

Regional Strategy for Latin America

Swedish Cooperative Centre 2007–2011



Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC)

Regional Strategy for Latin America

2007–2011

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Contents

Introduction	5
1. SCC development cooperation	6
2. Contextual Analysis: The situation in Latin America	7
2.1. Poverty and inequality	7
2.2. Democracy and citizenship under construction	10
2.3. Gender inequality	11
2.4. Lack of adequate housing	14
2.5. The impact of economic liberalization and trade agreements with the US on rural areas	15
3. Organised civil society: a prerequisite for development	18
3.1. Strengths and weaknesses in the region's cooperative movement	19
4. The Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC)	21
4.1. Poverty and its dimensions	21
4.2. A world free from poverty and injustice	22
4.3. Target group	22
4.4. SCC's contribution to development	23
4.5. Looking back to move forward: lessons learned	25
4.6. Basic principles and methods	27
4.7. Goals for SCC Regional Office in Latin America 2007-2011	31
5. Priority working areas	32
5.1. SCC Global profile	32
5.2. Priority areas in Latin America	33
5.2.2 Housing and habitat (including finance)	36
5.2.3 Democratic participation and citizenship	38
5.2.4 Gender equality	40
5.2.5 Other crosscutting thematic issues	42
6. Geographical priority areas in Latin America 2007-2011	44
Appendix 1	46
Appendix 2	47

Introduction

This document summarises the Swedish Cooperative Centre's regional strategy for Latin America, and outlines the focus of the period 2007–2011. The strategy was developed throughout 2006 in a participatory process. The conclusions and proposed way forward are based on the joint assessment of what Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) has learned so far, and where we believe we can make a strategic difference in the future.

The regional strategy is guided by the overall SCC strategy entitled “More steps in the right direction” 2007–2011. It is also complemented by a number of global SCC policy papers covering areas such as adequate housing, gender equality, information and communication, partnership, environment and organisational development. This strategy is a working document, intended to guide our overall focus and activities. It will be updated and adapted if such need should arise.

This document is divided into three sections. The first gives a contextual analysis of the situation in Latin America and the causes of poverty and injustice; the second describes SCC guiding values, principles and methods and, finally, the third presents the resulting strategy.

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1. SCC development cooperation

Fifty years ago, the Swedish cooperative movement initiated development cooperation. SCC emerged out of the desire to contribute to improved livelihoods for poor women and men. Today, SCC is an international, professional, non-government and non-profit organisation. SCC is currently operating in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. In Sweden, SCC works with policy and methods, information, advocacy and fundraising.

SCC development cooperation is founded on the principle of help through self-help and strives towards the vision of a world free from poverty and injustice. The goal is the same one that once founded the cooperative movement in Sweden – to support the development of democratic organisations and associations that have the capacity to articulate the rights and needs of their members. In this endeavour, these organisations contribute to building a more democratic and just society.

Currently, SCC has more than 60 member organisations in Sweden representing sectors such as agriculture, housing, consumers, banking and adult education. SCC members, who contribute with their commitment, funds and technical expertise, provide a strong base for SCC development cooperation.

2. Contextual analysis: The situation in Latin America

2.1 Poverty and inequality

High levels of poverty and social, economic and political inequality defines Latin America. Poverty affects more than 213 million Latin Americans (41% of the continent's population); of these, 17% live in extreme poverty. The populations most affected by poverty and social marginalisation are indigenous groups, women and youth.

The causes of poverty and injustice in the region are numerous. Primarily, the high concentration of power, the uneven distribution of income, low participation, gender inequality and the colonial heritage have made important contributions to this situation and also tend to maintain it.

The Human Development Index (HDI) gives a multidimensional indication of people's life quality and wellbeing. The HDI combines measures such as life expectancy at birth, school enrolment ratio, literacy rates and per capita GDP. This index reveals the great disparity between different countries in the continent.

Chart 1 shows the HDI for relevant countries in the region.

The poor distribution of wealth is one of the main causes of poverty in Latin America. Income distribution can be measured using the Gini Coefficient ranging from 0 to 1. Closer to 1 indicates a higher concentration of wealth; closer to 0, the more equal distribution of wealth in a country. The simple average of the Latin American and Caribbean countries is around 0.54.

Chart 2 in Appendix I shows how income distribution in Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal in the

Chart 1. Position of some Latin American countries in the Human Development Index (2006)

Position	Country	HDI	Life expectancy	Adult literacy	Per capita GDP
			at birth (in years)	rates (%)	(PPP in USD)
			2004	2004	2004
43	Uruguay	0.851	75.6	98.0	9 421
48	Costa Rica	0.841	78.3	94.9	9 481
69	Brasil	0.792	70.8	88.6	8 195
82	Peru	0.767	70.2	87.7	5 678
83	Ecuador	0.705	74.5	91.0	3 963
91	Paraguay	0.757	71.2	93.0	4 813
101	El Salvador	0.729	71.1	80.0	5 041
112	Nicaragua	0.698	70.0	76.7	3 634
115	Bolivia	0.692	64.4	86.7	2 720
117	Honduras	0.683	68.1	80.0	2 876
118	Guatemala	0.673	67.6	69.1	4 313

Source: UNDP. Report on Human Development 2006.

world. If Latin America was to experience similar income distribution as South Asia, it is estimated that the percentage of poverty would be 15% instead of current 41% in Latin America.

This illustrates the importance of improving income distribution to reduce poverty in the region, especially where the necessary economic growth rates are difficult to reach i.e. where the highest levels of poverty are found.

In addition, recent studies¹ show that when poverty and inequality are reduced, growth rate increases. Thus, improving livelihoods and wellbeing is not only dependent on a strategy directed at achieving economic, social and cultural rights, it is also dependent on the improvement of equality. Given the experience of previous

1. Lustig, Arias and Rigoloni (2002) and Birdsall and Szekelt (2003)

decades, economic growth in itself does not ensure poverty reduction. Hence, it is necessary to complement efforts seeking to increase income with activities leading to improved income and wealth distribution, in order to exert a more rapid effect on poverty reduction.

In 1990, the first Human Development Report predicted a decade of rapid growth. As there was then, there is currently a consensus regarding development, however the lack of political will and concrete development activity continue. The obvious risk is that human development during the coming decade will be much lower than expected in spite of the consensus as expressed in the Millennium Development Goals.

However, since 1990 there has been some positive change. People living in poor countries have improved healthcare and education and fewer people are poor. The number of countries governed as democracies has increased. On the other hand in 2003, 18 countries with populations of 460 million dropped in the ranking of the Human Development Index as compared to 1990, and a billion people worldwide still live in poverty. The gap between countries regarding human development is wide and in some cases growing both in terms of income and life opportunities. While ending poverty and inequality continues to be possible, progress made has been unsteady and unequal.

Chart 3 in Appendix II shows that fifteen years after the starting point of the Millennium Development Goals advances recorded are limited and, almost certainly, these goals will not be fulfilled in the majority of Latin American countries.

Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia and Nicaragua – countries with the highest levels of extremely poor in the region – will have increased their current population level by 30% in 2015. In order to be able to meet the first Millennium Goal², these nations must

2. The first Millennium Goal aims at reducing the percentage of people living in extreme poverty, and reducing hunger to half by 2015.

increase their GDP by an average 6.7% per annum over the next ten years. This seems highly unlikely.

2.2 Democracy and citizenship under construction

The countries of the region have left the military dictatorships behind and replaced them with democratically elected governments. However, these new democracies have had little success so far in reducing poverty and inequality. According to ALOP (the Latin American Association of Promotion Organisations), during the 1990s a perverse combination of democracy and neo-liberalism characterized the region. The democratically elected governments legitimised the violation of rights, cut down in social investments and policies and privatized essential public assets in the name of the market economy and globalization³.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out a broad definition of citizenship covering civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The region is striving toward this broader democracy; that is to say, a political and social democracy that also allows people access to health, education, recreation and culture⁴. The neo-liberal model is losing ground as a direct result of corrupt governments using inadequate measures, and consequently losing credibility. Today's debate in the region focuses on the real democratization of society and the political inclusion of the majority in decision-making as a necessary precondition for the reduction of inequality and poverty.

The social mobilisation and civil activities occurring throughout the region is a challenge for governments. It is not a rejection

3. The Latin American Association of Promotion Organizations (ALOP). Latin America 2004 – 2005, Democracy and Development: a civil society viewpoint. San José, Costa Rica

4. Ramírez, Gloria. Former president of the Colombian Federation of Educators (FECODE) and advisor to the United Workers Federation (CUT). Colombia. 2005

of democracy per se but more a questioning of top-down democracy that denies people's participation in decision-making, and one that does not put the interests of the powerful and wealthy at risk.

Throughout the region, the oligarchic nature of this elitist democracy is being questioned as are its links to multi-national capital. In several countries, new spheres of popular mobilisation are emerging and these movements demand political transformation. Emerging leftist and central-leftist governments in the region reflect the opinion of the low income sectors that are using their vote to bring about the changes they need and, as a consequence, rejecting the traditional elite.

The region is going through a period of political maturation, now seeking democratic solutions⁵. A new civic and political culture is under construction mobilizing, in particular, the social sectors that have been excluded and discriminated against. The new democratic government model is based on a relationship with organised popular sectors, social movements, new political parties and governments expressing greater social sensitivity.

2.3 Gender inequality

In the last 30 years, the women's movements of the region have managed to put women's rights on the political agenda. Hence, some progress can be observed, mostly regarding increased access to education, inclusion in the work force and political participation⁶. However, significant inequality persists. In today's societies, citizenship is a male attribute. Modern states were founded on formal democratic principles that did not question the exclusion of women. While men occupied the public arena to control

5. Corporación Latinobarómetro. Latinobarómetro Report, 2005. Santiago de Chile.

6. ALOP. Op. Cit.

strategic activities such as the economy and politics, women were designated the domestic front, their main social responsibility being child raising and taking care of the daily household duties.

In Latin America, women are still responsible for more than 90% of household chores. Men's work is valued and paid; women's work at home is invisible, unappreciated and unpaid. The downgrading of female biological and social functions has been translated into the devaluation of women as citizens. Men exercise power and control over public affairs, and over women.

Conditions for women in the workforce are much more precarious than for men; unemployment figures are higher for women, salaries for equal work are lower, and their access to property and other resources continues to be severely limited⁷. Latin America shows the worst income distribution patterns in the world; one of its main causes is gender inequality.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without bringing about changes to the structures of power and their influence on all spheres of life. Inequality persists in public policies and public institutions and in the culture in general. Although all these countries have passed legislative reform bills, positive discrimination and equal opportunities' policies these, in general, are not enforced. Gender inequality is also a hurdle to the economic development of the region's nations. Among the main gender problems limiting development in the region and negatively affecting the poor are the losses caused by the absence of women from economic activities, the social and economic costs of violence against women and maternal mortality⁸.

In most agricultural cooperatives, women only represent 20% or less of the membership and have practically no participation in

7. Ruiz Abril, María Elena. Challenges and opportunities for gender equality in Latin America and the Caribbean.

8. Ruiz Abril, María Elena. Op. Cit.

management structures; consequently, their needs and interests are not incorporated into internal policies, nor are their demands considered within the organisation's productive services and activities.

The agricultural legislation established to assign land to the smallholders, generally only took men into account as beneficiaries, excluding women from this right. Even in those countries that passed reforms to guarantee equal rights for women, men still dominate. Male-based governing bodies plead the lack of land or women's incapacity to exclude them as members. In many cooperatives, the women provide the cheap or unpaid labour. In Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the percentage of women in management posts in agricultural cooperatives is less than 5%, and their participation in SCC projects is around 21%.

More than 60% of those making up housing cooperatives are women. However, in general, men largely occupy management posts. Women represent the highest proportion of the workers in construction projects. Frequently, when it comes to legalizing property ownership, a man's name appears on the deeds of the house. In the majority of the countries, social legislation does not guarantee women's rights; neither is it enforced. Gender issues continue to be regarded as exclusively women's issues. In the majority of organised social sectors, specific and separate spaces have been created for women's participation such as committees, secretarial posts and commissions. Women's needs and demands are kept as separate agendas, or are not taken into account as legitimate issues to be dealt with by the organisations, even less to be promoted as public policies.

The key aspects for women such as equal access to land and productive resources, to income and wages for equal work or opportunities for representative positions in these organisations are still not understood as being strongly connected to the devel-

opment of democracy, transparency and citizenship. Gender equality is not regarded as a factor fundamental to development either by civil society or by the cooperative movement in the region.

2.4 Lack of adequate housing

In recent years, Latin America has been characterized by sustained urban growth, and a drastically increased housing deficit with the resulting informal slum settlements around the cities. According to ECLAC, between 1990 and 2000 the region's housing deficit rose from 38 to 52 million units⁹. This rise is explained not only by the natural population increase or migration of rural families to urban zones, but also by the deterioration of existing housing which has led to a substantial increase in the shortage of quality housing alternatives. The problems of housing quality are acute, affecting a higher percentage of units in the rural area, whereas a much higher number of people are affected in urban areas.

The causes of the shortage are varied. One clear structural reason is the State's failure to meet its obligation to resolve housing needs. This leaves the private sector to take charge of providing alternatives, but under the premise of housing as merchandise and its ties to the land as a marketable commodity. Thus, commercial housing values are six times the average annual income, and represent approximately 80% of poor people's incomes. These groups cannot meet relevant conditions for obtaining credit, and only the upper and middle classes have access to the financing available on the market.

In this situation, the region's poor¹⁰ have little or no access to adequate housing and habitat. They become easy prey for the real

9. ECLAC, (2006), Financial tools to improve access to housing for low-income sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

10. According to data from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (2000 – 2002) a third of Latin America and the Caribbean's population live in conditions of poverty, with 15% living in conditions of extreme poverty.

estate market and urban land speculation. They live in informal settlements, often in high-risk environmental conditions, in areas unsuitable and inaccessible for urban development. The lack of clean water, sewage, electricity, health and education centres etc. only worsens the situation. In the rural areas, environmental degradation and difficulties faced by the agricultural sector are seriously affecting habitat conditions. Houses and rural settlements deteriorate daily and there is little or no access to maintenance or to basic services such as sanitation, health or education.

The urban and rural poor are facing difficulties. The situation is even worse for single mothers who are more vulnerable due to lower income, unstable employment situation and in addition, often the sole child carers. They also suffer from legal structural limitations which in many countries limit their opportunities regarding property ownership or access to a housing credit.

According to the United Nations, the investment needed to improve or eradicate the region's slums between 2005 and 2020 is estimated at USD 1 200 per capita. Despite a regional average increase since the '90s in the GDP percentage assigned to social expenditure by 2.3%, the amount assigned to housing has decreased in the same period to -0.3%.

2.5 The impact of economic liberalization and trade agreements with the US on rural areas

Approximately 45 million poor people in Latin America live in rural areas, with extreme poverty rates reaching 37%. This figure increases notably in the poorest countries: with 78% extreme rural poverty in Guatemala, 67% in Honduras, 64% in El Salvador, 62% in Bolivia and 56% in Nicaragua.

The region shows limited competitiveness and productivity, which is a result of a productive structure based on exploiting cheap labour, the non-sustainable use of natural resources and a

deficient physical and social infrastructure. The unequal land ownership pattern is notorious, concentrated as it is into the hands of a few multi-national companies and local oligarchies that own huge tracts of land whereas thousands of farmers own only small, low-quality land plots, which only contributes to the disparate distribution of income and the increase of poverty. According to INE in Guatemala¹¹, 87% of Guatemala farmers have access to 9% of the cultivable land, yet 80% of the land is under the control and ownership of 13%, mostly large-estate, landholders.

Trade liberalisation, together with agricultural subsidies in developed countries, have created unequal conditions for competition for farmers in Latin America, with small and medium-sized producers and entrepreneurs being most affected. This situation has become more acute with the negotiation and signing of the Free Trade Agreement. The structural adjustments made in previous decades have worsened the unequal resource and income distribution in rural Latin America. Increased capital investments in large scale agriculture have led to greater social exclusion in these areas. Work opportunities for rural poor are uncertain, dependent on season and poorly paid. Smaller and medium sized producers experience difficulties in competing and migration to cities is often a consequence. Some rural producers manage to continue, but then their activities are often linked to the agro-industrial large-scale production of international companies.

The combination of agro-industrial and trans-national capital with large estate owners has given rise to huge single crop export agro-businesses that have resulted in a new offensive against the environment and the survival of the small producers. Various

11. INE (National Statistics Institute), 2003 Guatemala Agricultural Census

farmers' movements throughout the region are tackling these trends.

According to studies carried out in Central America, the effects of the Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) will affect the small-scale agriculture strongly, along with micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, and other business focusing on the Central American market. The productive base of these sectors is limited in volume, making it more difficult for them to compete with United States production on the regional market¹².

Staple crop production (corn, beans and rice) will steadily diminish, impacting negatively on producers' incomes due to the direct effect of reduced prices coming from the tariff-free importation of grains from the United States. Furthermore, food security among smallholders will be threatened.

CAFTA will have negative effects on production, employment, income and living conditions among the campesino population¹³, and this has been condemned by civil society citing the lack of guarantees to labour rights and environmental protection etc.¹⁴

Beyond this, it is very probable that the negative impact will be even greater than that predicted by these studies. One example is that the proposed price reductions for agricultural goods will be passed onto the final consumer, which is highly unlikely. It also suggests that smallholders producing for self consumption will not be affected by price variations, which is unlikely given that most of them sell at least part of their production on the national market.

12. Nowalski, J., Osterlof, D., y J. Urbina. CAFTA: Contributions to a Working Agenda on the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. San José, Costa Rica. 2005.

13. Tolentino, J.A. Op. Cit.

14. Amnesty International. Report 2005.

3. Organised civil society: A prerequisite for development

Civil society in Latin America plays a fundamental role in demanding respect for human rights, promoting justice and contributing to poverty alleviation. Social movements, informal groups, trade unions, NGOs and cooperatives make up part of civil society; they are examples of the joint efforts made to respond to difficulties that could not be resolved on an individual basis.

We define civil society as, “groups and organisations found in the arena between the State, the market and the individual households, acting together in the defence of common interests”.

The social economy is made up of organisations with primarily a social goal. The core characteristic of these enterprises and organisations is that they run economic activities in the interest of their members.

Democracy is the basis for their internal governance and management. Membership is open and voluntary, applying principles of solidarity and democratic participation, either sharing surplus among members or channelling it into social objectives. Their administration is autonomous and they are independent of the state. The cooperatives are part of the social economy sector and civil society alike, given their double role as a people’s association and an enterprise.

SCC works with a wide range of actors in civil society; most commonly with agricultural and housing cooperatives or associations, but also with *campesino* organisations, financial organisations, different NGOs, social movements and other democratic

organisations that share the organisation's basic values and aim to bring about change in society.

3.1 Strengths and weaknesses in the region's cooperative movement

Cooperatives are formed when people's needs cannot be met by either the State or by individuals acting alone. They are often the best alternative for poor people in order to fulfil basic needs and rights such as improved income and nutrition, adequate housing and job opportunities. Today, there are approximately 6 800 active cooperatives in Central America, with a membership of around three million people¹⁵.

Cooperatives possess the capacity to create employment and income and to strengthen people's participation and political articulation. The cooperatives contribute in several ways to improving living conditions and social justice: 1) by improving opportunities and practical living conditions for the poor; 2) by promoting the democratic and economic development and capacity of the organisations 3) by increasing the legitimacy and representativeness of the organisations, along with their capacity for political lobby and advocacy in local, national and international decision-making.

The United Nations, ILO and other international actors have understood the potential of the cooperative model as a facilitator for poor women and men to organise themselves, create work, and thus contribute to reducing poverty.

According to a recent study¹⁶, the cooperative movement in the region also shows weaknesses that will need to be considered when defining SCC's work in the region: the movement needs

15. Study "Situation of the Cooperative Movement in Central America", CCC-CA, 2006

16. Ibid

improved capacity to face and adapt to changes and to access markets, it has internal problems with political governance and a traditional and old-fashioned leadership, it often lacks creativity to develop new initiatives and links to other cooperatives, and finally the movement shows insufficient collaboration with other civil society actors leading to limited impact on public policies.

4. The Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC)

4.1 Poverty and its dimensions

Poverty does not only mean lack of money. A multidimensional definition of poverty is used that includes lack of opportunity, economic resources, power and security.

The poor generally lack economic resources due to low wages or unemployment, low productivity or low prices for their produce.

Lack of power and influence is equally important as lack of economic resources, since it is one of the main obstacles for the poor in their efforts to change and improve their lives. The lack of power makes it hard for poor people to make their voice heard, coupled with the humiliation and exploitation they often suffer from the dominating class or from people in power positions.

People with few resources have only limited opportunities to act independently and participate as citizens in the decision-making processes that define their lives. The ability to mobilise and organise themselves to act together is therefore one of the most important resources for poor people in their exercise of influence and power.

Lack of security is another aspect obstructing poor people. It means that they cannot defend themselves against abuse of power, natural disasters, unemployment or illness. They cannot afford to take risks or make fruitful, long-term investments. Access to power and security are very closely linked to the ability to initiate new alternatives.

Living in poverty is often a vicious circle where the lack of resources, powerlessness and lack of security tends to perpetuate or even worsen the situation. Poverty is caused by various factors,

often structural and macro economical/political. In order to be able to contribute to change in society, SCC works at different levels addressing the various causes of poverty.

4.2 A world free from poverty and injustice

The SCC vision is “A world free from poverty and injustice”. SCC believes that together with our partners and in alliance with civil society organisations, it can contribute to reducing poverty and increasing global justice. Working towards a world free from poverty and injustice is carried out in two ways, both equally important. The first is development cooperation undertaken with partner organisations, and the second is operations related to advocacy and lobbying, communications and information.

Our mission is to:

- **support poor women and men to enable them to increase their incomes, improve their living conditions, defend their rights, and organise themselves.**
- **strengthen the democratic and economic development of our partner organisations.**
- **contribute to the development of democratic and just societies.**

In Sweden, SCC will work to:

- **ensure that people take a stand and become engaged in the establishment of an equitable world order.**
- **support our development programmes with fund-raising activities.**

4.3 Target group

SCC's target group is poor women and men who are members or potential members of democratic organisations, associations, movements or informal groups working for common goals. The target group is mainly found in rural areas where poverty is wide-

spread; however this group is also represented in urban areas.

The extremely poor often lack opportunities and organisation. SCC does not normally reach the extremely poor due to the fact that they are most often not organised. However support is provided to the mobilisation and development of member-based organisations with the aim of indirectly, and in a long-term perspective, reaching this group.

4.4 SCC's contribution to development

SCC is a global organisation, with three regional offices and operations in more than 20 countries worldwide. Over the years, SCC has become an experienced development actor with distinctive comparative advantages such as:

- SCC collaborates with partner organisations, which is the essence of SCC value added. Partnership contributes to building capacity and sustainability. SCC enhances synergies among partners and other actors (including SCC as an actor in its own right) and contributes to political advocacy and lobbying. Sustainable development and self-sufficiency are supported i.e. we do not give handouts.
- Globally and regionally, SCC works according to a strategy within well-defined programme areas. Position and policy papers, as well as specific sector strategies, are in place.
- SCC works in a decentralized manner. Regional offices (with coordinators in each country) take the operative decisions.
- SCC is based on a large constituency of Swedish people within the Swedish cooperative movement and through various networks in Sweden. The organisation is also founded on a movement-to-movement principle.
- SCC possesses long experience in the field and is a member of established networks throughout the relevant countries. SCC's global presence and its extensive membership in Sweden allow

the organisation to facilitate and strengthen global alliances.

- SCC works with consolidated and transparent administrative and financial systems. SCC helps partners to improve their own administrative and financial systems.
- SCC possesses the relevant technical knowledge and experience in strengthening civil society organisations and cooperatives. Most regional office staff is locally employed, meaning that capacity is built up and retained within the region.
- SCC is an important and recognised stakeholder for the cooperative movement throughout Latin America.
- SCC is an important actor in the region regarding low income housing. Promoting the self-help and self-management cooperative housing model has been successful. SCC has come to play a significant role in housing and habitat networks and alliances and priority is given to the work of political advocacy aimed at achieving the right to adequate housing.
- SCC has contributed to several partner organisations being recognised as important actors regarding rural development and poverty alleviation. In addition, these organisations are increasingly entering national and international markets, especially fair trade and organic market alternatives.
- SCC has developed a participative planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology (PME) for projects and programmes.
- SCC is recognised as a dynamic and rapidly moving actor in dealing with emergencies, humanitarian relief and reconstruction activities. Through its member-based partner organisations, SCC has been able to reach large numbers of people needing help.

4.5 Looking back to move forward: lessons learned

SCC began its work in Latin America in 1984. Operations were initiated in Nicaragua, extending to Costa Rica in 1985 and the

rest of Central America and Uruguay from 1987 onwards. In 1996 a refocusing took place, where people and not only organisations, became our main focus of attention. In 1997, SCC's regional office in Costa Rica opened. With a local presence, the process of decentralization began based on the principle that decisions concerning projects and programmes are best when taken as closely as possible to the people involved.

With more than 22 years of working in Latin America, SCC has gained experience and learned many lessons. Among them:

- The causes of injustice and poverty are multidimensional. Consequently, operations should be directed at various levels, focusing on promoting structural change and contributing to improved living conditions for the people.
- In order to achieve sustainable effects, SCC concentrates on holistic and strategic development support to partner organisations in order to enable them to continue working without external support in the future.
- SCC has primarily been working with cooperative organisations and NGOs. In the future, the intention is to extend operations by supporting farmers' organisations and social movements as well. This is due to the fact that these organisations and movements, and their work, contribute to real social and political change, essential to development. By combining support for cooperative partners and NGOs with strategic support to these social movements, SCC hopes to help turn around injustice and poverty in a more efficient manner.
- During the period 2002 – 2006, operations were based on eleven strategic objectives, some of which were also mainstreamed issues. Given that SCC is a relatively small organisation with limited funds, efforts must be focused and concentrated on a smaller number of strategic areas.
- The development context is constantly changing. It is essential

for partners to adapt to these changes. Globalisation of economies and markets is a huge challenge to many of our partners. In order to survive in the market and to be able to satisfy members' demands, organisations must modernise and learn to adapt. If they are to be able to influence economic and commercial policies, partners have to increase their capacity for presenting proposals and practising advocacy.

- In a first phase of our housing strategy, SCC made significant progress in pushing a cooperative, self-help, self-managing housing model, and in promoting advocacy. In some countries, these processes have resulted in new legal frameworks and financial resources. The greatest challenge facing SCC and the housing organisations now is finding appropriate financing for house construction. SCC wishes to develop a pilot project for a financial mechanism that proves that granting credit is both viable and sustainable and can be adjusted to the repayment capacity of the people and their sense of responsibility.
- Gender equality has been both a strategic objective and a mainstream issue. Although positive results have been achieved in meeting women's practical needs, strategic and structural impact is still missing in order to overcome the causes underlying gender inequality. Consequently, gender equality will be a priority area designed as a regional programme.
- Authoritarian leaders, a male-dominated older leadership, centralised organisations and little participation and influence by women and young people are creating serious problems of relevance, identity, ownership and sustainability for partner organisations. Horizontal and vertical integration and the democratization of the organisations are fundamental and should be carried out from the bottom up.
- Development of the savings and credit cooperative sector has been a strategic objective for SCC in the past. However, many of

these organisations have been forced to adopt regulation mechanisms resulting in increased interest rates and demands for greater guarantees and requirements. Consequently, the financial services offered by the savings and credit cooperative institutions are not generally accessible to poor people. SCC's target group consists of poor people and their organisations. Therefore, the search has been on to find other ways to facilitate access to financial services, especially in rural zones, using mechanisms that are financially accessible to poor people. During the period 2007 – 2011, this issue will be mainstreamed into a priority operational area.

4.6 Basic principles and methods

Partnership

The SCC definition of partnership is, *“a relationship involving development cooperation in which two or more organisations share the responsibility of uniting skills and resources to achieve common objectives.”*

This principle is the result of lessons learned over nearly 50 years of development cooperation in which SCC has developed from primarily providing funds and promoting top-down expertise to the current method of mutually accountable partnership with local partner organisations. Experience has shown that investing in local capacity leads to more sustainable results. Responsibility, participation and ownership are indispensable requirements for the achievement of sustainable development.

The partnership relationship is aimed at clearly illustrating that the partner organisation is the “owner” of its activities and development. This implies that cooperation is based on needs identified by the local actors themselves. Development can never be created from outside. One main principle is never to implement activities in the field ourselves, as this is not sustainable in the long term. SCC recognises that differences exist between our

partner organisations and us, and that a true partnership relationship is difficult to attain when one is funding the other and the power that implies. However, we strive towards a relationship that is as equal and complementary as possible.

Our role in cooperation is to contribute to development and to strengthen partner organisations. The criteria for selecting organisations are that they possess the potential for development, share our principles and values, contribute positively to improving people's living conditions, and that their work contributes to a more just society.

Human Rights

SCC applies a rights-based approach in its development work. This means translating poor women and men's needs into rights and recognising individuals as active subjects and citizens. It also means that SCC recognises that respect for human rights is first and foremost the obligation of the state.

All the SCC countries in Latin America are signatories to the fundamental UN conventions on human rights. Yet these basic principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency, accountability and rule of law stand in sharp contrast to the reality facing the vast majority of poor women and men in Latin America. The roots of poverty can, in part, be explained by lack of power and choice. In order to decrease poverty, it is therefore imperative to increase poor women and men's power to decide over their own lives.

Consequently, SCC supports the democratic participation of citizens. SCC supports people's mobilisation and organisation and their political and social empowerment. SCC applies affirmative action to contribute to gender equality and the inclusion and participation of marginalised groups. SCC supports political lobbying and advocacy activities. SCC's rights-based approach also

includes obligations, which in turn illustrates a break with the hand-outs, welfare approach.

Organisational development

In order to contribute to long-term sustainable development, SCC supports organisational development and capacity building in its partner organisations. This is the main approach and method used to strengthen civil society and contribute to a world free from poverty and injustice. SCC uses existing local resources as a point of departure and assesses the type of support needed from a holistic perspective, jointly with the partner organisation. This is in order to identify the kind of support needed to enable them to become effective and democratic organisations, capable of functioning well in the long term without external support.

The SCC concept of organisational development contains three dimensions: to be, to do, and to relate. It is a holistic approach covering every aspect of the organisation, including its operations and activities. With this focus, SCC strives to increase the relevance of its operations, identifying strengths and weaknesses in these organisations. Activities are directed towards the partners' strategically more important areas and, consequently, those that will have a greater impact on their development and autonomy.

Lobbying and advocacy

In order to change economic, political and social structures — so often the cause of poverty and inequality — it is necessary to advocate for change at local-community and national-global levels where decisions are made that affect the vast majority of people. SCC works to develop and strengthen the capacity of partner organisations as concerns lobbying and advocating for change. SCC also promotes alliances and coordination between different actors in order to improve their articulation and impact in this regard.

Focus and concentration

If greater impact and sustainability is to be attained, SCC will focus its operations on countries with low human development indexes, widespread poverty and inequality. SCC works in regions and countries where there are relevant organisations or actors, assessed as having development potential and the capacity to achieve positive effects. SCC values the capacity to form allies and to collaborate with other actors.

In order to improve relevance and flexibility, the aim is to develop regional programmes instead of isolated, and often small scale, projects. Considering SCC's limited size and resources, four priority areas for the period 2007 – 2011 have been identified. Within these four areas, SCC will use a broad approach so that the causes of poverty and injustice are not lost. Organisations and actors will be carefully selected, identifying those who best contribute to change and positive effects.

SCC will work at three, inter-connecting levels: (a) basic level – with grassroots organisations, supporting practical activities to improve members' living conditions, and developing replicable models; (b) national level – with second and third tier organisations, strengthening the networks they represent and their advocacy activities towards local and national governments and public institutions; (c) international level – promoting exchange, developing synergies and promoting advocacy in international organisations and institutions.

4.7 Goals for SCC Regional Office in Latin America 2007-2011

- Continuous improvement in the quality of development cooperation and internal processes.
- Increase and diversify complementary funding sources in order to decrease dependence on Sida/SEKA.

- Strengthen the capacity of the SCC regional team regarding the SCC role as proactive development agent.
- Increase the capacity of the regional team to carry out continuous dialogue regarding organisational development of the partner organisations.
- Increase coordination and collaboration with SCC regional offices in Kenya and Zimbabwe, as well as with the Stockholm office.
- Devote time and effort to improving information and communication activities, the capacity for advocacy and improved visualisation of development operations in the region.
- Monitor the regional strategy in order to ensure the relevance and quality of operations, and to guarantee the fulfilment of objectives.
- Develop and strengthen alliances with civil society actors with capacity to advocate and lobby in SCC priority areas.

5. Priority working areas

5.1. Global profile

SCC is primarily involved in areas where the organisation possesses particular knowledge and expertise. This is the SCC profile.

Prioritized areas are:

- **Rural development**
- **Housing and habitat**
- **Financial services**

Most projects and programmes at global level are carried out in cooperation with partners working with the organisation of small scale farmers and the improvement of their market-based production. Particularly in Latin America, SCC has also expanded support to emerging cooperative associations in the housing sector. In order to strengthen activities in both these sectors, SCC supports the creation and development of organisations offering financial services which provide poor people with investment opportunities, especially in rural areas.

In order to succeed SCC also works with the mainstreaming of thematic issues that are of fundamental importance for success and for sustainable results. These areas are:

- **Democratic participation**
- **Gender equality**
- **Environmentally sustainable development**
- **Combating HIV and AIDS**

The situation and needs in the various regions determine which sectors and areas are to be awarded priority in the next few years.

5.2. Priority areas in Latin America

At regional level a contextual analysis has been carried out to identify regional priority areas and approaches in order to contribute to positive impact and change in the region.

During the period 2007- 2011, SCC will concentrate on four priority areas in Latin America:

- **Rural development**
- **Housing and habitat**
- **Democratic participation**
- **Gender equality**

These priorities are related to change in society, and each area contains activities from both an integral and a broad perspective.

5.2.1 *Rural development*

Objective: to promote the capacity of the organised rural poor to improve their economic, social and political livelihoods.

Focus: economic development and food security

The SCC approach to reducing poverty in the rural areas is based on development and strengthening of the rural organisations representing poor people. This approach has proven valid considering the effects of commercial liberalization in the rural areas in Latin America. Promoting rural social economy enterprises is fundamental to reducing vulnerability but mainly in order to take advantage of the scarce opportunities that do exist. This is especially important now that free trade agreements have been signed by a large number of Latin American countries.

In order to understand and tackle the causes of rural poverty, it is necessary to go beyond the concept of agricultural systems and adopt a political and economic perspective where agricultural systems comprise only a part of the rural scenario. Rural develop-

ment is multidimensional and a continuous process, covering rural conventional economic development and production but also alternative agricultural development, environmental conservation, social development, participation, justice, human rights, cultural identity and gender equality. Rural development is based at local level and means linking local with global, where local is understood as a territory within a municipality or community where social, economic and political actors mutually interact. It is a matter of finding common ground between various development actors, coordinating and collaborating with them in order to strengthen these rural organisations and groups.

This strategy aims at improving incomes, starting with a productive-chain approach that goes from improved production and productivity to better access to local, national and international markets. It incorporates food security, adequate management of natural resources and environmental sustainability. Increasing rural incomes, in turn, has a multiplying effect on the rest of the economy. In poor countries, rural growth has a greater impact on the general wellbeing of the country than non-rural growth as non-rural growth is normally used for consumption of imported goods.

SCC seeks to work with a mid and long-term development vision, advocacy activities, and promotion of suitable policies and legal frameworks for the rural sector. In order to achieve this, SCC encourages democratic citizen participation, also taking into account the role of the municipalities with the resources they possess and the role they play in policymaking which can generate positive conditions for rural development. In addition, this approach strengthens pluralistic and participative leadership, thus contributing to local development.

Strategic approach

- Contribute to increasing the productivity of small-scale producers, through technological, organisational and economic change.
- Support initiatives for agricultural diversification, in order to reduce the vulnerability of production systems and their dependence on single-crop farming.
- Support activities that contribute to food security for small-scale agricultural producers and the rural populations.
- Promote technologies for sustainable agricultural production, including organic farming.
- Promote business training and creation of rural enterprises as a source of non-agricultural work opportunities.
- Support entrepreneurial and trade association organisation, strengthening organisational capacities to improve fulfilment of the needs of the rural poor.
- Increase women's access to productive resources (land, financing, technology), and access to decision-making in rural organisations.
- Strengthen financial organisations providing suitable credit systems for rural groups and associative enterprises.
- Support marketing initiatives, the development of local markets and access to new markets (fair trade, organic production) as well as obtaining fair prices for the producers.
- Support rural agro-industry and other value adding initiatives associated with agricultural production in order to make agricultural systems in small scale production more sustainable.
- Support political lobbying and advocacy at local, national and international level for access to basic services and fairer rural and agricultural policies.

5.2.2 Housing and habitat (including finance)

Objective: Contribute to increased access to adequate housing and habitat for poor people at reasonable cost, using a model based on participation, self-management and self-help, shared responsibility and solidarity.

Focus: housing is a human right

Adequate housing and habitat means more than just roofs over heads. It means having a private place, sufficient space, security, access to basic services, all available at reasonable cost. According to the United Nations Habitat Agenda, adequate housing is “habitable, affordable and accessible”.

Adequate housing must meet certain minimum conditions to be sufficiently habitable, such as access to clean water, electricity, natural light, sanitation, food storage, refuse collection and drains.

Housing and habitat are prerequisites for exercising other rights such as health, education, employment, security and the practice of citizenship.

Access to housing and habitat is a human right. It is a state responsibility to create the conditions whereby the right to adequate housing can be realistically achieved. This implies public policies and tools that allow access to land, secure tenure and access to financing on reasonable conditions, including subsidies and soft credits for the poor. Access to financing that is adjusted to the conditions and capacity of the population is essential if the right to housing for all is to become a reality.

SCC has focused on organisational aspects and political lobbying in the past. For the period 2007-2011, financing alternatives for housing cooperatives will be identified. The State maintains the principal responsibility for creating favourable conditions for the poor to access adequate housing and hence SCC will continue

supporting political lobbying activities in each country aimed at obtaining public subsidies and other favourable conditions. In addition, SCC will search for financial alternatives and also carry out a pilot project regarding a financial mechanism accessible to poor people that enables them to build new, adequate houses. SCC will support the creation of alliances and collaboration between different financial institutions and housing cooperatives.

In order to increase sustainability and reduce costs, SCC works with organisations that develop models for self-management, self-help, self-construction, previous savings and some type of social ownership.

SCC promotes the establishment of housing cooperatives and other associative groups, as well as creating alliances between actors to improve mobilisation and the defence of interests, advocacy to push for public policies that benefit social housing, and improved capacity within the relevant organisations. SCC also promotes the creation and strengthening of popular national platforms or housing movements.

Strategic approach

- Support alliances, networks and organisations in their lobbying and dialogue activities aimed at reforming housing legal frameworks and public housing policies to efficiently target the poor.
- Support activities aimed at facilitating land access and secure tenure.
- Promote a transparent and stable public subsidy system and other initiatives to make financing accessible to poor people.
- Promote linkages with financial institutions such as saving and credits cooperatives, or other actors, to increase access to finance for adequate popular housing and encourage finance pilot projects for social housing that will strengthen advocacy

to push for housing policies and adequate legal and financial frameworks.

- Encourage poor people to organise, be these informal groups, people's associations, cooperatives, movements or other kinds of organisations.
- Support self-management, self-help, self-construction and previous savings as efficient methods of ensuring sustainability and reducing costs.
- Support the strengthening of housing and habitat promotion organisations and their capacity for training, exchanges, creation of synergies, business management training and social housing production.
- Promote the development of a community concept based on self-management and the existing social fabric to construct an environmentally friendly habitat.
- Promote other initiatives in connection with housing and habitat, which satisfy other basic needs, create incomes and jobs and improve the sustainability of these organisations and their work.

5.2.3 Democratic participation and citizenship

Objective: promote the democratic participation of organised women and men in order to increase their control, power and capacity to represent and demand their interests, rights and needs in the national and regional arenas.

Focus: democracy is built from below

Democracy means distributing power as equally as possible. Mobilisation, participation and organisation are fundamental prerequisites for a dynamic and sustainable democracy. This is why SCC encourages people to know their rights and to organise in order to claim and exercise these rights.

Further, activities to improve income must be complemented with activities to improve economic distribution. A better distribution of resources develops from democracy and citizen participation.

Democracy needs a strong civil society that participates in decision-making that affects society as a whole. Civil society is a channel through which to articulate and to give voice to organized citizens. Hence, the participation of citizens is a necessary precondition in order to achieve improved living conditions for the people. Participation should not be limited to formal institutions, but rather extended to society in general through community-based and grassroots organisations, associative networks and other groups defending common and basic rights, interests and values. Democracy is built from the bottom up.

SCC will work at three levels: people, organisations and society, to bring about positive change in structures and regulations at micro and macro levels, affecting the living conditions of poor people.

Strategic approach

- Contribute to the knowledge on, and defence of, human rights, as understood by people's civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights.
- Support the legalisation and recognition of community-based and grassroots organisations and their work.
- Encourage awareness and use of legal frameworks that protect opportunities and mechanisms for participation at local and national level.
- Strengthen strategic, political and methodological capacities of organisations to formulate proposals, advocate and negotiate.
- Promote planning, management and social auditing of local development.
- Strengthen democratic practices of organisations.

- Encourage organisations' participation in national level discussions and political proposals.
- Strengthen networks and alliances.
- Support the creation of common platforms for national level proposals and negotiations.
- Promote studies and research to support civil society proposals and initiatives.
- Support alliances between civil society organisations at national and regional levels.

5.2.4 Gender Equality

Objective: to promote social, cultural, economic and political change in partner organisations and society to contribute to increased gender equality.

Focus: gender equality – an issue of power

Despite the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, stating that all people have equal rights and freedom from discrimination, there is still a systematic violation of these rights as concerns women, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural.

This inequality persists in legislation, public policies and culture, due in part to patriarchal hierarchies, religion and historical factors. Gender inequality causes more poverty and injustice and means that women's knowledge, capacities and talents are not being used to full advantage.

The main concern related to gender equality is the division and distribution of resources and power between women and men. Gender equality is a power issue, involving women and men, where a new power balance is required in order to reduce the power of men.

In order to achieve equal rights and opportunities, changes must be made to the social construction of gender roles and their interre-

relationships, especially the power-subordination imbalance that exists between them. Changes must be made to cultures that keep women oppressed, new ways of living together must be explored.

Hence, SCC will focus on women's strategic rights and needs, raise men's awareness, and support women's empowerment in order to bring about changes in legislation, institutions, structures and attitudes in general to improve gender equality.

Strategic approach

- Support awareness-raising and training for women and men.
- Encourage the development of methodologies, policies, strategies etc. in order to enable increased gender equality.
- Promote women's inclusion in partner organisations, creating opportunities for their participation in management positions and decision-making.
- Support financially profitable and sustainable initiatives and credit access for women.
- Endorse organisational development processes where women have equal access to, and influence over, the organisation's plans, management and budget.
- Support the elaboration of gender equality policies in these organisations.
- Strengthen networks and movements striving to improve the economic, social and cultural rights of women in alliance with the social sector of the economy
- Support lobbying and advocacy activities aiming at increased women's participation and legislative change concerning issues such as access to land and other resources.
- Encourage links with mixed organisations and women's organisations with social movements that have experience and tools for increased gender equality and can support the internal processes of these organisations.

5.2.5 Other crosscutting thematic issues

SCC Latin America has worked for a number of years with various mainstreaming areas. This work will continue with three thematic issues: **youth, sustainable development** and **financial services**.

Youth

The issue of youth is justified as a crosscutting issue as young people are key players in the development of society and also in building the future. They represent an important resource for civil society organisations.

Currently, organisations limit youth participation and decision-making, giving youth very limited opportunities to participate and exert influence. This leads to rigid structures, centralised leadership and a lack of creativity related to new alternatives and methods of development. In order to achieve relevant and democratically run organisations, youth should be given space and influence in them. Young people should not be regarded as ‘the future generation’ but as protagonists in today’s building of development. SCC will provide and consolidate opportunities for young people to participate and to develop activities that will allow them attain positions of power and influence within organisations.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development should continue to be a cross-cutting issue because traditionally the region’s economic development has been based on the over-exploitation of natural resources, causing environmental degradation and increasing poverty. An enormous number of people lack access to clean water, water for production activities and generally live in unhealthy environmental conditions. The rural populations often face degraded and less fertile soils because of the indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals. Defor-

estation is also a problem that also causes the loss of overall biodiversity and increased vulnerability.

In order to reverse this situation, sustainable development principles will be promoted in both urban and rural areas. SCC will support the recovery and conservation of natural resources, as well as carrying out environmental audits and studies when deemed necessary.

Financial services

SCC will continue to work with financial services, however this period as a cross-cutting issue. In the past, the development of financial sector organisations (savings and credit) was one of SCC's strategic objectives/priority areas. However, many savings and credit cooperatives have become strong financial and banking institutions competing in the market with the private banking system. Changes in banking regulations have led to greater demands concerning guarantees and other requirements when applying for credits, which in turn have driven the savings and credit cooperatives away from meeting the needs of the poor. Our target group is first and foremost poor people. Consequently, SCC will promote activities within each of the prioritized working areas aimed at meeting the financial needs of the poor, with special emphasis on the social economy organisations (urban and rural), economic initiatives for women and facilitating access to social housing.

6. Geographical priorities in Latin America 2007-2011

Our cooperation will be continued and intensified in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia. Central America as a region has low human development indices and large portions of the population are poor. Paraguay in South America is characterized by low human development, low popular participation, corruption and wide spread poverty. Brazil is a new country for SCC, initiated in 2006. The partner organisations in Brazil use models within housing and rural development in very poor geographical areas of the country and generate experience replicable for SCC. Bolivia is the poorest country of South America.

In Costa Rica, SCC will continue to provide support for projects that can serve as important experience and replicable models for other countries. Cooperation with Uruguay was finalized during the last period. However, support for the housing cooperative movement in Uruguay will continue, as accumulated experience in developing well functioning self-help and self-managed cooperative housing is strategically important.

Through the construction of regional programmes the aim is to increase the relevance of our activities and increase concentration and focus to fewer areas. Generally, the intention is not to expand activities to new countries in Latin America during 2007-2011. However, pragmatism will be the watchword in the construction of regional programs, SCC must ensure that relevant and strategic actors or activities of importance in the region are

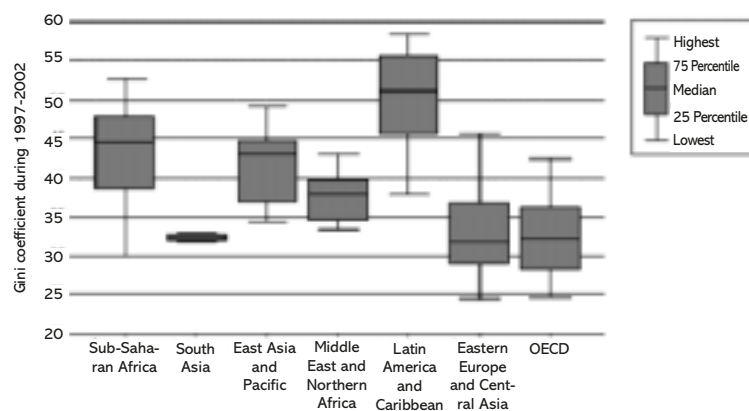
not left out. The main criteria for selecting countries and (regions within each country) for operations are:

- Levels of human development, poverty and injustice.
- Existence of social movements or organisations that have the potential for development and the capacity to advocate change in society.
- Organisations that work well in the fight against poverty and injustice.

Appendix 1

Chart 2. Regions of the World: Gini coefficient, 1997-2002

(Concentration of income per capita, in decile groups)

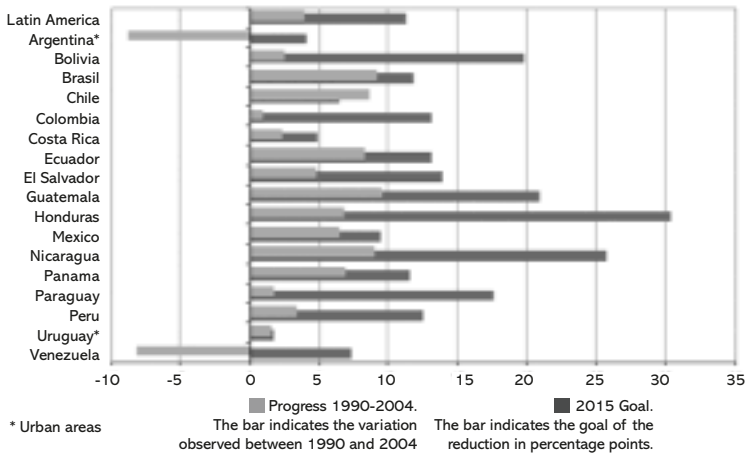


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators (online) ([http:// www.worldbank.org/data/](http://www.worldbank.org/data/)).

Appendix 2

Chart 3. Latin America (17 countries); Progress in absolute terms in the reduction of extreme poverty between 1990 and 2004.

(In percentage points)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, based on the projections derived from the national census of population of the respective countries.

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This document summarises the Swedish Cooperative Centre's regional strategy for Latin America, and outlines the focus of the period 2007–2011. The strategy was developed throughout 2006 in a participatory process. The conclusions and proposed way forward are based on the joint assessment of what Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) has learned so far, and where we believe we can make a strategic difference in the future.



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