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News

Progressive structural change with a 2030 horizon

BY Alicia Bárcena

Sunday, May 15, 2016

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The world today is undergoing a change of era. The unprecedented rise in global inequality, the increasingly severe effects of climate change and the ambivalent role played by the technological revolution, which multiplies capacities and threatens employment, are signs that the reigning development pattern has grown unsustainable.

These imbalances have mobilised the international community, which has laid out a road map to 2030, an Agenda for Sustainable Development that clearly reflects the broad and urgent nature of these global challenges, and that has put the fight against inequality at its centre.

Achieving the sustainable development goals requires tackling the task of putting into place and consolidating specific instruments for their implementation. To this end, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) proposes an analytical framework that complements the 2030 Agenda, based on a structuralist perspective of development and from the point of view of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The core concept of ECLAC's proposal lies in progressive structural change: a process of transformation towards activities and productive processes that:

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- 1) are intensive in learning and innovation;
- 2) are associated with markets and areas of goods and services provision that are expanding quickly, which allows for increased production and employment; and
- 3) favour environmental protection and the decoupling of economic growth and carbon emissions.

To be able to move towards these new productive structures, a new set of institutions and political coalitions are needed that promote them on a global, regional, national and local level.

Furthermore, regional integration must be strengthened because it constitutes the most natural space for creating productive chains, taking advantage of geographical proximity and complements national economies. It is essential that officials strengthen the regional financial security network, co-ordinate fiscal policies and measures to attract foreign direct investment, make progress on the creation of a single digital market, and, of course, articulate a resilience fund for Caribbean countries.

It is time to make a strong environmental push in Latin America and the Caribbean, by fostering an integrated package of co-ordinated public and private investments in distinct areas to redefine patterns related to energy, production and consumption, based on learning and innovation. In this scenario, we must embark upon paths to increase investment, above all in infrastructure, energy and technological innovations aimed at halting environmental deterioration.

At the same time it is necessary to adopt social policies that allow for universal access to health and education, and which strive to achieve full employment. These policies have a great impact on productivity. But productivity and the universalisation of rights must go hand-in-hand; neither is sustainable without the other.

Despite the adversity of the economic context that the region is facing, the present moment offers promising paths. That is the purpose of the proposals that the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will present during its most important biannual meeting: the 36th session, which will be held from May 23-27 in Mexico City with the participation of senior authorities from our region.

An ambitious and urgent agenda with growth, sustainability and equality at the centre has emerged. In light of this, we in Latin America and the Caribbean must be the protagonists of our development — based on our own reality, recognising the difficulties and potential, and imagining tomorrow from the South.

– Alicia Bárcena is executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

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