

A two-pronged approach to increasing levels of consciousness that generate lasting structural change

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Abstract:

Poverty in Mexico has seen little if any improvements from 1992, when poverty was first measured in the country, to 2014. According to CONEVAL (2015), in 2014 55.3 million (46.2%) of Mexicans were living in poverty and 11.4 million (9.5%) in extreme poverty. The future looks even more negative as Kadelbach (2017) points out that the poverty situation in Mexico will worsen over the next 32 years if economic and social conditions in the country remain unchanged. Thus, poverty seems to be a structural problem and the existing system prohibits an escape from the poverty trap that Mexico finds itself in today. According to North (1981), structural change is possible once the ruling class decides to change the system as it no longer serves their purpose. Under the assumption that consciousness is the key to structural change, this paper therefore suggests a two-pronged approach to increasing levels of consciousness of the privileged and unprivileged members of Mexican society by incorporating social innovation in the educational process.

Key Words: Poverty, structural change, Mexico, social innovation, education

1 Introduction

Poverty is a complex phenomenon that has not only enjoyed academic attention but has also been addressed by countries worldwide for the past decades. The Millennium Development Goals were followed by the Sustainable Development Goals that were signed by over 150 countries in the year 2015 to be achieved by the year 2030. SDG #1 states that poverty in all its forms is to be eradicated by 2030 (UN, 2017).

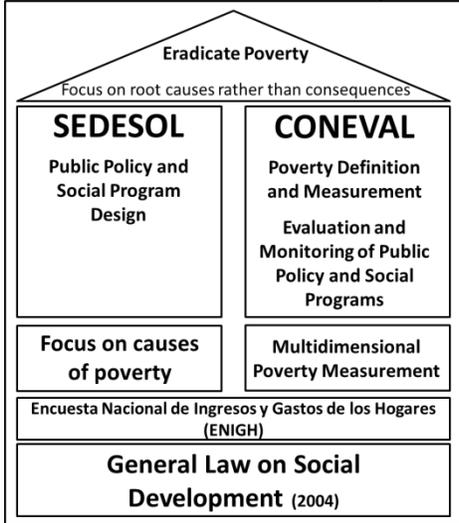
In Mexico, poverty levels are almost unchanged when comparing levels from 1992 and 2014. Why have poverty alleviation efforts not had the desired effect? Why doesn't the paternalistic focus on reducing poverty that is oriented towards the poor themselves show results? For anti-poverty efforts to be effective, a systems change allowing the poor to implement their newly acquired freedoms needs to happen first.

This paper suggests that work needs to be done to increase the levels of consciousness of those living in poverty but also of the privileged classes of Mexican society as these will be the ones able to change the system if it no longer serves their purpose as mentioned by North (1981). In order to do so, the strategy proposed in this paper is to include social innovation in the educational process with University students facilitating the ideation and solution implementation process in marginalized communities. This strategy will guarantee a bottom-up approach to community problem solving with the affected population being involved at every step of the way and will also lead to long-lasting systemic change as the encountered solutions will most likely challenge the underlying structures in Mexico.

2 Poverty in Mexico: Past – Present – Future

In Mexico, poverty became a topic of public interest in the 1970s with an original focus on social inequality and income distribution. In 2004, when the General Law on Social Development came into effect, poverty analysis matured from being a sub-topic of social inequality and income distribution to being an independent field of study due to the governmental interest in including poverty as a permanent item in the public policy agenda. The objective of this law was to institutionalize national social development politics that could address problems stemming from poverty with evaluation and follow-up mechanisms for specific social programs. A national social development system, shown in Figure 1, was created with its institutions, principles and alignments.

Figure 1: The National Social Development System

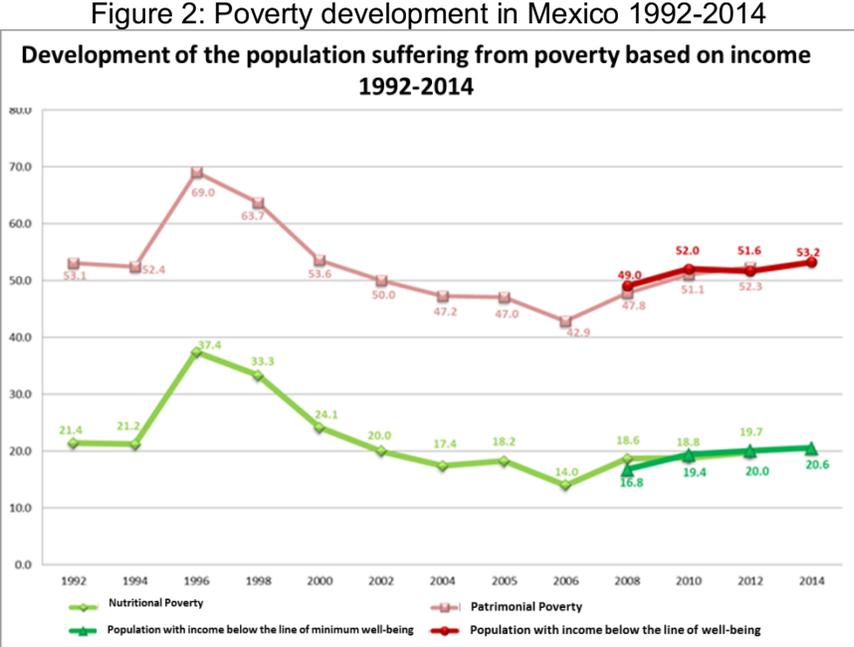


Source: own elaboration

2.1 Past

Despite an ample focus on the magnitude, duration and behavior of poverty, the situation in Mexico has remained unchanged: 53.1% of the population was affected by patrimonial poverty in 1992 and also in 2014 while 21.4% of the population was living in nutritional poverty in 1992 compared to 20.6% in 2014 (CONEVAL, 2015). Hence, over a 20 year period, the poverty levels in Mexico, as measured by CONEVAL, the government agency responsible for the definition and

measurement of poverty in the country, are unchanged. Nevertheless, Figure 2 depicts changes in poverty levels over the 20 year period: 2006 marks the year with the lowest poverty levels for nutritional and patrimonial poverty while the years 1996 and 2008 show significant increases in both poverty levels. This proves that increases in poverty levels go hand in hand with macroeconomic crisis suffered by the country as is the case for the year 1996 and 2008 as a consequence of the 1994 - 1995 and 2008 crisis respectively.



Source: Coneval, 2015

Mexico’s approach to poverty has been paternalistic and oriented towards the poor themselves: 7.7% of the country’s GDP was invested in Social Development in the year 2011 with a strong focus on educational topics (OECD, 2016); over 5,000 anti-poverty programs are in place, administered by SEDESOL; and the Conditional Cash Transfer program Prospera-Oportunidades was implemented in the late 1990’s, setting an example for other countries in the region. Hence, the poverty alleviation efforts of the country have been focused on the micro level, aimed at improving living conditions, health and education of the poor, reflecting the multidimensional view of poverty according to A. Sen’s capabilities approach which, as shown previously, has not led to the desired results of eradicating poverty.

2.2 Present

Today, the poverty topic in Mexico is integrated in the National Development Plan¹ (2013 to 2018) in the chapter on ‘inclusive goals’² that was designed by President Enrique Peña Nieto’s government to address and reduce the average number of social deprivations of the population living in extreme, multidimensional poverty based on six indicators³ defined by CONEVAL.

¹ Plan Nacional de Desarrollo in Spanish
² Meta Incluyente in Spanish
³ The six indicators for social deprivation in Mexico are: 1. Lack of education, 2. Deprivation due to lack of access to health services, 3. Deprivation due to lack of access to social security, 4. Deprivation due to quality and living space, 5. Deprivation due to access to basic housing services, 6. Deprivation due to lack of access to nutrition.

The most recent national poverty measurements were conducted in the year 2014 by CONEVAL based on data provided by the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI)⁴. According to data published by CONEVAL (2015) for the year 2014, the situation as it relates to poverty in Mexico could be described as follows:

- Incidence:
 - Poverty incidence is 46.2%, compared to 45.5% in 2012.
 - 55.3 million (46.2%) of Mexicans live in poverty and 11.4 million (9.5%) in extreme poverty.
 - The poverty incidence in Mexico varies according to different regions of the country. In general terms, the poverty incidence is higher in the geographic south than in the north with the poorest states being Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero.
- Rural compared to urban poverty:
 - Rural Mexico: 40.5% live in moderate poverty, 20.6% in extreme poverty with a total of 17 million Mexicans living in rural poverty which represents 61.1% of the rural population.
 - Urban Mexico: 35.4% live in moderate poverty, 6.2% in extreme poverty with a total of 38.4 million Mexicans living in urban poverty which represents 41.7% of the urban population.

2.3 Future

What is more alarming is that according to analysis conducted by Kadelbach (2017), the poverty situation in Mexico will worsen over the next 32 years. According to the underlying research, the probability of the population remaining in states of lesser social deprivation will decrease while the probability of migrating to states with larger exposure to deprivation will increase by the year 2050. The probability of experiencing three or more social deprivations will be progressively larger. Hence, *ceteris paribus*⁵, any inhabitant who suffers from 1 and 3 social deprivations today shows a higher probability of doubling his/her number of deprivations by the year 2050 than of remaining in the same state. Overall, as was shown by Kadelbach (2017), the situation at hand increases the probability of converting the moderately poor and the non-poor with one social deprivation into extremely poor or of transforming the transitory poor into chronically poor by almost five times. Also, there was shown to be no automatic connection between GDP growth and poverty exit times in Mexico and individuals suffering from more than 50% of social deprivations appeared to be insensitive to GDP growth. The research paints the picture of a country trapped in poverty unless radical changes in economic and social conditions in Mexico are to take place. The key elements that seem to be responsible for this future scenario are rigid and little competitive markets and an unequal distribution of resources between sectors, regions, cities and individuals to name a few. Overall it can be said that institutional, cultural, political and religious factors that exist in Mexico don't allow the poor to benefit from the growth of the country's market economy.

The picture painted by the observed poverty development in Mexico since 1992 and the research conducted on possible future scenarios is grim. The multidimensional approach to poverty, that has been the basis for anti-poverty policies in the country, seems to be necessary but not sufficient to alleviate poverty in Mexico. There are deprivations that are indifferent to changes in GDP due to the fact that they are more related to income distribution. Therefore, gradual employment policies, differentiated by region and according to the technical abilities of the population that is

⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía in Spanish

⁵ With stable GDP growth rates at current levels.

excluded from the market economy, are recommended to move from a merely aid focused approach to one that leads to structural change in Mexico. The question that this paper tries to address is what needs to change in Mexico to free the country from the poverty trap described earlier.

3 System reality and structural issues in Mexico

As mentioned previously, this paper suggests that structural change in Mexico is necessary in order to reach zero poverty by the year 2030 (SDG #1). Before delving into how structural change can become a reality in Mexico, it is important to understand what a system is and what characterizes the current structure of this system in Mexico.

“A system is a set of things – people, cells, molecules, or whatever – interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. [...] A system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose” (Meadows 2008). According to Merriam-Webster (2017), a system is defined as “an organized set of doctrines, ideas, or principles usually intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole” and “a form of social, economic, or political organization or practice”.

This paper will focus on the characteristics of the social and economic/political systems in Mexico as these seem to be responsible for keeping the country trapped in poverty.

3.1 Social System in Mexico

In order to understand underlying belief systems that form culture and resulting local structures, it is important to gain insight on a country’s history. Mexico was colonialized by Spain in the 16th century. The primary purpose of this exploitation colonialism was to gain resources and land and to spread Christianity. The Spanish minority or the conquerors soon dominated the indigenous population living in the Mexican territory at that time. At first, the Spanish domination was reached by the use of arms. Later, a more subtle colonialization was achieved through the use of religion, advanced technology, institutions from Europe and the overall Spanish culture and ideology. A legal racial caste system was put in place which differentiated three categories of humans that were further broken down into 16 racial subcategories. The casts defined how far up an individual could move within society.

The Spanish elite minority became the ruling class, imposing its rules and institutions on the indigenous population which led to a dual consciousness to surge in the so called New Spain. Vela-Beltran-del-Río (2014) says that “even though minority members have their own set of beliefs, the formal world and institutions veil the real world and the minority’s real interests. This dual consciousness also encourages the masses to accommodate the elite interests before their own, being forced to adapt to the status quo” (Vela-Beltran-del-Río, 2014).

Another legacy from Spanish colonialization is the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico. It was the only Church allowed in the colonial era and enjoyed a privileged position until the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, the Reform and the resulting Constitution of the year 1857 restricted the Church in many of its previous roles. Anti-clerical measures were further enhanced in the Constitution of 1917, following the Mexican Revolution. It wasn’t until the presidency of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) that the Church’s juridical personality was restored. Today, Catholicism is the dominant religion in Mexico with 82.7% of its population being Catholics. The catholic religion and the

dominance of the Church can be felt in Mexican culture today. The belief that everything is God-given and that the human being needs to ask for forgiveness for his/her sins is deeply engrained in everyday behavior.

The Mexican culture can be classified according to the 6 cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (2017) to describe and differentiate cultures worldwide. The cultural scores for Mexico are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Cultural dimensions for Mexico according to Hofstede

Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long Term Orientation	Indulgence
81	30	69	82	24	97

Source: Hofstede, 2017

It becomes apparent that the Mexican society accepts high levels of hierarchy and unequal distribution of power (Power Distance of 81), there is a high level of interdependence among its members (Individualism of 30) and the society is apprehensive of uncertainty (Uncertainty Avoidance of 82) which means that rigid codes of behavior and beliefs are in place. The Mexican culture is normative which means that the society looks to establish the absolute truth, respecting traditions but is also focused on achieving quick results (Long Term Orientation 24).

Mexico’s history as a colonized country has had long lasting effects on different levels of society and their self-worth that can still be felt today. In Mexico, the culture is that of a conquered nation with a clearly defined in-group or those in power and an out-group or the powerless. With that comes deeply engrained inequality between individuals starting with a person’s worth or intrinsic value.

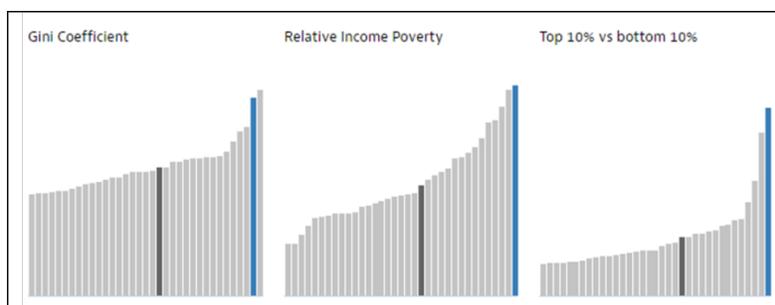
3.2 Economic and Political System in Mexico

The economic and political system in Mexico is extremely corrupt. According to Transparency International (2016), the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for Mexico is ranked 95 out of 168 observed countries with a score of 35⁶ in the year 2015.

Compared to other OECD countries, it can be observed in Figure 3 that Mexico’s inequality (GINI coefficient) is the second highest (blue line)⁷ with 48.1 in the year 2012, while the black line represents the average of OECD countries at 32. In relative income poverty, Mexico occupies the last place at 21.4% in the comparison of OECD countries with an average of 11.2% (OECD 2016).

Figure 3: Comparison of OECD countries

⁶ A score of 0 means that a country is highly corrupt while 100 indicates that it is very clean.
⁷ Out of the OECD countries compared, only Chile has a higher GINI coefficient than Mexico (50 in the year 2011)



Source: (OECD 2016)

Campos et al. (2010) states that in Mexico, 10% of the richest families gained 42% of total monetary income in 2006 while 10% of the poorest families only obtained 1.2%. This reflects the high levels of social inequality observed in the country and shown by Hofstede in his analysis of cultural dimensions as outlined previously.

The market system in Mexico is very rigid and little competitive, which applies for the labor market as well as for the consumer market. These characteristics make it difficult if not impossible for the under-privileged members of Mexican society to participate in the country's market economy. Due to their lack of access to markets, whether these are labor or consumer related, their production does not reach the end customer for lack of a functioning supply chain and they do not have access to well-paying jobs that require a certain educational level. The lack of opportunities has demotivating effects.

Efforts to providing access to consumer markets for the poor have been made. The Hybrid Value Chain promoted by ASHOKA, which combines social entrepreneurship with business scale is an example. In order to reach systemic change, scale is important and many more projects of this caliber are required in order to make change happen.

The lack of opportunities in the labor market reduces people's employability and in turn their interest in and the value of education. The labor market could be reinforced and strengthened, especially in marginalized areas, by supporting the development of certain industries or clusters that require an educated work force and thus providing a lucrative, long-term incentive for those that attend school and obtain a degree.

Summarizing the above, structural change could be geared towards a decrease in corruption, a more equal society (income equality), and a more flexible and inclusive market system.

3.3 Systemic Change

As has been shown, governmental efforts to alleviating poverty in Mexico have not led to the desired results over the past decades and the future looks even less promising for reaching the SDG #1 goal by the year 2030. This paper therefore focuses on possible solutions that go beyond the paternalistic, micro level approach to combating poverty that has been predominant in Mexico. Macías Vázquez (2014) claims that "the elimination of poverty requires structural, institutional, economic and social reforms that eradicate inequality that reproduces poverty"⁸ (Macías Vázquez

⁸ Author's translation from the original text in Spanish to English

2014) and therefore speaks of a need for structural or systemic change to alleviate poverty and hence a focus on the macro level.

Profound, long-term systemic change is the result of a changed underlying belief system with an increased level of consciousness that leads to a change in the overall structure of a society and in turn promises to alleviate poverty in the country. The complete causal chain of achieving zero poverty in Mexico by the year 2030, and as suggested by this study, is shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4: The proposed causal chain for reaching SDG #1



Source: own elaboration

But the structure of a country and a society is based on its history, its values, its constitution and its division of power. Social structures and belief systems are not easily changed as these changes could potentially jeopardize the current privileges of the leading group of people or families. Systems are created by those in power and protect and reinforce the interests of the ruling class. According to North (1981), institutions create an infrastructure that helps people create order and reduce uncertainty and those in power are the ones able to make changes to the system if it no longer serves their purpose. There are different examples throughout history where a change in the belief system of the powerful or the newly influential class led to long-term systemic change: the Renaissance, the French and Russian Revolutions, World Wars I and II, the Indian Independence, and the end of Apartheid in South Africa to name a few.

Following the causal chain discussed previously, in order for systemic change to happen, the underlying belief system of the ruling or influential class needs to change. But how can such a change be brought about? Societies share levels of consciousness that are deeply engrained in every individual member’s behavior and thought process. We are social beings with the need for belonging. The human socialization process, which begins in early childhood, is guided by those deeply held societal beliefs that allow for the individual to be accepted as a member of a society, able not only to understand the commonly defined rules – written and unwritten - but to behave accordingly. These beliefs are therefore deeply engrained in every person’s identity and are difficult to change. The first step to eradicating poverty in Mexico by the year 2030 is therefore to change the underlying societal belief system, by taking the overall characteristics of the country and its current situation into consideration as described previously.

Hence, the proposal of this paper is a two-pronged approach to creating a higher level of consciousness among the poor on the one hand and the more privileged members of society on the other. An increased level of consciousness not only about the world’s pressing problems but also about the responsibilities, preoccupations and issues of each and every member of society can potentially lead to structural change and to an increased impact of social development policies on sustainable development. This conceptual study explores strategies for developing a higher level of social consciousness that promises to have a long term positive effect on poverty levels in Mexico.

4 A two-pronged approach to structural change

This paper is based on a two-pronged approach to generating systemic change by elevating levels of consciousness. Previous research pointed out that it is not sufficient to work with the poor themselves in order to eradicate poverty in Mexico due to the fact that the current system does not allow for the poor with an increased level of consciousness to implement their newly achieved freedom. What is the value of increased levels of schooling if there isn't a labor market that values or recompenses these additional efforts? Why increase agricultural or production of goods if there is no market to sell these products to? Why make an effort if levels of inequality are so high that it is impossible for the poor to generate sufficient income or to be able to participate actively in society?

But how can levels of consciousness of the poor and the privileged members of Mexican society be increased in one concerted effort? This study explores social innovation integrated into the educational system as a means to change the underlying societal belief system of the two groups of society discussed earlier. Social innovation is a new concept that has evolved over the past decade. It is innovation that searches for a new solution to an existing social problem with a widespread impact and in turn challenges and changes the underlying system conditions that caused the identified problem. Based on a bottom-up approach to social problem solving, the affected communities themselves identify social issues that they are experiencing. But, identified problems are often symptoms or consequences of an underlying, much more complex topic. As we live in a complex world, it is sometimes difficult to clearly identify the problem itself and even less so to define the root cause of observed social challenges. In addition, involved stakeholders often don't share the same views, there is no fixed or final solution readily available and the issues can sometimes be a symptom of another problem.

As suggested in this study, social innovation can be applied as a two-pronged educational element with the purpose of increasing levels of consciousness at different levels of Mexican society that promises to lead to systemic, long-term change.

4.1 Social Innovation to increase levels of consciousness

The individuals that are identified as living at the bottom of the pyramid in Mexican society are the first group addressed by social innovation as proposed by this conceptual study. As shown, the approach to poverty in Mexico has been paternalistic in the past without reaching the desired results of alleviating poverty in the country. Therefore, it is important for the affected population to participate in the process of defining their social issues, the root-causes and a possible solution in a first step and to be the authors and implementers of the identified solution in a second step. It is not only important for the poor themselves to understand their social problems but also to own the solution. But oftentimes, the marginalized people of society lack the level of consciousness that would enable them to help themselves by applying the concept of social innovation. The first pillar consists in organizing students of the local, marginalized communities that are currently attending the highest levels of education available in their areas. Schooling levels in poor areas of Mexico are often low with an average of 8 years of school attendance.

The second pillar for increasing consciousness, as proposed by this study, are Mexico's University students, the so called millennials. According to Goldman Sachs (2017), this generation, born between 1980 and 2000, is characterized by their interest in having access instead of bearing the burdens of ownership which has given rise to the so called 'sharing industry'. They are highly interested in their physical well-being and in social issues and consider themselves an essential part of society which goes hand in hand with responsibility. This

generation's needs are different from those of their parents as they seem to value maximum convenience at lowest cost. The millennial generation is focused on working independently, often in co-working office facilities, where they can develop their work according to their own beliefs and priorities, allowing for personal time to pursue their well-being. Overall, they are looking for increased work-life balance and a way to make a difference in the world. Being self-employed has become the new business model often pursued by this generation. Entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship are now part of University curricula in Mexico, not only for those students enrolled in business programs but for the overall student population. In the 21st century and as a consequence of the global financial crisis, entrepreneurship has become a valid alternative to being employed in the corporate world, the model of past generations.

In Mexico, in order to receive an undergraduate University degree, University students have to complete their Social Service of 480 hours to consolidate the obtained education while at the same time providing a service to society with the final objective of diminishing social inequality. In order to place their students in social service programs, Universities are in contact with foundations, NGOs, non-profit organizations to name a few that provide access to social projects and communities in need. Most of the projects that students work on are administrative in nature or provide a top-down service to those less privileged. Examples are classes taught in communities, office work for foundations or cultural institutions.

Thus, the second pillar suggested by this conceptual study proposes that Mexico's University students complete their Social Service through applied social innovation. They have an academic understanding of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship and can apply their knowledge to guide the poor communities on solving their most pressing social problems. This approach would not only enable them to apply their theoretical knowledge in real life but also to interact with the less privileged members of Mexican society, gaining insight into their view of the world, their social problems and their way of life. This is where the first and second pillars can be combined to jointly raise levels of consciousness.

4.2 The Social Innovation Process

The proposed strategy consists in the University students completing their Social Service by guiding social innovation in the communities in a sequence of workshops. They would orient the local students to identify problems and find solutions. They would also help them with the implementation, especially when prototypes or apps need to be created. Teams should be interdisciplinary to ensure that different issues that surge during the workshops could be adequately addressed. The ideation process or the steps to finding a new story to tell that changes the underlying belief system initiates by understanding and observing the environment, the social structure and personal interactions. In a next step, the observations need to be synthesized to create insight on the problem at hand and its possible root causes. In a third step, ideas on problem solving are generated in a process that first expands and then contracts the number of out of the box ideas to reach the last step of experimentation. This is where the University infrastructure would come into play, providing access to 3-D printers, engineering labs etc. to create prototypes that can be tested. Following the current entrepreneurial approaches of design thinking and lean start up, it is important to test the ideas as quickly as possible with a minimum viable product (MVP) that can then be adjusted and adapted depending on the obtained feedback.

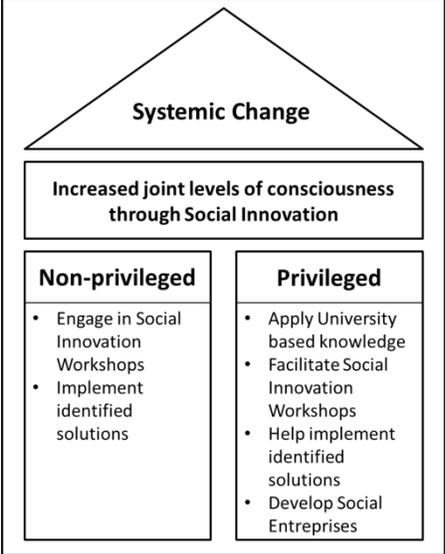
An active social interaction between opposite sides of the social spectrum would thus become a reality and would create an increased level of understanding and empathy between those more and less privileged in society. A personal interaction based on mutual respect and a desire to

grow together would help both sides reach their respective goals while increasing their levels of consciousness. In addition, the children of poor communities would learn to address their problems independently and would create solutions that work for them.

Some of the ideas generated in social innovation sessions could then be turned into social enterprises that prioritize transformative social impact while striving for financial sustainability (Acumen, 2017) by the University students. These solutions could possibly put in question existing structures and could thus lead to long term systemic change in Mexico.

Figure 5 summarizes the two-pronged approach to creating systemic change through increased levels of consciousness as suggested by this conceptual study.

Figure 5: Two-pronged approach



Source: own elaboration

6 Conclusions

As was shown previously, profound systemic change is not possible without the interest of the privileged members of society to make this change a reality as this will cater to their changed needs. Hence, it is not sufficient to increase levels of consciousness among the poor as this will only lead to improved frustration. Systemic change needs to go hand in hand with increased levels of consciousness of the poor. Therefore, the first step to eradicating poverty in Mexico by 2030 lies in increasing levels of consciousness among the privileged for them to create systemic change that will in turn positively affect the situation of those less privileged. It is not a question of giving to the less fortunate to increase their own self-worth following the paternalistic tradition in Mexico but rather of opening up markets and reducing inequality in the belief that this will benefit everyone. Rather than splitting the existing pie into pieces, the pie should be jointly grown to make room for everyone. As pointed out in this conceptual study, a possible way to increasing levels of consciousness of the poor and of the privileged members of Mexican society at the same time is to include social innovation in the educational process. This would increase the level of empathy between the different groups and at the same time social innovation would lead to a change in the system by creating new solutions to current social problems that question existing underlying structures. A focus on structural change in addition to developing the lives of the poor on a micro

level is a necessity that could prove to be sufficient for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG #1) by 2030.

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