

Study on Social Organizations' Role During the Process of Antipoverty in Argentina

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Abstract

From 1970s to the beginning of 1990s, Argentina had experienced a rapid process of immiserization which led to the increase of unemployment and the reduction of income. During the period from 1990s to the beginning of 21st century, "poverty relapse" once again, both the absolute poverty population and the relative poverty population have increased exponentially, and then here came a new poor class which consisted of the middle class. During this process, social organizations in Argentina engaged in the labor training progress and economic development plan which were proposed by the government, playing the role of employment assistance in the process of antipoverty, from charity relief to technical assistance, from disorder to professionalize progress focusing on organization ability construction, from independence to collaboration and complementarity with government. Social organizations have made up the deficiency of the market mechanism and inadequacies of government poverty alleviation work, which have accumulated rich experience, and social organizations become an important force of antipoverty in Argentina.

Key words: Argentina; Social organization; New poverty; Antipoverty

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INTRODUCTION

In Argentina, social organizations have a long history of fighting against the poverty which could be dated to the period before the foundation of its national state. Since then, social organizations like the church and the charity provided deliverance to those living a poor life has become a tradition. From 1970s to 21st century, Argentina has experienced the process of immiserization and "poverty relapse" (Gao, 2012). During this period, social organizations in Argentina engaged in the labor training progress and economic development plan which made up the deficiency of the market mechanism and inadequacies of government poverty alleviation work. By accumulating the rich experience, those social organizations have become an important force of antipoverty in Argentina.

In this article, issues related to the poverty situation in Argentina, different stages when social organizations participated in the process of antipoverty, social organizations' engagement into the government antipoverty, and the obvious supplement for the deficiency of market through their engagement will be focused on. Then, characters of the engagement can be concluded which will enlighten us a lot.

1. THE POVERTY SITUATION IN ARGENTINA FROM 1970S

From 1970s to the beginning of 1990s, Argentina had experienced a rapid process of the immiserization which led to the increase of unemployment and the reduction of

income. During the period from 1990s to the beginning of 21st century, “poverty relapse” once again, both the absolute poverty population and the relative poverty population have increased exponentially, and then here came the “new poor”. According to Alberto Minujin, “the new poor” refers to the middle class who maintains the education to some extent, possess house property and asset with an insufficient income, and struggle upon the poverty line (Minujin, 1995). Up to 2002, the number of the “new poor” reached 4.3 million which occupied 35.8% of the total population and had increased more than 20 times comparing with the number in 1982 (Osava, 2004), a kind of “new poverty” has formed.

Firstly, the “new poverty” contains the technological unemployment. During the economic development in the capitalist world, labor force replaced by technology could be far more than additional jobs brought by industrialization (Song, 2013). In 1990s, middle and low income groups were sacrificed by the Neo-liberal reform in Argentina, there were about 26.7% of individuals or 18.9% of households couldn’t obtain sufficient income to maintain their life in the end of 1990s (Hanley et al., 2005, p.92). Among these people, the unemployment of technical personnel whose age were from 25 years old to 29 years old have increased, from 1990 to 1999, that unemployment rate rose from 1.3% to 7.0% whose amplification outnumbered 200% (Bárcena & Narcís, 2008, p.99). Secondly, the “new poverty” contains informal employment. Relevant researches in Great Buenos Aires made by Vicente Espinoza and Gabriel Kessler has showed that occupations with a small employment scale met a disappearance of working-class jobs from 1980 to 2001, the public sector had to face to the threaten of the decrease of employment jobs, and a huge amount of permanent jobs were replaced by those informal and unstable (Kessler & Espinoza, 2003, p.33).

In terms of location, poverty is distributed within provinces along a population density gradient running from dispersed rural to urban, and across regions. From more developed urban area, through the urban periphery and smaller towns (grouped rural areas), to the more remote areas, the living conditions declined gradually (Verner, 2006, p.5). In short, poverty in Argentina has a wide cover range in geography.

2. SEVERAL STAGES WHEN SOS PARTICIPATED IN THE PROCESS OF ANTIPOVERTY

Social organizations’ participation into the process of antipoverty in Argentina had started before the foundation of the national state, four stages have been experienced during its history.

The first stage was in the initial stage which was from 15th century to 18th century, including the church

organization mainly consisting of the clergy and the amateur, and the charity institution which offered temporary assistance to the rabble. This kind of social organizations had a strong character of religion, basing on the morality, they combined religious mission with social assistance.

The second stage was the transitional period which was from the beginning of 18th century and 1980s. With the reinforcement of state authority, national administration intensified a lot which meant the state undertook almost all of the public welfare with the expansion of labor union. However, the development of antipoverty social organizations seemed to be slower than they had been before. For instance, the Society of Beneficence founded during this period developed well due to the constant financial support provided by the state, but it was also managed by the state as both the private and public entity which diminished the vitality of a social organization (Thompson, 1997). Social organizations in this stage paid more attention on social problems, and their religious character lessened which could also be considered as a progress of social organizations’ secularization. Social elites organized different social organizations to supply assistance during the time when the government lacked of relevant abilities, that made the financial source of social organizations various.

The third stage was the golden age of those organizations which was from 1980s to 1990s. Social organizations incorporated with each other beyond the state and developed a regional alliance, providing public service such as education and sanitation with the finance donated from the government, enterprises and international institutions (China Institute of Contemporary International, para.2, 2010, p.340). During this period, social organizations focused more on the professionalization, they not only helped the poor, but also prevented the poverty. Meanwhile, they improved their capacities through the collaboration between diverse organizations as well. The allocation of funds and the recognition of qualifications for the poor were supervised by relevant sectors in the government in order to avoid corruption and put the management for social organizations into legislation. Moreover, support from local enterprises which was given to social organizations increased continuously through various foundations (Thompson, 1997), endowing social organizations which took part in the process of antipoverty more funds.

From the 21st century, it is the fourth stage considered as a stable period. The international institutions have decreased their support to Latin America and its social organizations, but these organizations still developed smoothly. With the government seceding from the health field, here came a tendency which refers to the guidance by the Secretary of Social Development, the self-development by social organizations and the

constant service by voluntary institutions. Since then, from charity relief to technical assistance, from disorder to professionalize progress focusing on organization ability construction (He, 2009), from independence to collaboration and complementarity with government (Fan, 2010), social organizations have become an important force during the process of antipoverty in Argentina.

3. SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS' SUPPLEMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT

From the mid-20th century, with the reinforcement of the state authority, the state possessed a huge amount of resource, dominating the antipoverty activities and interfering in social organizations' activities, which made these organizations become the representative or the supplement of government when they were engaged into the process of antipoverty. Here come the details.

3.1 Implementing the Public Policy

During the period when the process of antipoverty was dominated by the government, there were two ways of implementing the public policy for the social organizations, one was being the associated agency of government, accepting the financial support from the government and representing the government to implement the policy, such as the Society of Beneficence.

The Society of Beneficence founded in 1842 was the largest and the most important public assistance agency, it was sponsored by the government and managed by private entities, consisting of rich women's groups. Before the mid-20th century, its main mission was to carry out philanthropy and social assistance which principally aimed at the vulnerable groups, especially orphans and widows, afterwards, both male and female laborers attained the assistance (Viladrich & Thompson, 1996). The Society of Beneficence executed public policies related to education and social assistance, accepting the donation from individuals and obtaining financial support from the state. For example, the subsidy given by the government occupied about 90% of its total budget annually (Ibid.). The organization was an intermediary of the government for fighting against poverty, and became both the private and public entity simultaneously supervised by the government.

Social assistance was a complicated scope because it provided public resource for private persons which caused a chaotic attribution problem of the Society of Beneficence. In Thompson's research, it became an official state entity under the control of the Minister of External Relations and Culture in 1908. Then in 1984, it was transferred directly to a government entity, the National Department of Social Assistance. Finally, from 1950 onwards, it was replaced by the Eva Perón Foundation which was another quasi-governmental private institution (Thompson, 1997).

The second way is the supplement to the governmental functions. For example, during the implementation of the Food Safety Plan directed by the Ministry of Social Development in December 2001, social organizations which advocated Food Rescue Program could be an active participant. Those organizations played its role primarily in Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Posadas and La Plata, they followed strict sanitary standards, and gathered leftover from parties and receptions which would be offered to those who needed food urgently (Huang, 2016). This activity not only avoided waste, but also gave a hand to the poor. Furthermore, this kind of organizations provided the poor with service in a wide-ranged and flexible way which became the crucial supplement to the government work.

Likewise, after the financial crisis in 2001, the Family Planning dominated by the government and developed by the communions and social organizations (Office UNDPE, 2009, p.21) was a similar example which became a new trend of social organizations' participation in antipoverty in 21st century. These organizations which incorporate with the government are more voluntary, they also keep a strong capacity when they get less or no financial support from the government. It suggests a character of the equal conversation between social organizations and the government.

3.2 Representing and Maintaining the Government's Image

The Eva Perón Foundation founded in 1940s, chiefly providing material or currency assistance for the poor, building houses for the poor family, setting up educational institutions and medical institutions, creating employment opportunities for minority groups and so on (Viladrich & Thompson, 1996). The establishment of the foundation had purposed on not only improving living conditions for the poor, but also gaining reputation of the Perón Government in terms of political considerations.

During the Perón Government which followed an independent model of capitalism, setting up a welfare state and helping the poor were its key work and necessary measure to maintain the stabilization of Argentina's society. The Eva Perón Foundation offset the deficiency of such a single way and a limited area served by the government. Meanwhile, according to the special status of Eva Perón, in 1950, it was given power over all social assistance establishments, and by law it also received 3 per cent of all salaries as well as private funds (Thompson, 1997). Moreover, Eva Perón paid attention to civic right while designing programs, especially for maintaining the civic satisfaction with social equity, which promoted the foundation to be a representative of social equity in the mean time.

The Society of Beneficence and the Eva Perón Foundation also had important effects on representing the government and maintaining the government's image

while providing material poverty alleviation, the former put into a part of the government, and the latter won political support for the Perón Government. It stated that during the process of poverty alleviation in Argentina, social organizations varied from behaving independently to collaborate with the government. Besides, The Society of Beneficence and the Eva Perón Foundation encouraged women to enter the society and engaged in philanthropy which enhanced the women's status by enlarging their public role, thereby women's poverty alleviation would be strengthened. Social organizations like these two ones admitted governmental leadership and protected the government's image during the antipoverty, which made a great contribution to the progress of Argentina's society.

3.3 Promoting the Development of Communities

During the antipoverty in urban area, communities became the emphasis of social organizations' work. The material support, the vocational training and the loan assistance were carried out in communities, especially

in the Jewish community. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) started participating in the poverty relief for Jewish communities in Argentina in 1980s. It developed rapidly in 2001 when Argentina experienced its financial crisis and then became a famous humanitarian organization all around the world (Murtaza & Austin, 2015). The AJJDC devoted itself into reducing the starvation and the hardship through succoring the poor Jewish, supporting the cooperation between the Jewish welfare organizations and voluntary organizations in order to provide social assistance for those poor Jewish families, and designing comprehensive strategies according to target groups' demands for welfare, employment and community re-engineering. Figure 1 includes the elements of AJJDC's comprehensive three-dimensional strategy, at the peak of its programming, the AJJDC and its partners provided aid to almost 40,000 people (AJJDC, 2011), while its budget reached 5 million dollars (Wald, Dror, & Della Pergola, 2005).

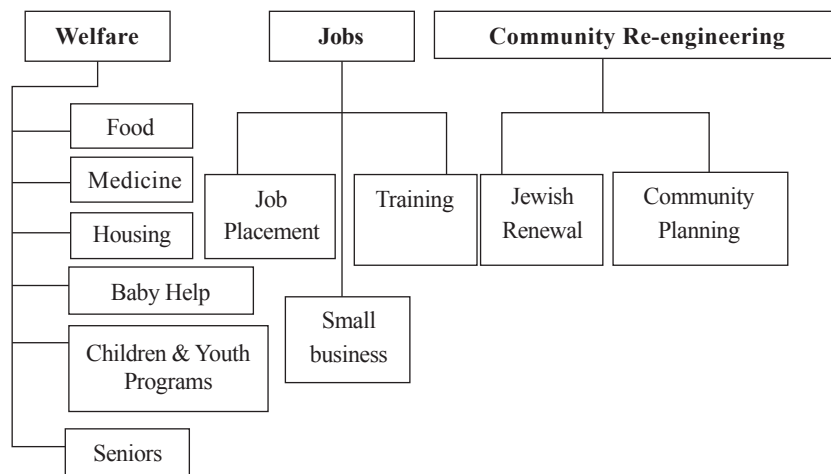


Figure 1
The AJJDC Multidimensional Program Strategy

Source: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, "Argentina: Facing the Crisis" (2011, p.18). New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Here are the AJJDC's specific activities:

(a) Welfare Supplement. In early 2002, the AJJDC proposed to create a new social assistance center in the Argentina Jewish community in order to provide assistance to the large number of families that were on the waiting lists for local services. Besides of food, medicine, housing, baby help and other activities which aimed at different age groups, the AJJDC also proposed special requirements to antipoverty social organizations in the community (Murtaza & Austin, 2015). Moreover, the AJJDC played its important part not only in the welfare supplement, but also in standard design and management. Here are some details about that:

Firstly, the criteria of the eligibility for assistance, the policy of service management, and the assistance procedure of flexibility were decided by both the AJJDC

and its partners for assuring that each families' basic demands could be satisfied (Ibid.). The poverty was defined by the income, the known and easily identified poor family could be succored preferentially. These two standards made the criteria of welfare supplement simple and easily counted which promoted supply efficiency.

Secondly, a centralized community information system was established in order to avoid the waste caused by an overlapping assistance which could be significant experience for those non-Jewish social organizations (American Jewish Organizations). However, the experience was based on limited target groups, centralized communities and homogeneous value which meant still tough to establish and perfect the whole community information system for all poor families in Argentina.

Thirdly, with the increase of the poor Jewish groups, social assistance centers distributed in different areas in Argentina have been expanded (Ibid). The AJJDC participated in and managed assistance programs directly, concentrating on employing people with professional skills and management abilities which enhanced the using of information technology, then the capacity of the existing assistance centers could be reinforced. In addition, assistance of health, rent, living expenses and public infrastructures were added into the original scope.

(b) Community Re-engineering. According to the literature, social organizations can make use of community organizations and grassroots organizations for eliminating poverty. The aim of AJJDC's community re-engineering was to help the Jewish community with self-financing and the unity among the Jewish group (Ibid.). Here come the details:

Firstly, community strengthening was realized through transmission of Jewish values (Ibid.). The life cycle programs illustrated the concept of community integration and the significance of volunteer efforts, a series of well-attached community celebrations helped the community to get together and promoted the community's consolidation. At the same time, people with the disturbance of unemployment and poverty could rediscover themselves. These activities were held mainly in the Jewish communities in Buenos Aires, what other communities could learn was that through building the community culture, social organizations were able to inspire community residents of helping each other mutually and motivate the poverty group to be more positive.

Secondly, in order to research the community's population, the Center of Studies for Latin America Jewish Communities was established (Ibid). For one thing, sociodemographic characteristics, religious practices, institutionalization, customs and habits were considered as the basis of making decisions. For the other thing, these studies helped the AJJDC to identify and position the poverty group in a faster, more precise and more scientific way.

The AJJDC is not only an international social organization, but also a religious organization. Its participation into poverty alleviation has shown a more frequent cooperation between the local social organizations and the international ones. It provides those groups having the same belief with relevant services, including welfare, jobs and psychological concern which have manifested the importance of social organizations' engagement into poverty alleviation.

4. SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS' SUPPLEMENT TO THE MARKET

Generally speaking, the market can only offer a relatively free environment of competition in terms of promoting

employment, the disadvantages of the poverty group are not improved radically. During the poverty alleviation in different countries, social organizations have meaningful impacts on the employment through providing jobs, professional training and employment loans which makes up the deficiency of the market to some extent. Here are several aspects about it.

4.1 Developing and Promoting Vocational Technology

In Argentina, the technological unemployment and the informal employment stimulated the development of professional training, and social organizations have become those carrying on it. In San Pedro, social organizations help farmers to gather to expand the new technological ideas (Nardi, 2011, p.146). For instance, the Institute of Social Development and Human Promotion (INDES) has successfully created and promoted agricultural technology and science suited for local families, it is famous for its promotion of the agro-ecology development and the organic products. Another example, the Union of the Family Farmers' School (UNEFAM) organized by the farmers and local schools, devotes itself into the tertiary education aiming at local development and non-agriculture income diversity (Nardi, 2011, pp.148-149).

In Misiones, the Union of Rural Technicians Workers of Misiones (UTTERMI) dedicates in the technology communication between agriculture and non-agriculture which is good for the innovation of technology. It doesn't provide vocational training directly, but support agro-ecology, local markets and commercialization of farmers' produce, preservation of genetic material, organic production, soil conservation and so on (Ibid., p.147). Social organizations like it are not established for poverty alleviation, they ask different countries for technology assistance and learn beneficial experience from international ones, manifesting the diversity of social organizations which participating in the poverty alleviation in Argentina.

4.2 Enhancing the Employability of Poverty Group

The UNEFAM emphasizes the importance of agriculture management of resources, sustainable development of agro-ecology, empowerment to local residents and cultivation for other social organizations as well, affording small infrastructure construction and health education (Ibid., p.148). It incorporates with the Institute of Agriculture Education (IEA) and the UTTERMI, providing re-employment education to farmers and the urban middle-class. The Association for Human Promotion and Local Agroecological Development (APHyDAL) is the one cooperating with German Catholic Church, founded in 1991. It aims of organizing human resource and cultivating local social organizations, enhancing the employ ability of poverty

group in psychology and technology education (Kasiañuk, 2008). The INDES and some other organizations also advocate the diversification of crop and food production, proposing to develop the local market and implementing comprehensive farm management (Nardi, 2002, p.27). On one hand, these activities have made the agriculture, agro-industry and market requirement combine with each other which benefits the job supplement. On the other hand, they also create a fair competitive environment for market participation which allows farmers' full play to make a better life. Moreover, some social organizations response to the rural development planning made by the government and implement activities according to its sustainable development. All of them have played a positive role in the vocational training for poverty group, the supplement of jobs and the exploitation of local human resource.

Forni Floreal and Neiman Guillermo point out that the female-headed household is more impoverished than the male-headed one in poverty group, hence, there is a connection between women's participation in production and its family's poverty condition (Forni, Floreal, & Neiman, 1994). In San Pedro, social organizations encourage women to take part in the process of production which is significant for promoting women's employment. It is not only good for relieving the dilemma of female poverty group's employment, but also beneficial to reduce the poverty caused by the women's unemployment.

4.3 Job Assistance in Communities

Given Murtaza's and Austin's research, the AJJDC has carried out the program helping the Jewish poverty group to work again during the process of antipoverty. Firstly, the AJJDC provides job supplement directly in its own planning. Secondly, it collaborates with the Ariel Job Center in order to relieve the poverty caused in high unemployment rate. With the assistance of Tzedakah Foundation, they help those unemployed through technology consultation and training, re-employment loan and timely employment information. Furthermore, they execute the Subsidized Employment Program (PES in Spanish) for providing the participants necessary skills of entering the labor force market which reduces the poverty group's dependence on social assistance. For preventing those who have obtained jobs from losing jobs again, the AJJDC also requires a regular feedback in order to maintain the re-employment group's capacity for work (Murtaza & Austin, 2015).

From 1990s, one of the characteristics of Argentina's poverty condition was the "new poverty" referring to the poverty resulted in the technological unemployment and informal employment. Both the vocational training supplied by social organizations in San Pedro and the poverty alleviation program into communities designed by the AJJDC have reflected the effect on job assistance.

They engage in the labor training program and economic development program, including assisting the government with decision making and policy implementation. Their behaviors have shown not only the "poverty alleviation", but also the "poverty precaution".

CONCLUSION

All in all, during the long process of antipoverty in Argentina, social organizations have positively implemented the poverty alleviation policy which maintains the government's image by playing active roles in vocational training, employment guidance, welfare supplement and culture concern. Here comes the abundant experience learned from Argentina.

Firstly, the advantage of social organizations' nature of grassroots should be played. These organizations in Argentina originated from church and philanthropy institute with the original intention which could be considered as "antipoverty". Thus, those poverty alleviation programs in Argentina were designed according to exact demands of poverty group which has followed a path from bottom to top. As a result, antipoverty activities are more extensive and creative which can be a reflection of social organizations' long-time independent development in Argentina.

Secondly, social organizations' capacity of developing independently ought to be cultivated. These organizations in Argentina were established before the foundation of its national state, developing for about 200 years without help of the government which presents their independence and rich experience. During the latter collaboration with the government, they not only participate in policy implementation but also keep their own judgment and execution which reveals its strong adaptation. In recent years, although international society has reduced assistance given to poverty alleviation in Argentina, the stable progress of antipoverty still shows the steady status of domestic social organizations.

Finally, social organizations' work of poverty alleviation needs to be professionalized. Early social organizations in Argentina were mainly Catholic Church which made the religious characteristic remain alive today. Some of international and domestic social organizations provide services in communities, aiming at specific groups with centralized resource. Meanwhile, some organizations not only engage in poverty alleviation, but also assist the government with the local economic development, showing their expertise in different fields like job assistance.

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