

COLOMBIA ADOPTS WORLD'S FIRST POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN TO USE NEW OXFORD UNIVERSITY MEASURE

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(Oxford – 22 August) In a bold and welcome new move, the Colombian government has committed to firm targets to close the country's poverty gaps using an innovative adaptation of a poverty measure developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.

Colombia's binding "multidimensional" poverty-reduction targets mark a major step forward in global poverty measurement and reduction efforts. Adding to traditional income-based approaches to poverty, the new national Multidimensional Poverty Index Colombia (MPI-Colombia) assesses broader social and health-related aspects of poverty: education, employment, the condition of children and young people, health, access to public services and housing conditions. This method works like a high resolution lens on poverty and reveals a vivid spectrum of challenges facing the poorest households. Giving a "multidimensional" picture of the many deprivations that batter poor peoples' lives at the same time, the method helps to target development resources more effectively.

The poverty measure used as the basis for constructing the MPI-Colombia was developed by Sabina Alkire, Director of OPHI and James Foster, Professor James Foster of George Washington University. The Colombian government has adapted and developed this method to reflect the country's needs and priorities, particularly related to social protection. The first global poverty index to use this measure – the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) – was adopted by the United Nations Development Programme's flagship Human Development Report in 2010.

The government's new development plan sets ambitious targets to reduce both income and multidimensional poverty. The government plans to reduce multidimensional poverty by 13 per cent over four years - from 35 per cent of the entire population in 2008 to 22 per cent in 2014.

Colombia's innovative approach to poverty reduction is part of a growing global trend. In 2009, the Government of Mexico launched the world's first national multidimensional poverty measure to use an adaptation of the method developed by OPHI. The Colombian government has now used the same technique to create the world's first national multidimensional poverty measure tied to a binding multidimensional poverty reduction plan. This response more fully addresses the multiple hardships facing poor people than simple income measures alone.

Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos's new National Development Plan reflects his personal commitment to making poverty reduction the centrepiece of his government – and to building on the country's substantial progress in social reform in the last decade. The plan has three pillars: employment, poverty reduction and security. President Santos has made poverty reduction the top priority.

Sabina Alkire, Director of OPHI, says 'Colombia's new development plan is an internationally significant breakthrough in national poverty measurement and reduction efforts. In times of global economic turmoil, this sets a powerful example to other governments in the region and beyond who want to know where poverty is most acute and set in place firm plans to fight it.'

The MPI-Colombia has been designed according to national needs and priorities: it creates a clear accountability system involving the ministries of Education, Social Protection, Housing, and the other main actors involved in social policy. 'The Government of Colombia hasn't just created a new poverty measure – we have created a comprehensive new poverty strategy. This has been embraced into the heart of the government - as concrete goals, as a mechanism of accountability, and as a robust test of our extreme poverty reduction strategy,' says Hernando José Gómez, Director of the National Planning Department (DNP).

On 24 August, the DNP will hold an international seminar on "Poverty Reduction and Social Mobility in Colombia: Measures and Strategies" to present the new measure. The seminar, opened by Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos and Hernando José Gómez will present three tools which underpin Colombia's new poverty strategy: 1) The MPI-Colombia and its findings, 2) The new income poverty line and its findings, and 3) A new Commission on Social Mobility.

The seminar will take place from 8am to 5pm at Centro de Convenciones Compensar - Auditorio Teatro, Bogota, Colombia. For more information see <http://www.dnp.gov.co/Programas/Educaci%C3%B3nculturasaludempleoypobreza/SeminarioInternacional.aspx>

Interview opportunities

Sabina Alkire and James Foster, co-creators of the measure adapted by Colombia, will be in Bogota from 22nd-24th of August 2011. To arrange interviews, contact Joanne Tomkinson, OPHI Research Communications Officer, on +447924599865 or +44 7984611109 or through joanne.tomkinson@qeh.ox.ac.uk.

Information about the Alkire-Foster measure – utilized by Colombia - is available on the OPHI website: <http://www.ophi.org.uk/research/multidimensional-poverty/>. Detail about OPHI's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), adopted by the UNDP Human Development Report in 2010, can be found at: <http://www.ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>

About OPHI (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative)

OPHI is a research centre within the Oxford Department of International Development at the University of Oxford<<http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/>>. OPHI is led by Sabina Alkire<<http://www.ophi.org.uk/about/people/sabina-alkire/>>, and works to develop and apply new ways to measure and analyse poverty, human development and welfare, drawing on the work of Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen. James Foster<<http://www.ophi.org.uk/about/people/james-foster/>> is a Research Associate at OPHI and a Professor of Economics and International Affairs at George Washington University<<http://www.gwu.edu/~elliott/faculty/foster.cfm>>.

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