

THE SOCIAL AND HUMAN SERVICES SECTORS AS INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

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My presentation intends to share with you some thoughts on Cuba's transition process, viewed as the sequence of events that will unfold in the island and abroad, once Fidel Castro ceases to control Cuba's life.

Hopefully, my comments will encourage Cuba's stakeholders to pay greater attention to micro social issues and challenges, perhaps not as transcendental as Cuba's constitutional reform, the future of the military, or the privatization of Cuba's economy, but nevertheless important issues that can speed up or retard the implementation of transition policies, not to mention their impact on the wellbeing of Cubans in the island.

The concepts of transition, succession, or change that are often used to describe Cuba's post-Castro governance and social institutions, need not be mutually exclusive, at least for analytical purposes. Planners and policy makers should consider these three concepts as stages and dynamic scenarios, providing useful contexts for an unchartered process leading to a more open society.

I say this because I believe the minute Fidel Castro is not in control any longer, change will begin, that is, significant institutional changes will take place toward a market economy, a more open society, and more democratic ways. This does not mean that Cuban society is static or that nothing has changed since 1959; I think most, if not all, of us in this audience are aware of that. But, Castro's succession will automatically begin a more profound transition process,

as I believe a Castro-like polity and economic system are not sustainable without the presence of Fidel Castro himself. Therefore, it may not be as important to argue over these terms as it is to study at the micro social level the structure and functions of Cuba's programs and organizations, particularly those delivering social and human services to the population at large. Furthermore, the transition process could be sequential, and with different points and degrees of impact on Cuban society, in which case static models and broad generalizations on social changes may be of relatively limited value to decision makers.

Some will argue that once freedom is anticipated or perceived to be within reach, social and economic changes will take place quickly and comprehensively, and a free and open society will develop overnight. Surely, most Cubans and non-Cubans who envision a free, democratic, and open society would like this to be the case. My own guess, incidentally, is that Cuba's transition will move faster toward a market economy, and more tentatively into an open, pluralistic, democratic society. If this were to happen, it would be the reverse of the transition experience of many former soviet bloc countries, where political advances happened faster and more successfully than economic reforms.

Forecasting aside, planners and policy stakeholders have looked at the transition experience in former communist countries such as Russia, Poland, Romania, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and their closest example in Latin America, Nicaragua. The common factor in the transition experience of these countries

is that change evolved in different ways, in response to both external and internal variables. Indeed, in Cuba's case, the post-Fidel era is likely to evolve according to both internal power struggles and well documented geopolitical factors ever present in Cuba's history.

Let me now underscore the need to pay greater attention to some micro social issues we may face as Cuba's transition moves toward modernization and more efficient, decentralized public services, with greater input by consumers and beneficiaries.

We will begin with a couple of educational challenges. For example, two years ago, Cuba reported that 86,000 youngsters were out of school and jobs; and two decades ago, Raúl Castro himself acknowledged an even greater number of marginalized youth. Needless to say, as Cuba becomes a more open, competitive society some of these youngsters will be struggling for survival within or outside the law, and society will need a sooner than later solution to help these youth become productive, self reliant members of society. And they will not be the only ones in need of training, or formal education, as in today's Cuba, many teachers are youngsters themselves with a 9th grade education, trained in so called "emergency" programs. Moving up a step in the educational ladder, one could ask what future government entity would or should have administrative control over the Camilo Cienfuegos pre-universitarios. Should it be the Ministry of the Armed Forces (MINFAR), or a civil society institution?

I was glad to see two University of Miami's Cuba Transition Project publications recommend that independent educators in Cuba begin to write a new ethical context of Cuba's education. Will this be accomplished at an early stage of the transition process, or will it resemble Russia's experience, where Soviet era textbooks are still being used across the country more than five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Likewise, it is not too early to begin work on Cuba's history books for the post-Castro era, or to prepare tentative plans and network with international resources needed for the training and retraining of Cuban teachers.

The planning of Cuba's educational reform can start now, especially inside Cuba, and remain open as a dynamic process that unfolds as Cuban educators and intellectuals catch up with world events and ideas banned from Cuba's cultural life during four decades. The sooner it happens, the faster Cuba's educational system as a whole will move toward democratic, pluralistic values based on 21st century world views.

Let us consider now the "Pioneros" organization for young children and the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDRs), and ask whether these organizations will or should have a role to play in post-Castro's Cuba. Should they be dissolved? Reorganized? Can they help train parents to become involved in their children's civic education? Are NGOs in Cuba and abroad preparing to become involved in this process? Again, in Russia, the "Pioneros" organization was abruptly dissolved, leaving an institutional vacuum in the availability of after school care.

Finally, let us raise a couple of questions on labor issues. For instance, who will be responsible for the training/retraining of workers in a more open economy and labor market? Will this be left to private concerns? And how will institutions such as the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Education, and others coordinate efforts to increase the productivity of Cuba's labor force in the short-term, regardless of how much change has taken place at a given point in the post-Castro era? Will most of the support for this effort come from government and international agencies, or from the private sector? What role can Cuban-American NGOs play to help channel these resources in an efficient, coordinated fashion?

Some may argue that the questions I have raised here are premature, or even unrealistic. Perhaps. But at least, I hope they will motivate all of us, particularly Cubans in the island, to look at the functioning of Cuba's social and human services institutions, at the smallest possible scale, and to start planning for their evolution, improvement, or substitution in a post-Castro era.