Indicators for Analysis of Public Policy Contribution to the Reduction of Extreme Poverty in Costa Rica (2010-2018)

Indicadores para el análisis de la contribución de la política pública, en la reducción de la pobreza extrema en Costa Rica (2010-2018)

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of this study was to define indicators for analysis of poverty derived from public policies implemented for the last ten years, in Costa Rica.

Methods: Literature review, observation, individual and group surveys.

Main results: The analysis of public policies that contribute to the reduction of extreme poverty with a national scope, due to the implications they have in programs and projects implemented by the public authorities. This study offers a social, economic, and political vision on the issue addressed.

Conclusions: Extreme poverty in Costa Rica is a structural problem of the national economy.

Key words: public policies; poverty; categories; variables; indicators

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Definir indicadores para el análisis de la pobreza, como consecuencia de las políticas públicas implementadas durante los diez últimos años, en Costa Rica.

Métodos: Revisión documental, observación, entrevistas individual y grupal.

Principales resultados: El análisis de las políticas públicas que contribuyan a la reducción de la pobreza extrema, lo cual posee un alcance nacional por la implicación que tienen en los programas y proyectos implementados por la institucionalidad pública. Se aporta una visión social, económica y política sobre el fenómeno abordado.

Conclusiones: La pobreza extrema en el país, es un problema estructural de la economía costarricense.

Palabras clave: políticas públicas; pobreza; categorías; variables; indicadores.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is not the result of insufficient amounts of natural resources or small territories; there are economic structures that hinder progress, and perpetuate impoverishing attitudes that dot not help create prosperity, unless they are fought against.

Many theoretical approaches explain this phenomenon, some of which visualize it as a matter only pertaining to the people who suffer it. Others explain it as a mere absence of financial resources, meanwhile, others consider it the result of unequal development processes.

In light of such approaches, this paper acknowledges that poverty is a complex social phenomenon, caused by a number of social, economic, political, and cultural conditions, among others. Therefore, it is important to learn their origins, and set up a clear strategy that does not tackle the flaws of families or society, but that copes with the causes of the economic system or development model assumed.

When reference is made of a poor family in Costa Rica, it is linked to unmet needs, living standards, basic needs, and social exclusion. These families are not allowed to integrate successfully to society they live in. However, the Constitution of Costa Rica (1949, p. 21) states that: "The State will seek the highest wellbeing standards for all the

inhabitants of the country, by organizing and stimulating production, and granting the most appropriate form of distributing wealth".

According to the previous, logic indicates that public policies should ensure the observance of the constitution, and contribute to the fight against poverty in the country. Nevertheless, poverty has grown in the last ten years, considering the number of people who live in that condition.

One alternative can be found in the public social policies defined by different governments and multiple programs and projects implemented by the public institutions, which have been thought of as necessary, but they are insufficient.

To state such perspective it is important to define the following question: How can poverty be analyzed as a consequence of public policies in Costa Rica?

Therefore, the aim of this paper was to define indicators for analysis of poverty derived from public policies implemented for the last ten years, in Costa Rica.

In that direction, various theoretical elements and reflections are made within a poverty-marked context. Finally, indicators that operationalize social, economic, and political categories were defined, in order to understand that extreme poverty in the country is a structural problem of the Costa Rican economy.

DEVELOPMENT

Poverty has always existed; in the late 19$^{\text{TH}}$ Century it was assumed as a variable of analysis to measure, understand, and particularly, reduce poverty.

Despite the efforts made, everything indicates that this issue will prevail throughout time, since neither the model of public management or the market model have been able to eradicate it. On the contrary, depending on the scenario, poverty seems to move within a stable, and an even growing trend. What is poverty?

Lora (2013), noted that poor people are those who cannot access or are not in the realm of basic requisites to sustain an acceptable living standard. Thus, a poor person would be one who lacks food or does not have access to services like education, health, drinking water, sewage, and others.

Furthermore, Cespedes and Jiménez (2010) claim:

"... hence, poverty not only shows a wide variety of faces as a reflection of different specific situations and conditions in time and space underwent by particular populations, but it is also a very complex phenomenon in terms of relations of causality". (p. 6)

According to the authors, poverty is a complex phenomenon caused by a number of variables. Based on that approach, to understand what a poor person or family is may be simple; however, its definition is much more complex than the mere lack of financial resources.

On this issue, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL, 2018), revealed that, in 2017, 30.2% of the population was under extreme poverty, the highest percentage of the decade, and the perspectives of 2018 pointed to a slight setback in relation to the levels of extreme poverty. Likewise, the World Bank (Méndez, 2018) stated that by 2018, extreme poverty accounted for 10% of the population on the planet, citing the countries with the highest indexes, namely, Chile, El Salvador, The Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama, and Uruguay. In face of these challenges, CEPAL (2018), urged for the implementation of complementary public policies of social protection and labor inclusion, based on better income redistribution.

Accordingly, when reference is made of a poor family in Costa Rica, it is linked to unmet needs, living standards, basic needs, and social exclusion. These families are not allowed to be a successful part of the society they live in.

The performance of the Costa Rican economy since postwar times to the crisis of the 1980s was particularly successful. The economy was able to accomplish an exceptional combination of economic growth, political and economic stability, and a substantial reduction of poverty. Hence, governments enjoyed the necessary resources to create a set of social prerogatives that led to the current social system in Costa Rica.

However, during the crisis that started in the early 1900s, in Costa Rica, there was a broad interest in health, education, and other social services of high relevance in subsequent years. In spite of it, the political sector did not have the means to respond to these concerns.

In that sense, poverty practically invaded the homes of over half of Costa Rican families for several different administrations, until the late 1990s, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2015), when poverty became stable in 20-22% of the population. Presently, the same percentage can be observed, which is shown in Fig. 1.
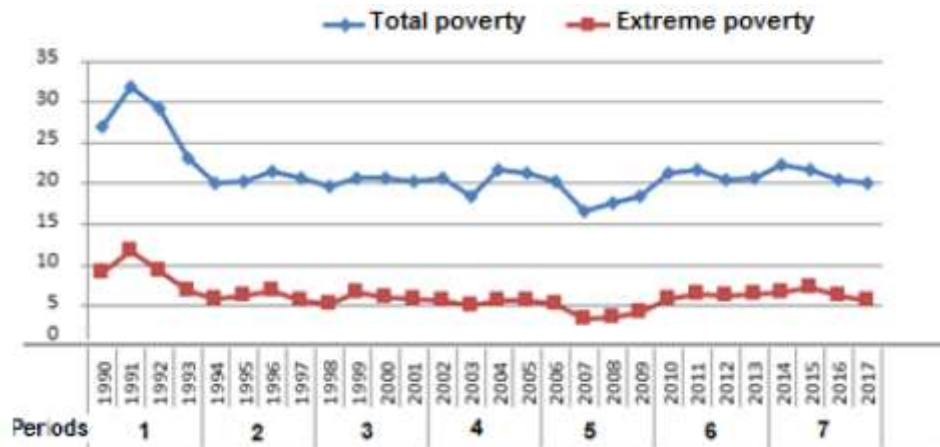

Fig.1. Behavior of extreme poverty in Costa Rica in the 1990–2017 period

Source: self-made based on INEC data

The figure shows that in the first period, poverty underwent a significant change, from 31.9%, in 1991, to 23.2% in 1993, and continued to decline up to 20% during the first year of the second period. However, the next three years, it not only remained stable, but slightly increased in a similar way, with 20.7% of the households in the country living in poverty, until 2006. In the next three years, a 2.3% reduction was observed, becoming the lowest extreme poverty level of the three last periods. The last two ended with up to 5.7% increases, though in absolute terms, these accounted for 86 663 homes stricken by extreme poverty in 2017 (INEC, 2017).

The families that suffer from extreme poverty are mainly concentrated in marginal areas, both rural and urban. This situation is illustrated in Fig. 2.
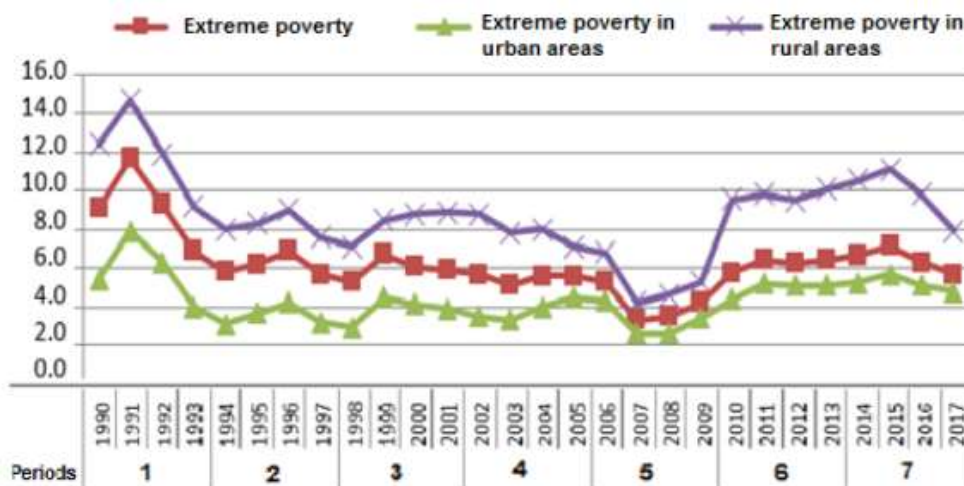
Fig.2. Location of extremely poor families. Rural or urban. 1990-2017

Source: self-made based on INEC data

The historical evolution of extreme poverty measured according to income, evidenced that in the long term, the country's poverty level has been sustained, particularly in rural areas, where up to 8% of families are affected. The main causes are related to the possession of land, credits, low levels of technology, infrastructure, educational level, little access to health services, and unemployment.

Although different governments devised corresponding public policies based on their ideologies, the poverty levels shown in the graphic are not mitigating.

Despite all the social programs designed and implemented, poverty continues to be an issue in public policies, when it comes to economic development, particularly to the Costa Rican per cent of the population whose needs are unmet, and suffer from shortages of both individual and general conditions, which obstruct their development as human beings, an impediment to become part of society.

Hence, performance in terms of public policies should be linked to such premises, in order to gather, administrate, and manage economic resources to cover public expenditure planned by the state, which "develops the economy to gather the resources that meet collective needs". (Rodríguez, Fernández, and de Dios, 2015, p.24).

Although large debate has created awareness on this issue, there are two opposing views: the wealthy, which refuses to make changes that jeopardize their interests; and the workers, who strive for security through public policies.

Thus, the multiple social demands, and occasionally, the breakup of legislative representativeness and public institutions, and the establishment of public policies, demand certain bargaining abilities in which each group or sector of power will have to establish their own strategies to submit the problems and demands of particular groups in the public eye.

In the Costa Rican case, this process has become rough and plagued by disagreements on national strategic issues. Accordingly, many of the social programs of the time, still in place, were not necessarily the product of policies adopted with the consent of different political and business sectors, but the result of social groups that fought for their implementation.

In short, it is not possible to achieve increased levels of human development without eradicating poverty, which, in turn, will remain unless the economy is reactivated, including the generation of more and better jobs to stimulate the country's economic growth.

Fig. 3 shows the approach used in the first level of analysis, and then, the indicators are defined in three categories, which are assumed as referents to analyze poverty in Costa Rica.
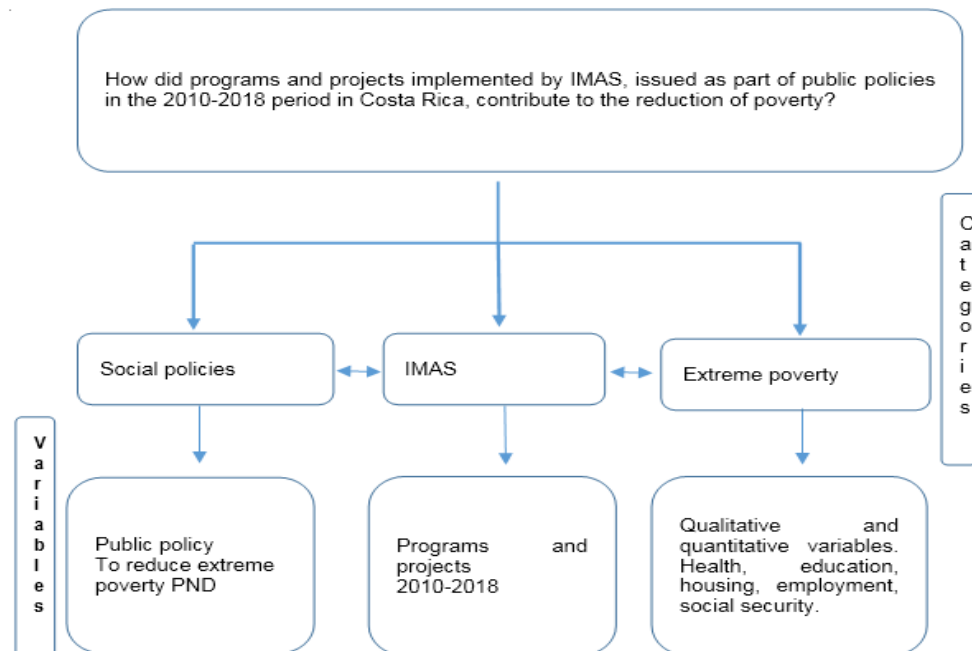
Fig. 3. First-level analysis

(PND) Plan for National Development

(IMAS) Mixed Institute of Social Aid

Expressed through the following equation: $Pe(f) = (Ce+Cs+Cp)$

Where:

(Pe) = Extreme poverty

(Ce) = Economic conditions of the country that people have access to.

(Cs) = Social conditions of the country that people have access to.

(Cp) = Political conditions of the country that people have access to.

Understanding that

$$Ce\ (f) = dr + yn + cE$$

dr = Distribution of wealth produced.

yn = Condition of pa income.

cE = Condition of the national economy.

$$Cs\ (f) = sa + ed + vi + tr + ps$$

sa = Condition of the health of the country and the people.

ed = Condition of education in the country and of the people.

vi = Condition of housing in the country and of the people.

tr = Condition of employment of the people in the country.

ps = Programs of social security implemented in the country.

$$Cp\ (f) = gz + rp$$

gz = Government

rp = Representation of different sectors of society

Therefore, and generally speaking, this study deals with extreme poverty, based on the following function:

$$Pe(f) = (Ce + Cs + Cp$$
$$= (dr + yn + cE) + (sa + ed + vi + tr + ps) + (gz + rp)$$

Table 1 shows three categories of analysis; it suggests variables and indicators of the poverty conditions that Costa Ricans live in.

Table 1. Categories, variables, and indicators. First-level analysis

Category: Social $Cs\,(f) = sa + ed + vi + tr + ps$

Variables	Indicators
Health (sa)	People with or without social security
	Malnutrition %
Education (ed)	Life expectancy
	Public expenses
	No secondary or technical education %
	Public expenses
Housing (vi)	Families with or without homes
	Condition (good, average, bad)
	Over-crowding
	Public services
	Housing bonds
Employment (tr)	National PEA
	Unemployment %
	With or without social guarantees
Programs of social security (ps)	Poor people aided through social programs %
	Quantity of program types
	Public expenses

Category: Economy $Ce\,(f) = dr + yn + cE$

Variables	Indicators
Distribution of wealth produced. (dr)	Gini coefficient
	Mean income of poor and rich people
Income (yn)	Economically active population (PEA) % on minimal wage or less
	Behavior of per capita GDP
Economic condition (cE)	Basic poverty %
	Extreme poverty %

Category: Policy $Cp\,(f) = gz + rp$

Variables	Indicators
Government (gz)	Trust in the law
Representativeness (rp)	Sectors represented in the legislative branch
	Number of institutions in the social sector

Considering that, the social policy is in keeping with the government's guidelines in terms of distribution of economic resources to create capacities in poor families or to answer some of their needs through money transfers; this study includes categories Politics, Social, and Development. Therefore, these policies require some economic content, and should be directed to particular social sectors.

In the study of the social condition of poor families, each of the previous indicators was given a value scale or response criteria, which was used to consider the contribution of each program to the reduction of extreme poverty. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the operationalization of each category.

Table 2. Operationalization of category: Social. Indicator, value scale

| Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Health (*sa*)	People with or without insurance	-With insurance Without insurance
	Malnutrition %	-No malnutrition (efficient) -Between 0 and 1% (acceptable) -Between 1 and 3% (deficient) -More than 3% (very deficient)
	Life expectancy	-75 years or more (efficient) -Between 70 and 75 years (acceptable) -Between 65 and 70 years (deficient) -Less than 65 years (very deficient)
	Public expenditure	-8% or over (efficient) -Between 7 and 8% (acceptable) -Between 6 and 7% (deficient) -Less than 6% (very deficient)
Education (*ed*)	Educational level	-32% or more (efficient) -Between 20 and 32% (acceptable) -Between 15 and 20% (deficient) -Less than 15% (very deficient)
	Illiteracy	-Less than 5% (efficient) -Between 5 and 6% (acceptable) -Between 6 and 7% (deficient) -More than 7% (very deficient)
	No secondary or technical education %	-10% or less (efficient) -Between 10 and 13% (acceptable) -Between 13 and 17% (deficient) -More than 17% (very deficient)
	Public expenditure	-Behavior of GDP % in education between 1990 and 2017.
Housing (*vi*)	Families with or without homes	-With a home -Without a home
	Condition	-Good, -Average, -Bad, -Very bad
	Public services	-With electricity, current water, telephone, Internet access (efficient) -With three of these services (acceptable) -With two of these services (deficient) -With one of these services (very deficient)
	Housing bonds	-5-6% benefit (efficient), 3-5% benefit (acceptable), between 2 and 3% (deficient), and less than 2% (very deficient)
Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Employment (*tr*)	Economically active population PEA	Number of people of working age
	Unemployment %	-3% unemployment (efficient) -Between 3 and 6% (acceptable) -Between 6 and 8% (deficient) -More than 8% (very deficient)
	With or without social guarantees (Minimum wage, social security, Christmas bonus pay, vacations)	-With the four guarantees (efficient) -With less than 4 guarantees (very deficient)
Programs of social security (*ps*)	Poor people aided through social programs %	-100% of the poor receive assistance (efficient) -Between 75 and 99% receive assistance (acceptable) -Between 50 and 75% receive assistance (deficient) -Less than 50% receive assistance (very deficient)
	Quantity of program types	-50% transference and 50% capacity (efficient) -60% transference and 40% capacity (acceptable) -70% transference and 30% capacity (deficient) -More than 70% transference and less capacity (very deficient)
	Public expenditure	-Equal to or greater than recommended % (efficient) -1% less than recommended (acceptable) -2% less than recommended (deficient) -More than 2% below the recommended % (very deficient)

Table3. Operationalization of category: Economy. Indicator, value scale

Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Distribution of wealth produced. (dr)	Gini coefficient	-Positive variation of Gini coefficient (efficient) -Constant Gini coefficient (acceptable) -Declining Gini coefficient (very deficient)
	Mean income of poor and rich people	-The mean income between poor and rich people tends to match (efficient) -The mean income between poor and rich people remain stable (acceptable) -The mean income between poor and rich people tend to increase (very deficient)
Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Income (yn)	Economically active population % PEA on minimal wage and less	-Most wages are higher than the minimal wage (efficient) -More than 70% of wages are higher than the minimal wage (acceptable) -More than 30% of wages are below the minimal wage (deficient) -50% or more wages are minimal or lower (very deficient)
	Behavior of *per capita* GDP	-Growing *per capita* GDP (efficient) -Stagnant *per capita* GDP (acceptable) -Decreasing *per capita* GDP (very deficient)
Economic condition (cE)	Basic poverty %	-7% basic poverty (efficient) -10% basic poverty (acceptable) -12% basic poverty (deficient) -More than 12% (very deficient)
	Extreme poverty %	-Absence of extreme poverty (efficient) -Extreme poverty below 2% (acceptable) -Extreme poverty equal to 3% (deficient) -Extreme poverty over 3% (very deficient)

Table4. Operationalization of category: Policy. Indicator, value scale

Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Government (gz)	Trust in the law	-The whole country trusts the rule of law (efficient) -2% of the population distrusts the law (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% of the population distrusts the law (deficient) -More than 5% of the population distrusts the law (very deficient)
Representativeness (rp)	Sectors represented in the legislative branch	-All the social sectors are represented in decision-making (efficient) -90% of the social sectors are represented in decision-making (acceptable) -80% of the social sectors are represented in decision-making (deficient) -More than 80% of the social sectors are represented in decision-making (very deficient)
	Number of institutions in the social sector	-All the sectors in social disadvantage can access social programs (efficient) -Some social sectors cannot access social programs (very deficient)

Fig.4 shows the component of second-level analysis, its categories, variables, and response criteria, in Table 5. Table 6 shows the variables, indicators, and value scale for that level of analysis.
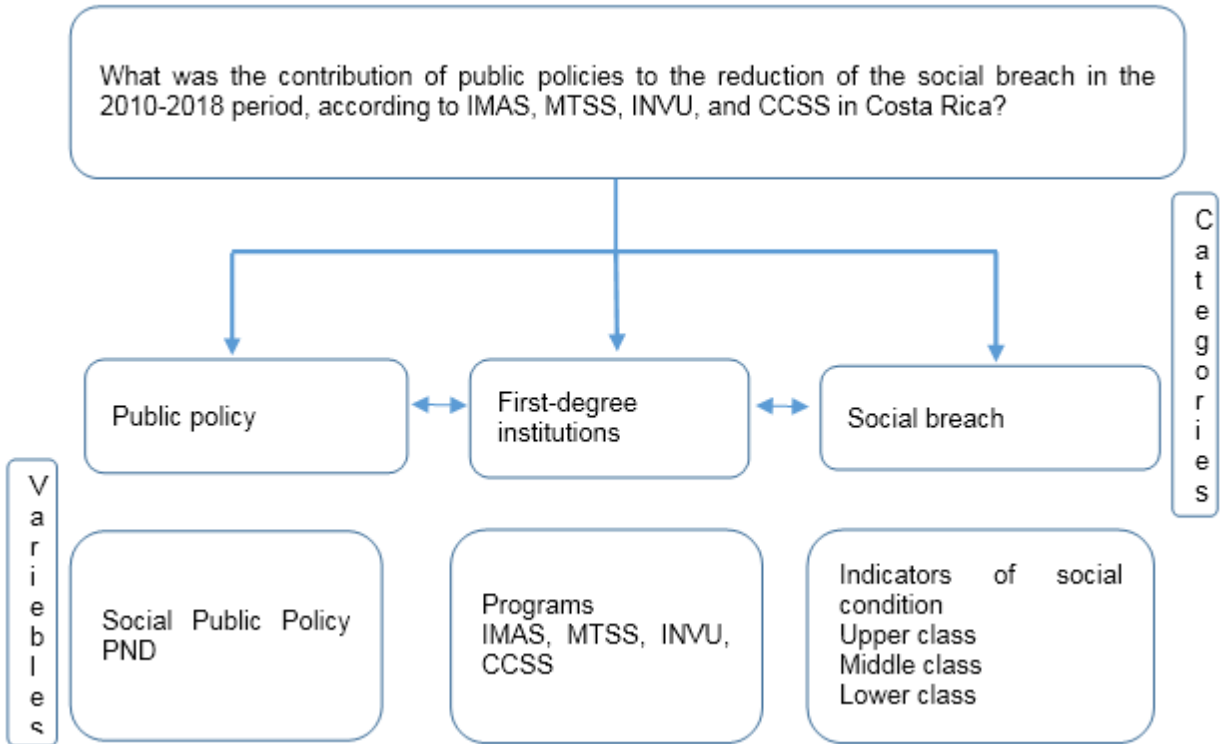
Fig.4. Second-level analysis

Legend:
(MTSS) Ministry of Labor and Social Security
(MEP) Ministry of Public Education
(INVU) National Institute of Housing and Urban Development
CCSS Costa Rican Social Security

Table 5. Categories, variables, and indicators Second-level analysis

Variables	Indicators
Category: Social	
Health	Behavior of life expectancy
	Infant mortality
	Number of people per physician
	Behavior of public expenditure
Education	Population in educational centers %
	Educational exclusion and lag %
	People within technical education
	Number of students per teacher
	Behavior of public expenditure
Housing	Number of families receiving services
	Home bonuses granted
	Behavior of public expenditure
Employment	National PEA
	Difference between rural and urban unemployment
	Unemployment in the young
	Unemployment and gender
Social security	Vulnerable population covered with services %
	Behavior of public expenditure
Distribution	Behavior of the public budget
	Distribution of social expenditure
	Distribution according to social sectors
	Distribution according to social institutions
Category: Economic	
Income	Behavior of *per capita* income
	Behavior of national income
	Social class behavior per cent
Economic condition	Behavior of *per capita* GDP
	Behavior of income quintile
Category: Policy	
Government	Public management credibility
	Trust in the law
	Separation of powers
	Prevision in public services
Economic condition	Number of political parties
	Number of institutions in the social sector

Table 6. Variables, indicators, value scale in the second-level analysis

Variables	Indicators	Assessment scale
Health	Waiting time for special treatments	-Less than a month (efficient) -Between 1 and 2 months (acceptable) -Between 2 and 4 months (deficient) -More than 4 months (very deficient)-
	Number of people a physician should assist per hour	-Three people (efficient) -Four people (acceptable) -Between 5 and 6 people (deficient) -Seven people or more (very deficient)
	Public expenditure of GDP on health	8% or over (efficient) -Between 7 and 8% (acceptable) -Between 6 and 7% (deficient) -Less than 6% (very deficient)
Education	School age population in educational centers (%)	-70% or over (efficient) -60-70% (acceptable) -50-60% (deficient) -Less than 50% (very deficient)
	Educational exclusion (%)	-1% in primary and 5% in secondary education (efficient) -1.5% in primary and 8% in secondary education (acceptable) -2% in primary and 9% in secondary education (deficient) -More than 2% in primary and 9% in secondary education (very deficient)
	Lag in new secondary education students	70% or more ends secondary education (efficient) -Between 60 and 70% ends secondary education (acceptable) -Between 50 and 60% ends secondary education (deficient) -Less than 50% ends secondary education (very deficient)
	People within technical education	-Annual increase of technical education graduates every year Per cent of people in school age without formal education, technical education student.
Housing	Public expenditure	-GDP % on education between 2002 and 2017. -Qualification in terms of efficiency and effectiveness of expenditures in education -Yearly average expenditure in education per student, compared to international standards
	Number of families receiving services	Percentage of families without homes -Number of home bonds granted yearly -Number of families receiving other housing services
	Public services and basic services	-With electricity, current water, telephone, Internet access (efficient) -With three of these services (acceptable) -With two of these services (deficient) -With one of these services (very deficient)
	Yearly home bonds to families without these services.	-Between 5 and 6% (efficient) -Between 3 and 5% gets benefits (acceptable) -Between 2 and 3% gets benefits (deficient) -Less than 2% gets benefits (very deficient)
Employment	National PEA	-Number of people of working age -Behavior of unemployment during the evaluation period -Annual growth of national PEA during the evaluation

		period -Annual behavior of new job opportunities
Programs of social security	Public expenditure measured in GDP % on all the programs, according to OCDE	-Equal to or greater than recommended % (efficient) -1% less than recommended (acceptable) -2% less than recommended (deficient) -More than 2% below the recommended % (very deficient)
	Public expenditure measured in GDP % on all the programs, according to OCDE	Equal to or greater than recommended % (efficient) -1% less than recommended (acceptable) -2% less than recommended (deficient) -More than 2% below the recommended % (very deficient)
Distribution	Lorenz curve	-Positive trend of Lorenz curve -Negative trend of Lorenz curve Stable curve in calculation
	Distribution of public income	-Behavior of budget during the evaluation period -Behavior of budget for the operation and public services -Behavior of social budget in the evaluation period. -Ratio between budget and disbursement of social expenditure during the evaluation period
Income	Per cent behavior according social classes	- The percentage structure of social classes in the country remains stable -The middle class tends to a decline, thus producing a rise in the lower class -The middle class tends to increase, thus producing a rise in the upper class.
	Behavior of *per capita* income	-Behavior of *per capita* income during the evaluation period -Ratio between *per capita* income and the condition of inequality
Economic condition	Behavior of *per capita* GDP	-The GDP grows satisfactory during the period -The GDP remains stagnant or grows insufficiently -The GDP decreases during the period
	Behavior of income quintiles	-Income tends to grow in quintiles during the evaluation period -Income remains stable in quintiles during the evaluation period -Income tends to decline in quintiles during the evaluation period.
Government	Public management credibility	-100% is satisfied with public management (efficient) -Between 1 and 3% considers public management as bad (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% considers public management as bad (deficient) -More than 5% considers public management as bad (very deficient)
	Trust in the law	-100% trusts in the law (efficient) -Between 1 and 3% distrusts the law (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% distrusts the legislation (deficient)

		-More than 5% distrusts the law (very deficient)
	Separation of powers	-100% trusts the separation of powers (efficient) -Between 1 and 3% distrusts the separation of powers (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% distrusts the separation of powers (deficient) -More than 5% distrusts the separation of powers (very deficient)
Representativeness	Sector representation in the legislative body (AL)	100% has representation in the legislative body (efficient) -Between 1 and 3% has no representation in the legislative body (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% has no representation in the legislative body (deficient) -More than 5% has no representation in the legislative body (very deficient)
	Trust in municipal governments	--100% trusts municipal management (efficient) -Between 1 and 3% distrusts municipal management (acceptable) -Between 3 and 5% distrusts municipal management (deficient) -More than 5% distrusts municipal management (very deficient)

The second-level indicators complement the rationale of public policy, and its contribution to people living in extreme poverty; they provide information from a macro-level integration of governments with the most vulnerable sectors, taking into account the definition and priority of social policies.

There are differences between the levels of analysis; they diverge as to the scale of processes:

First-level processes are essentially local.

Second-level processes are regional or national.

The two levels are integrated by different dynamics and actors. However, they are clearly interrelated, because first-level process analysis or the micro-level offers a rationale to second-level processes, or the meso-level.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributed to the definition of indicators for analysis of poverty derived from public policies implemented in the last ten years, in Costa Rica, at the two interrelated levels.

These indicators are associated to three categories: social, economic, and political. The social category, with five variables (health, education, housing, employment, and social security); the economic category, with three variables (distribution, income, and economic condition), and the political, with two variables (government and representativeness).

Operationalization of the ten variables enables the definition of 36 indicators, of which 19 correspond to the social category, 8, to the economic category, and 9 to the political category. All of them are valued at different scales, into the second-level analysis of the system.

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