

**Chiba University Leading Research Promotion Program  
Online International Seminar (in English)**

**A High Impact Welfare Project against Food Poverty in Mexico:  
Collaboration Difficulties, Governmental Intervention, and  
Its consequences in Fairness**

**Date & Time : 18 Nov. 2022(Fri), Japan**

Abstract: This is a research essay based on the transcript of the seminar “A high impact welfare project against food poverty in Mexico: collaboration difficulties, governmental intervention and its consequences in fairness”. Mr. Alfonso Torrero (Ph.D. candidate from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico) addressed the issue of regional development, poverty, and communities in Mexico from the perspective of fairness, and discussion was initiated, and research ideas were exchanged afterwards.

**Moderator**

•**Prof. Hikari Ishido (Chiba University)**

**Panelists**

•**Mr. Alfonso Torrero (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana)**

•**Prof. Jiro Mizushima (Chiba University)**

•**Prof. Masaya Kobayashi (Chiba University)**

•**Prof. Takayuki Kawase (Chiba University)**

•**Dr. Xiaofang Zhang (Chiba University)**

**Organizer: Chiba University Global Fair Society Program**

### **Introduction (by Prof. Hikari Ishido)**

This online seminar is entitled “A high impact welfare project against food poverty in Mexico: collaboration difficulties, governmental intervention and its consequences in fairness”. Mr. Alfonso Torrero (Ph.D. candidate from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico) will address the issue of regional development, poverty, and communities in Mexico from the perspective of fairness.

### **Opening remark (by Prof. Jiro Mizushima)**

We are going to have a session now, and today’s special guest is Mr. Alfonso Torrero. We are very pleased to hear that you have accomplished your dissertation just a couple of weeks ago, congratulations! And I wish you success!

### **A High Impact Welfare Project against Food Poverty in Mexico: Collaboration Difficulties, Governmental Intervention, and Its consequences in Fairness (Presented by Mr. Alfonso Torrero)**

The welfare project I am going to talk about is called “**Jalisco sin Hambre**”, which is also linked to my dissertation. This project is considered a high impact welfare project against food poverty because a high budget governmental grant, consisting of more than a million dollars, was given to a group of organizations for the purpose of diminishing food poverty in a wide territorial region of Jalisco. This region included the city of Guadalajara and its surroundings, the second most populated area in the country. The relevance of the project is that decreasing food poverty is one of the main issues related to achieving fairness in the country.

Mexico has a long history of welfare programs, which started in 1976. Since then, almost every presidential term, a period that last for six years, the government has made strategic plans with new welfare programs for achieving a fairer society. The first high impact social welfare program was named COPLAMAR (1976). It was a government program that had the objective of reducing economic poverty in Mexico. Since that year, many different programs were created<sup>1</sup>. However, in accordance with Gestión Social y Cooperación CSO (2017), the effectiveness of social programs in Mexico is really low, and just 14 out of 136 programs are successful, 122 programs were working in opacity (lack of transparency in their management and decision processes), had a lack of budget or fell into corruption activities related to the misuse of funds and political partisanship. Therefore, I wanted to study a different program that was not coordinated by a governmental institution, but by a group of organizations belonging to the three economic sectors – public, private and NGOs -, led by a private university. This interorganizational collaboration was meant to join the different expertise and knowledge from every organization. In this way, an integral and strengthen program was going to be created to help the most marginated citizens to move from food and economic poverty. The characteristics of “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” included, first, a non-care approach to fight food poverty instead of giving regular amount of free food to the targeted citizens. Instead, it was planned to train beneficiaries for self-employment. For the aforementioned, “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” tried to adapt the BRAC poverty graduation program (designed by two Nobel Prize winners, Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo from Bangladesh) into Jalisco context.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, **Sistema Alimentario Mexicano** (Mexico Food System, 1980-1982), **Solidaridad** (1988-1994), **Prospera** (1994-1996), **DICONSA** (2007-today), **Cruzada Nacional contra el hambre** (Mexican Crusade against Hunger 2014-2018)

Second, “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” planned to create a food plant in which food wastes (fruits and vegetables) could be transformed in healthy products. Lastly, “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” planned to implement a more effective strategic management and logistics in three food banks.

Here is the image of how the organizations participated in the project (Figure 1). Inside every circle, there is an organization that participated in the project. The light blue one is the coordinator of the project (ITESO), and the red lines are its internal relations. The dotted lines represent the inter-organizational relations between the different organizations. All the actors had to be in contact with the coordinating organization, and each one of them had specific tasks that were discussed with other organizations to guarantee its effective accomplished. For example, there was a legal observatory inside the ITESO that was going to propose some new laws related to food management, as changing laws and restrictions for organizations that wasted food was important to guarantee a better managed and preservation of food quality in the food banks. The legal observatory was in constant with CIATEJ (the light blue circle) to discuss about the best industrial requirements that should be considered in the law changes. Also, they worked directly with CIATEJ to create a food plant to process food wastes. Another example is the food right observatory. The ITESO made a website for all the people to know how important it was to have a good nutrition. The ones in orange are the food banks that were going to receive all the other contributors’ work because their beneficiaries were supposedly going to receive the training from the adaptation of the BRAC program, were going to get better food nests and enjoy a more effective service from the food banks.

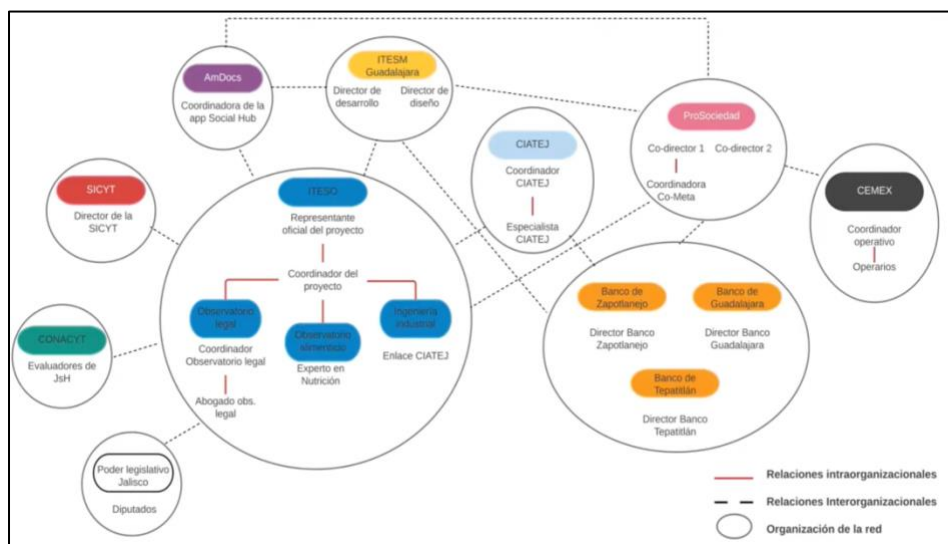


Figure 1

The theoretical framework supporting my research was composed of three main topics, governance, interorganizational relations and policy networks. “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” was organized and governed by different private organizations, which we could also call communities (studied in governance literature). The interorganizational relations framework helped me understand the main characteristics of interorganizational relations. Policy networks theories helped me understand how individual and collective decisions were taken in the project. “Bounded Rationality”, the classic theory of Simon, was very useful to understand how decisions were made individually, without considering the decisions effect in the whole organizational network. The processes approach gave some light about decisions taken collectively in the network. Other important knowledge, e.g. contingency theory and neo institutionalism theory, helped me understand some conflicts between the network actors.

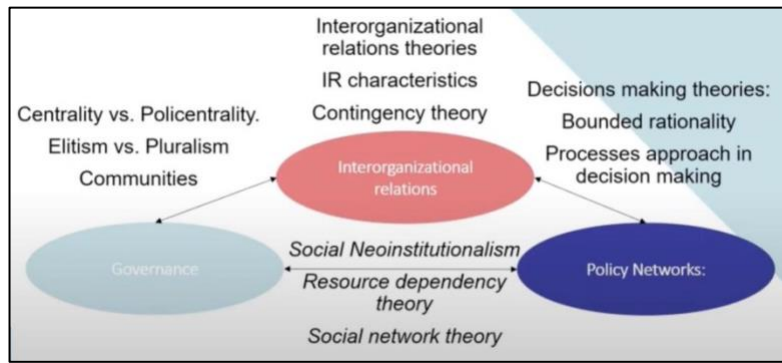


Figure 2

During the project development, it was found that there was a hidden agenda in one of the organizations, the one that decided to abandon the project abruptly in its development stage. This organization was expecting to be recognized as a social responsibility organization, after their collaborators were able to say that they worked in *Jalisco sin Hambre*, they left the project. It is not that unusual that when interorganizational projects are promoted, they show 20 or 30 logos from different organizations, which are supposedly in a social cause, but in reality they are not working on it. Dropping off the project was one of the elements that affected trust in the network. Another phenomenon was that between organizations, there was a conflict in their work values or institutionalized values. For instance, Pro-Sociedad and the food banks, or the ITESM and Pro-Sociedad. An NGO that used to work with the food banks had problems when the internal committee of the banks changed; this internal committee thought that the training given to their employees was not useful. So, they ended the interorganizational relation with the NGO. The relation between other organizations was limited by bounded rationality, there was no collective process approach in decision making. Most of the decisions were not taken by the organizational network but individual decisions. For example, CIATEJ decided by itself how and where to construct the food plant, they just thought about the best choice for a structure but did not discuss with the other actors. This individual decision was taken by bounded rationality and a lack of discussion between the other network actor, that had other values. The result of their decision limited the use of the food plant to one of the food banks, while the others would lose more money in carrying their trucks to the food plant.

Besides, the lack of post evaluation and unkept promises accelerated the slow death of “*Jalisco sin Hambre*” such as unfair use of the food plant, unexpected departure of one organization from the network, and an unexpected end of the training program. In addition, during the pandemic, working restrictions from the government resulted in food banks closure and unattainable activities, which limited organizational work. Besides, after the initial grant finished the government did not provide new funds, and the organizations did not do anything to obtain resources from other possible donors. Finally, the project was taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic; Jalisco governor used “*Jalisco sin Hambre*” name, logo, and social networks to promote the donation of food nests, eliminating one of the main characteristics on the program, which was training people living in food poverty for self-employment, instead of just giving them free food.

Therefore, “*Jalisco sin Hambre*” ended being an assistance program, leaving apart the possible benefits derived from the BRAC graduation of poverty program. And it caused unfair opportunities and representativity of beneficiaries due to the lack of governance. However, I believe that there are still positive outcomes derived from “*Jalisco sin Hambre*”; specially the creation of law reforms related to adequate food management.

### **Review (By Prof. Hikari Ishido)**

In the “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” project, I was really interested in the reasons why there has been this coordination failure, maybe poverty, bounded rationality, or culturally oriented reasons as well. And then in the field of management science, the organizational issues you talked about, reminded me the X-inefficiency issue, which means intraorganizational inefficiency. Simply to say, it means your boss is not in line with the subordinates. And then the subordinates are also thinking differently from the head of the company. Then the company’s whole or the organizational objective will not be achieved under this influence of X-inefficiency.

### **Comment and Q&A**

#### **Prof. Takayuki Kawase**

I am afraid that my question is slightly missing the point or outside of your presentation. My question is about religion, especially catholic Christianity in Mexico. In my opinion, in a lot of pre-modern societies, the religious organizations such as churches or temples have been taking responsibility for social welfare in each society. But in modern society, the governments took over a large part of this responsibility, and it was the same case in Japan, but how about in Mexico? Do Christian churches do something important about social welfare in Mexico?

#### **Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

The “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” project, might be a perfect case of what you are talking about. The project was taken by the Jalisco government to promote their fight against poverty after it had been run for a year. Then, the government passed the responsibility of the program to an organization called **Caritas** that is a Catholic religious organization. But I think that in this case, the program lost its identity after been taken by the government during the pandemic. The main goals of the program were not really accomplished. But yes, there are many religious organizations that work in social welfare and give economic resources to help people.

#### **Prof. Takayuki Kawase**

In my opinion, in a very general way, I guess in Mexico, religious organizations are stronger than in Japan. And the diversity of the actors is very important. I think a lot of Japanese people rely on only the government too much. Of course, the government should take big responsibility, but religious organizations or other organizations also take some responsibility for social welfare. Such diversity is very important. I think the government is one of the most important sectors, but it is just one of the organizations. In Mexico, if the religious organizations have some power or some resources to take responsibility for social welfare, I think we have a lot of things to learn from Mexican society.

#### **Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

I’m not sure about Japan’s context, but here religious organizations and NGOs do a lot of social welfare because the government is not that efficient, and the resources are not adequate, sometimes because of corruption funds are stolen, they are wrongly distributed, etc., so it’s complex work. So, we need a lot of the other economic sectors to help people out of difficult situations or poverty situations.

#### **Prof. Masaya Kobayashi**

I understand that your research pointed to the effect or influence of unfairness regarding a project in your country. How do you think of the relation between the project in your country and fairness, and can you suggest the way to improve fairness concerning to the project in your country?

**Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

First, trust is essential in this temporal interorganizational projects, if different organizations commit to accomplish specific objectives, they must do so. I believe that trust in this project was very fragile. Informality is always present in projects like this one, that last for 2 or 3 years; you really do not know, as much as in other projects, the other actors. I think that trust must be preserved in all circumstances. Trust was related to accomplishing the tasks that the actors said they were going to do. Another thing that can be useful are the reunions between all the actors. In this project it seemed that they heard each other, but at the end, they took decisions differently from what they were supposed to do. I believe that if trust was preserved even in the pandemic scenario, people would do something to work together. But when they lost their interest in the project or when they saw that the other actors were not following what they said, the project started to diminish its effectiveness, which affected the beneficiaries.

**Prof. Masaya Kobayashi**

The problems concerning, for example, trust is influenced by social custom, or economic management, or political factors or so on. So which factor influenced the most of all?

**Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

I think that trust was lost in the interaction between the actors while accomplishing the tasks. I talked about the other factors, for example, lack of funds, or the government taking over the project. But I think in these short-live projects, the glue for people to continue working is that trust could be seen in the actions and in the interactions between the actors. For example, if you told me you would work with me doing a new software program, but you didn't, or you did it in a way without following my indications because you have another work values. This probably happened every day in the interaction of the actors.

**Dr. Xiaofang Zhang**

What do you think is necessary for an effective program?

**Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

I believe that when things went wrong in the project, something should have been done. Besides, a post evaluation of the project would have been useful for the government to notice all the issues that diminish Jalisco sin Hambre effectiveness, this must be really considered in future projects because, at the end, it seemed that there was not the compromise to really obtain the goals. If we don't have money, or if we don't trust the other actors, we will get behind the main goals of the project. I think that it's important to make and follow a daily plan and really complete it, considering all the important parts such as constant evaluation and post evaluation. Also, I believe that the attitude towards government should be changed. If there is a program that has been developed for 3 years, and many efforts were put in the project, it shouldn't be taken by the government that easily. It is important to not let the government promote the project as propaganda and preserve trust, as mentioned before.

**Prof. Hikari Ishido**

I am a development economist in a sense, so I'm really interested in this food related topic, because it must do a lot with Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize in Economics, way of thinking. He mentioned that there is this rational foo idea going on under this – in a capitalized society. Rational fool in the sense that every individual is rationally behaving, trying to maximize his or her own benefit alone. Then what would happen at the societal level is that there would be

poverty gap, income gap, and then you know criminal rate, social unrest and then – so each of the participants in the society is trying to be rational, but foolishly so, because in the end, the society will not be so stable and sustainable, so nobody wanted that kind of society. But because of this rational foolishness, the society cannot solve this issue of like you know volunteering and donations, so irrational conduct of volunteering and donation. Of course, you lose money, and you lose your time, but for a fair society, I guess, it's important. So, if you try to be too rational, then actually you are being too foolish so that is what I was thinking. Then it takes a lot of trust and ethicality and everything to stop being microscopically rational, and stop being foolish at the societal level. So, what is the practical solution?

**Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

I saw it from another perspective, in the sense, that there is not a collective value to think about. There is not collective thinking, or there were no efforts to collectively try to stop problems, and this ended in an unarticulated program that has many different problems. Actors worked individually to solve problems. Maybe we need a more collective oriented culture or promote collective work in education. I think that we are sometimes very mechanical and automatic, just focused on maximizing results without thinking about how to do it; we need to reflect about deeper things that are going on in the planet because we are mainly guided by our micro rationality. I'm not sure that I can say this will solve the problem of social welfare in Mexico. I just took what I saw in the program I studied, what I observed and my interpretations, and that's the answer I have given, the practical answer. There should be other solutions for not working that mechanically, and to really work together with other organizations; we must try to solve the problems considering the knowledge of all the actors and the needs of all of them. For example, communities in poverty, could give ideas about how to make a program better because, sometimes, we think that we are the experts in a topic, but maybe the people living every day in the situation have other ideas more important to consider for these programs.

**Prof. Hikari Ishido**

Maybe to some extent, selfless type of contribution and devotion to this “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” project or any other parts of Mexico or where else in the world that would be needed. So, it shouldn't include too much of economic or financial sort of calculation, but it should be driven by trust and the hope of a fairer society. However, small it might be, that could be the starting point. So, there is no mechanical solution. Mechanical design will definitely be reduced to this rational foolish situation. Or no mechanism is needed, rather maybe trust-based, hope-based small state project. So, in that sense I guess that what you talked about today has a lot to do with this trust-related issue.

**Prof. Jiro Mizushima**

I would like to know about the status or position of “**Jalisco sin Hambre**” in Mexico, in Mexican context. Is this project typical in Mexican context or is it quite unique? Why did you choose this project? Do you think it could be continued as a unique case or a typical case?

**Mr. Alfonso Torrero**

Jalisco is the second most populated state in Mexico, and its economy is not as bad as in some other states like Oaxaca or Chiapas, the southern states with more poverty. The project itself was innovative because it was supposed to use an integral approach to fight poverty, working with the food banks, creating a food plant, and adapting the BRAC model from the Bangladesh Association. The latter model was also called the Graduation of Poverty Program. Banerjee and

Duflo, the authors of the model, won the Nobel Prize because all the characteristics of their training have been proven to help people be self-employed and really overpass their poverty situation with better economic solidity after being part of this program. So, I found it interesting and wanted to know how it would work in Mexico.