

## Social projects. Notes on their design and management in rural territories

Norma Baca-Tavira / [bacatavira@yahoo.es](mailto:bacatavira@yahoo.es)

Francisco Herrera-Tapia / [ferrerat@uaemex.mx](mailto:ferrerat@uaemex.mx)

*Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Mexico*

**Abstract:** The paper describes and critically analyzes the main steps in the development of social projects; the latter are seen as tools of collective management in solving problems of general interest. Especially, implications for the implementation and assessment of the impacts of social projects in rural areas are emphasized; spaces where scenes of poverty and marginalization persist. Also, there is a need to analyze comprehensively the formulation and development of projects, and it is necessary to particularly emphasize the participatory inclusion of stakeholders and greater confidence and legitimacy to cope with poverty and promote development. Finally, the text suggests guidelines and recommendations in the process of managing social projects that can be useful for managers, field technicians, community workers, including dynamic agents of rural territories.

**Key words:** social projects, management, participation, territory, rural.

**Resumen:** El artículo describe y analiza críticamente los pasos principales en la elaboración de proyectos sociales, vistos como herramientas de gestión colectiva en la solución de problemas de interés general. Especialmente se enfatizan implicaciones de la implementación y valoración de los impactos de los proyectos sociales en el ámbito rural, donde persisten escenarios de pobreza y marginación. Por otro lado, se plantea la necesidad de analizar de manera integral la formulación y desarrollo de los proyectos, en donde se debe poner especial énfasis en la inclusión participativa de los actores involucrados, así como una mayor confianza y legitimidad a las acciones de combate a la pobreza o de promoción del desarrollo. Asimismo, el texto sugiere pautas y recomendaciones en el proceso de gestión de proyectos sociales, que pueden ser útiles para gestores, técnicos de campo, promotores comunitarios, entre otros agentes dinamizadores de los territorios rurales.

**Palabras clave:** proyectos sociales, gestión, participación, territorio, rural.

## **Introduction**

Projects are considered strategic tools for decision making in governmental and social organisms. They are the technical expression of solutions to general interest problems and a means to change unfavorable or problematic situations into convenient aspects in benefit of society.

In the design of social projects, the best options to reach the stated objectives and goals are explored planning stages and routes to accomplish such objectives. Proposals are produced to meet social demands and modify the people's life conditions, in view of improving society's everydayness, or at least that of the most disfavored groups, trying to improve their quality of life, labor and general environment.

Many of these projects intend to generate incomes for vulnerable groups, empower women; these are projects which from a micro-social scale fight hunger and poverty, family, school and labor violence, foster health, disseminate culture and art, in addition to rescue traditions and customs, or promote ecological actions and environmental protection, et cetera. But, how do these projects are build from the territory? How is the evidence of their impact generated through them?

These and other questions linked to the management of social programs have motivated the present heuristic exercise that conceives thoughtful contributions for decision making in context of design and operation of social projects, with the purpose of enriching the methodological analysis of social management and deepening the invigoration of Mexican rural territories, especially those in poverty situation.

The article consists of a number of stages of reflexive analysis on the main steps conventionally followed at the moment of devising and developing a social project. The intention is to analyze them from their technical dimension and social, economic and institutional implications to design and manage them at local level.

## **Social projects and planning**

Social projects are a tool that allows inducing change from the initiative of the actors who interact in a specific territory or sector. Social transformation via projects implies local management that builds new opportunity structures and greater spaces of liberty for the inhabitants, thus creating an environment favorable for the unfolding of the territories' potential. Then, it is about reverting unfavorable situations that hinder local development,

which is conceptualized as the endogenous capability to generate social and economic wellbeing (Boisier, 2005).

Because of this, we start from the supposition that structural change from the social base can be set into motion by means of comprehensive strategic plans (local and communitarian), which imply the participation of diverse actors in processes of value creation and generation of economic and social wellbeing. It is a micro-social and regional perspective that can grow at various territorial levels according to the evolution of a locally managed process.

The management of projects from this perspective carries a local “micro-planning” process, this is to say, “bottom-up”, but which does not overlook the importance of “top-bottom” planning, while it seeks to harmonize its objectives with the official plans at municipal, state and national order.

This micro-planning schema demands collective action and social mobilization. Hence, the citizens’ local participation is an essential requirement, as pointed out by Weitz (1981: 41): “The active participation of local population in development projects is a crucially important factor for integrated development, considering the need for changes in the social structure and a maximum mobilization of local human and natural resources”.

Because of this, the projects here referred are social projects at small scale in the local space, which can be noticed as small businesses, family production units, microenterprises and other initiatives of local nature that grouped can trigger local development schemas in rural and marginalized zones. It is about proposing productive strategies at times when economic globalization imposes a culture centered on consumption, which can inhibit the entrepreneurial capabilities of the general population.

The agglomeration of small-scale initiatives and projects in the local space create virtuous circles of prosperity, which can be noticed in the articulation of productive chains, institutional or mercantile ties that generate and retain wealth in a specific territory. Some relevant cases in this context of local articulations for development have been studied from the standpoint of local productive systems, localized agri-food systems, clusters and productive corridors, among others.

The viability of social projects and civil initiatives is heavily influenced by multiple factors that determine their success or failure. An initial balance is needed to weigh the strengths of the project regarding factors of social, economic, political and environmental nature, among others. This is to say, multidimensional approach and analysis have to be made on the very circumstances of the project.

The intention of a project that tends to integrality seeks to add various aspects determinant for its viability. With this, it is intended to address the problems of a community or territory from a systemic vision. Hence, the population must actively partake of the project from its inception, as the citizens closely known the problems and most pressing needs.

Linking a project with a community implies articulating, activating “social energy” and creating territorial networks; this poses a challenge for those who undertake the extension of services related to the project. This way, facilitators, extension agents, providers of professional services, community promoters, technicians and other roles taken by people who promote projects in the territories can work in a coordinated manner to accomplish a greater impact of their own initiatives of institutional assignments.

It is crucial for this planning process that after the conclusion of the project the communities take up a self-management role to maintain the results; this depends on the degree of appropriation of the project by rural communities, as in many cases the project did not generate the necessary mechanisms to attain support from the communities to make the essential changes established in the project's objectives.

This deficient social engineering in the long-run planning and monitoring makes poorly planned projects turn into mere subsidiary mechanisms or disarticulated units to channel public funds into rural communities, whereby the political control of these marginal social groups is reinforced through monetary transferences and projects with no adequate technical and social bases become instruments that perpetuate dependency on the State. Assistance-based policies inhibit the communities' growth if social projects do not incorporate in its design and operation various reagents that release the potential of rural territories for their integral development.

### **Analytical and participatory diagnosis**

Where do projects begin? In the context of innovative projects for rural zones, a diagnosis consists in the analysis of situations, conditions or restrictions that block the satisfaction of the local population needs. In this framework, the diagnosis implies recognizing the nature of a problem by means of observation and integral analysis. A problem's diagnosis tries to detect a set of facts that hinder the accomplishment of a goal.

A good program has to begin from a good diagnosis, from a good analysis of what the problem is, which the specific characteristics of that problem are (Yashine, 2013: 26).

Every project has to start by determining the general situation to be improved, the prospective beneficiaries and stakeholders, geographic scope, the issues to be addressed, duration and probable expenses. Likewise, the interests of the community, government and probable funding agencies have to be determined. During this initial stage it is important to find out whether the basic concept upon which the project is based is viable and if the main stakeholders provide sufficient support to make it worth moving on to the next stage (Gijjt and Woodhill, 2002: 3-17).

Producing a diagnosis to set up projects in rural communities acquires a very important public connotation, therefore the planning of projects, from its initial stages, shall integrate the citizens' participation, this is to say, foster a participatory planning approach and incorporate the local population's ideas, interests and expectations in order to determine the legitimacy of the project and the sociotechnical contributions to it.

In the diagnosis with civil participation, the accuracy of the analysis and opportunities are key factors in which facilitators or rural extension agents must pay especial attention, since the territorial actors interested in the project will devote time and effort to it. Because of this, it is important that assertive communication becomes the axis to articulate the elaboration of the diagnosis and the participants do not consider the exercises related to the project a "waste of time" or something that is not significant for their everyday lives.

In the participatory approach, the initial approach is also an instrument to raise awareness and mobilize people; it develops in action and cannot be totally disassociated from it; this also means that it creates higher expectations than a traditional diagnosis. Participatory diagnosis is also an iterative process, i.e., it does not end with the beginning of implementation, but it has to be completed and adjusted along the process, according to the needs of the people and projects. Diagnoses can be broad or thematic (focused on a specific topic) (Geilfus, 2009: 13).

The diagnosis indicates to perform studies and researches that lead to an analysis of the existing policies, which is a highly contextual exercise; this is, it requires an analysis of the multiple dimensions involved, in order to avoid the exclusion of important elements which directly or indirectly represent the causes or consequences of the problem. For instance, the methodology of the logical frame<sup>1</sup> contemplates the following stages of the diagnosis in view of solving social problems:

1 The logical framework method, also known as ZOPP (*Zielorientierte Projektplanung*) or goal oriented project planning, was introduced by the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH, with the intention to develop a realistic and clear definition of the objectives from a long term perspective, improve communication or organization of counterparts by means of the joint planning, using documents and clear definitions, and establish indicators for assessment.

1. Analysis of participant actors
2. Analysis of the problem
3. Analysis of the objectives
4. Analysis of possible solutions

These stages are part of the diagnosis and have been tried by managers of programs and projects at the level of fieldwork; such phases are fundamental for the definition of later stages, the information obtained from the analysis will provide the necessary supplies to devise the project; therefore, diagnosis turns into the basis for the foundations.

As a part of the diagnosis, an outline of the context of the problem is made, focusing the most representative dimensions of the sector, community, group and territory in which it is intended to unfold the project. To do so, data can be taken from direct and indirect sources; in this regard studies, journalistic news and scientific-technological knowledge that can be useful to determine the heart of the problem are valuable as well.

## Location of the project

The location of both the project and its beneficiaries implies establishing criteria to ascertain its territorial viability, which can be undertaken from the interests and conveniences of the project. For instance, in a rural agribusiness project it is important to use location criteria to decide on the zone where its setting up is more feasible; this depends on the proximity to the supply sources of raw materials and inputs, also on the availability of labor force, road infrastructure, closeness to consumers, regional identity of the agri-food products, education and scientific centers, among others.

Some instances of projects based on the territorial and organizational proximity of production are supported on the idea that since rural supply chains are shorter, it will be beneficial for the involved economic sectors because of a diminution in energy consumption and the low cost to move products at local-regional level.

Likewise, in an integral water management program with a micro-basins approach, its territorial focalization will not only explain the current situation of edaphic, topographic and hydrologic conditions of the basin, but also incorporate, among others, the social and institutional dimensions of the territory, this is, the role of the social and institutional actors in water management; similarly, it is also important to review the legal and institutional frameworks that rule the regulation and subsidiary policies of the hydrologic sector.

In social projects, managers shall bear in mind the territorial *continuum* of problems beyond the political-administrative demarcation of the territory. Even if the project's geographic location implies limiting or downsizing the time-space for its development, it is essential to consider the nature of problem to address in the territory and its interconnections with various geographic and governmental scales in which such social problem is born.

Territorialize the projects means to focus social action on a specific locality, in an ejido, municipality or region which because of its characteristics is important for the development of a project. It always has to be borne in mind that the territory is multidimensional and subjects, as parts of it, must be considered in their situated context; this way, an intervention that sets aside the social dimension of development, concentrates resources in function of priorities defined from the outside, assists segmented units of population, favors the formation of enclaves for the development of commercial productive activities, establishes short terms of assistance without securing its continuity in the future can be prevented (Pérez and Zizumbo, 2014).

The localization of any given project in a specific territory can yield benefits for population, but can also harm it severely, this is why diagnostic is fundamental. Examples of this are the megaprojects related to mine exploitation, oil and gas exploration, installation of hydroelectric plants, rail projects or large agro-industrial and road-development projects.

## Characterization of beneficiaries

Every project requires an analysis of the profile of its beneficiaries, who are classified, in the first place as direct beneficiaries, and secondly as indirect. The project management has to be sensible and understand that even if social management is a technical task, it should not be omitted that social subjects are involved, this is, the manager will invariably face the intricate subjective life of human beings; thereby, it will not be the same to work with adults, men, women, youths or kids.

Likewise, the gender of beneficiaries can be a limitation or failure for those projects that do not incorporate gender perspective in their analysis. Moreover, it shall not be forgotten that even if people can be benefitted by a project, first of all they are subjects of human rights, they are intelligent and have dignity; they are not mere stats that help meet the goals.

Indeed, in order to profile the beneficiaries it is important to learn, by means of questionnaires, characteristics such as sex, age, marital status, schooling level, among others. However, if the intention is to deepen into the

profiling of beneficiaries, tools such as life histories or in-depth interviews can be resorted to, which help gather information on these individuals' profile.

Profiling the beneficiaries is key as it helps construct and recognize the "subject", gathering information on their sociodemographic, economic conditions and in general, the subjective dimension of those who will be benefitted by a project.

### **The project's methodology as management strategy**

Managing a social project involves the design and application of a series of methods and techniques and occasionally the algorithms necessary to unfold a strategy on the territory or inside a sector. Management, in this sense, implies coordinating the actors' efforts from the administration of the project to achieve the established goals and attain the desired result in a determinate sector or rural community. Under this supposition, what the methodology seeks is to answer the question: how will the project's goals be accomplished?

The answer to the previous question is not easy, neither is there only one, as each project has a different methodological perspective. In such case, what is important is to select adequate tools to reach the objectives and goals. As a part of the methodological strategy, it is sought to maintain proper communication with the members of the project and its beneficiaries to work in coordination and following a strategy previously planned by the participants.

It is worth mentioning that traditionally methodology has been a stage that is paid scant attention, in spite of the strategical importance it represents, both in applied projects and researches in rural contexts. However, methodological omission is a mistake that can be fatal for the project, because the methodology is the main link between theory and practice; there can be ideas, but if they are not correctly undertaken the project will not come to fruition.

We deem that methodology has its origin in the project's philosophy (theory, development model or political ideology). In this contest, aspects such as values, mission and vision are the elements that allow visualizing the sort of methodology to use. In social science research, for instance, qualitative methods more akin to theories that involve more flexible concepts, which enable dialogue and the discussion of ideas such as phenomenology, dialectic and hermeneutics. On the contrary, there are rigid theories which in order to be proven require controlling variables in an experiment, because of this, such theories will be more akin and harmonize better with quantitative methodologies, which secure numeric and statistical control of the research processes.

In like manner, methodology in the context of social projects obeys the need to “identify and perfect procedures, techniques and instruments that allow linking the analysis of social reality with an intervention into it, so as to identify and use strategic spaces to act” (Pichardo, 2008: 86). This way, each project is space for knowledge and learning to formulate regional development “models”.

Then, the methodological strategy of management or local development contemplates a series of actions to materialize the project’s results, there is a sequence of tasks. According to ILPES (2006: 15), this is known as the phases of “preparation-negotiation-execution (or implementation) operation and stages of preparation for the identification of the idea, the preliminary drafts (previous feasibility studies), the definitive draft (feasibility study) and the full project (engineering and execution)”.

This methodological structuring in phases or stages of the project implementation, as previously stated, find its theoretical foundations in the project’s philosophy to trigger programmed actions. This implies a combination of values, technical tools that guide the project. According to ILPES (2006), the strategy that looks for development will be set into motion by means of a series of instruments, which operate at various levels, scales and time horizons. The application of such instruments to homogeneous or interrelated groups of activities leads to the preparation of programs (and projects), which comprise a set of tasks linked spatially or by sector.

On the other side, on the project’s methodological design, the theoretical planning standpoint from which the project is implemented is relevant; in any case, it is not the same to start from a top-bottom planning approach (decentralized) as from a top-bottom planning approach (centralized); in the first theoretical model horizontal relations prevail, while in the second, vertical relations. These circumstances must make the project developers wonder about the efficacy of the project, and so, plan a methodology that at once produces results and considers its agreement with the values that come from the project.

In such sense, the methodological construction of projects of sectoral or territorial nature should be balanced and harmonized between both planning approaches, since the proposals of planning in one way or another set the parameters upon which the variables will be based, whose analysis is the study and action inside the projects (ILPES, 2006), this way,

There may be a theoretical design highly suitable for the problem, but if it is not implemented with specific processes that operate well in the field, with good institutional design that makes that operation possible, it will be very difficult to obtain the desired results (Yaschine, 2013: 27).

## **Objectives and goals: toward results' effectiveness**

Goals represent the materialization of objectives, however it is very common that concepts such as “goals” and “objectives” are utilized indistinctively. One way to difference the latter from the former is to state that objectives guide the generic or specific action, they are the target, point or achievement to reach; for their part, goals are a tangible and measurable end which the project’s actions head to.

Goals have to be realistically stated; moreover, it is important to design them with critical and reasonable sense on the viability of their fulfillment, because in order to accomplish them, resources, time and efficient management processes have to be incorporated; which, if not properly managed, can compromise ambitious goals that in practice are unrealizable or unreachable.

Additionally, in every project natural tensions between the schedules of the project and those of the social group to accomplish the objectives and goals generate, particularly when the project acquires a more technocratic function and lack grassroots participation in its design, in such manner that the institutions and managers’ schedules are tied to normative, fiscal or governmental-administration procedures that disregard the period in which people accept and assimilate the changes promoted inside their communities.

Therefore, even if among the main characteristics of the goals is to be tangible, verifiable and must be met within a reasonable period, it is important to consider that both the design and strategies for its accomplishment it is recommendable to have greater participation of the project’s actors, in view of jointly determining the deadlines to meet the goals between management and stakeholders.

## **Substantive activities**

Good programmatic design and adequate logistics will enable the efficacious accomplishment of the goals, thus it is very important to pay especial attention to the activities’ details; on the contrary, the success of the project will be compromised and failure will ensue.

The project considers that each activity represents a specific act, which added to other activities boost its integral development; then, human capital shall undertake specific tasks that each collaborator will perform with proactive attitude to offer added value to such activity.

It is desirable that a social project includes a multidisciplinary team. Work groups in which people with various training backgrounds and professional experience usually offer a more complete vision of the problem. From this teams can unfold their talents in function of specific goals and objectives, such as the project activities. The capabilities of the members will determine the efficacy and commitment of those leading each activity.

## Budgetary considerations

In every social development initiative the available funding is crucial. Derived from this, the financial sources to set the project into motion must be identified. Frequently, this implies monetary and non-monetary investments, even from the beginning the project, for example to carry out feasibility studies, diagnoses and the elaboration of the project itself, expenses related to work meetings and planning, among others.

Because of this, it is important to be aware of the operation rules of public programs, municipal, state and national expenditure budgets. Be informed about governmental budgetary lines, tenders, public calls and joint-ventures and other funding options from the private or social sectors that exist and which can be utilized to operate a social project; especially if the projects are operated from municipal governments, private companies or civil groups.

The range of possibilities to access resources is ever higher as it is not restricted to the governmental. Without thoroughly discussing the sort or modalities of funding that exist in public or entrepreneurial finances, in this case —for the ends of social projects undertaken by local entrepreneurs such as NGO's, municipal governments or organized people— it is important that the budget responds and orients to tackle the problems of local society.

From this, in a “bottom-up” planning scheme, it is indispensable to find mechanisms to include and make citizens participate in the design and operation of budgets by means of well defined projects.

In the terms of conventional literature, a participatory budget is a mechanism by means of which citizens actively intervene in the design of a project's budget: how and what on the money generated from their taxes will be spent.

The budget design tries to make it realistic; neither overly large for the project's needs nor too tight so as not to reach the proposed goals. In a context of efficiency and austerity in the use of public resources, it is imperative to correctly exercise budgets to avoid some of the mistakes usually made:

1. The budget does not address the needs or problems of society.
2. The project is not attractive for prospective investors.
3. Overestimate the cost of the material and human resources destined for the project.
4. Program the use of resources in short periods.
5. Ignore the implications and legal, political, fiscal and mercantile consequences in the use of public resources.
6. Lack of recognition of the sort of economic support for the project (credit, subsidy, donations, etc.).
7. Underspend the resources.
8. Disregard accountability or divert funds for ends different to those of the project.
9. Lack sufficient and veritable proofs of the expenses.
10. Ask for monetary support for concepts not authorized by the donating or funding instances.

A budget is accompanied by possible funding sources, as in a strategy of concurrence of resources it is determinant to have the prospective alternative sources of financial funds for the project. It is important to be careful in the execution of resources and not underspend the budget in order to prevent reimbursements to the funding source and not meet the goals.

Being resources insufficient and scarce, it is worth underscoring that the project managers must foresee that funding sources can only contribute with specific percentages; this implies that each project, depending on their financial needs, might make a concurrent management of resources to fully afford the cost, which requires gargantuan endeavors to articulate financial actors around the projects.

It should be borne in mind that not all the concepts of a budget are subject to funding, because there are especial policies in this respect. For example, some financial sources exclude the purchase of land or vehicles; others, depending on their programs, might or not fund grants, labor days or payment of fees; others totally exclude payment of debts, liquidations, insurance or taxes. Hence, the need carefully review the funding policies of each financial entity.

### **Assessment of results and impacts**

The evidence of the effects of a project in terms of generation of social wellbeing, growth and poverty alleviation will be fundamental in the strategies to later improve the programs and projects. In like manner, it

will offer certainty to the beneficiaries on the importance of these effects, moreover it will legitimize the managers and politicians who endorse this sort of initiatives.

In this context and as an integral part of the formulation of projects, assessing is a permanent process of valuation and calculation of the project's added value for a community or territory. This is to say, to estimate the skills, know-hows and performances triggered by the project. This is a permanent and transversal activity that allows assessing its efficiency, quality, economy and efficacy, among other aspects regarding assessment.

This way, the assessment of social programs measures its impact, with which it is improved in design and setting up. A good assessment not only is quantitative in relation to the consequences of the program, it also intends to explain why they occurred; this way, better comprehension of the project is accomplished. Another relevant factor in the assessment of programs is the projects' transparency (Albiter, 2013: 6).

Assessment can take place in various modalities. Authors such as Medina (2007) mention three types:

1. According to the moment of assessment, it can be ex ante; during the project follow-up; and ex post.
2. According to the investor. Private assessment (financial); economic assessment; and social assessment.
3. According to results. Assessment of effects and impacts.

In strict sense, assessment would have to be permanent; it is the addition of monitoring and follow-up actions that allow the project to reach the stated goals step by step. This way, there exists the previous assessment (ex ante), which validates it. In the case of intermediate assessment (ex durante), it implies the revision and updating of the project's actions as a strategy to improve management and functioning. Later assessment (ex post) indicates that once the project concludes both results and impacts are assessed.

As for private of financial assessment, it implies a pre-investment analysis; this is to say, the profitability of the money invested. "To calculate revenues, profitability values such as net present value, internal rate of return and cost-benefit relation, time of investment recovery, among others are utilized (Medina, 2007: 42). This sort of assessment takes place when projects are focused on agri-business or profitability of particular investors, who need to verify the financial efficacy of the project in a context of economic competitiveness.

In previous lines, it was commented that every project's objective is to generate goods or useful services for society; this is, producing results and generating positive impacts and effects in the environment. Such impacts

are especially visible in the long term, once the projects yields the expected results, as this conveys effects that are defined as “any behavior of occurrence about which it can be reasonably said it was influenced by an aspect of the project” (Cohen, 1977, cited in Medina, 2007: 44).

The assessors intend to find out whether a project met the expectations, which is accomplished by means of measuring efficacy. Assessment can also work as a means for continual improvement, as it helps suppress simulation and self-complacency in results; therefore, there is need for the acceptance, recognition and amendment of errors which at the same time capitalizes the experience to perfect interventions in future projects.

Self-assessment also represents an opportunity to improve control, continuance and monitoring, fundamental aspects for the functionality and efficacy of the project. This sort of exercises allows performing the responsibilities for the beneficiaries, funding agents to attain certifications, even to legitimize public action.

There is a number of ways to assess the results and impacts of a project. To begin with, to ascertain with the stakeholders the dimensions (variables) to be assessed. In this case, the variables enable accounting for the change in a baseline and identifying a statistical reference datum or a qualitative one that serves to refer a change from the implementation of the project.

Indeed, variables are changeable, therefore, unsteady and mutable from the intervention in a project. Variables are part of broader dimensions, such as the environmental, social, political, economic or cultural. In quantitative terms variables represent the magnitude that any given value in the set of the project may take. Examples of them are poverty, productivity, employment or educational quality. In the case of indicators, these are more specific and accurate, because of this they facilitate the assessment of a change of variable, which on its own is a part of a superior variable.

Indexes are mathematical expressions or more elaborate statistics that allow the assessors to approach a reference statistical datum on the global behavior of a group of indicators. This way, various sorts of indexes can be established: development, poverty or competitiveness.

The indicators of effects or results are linked to significant variables that measure some of the dimensions established in the project. These variables can be qualitative or quantitative and are measured at the end. By and large, assessment registers the project’s “before” and “after”, to do so information from a baseline is needed to mark the beginning of the project. It is simply calculate the difference between: 1) a beneficiary’s observed condition after the project; and, 2) the beneficiary’s estimated condition before the project.

In the end, it is worth mentioning: how much is it for ignoring if a project fulfills its goals or not? The cost is very high if we revalue the efforts, times, energy and resources made available for the project, hence the importance of assessment before, during and after and secure that the project produces the expected results. What do we know about the results of that public work? Are productive projects still valid and operating? Does the water piping network work correctly? Do people put the teachings from the training courses into practice?

## Conclusions

The inception and management of social projects for local and rural development are part of the activity of managers, community promoters, providers of professional services, public functionaries and other actors. The design and operation of projects is an art and an entrepreneurial activity that combines strategies, values and actions aiming to reach the objectives.

However, their *raison d'être* goes beyond merely achieving objective and goals; in its analysis the impacts on the various scales and territorial dimensions have to be revised. The project's elaboration shall be integral, paying attention to operative details and to the strategies defined by the institutions or the citizenry.

Because of this, a project should never be an individual activity developed by a professional in isolation and on their own, as the idea is to articulate efforts and produce alternatives together with local society, which ask for the establishment of dialogue between local know-hows and professional and scientific knowledge. The tendency to build integral proposals necessarily requires interdisciplinary teams to address the problem

As we have seen, social projects have a high operational context in their development, and generally are also a reflection of their promoters' mentality. The efficient execution and suitable combination between the technical and the social—which is inherent to projects— might help improve the people's conditions of life, thus contributing to overcome poverty, together with other structural-order actions.

Another lesson learnt is that accomplishing the cohesion of stakeholders on social projects is a challenge that implies improving the mechanisms to concur and articulate efforts and resources destined for rural territories. To do so, it is necessary to involve project managers in efficient participatory planning, not only will this give the accomplishment of goals more certainty,

but also contribute to strengthen the social legitimacy of the projects proposed by local or external actors.

In the sphere of social management, it is crucial to overcome bureaucratization in the design and operation of projects, which goes against dynamicity and versatility. It is important to move to schemas with greater flexibility, and which also guarantee the projects' continuity and sustainability by means of innovative monitoring models.

Finally, an objective is to create transparency mechanisms on tenders or public funding mechanisms; in addition to be a democratic duty and an obligation in the processes to build virtuous schemas for social development, this is a *sine qua non* condition in the design and management of projects that operate on resources from the citizenry taxes.

## References

Albiter, Katya [ed.] (2013), "Programas Sociales. Principales aspectos", in *Revista Cámara*, year 3, no. 33, Mexico: Cámara de Diputados.

Boisier, Sergio (2005), "¿Hay espacio para el desarrollo local en la globalización?", in *Revista de la CEPAL*, no. 86, Chile: CEPAL.

Cohen, Ernesto and Rolando Franco (1977), *Evaluación de proyectos sociales*, Chile: ILPES.

Geilfus, Frans (2009), *80 herramientas para el desarrollo participativo: diagnóstico, planificación, monitoreo, evaluación*, Costa Rica: IICA.

Guijt, Irene and Jim Woodhill (2002), *Gestión orientada al impacto en el desarrollo rural. Guía para el SyE de proyectos*, Italy: FIDA.

ILPES (Instituto Latinoamericano de Planificación Económica y Social) (2006), *Guía para la presentación de proyectos, Siglo XXI*, Mexico: ILPES-CEPAL.

Medina, María (2007), *La investigación aplicada a proyectos. Identificación del proyecto y formulación de la investigación*, vol 1, Colombia: Ántropos.

Pérez, Carlos and Lilia Zizumbo (2014), "Turismo rural y communalidad: Impactos socioterritoriales en San Juan Atzingo, México", in *Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural*, vol. 11, no. 73, Colombia: Universidad Javeriana.

Pichardo, Arlette (2008), *Planificación y programación social. Bases para el diagnóstico y la formulación de programas y proyectos sociales*, Argentina: Lumen.

Pleitez, William (2014), "Producir antes que consumir", in *Blog Humanum*, El Salvador: PNUD. Available at: <http://www.revistahumanum.org/blog/producir-antes-que-consumir/> [August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014].

Weitz, Raanan (1981), *Desarrollo rural integrado*, Mexico: Conacyt.

Yaschine, Iliana (2013), "No hay articulación entre lo federal, lo estatal y lo local", in *Revista Cámara*, year 3, no. 33, Mexico: Cámara de Diputados Federal.

**Norma Baca Tavira.** Doctor in Geography from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Fulltime researcher-professor in the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEM). Research lines: international migrations, labor markets and participation by gender. Recent publications: *Procesos participativos, desarrollo y género en México*, Buenos Aires: Mnemosyne (2016); *Migración internacional, territorios y sujetos migrantes del Estado de México, Mexico*: Eón (2015); “Desigualdades de género, trabajo reproductivo y mujeres migrantes. Reflexiones sobre el debate inconcluso” in *Trabajo global y desigualdades en el mercado laboral* (2016), Toluca: UAEM/ Clacso; “Hogares, configuraciones familiares y de género en un contexto de alta migración internacional en el sur mexiquense” in *Perfiles de los hogares y las familias en el Estado de México*, Mexico: Miguel Ángel Porrúa (2015) and “Institucionalidad y justicia de género. Nudos y desafíos desde la perspectiva de los derechos” in *Violencia, género y la persistencia de la desigualdad en el Estado de México*, Buenos Aires, Mnemosyne (2013).

**Francisco Herrera Tapia.** Doctor in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Researcher at the Institute of Agricultural and Rural Sciences (ICAR) of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEM). Research lines: rural development, public policies and territorial management. Recent publications: *Proyectos sociales. Diseño y gestión para el desarrollo local y rural*, Buenos Aires, Argentina: Mnemosyne (2015); in coordination with Cristina Chávez Mejía, *Procesos Sociales en el Medio Rural. Acercamientos teóricos y experiencias de investigación*, Toluca, Mexico: UAEM (2015); Elizabeth Guadalupe Chong González, Francisco Herrera Tapia, Cristina Chávez Mejía and Fabiana Sánchez Plata, “Mercado de trabajo rural y precarización: nuevas condiciones socioeconómicas en el sur del Estado de México”, in *Revista Región y Sociedad*, vol. 27, no. 63, Hermosillo, Sonora: El Colegio de Sonora (2015).

Reception: November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Approval: June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016