
Poverty and Vulnerability in Cuba Today

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This paper analyzes poverty and vulnerability in today's Cuba. Poverty and vulnerability are important human issues in any context, but even more so in a society that, exactly 50 years ago, embarked on an alternative path of development – socialism – which prioritizes the emancipation of human beings and the fulfillment of their potential. This required as its point of departure a commitment to social development, justice, and equity, based on universal and multifaceted social policies. Below I reflect on current poverty and vulnerability in Cuba, their determinants and forms of expression. My thesis is that these are diverse and heterogeneous, and their analysis must be supplemented by a family- and gender perspective. Finally, I outline some ideas about how to improve social policies to address these issues.

Social development, justice and equity in the Cuban social model

When the World Summit for Social Development took place in Copenhagen in 1995, many of the world's pressing social problems had already been solved in Cuba and several of the proposals agreed upon at this important forum were already an integral part of the Cuban concept of social development that had been devised and implemented since 1959. Among them are the promotion of social integration, especially of the most disadvantaged groups; access to a quality education and basic health care; gender equality; and the eradication of poverty.

While the rest of Latin America embraces the reigning belief that economic growth will solve the problems of poverty and inequity (“trickle down theory”) and has been pursuing policies of structural adjustment and privatization, Cuba has placed its bets on universal social policies and the central role of the State, to promote and achieve just and equitable human development.

Cuba's concept of social development is defined by these basic principles: it is comprehensive and multidimensional in character; economic and social aspects are assumed to be interconnected; the State plays a central role in the design and implementation of social policies that ensure free and universal basic social services; there is broad public participation in the outlined social policies; individual and social consumption are both improved to provide for higher standards and consumer safeguards; and differential treatment of those groups considered vulnerable (children, women and the rural population) with appropriate policies is acknowledged as necessary. These principles give rise to multifaceted, coherent, and systematic social policies that are comprehensive and universal (Rodríguez & Carriazo 1987).

This Cuban model places special emphasis on equity, consistent with its aim of social justice. Equity does not pertain only to the distribution of income; it includes equal opportunities and universal access to social services, with specific attention to disadvantaged groups so they can benefit from the existing structure of opportunities. (Álvarez & Mattar 2004).

Elaborating on this premise, sociologist Mayra Espina links the promotion of equity and social justice in the

Cuban social model to the consolidation of *opportunities for equality*, which she defines as “a mechanism for distribution through public consumption funds, which is characterized by universality; massive application; free or easy access; legally guaranteed equality of status; centralized public design and guaranteed access; social participation; priority of collective solutions over individual ones; homogeneity; increasing quality; opportunity for social integration on equal terms for all social sectors, regardless of income; and the aspiration to equal outcomes... [with regard to] basic nutritional needs, education, health, culture, sports and social security” (Espina 2008: 144f).

Cuban social policy regarding poverty attempts to eradicate it by addressing its causes, promoting equity as a means to integrate all sectors of society, fostering human development and well-being, and guaranteeing the entire population basic social protections. Above and beyond these objectives are more specific policies of social compensation and assistance for those sectors considered vulnerable. In keeping with the ethical and humanistic principles of Cuba’s social program, merely reducing, alleviating or mitigating poverty is not enough. The aspiration is to eliminate or minimize the conditions that produce and/or reproduce poverty and to promote human development in all its aspects.

As a result of implementing this concept of development and the social policies it implies, Cuban society for nearly three decades enjoyed a trend toward a more equitable distribution of wealth, which has been documented by renowned authors and institutions,¹ and advanced significantly in terms of social development, as evidenced by very favorable social indicators – some of which are even comparable to those of developed countries – at virtually the same level throughout the island. Particularly outstanding among these indicators is the Human Development Index (HDI). Cuba’s rank has risen continually since 1998 and it currently holds 50th place, thus placing it among the highly developed nations (PNUD 1998-2006). According to the Human Development and Equity Index (HDEI),² whose goal is to measure equity in the relevant aspects of human development, Cuba ranks among the top five nations of Latin America and the Caribbean – along with Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia and Costa Rica. It must be emphasized that these results were achieved by an underdeveloped country with limited resources and almost constantly facing adverse economic conditions.

Poverty and vulnerability in present-day Cuba

The crisis and economic reforms that occurred in Cuba during the 1990s not only severely hurt the country’s economy but seriously affected everyone’s quality of life. In particular, material insecurity grew and intensified. In this complex scenario poverty reemerged as a social problem and consequently the thesis that poverty was being eradicated in Cuba, which had been widely shared in all spheres – political, social and academic – and proven by indisputable social advances and achievements, began to be questioned (Rodríguez & Carriazo 1987).³

Special terms are used to discuss problems connected types of personal insecurity (*precariedad*), reflecting both the aforementioned social achievements and the specifics of the phenomenon of poverty in Cuban society. Among these terms are: *social disadvantage*, to describe adverse socioeconomic and familial conditions that place schoolchildren at risk (Díaz et al. 1990), *vulnerable groups*, defined as groups with incomes too low to provide a minimum standard of living (Torres 1993), and *at-risk population*, defined as that population in danger of not being able to meet some basic needs (Ferriol et al. 1997) – a term the authors explicitly prefer to use instead of *poverty*.⁴

The recognition of poverty in today's Cuba requires acknowledgement of its *sui generis* character. It is limited in extent and one does not find critical or extreme poverty, of the sort that would produce malnutrition, poor health, illiteracy, insecurity, and social exclusion. It is also unique with regard to the social protection received by the entire population. Even those sectors with scarce resources are guaranteed access to basic social services (Zabala 1996). It is precisely this social protection – free and accessible health care, education and social security, guarantees of employment, wages and basic foodstuffs, and residential subsidies – that keeps social exclusion to a minimum.

It is this social protection that accounts for Cuba's favorable ranking in terms of human development and poverty. According to the Human Poverty Index (HPI), Cuba has ranked among the top five developing countries over the last 10 years, with poverty rates ranging from 4.1% (2002) to 5.1% (1997). It has ranked between second and sixth, and in every case the results have been considered very favorable.⁵

The second report prepared by Cuba on the Millennium Development Goals explained that Cuba is doing very well at meeting those goals. Regarding the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, unemployment fell from 7.1% (1997) to 1.9% (2004), a rate that can be regarded as full employment, benefiting all sectors of society, especially youth, women, the disabled, and the people of the country's eastern provinces – the region where unemployment was highest during the economic crisis. Over this same period minimum and base salaries increased (by 125%, benefiting 1,657,191 workers) in various sectors. Social security benefits to low-income pensioners increased, benefiting 1,468,641 individuals, as did social assistance, benefiting 476,512. In terms of the goal of reducing the rate of hunger by half between 1990 and 2015, food availability increased between 1999 and 2003, from an average of 3007 kilocalories to 3165 per capita per day. The proportion of the population at risk of malnutrition fell to 2%. The incidence of low birth weight babies has fallen since 1993 and is consistent throughout the country. Likewise, the percentage children up to five years old who are moderately or severely underweight decreased to 2% – a very low incidence by worldwide standards – and with very little variation between the sexes. Specific programs now ensure proper nutrition of children, the elderly, pregnant women, and the chronically ill. Given all of this, the achievement of this millennium goal is quite possible for Cuba. Cuba has shown significant progress toward fulfilling other related goals such as universal primary education, women's equality and independence, reduction of infant mortality, better maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (INIE 2005).

Analyzing poverty is complex because of its multiple layers: regional and global development events and trends, national macroeconomic conditions, specific characteristics of the different zones, and individual and family situations and characteristics. Thus it is a multidimensional phenomenon that incorporates both causes and attributes that are economic, social, political, cultural and subjective in character, among others. It is a dynamic phenomenon, always in process, in which cumulative deficiencies, contextual elements and other factors feed back simultaneously and over time. Lastly, its production and reproduction intersect in a synergistic manner with the axes of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and generation. Poverty in Cuba is thus a heterogeneous phenomenon.

One should add that social vulnerability has increased to a degree in Cuban society. Major contributing factors are the aforementioned economic crisis and reform, the effects of the US economic blockade, and the natural

disasters that frequently assault the country. Other factors are associated with the characteristics – gender, race, age, etc. – that can make individuals, households or groups more vulnerable. In addition, the most vulnerable can be identified by looking at poor people’s resources and assets – physical, financial, productive, and human and social capital – and particularly the types of strategies developed by an individual or household (Moser 1998).

Insufficient income

Most economic studies of this phenomenon, and in particular those using the income or Poverty Line (PL) method, have revealed insufficient income to be the essential determinant of poverty and its sole, most important and widespread most form. This view of poverty places emphasis on the inputs available to individuals or households to satisfy their material needs. Those individuals or households who do not have the monetary income to satisfy their minimum needs within the historically determined norms of a society are considered to be below the PL.

It is well-known that the income redistribution that took place during the first two decades of the Cuban revolution resulted in notable increases in the incomes of the poorest sectors.

This tendency toward equitable distribution of wealth in Cuban society is demonstrated by the Gini coefficient, which shows a continual decrease in values from 1953 to the end of the 1980s: 0.56 (1953), 0.25 (1978) and 0.22 (1986) (Zimbalist 1989, Baliño 1991). Although in later decades the value of this coefficient has increased somewhat, to 0.38 between 1996 and 1998, it still ranks among the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cuba’s rank is even more significant because these calculations only include monetary income and do not include transfers such as health care, education and housing. Cuban experts explain these low levels of income inequality recorded until 1989 by the high employment rate – 95% – in the state sector of the economy, the implementation of a unified salary system with a narrow gap between pay levels, the importance of salaries to household income, the effect of state-subsidized consumer items, and the maintenance of an overvalued exchange rate (Álvarez & Mattar 2004).

However, the crisis and the economic reforms reversed this trend in income distribution and equity. Various factors contributed to this: the declining purchasing power of salaries due to price increases; the dual currency system; the dual market system with different prices, currency, and quality of products;⁶ diversification of income sources; and the divorce of the pay scale from work effort and professional skill, among other factors.

Taken together, these factors led to an increase in social inequalities and socioeconomic differentiation. Mayra Espina studied these aspects in depth and found that they are expressed in the polarization of income and the emergence of vulnerable groups who do not enjoy high levels of consumption or material well-being (Espina 1997). In her most recent work, Espina links this tendency to the emergence of poverty: “Without producing a mechanism for restoring the relations of exploitation or of private property on a large scale, the Cuban reform has led to restratification, providing the context for the growth of poverty as a social problem, the expansion of the at-risk segments of the population, and a general trend of widening socioeconomic inequalities” (Espina 2008: 161). Such social restratification and growth of income-inequality are linked to the increased role of the market in distribution.

Insufficient Income

Macroeconomic studies designed to identify sectors of the population with insufficient income have found an increase over the last two decades. A study carried out by experts at the National Institute of Economic Research (INIE) and the Global Economy Research Center (CIEM) looked at the urban population at risk and found that this sector had more than doubled, from 6.3% to 14.7%, between 1988 and 1996; in both years, the income of the majority of the at-risk population was near the poverty line. By region, although the east was most affected (21.7% of the population at risk), the western region and the city of Havana showed the sharpest increase in risk. The urban at-risk population includes seniors, women, individuals with primary and middle school education, unemployed, state workers and large households (Ferriol et al. 1997). According to the most recent data (1999) 20% of the urban population was at risk. The data show that there is little variation within this group and that most of these people live close to the poverty line. Preliminary calculations for 2001 have indicated that this situation has not been reversed (Álvarez & Mattar 2004).

Insufficient income is directly associated with limited consumption of all kinds, but food most of all. A study performed in the city of Havana by researchers of INIE, the National Statistics Office (ONE) and the Population and Development Studies Center (CEPDE) highlights the insufficient food consumption of households in the two lowest income deciles and their dependence on the rationed goods from the state markets complemented by government-subsidized meals and other forms of social protection (Ferriol et al. 2004).⁷

Economist Viviana Togores combines the rates of dependence and salary income of households and an estimate of the basic food basket into a single index. From these she calculates *income poverty*, defined as a condition in which the household is not able to meet its basic food needs. According to her estimates, 48.4% of the Cuban population is in this category. But at the same time, she acknowledges that the redistributive effect of social expenditures – in education, health, social assistance, etc. – while it does not compensate for the loss of purchasing power, does have a favorable effect on the population, especially those in more needy sectors (Togores 2000, 2004).

In contrast with other countries, insufficient income in Cuba is not directly related to unemployment; even during the economic crisis, workers' nominal salaries remained unchanged and the employees affected by company closings received subsidies. Moreover, as the economy recovered, unemployment dropped significantly. In 1995 the unemployment rate was 8.3%; by 2000 it had dropped to 5.4%. In 2006 it stood at only 1.9% and in 2007 just 1.8%, or nearly full employment (ONE 2008). In addition, nominal wages in the state sector have been gradually increasing in line with other wages in the country.

Furthermore, the social security program ensures universal protection for workers and their families, and also for sectors of the society whose essential needs are not otherwise met or who, due to life circumstances or health reasons, cannot meet their needs without social assistance.⁸ Expenditures on social security and services as well as pensions have increased substantially in recent years. The costs of social assistance programs and the number of beneficiaries have also increased dramatically.

Insufficient income is primarily related to the decline in purchasing power of salaries and social security and

assistance programs provisions. According to Togores (2004) and Pérez (2008), this occurs because nominal wages have not kept up with increases in the consumer price index,⁹ so that real wages have fallen by 37% between 1989 and 2000 (Perez 2008). This particularly affects those whose main income comes from the State, such as traditional state sector employees who do not receive other benefits or perks and those receiving pensions and social assistance.

Though unemployment is not the main cause of insufficient income, households with low adult employment and high rates of economic dependence are among those with the lowest income levels (Zabala 1999, Ferriol et al. 2004).

Although these estimates reflect the significance of insufficient income in today's Cuba, they should be analyzed with caution and in the light of important qualifications. For example, free public services, such as health care and education, satisfy important needs. Furthermore, the cost of the basic goods basket is difficult to calculate because basic goods are acquired in various markets with different prices; each household has its own formula for satisfying its needs. Moreover, such estimates are themselves questionable, because they do not take into account income not stemming from formal employment, such as hard currency income and various types of worker incentives.

Unmet basic needs

Poverty can be identified directly by examining whether or not individuals' or households' actual consumption of goods and services meets their basic needs (as opposed to being measured by income, which is an indirect approximation, as it only represents a portion of inputs). In order to identify the unmet basic needs, each household's success at meeting a group of specific needs – housing, water, sewage, electricity, furniture and household items, etc. – is evaluated. In each case a minimum value is set. If the household falls below that level, the need in question is considered unmet and an overall lack of essential services exists (Boltvinik 1992).

Studies on spatial inequalities undertaken by the Center for the Study of Health and Human Welfare at the University of Havana have revealed interregional and intraregional inequalities; some of these are due to spatial inequalities inherited from before the revolution and the new inequalities that emerged during the crisis and the economic reform. Such inequalities involve differences in housing quality, access to consumer goods and social services, and levels of socioeconomic development that give advantages to certain regions over others, the so-called *luminous* and *opaque areas*, respectively (Íñiguez & Ravenet 1999; Íñiguez & Everleny 2004).

The housing question is, without a doubt, one of the most pressing problems facing Cuban society. Despite efforts and achievements, the latest data available indicate that 26% and 15% of Cuban homes were considered to be in fair or poor condition, respectively (Alvarez & Mattar 2004). Estimates made in 1993 indicated that fair and poor structural conditions were more common in rural areas (Hábitat 1996); nevertheless, the city of Havana was in a particularly critical state: not only are 20% and 16% of units, respectively, classified as fair or poor, but in addition 60,000 houses needed to be replaced, another 60,700 dwellings were located in multifamily units or rooming houses¹⁰ and 2,700 units were transition shelters that accommodate families whose housing is uninhabitable; in addition, there are 60 unhealthy districts and 114 precarious settlements with marked deterioration in the capital. (Coyula 2006).

Another housing problem is the accumulated housing shortage, which the National Housing Institute has estimated at about 530,000 units (Álvarez & Mattar 2004), and the overcrowding that this causes. Currently a do-it-yourself construction program is underway with the participation of the State. In 2007, 57.4% of homes were built without state involvement and of these 52% were do-it-yourself (ONE 2007); however, the construction is far from meeting expectations and existing needs.

The natural disasters endured by Cuba, steadily more frequent and intense, have had a damaging affect on the country's housing situation by destroying dwellings entirely or partially and accelerating the deterioration of the housing base.¹¹ Although reconstruction and rehabilitation of housing damaged by hurricanes are given priority in allocating the scarce resources available for construction, only 22% of the affected dwellings have been repaired (Rodríguez 2008).

In terms of safe drinking water, the coverage of households is high: 95.2%, according to 2002 data; although in rural areas the figure is only 85.4%, and only 75.4% of covered households have direct connections. In many homes water must be stored because water service is intermittent, affecting its quality and availability. 94.2% of households in 2002 have sanitation services, of which 38.4% are sewer connections and 55.8% are pits and latrines. The situation is worse in rural areas where 84.6% have services, only 9.8% of which are sewer connections. In general, the lowest levels of access to water and sanitation are found in the rural areas of the country's eastern provinces (Álvarez & Mattar 2004).

Regarding electricity, 95% of households have service: 100% in urban areas and 83% in rural areas (ONE 2002). The state continues working to bring electricity to the more remote areas.

Some perspectives of analysis: family and gender

The diversity and heterogeneity of poverty are also evident when examined by gender and family status. This investigation also brings subjective and sociocultural dimensions into the analysis. Poverty studies from the family perspective¹² have revealed the impact of poverty on family structure, dynamics, and functioning, as well as on the ways in which families respond to their situation – including survival strategies. Poverty also influences the ways people interpret their family situation, in plans, self-perception, self-esteem and values, among other things. The family perspective incorporates both analysis of the immediate socioeconomic impacts specific to families and analysis, over time, of the changes that occur through the entire life cycle of a family.

Along these lines, I have conducted studies of families living in poverty, based not only on their unfavorable living conditions, but also on family composition: high average size, predominantly young age structure, education level slightly lower than the national average, low rate of employment, overrepresentation of blacks, mixed-race individuals, and female heads of household. They are predominantly characterized by extended families and single mothers, unstable relationships, predominance of the maternal role in all areas of family life, patterns of early motherhood and high birth rates, and limited family role in education. In the family-society relationship, one can discern various strategies oriented toward family subsistence; a high degree of social integration, except in employment; a limited degree of social participation; and some conflicts with or alienation from social organizations. In subjective terms, one can observe the variable self-perception of families regarding their poverty, the predominance of a family-centered perspective instead of a social perspective, and the immediate role of the family in transmitting a sense of its own worth.

These studies reveal a reciprocal relation between the characteristics of structure, functioning and dynamics of families living in poverty and the organization of their daily life based on family survival via various strategies. This relation reinforces disadvantaged living conditions, family dysfunction and the insufficient use of opportunities offered by society, thus feeding the generational reproduction of poverty and the intensification of this phenomenon at certain stages of the family life cycle. The studies also highlight the importance of the family in the reproduction of poverty, expressed in three dimensions: traditional, situational and current. The traditional includes the lack of material wealth and other assets as well as some generationally transmitted patterns of behavior and values. The situational dimension is linked to the economic crisis and reforms. In this context, the current dimension refers to the promotion of some traditional characteristics and behaviors.

Subsequent research reaffirms some of these findings. A study by the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) confirmed that the most disadvantaged families were extended, single-parent, growing, and with female heads of households and many economically dependent family members. It also revealed that such families are most common in poor housing conditions, areas of little socioeconomic development, urban slums and resource-scarce rural areas (Díaz Tenorio 2008).

Families' lack of various kinds of capital affects their poverty. According to psychologist Patricia Ares (2008), families with high cultural capital and declining economic capital – professionals and technicians belonging to the traditional state sector – and particularly those with low cultural capital and declining economic capital are financially insecure.

Other studies conducted in Havana city found that with regard to income, poorer families were those headed by single women and pensioners, those with more children, elderly individuals living alone, the unemployed, the chronically ill and disabled, women, full-time homemakers, the less educated, larger families and people of color (Ferriol et al, 2004).

From the foregoing it can be concluded that the diversity and heterogeneity of poverty is linked to specific characteristics of the family group, their living conditions, their links with society and their subjective representations.

The gender perspective in the analysis of poverty enriches the understanding of this phenomenon. In the Cuban context it acquires special significance because of the important achievements of women in the social sphere, and the social and legal protection they enjoy.

Regarding the problem of poverty, according to estimates of the at-risk population, defined as those with incomes below the poverty line, there were no significant gender differences in urban areas in 1997: females accounted for 50.7% of total population at risk (Ferriol et al. 1997). More recently, research on at-risk populations in Havana found that women were slightly overrepresented (57%) in the lowest monetary income groups – deciles 1 and 2 (Ferriol et al. 2004). Though there is no occupational or wage discrimination in Cuba, and though women have achieved high educational levels, their greater poverty could be due to their overrepresentation in lower-paying occupational categories, such as service and administrative, even though they make up the majority of professionals and technicians (Núñez 2000); unequal access to positions of leadership (Díaz 2004); the existence of a sector of the female population that has no economic autonomy because it engages only in homemaking; and the greater role of women as caretakers for children and the

infirm.

In the realm of family, this analysis points to the possible vulnerability of households headed by women, and particularly single mothers, whose numbers are steadily on the rise in Cuba. These households are sometimes and in some cases in a state of poverty and vulnerability because of the structure, composition and conditions in which the mothers fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Several studies have shown that households headed by unemployed, single-parent females who lack technical training or have low educational levels are vulnerable and in poverty. This analysis highlights the importance of access to and control over job opportunities, training, education and social support networks available to women, which may be decisive in breaking the cycle of poverty.¹³

This demonstrates that women still suffer some disadvantages, which are made to seem natural or justified by symbolic representations of women, families and various social actors that are historically and culturally conditioned and that contribute in various ways to a certain level of vulnerability in women not only in the employment and social realms but also in the family environment. It is important to consider that such representations can be determinants of gender- associated poverty and thus contribute to the social exclusion of women.

Concluding Remarks

Comparative analysis shows not only that the conditions and manifestations of poverty in Cuba are unique, but that that uniqueness is strongly influenced by the social policies implemented in the country and the social protection they provide.

In Cuba as elsewhere poverty is diverse and heterogeneous in expression. Considered separately, its manifestations – insufficient income and unmet basic needs – can only offer a partial and incomplete view of the phenomenon. This issue was raised by Julio Boltvinik (1992) who proposed a comprehensive method of measurement, which if put into effect could produce results of special interest if a link between habitat and insecure income emerged.

Other dimensions of poverty, especially the subjective and cultural, complement that diversity and are reflected when poverty is analyzed qualitatively from the perspective of family and gender. The results of such analysis reaffirm the importance of Cuba's educational and cultural policy. Poverty in rural areas remains to be studied adequately; the issue has been left unexplored in recent decades.

The goals of equity and social justice, inherent in a society that seeks to build socialism, make it essential to eradicate poverty. To that end it is critical to maintain existing social policies and continue improving them. In the present decade, these policies have been expanded through various social programs currently under way and have assumed a more personalized character. The further development of policy should take into account the diversity and heterogeneity of the phenomenon. Addressing the problem of low incomes would require changes in employment and wage policies, while the persistence of unmet basic needs would require prioritization of housing construction and repair and the improvement of technical services. Policy should also recognize the more specific needs of its beneficiaries. Another positive move would be to implement social policies affecting the family as a unit, transcending the traditional sectoral approach that focuses on particular members. Finally,

it is necessary to encourage families and local actors to take a more proactive approach to solving their problems.

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[Abbreviations of Cuban institutes not named below: CEDEM: Centro de Estudios Demográficos; CEEC: Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana; CIEM: Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial; CEPDE- Centro de Estudios de Población y Demografía; CESBH- Centro de Estudios de Salud y Bienestar Humanos]

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1. For more information, see Brundenius 1984, Zimbalist 1989, Baliño 1991.
2. This index was developed by a collective of Cuban researchers (CIEM/PNUD 1999).
3. Evidence of conditions of insecurity was already recognized before the crisis, as in research by the Cuban Institute for Research and Guidance on Internal Demand (ICIODI), which revealed socioeconomic variation among households and regions in the country, including some classified as disadvantaged. Consistent with this, some researchers believe that the current situation reflects a deterioration of poverty relief mechanisms, since total eradication has not been possible (Alonso 2002).
4. Subsequently they developed the concept of *poverty with protection and guarantees*, characterized by insufficient income to cover the cost of the basic goods basket, but with social protection in key areas, namely food, health, education, employment and universal social security services that are free and subsidized. This condition certainly distinguishes the Cuban situation from the destitution that characterizes poverty in the rest of the world (Ferriol et al. 2004).
5. The Human Poverty Index includes an estimate of the number of individuals who will not survive to the age of 40, illiterate adults, individuals without access to safe drinking water, individuals without access to healthcare and children under five with moderately low or severely low weight. This index came into use in 1997. In 1996 the Índice de Pobreza de Capacidad (IPC) was used. Cuba received a score of 7.8, placing it 10th among 101 countries. In 2001 the IPH was not calculated for Cuba, but it was in 4th place among 90 developing countries.
6. Two currencies circulate in the country: Cuban pesos (*moneda nacional*) and convertible pesos. The former are used for rations, subsidized meals, social consumption, domestically produced items for domestic consumption (with prices set by the State) and farmers’ markets (with prices determined by supply and demand). The latter are used in hard currency stores. Until 2004, US dollars also circulated in the hard currency market.
7. 1992 calculations regarding households with low incomes – 50 pesos or less – showed that this amount is insufficient to meet basic needs. As mentioned earlier, Julia Torres called these sectors “vulnerable groups”, due to their lack of food security (Torres 1993).
8. Currently the system provides social protection to those experiencing illness, maternity, work-related injury or illness, partial or total disability, or retirement, and to beneficiaries of deceased workers. It includes not only

monetary provisions (direct income in the form of salaries, subsidies, and pensions) but also a package of benefits including services.

9. This due to the high price in Cuban pesos of products in the non-regulated markets – especially farmers’ markets – and the prices of food and non-food items in the hard currency stores, which reflect a high exchange rate.

10. These are mansions divided into apartments with shared bathrooms and kitchens called *solares*.

11. Hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma alone damaged 530,758 dwellings (Rodríguez, 2008).

12. See Zabala 1996, 1999.

13. These issues were the focus of a soon-to-be -published study I carried out as a senior fellow with CLACS-CROP: “Jefatura femenina de hogar, pobreza urbana y exclusión social: una perspectiva desde la subjetividad en el contexto cubano” (2007).

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