



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Fact Sheet

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN VENEZUELA

Though rich in oil, poverty has long affected a majority of the Venezuelan people. **After a series of harsh economic reforms promoted by the International Monetary Fund in 1989, the percentage of Venezuelans living in poverty jumped from 43.9 to 66.5 – over the course of just one year.** Elected in 1998, President Hugo Chávez quickly recognized the corrosive impact poverty was having on Venezuela. By forcing millions of citizens to the margins and excluding them from meaningful participation in the country's political and economic life. High levels of poverty were diminishing people's faith in Venezuela's democratic institutions, were serving as a catalyst for crime and were holding the country back from sustainable growth and development. Starting with changes to the constitution that placed additional emphasis on achieving social justice, President Chávez promised to aggressively combat poverty and focus on the economic and social rights of all Venezuelans, a promise that continues to this day.

The centerpiece of President Chavez's campaign against poverty has been Venezuela's social missions, which are state-sponsored grassroots oriented development programs, addressing pressing needs in various fields of human development such as education, health, culture, food security, job training and housing. Started in 2003 and funded by increased social spending (currently standing at 20,2 percent of the GDP)¹, the

missions have placed doctors, teachers, and social workers in thousands of poor Venezuelan communities, offering much-needed services free of charge. Below is a small sampling, of the 25 social missions² operating in Venezuela today:

¶ **Mission Barrio Adentro** (Inside the Neighborhood) has placed 20,000 doctors in poor communities throughout Venezuela, who participated in nearly 300 million medical check-ups saving the lives of more than 80.000 persons through April 2008, Today *Barrio Adentro* operates 1,600 community consultation centers dispersed all over Venezuela and people's access to free healthcare has increased with a rise in primary care physicians from 1,628 in 1998 to 19,571 in 2007.³

¶ **Educational Missions** served to eliminate illiteracy in Venezuela. Mission Robinson taught 1.6 million Venezuelans to read and write, primarily people of indigenous descent. Furthermore, approximately 450,000 Venezuelans were able to get their high-school degree thanks to Mission Ribas.⁴

¶ **Mission Identidad** (Identity) has provided identification papers and other legal documents to 18 million Venezuelans enabling them to take advantage of their

² Venezuela's Social Missions Five Years Later <
<http://venworld.wordpress.com/2008/05/13/venezuelas-social-missions-five-years-later/>>

³ Venezuelan Information Office.

http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Social%20Missions.htm#_edn14

⁴ Presentacion "Logros Sociales" MPD

¹ Presentation "Logros Sociales" MPD.



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

right to vote and to request other vital government services. More than 5.5 million Venezuelans registered to vote for the first time in their lives. 430,000 immigrants naturalized and nearly 274,000 indigenous persons issued ID Cards. By February 2007 the Mission had served approximately 23 million people.⁵

Mission Mercal provided the Venezuelan population with 5,172,082 metric tons of food at subsidized prices between 2003 and April 2008, resulting in an average sale of around 110,000 metric tons per months. In April 2008, Mission Mercal benefited more than 11.4 million Venezuelans, representing more than 40 % of the nation’s population.⁶

Mission Che Guevara (formerly called “Vuelvan Caras”) offers both technical education in fields like agriculture, tourism or construction, and orientation as to what a Social Economy is about. Between March 2004 and August 2007, over 670,000 people completed the program, resulting in the creation of more than 10,000 cooperatives by its alumni.⁷ More than 3,000 of these organizations pertain to the agricultural sector, and they represent an important contribution to the strengthening of this important area of the economy in Venezuela.⁸

Mission Arbol focuses on the environment making clear that environmental policies are an integral part of the Republic’s social development projects. Mission Arbol seeks to protect river basins and to promote the sustainable use of Venezuela’s forests. Currently, 2,230 projects are being carried out by communities organized in Conservation Committees, through which 33 million forest and fruit plants have been produced and planted and 13,524 hectares reforested through 2006 and 2007.⁹

The missions have proven to be both effective and extremely popular. By serving as integrated interventions against poverty, improving access to credit, focusing on issues of gender and ethnicity, and being predicated on popular empowerment, the missions have both reduced poverty and created active citizens. Studies have found that the social missions contributed to a 9.9% decrease in the poverty rate since 2003.¹⁰ **The Venezuelan National Statistics Institute recently announced that the percentage of Venezuelans living in poverty dropped from 48.8 percent in 2005 to 33.1 percent in 2006.**

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5

http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Social%20Missions.htm#_edn4

⁶ Presentation “Logros Sociales” MPD

⁷ Fundación Misión Che Guevara, “Oleadas MVC 2004-2005/2006 y Joven MchG 2007”, (Presentation Power Point) February 22, 2008.

⁸ According to information received from the “Fundación Misión Che Guevara” on March 24, 2008.

⁹ Fact Sheet Environment.

¹⁰ Venworld, “Venezuela’s Social Missions Five Years Later,”

<http://venworld.wordpress.com/2008/05/13/venezuela-social-missions-five-years-later/> (accessed June 13, 2008)



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Furthermore, according to CEPAL, the GINI ¹¹ Coefficient in Venezuela improved “significantly” between 2002 and 2006. ¹² In fact, according to the Venezuelan National Statistics Institute, the index decreased from 0,49 in 1999 to 0,42 in 2007.

The missions’ effectiveness have also made them highly popular throughout Venezuela – the educational missions are viewed positively by 76 percent of Venezuelans and the health missions by 72 percent.

More importantly, though, is the fact that millions of Venezuelans are now able to access key social services and fully participate in their country’s political, economic, and social development.

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¹¹ The GINI Coefficient is a standard measure of income distribution, with “0” representing perfect equality and “1” perfect inequality.

¹² CEPAL <http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/5/30305/PSE2007_Cap1_Pobreza.pdf>