

UNITED NATIONS

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN - ECLAC**



Distr.
LIMITED

LC/L.1592
8 October 2001

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN DEMOGRAPHIC CENTRE (CELADE) –
POPULATION DIVISION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (ECLAC)

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT MEETING: INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
ON FORMS OF SOCIAL VULNERABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Santiago, Chile, 20-21 June 2001)

Valuable contributions were made to this meeting by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Regional Delegation for Cooperation with the Southern Cone and Brazil of the Embassy of France in Chile.

01-9-720

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A. BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES, ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date of the meeting

1. The expert meeting entitled International Seminar on Forms of Social Vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean was organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) – Population Division of ECLAC, and took place at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, on 20-21 June 2001.

Background and rationale for the meeting

2. CELADE and ECLAC—in particular the Commission’s Social Development Division—have a long track record in the study of what are known as vulnerable groups and have conducted research activities, training and technical assistance with groups who are defined in policies as especially vulnerable. These groups include: children and infants; women, particularly those whose family planning needs are unmet; female heads of household, especially those who have child rearing responsibilities; young people; adolescents, particularly adolescent mothers; older adults, ethnic groups, particularly Amerindians and peoples of African descent; residents of precarious settlements—in both rural and urban areas—and squatters in private dwellings.

3. In recent years CELADE has sought to renew its vision of the interrelationships between population and development, and address the processes by which individuals, households, groups and communities become vulnerable. These efforts have led to four basic convictions:

- (i) The traditional approach to vulnerable groups—though it continues to be relevant for practical reasons—is conceptually limited and hampers the design of public policies intended to foment social equity. This is because the notion of “vulnerable group” became generalized and, as it lost specificity, it came to be a synonym for populations targeted by cross-sectoral public policies. The concept of “vulnerable groups” thus refers to groupings of the population who have a wide range of needs, the satisfaction of which requires not only sectoral approaches, but also more integrated ones. By means of conceptual and operational refinements, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish segments within the “vulnerable groups” that are susceptible to specific sectoral or cross-sectoral policy measures.
- (ii) Recent debate on the concept of vulnerability in the context of the current pattern of development—which is marked by uncertainty and insecurity—provides new and powerful conceptual tools for understanding the new forms of social disadvantage that limit the response capacity of different social actors (individuals, households or groupings of different kinds) to the unending succession of changes seen in contemporary society. These new forms of social disadvantage also make it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities that society (through determined institutional orders, such as the State, the market, the family and the community) offers to social actors to develop their strategies and life plans (such as upward social mobility, strengthening of identities and formation of alliances).

- (iii) The vulnerability debate also provides a forum to consider the role of sociodemographic issues, which does not yet have the profile it deserves nor it is sufficiently analysed in Latin American and Caribbean countries. This forum is largely associated with the classic focus of the demographic dynamics of poverty: the epidemiological profile of higher morbidity and excess mortality among the poor constitutes a barrier to the development and use of their human potential; earlier and higher rates of fertility hinder both integration into the labour market and continued participation in the formal education system, which propitiates the intra- and inter-generational transfer of the other disadvantages that demographic factors tend to generate. Another —and perhaps less explored— aspect of this forum concerns new phenomena that are conceptually interlinked with transformations of family structure and dynamics arising from what is now known as the “second demographic transition”.
- (iv) There is a need to encourage the development of multi- and cross-disciplinary focuses in order to analyse sources of vulnerability and design policies and programmes to reduce their incidence and intensity among societies’ most disadvantaged individuals, households and communities. The multidimensional nature of the vulnerability concept (which is reflected in the social, economic, cultural, demographic, physical and other meanings of the word) and the lack of referential models of the way in which these dimensions are interrelated make it necessary to achieve progress in developing theory and methodology to identify possible links between them, ranging from aspects of vulnerability that tend to be associated with and exacerbate each other to aspects that counteract each other.

4. In view of the weaknesses and shortcomings of traditional approaches to social disadvantage and inequality, the representatives of the governments of the Latin American and Caribbean countries entrusted to CELADE the preparation of a document on social vulnerability —of communities, households and individuals— to be presented at the next meeting of the ECLAC sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development, during the twenty-ninth session of the Commission (resolution 577(XXVIII)), to be held in Brazil in April 2002.

5. In order to carry out this mandate, CELADE considered it essential to obtain support from a wide group of experts in social sciences associated with different aspects of vulnerability. As a first step, a round of discussions was held in December 2000 to determine how to approach the preparation of the document. A preliminary list of contents was also drawn up at this meeting. The International seminar held on 20-21 June 2001 was designed in such a way that the presentations requested —covering a variety of social vulnerability-related issues— and the debate they generated both provided fundamental inputs for the preparation of the document required by the governmental representatives.

Objectives

6. The International seminar had three fundamental objectives: (i) to analyse the notion of vulnerability and, in particular, the different conceptual approaches that use it to coordinate their propositions; (ii) examine the evidence on vulnerability from different relevant social dimensions; and (iii) identify and produce an empirical illustration of sources of demographic vulnerability for communities, households and individuals in Latin America and the Caribbean, bearing in mind their usefulness in developing sociodemographic policies and interventions.

Attendance

7. The meeting was attended by experts who conduct their professional activities in the following States members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. The list of participants is included as annex 1.

Documentation

8. The list of presentations made by the experts attending the meeting is included as annex 2.

Organization of work

9. The work was conducted in plenary sessions (modules), at which a group of experts gave presentations on different aspects of social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean. Other experts officiated as commentators on these presentations. General presentations were then made on the substantive material of the meeting, by way of conclusion, at a final session (roundtable).

B. AGENDA

10. The meeting proceeded according to the following agenda:

Wednesday 20 June

9:00 - 9:15 Registration

9:15 - 9:30 Opening session

- Speaker: Daniel S. Blanchard

9:30 - 10:45 **Module 1:** A frame of reference for social vulnerability

- Speaker: Miguel Villa
- Commentators: Rubén Kaztman and René Pereira
- Moderator: Juan Chackiel

11:15 - 13:00 **Module 2:** Vulnerability in the sphere of labour

- Speaker: Carlos Filgueira
- Commentators: Roberto Pizarro and Jorge Bravo
- Moderator: María Elena Valenzuela

14:30 - 16:30 **Module 3:** Basic services: universality, exclusion and quality

- Speakers: Camilo Arraigada and Ana Sojo
- Commentators: Juan Carlos Ramírez and Miguel Bolívar
- Moderator: Gustavo Busso

- 16:45 - 18:30 **Module 4:** Environmental vulnerability
- Speaker: José Javier Gómez
 - Commentators: Ricardo Zapata and Asha Kambon
 - Moderator: Dirk Jaspers-Faijjer

Thursday 21 June

- 9:00 - 11:00 **Module 5:** Territorial forms of vulnerability
- Speakers: Rosa María Rubalcava and Rubén Kaztman
 - Commentators: Ricardo Jordán and Fernando Carrión
 - Moderator: Daniela Simioni
- 11:15 - 13:15 **Module 6:** Vulnerability, rights and citizenship
- Speakers: Martín Hopenhayn and Irma Arraigada
 - Commentators: Raúl Atria and Silvia Calcagno
 - Moderator: John Durston
- 15:00 - 16:30 **Module 7:** Demographic vulnerability
- Speaker: Jorge Rodríguez Vignoli
 - Commentators: Mary Castro and Tomás Jiménez
 - Moderator: Susana Schkolnik
- 16:45-18:00 **Module 8:** Concluding round table discussion
- Participants: Gilberto Gallopín, José Miguel Guzmán, Asha Kambon and Ernesto Rodríguez
 - Moderator: Reynaldo F. Bajraj

C. OPENING SESSION

11. The opening session was chaired by Mr. Reynaldo F. Bajraj, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Ms. Miriam Krawczyk, Director of the Commission's Programme Planning and Operations Division, and Mr. Daniel S. Blanchard, Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) - Population Division of ECLAC.

12. The Director of CELADE took the floor and, after welcoming the experts present at the meeting, referred to the role played by CELADE in generating information and knowledge about demographic trends and the factors that influence population change. In recent years, in response to the mandates issued by the countries of the region —and thanks to their full involvement in the ECLAC system— CELADE had striven to unravel the complex interrelations between population variables and the development process. As part of this task, the Director indicated, the Centre had conducted studies into specific population groupings defined by age, sex, geographical location or cultural features. These groupings generally coincided with those known in the sphere of public policy as vulnerable groups.

13. Mr. Blanchard indicated that, according to research, specific features of the population dynamics of those groupings were closely associated with inadequate social situations and various forms of poverty. Although these studies served to locate such groups, define their features and identify social segments towards whom public policy efforts should be directed, CELADE was aware of the need to develop a broader approach encompassing the sources of social disadvantage, which would be of use in designing

measures that different social agents could put into practice. In this context, the speaker referred to the great potential of the concept of social vulnerability, given that it involved not only the material aspects of disadvantage, but also symbolic, value-related and formal aspects. This vulnerability affected communities, households and individuals who were unable to exercise their rights or experienced discrimination, regardless of their socio-economic status.

14. The Director of CELADE then briefly reviewed the items on the meeting agenda, which were to be understood as forms of vulnerability in different dimensions of the social, economic, political, cultural, territorial and environmental spheres of Latin America and the Caribbean. He concluded his remarks with an expression of thanks, on behalf of CELADE and ECLAC, to the attendees at the International seminar.

D. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Module 1: A frame of reference for social vulnerability (session two)

15. The first speaker emphasized the fact that among the different social players and agents in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean there was a widespread perception of uncertainty, insecurity, defenceless, precariousness and erosion of rights which had been thought to be won, and that numerous social, economic and environmental indicators bore out this perception. Together with longstanding and persistent problems, other issues had arisen that appeared to be inherent to the region's current development pattern. The concentration in income distribution, inequalities based on social and ethnic origin, segmentation in the provision of social services, urban segregation, the disintegration of forms of solidarity and, in general, the loss of social ties, were some of the factors that generated risks for individuals, households and communities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

16. It was pointed out that, in the broad sense, the notion of vulnerability referred to the probability (risk) that individuals, households or communities could be hurt or damaged by alterations to their environment or by limitations placed on their own attributes. This concept of vulnerability was multidimensional and had many causes, as it referred to the convergence of a set of external and internal factors which become apparent at the level of the individual, the household and the community at determined times and circumstances. Although many disciplines used the term in different senses, these almost all encompassed a social aspect. It was not until the 1990s, however, that analytical approaches were developed for the systematic study of social vulnerability and distinctions were made with respect to analogous concepts such as marginality and social exclusion, the importance and relevance of which were linked to specific historical and contextual circumstances that differed from the prevailing conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

17. After outlining some of the approaches that had been proposed, three analytical categories were defined for the examination of vulnerability: (i) the assets (physical, financial, human and social) of individuals, households and communities; (ii) sets of opportunities arising from the social environment, consisting of the State, the market and society; and (iii) strategies (or behaviour patterns) that individuals, households and communities developed to mobilize their assets and respond to external changes. This analytical framework offered great potential for the development of public policies aimed at preventing, reducing or eliminating the internal weaknesses of social players and the adversities of their environment. Possibilities for intervention thus ranged from strengthening the capabilities of individuals, households and communities to derive benefit from the opportunities of the external environment —and thus reduce

the risk of a deterioration in their welfare conditions— to the development of socioeconomic scenarios that would be conducive to upward social mobility and in which the risks inherent in the current social and economic conditions would be attenuated.

18. The presentation highlighted the fact that the conceptual development of the notion of vulnerability —and its link with a theoretical focus— was still at an early stage, and sustained methodological efforts, including the spheres of measurement and empirical examples, were therefore required. Particular importance was placed on the design of analytical frameworks to evaluate the degree to which social vulnerability shaped the sociodemographic behaviour patterns of individuals, households and communities. By the same token, it was necessary to examine the extent to which sociodemographic behaviour patterns carried specific hazards that could generate or exacerbate some forms of vulnerability.

19. The comments on the presentation stressed the fact that the most novel feature of the social vulnerability concept lay in the possibility to develop an analytical framework which would open the “black box” of household behaviour patterns. One commentator argued that the strategy for developing such a framework should be directed mainly at the point where changes in household asset portfolios intersected with infrastructure changes that determined welfare access opportunities. In other words, it was necessary to advance hypotheses about how the changes in the basic institutional orders of society combined with shifts in the make-up of individual and household assets to generate different types of social disadvantage.

20. Another commentator pointed out that the examination of new analytical approaches could be highly useful for the countries of the region, particularly if these helped to overcome the theoretical flaws of poverty studies, which tended to be rather descriptive and static. The speaker maintained that new approaches should make a substantive contribution to the prevention, reduction and cushioning of hazards by strengthening the asset portfolios of social players and promoting strategies of asset mobilization. It was also necessary, however, to move the debate on these new approaches away from one of the major problems affecting social sciences, which was the lack of association between theoretical analysis and empirical verification; one of the challenges of examining social vulnerability was therefore to gain ground in empirical measurement and generate public policy inputs.

Module 2: Vulnerability in the sphere of labour (session three)

21. The speaker sustained that one of the principal sources of social vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean was to be found the sphere of labour, as social safety nets and social security —both strongly associated with employment— had suffered as a result of increasing job precariousness, informality and insecurity in the context of the new pattern of development. The old Fordist model of development carried a component of collective and trade union action —which in many of the region’s countries had contributed to the protection of labour conditions— but globalization had radically changed this situation by opening the economy and incorporating new technological models.

22. Institutional disaffiliation, insufficient dynamism for job creation in the economies, changes in labour structures, the growing preponderance of services in output and the emergence of new forms of labour hiring were some of the phenomena that had helped to generate new situations of vulnerability, which placed unemployment within a system of market relations rather than a labour system as such. It was mentioned that the reduction in the capacity of the public sector and of large firms to generate employment had resulted in an increase in the relative weight of small enterprises, which were frequently

characterized by low productivity and casual forms of employment, with the associated precariousness, uncertainty and heterogeneity.

23. Analysis of the combination between welfare systems and modalities of labour demand in developed countries pointed to the existence of a trade-off between exclusion and equality. A comparison of recent experiences in the United States and several European countries suggested that a higher degree of social equality corresponded to greater labour exclusion and vice versa. In Latin American and Caribbean countries this trade-off was less marked, as a worsening of income inequality had been accompanied by an increase in rates of unemployment and visible and invisible underemployment. The new pattern of development implied changes to the typical waged, dependent and subordinate, formal and protected job; for example, there was an expansion of independent, subordinate forms of work (own-account) and autonomous, subordinate types of work (work in the home).

24. One commentator argued that the poverty approach was inadequate to explain the complex situations that arose in the context of the new development pattern that had become consolidated in recent decades in the countries of the region; by contrast, social vulnerability was a concept that was capable of elucidating such situations. The speaker added that vulnerability had become a predominant social feature, due both to the commercialization of social relationships and to the State's separation from its functions of providing protection and security to the population. Vulnerability thus emerged as an adverse configuration of micro- and macro-social aspects, and influenced the hazard levels of individuals, households and communities. In the speaker's opinion, the import substitution development model may have generated less opportunities, but it had also created lower levels of vulnerability; in market-based societies there were more opportunities, but vulnerability levels were higher, as taking those opportunities implied competition, contest and conquest, as could be observed in several of the region's countries.

25. Another commentator highlighted the importance of the vulnerability concept in virtue of both its heuristic potential, based on its multidimensional nature, and of the fact that it created room for manoeuvre and opportunities for public policies and, in particular, for employment policies. In the labour sphere, the concept made it possible to overcome some of the limitations of other approaches, given that it dealt with a greater number of elements, at the macro-, meso- and micro-social level. It was suggested that the concept of vulnerability could advance furthest in the sphere of labour, as it would help to deepen studies—such as those on informality, precariousness and labour-market segmentation—that had been conducted for a number of years in the region. To achieve this purpose it was necessary to move towards an operational definition of the concept, acknowledging the key role of population variables in determining the type of policies needed to reduce the hazards to which the region's most disadvantaged social groups were exposed.

26. The discussions laid an emphasis on the fact that the rise in unemployment levels during the 1990s had had an uneven effect on the population. This was clearly apparent from examination of the effects of unemployment by sex, ethnic features or age. It was also considered important to observe the ways in which the assets of individuals and households were linked at the local level to improve their position in the labour market. In addition, there was a need to generate incentives to improve social safety nets and thus help to attenuate household and community vulnerability. Other points raised included the need to expand social capital in order to mitigate the structural vulnerability inherent in the new pattern of development; the need to analyse the rights of citizens' with respect to vulnerability levels; and the importance of examining the responsibilities of the different international instances in the worsening of vulnerability scenarios in the Latin American and Caribbean economies.

Module 3: Basic services: universality, exclusion and quality (session four)

27. The two presentations given in this module focused on social services as a source of assets and of risk reduction (or diversification) for individuals, households and communities. Reference was made to some of the interrelations between economic, political and population conditions in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean which affect access to and quality and equitable provision of social services. The role of the State was highlighted as an essential agent in generating and fortifying assets (the impact of which was differentiated by social group and the stage of the life cycle of individuals and households). The role of the market, too, was essential in creating opportunities for upward social mobility, but also involved risks of social exclusion, particularly in the absence of appropriate regulatory mechanisms. Because the modalities of operation of these agents were uneven —and because of the effect of historic lags— the countries of the region displayed a variety of social spending and income distribution patterns. With respect to population status, although there are differences between countries, high rates of urbanization and changes in age structure and household composition had a major impact on demand for social services.

28. It was acknowledged that recent decades had seen progress in the coverage of basic social services, but this had been accompanied by significant inequalities of access and quality of provision for the most disadvantaged social groups. Although ownership of dwellings was a common asset in the region's countries, dwelling units in poor areas displayed grave quantitative and qualitative deficiencies and there were occurrences of real exclusion among younger households. In addition, while urban infrastructure had improved —with wider coverage of water and drainage services— major problems remained in the areas around dwellings, especially in neighbourhoods of lower-income households. These tended to occupy inappropriate sites, lack social and community infrastructure and environmental development —increasing exposure to hazards, even of a catastrophic type, such as flooding— and were often located far from places of work.

29. In a wider sense, Latin America and the Caribbean was affirmed to be a region featuring high economic and social risk. Although the 1990s had seen a reduction in fiscal deficits and an upturn in social spending, economic growth had been insufficient to reduce social gaps and consumption had tended to be highly sensitive to crises and recessions. There was also a deterioration in the middle-income sectors, which translated into higher degrees of insecurity and defencelessness; this in addition to persistently high levels of poverty and weak labour markets. These situations called into question the countries' focalized policies and the efficiency and effectiveness of their social safety nets. Weak regulatory mechanisms meant that the financial and insurance markets suffered high intermediation costs.

30. It was pointed out that the quantity and quality of social protection required to be in keeping with the notion of a "fiscal pact", in order to safeguard basic macroeconomic equilibria. Although it had been required by a development pattern shaped by the contemporary context of globalization, an excessive emphasis on seeking to establish macroeconomic equilibria had jeopardized financing for social safety nets. It was therefore argued that the relegation of the social authority to a position subordinate to its economic counterpart had adversely affected its real operational capacity and weakened traditional channels of access to social protection. The institutional changes seen in recent years had thus put social prevention at risk, as it became dispersed in unconnected networks operating in a framework of increasing public-sector decentralization.

31. Among other aspects, the equivalence of the cost of social security to the magnitude of risks had

to be determined by considering the system as a whole; a lack of appropriate information masked the asymmetries that occurred within a very specific market. The State could therefore contribute to risk diversification by various means, such as provision of insurance, strengthening of its regulatory capacity and oversight of the equity and efficiency of the insurance system.

32. The commentators underscored the need for progress in identifying both the risks to which the population was exposed and the gaps between different social sectors in terms of provision of protection. It was added that one of the biggest policy challenges was to generate public social capital to boost the capabilities of individuals, households and communities to deal with the adversities of their surroundings. There was a need for detailed examination of the public-sector reforms begun in recent years, as these could have ambivalent effects on individuals, households and communities. By the same token, they argued that, just as further study was required of vulnerability in relation to social security systems, so vulnerability should be analysed in relation to public policy. Lastly, another complex challenge was to strike a balance between expanding the coverage of social protection mechanisms and developing them on a more equitable basis.

33. During the debate it was proposed that the wealth of possibilities embodied in the social vulnerability and risk approach should be reflected in an equivalent breadth of information sources, in order to evaluate the variety of dimensions represented. The data available in the region was not always suitable for quantifying risks and, in addition, it was by nature difficult to compare on an international or intersectoral basis. The measurement and composition of social spending were also relevant to the issue of vulnerability which, in its different aspects, constituted a cross-cutting issue in society. The modalities of social spending allocation, it was added, had a direct impact on the possibilities of expanding assets and reducing risk.

Module 4: Environmental vulnerability (session five)

34. The presentation began with the examination of a number of theoretical advances and experiences of intervention regarding vulnerability to environmental hazards. Reference was made to some of the recent disasters that had struck Central America and the Caribbean. It was stressed that disasters and adverse environmental changes—both those resulting from natural processes and those triggered by the action of humans—affected the different social strata in a differentiated manner. The speaker highlighted the policy elements that should be considered in order to mitigate the hazards associated with environmental vulnerability. One rationale for these policies, in addition to the need to protect human life, was the massive economic impact of natural disasters. The environmental dimension encompassed a network of complex and delicate balances since, just as global changes had an impact at the local level, local changes had repercussions at the global level. In consequence, there were no simple, blanket solutions to environmental problems; rather it was a case of identifying approaches that were adapted to the specific vulnerability conditions of each territory and community.

35. One piece of evidence in favour of using the vulnerability approach to address environmental issues was that a change was occurring in the vision that served as a basis for policy-making. In place of traditional concerns over natural disasters, attention was currently directed at examination of the human and natural systems undergoing change. From this perspective, it was argued, the vulnerability-environment relationship required two basic subsystems to be recognized: one ecological and the other socioeconomic. It would thus be possible to identify both changes that threatened societies' welfare and others that affected the functioning of ecosystems. In the case of the latter, a distinction was drawn

between gradually occurring changes in the global environment and sudden events that triggered disasters. Analysis of the relationship between society and the environment provided a clear picture of feedback situations that gave rise to vicious circles, such as the poverty-environmental degradation-human harm cycle.

36. It was mentioned that the environmental issue had been incorporated, at least nominally, into the development programmes of most of the region's countries during the 1990s; this was a reflection of growing awareness of the fact that environmental changes, even those not on the scale of disasters, had a negative impact on welfare. It was equally clear that the vulnerability of systems could not be attributed to the action of a single factor, but resulted from a combination of cumulative and synergetic effects.

37. It was argued that it was necessary to distinguish between threat, vulnerability and risk. In the sphere of natural disasters, threat referred to a dangerous phenomenon, while vulnerability referred to the internal configuration of the socioeconomic subsystem faced with the effects of such a threat; in the absence of vulnerability, there would be no destruction or loss. Risk of disaster referred to the probability of a disaster occurring, and was the product of an interaction between threats and vulnerability factors. Risk was therefore dynamic, changeable and differentiated (as each actor perceived it differently). Vulnerability was principally a function of five factors: degree of exposure, protection, immediate response capacity, basic resiliency and rebuilding capacity.

38. The commentators highlighted the need for a conceptual framework to deal with natural disasters, on the understanding that such events were not disasters in themselves, but as a function of the damage and injury they caused to people. Societies displayed a higher degree of resiliency to natural disasters, as they were able to deal with events that were beyond the scope of individuals and households. In this sense, it was imperative to reformulate disaster response strategies from the specific perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean.

39. According to one commentator, in defining vulnerability characteristics special attention should be paid to the particular implications of the risks to which each territory was exposed. In the small island States of the Caribbean, for example, the cost of the damage wreaked by some of the natural disasters of recent years amounted to several times the respective country's GDP figure. This generated a kind of decapitalization, the effects of which were added to the by-products of other problems—such as the docking of already small public areas for private tourist purposes—which are of considerable magnitude in small countries.

40. Emphasis was laid on the need to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between poverty and environmental vulnerability, in order to construct a causal chain between the initial link to those aspects associated with the reproduction mechanisms. The task also remained to define the responsibilities of States and the international community in efforts to reduce environmental vulnerability.

41. It was considered appropriate to adopt new modalities of disaster-associated risk and damage appraisal, as it was recognized that the methodologies available for measuring the impact of such events on social, economic and environmental conditions were gravely limited. In addition, a comparison was drawn between the impacts of environmental disaster on developing and developed countries. The fact that disasters caused less deaths—though higher economic costs—in developed countries was attributable to a number of factors, two of which were relevant to the notion of vulnerability: (i) the higher level of education and organization of the population, which helped to develop a culture of damage prevention and mitigation, and (ii) the location and design of infrastructure, housing and services, which

were built in less vulnerable zones and conformed to strict regulations (which protected not only ownership, but also the life and health of individuals).

42. The debate saw various suggestions for developing a strategy to reduce environmental vulnerability: (i) propitiate, with the active participation of civil society, a culture of damage prevention and mitigation; (ii) strengthen systems to track natural threats in order to create early-warning mechanisms; (iii) prepare maps of vulnerability to different natural phenomena (on a suitable scale), to serve as a guide for proper land use zoning; (iv) include environmental vulnerability (not just impact) analyses in development projects; (v) encourage incentives directed at re-establishing the environmental balances in areas where they have deteriorated.

Module 5: Territorial forms of vulnerability (session six)

43. The first presentation emphasized the fact that both physical and social spaces were important in analysing the vulnerability of individuals, households and communities. It was argued that the region did not possess sufficient knowledge about the ways in which populated areas formed and reorganized, which hampered the study of interactions between different communities. Although the concept of community was associated with broad social and cultural features, one of the criteria usually considered valid for delineating it was the coexistence of a human group, so that the notion of locality could be understood as a basic approximation to the concept of community.

44. The number of households was on the increase in those countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that were at intermediate stages of the demographic transition. This contributed to the formation of new localities and influenced social vulnerability. The vulnerability of localities was not simply a function of their physical size or the magnitude of their population —however small these may be— but mainly of their isolation, which was determined by the intersection of social and physical spaces. Thus, dispersed localities with a mainly indigenous population formed socially distant enclaves; similarly, forms of segmentation could be observed in processes of urban concentration. In summary, isolation brought trends toward segregation and differentiation which acted against social cohesion; the resulting polarization also involved potential conflicts between social sectors and municipalities. To examine these situations, the speaker used the notion of propensity, propounded by Popper, which referred to repeated regularities of probabilities and showed that these were unevenly distributed among different social groups.

45. The second presentation maintained that the processes leading to isolation and segmentation limited interaction between different social strata and raised barriers to the accumulation and diversification of assets for more socially disadvantaged groups. Social segmentation as observed in urban areas was an important factor in the persistence of poverty and its transfer between generations, as it restricted the possibilities of the poor to accumulate human and social capital. The isolation of poor groups within internal urban structures —which was visible in the modalities of residential segregation— was exacerbated by increasing segmentation in the spheres of labour and education. Segmentation and segregation thus created barriers that accentuated inequality between social groups, separating them in their day-to-day activities and in the construction and development of life plans.

46. The main factors seen as contributing to the rigidity of poverty included the difficulties encountered by the urban poor in gaining access to opportunities to increase their individual social capital, make use of collective social capital and benefit from citizen capital. The influence of these

factors increased in step with the segmentation of the labour market, the educational system and urban areas. It was argued that the possibility of accumulating individual and collective social capital in contemporary Latin American and Caribbean societies was linked to the opportunities for interaction between disadvantaged individuals and people and groups in possession of a larger number of more diversified assets. Residential segregation, which was increasingly marked in the region's large and middle-sized cities, was likely to be accentuated by the zoning criteria that were implicit—and sometimes explicit—in urban housing and design regulations and policies. Residential segregation, combined with segmentation of the labour market and education, presented the different social groups with radically different sets of opportunities and channels of social mobility. As a corollary of these circumstances, consumption aspirations among disadvantaged social groups—encouraged by the mass media—diverged markedly from their real consumption; as a result, the participation of poor individuals in society became more symbolic than tangible.

47. The commentators stressed the need to conduct a detailed examination of the factors that limited social mobility expectations and the exercise of citizens' rights. It was argued that residential segregation was a source of conflict, as it hindered processes of social integration by the population residing in a single territory; a demonstration of this lack of cohesion was that Latin America and the Caribbean was the region with the highest levels of violence in the world. As residential segregation and segmentation exacerbated social inequalities, the poorest households, which possessed a smaller stock of assets and had a higher number of dependants, saw their real wages deteriorate.

48. During the debate it was indicated that the adverse effects of globalization—which were inherent in the current regional development pattern—were apparent in the high percentage of the population that was unable to accede to the opportunities generated by globalization. In particular, both urban segregation and the dispersion of localities magnified the distance between different social environments, which eroded communication and comprehension among social groups. It was also important to analyse the way in which territorial segregation was associated with different sociodemographic dynamics and modalities of structuring of households, which could translate into forms of vulnerability.

Module 6: Vulnerability, rights and citizenship (session seven)

49. The first presentation propounded an interpretation of social vulnerability in the framework of citizens' rights. The three dimensions covered were: asymmetries between rights, cross vulnerabilities and perception of new problems that generated social concern. With respect to asymmetries between rights, it was sustained that the current development phases of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean—as they sought to position themselves in the global context—displayed an unprecedented contrast between advances in the dissemination of certain rights (civil, political and cultural) and a backslide in the exercise of others (social and economic rights). This asymmetry was manifested in a yawning gap between greater symbolic integration and decreased material integration. The greater symbolic integration was apparent in increasing access to mass media communications, formal education, information and knowledge; while decreased material integration was to be seen, among other aspects, in sharp wage differences, the heavy concentration of wealth and the increase in rates of unemployment and informality. It was argued that these asymmetries frustrated expectations and debilitated adherence to national plans and to the regulatory force of the law and institutions; which in turn generated new vulnerabilities.

50. With respect to the nexus between different forms of vulnerability, mention was made of the situation of ethnic minorities (native peoples and peoples of African descent), who have suffered virtually

all forms of exclusion in the course of history. Those minorities were not able to fully exercise their political citizenship rights, accede to formal employment or quality social services, or participate in public dialogue. Their identity was not respected either, as they had been stripped of their main mechanisms of protection, such as traditions, cultural and productive wealth and forms of community organization.

51. Among the issues that had become social concerns, reference was made to two that had emerged as sources of vulnerability and stalked Latin American and Caribbean countries like phantoms: drugs and criminal violence. The speaker pointed out that the phantom-like nature of these two issues derived from the fact that they channelled and expressed—and at once hid—a series of fears and phobias which made up a subjective substratum of contemporary vulnerability and led to the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals—especially young people—who needed to strengthen their social integration.

52. In the second presentation it was argued that the family was a social entity which established individuals' basic dimensions of security, generated and multiplied assets and defined strategies for improving social integration. In addition, the institution of the family figured in public and private discourse, but with a distorted image that was very far from its contemporary status. Public discourse, in particular, portrayed the family as a refuge in the face of changing situations, but did not acknowledge that it also constituted a sphere of insecurity for the individuals who belonged to it—as seen in cases of family violence and instability generated by the spectre of unemployment, for example.

53. An analysis was conducted of some of the major changes experienced by the family that affect the immediate environment of individuals. These included: decrease in the number of children; conceptions that were more spaced out; an increase in the proportion of female-headed households; and a larger variety of family compositions. The problems and difficulties that these changes and others in the social environment imposed on family-orientated public policies were also described and examined. Reference was made to the tensions between individual and family rights, between the ideal and the real family, and between the public and private spheres. Likewise, a distinction was drawn between family and labour policies, which led to the affirmation that the greatest challenge for family-orientated interventions was to empower their essentially transversal and integrated nature.

54. Some of the comments emphasized the need to move towards a sociology of risk, seeking a connection with the social relationship matrixes characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean societies. It was argued that perceived risk is not always the same as the objective risk to which individuals, households and communities are exposed. Although perceived risk is a social construction, which passes through the medium of the mass media, this perception serves as a reference for the behaviour patterns of the players (individuals, households and communities). It was added that the study of perceived risk construction should not be dissociated from the role played by the structures of domination that had historically grown up in the societies of the region. In this sense, the expansion of the capitalist system at the height of the transformation process engendered tensions that were inherent to a situation of transit from a manufacturing model to one in which services took on greater prevalence; this process was plagued with uncertainties which contributed to the perception of new risks and the emergence of apparent asymmetries.

55. The commentators also pointed to tensions between cultural identity and social change, which translated into the complex challenge of reconciling specific historic and cultural features and the universalist drive of development and modernity. The socialization of individuals and households in Latin America and the Caribbean had been infiltrated with ethnic and other types of discrimination, which were

manifested in habits, behaviour patterns and the ways in which policies intended to strengthen social integration processes were conceived. The globalization process, it was argued, clearly revealed the distance that lay between *de jure* and *de facto* society, which implied a need to strengthen mechanisms of dialogue in order to reduce the multiple forms of discrimination based on ethnic origin, gender or country of birth.

56. With regard to the changes seen in the family and related social vulnerability, empirical evidence showed that two-parent families strengthened the accumulation of assets by the children. With respect to the construction of vulnerability, it was also important to examine power relationships within households, given that these were closely linked to the acceptance and exercise of rights that were conducive to *de jure* and *de facto* equality.

Module 7: Demographic vulnerability (session eight)

57. The presentation began by drawing a distinction between two senses of the term vulnerability. The first, of a general nature, referred to risks, weaknesses or disadvantages; the second, which involved specific definitions, was linked to analytical approaches used to grasp social problems, such as response capacity to economic crisis, survival strategies of the poor and social mobility. In terms of the more general meaning of the word, demographic vulnerability referred to the risks, weaknesses or disadvantages that communities, households and individuals faced as a result of demographic factors (trends, characteristics, behaviour patterns).

58. Three long-term processes were identified as having contributed to the creation of demographic vulnerability scenarios: (i) the classic demographic transition, which involved a sustained fall in fertility and mortality rates, the long-term result of which was a drop in the rate of population growth and the ageing of the population; (ii) the urban and mobility transitions, which were characterized by the systematic growth of the urban population as a proportion of the total, increasing inter-city migration and a simultaneous increase in short- and long-distance movements (intra-urban movements and international mobility, respectively); and (iii) the second demographic transition, which was an expression coined by European demographers to describe a set of changes in marital and reproductive behaviour in Western European countries from the 1960s onward. With respect to this second transition, it was added that, as well as the prevalence of fertility rates that were well below replacement level and sustained over time—which some authors considered to be features of the classic post-demographic transition—the phenomenon was marked by an increase in single status, higher age at marriage, higher age at birth of first child, an increase in the number of consensual unions, a higher proportion of births outside marriage, a higher number of marital break-ups and a diversification of family structure models.

59. In the classic demographic transition, vulnerability was associated basically with different types of lags in the downward trend of fertility and mortality rates. As the transition progressed, demographic pressure could be attenuated on the basis of resources as economic dependency rates in households declined (as the child-rearing demands on couples eased). This advance also lessened the risk of early mortality and favoured diversification and an improved social position for women. Furthermore, in the long term, the transition was supposed to lead to a convergence in fertility and mortality rates between and within countries, which would eliminate the effect of demographic factors (excess mortality and fertility rates among the poor). However, it was emphasized that at its advanced stages the demographic transition did not imply the disappearance of demographic vulnerability, for a number of reasons: (i) the emergence of new risks, such as ageing; (ii) uncertainty over whether some suppositions, such as

convergence, would be borne out; (iii) the influence of a number of crucial fertility-related issues (such as adolescent fertility rates and unwanted fertility), which would continue to be problems even in contexts of low fertility; (iv) the existence of other long-term demographic processes that generated risks and disadvantages, independently of the progress of the classic demographic transition.

60. In relation to the urban and mobility transitions, it was emphasized that the risks associated with the early stages of the process were known and observable in some Latin American and Caribbean countries: (i) unsustainable urban growth; (ii) rural depopulation, as a result of the exodus to urban areas; (iii) exclusion of rural migrants in the cities, because of their sociocultural lag. It was stated, however, that the advance of this transition would dilute some of the risks—such as those concerning rapid growth in the cities—and would make others lose their numerical significance—such as the integration of rural migrants, who would become a minority among the total numbers of migrants. The risks of depopulation and ageing in the rural setting persisted, however, while others increased, such as those concerning movements on a micro-scale—moves to peripheral areas of cities implied location disadvantages and the socio-economic selectivity of intra-urban mobility led to residential segregation—and on a macro-scale—defencelessness and the disadvantages of most of the migrants in their developed destination countries.

61. It was emphasized that because of its highly sociodemographic nature, the second demographic transition depended on cultural processes that were difficult to anticipate and that displayed a high degree of regional, national and subnational specificity. It was sustained, nevertheless, that the lag in the adoption of some of the behaviour patterns characteristic of the demographic transition constituted a source of vulnerability, as it suggested that individuals did not yet have the capacity to consciously manage their reproductive behaviour as a function of their life plans. Given that this second transition was just beginning to appear in some Latin American and Caribbean countries, a variety of questions were raised about future risks. Some, like those concerning a fertility rate consistently below the replacement level, referred to a distant (and even uncertain) future in the countries of the region; others, such as the frequency of consensual unions and single-parent households (in particular female-headed households), were not new in the region nor did they constitute early evidence of the second demographic transition, but rather reflected conditions of need and exclusion and institutional failings. Lastly, there were risks that affected communities, households and individuals, through a variety of mechanisms; marital break-up was an example. Although exposure to these risks was transversal in terms of socioeconomic status, the ability to cope with their consequences varied significantly as a function of this status.

62. Special mention was made of the misalignment between the spread of behaviour patterns that were associated with the second demographic transition in developed countries—such as initiation of sexual activity at an early age and outside marriage, consensual unions, rearing children outside marriage, divorce and family recomposition—and the persistence, in the Latin American and Caribbean context, of a framework of norms, values, institutions, formal procedures and resources that did not acknowledge or even stigmatized such behaviour patterns, thus exacerbating their adverse repercussions. Aggravating factors included normative and institutional restrictions on access by adolescents to reproductive health services and the persistent legal and social discrimination of consensual unions and children born outside marriage.

63. The commentators underlined the fact that the presentation contributed a new focus on vulnerability, which diverged from the traditional (and limited) approach to vulnerable groups; this new focus required consideration of the epistemological dimensions of the vulnerability concept. In this sense it was indicated that although the perspective was broad, as it encompassed three substantive levels of

aggregation —communities, households and individuals— it ought to move beyond the level of the agents and consider the existence of “vulnerabilizing structures” operating in specific geographical and social spheres and generating particular risks for individuals, households and communities, which varied according to conditions of ethnic origin and gender, among others. It was acknowledged that the task of dealing with issues relating to different levels of analysis was a complex one and could potentially contradict what was viewed as “good” for an individual or a society; equally, it was possible that a single sociodemographic event could have categorically opposed meanings and consequences on the economic (material) and cultural fronts.

64. As a means of incorporating the range of meanings that could be attributed to interrelations between population and development, it was emphasized that it was important to include cultural and subjective aspects of the study of vulnerability. Emphasis was also placed on the institutional elements surrounding political action in the field of variables of population structure and dynamics; while mention was made of the need to consider population variables in vulnerability analyses for public policy design, given that changes in demographic behaviour were related to the rights of individuals in the spheres of both mortality and fertility, and territorial mobility.

65. The discussions reiterated the importance of linking the demographic and social dimensions through appropriate use of the concept of vulnerability. This required the applicability of demographic risks to be duly established. In this respect, it was emphasized that the causes of those risks varied between countries depending on their stage of progress in the demographic transition; this distinction was also apparent at the level of individual social groups. It was further sustained that a single item, such as consensual unions, could have totally different senses in different demographic contexts, which generated methodological complexities. The importance of studies on mortality and quality of life was also underlined, as the epidemiological transition was an appropriate sphere in which to analyse the differentiated risks to which different population groups were exposed. Lastly, there was a debate on the need for more in-depth study of the second demographic transition, which had been little analysed thus far, but which offered major heuristic potential for public policy formation.

E. CONCLUDING ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

66. The four experts who participated in the concluding round table coincided in underscoring the potential of the social vulnerability concept for furthering understanding of the complex transformation processes underway in Latin American and Caribbean societies in the framework of a development pattern shaped by globalization, and for mapping out courses of action in the field of public policy. They also agreed that the notion of vulnerability was very much at the construction stage and that international literature on the subject and the contributions made at the Seminar had clearly revealed the need to develop it through the use of interdisciplinary focuses. The experts further highlighted the importance of methodological efforts to refine analytical approaches; this made it necessary to mark out the fundamental concepts, coordinate them with theoretical proposals and formulate hypotheses that could be empirically validated.

67. One of the speakers put forward a vision of vulnerability based on a systemic focus, according to which the concept corresponded to the propensity of a system to undergo significant structural transformations, from which sudden or gradual damage or benefits could result. He propounded that systems could experience these transformations as a result of the action of internal or external processes.

In this respect he underlined the fact that all systems have a certain capacity to handle stimuli and adapt to external scenarios, although this capability did not necessarily yield positive results, as it might involve postponing necessary structural changes. He concluded with the observation that no system was closed, as closure would imply asphyxiation and, therefore, all systems were vulnerable to external impacts, as they were open to interactions with their surroundings.

68. Another speaker stressed that, although the notion of vulnerability was at the construction stage, it was already beginning to gather momentum, and it was thus possible to perceive its potential in comparison with the limitations of focuses characterized by binary features, such as poverty. He affirmed that both the definition and the operational validation of the concept of vulnerability had broad implications for policy design, and could therefore have an impact on the daily lives of individuals. He argued that this conceptual task ought to ensure that the terminology did not mask the roots of inequality, as there was a need to uncover the causal processes that led to the vulnerability of social sectors with greater disadvantages in their stock of assets. As the current development model inevitably generated present and future vulnerabilities, he sustained, it was necessary to identify not only current risks, but also those likely to emerge in the short, medium and long term. Lastly, he affirmed that the challenge of building a vulnerability approach extended to the methodological level, since it required the creative coordination of quantitative and qualitative procedures.

69. The third presentation highlighted the importance of adopting a concept of vulnerability that would be appropriate for the specific conditions of countries with small physical, demographic and economic dimensions that were permanently exposed to risks, such as the Caribbean and Central American countries. The speaker emphasized that the construction of the concept should be guided by the principle of its usefulness for public policy, which implied that it should facilitate the identification of structural factors that led to risk exposure. She maintained that the vulnerability concept needed to have operational validity in order to make progress in preparing indices and indicators to evaluate the current situation and closely monitor its evolution. By way of example, she mentioned that, in the sphere of labour, progress could be achieved in short order by designing indicators of defencelessness, precariousness and informality; by contrast, in other spheres of vulnerability—such as the aspect associated with cultural identity—there was still a long road to travel before the new approach could be expected to become operational. With respect to population variables, the speaker underlined the importance of ensuring that the analysis paid particular attention to the early life stages, in which a great part of an individual's evolution was defined; she added that this emphasis did not exclude the need to examine other sources of vulnerability associated with sexual and reproductive behaviour—especially in adolescence—and mortality and migration.

70. In the final presentation it was affirmed that it was essential to delineate the concept of vulnerability, given the range of situations to which it appeared to refer. The debates conducted at the Seminar represented progress in that direction, as they had identified areas in which deeper analysis was required. The speaker also proposed further examination of the modalities of application of the vulnerability concept in policies. Emphasis was placed on the need to analyse the sources of vulnerability of a number of specific groups, such as young families with small children, young people who neither worked nor studied and workers exposed to processes of economic reconversion. It was also necessary to encourage coordination between different analytical approaches to social conditions—such as focuses on the rights of individuals, gender status and the generational view—and the concept of (and approaches to) vulnerability. Lastly, the speaker proposed encouraging policies that would combine risk prevention with the strengthening of assets, building on valuable experiences in the design, management and

evaluation of interventions conducted in the countries of the region, especially in the area of communications.

71. The concluding debate highlighted the need to deepen the concept of vulnerability by various means, taking advantage of the fact that it not only referred to elements of the material culture, but also to aspects that belonged to the subjective world of perceptions (including the expectations of social movements). The operational validation of this concept required work to define quantitative and qualitative instruments, which posed challenges in terms of statistical sources. It was also stressed that, as well as the identification of vulnerable groups, there was a need for a deeper understanding of assets and the ways in which they were used and accumulated. Lastly, it was essential to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue and explore ways to complement and move beyond the analytical focuses currently in vogue.

Annex 1

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Annex 2

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS

- Camilo Arriagada Luco, *Servicios sociales y vulnerabilidad en América Latina: conceptos, medición e indagación empírica.*
- Irma Arriagada, *¿Familias vulnerables o vulnerabilidad de las familias?*
- Gustavo Busso, *Vulnerabilidad social: nociones e implicancias de políticas para América Latina y el Caribe a comienzos del siglo XXI.*
- Carlos H. Filgueira, *Estructura de oportunidades y vulnerabilidad social. Aproximaciones conceptuales recientes.*
- José Javier Gómez, *Vulnerabilidad y medio ambiente en América Latina y el Caribe.*
- Martín Hopenhayn, *La vulnerabilidad reinterpretada: asimetrías, cruces y fantasmas.*
- Rubén Kaztman, *Seducidos y abandonados: pobres urbanos, aislamiento social y políticas públicas.*
- Jorge Rodríguez Vignoli, *Vulnerabilidad demográfica en América Latina y el Caribe: ¿qué hay de nuevo?*
- Rosa María Rubalcava, *Localidades y hogares en un mundo de propensiones.*
- Ana Sojo, *El combate a la pobreza y la diversificación de riesgos: equidad y lógicas de aseguramiento en América Latina.*
- Miguel Villa, *Vulnerabilidad social: notas preliminares.*