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MPPN Policy Briefing

How to Explain the Measurement of Multidimensional Poverty to the General Public: Workshop for Journalists in Colombia

Silvia Botello, the author of this briefing, was head of the Poverty Statistics Group of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) during this project.

In 2011, an important change was made to the way in which poverty in Colombia is measured. Together with a review of the methodology to measure monetary poverty, the government introduced a new methodology for measuring poverty – the Multidimensional Poverty Index for Colombia (MPI-CO). This new scenario, however, created a challenge: how to explain the existence of two poverty figures to the Colombian people. This uncertainty resulted in a number of reporting errors of poverty figures by the media.

One way this problem was addressed was to offer training to media editors and reporters through

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a multidimensional poverty workshop entitled "The Unknown Dimension". This workshop was designed by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the entity in charge of measuring and disseminating poverty data using the two methodologies.

TWO WAYS OF MEASURING POVERTY

At the end of the last decade, Colombia faced something of a dilemma in terms of poverty statistics. On the one hand, new information from the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (ENIGH), which could be used for updating the poverty lines and consumption patterns for measuring income poverty, had become available. Furthermore, the Continuous Household Survey, which until 2005 was the source of information used to calculate income by household, was replaced by the Great Integrated Household Survey. The latter included a wider sample and a new data collection system based on mobile devices. The consequence of these changes was that the data of both surveys was no longer comparable over time. This problem re-

sulted in the need to convene the Mission for the Splicing of Employment, Poverty and Inequality Series (MESEP), made up of a group of national and international experts, who developed a methodology for integrating the monetary poverty data from the different surveys.

On the other hand, at the same time, the National Planning Department (DNP in Spanish) was taking steps to develop a measure of multidimensional poverty using the Alkire–Foster method. This method would eventually underpin Colombia's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI-CO).

MESEP delivered its recommendations in 2011. At the same time, the DNP, following consultations with national experts and an assessment of available data, concluded its efforts to define an MPI for Colombia. This process produced an MPI-CO consisting of five equally weighted dimensions and 15 indicators, whose source of information would be the National Quality of Life Survey.

Following this, by an institutional agreement, the Working Document 150 of the *Consejo Nacional de Políticas Económicas y Sociales of 2012 (CONPES 150)* designated two poverty measures as the official methodologies: one for monetary poverty, defined by MESEP, and one for multidimensional poverty, measured by the MPI-CO. Furthermore, it delegated to DANE the responsibility of measuring and disseminating poverty data using these two methodologies.

Thus, the DANE faced the challenge of effectively communicating the adoption of a new methodology for measuring monetary poverty, a statistic which was recognised by the general public, at the same time as announcing the inclusion of an additional measure, the MPI-CO – two measurements of poverty but with different approaches and sources of information.

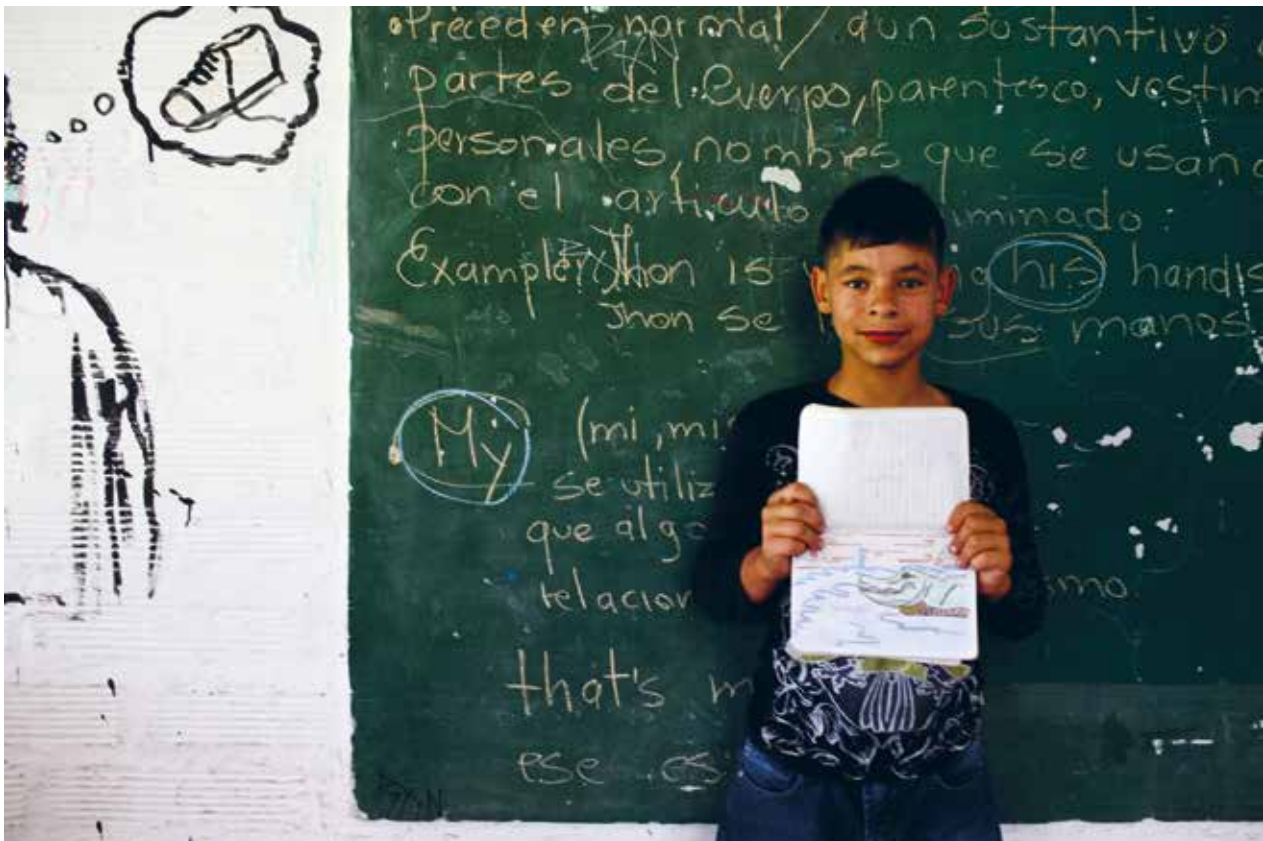## THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATING MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

In order to effectively communicate both poverty measurements, DANE designed a multidimensional poverty workshop for journalists entitled "The Unknown Dimension". The workshop was developed by the professionals involved in measuring poverty, together with those responsible for the dissemination of the results and educating the public in statistical terminology within the DANE.

The aim of the workshop was to provide attendees with the necessary tools to understand, apply and disseminate the concepts associated with multidimensional poverty in Colombia. The workshop's structure had four components: setting, justification, application, and synthesis.

The first of these entailed introducing the workshop, surveying the participants' prior knowledge on the subject of poverty and the formation of working groups. Following this, the justification for multidimensional poverty measurement was explained in a keynote presentation on the MPI-CO. Attendees were then invited to apply this new knowledge by role-playing as interviewers and respondents. Participants were also asked to write a press release that used country-specific information and conformed to specific criteria. To assist, the presenter offered concrete examples (see Figure 1) taken from the Colombian press that illustrated how figures for multidimensional poverty were being incorrect-

Figure 1. Real Examples of Mistakes in Reporting Poverty Data in the Colombian Press

Example 1:

"The multidimensional poverty index went down from 29.4% to 27% in the same period, which is why the head of state highlighted the housing and health policies that have permitted a two-point inequality reduction, according to the Gini coefficient."

- Gini measures income inequality. It is not related to the multidimensional poverty measurement.

Example 2:

"Poverty decreased by three percentage points and indigence by 1.7% in the last year, according to the new MPI which measures 15 indicators using the Quality of Life Survey."

"This slight decrease brought about an improvement in equity. The Gini coefficient, which calculates the level of inequality in income, went down 1.2 percentage points."

"This is the positive side of the report submitted by DANE, the analysis of which, however, is still discouraging."

- Multidimensional poverty only shows the total number of people in poverty, not extreme poverty (indigence). There is confusion between monetary and multidimensional poverty.
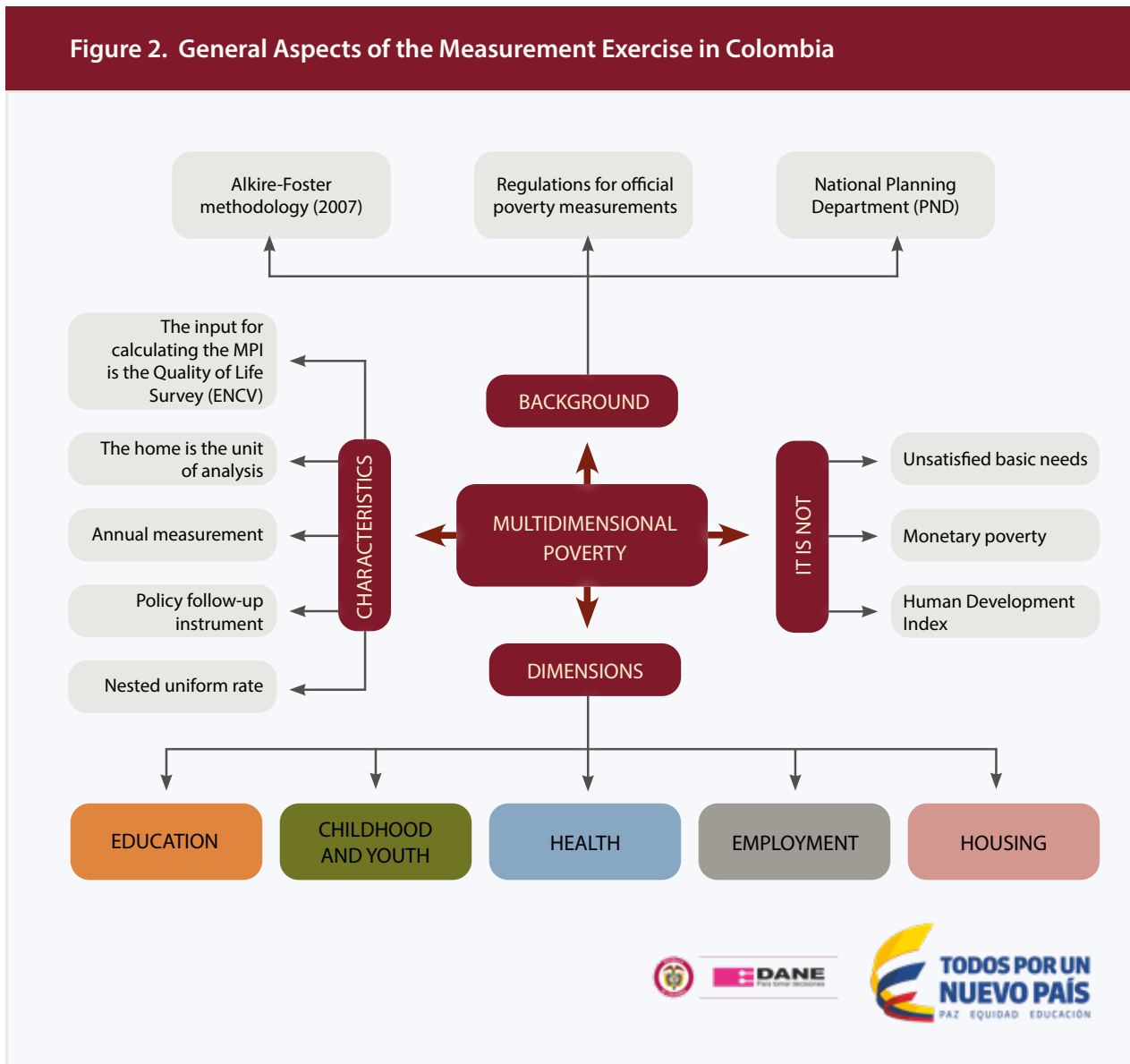

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ly reported prior to the workshop and information campaign. The workshop concluded with a summary that outlined the general aspects of the measurement exercise and a visual synthesis of the origins, structure, and characteristics of multidimensional poverty measurement in Colombia (see Figure 2).

This workshop was implemented by DANE in other countries – El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama – prior to the official launch of their multidimensional poverty measurements, and at the invitation of their respective governments. In all of these cases, journalists, opinion leaders and senior government officials took part in the course, as it is a source of information for any person not acquainted with the technical details of the various ways of measuring poverty. These activities reflect the Colombian government's commitment to international cooperation and poverty reduction, and are also part of the Colombian government's efforts to support the Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network (MPPN).

Figure 2. General Aspects of the Measurement Exercise in Colombia

CONCLUSION

Publishing two figures for poverty is a communication challenge for any government. Not only is it necessary to explain the reasons why both measurements are necessary but also why the respective figures may differ or appear to conflict. These explanations must be free of jargon and translate highly technical aspects of poverty measurement into a language that can be understood by the general public. The workshops designed by DANE have proven successful, in meeting these challenges both within Colombia and elsewhere, helping to improve communication of these subjects in the media and to reduce inaccurate reporting about multidimensional poverty measurement.

Original text in Spanish.
Translated to English by Alicia Holliday.

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Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI)

Department of International Development (ODID)
University of Oxford
Queen Elizabeth House (QEH)
Mansfield Road
Oxford OX1 3TB, UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 271915
Email: ophi@qeh.ox.ac.uk
www.ophi.org.uk
www.mppn.org

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Oxford Poverty & Human
Development Initiative

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