

## **Conditional cash transfers and the development of welfare policy: the case of the Tekoporã program in Paraguay**

Liliana Rocío Duarte-Recalde\*

\* PhD candidate, in Political Science at Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM), Argentina  
*Correspondence:* rociohk@yahoo.com

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the development of a social assistance institutional framework in Paraguay, linked to the first two decades of implementation of the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program Tekoporã. What follows is the path that shaped the social assistance scheme in Paraguay around the Tekoporã program, a flagship CCT program that has been implemented continuously since 2005 through different governments. This article examines the existing conditions for the administration of social policies in this country as well as the political actors involved.

**keywords:** Social Assistance, Conditional Cash Transfers, Paraguay, Institutional Development.

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### **1. Introduction**

Welfare institutions in Paraguay have historically been characterized by their limited capacity to respond to the needs of the population. This country has been classified among the regimes in Latin America with lower levels of commodification of the workforce and high degrees of familiarization of welfare provision (Martínez-Franzoni, 2007: 15), that have shaped the need for continuous palliative state intervention related to social protection. Such palliative interventions remain necessary due to the historical limitations of the institutionalized welfare in this country and the lack of comprehensive policies aimed at protecting Paraguayan population.

Since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the main public strategy aimed at addressing the problems of the vulnerable population in this country has been targeted Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs that aimed at alleviating poverty while rationalizing public resources (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011). This intervention model coincided with the regional trend initiated a decade earlier (Andrenacci and Repetto, 2006; Fiszbein and Schady, 2009; Cecchini and Madariaga, 2011; Cecchini and Martínez, 2011; Osorio-Gonnet, 2015). However, unlike countries that had legacies of universal social policies and broad coverage of basic services infrastructure, Paraguay did not have a welfare institutional framework that could allow the coordinated incorporation of these targeted programs. Therefore, caring for the population living in extreme poverty

required the development of an institutional framework that would account for the particular needs of this sector, as well as the identification of stakeholders that would take part in the implementation of programs.

By and large, Paraguayan social policy has historically been addressed by charitable institutions that were located predominantly in the main urban centers of the country, which had limited budgets and low capacity for articulation. The breakdown of authoritarian rule in 1989 marked a turning point in the Paraguayan political system, as it led to a constitutional change in 1992 that set the basis to guarantee the social rights of the population and could potentially lead the way towards the building of a social welfare system in this country. However, democracy in this country has had an irregular path towards consolidation during the following decade (Duarte-Recalde, 2015), as the first years of this new regime were characterized by the absence of structural state reforms, the persistence of instability and a high degree of political conflict that lacked institutional means of resolution (Barrios, 2005).

The political reforms initiated under democratic rule were insufficient to address the social problems that affected this country's population, which exerted negative influence on the development of an institutional framework capable to implement social policy in this country. Social policy administration became fragmented, as the problems faced by public institutions in charge of implementing social policies turned more complex (Fogel, 1996). In this context, the dynamic among State agencies responsible for different welfare-related areas even turned antagonistic, as each Ministry jealously guarded its autonomy and operated as a separate fiefdom (Nickson, 2007).

To the absence of structural reforms, to an impoverished citizenship, and to the fragmentation of the incipient welfare institutions in the first years of transition, it was added the authoritarian imprint in public management inherited from *stronismo*. During his thirty-five years of government, Stroessner developed "an almost complete identification between the ANR and the State" (Schuster, 2013: 6), whereas affiliation to the party was a requirement to access a position in the public administration, and automatic deductions made from civil servants' salaries were used to finance the party. In this way, it has been observed since then that the institutional weakness "defined as the political-administrative continuity and participatory legalization - together with the turbulence typical of a slow democratization process - generates the conditions for a disarticulated social policy" (Tapia, 2001: 230).

The construction of an institutional social assistance would occur in Paraguay only after the government of Nicanor Duarte Frutos (ANR, 2003-2008), the fourth elected President of the Republic since the change of regime.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Duarte Frutos was elected on behalf of the Republican National Association (ANR), the same government party that had not lost control of the Executive Power since the dictatorial period.

government promoted the non-contributory social protection system in the country, which had “systematic development starting in 2003” (García-Agüero, 2015: 13) with the formulation of the first “National Strategy to Fight Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion” (ENLP). Particularly, social assistance was structured around the emblematic Tekoporã Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program established in 2005 as part of the aforementioned strategy.

Presented next is the course of the current social assistance institutional framework in Paraguay, the way in which different political actors took part in its definition, and the challenges faced by this dimension of the Paraguayan State. The work presented is based on primary sources that include Paraguayan legislation, government action plans and semi-structured interviews with technical officials who have occupied leadership positions in dependencies related to this area, supplemented by literature related to the subject.

## ***2. Development of an institutional framework for welfare policies***

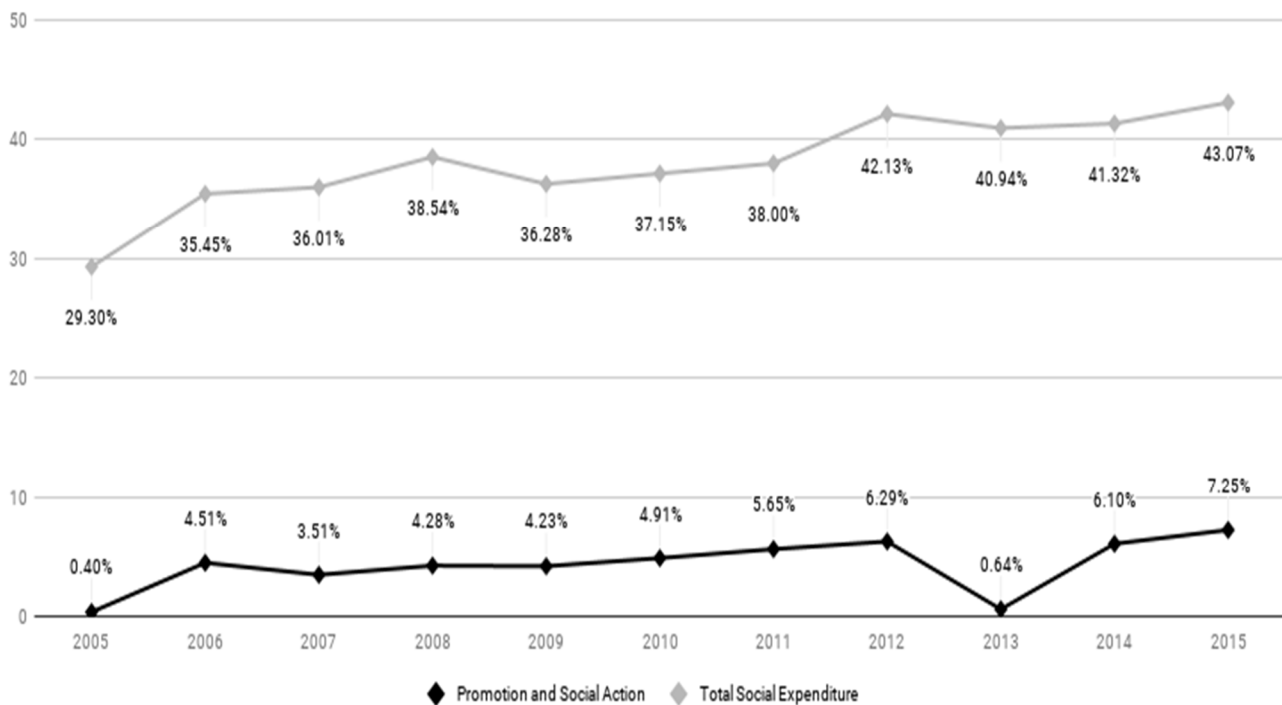
As previously pointed out, the non-contributory social protection system was developed in Paraguay with the government period that began in 2003. From that moment, all the governments that followed formulated some type of strategic plan aimed at the fight against poverty or at social development, differing in the emphasis they placed on the type of public interventions necessary to face these challenges. Nevertheless, regularities did occur since that time, both in the definition of poverty as a political problem and in the identification of state responsibility in the provision of minimum benefits that all people should receive from the State.

The first government strategy that incorporated social assistance as the core of public intervention was the “National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion” (ENLP) during Duarte Frutos’ government. At first, this scheme “was financed with sources from cooperation” and then gradually began to be financed with public funds (García-Agüero, 2015: 19). The growing government attention to the area of social policies was manifested in annual public spending since 2005, year in which implementation of the CCT programs began, which “brought with them the stamp of innovation in design and in execution criteria, not seen before in the sector of social assistance policies” (García-Agüero, 2015: 15).

It is observed that total social spending as a percentage of the National General Budget (PGN) increased during the first decade of the period analyzed (Graph 1),

going from 29.30% at the beginning of the decade to 43.07% in 2015, although that trend has not been linear. The function referring to the Promotion and Social Action of the PGN, which includes the "expenses inherent to services to improve the quality of life, dignity of people and social assistance" (Law 5554/2015, Annex, p. 61), appears as the type of expense that increased the most during the period reviewed. This went from representing 0.40% of the PGN in 2005 to 7.25% in 2015.

**Graph 1: Evolution of Social Expenditure in Paraguay (% PGN) 2005-2015**



*Source: Own elaboration based on data registered in the PGN laws corresponding to each year indicated*

The main inter-institutional space for coordinating the implementation of social assistance and development policies for the period analyzed has been the Social Cabinet, articulated by the Executive Power since 2003. In that year, Nicanor Duarte Frutos created the first Social Cabinet that would function as "political domain in which decisions concerning the State's social policy are made" (GS, SAS, DIPLANP, 2004: 41). This space was integrated at that time by those who

were in charge of the Vice Presidency of the Republic, the Secretariat of Social Action (SAS), the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MEC), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSPyBS), the Ministry of Finance (MH), the General Secretariat (SG), and the participation of other designated Advisors. However, the formal absence in this space of other Ministries or Secretariats limited the comprehensive quality of the Cabinet's actions at that time.

The ENLP established specific tasks of the different Executive Power portfolios under the core topics of "Social Protection", "Social Promotion" and "Economic Inclusion" (ENLP, 2006: 37), from the perspective that the work of these institutions should be coordinated. Likewise, the "National Directorate of the Plan, National Strategy to Fight Poverty, Inequality and Exclusion" (DIPLANP) was created under the Presidency of the Republic (Decree 2934/2004, Art. 3). The administrative dimension of this plan included the Social Equity Fund (FES), also dependent on the Presidency of the Republic, intended to "coordinate the allocation of financial resources towards inter-institutional efforts to fight poverty" (Decree 6692/2005, Art. 1). For this, the FES would have to report regularly to the Social Cabinet on "the action plans and the concrete progress made in the implementation of said plans" (Decree 6692/2005, Art. 3). In turn, it was established that the DIPLANP was in charge of "carrying out the analysis of admission and management control of the programs included in the Social Equity Fund (FES)" (Decree 6692/2005, Art. 7).

After that first institutional arrangement for the implementation of social and economic inclusion policies, the government of Fernando Lugo (APC, 2008-2012)<sup>2</sup> also included the fight against poverty and the promotion of well-being as a basic point on its agenda. There was continuity by formally maintaining the pre-eminence of the Social Cabinet as a space for institutional coordination dependent on the Presidency of the Republic for the implementation of social policies, indicating that through this space "the Executive Power directs the processes of definition, installation, monitoring and evaluation of Government Social Policies" (Decree 1799/2009, Art. 2). This Social Cabinet would be led by an Executive Team, whose functions included "executing, promoting and coordinating its activities" as well as "establishing the coordination mechanisms for International Cooperation in the Social Area" (Decree 1799/2009, Art. 9 ). In turn, there would be the Technical Unit of the Social Cabinet in charge of "the administrative direction, implementation, coordination and supervision of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Patriotic Alliance for Change (APC) comprised an electoral coalition between parties of different ideological positions, formed as a platform to promote the candidacy of Fernando Lugo for the Presidency of the Republic and to confront the dominance of the ANR. The rupture within that alliance would result in the loss of political support for Fernando Lugo and the eventual dismissal of him in June 2012, which would give way to the brief government of Federico Franco until the following general elections in the year 2013.

programs, projects, plans and activities of the Social Cabinet” (Decree 1799/2009, Article 11).

The Social Cabinet during the Lugo government was expanded to include a greater number of institutions. In addition to the institutions that made it up in the previous period, it was integrated by representatives of the Ministry of the Interior (MI), Justice and Labor (MJT), Public Works and Communications (MOPC), the Secretariats of Technical Planning (STP), National Emergency (SEN) and Environment (SEAM), among others under the Presidency of the Republic, in addition to the Paraguayan Directors of the Itaipú Binational Entity and the Yacyretá Binational Entity, the President of the National Housing Council (CONAVI), the Director of the National Institute for the Protection of Exceptional Persons (INPRO) and the Director of the DIPLANP (Decree 1799/2009, Art. 8).

It was established that all state agencies should be willing to commission to the Social Cabinet all the personnel requested "in order to comply with the functions assigned by the Executive Power" (Decree 1799/2009, Art. 17). However, despite the inclusion of a greater number of institutions with a view to implementing a more coordinated social policy, its operation was characterized by constant confrontation between the constituent parts as a consequence of the multiplicity of political affiliations represented in it. While Fernando Lugo came to the presidency supported by an electoral coalition composed of parties and political movements of different ideological positions and different programmatic agendas (Duarte-Recalde, 2015), the presence of representatives of such political sectors in this Cabinet turned into a competition situation to maintain political influence over their respective institutions, rather than to undertake coordinated actions. In this context, "the tendency of the Paraguayan State to resemble a confederation of ministries was exacerbated" (Schuster, 2013: 14), which coincides with the following assessment:

*Within the same cabinet there were not only a multiplicity of factors that influenced one Ministry to have more relevance over another in budgetary, historical and other aspects, but also a great deal of internal competition. In other words, there was more than one President, because each one felt like President in his own space, which was his Ministry, and each one implemented the policy that seemed best to him. (Interview 1, 08/08/2017).*

The Social Cabinet would be restructured again during the government of Horacio Cartes (ANR, 2013-2018), whose concentration of political power at the beginning of his term (Duarte-Recalde, 2014) made it easier for the government's agenda to operate in a homogeneous manner. The Social Cabinet was presented as the "body in charge of promoting, coordinating and directing the management of the programs and public policies of the National Government in the Social Area" (Decree 751/2013, Art. 1). In addition to the institutions included in previous periods, this Cabinet would be made up of those responsible

for the Ministry of Women (MM), the National Secretariat of Culture (SNC), the National Secretariat for Housing and Habitat (SENAVITAT), the Secretariat for Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SENADIS), Secretariat of Information and Communication (SICOM), as well as the General Director of the Directorate of Charity and Social Assistance (DIBEN) (Decree 751/2013, Art. 2).

It was established that the Social Cabinet would once again be led by an Executive Team "with functions of implementing, promoting and coordinating its activities" (Decree 751/2013, Art. 9), while the Technical Unit of the Social Cabinet would remain as "technical and operational body, responsible for the direction, administration, execution, coordination and supervision of the activities of the Executive Team of the Social Cabinet" (Decree 751/2013, Art. 11). It was decided "the suppression of the Directorate of the Plan of the ENLP, Inequality and Social Exclusion" (Decree 2649/2014, Art. 1) and its functions, powers and resources were transferred to the Civil Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic (Decree 2649/2014, Art. 2). In this context, the inter-institutional coordination remains a mechanism for the comprehensive management of social assistance policies in Paraguay.

Parallel to these coordination spaces, the main institution in charge of implementing social policy in Paraguay during the period analyzed has been the Social Action Secretariat (SAS). This Secretariat was created in 1995 and has broad responsibilities that include planning, administration, and coordination of initiatives between State agencies together with other international and local organizations, regarding the fight against poverty (Decree 9235/1995, Art. 2). The responsibilities of the SAS vis-à-vis those of the Social Cabinet are not mutually exclusive in this sense, with overlapping of functions occurring.

The most emblematic social assistance program in the country has been the Tekoporã program, implemented by the SAS, which emulated the model of CCT programs implemented in the region as a result of a public policy dissemination process (Osorio-Gonnet, 2015). The design of this program contemplated its collaborative implementation since the Lugo government period, when it was established that the assistance granted through this program would have national coverage "through coordinated, articulated and harmonious work with the different municipalities of the country and community participation" (Law 4087/2011, Art. 1). For its implementation, it was established that "the SAS can sign agreements or alliances with other Ministries and/or other institutions to assist in the operation of Conditional Cash Transfer programs" (Decree 7743/2011, Art. 6). Although the SAS remained "the institution in charge of updating or commissioning the updating of the instruments used in the selection process of beneficiaries," it was indicated that it should work "together with the Municipalities involved for the approval and modification of the technical instruments and procedures used" (Decree 7743/2011, Art. 7). The inclusion of

Municipalities as institutional actors involved in the implementation of the program represented something new in the dynamics of its operation.

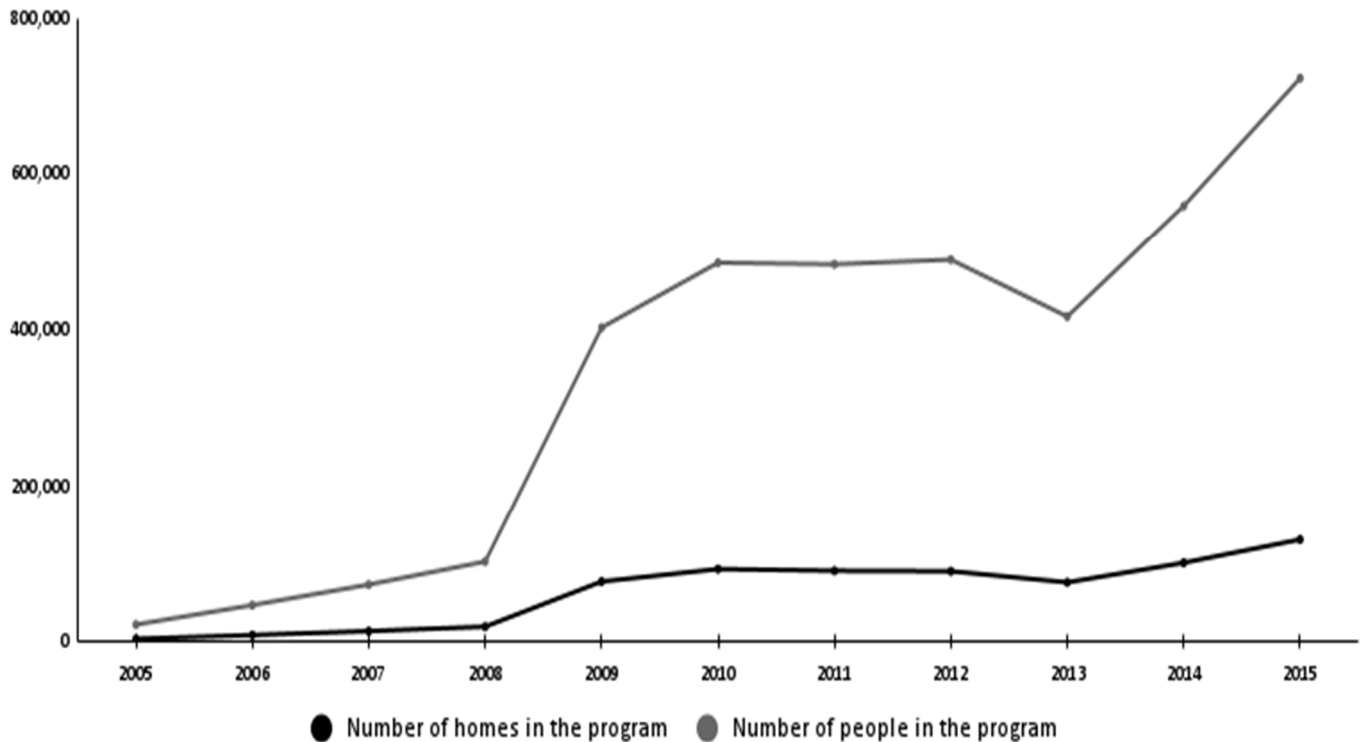
Social assistance based on objective targeting criteria confronted the deep-rooted practice in the Paraguayan State of the individualistic provision of goods and services to the population living in poverty, based on the client exchange of basic services for political support (Schuster, 2013). In this realm, one of the interviewees has indicated that the Paraguayan State "reconfigures the idea of assistance" (Interview 3, 11/08/2017), although it is limited to the conditional transfer of money:

*Assistance is reconfigured, because with the anti-poverty programs, assistance is basically referred to as the monetary transfer. Before, the assistance was also referred to the provision of food, clothing, seeds, it was much more diverse. (...) Assistance for extreme poverty assumes a new type of assistance that the Paraguayan State had not known about, had not yet developed - and it admits that all its technical staff were not prepared, because what the dictatorship did was to cut-cross through the assistance they had to the patronage issue - thus, this always implied that people were grateful to some character on duty. On the other hand, here we had to work on a (human) rights approach. (Interview 3, 11/08/2017)*

Throughout this period the Tekoporã program has remained operative, although it has been pointed out that it has weaknesses, such as targeting errors (Robles, Rubio & Stampini, 2015). The continuous implementation of the program did not result in significant increases in its budget in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, reaching 0.22% share in 2015. Nonetheless, the observed yearly population coverage has increased steadily from 0.38% to 10.33%, i.e. the share reached during its first decade of implementation (Graph 2). The stability of this program is atypical with respect to public policies experiences in Paraguay, characterized by high volatility (Molinas et al., 2011).



Graph 2: Evolution of the Tekoporã program



Source: Own elaboration based on data available at <https://dds.cepal.org/bdptc/programa/?id=27#>

The existence of this program and its effects on the state bureaucracy – development of administrative capacities, definition of the target population through objective criteria, creation of coordination mechanisms– introduced a model of attention to the needs of the population that challenged the traditional Paraguayan patterns of intervention in social assistance. This occurred in coincidence with the growing identification of the Social Cabinet as a space from which it was intended to advance in the implementation of social promotion strategies in a coordinated manner. The articulation between Tekoporã and the Social Cabinet represents a historical novelty for the Paraguayan State, at least in illustrative terms, with regards to the institutional framework for social assistance. Nonetheless, the technical capacities and the internal political dynamics of each agency involved would establish the feasibility limits for the effective implementation of the program, while the political externalities generated during its implementation would provide the basis for the stability of the intervention.

### **3. Actors involved in social assistance policy**

The introduction of social intervention schemes of the type seen in Latin America in the last decade of the 20th century had strengthened "the public-private articulation" in coincidence with a State that assumed "the character of guarantor, not necessarily provider but not only subsidiary" (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011: 33). The same happened in Paraguay, where contributions to these programs were incorporated from political actors who had not been previously recognized as protagonists. These actors would not only participate in the implementation of the programs but also in the very meaning of the interventions.

Initially, the formulation of the ENLP took place with the support of organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank (WB), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which had already warned about the "fragile existing public institutions for the implementation of this policy" in Paraguay (García-Agüero, 2015: 13). The limited bureaucratic capacity of the area was symptomatic of the institutional weakness of the Paraguayan State, made up of officials "who temporarily enter the government according to criteria of trust or partisan affiliation" and in which "ministerial rotations or changes of government influence the formation of the workplan and can imply massive changes of officials" (Echebarría and Cortázar, 2007: 166). In this sense, Paraguay has been classified among those countries that present a situation of "serious precariousness in the technical capacity of their public administrations", that have "labor forces with very low professional qualifications, profiles and defined job positions without technical studies or simply non-existent", among other limitations (Echebarría and Cortázar, 2007: 163).

Part of the cooperation's work consisted of beginning to develop local technical capacities for the implementation of social assistance policies, within the attention focused on the needs of the population living in extreme poverty. This, added to the incipient domestic initiatives to generate technical capacities, resulted in the current existence of a professional body with adequate training to formulate and implement public interventions in the area:

*What was seen is that Paraguay did not have the capacity, so (there were) consultants here, consultants there, in computing, in how to do field work, how to follow up on families who are in extreme poverty, how to register (...). For example, there are people who went to ten international courses on the same topic, right, it may be cheaper for the State what that person does rather than hiring other consultants. (Interview 3, 11/08/2017)*

According to previous analyses (Schuster, 2013), during the government of Fernando Lugo, concrete steps were taken towards the competitive and meritocratic recruitment of the Paraguayan civil service. Although this only comprised "a minority of institutions and vacancies" (Schuster, 2013: III), one of the institutions in which this shift was registered has been the Social Action Secretariat. In particular, the Secretariat of the Public Function (SFP) was instructed to provide support for the holding of public tenders "to select personnel in the emblematic programs of the Presidency" (Schuster, 2013: 38), among which was the SAS Tekoporã program. However, the local technical capacities available tended to be undervalued and lose space to technicians external to the institutions:

*It is very difficult to obtain the support of a director or a general director right away, so many times we have to resort to external academic references to be able, let's say, to support our proposals in some forums, discussions or consultations within our institution, where we can talk about some points that are not, let's say, "digested" by our authorities. But with the endorsement of a certificate signed by some external specialists in these matters, then it is something else. (...) But it is not that the observations come only from us, from the technicians, it comes from the people themselves, that is, from the program participants themselves. (Interview, 5 11/17/2017)*

The social assistance strategy of the Fernando Lugo government pointed to clientelism (patronage) as one of the causes that generate poverty (GS, 2009: 52). In this scheme, the particularistic historical tendency of the provision of social services came into friction with claims of objectivity in the implementation of the policy:

*I believe that (the target audience) experienced a transition in the sense that, in a patronage and prebendary State, the way in which I maximize assets or instruments of public policy is by responding to the patronage scheme - I am talking about the target audience - because if I don't respond to that clientelist logic, I would receive nothing. So I have to be constantly playing and dancing with that actor: clapping here, or accepting that or cheering, because otherwise I am outside the system of instruments of social policies. (Interview 2, 08/25/2017)*

On the other hand, the establishment of meritocratic criteria for the selection of public officials had no correlation with the establishment of effective mechanisms for controlling their work in the field nor for professional

promotion. This characteristic has been constant throughout the period analyzed, indicating that “there is an almost total disconnect between salary levels and job classification, determined particularly by individual and political loyalties” (Nickson, 2007: 28). In particular, the officials who implement social assistance programs are usually recognized for being active in certain political parties, so that their actions in the communities are identified with the party to which they belong and “in some places they cross paths with clientelist issues” (Interview 3, 11/08/2017). The work of officials with political-electoral purposes has been observed on a regular basis:

*Not much time passes between one election period and another<sup>3</sup> and in those periods people work more politically oriented. And the rest of the time, the technical formalities are fulfilled but without much responsibility, without much pressure. There are even people who do nothing at all and who always get paid because they are trusted by someone with power, these people act as “planilleros” (scorers), let's say. They are even the ones with the highest salaries, the ones with the highest authority and all that. (...) Those who are in the field, many of them are part of the roster of clientele, let's say, they are staff of local politicians. No matter how many contests are held and all that, there are a kind of quotas in some places. In some places they are, let's say, hegemonically of the official party, , , and in other places they are quotas that are distributed. (Interview, 5 11/17/2017)*

The weak administrative capacities of the Paraguayan State would not be limited, then, to the absence of technical capacities of the body of public civil servants, but to its limited institutional appraisal and to the subjection of their work to political-partisan criteria. On the other hand, staff officials are aware of the volatility that impacts on the main guidelines of public policies, which are conditioned by electoral criteria (Molinas et al., 2011). The absence of coherent and stable policies conditions the performance of officials, as they realize that the efforts are limited to the management periods of those who are temporarily in charge of the different institutions. In this sense, the behavior of those who are a stable part of the State apparatus is shaped by long-term trends in the functioning of their institutions:

*(...) they think that programs are like theaters where we have to do things, but they know how it works. And on one hand they are right,*

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<sup>3</sup> The general elections - which include the election for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the Republic, Senators, Deputies and Departmental Governors - are held every five years. Two years after the general elections, municipal elections are regularly held, which are of great importance for the political careers of those who access spaces of local representation.

*so when the State is absent, they develop mechanisms of empirical functioning, since they think there are times that things have to be done this way. (...) This articulation does not exist, so there is a very impressive network of officials who work empirically, but they are not affected by new visions, new paradigms or new approaches. And that is complicated, because we have to worry, it is them who keep the institution afloat but do not allow the transformation of the institution. (Interview 4, 11/13/2017)*

In addition to bureaucratic actors, another actor that has assumed a leading role in the area during the period analyzed has been the civil society, sheltered by the progressive rights-based approach in which social assistance interventions were formulated. The formal incorporation of the target populations into the process of implementing programs of this type –in terms of direct participation– also meant a historical novelty in Paraguay, given the meager background of civil society advocacy as an autonomous actor. Coinciding with the perspective of social protection as a citizen guarantee that was imposed in the region, the participation and empowerment of the population appeared as principles to be "incorporated at a conceptual and operational level in social protection systems" (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011: 45).

The participation of the target populations during the implementation of the programs has been another innovative feature in the management of social assistance; registered since the government of Duarte Frutos, when the ENLP identified civil society organizations as important political actors for the implementation of social policies. This strategy emphasized the need to articulate efforts with these organizations as a way to correct "the coercive and demobilizing nature that was the essential feature of the authoritarian system" (GS, SAS, DIPLANP, 2004: 40), at the same time that it was pointed out as an expression of poverty the limited capacity of individuals and groups "to affect or have direct influence on the decisions that involve them, and that result from social inequality, from the weakness of their organizations and from the channels of representation before the instances of power" (GS, SAS, DIPLANP, 2004: 6). The Tekoporã program also included a participatory component from the government of Fernando Lugo. The scheme for promoting social development of the Horacio Cartes presidency called "Sembrando Oportunidades", on the other hand, recognized the importance of coordination between state actions and the private sector, rather than with grassroots communities.

In return to the intention of citizen empowerment, the field work carried out indicates that the Tekoporã program had a negative impact on the social cohesion that characterized the rural communities of the country, inasmuch as it focused on families living in poverty and not in communities:

*(...) People, especially in rural areas, of rural poverty, are very cohesive, lead a lot of community life, and the transfer programs do not have a community approach, they have a family approach. (...) What happened was that families who were in very similar conditions, for example, one acceded to the program and others did not. They loved each other, they helped each other when they were sick, and they started fighting. (Interview 3, 11/08/2017)*

Added to this erosion of the bonds of trust among members of the same community was the inefficiency resulting from the atomized arrival of state officials to the target populations, which also represents a great wear out for them. In this process, the participatory quality of the target populations would occur only in the implementation or evaluation stage of the programs, wasting capacities for local management based on detailed knowledge of the local populations:

*(...) It is not that the anti-poverty programs strengthen the organizations that already exist, but rather that they are stretched so that they participate in the program's evaluation cycle, not in the design. Only technicians participate in the design. (Interview 3, 11/08/2017)*

In this way, a development is observed in the enunciation of the importance of bureaucratic and social actors for an adequate implementation of social assistance programs, which is accompanied by institutional innovations that account for this change. However, bad practices rooted in the Paraguayan bureaucracy, added to the scarce tradition of contentious-based social organization, configure a context that favors the exercise of power by traditional political actors.

#### **4. Conclusion**

During the last decade, the social assistance scheme in Paraguay has registered advances in the construction of its institutional framework that have no precedent in the political history of this country. This development did not occur immediately after the regime change, although it required the stability of a democratic institutional framework as a condition for its development. After the

implementation of the first strategic plan for social assistance during the government of Duarte Frutos, the spaces for inter-institutional coordination for the implementation of similar schemes have been reproduced during the following governments. However, the overlapping of responsibilities between the Social Cabinets and the SAS, as well as the central role of coordination – between changing actors– as a requirement for the implementation of these interventions, negatively affected the institutionalization of a coherent social policy in Paraguay inasmuch as the institutional faculties are redefined in each period of government, according to the conjunctural distribution of the political power.

The Tekoporã conditional cash transfer program is the main element that provides continuity to a social assistance policy in Paraguay since 2005. The operation of this program required the generation of technical-administrative capacities previously non-existent in the country, endeavor supported by international cooperation agencies in its beginnings. However, informal practices in state management crystallized in public agencies, constantly challenged the implementation of the policies formulated during this period and eroded the confidence of the target population in their quality focused according to objective criteria of need. In this context, the technical capacities that have been developed during the analyzed period also remain underutilized.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out -as a negative externality- that the implementation of Tekoporã has weakened the previously existing social capital at the community level in rural regions of high poverty. As the participation of the population is not incorporated from the moment of design of the intervention, its focused approach becomes the object of questioning among the target population.

Although the targeted intervention scheme has achieved stability and resulted to a certain extent in the construction of administrative capacities, spaces for inter-institutional coordination and consultation with representatives of civil society, it has not implied substantive changes in regards to the institutional framework of welfare in the country. The degree to which the conditionality of transfers has influenced the development of state capacities for the provision of basic services, as well as a detailed analysis of the type of links generated between officials and beneficiaries, remains to be reviewed.

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