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## A quake to Chile's social reality

LSE Ideas

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Indeed what happened in Chile is terrible, and continuously shocking. Every day that passes we are more able to realize what really occurred, as communications are improving and water returns to the sea. Like always, those who had little are the ones who lost all.

The Chilean quake is also a big slap on the face to a society that had become increasingly conformist. A society that ironically was just a few months ago celebrating its status of new OECD member, but now crashes with its pure reality; a country with a social inequality deeper than the great canyon, which splits the nation in two raw groups: those still in the OECD, and those who cannot survive a natural disaster.

Chile's social policy for years has had a strong focus in reducing poverty. In fact, we congratulated ourselves as Chileans for reducing poverty from 40% in early 1990s to 15% in mid 2000s. These numbers freed our senses and we increasingly began to believe that the poverty problem was on a right road for being solved, without paying attention to the large population which, literally lived slightly above the line in a place invisible to poverty-line numbers and OECD standards.

It is no surprise that after the quake poverty and inequality will rise in Chile. Recovery is not a task of 5 days, nor 5 weeks, not even 5 months. This may take perhaps 5 years!, time enough to rebuild houses, create jobs, and re-design our social policy with a broader focus that is comprehensive with poverty and inequality as roots of the same problem (the notion of "social exclusion" as distinguished from "poverty" might be a good idea). Poverty lines and standards give us a good idea of development speed, but in no case they should be considered as ends themselves.

There is now a lot to be done. I have no doubt that the Chilean people will stand up again such as we have from previous quakes (1962, 1985). I just hope that in the long run we do not forget a large part of the population that live in vulnerable condition. They not only need today's assistance, but also long term social policies that re-focus on the grounds of their social exclusion from the promised prosperity.

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