

Social Inequalities in Colombia: An Analysis from a Cultural and Social Perspective

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Abstracts

The objective of this article was to analyze inequalities in Colombia using a strategic prospective approach to identify the social, economic and cultural dynamics that prolong such asymmetries and propose actions to reduce these gaps. The methodology employed is based on the use of advanced prospective analysis tools, such as influence matrices and variable mobility diagrams, in addition to the identification of key actors involved in the formulation and execution of public policies. The results point to the complexity of the interactions between critical variables such as access to technologies, gender equity and youth participation in employment; likewise, the study showed that certain actors, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Equality and Equity, have a significant influence on the achievement of objectives that seek to mitigate social inequalities in Colombia. The study concludes the need to work on public policies for social and economic development, but with an approach based on education and changes in cultural patterns in society that allow the gradual reduction of inequalities. The discussion points out that through strategic collaboration among diverse actors and a comprehensive approach, progress can be made towards a sustained reduction of inequalities, promoting a more equitable and inclusive development in Colombian society.

Keywords: Social inequalities, inequality, foresight, culture, society.

Introduction

The importance of a prospective study regarding the phenomenon of inequality in Colombia has as its main reference the Sustainable Development Goal SDG10 that seeks to reduce inequality within and between countries. With the understanding of considering different factors that affect the inequality gap, this article will focus on aspects related to education, gender, poverty, wages or remuneration and health. The paper outlines some statistical data and theoretical references

that define and justify the phenomenon and then with the use of software used in the voluntarist school of Godet, a series of strategies are proposed based on the analysis of trends and/or the influence of actors that are converted into public policies. These foresight tools and methodologies make it possible to identify emerging trends, challenges and opportunities, facilitating the creation of public policies that promote the development of strategies necessary to face the environmental, economic and social challenges of the 21st century. By integrating education, health, income and gender equity into sustainable development strategies, we develop a culture of committed citizenship capable of ensuring an equitable and viable future for generations to come.

In this sense, the purpose of this document is to use the prospective approach methodology to answer the following question: How can public policies in Colombia be integrated with cultural and social transformation strategies to reduce structural inequalities in gender, ethnicity and social class, and promote equitable access to education, health and employment?

This study implements a strategic and territorial foresight methodology that allows for an initial diagnosis, the identification of trends, actors and strategies that facilitate the fulfillment of the proposed objectives. Using an approach from the voluntarist school of foresight, specialized software is used to define viable strategic actions that contribute to the reduction of inequality at the national level.

Theoretical references.

Foresight

To speak of prospective is to speak of anticipation and in this sense, Godet (2008) considers that anticipation and remembering are inherent to human beings and that makes them different from other living beings; In the same sense, Gabilliet (2008) maintains that anticipation involves another series of actions inherent to human beings such as thought, reason, intuition, among others, and according to Medina (2003), anticipation becomes an initiative of human beings to imagine and/or represent events that could be generated in the future, and according to Bellier and Benoist (2003) anticipation is doing something before a fixed or predetermined moment. Gabillet (1999), referring to the business sector, when speaking of anticipation in organizations, argues that it is used to prevent problems, identify opportunities and solve problems as they arise. Now, the above presents us with a dilemma regarding the concept of extrapolation, believing that the analysis of the past is sufficient to determine what will happen in the future through scientific study, developing economic analysis, social and technological changes through medium-term cycles such as those developed by Kuznet or long-term cycles such as those developed by Kondratieff Moura (1994).

Mojica (2010), quoted by Bosovka et al. (2023), indicates that the future should be analyzed through different optics, whether they are linear in nature or as something that could be presented in different directions or edges, understanding that the linear aspect is related to forecasting and the openness to different scenarios with strategic foresight. Berger (1957) and De Jouvenel (1967) identified this dilemma very early on and spoke of alternative futures or *futuribles*, which

served as a basis for foresight not to refer to a single future but rather to the investigation of multiple scenarios. Later, Godet (2005), based on expressions such as "seeing differently, in another way, as a whole", proposed the use of tools to achieve greater rigor in the collective analysis. Given the above, Berger, Godet and Durance (2011) conclude that the analysis of probable and possible futures implies making decisions and taking actions in the present since the desired future has a clear link with the activities that are developed based on the current situation. Godet (2000), quoted by Mojica (2005), considers that prospective analysis shows that the traditional conception of a single future scenario, a single option, is not valid and that, on the contrary, possible scenarios can be constructed.

Inequalities (poverty, health, wages, gender).

Globally, one of the major problems that generate inequality is associated with the level of income or economic inequality that in concatenation generates lack of access to goods and services, problems of access to education and quality of education, problems associated with optimal health levels and socio-political aspects (Gómez, 2002) (Hernández, et al. 2018) (Sánchez & Torres, et al. 2020).

Social inequalities encompass multiple dimensions that interact with each other, creating a complex web of disadvantages for certain population groups. These inequalities affect not only economic well-being, but also quality of life, opportunities for personal development and participation in social and political life. Understanding and addressing these inequalities requires a multidisciplinary approach and comprehensive policies that promote equity and social justice. Piketty (2014) argues that economic inequalities are a product of dynamics inherent to capitalism, where rates of return on capital exceed rates of economic growth, resulting in a greater concentration of wealth. Lorber (2018) argues that gender inequality manifests itself through gender roles and expectations that limit the opportunities and rights of women compared to men, in the same way it occurs with segregations of racial origin as it was in the emblematic case of Apartheid in South Africa.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital, accumulated through education and socialization, affects educational performance and opportunities, thus perpetuating inequalities between different social groups. Marmot (2005) argues that health inequalities are profoundly influenced by social factors, such as socioeconomic status, which affect access to health resources and living conditions.

In Latin America (LA) social problems present a cumulative character and the governments in office should determine the above as a priority given that otherwise aspects such as monetary poverty, multidimensional, income, aspects such as inequalities at the level of gender and income or remuneration, health and factors that generate environmental suffering would worsen (Auyero & Swistun, 2013) (Jordán Fuchs, R. (2017).

Studies related to LA raised the effects that the covid-19 pandemic could have on a city with 47% of informality (47%) (Alvarado, 2020). For the (DANE), in a study for social classes in Colombia, for the year in cities and areas that were part of the metropolitan area, 33.6% of the people had conditions of poverty, 23.1% conditions of vulnerability, which implies more than 50% of the inhabitants at social risk, 39.9% corresponded to the middle class and 3.4% to the

upper class (DANE, 2022a). Lustig and Tommasi (2020), point out that, in the face of this type of impacts such as those generated by covid-19, it is essential that the response of public policies by the state concentrate and give priority to people in conditions of poverty and vulnerability, given that they already have disadvantages and the consequences of this type of situation would have a greater impact in the long term (Jordán Fuchs, 2017).

The establishment of social policies, which according to Giraldo (2018), occurs in a national context through public or private execution in the understanding that it is composed of public goods and involves a public budget (p. 18). In this sense, Ocampo (2008) and later Gómez et al, (2019) state that this definition of social or public policy has two edges, one related to the welfare state to achieve the universality of citizens' rights; and the other with the prioritization in the reduction of social risk in populations that deserve it.

On the other hand, another aspect under consideration is multidimensional poverty is a comprehensive approach that provides a richer and more complete vision of people's living conditions, allowing for more adequate and efficient interventions to improve their overall well-being. Amartya Sen (1999), one of the pioneers in the study of multidimensional poverty, argues that poverty should be understood as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than as a mere insufficiency of income; Sen explains that multidimensional poverty implies the lack of capabilities that allow people to lead a life they value, such as health, education and participation in social life; under these premises, in 2007, Alkire developed a specific methodology to measure multidimensional poverty, known as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

This methodology was adopted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2010. Each of these dimensions is broken down into several indicators, such as nutrition, infant mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, access to basic services, and housing quality. Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011). The MPI data evidence an inequality between urban and rural and dispersed rural areas; the indicator was at 11.5% in 2021 for urban areas, in the case of rural and urban centers it was 31.1% (DANE, 2022b).

In the case of the health sector, Colombia has shown improvements in this regard in recent decades Meisel et al. (2018). Acosta and Romero (2014) show that the infant mortality rate has been declining considerably. Ayala (2017) studies the relationship between inequity and mortality rate based on the analysis of the regions taking as a reference the health perception of the inhabitants. Pérez and Silva (2015) study the health expenditures of Colombians using the database of the National Survey of Income and Expenditures 2006-2007 and again income inequality is raised as an aspect that has a direct relationship with the quality of health.

Guzmán (2014) analyzes the supply of health services based on the corporate name of the provider entity, whether public or private, and found that in 2013, 45% of municipalities have a public supply and of this group, 73% only have service provider institutions (IPS).

Methodology

Based on the analysis of foresight schools, the models for scenario building are summarized in the following graph:

Table 1. Phases of the integrated methodology of strategic foresight

Step	Process	Focus
1. Definition of the desired future	Creativity	Future
2. Diagnosis (SWOT Analysis and Competence Tree)	Prospective Reflection	Prospective Reflection
3. Determination of strategy variables (Structural Analysis)	Available Resources	Prospective Reflection
4. Identification of involved actors (Analysis and Conflicts)	Available Resources	Prospective Reflection
5. Generation of Scenarios (Smic-Prob-Expert and Peter Schwarts Axes)	Necessary Resources	Strategic Will
6. Design and Execution of the plan	Action	Action

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Cortez and Galicia (2007).

The methodology employed in the study on inequalities in Colombia is based on a strategic prospective approach, using advanced analysis tools such as the software developed by the voluntarist school of the LIPSOR laboratory, including MICMAC, and SMIC PROB. This approach allows the identification of emerging trends, key actors, and the evaluation of possible future scenarios, with the objective of designing effective strategies for the reduction of inequalities.

The methodology is based on the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, integrating documentary information, bibliographic references, development plans and government policies. Through the construction of influence matrices and variable mobility diagrams, we analyzed the complex interactions between diverse social, economic and cultural factors that perpetuate inequalities, which allow us to contribute to the design of more informed public policies aimed at mitigating these phenomena in the Colombian context.

Analysis and results.

The analysis of inequalities in Colombia, based on a strategic prospective approach, makes it possible to identify the complexity and persistence of social, economic and cultural gaps in the country. Through the analysis of historical, present and emerging trends, it is possible to identify patterns that influence the perpetuation of these inequalities. These results provide insight into the underlying dynamics that have kept Colombia as one of the most unequal nations in Latin America, and offer valuable inputs for the design of public policies that address these challenges in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Identifying these trends is essential for designing effective strategies to promote equity and inclusive development in the country.

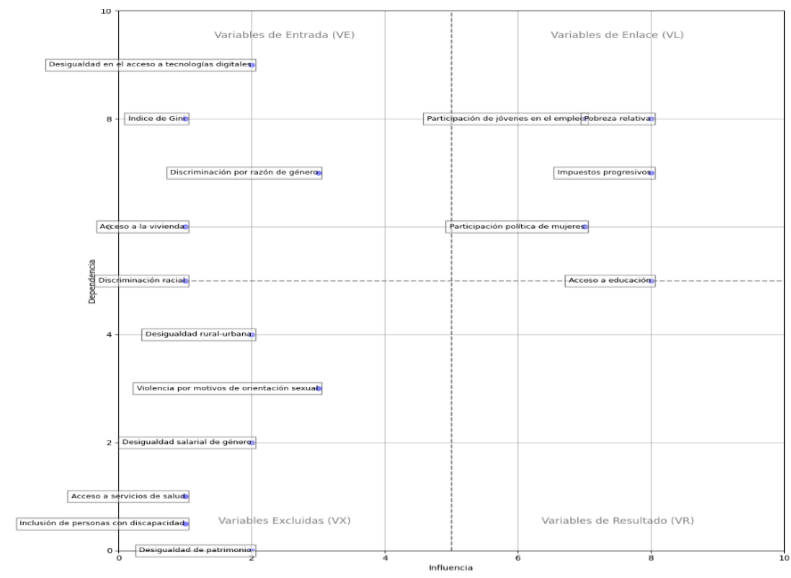
The following trends are presented below, based on government plans, development plans and recognized public and private documentary sources:

Table 1. Trend Matrix for Colombia

Category	Past	Current	Emerging
Market	Gini Index (0.56)		
	Relative Poverty (slight decrease, \$1.90 per day)		
	Gender Wage Inequality		
	Access to Housing		
Technology			Inequality in Access to Digital Technologies
Persons	Access to Education		
	Access to Health Services		
	Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities		
	Youth Employment Participation		
Culture	Racial Discrimination		Gender Discrimination
	Rural-urban inequality		
	Social Mobility		
	Sexual Orientation Violence		
Business	Formal vs. Informal Employment		
	Women's Political Participation		
	Progressive Taxes		

Factors of change

On the other hand, the variables motor diagram represents the causal relationships between different variables, highlighting those that have a greater impact on the system or phenomenon under analysis. This diagram makes it possible to visualize graphically how certain variables are driving forces or drivers of changes in the system, showing their influence and the level of interaction between them. The following is a motor diagram of variables.



Graphic 1. Variables motor diagram

The results obtained from the Variables Motricity Diagram point to the complex dynamics and interdependencies that exist among the factors that perpetuate inequality in Colombia. The diagram identifies key variables that act as drivers within the system, i.e., those that have the capacity to significantly influence other variables. These driving variables include factors such as inequality in access to digital technologies, gender discrimination, and youth participation in employment.

The results show that inequality in access to digital technologies is a driving variable with a high impact and control over other variables, which implies that improvements in this area could trigger positive effects on other dimensions of inequality, such as access to education and employment. Likewise, gender discrimination appears as a variable that, although difficult to control, has a considerable impact on the configuration of social inequalities, underscoring the need for public policies aimed at gender equity to generate systemic changes.

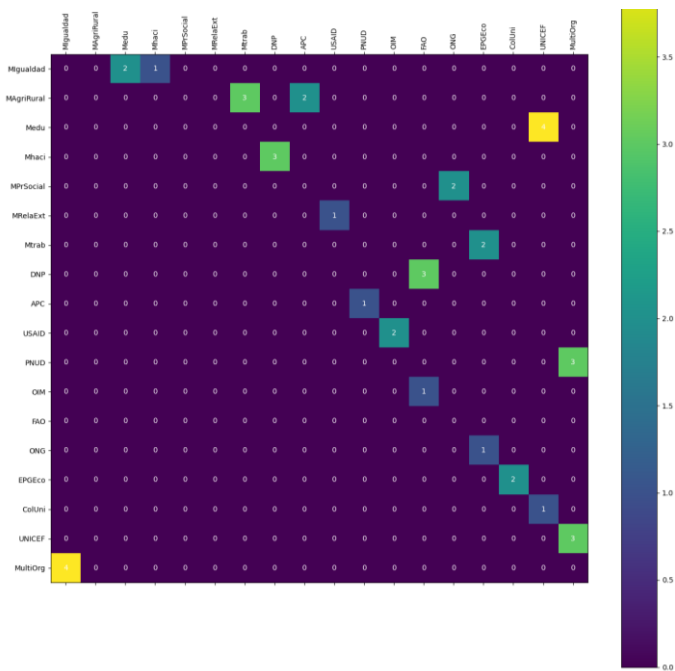
On the other hand, the participation of young people in employment emerges as a determining variable that can have a broad impact on economic and social development.

Likewise, an exercise was carried out to identify the actors that can have an impact on the achievement of the objectives established to reduce inequalities in Colombia, as follows

Table 2. Stakeholder Identification

Name Actor	Short name
Ministry of Equality and Equity	MIgualdad
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	MAgriRural
Ministry of Education	Medu
Ministry of Finance and Public Credit	Mhaci
Department of Social Prosperity	MPrSocial
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MRelaExt
Ministry of Labor	Mtrab
National Planning Department	DNP
National Agency for International Cooperation of Colombia	APC
United States Agency for International Development	USAID
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP
International Organization for Migration	IOM
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	FAO
NGOs and civil organizations	NGO
Private companies and economic associations	EPGEco
Colleges and Universities	ColUni
United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
Multilateral organizations	MultiOrg

In relation to the identification of the stakeholders, the Stakeholder Influence Matrix was developed. It is presented below:



Graphic 2. Stakeholder Influence Matrix.

The results of the study on inequality in Colombia, such as the identification of key actors, such as ministries, NGOs, and international entities, are fundamental to understand who influences public policies. Thus, the Stakeholder Influence Matrix shows how these actors interact and are classified according to their power and influence on inequality reduction; in this case actors such as the Ministry of Finance and the National Planning Department have significant control over resources and strategic decisions. The Diagram of Actors according to their Power and Influence visualizes these relationships, as in the case of actors such as the Ministry of Equality and Equity are in positions of high influence, essential for policy formulation, while NGOs and civil organizations, although with less power, play an important role in implementation and social mobilization. In short, these elements underline the need for strategic collaboration among the different actors to achieve a significant and sustained impact in reducing inequalities in the country. The comparison of the actors among themselves, according to their influence, evidences a complex network of interactions that determine the dynamics of power and cooperation in Colombia's socioeconomic and political sphere.

Conclusions.

The study allows determining that the analysis of inequality in Colombia, from a strategic and prospective perspective, points out the importance of culture and society in the perpetuation and

possible mitigation of inequalities. The study shows that economic, social and gender inequalities are rooted in the cultural and social structures that prevail in the country.

In that order of ideas, the predominant culture in Colombian society not only reflects existing inequalities, but also reproduces them, such as cultural norms related to gender, ethnicity and social class that perpetuate a cycle of discrimination and exclusion, as is the case with gender expectations that continue to limit women's access to equal opportunities in employment and politics. In addition, racial discrimination and residential segregation remain significant barriers to equal access to education, health and other basic services.

Colombia's social structure, marked by profound economic and social inequalities, acts as an impediment to equitable development. Disparities in access to education, health and income are reinforced by policies that do not always manage to effectively address the roots of inequality. Society, in this sense, plays a dual role: on the one hand, it perpetuates these inequalities through exclusionary practices and, on the other, it offers the possibility of transformation through social movements and inclusive public policies.

For this reason, cultural transformation is the way to reduce inequalities, since, in order to achieve significant change, it is necessary to challenge the norms and values that support unequal structures; this can only be achieved by fostering a culture of inclusion and equity and respect for diversity and the rights of all social groups.

Likewise, an action plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 10 in Colombia, which seeks to reduce inequality, requires a coordinated approach and based on achieving the goals for each scenario, in that order the study also allows us to point out that public policies in Colombia should be designed with a cultural and social approach that seeks not only to reduce economic gaps, but also to transform attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate inequality. This implies the creation of education and awareness programs that promote gender equity, racial inclusion and social justice at all levels of society.

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