of more than seven vaccines worldwide, 90% of the Vaccines were distributed among the ten richest countries on the planet and many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have not yet received any doses. The WHO COVID 19 Response Fund has failed to provide effective samples for the most vulnerable countries.
- 2) Promote decent work, which is a demand not met by the governments of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The ILO has described the employment crisis in the region as a tragedy, observing the loss of 34 million jobs in 2020. The crisis generated by the pandemic was preceded by multiple crises that caused a situation of vulnerability for millions of workers affected by unemployment, employed in informal and precarious conditions in multiple ways. Communication and information technologies, teleworking, platform work and care work have been fundamental to provide societies with substantial services in the midst of the health emergency. However, the people who work in these jobs were always ignored and their rights were ignored. But the pandemic has also destroyed millions of formal jobs, affecting collective bargaining and weakening the

already fragile social dialogue in the region. The ravages of neoliberalism in our countries are as strong as the virus in people's bodies.

The appreciable gap between the performance necessary to achieve the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and the situation in the region in recent years - affirms ECLAC - is a call for attention, that if current trends are maintained, it is not possible that the region as a whole will meet SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Therefore, strengthen GDP growth and investment policies, as well as proactive policies in the labor market.

It is urgent to promote decent work, as well as social protection policies aimed at avoiding unemployment, reducing informality and job insecurity and the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises, and mechanisms to guarantee a minimum income to the most vulnerable population in times of crisis like the ones we are experiencing, avoiding a further increase in poverty. The non-recognition of informal workers left them outside the containment policies, forcing them to not respect isolation, with the risks that this implies. Today more than ever, "leaving no one behind" and a New Social Pact -as the ILO proclaims- depends on achieving a development model that contains all of us and that, without privileges, allows all sectors of society to contribute with equity.

Despite the evidence of an increase in violence, especially against women and children in the context of COVID19, governments did not take significant measures to stop it. In a few cases, alternative reporting channels for women and girls were strengthened but their reduction was not achieved; rather, progressive and alarming increases were observed in the statistics of violence suffered by women, youth and children in the region.

It is urgent, the protection, promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights to a life free of violence, as well as the sanction and effective enforcement of laws and policies that meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups and ensure the eradication of any type of violence and / or discrimination.

3) The civil society of the countries warns about human rights that are not being respected for all groups placed in vulnerable situations such as in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Honduras and Guatemala. There are evidence and complaints of violation of rights such as housing, education, access to water, free movement, to land and territory, and a life free of violence. It is worrying that in many countries the impunity of those responsible for human rights violations continues. Without work, education and social security, violence grows. The standards implemented by governments that guarantee the well-being and respect for the dignity of the elderly, another of the groups most vulnerable in the context of COVID19, has consisted of promoting social and mandatory isolation as the only preventive health measure. In many countries, the information disseminated reinforces the need for social distancing among this population. However, there is great concern about the increase in violence against older people.

It is imperative to stop the generalized violence, mainly towards children, adolescents, youth, the elderly, women, the LGBTQI + population, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, migrants, informal workers, such as street vendors, workers / sexual relations, people with disabilities and people living with or affected by HIV / AIDS, which must change to avoid further deterioration of our populations.

4) The protection of defenders of land and the environment, journalists and human rights defenders is worrying due to the increasing criminalization, persecution, penalization and violation of fundamental rights that is exercised on defenders, a situation that it was exacerbated in the context of a pandemic. Latin America is the most lethal region for land and environmental defenders, with Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala being the countries with the highest number of murders in 2019 according to Global Witness. This problem is particularly observed in Colombia where social leaders have been assassinated. The case of Brazil is very serious, given that it is the fourth country with the largest number of human rights activists. The Brazilian government is at war against the indigenous peoples and the Quilombolas, promoting the attack on their lands. It is urgent that measures be established for the protection, promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights, of human rights defenders, ensuring the well-being of the entire population, with laws and policies that meet the needs and ensure the eradication of any kind of discrimination. It has never been so important to have comprehensive and coordinated responses that reinforce the territorial anchoring of policies to expand their coverage, relevance and effectiveness, while responding to the multiple needs and demands of all people, in all their diversity and in all stages of its life cycle.

5) The absence of disaggregated data in the countries of the region on human rights to plan concrete and inclusive responses from a perspective of interculturality and intersectionality is constant, with some exceptions of national governments such as Argentina, but whose policy does not reach the governments provincial and / or local. In Brazil, studies to map the profile of people impacted by COVID19 were prepared by other actors, not by the government. The poorest people, especially people of African descent and indigenous peoples, are the most impacted there. It is necessary to implement concrete actions based on disaggregated data, by ethnicity, race, disability, to plan responses from the perspective of intersectionality and interculturality, as well as programs and services to reduce inequalities that benefit us equally. Especially when ECLAC has warned that the number of poor in the region would rise from 185 to 220 million and that extreme poverty would rise from 67.4 to 90 million people in the context of the coronavirus.

6) ECLAC, the World Bank, FAO, OXFAM and other international organizations have presented evidence on the widespread and worrying increase in hunger and poverty in the region, a serious problem to which governments have not responded. The World Bank estimates that poverty in Nicaragua has progressively increased by more than 3% between 2016 and 2019 and the figures for 2020 are still unknown. In Honduras, it is estimated that 75% of the population will fall into poverty in 2020. In El Salvador, there is evidence of a reduction in family income, and the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups deteriorate and 1% of

Salvadorans will fall into poverty, particularly affecting women the most. In Guatemala, according to OXFAM, there will be five million people without food security, doubling the number of people in that situation before the pandemic. According to ECLAC / FAO, extreme poverty in Guatemala will increase in the country by 3%. The Bank of Mexico declared that this year, 9 million people will fall into poverty in Mexico, amounting to 70 million Mexicans. In Argentina, according to September data from the Census Institute, 47% of the population is below the poverty line and 14% is in a situation of indigence. In Brazil, the Civil Society Report on the 2030 Agenda, which has been monitoring compliance with the SDGs since 2017, denounces the deterioration of indicators on hunger.

The current crisis requires putting the State as a fundamental development axis to end hunger and reduce poverty. The few attempts to guarantee a minimum income for all people only apply to some groups, so social protection is necessary for all groups, including informal workers, such as programs with subsidies that currently only exist for those who are at higher risk, they are not universal and, in many countries, they have not yet been met. We advocate for universal social protection that allows a sufficient income floor and simultaneously active decent work programs for social inclusion through employment and equal opportunities.

Although in many of the countries there is a constitutional right to free, universal and quality public health services, they have suffered a wide deterioration and lack of budget for years, boosted by increasing privatization. In the face of the pandemic, health care services have only been improved in cases of COVID19. Free, secular, public education in many of the countries such as Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico among others, is not universal and its quality has deteriorated. The virtual modality, in many countries of the region, shows the existing digital divide due to lack of access to technology, which affects the majority of children and adolescents who will have great difficulties in continuing their schooling and which will be very difficult. difficult to get them back. For example, in Guatemala, access to technology resources only reaches 30% of the population concentrated in the Guatemalan capital. In Mexico, the dropout figures are alarming and unprecedented: it is estimated that 2.5 million children and young people will definitely drop out of school due to the pandemic; 800 thousand adolescent students between 15 and 17 years old who are in the third grade of the intermediate level will not be able to finish their schooling and a figure of 593 thousand young people of the higher level. This situation disproportionately affects virtual education for children in rural areas of the countries of the region. The health crisis will continue to show us the turning point on the laziness and absence of public educational and health policies, and the supremacy of the deregulated market in the production and distribution of wealth and the depredation of our environment for the benefit of economic interests. private.

7) The advancement of religious fundamentalisms and of any kind in political spaces, denies scientific evidence, fostering hatred and discrimination, and making it difficult to implement policies with a rights perspective. Governments do not fight these groups; balancing with Catholic religious groups, new Pentecostals and others that have penetrated the popular sectors. Therefore, we demand that the advance of the growing influence of religious

fundamentalisms and of any kind in political spaces, including health and education, that deny informed scientific and political evidence, that promote inequalities, promote hatred, heteronorm, be contained, the schism and make it difficult to implement public policies that guarantee the full exercise of rights, such as comprehensive sexuality education and other policies that defend and support sexual autonomy and the emancipation of the most marginalized populations.

8) We demand that the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons be ratified and that they guarantee a dignified old age; that the Program of Action for the OAS Decade be adopted; the ratification and compliance with the fundamental ILO conventions such as Convention 169 and the application of the Earth's Guidelines on World Food Security (UN); that a plan be expedited to implement the UN Decade of Family Farming and Peasant Rights and the International Decade for People of African Descent; that the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean be ratified, and the Declaration of Incheon, of the World Education Forum in 2015, and that they address to the demands of the 2019 High Level Political Forum and the ALC 2030 Youth Forum.

9) In the countries of the region in general, the human right of people to migrate is not being guaranteed. Public policies do not respect security or allow regular migration. The rights of migrants are not respected, regardless of their migratory status as refugees and / or displaced persons. There are multiple discriminatory practices against migrants, as well as situations of extreme racism, xenophobia, restrictions and serious discrimination, especially against migrant women. The situation is especially dramatic in Mexico, a host country for Central Americans through the Remain in Mexico (Stay in Mexico) program, but which does not offer decent living conditions, leaving a large number of migrants in precarious and threatened conditions, even, at the mercy of organized crime in the border areas. Almost 50% of the Central American migrants who pass through Mexico have suffered violence and even kidnappings. The southern border of Mexico concentrates a large number of Central Americans and other nationalities detained for lacking legal residence permits and pending deportation to their countries of origin. The migratory stays are exceeded in their capacity, with migrants in overcrowded conditions, without access to health services or information on legal procedures. Government institutions have prohibited access to organizations that work for the human rights of migrants. In Chile, the situation of migrants is alarming due to the multiple intolerances and discrimination increased by the COVID19 crisis. The Chilean government recently forwarded a Migration Law Project to the National Congress for its review by the Human Rights Commission, which does not respond to minimum standards that are consistent with International Human Rights Conventions, such as the Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families (CMW). Migrants in Chile continue to suffer violence at all levels and ages, criminalization by state agents reproduced by the media, which allow multiple forms of vulnerability and violence. Since 2019, Brazil has received serious complaints in international forums for systematic violations of fundamental rights, which has prompted recommendations from the United Nations Special Rapporteurs. Goal 10.7 of the SDGs has receded as the country has reduced its support for immigrants and

refugees. Most are concentrated in the southeastern and southern regions of the country, until 2018, those from Haiti predominated, since 2018, Venezuelans represent 39% of immigrants. The hate speech and xenophobia of the current Brazilian government generate great concern in civil society.

10) We reiterate and demand financial, political and legal commitments to ensure full compliance with the 2030 Agenda, especially that the right to health is a reality for all people and guarantee full compliance with goal 3.8. "Achieve universal health coverage, in particular protection against financial risks, access to quality essential health services and access to safe, effective, affordable and quality medicines and vaccines for all people." It is an ethical duty and humanitarian to consider all the most vulnerable groups in the face of the COVID19 crisis, such as migrants, displaced people and refugees, people living with HIV / AIDS and chronic diseases, with disabilities, workers with daily pay unable to work (including sex workers), health workers, caregivers (mostly women) and essential services, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, girls and boys and especially older people also to the situation of women, girls and LGBTIQ + with the increased risk of suffering from multiple forms of gender violence due to confinement for forced quarantine.

11) We consider that the main response is to create an environment where cooperation and solidarity, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, have adequate capacities, regulatory frameworks and defined state resources to deal with them. All of this implies demanding that the commitments assumed by international development cooperation, and in particular South-South cooperation, between developed countries and those with low or middle income are reviewed and activated to respond effectively to the current scenario of development. generalized crisis in the region, without abandoning the Objectives of the 2030 Agenda and recognizing the effective participation of civil society.

In most countries, the SDG targets are far from being achieved or have been set back. Historical inequalities require structural changes, with more and better public policies considering the impacts of the pandemic. In a context where governments have not yet shown themselves to be effective in responding to the negative effects of the socio-economic situation, without betting on a new development paradigm, based on freedom and democracy, solidarity, and human development in harmony. with our planet, decent work, social justice, happiness and the integral well-being of all.

The situation facing our region is extremely serious and indicates that the recommendations of civil society were not listened to, so in this IV Forum we hope to discuss our complaints, diagnoses and demands.