

*Write a comprehensive paper on the social policy strategies employed by a developing country of your choice. Motivate the choice of the country, and describe and analyse the strategies employed by policy makers over time, also indicating changes in strategies. Evaluate these strategies critically with reference to the theoretical models, frameworks and strategies that were discussed during the course.*

## **Social Policy in Cuba**

Course: Social Policy for Developing Countries  
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### **Introduction and motivation for choice of country**

With a surface area of approximately 110,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 11 million (2013 est.), Cuba is the largest Caribbean island, located in the northern Caribbean, south of Florida and the Bahamas, west of Haiti, and north of Jamaica. Since the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro, who brought the rebel army to victory in 1959, the nation has been under communist rule. Fidel Castro stepped down as president in 2008 in favor of his younger brother Raúl Castro, who is still president today (cf. CIA, 2017). With its communist history of nearly six decades, Cuba is one of the world's last surviving communist states that is characterized by a very particular social welfare system. Since the experience of the Cuban revolution, the Cuban development model has been oriented to guarantee citizen's entitlements as a key factor for economic growth (cf. Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 21). Social policy forms a systematic political strategy in the center of this model. It is a political priority in all Cuba institutions, and it has been the primary mechanism of income redistribution, the guarantee of basic quality of life to the population, and the most important condition of social equalization (cf. Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 176). However, a broad set of domestic and global problems, which have been aggravating the Cuban economy for many years, have stimulated a transition towards a new paradigm of capitalist development. Initiated with the arrival of Raúl Castro, the country has been undertaking a series of reforms to begin its transformation (cf. Solorza, 2016: 137). Especially the reopening of political and diplomatic relations with the USA have been an important development at the center of the global political scene in recent years. In the light of Cuba's distinct welfare architecture and these important changes taking place,

Cuba is a very interesting case to look at when it comes to social policy in developing countries, hence my choice to analyze this countries' social policy strategies.

### **Description and analysis of the strategies employed by policy-makers over time**

Examining the development of the “social purpose” of the State-directed Cuban economy, can expose the direction and changes taking place in the Cuban society based on this model (cf. Prieto, 2011: 13).

The history of Cuban social policy since 1959 can be divided into three phases, two of which have ended, and one which has just begun.

- 1) **1959-1989:** Exclusively State-directed social policy
- 2) **1990-2011:** Loosened State-directed social policy
- 3) **From 2011:** Further loosened State-directed social policy, in a transition towards more market-provision

In the first phase, which started in 1959 and ended in 1989, social policy focused on promoting equality, and the universal fulfillment of basic needs was considered a right to all citizens. Particular focus was set on the assistance of vulnerable groups such as women, young children and the ill or disabled population. Traditionally, the provision of social programs and social benefits has therefore been the exclusive responsibility of the State, and most welfare guarantees depended on social policy. This emphasis on universal coverage that favors equity, i.e. equal distribution among every member of society from cradle to grave, implies direct redistributive state action, as well as the institutionalization of social policy through the development of national systems of public service that provided education, health, social security and assistance, culture and sports (cf. Uriarte, 2002: 6; Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 176). The most important social services and provisions in the areas of education, health, social security, social assistance and subsidies included:

- **Education:** Education is a right of all citizen's. Hence, there is free access and delivery of education at all levels, including special education. Every level is guided by a national program. At post-graduate levels, the availability of student lots is closely linked to economic needs, making tertiary education competitive.

- **Public Health:** Health care is also a right of all citizen's. It is provided free of charge at all levels. Government has a strong commitment for not only high quality health care in general, but especially for primary preventions and primary care.
- **Social Security and disability:** Universal retirement program, whereby employees contribute 10%; disability coverage (temporary; work-related; accidents and illnesses). Worthwhile to mention in this regard is that Cuba was one of the first Latin American countries to establish a pension system.
- **Social assistance:** Cash subsidies and other assistances for families without income. Benefits include meals and laundry service for elderly people, or job trainings for mothers without income.
- **Subsidies:** 1) A so-called ration card provides universal food subsidies (in 2000, the ration card provided for 65% of the nutritional needs of the population). Children, elderly, and ill people who require a special diet, are also covered. 2) Subsidies for mortgages and caps on rent for housing (10% of income) 3) Subsidies for water, electricity, gas & telephone.

(cf. Uriarte, 2002: 7)

Social achievements of this system, particularly in the areas of education and health, have been recognized internationally for its universality and accessibility with a high quality. A very low Gini coefficient of 0.24 in 1980, and the – for developing countries' standards – relatively low poverty rate of 6.4% in 1984 reflected the success of this system (cf. Prieto, 2011: 13f). Furthermore, selected health indicators from 1999 (infant mortality rate, under 5 mortality rate, life expectancy at birth, adults living with HIV/Aids, number of physicians per 1k persons) show that Cuba was performing equally as good as Canada or the USA, at a much lower GDP per capita. Similar achievements lie in the area of education, where total enrollment at all levels of education stood at 76% in 1999; Cuba's performance in this area was again comparable to those of the USA and Canada, which are much more developed countries (cf. Uriarte, 2002: 9,11).

The foundation of the Cuban model based on equity and social solidarity has considered that social and economic projects should be simultaneous, which is one of the characteristics of the social welfare system established in the Cuban revolution. Economic institutions were adjusted to the realization of this social

model (cf. Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 176). Probably the major factor, which this early Cuban model lacked, however, was sustainability. The Cuban government had been able to maintain its social system through significant economic support from the Soviet Union, at that time 87% of its financial exchanges. This support was also the reason why Cuba could withstand the US embargo of trade and travel since 1961, which had caused aggravated effects on the islands' economic situation. The disappearance of the communist bloc, paired with a reinforcement of the US-blockade against Cuba at the end of the 1980s, led Cuba into an economic crisis in 1990, which had deteriorating effects on the quality of social services that had been provided as it acutely diminished the State's redistributive capacity (cf. Prieto, 2011: 14; Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 24). Cuban policy-makers realized that certain priority had to be given to economic growth over social protection, which was a first contradicting point with the traditional Cuban socialist model of guaranteeing equity and social solidarity for all.

Between 1993 and 2003, several reforms transformed the design of provision of services, and established a larger market role in the provision of basic goods, some of which were no longer freely provided or subsidized. The most important changes took place in the area of employment and social assistance. For instance, some gratuities were eliminated, and prices for non-essential goods were increased. The labor market went through a transition as the government drastically decreased the number of public sector jobs, and increased self-employment. Before the crisis, 8% of the Cuban population was employed in the non-state-sector, a number which has increased to 21% by the mid-1990s. Other important measures taken that affected the social welfare system included the following:

- Free market for agricultural-livestock products to encourage food production, as food insecurity was the most critical dimensions to the crisis
- Attraction of foreign investment and generation of foreign currency (as part of this reform, wages for foreign currency-generating activities that had a social role were raised, for instance)
- Granting greater autonomy to industries in order to directly establish international economic relations
- Establishment of public community networks for the provision of social services to local levels, including the distribution of food subsidies
- New institutional frames, with the participation of NGOs in the

management and funding of social policy programs

- Ranking public services in education and health according to priority, in order to guarantee optimization of services

(cf. Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 178,180; Prieto, 2011: 14; Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 24)

Social expenditures continued to be significant in the Cuban budget. Even during the crisis, the Cuban government maintained equal and free universal access to social services that provided a basic level of welfare. As an expression of the regime's social character, social policy had remained the priority. Despite the great political will to maintain the coverage and quality of social services, the economic difficulties and the impact of the crisis had generated social inequities and marginalization (cf. Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 182) .

Some components of social spending highlight the general tendencies during this period:

- **Family welfare:** Families experienced notable differences in earnings, which depended on their access to foreign currency.
- **Food:** Due to a decrease in food production during this period, basic food subsidies could not be fully provided. Total food rationing and lower family quotas were a consequence of this situation. In some regions of the country, infantile weight and height decreased, which indicates the lack of nutrition and access to food. The reforms taken to maintain the supply of basic food have allowed a slow improvement in the nutrition levels of the population (cf. Ferriol, 1998: 5; Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz, 2004: 181).
- **Education:** Educational coverage was preserved during the crisis. The reduction in the number of teaching personnel due to the cut in public sector employment was the main effect of the crisis on the system. Problems such as deterioration of schools and the decrease in schooling supplies were addressed towards the beginning of the 21st century, as a new program had led to the massive repair of schools. Attendance rates during the crisis remained high. In fact, one out of every five residents were part of the educational system at that time.
- **Public Health:** The greatest problem in this sector has been the lack of provisions and medicines. Improved organization and a greater emphasis on preventative medicine have, however, maintained the quality of services.

Towards the end of the 1990s, most health indicators have remained the same or improved among the Cuban population.

- ***Social Security***: From 1990 to 1997, there was an increase of spending on social security of 36%. The inflationary process, which had resulted from the crisis, however, devaluated the net value of loans. The relative revaluation of the national currency over time, and the increase in pensions to sectors with fewer earnings, contributed in part to the compensation of this devaluation. Due to a growing aging population, whose life expectancy is increasing, the Cuban government had been facing an increase in average annual spending on social security of over 15%, which would have to be addressed in the coming years.
- ***Employment***: The State had been the major employer in the country in previous decades, which is why the level of almost total employment had been achieved. During the crisis, it became clear that measures would need to be taken against the notable level of low labor-productivity resulting from the high number of State-provided jobs. Emergency measures taken to restructure the labor market were the drastic decrease in public sector employment, subsidized temporary unemployment, the transference between sectors of the economy, agrarian transformations and the authorization of self-employment. By the end of the 1990s, employment reached 96.5% of the 1991-level and an annual growth rate of 1%. In the following years, job creation remained stable but insufficient. In addition, the authorization of self-employment resulted in economic contractions from a lack of rules for labor force protection. This led to informal changes in the welfare system due to social demands of the population.

(cf. Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 24)

As an expression of the inequities produced, crime and corruption increased.

By the year 2000, the Gini coefficient had risen to 0.38; and urban poverty was estimated to be 20% (cf. Prieto, 2011: 14). This second phase of Cuban social policy, which had begun in 1990, was strengthened in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2005, the Cuban economy still had limitations to solve the deficit in its balance of payments and the high volume of overdue payables (cf. Government of Cuba, 2011). In 2008, the Cuban economy was hit by the global economic crisis, which

put further pressure on policy-makers to find new adjustments that could work against the problem of efficiency and sustainability of the Cuban economic development model. A combination of the international crisis and prevailing internal problems such as growing inequalities, the US blockade as an obstacle to development, and low productive efficiency, were the starting point for the development of the New Lineaments of Development at the Communist Party's Sixth Congress in 2011. With the goal of finding an economically sustainable pathway to sustain the social system, the Party developed new economic goals, which pointed more towards a "multi-actor" socialism, as Prieto (cf. 2011: 14) calls it. The Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution state that "In this new stage, the economic policy will be built on with the principle that only socialism is capable of overcoming difficulties and preserving the achievements of the Revolution." (Government of Cuba, 2011) Nevertheless, the new measures would intend a profound reform of welfare and economic trends in the country, with large social impact. The Cuban government has been focusing on four basic areas of transformation that are inevitably affecting the social structure of the country:

- 1) ***Employment and income policy***: Promotion of any type of non-state economic management, such as cooperatives, joint ventures, small farmers, and other types of self-employment; allowance of non-state activities and independent businesses; attraction of more foreign investment.
- 2) ***Social spending***: Newly established tax-system as a redistributive system; expansion of social system based on market dynamics; progressive elimination of excessive service personnel, subsidies and basic food provision, along with a compensation for people in need.
- 3) ***Social security***: Expanded contribution of state-workers and special tax systems for non-state sectors; systematic targeting of the vulnerable population in order to provide services to those in need.
- 4) ***Localization & decentralization***: Transferring more responsibility to local levels, establishment of a business tax system that pays local municipalities. The aim of these measures is to guarantee a more flexible and effective management of resource distribution and service delivery.  
(cf. Prieto, 2011: 15)

In further restructuring the social system, the Cuban government has repeatedly made clear that services and provisions that address the most vulnerable parts of the population are being preserved and prioritized. Since 2011, the government has slowly and incrementally implemented limited economic reforms. According to the Online-Newspaper Cuba Sí, 21% of the guidelines, which include 130 policies and 344 new legal norms, have been fully implemented and 78% is in different stages of implementation until today (Cuba Si, 2016). While changes are still in progress, with regards to anticipating social impacts of these reforms, particularly the restructuring of the labor market, as well as the decentralization of public services are an important factor to consider Prieto (cf. 2011: 15). emphasizes that particularly the localization of public services is an important step in promoting local participation and, finally, in adapting policies to local needs. In the promotion of self-employment, the government must consider that due to the high level of inequality among the population, large parts of the Cuban society are not able to take advantage of the newly given opportunities for micro-enterprise development. Unless the government provides support that goes along with the expansion of entrepreneurship (such as micro-credit and training), reforms in this area could generate a precarious informal economy.

Furthermore, in this new configuration the role of informal social networks becomes an important factor, as strategic participation of individuals, families and communities is becoming more important in the formation of this newly structured welfare system in Cuba (cf. Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 25).

The analysis of the different phases of the Cuban welfare system highlights that by gradually moving from a purely State-directed social policy system towards a system with increased market mechanisms, the country is currently facing the central issue of finding an acceptable balance in the institutional organization of welfare, between the State and the “new” actors - the market and civil society (cf. Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 26). In the following years, the role of policy-makers will become even more crucial in anticipating and carefully planning and formulating adequate social policies that go along with the economic developments of the country.



**Critical evaluation of employed strategy (with reference to the theoretical models, frameworks and strategies that were discussed during the course)**

Aspalter (cf. 2011: 746), with the help of insights and findings of numerous other researchers, has developed a theoretical model of ideal-typical welfare regimes, which can be differentiated by the provision and responsibilities given to different actors in the system, namely the state, the market, the family and the individual. This analytical framework provides a basis for examining the connections between social policies, market interactions and families' informal safety networks. The author recognizes, however, that countries such as Cuba, where the state has been the only provider of social programs and social benefits in the past, do not fit into any of his defined categories. With Cuba slowly transitioning to a more open and market-oriented system, it is unclear at this point, what type of connection between the different actors is going to evolve in the future that will shape the Cuban welfare regime. Cuba as a socialist nation is facing a great task of maintaining the "social purpose" of the system at this moment, while it is transferring some responsibility to other actors. Particularly when it comes to the high quality of education and health services, which has contributed to Cuba's great international reputation for having a high standard of education, and highly educated professionals in the health sector, the Cuban government will need to find solutions that sustain the accomplishments made in the past. In this regard, economic considerations play a greater role than political will to maintain the system, as it is not a question if the government wants to, but rather how it would be possible to sustain particularly the accomplishments of the welfare system. In addition, the State must pay careful attention to policy planning and possible outcomes of reforms, as it could lead to situations where marginalized parts of the population are left out of the system. This includes anticipating not only formal, but also informal market mechanisms that may be developing as a result of economic and social reforms. The role of policy-makers must be stressed in this regard, as they are facing a complex task of assisting the government in dealing with the welfare of their people.

Especially for developing countries like Cuba, social protection is an important instrument and at the same time a great challenge for policy-makers, to securing

minimum standards of welfare for a country's population. Over the past decades, researchers and organizations have attempted to develop frameworks that help defining what such a minimum standard of welfare entail, and what type of services and benefits social protection should provide. Three of these conceptual frameworks of social protection systems that were discussed during our course were the life-cycle approach, the social protection floor, and transformative social protection.

The life-cycle approach focuses on social protection services based on vulnerabilities of people throughout the life-cycle. This means that at every life-cycle stage, certain social protection services and provisions are offered in order to support the population in overcoming their vulnerabilities at this stage. Pre-school children for instance are particularly vulnerable to health risks at this stage of their lives, hence they may be provided free primary health care services. School-age children are in need of education and sufficient nutritional levels; hence they may be provided with free education and free meals at schools. At working age, the population is in the least need of public services, as they are earning their own income which can contribute to the social protection system, and hence they will not be a "financial burden" on the State. In this stage, for instance, social security in case of work-related disabilities or illnesses would be an adequate social service. In order to sustain the life-cycle system, this life-cycle-stage is crucial as the working-age population, the tax-payers, are the ones who guarantee the redistributive mechanism of providing services to other parts of the population that do not contribute. In the case of Cuba, this approach does not apply because the social welfare system does not only focus on vulnerabilities at certain stages of the life-cycle. In fact, the Cuban population is provided with many more benefits and services apart from life-cycle-risks and -vulnerabilities. Basic food, housing, water and electricity subsidies, for instance, are provided for every member of society at every stage of their life-cycle. Currently, as economic pressures have affected Cuba, the government is optimizing its social protection system in a way where priority is given to vulnerable groups. In the future it is therefore possible, that the Cuban welfare model may adopt a life-cycle approach, which would then however not be in its pure socialist character.

The social protection floor – a framework developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) – is based on the universal right to social assistance that will

allow an adequate standard of living, and that gives security in the event of unemployment, as defined in the Human Rights Declaration. This nationally defined basic set of social security services in the form of social assistance is the floor of social protection. It entails basic health care and income security (for children, during the working-age, and for elderly people), which together – as defined by the framework – secure access to goods and services, i.e. the fulfillment of human rights. As a higher level of social protection, the framework defines social insurance as a contributory factor, and private insurance as an even higher level of social protection. It must be noted in this regard, that ILO as the United Nations specialized agency for labor, promotes first and foremost decent work and employment. Due to the organizations agenda, income security is seen as the most important aspect to social protection, and it is therefore in the center of the framework. In Cuba's case, the "social purpose" of the development model itself implies the provision of a stable social protection floor, as the core of the model is to equally guarantee entitlements for every member of society throughout their life-cycle. With the State being the only provider of social services in early days, private insurance was not necessary as all social services were entirely covered by the State. The many universally provided social benefits in Cuba partly formed the contributory social security benefits as defined by the ILO-framework, because they provided more benefits as necessary to sustain income and basic health care to the people. The free access to education, for instance, which is defined as a right to all citizens by the Cuban government, would be a contributory social benefit in ILO's-framework. Regardless of the fact that the State has been providing much more than income security and basic health care, today, and with the many changes taking place in the Cuban labor market, it remains a task for the Cuban government to maintain its social protection floor, especially for the working-age population that receives social benefits from market mechanisms. Indications for this have been the prevailing poverty situation and inequality among the population.

The great accomplishments and well-performance of the Cuban government in the areas of health and education emphasize shortcomings of ILO's framework. The model does not consider preventive and qualitative measures of social security, which can be great contributors to the population's welfare. In developing countries such as Cuba, the population may require benefits or services other than basic

health care and a basic income to lift themselves out of poverty. Simply providing a system that guarantees survival of its people does not address structural drivers of poverty within a society.

The transformative social protection framework, developed by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, focuses on four aspects of social protection: protection, prevention, promotion and transformation. Social protection as the basis of the model takes place in the form of social assistance (e.g. cash or food subsidies) for those in most need. Social insurance serves the purpose of preventing against life-cycle risks and vulnerabilities, in the form of social security or pensions for instance. Promotion is meant in terms of enhancing people's livelihoods by gradually lifting them out of poverty. Social services can be school feeding or public works programs that provides an additional opportunity to change one's situation. School feeding programs can contribute to greater energy and motivation of the students to learn, which will increase their chances of eventually reaching a high level of education. Sufficient education broadens opportunities for higher employment and income. Public works programs can also provide an unemployed person with an income where there was no income before, which provides him/her with the opportunity of looking ahead to find a permanent job while not having to worry about having food on the table during the course of the program. The core of the transformative social protection framework – the transformation aspect – addresses structural drivers of poverty within the population through policy and social inclusion. This implies a rigorous analysis of poverty in the country as a basis to develop a comprehensive poverty profile that will reveal those structural drivers of poverty and vulnerabilities within a society. In this regard, the topic of poverty in the Cuban context is an important issue to discuss. First of all, it must be noted that poverty and inequalities are expected to be high in Cuba. Nevertheless, there is no official data available, which gives us an idea of the actual intensity of poverty. Reason for this is that, from a political perspective, poverty has not been explicitly recognized by the government. There have been efforts to define vulnerable groups in the formulation of policies which aim at assisting those groups in need. However, there is no policy or program, which systematically addresses the issue of poverty in Cuba (cf. Isabel Peña Farias, 2016: 26). This lack of political understanding of the multidimensional problem of poverty is particularly concerning in the recent state of the Cuban transition,

which poses a high risk of worsening inequalities and poverty in the country. Without a rigorous understanding and analysis of the demographic and socio-economic structure of poverty, adequate policies to address the problem cannot be formulated by policy-makers. In the planning of future changes in the social welfare structure in Cuba, the issue of targeting becomes problematic as well, as it cannot be applied adequately without an understanding of the dynamics, and without data that can indicate certain dynamics taking place. Cuban policy-makers now have an important task of steering the future of social policy into the right direction in order to work against structures that promote inequality and poverty, or in other words - to sustain the social character of the Cuban development model.

From a theoretical point of view, it is difficult to position the Cuban welfare system within any of the discussed theoretical models and frameworks. Cuba being one of world's last communist states, the Cuban social protection model is a very particular case, which is characterized by the State as the largest welfare provider. Therefore, it cannot easily be compared to other social welfare systems in the world, which have much less state-involvement, and where the market, the family and the individual have a much more important role to play in the provision of social benefits and services. With recent changes taking place within Cuban politics and society, it is possible that in the future the country may possibly be slowly moving towards one of the existing social welfare models. At this point, however, the developments are not certain.

This comprehensive paper dealing with social policy in Cuba is an example that shows the difficulties that policy-makers face as they try to formulate adequate social policies for a country. The Cuban example highlights that even with the strongest political will demonstrated over time, it remains a great task to provide an "ideal" social protection system to all citizens. A system that protects and prevents from risks and vulnerabilities throughout the life-cycle, and a system that is able to address inequalities and alleviate structural poverty among populations. Every welfare system does not only require careful policy planning, but it also requires the necessary budget to finance and sustain it. In the rare situation where the amount of financial investments does not play a big role in the implementation

(as it was the case in the early Cuban system before the crisis), it is possible to provide universal access to social services with many other services and benefits that assist the population. Since this situation is barely ever found, priorities as to “who is most vulnerable”, and “who needs it the most”, must be set and clearly defined. Assuring that those groups identified as most in need actually receive the service or benefit, requires careful targeting of services. This is a complex task for any government to perform, which requires not only planning, but also adequate data to understand the dynamics of the populations risks and vulnerabilities. Developments of the Cuban welfare system in the coming years will depend on these many factors, and it remains uncertain which tendencies the Cuban path will take in its many dimensions in the future.

5013 words

## Plagiarism

Hereby I, Benita Rose, born 08 June 1990 in Bergisch Gladbach (Germany) confirm

- i) that any work submitted is my own unaided work,
- ii) that the thoughts and ideas of others are appropriately referenced, and
- iii) that I am aware that disciplinary action may be taken against me if they fail to comply.

(Benita Rose)

\_\_\_\_24.03.2017\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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