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Emerging post-2015 education agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean

Context

Over the past years, a series of international commitments have shaped the development and education agendas in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26) stated “Everyone has the right to education” and Articles 28 and 29 of the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child reiterated the right to education for all children.

The World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) recognised the fundamental right of all children, youth and adults to have access to education to meet their basic learning needs and to allow them to participate fully in society. This declaration was confirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar, Senegal, 2000) in which countries reaffirmed their collective obligation to guarantee Education for All (EFA) through the six following goals by 2015:

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

In September 2000, 147 Heads of State signed the Millennium Declaration that asserts the right of every individual to dignity, freedom, equality, a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence, and encourages tolerance and solidarity.

In time, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) operationalized these ideas by setting targets and indicators with an international commitment to reducing poverty and to achieving the rights set forth in the Declaration. The deadline to achieve the eight MDGs is also 2015:

- Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4:** Reduce child mortality rates
- Goal 5:** Improve maternal health
- Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8:** Develop a global partnership for development

As 2015 approaches, a process of reflection about the post-2015 development and education agendas has started involving all UN organizations, international cooperation agencies, Governments, CSOs, and a wide range of partners.

In the LAC region, the UNESCO Regional Education Office in Santiago has launched a process of analysis to give impetus to achieve the 2015 education goals, and to advance in the design of the post-2015 education agenda for the region.

As part of this process, two salient activities have been undertaken:

- Together with ECLAC (UN Economic Commission for LAC), establishment of an inter-agency working group to reflect collectively on the post-2015 education agenda. This Group is being expanded to include other partners.
- Production of two reports on the state of education in LAC that provide a diagnosis of progress towards the 2015 goals and education projections in the post-2015 period.
 - The 1st report was presented at the Global Education Meeting (GEM) in November 2012 [The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Towards Education for All by 2015 and beyond](#);
 - The 2nd report was presented at the LAC Ministerial Meeting of Mexico in January 2013: [Regional Report on Education for All in Latin America and the Caribbean / Global Education for All Meeting](#)

The meeting in Mexico was convened at the occasion of the 3rd Board Meeting of the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (EFA/PRELAC). At the meeting the Ministers discussed the educational challenges facing the region and reached a consensus for the upcoming post-2015 education agenda.

For more information visit the [III Meeting of the EFA/PRELAC post 2015 website](#).

They validated the road map which will guide the efforts of UN, UNESCO and Member States in the design of the post-2015 education agenda, and called for enhanced convergence between the emerging post-2015 education agenda a.k.a. EFA + and the post-2015 development agenda a.k.a. MDG+

Development and education trends in LAC

During the 2000 decade (and in some cases earlier), most countries experienced sustained economic growth and, to a lesser extent, reduction in poverty levels, which have provided a positive context for social sector development, particularly education. To cite but a few:

- Sustained increase of average GDP per capita from US\$ 8,400 in 2000 to US\$9,600 in 2010.
- Most countries became middle or high (one country) human development countries. By 2013, only Haiti was in the low human development category.
- The percentage of population living below the poverty line decreased from 44% to 35% of total population.

A demographic factor i.e. aging of the population, has contributed to a reduction in the demand for education. However, the expansion of the provision of quality education has been complicated by pervasively high levels of inequality and poverty, compounded by a high percentage of people living in rural and remote areas, and by rather large groups of slum dwellers with little access to quality social services such as education.

Over the past decade, public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP has increased on average from 4.5% (2000) to 5.2%, though its share of total public expenditure has not increased significantly. Information on private expenditure on education tends to be proportionately higher in LAC than in OECD countries, and for all levels of education.

On the whole, the region is making steady progress towards achieving the six EFA goals by 2015. While this progress has been acknowledged internationally, important challenges remain for these goals to be fully reached by 2015. Three critical points are to be emphasised:

- Achievements in education are not the same in all countries; there are notable differences not only between but within countries. In fact, some countries are still far from meeting the basic goals of Education for All or the Millennium Development Goal 2 “Universal Primary Education”.
- High levels of inequality are observed in all countries, with social class, ethnic origin and geographic location being important determinants. Even when the most disadvantaged have managed to move up the social ladder, their situation, when compared to the most privileged groups, has not improved significantly.
- International criteria for assessing educational progress increasingly refer more to quality beyond measuring simple education coverage. The concept of quality is broad and includes learning achievements and processes, conditions and outcomes. It considers both academic aspects, psychosocial and civic ones. Under these criteria, the LAC region is lagging behind.

The tasks ahead by 2015 and the emerging post-2015 education agenda

In the lead-up to 2015, at the meeting in Mexico, the Ministers identified a) key points for achieving and consolidating education goals and gains by 2015; b) guiding principles to steer the process of joint design of the post-2015 education agenda; and c) emerging trends likely to configure the emerging post-2015 education agenda.

Achieving and consolidating education goals by 2015

- ✓ Quality of education at all levels of the education system as well as all teacher-related issues, are determinant factors to improve education systems, and to establish more inclusive schools where better learning outcomes are to be achieved.
- ✓ The continued expansion of early childhood care and education services, including informal ones, should be prioritised while ensuring overall quality improvement of the services offered and emphasizing the holistic development of children.
- ✓ Renewed attention is to be given to access and completion of the compulsory education cycles of quality, with emphasis on the skills and competencies required to continue education, for a proper transition from school to adult life, and in response to illiteracy and functional illiteracy, with the purpose of a decent job in the work place for full personal development.
- ✓ Beyond numerical parity, it is critical to progress towards better gender equity by addressing the causes of unequal learning achievements, and by reducing school drop-outs, child labour, the number of adolescent mothers and other social phenomena.

- ✓ In the progress towards quality education, innovative instruments such as periodic evaluations including learning metrics to assess soft and non-cognitive skills are required. The evaluation cycles need to be carried out within timeframes that allow for pertinent evidence-based decision-making.
- ✓ The enhancement and promotion of national regulatory frameworks should underpin the achievement of the quality education for all goals.

Guiding principles for the post-2015 education agenda

- Education is a fundamental human right and the basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights.
- Since the major pending task in the region is inequality and its consequences on the progress of countries, a key principle is the reduction of inequality and poverty through the provision of quality education for all.
- Quality education for all is an essential condition for tackling inequality, poverty and for creating more inclusive societies.
- Quality in education is a broad, multi-faceted concept that implies a holistic approach towards life-long learning.
- The concept of sustainable human development should be at the core of all efforts to promote social development that is both inclusive and equitable.
- Education should promote active and effective citizenship both locally and globally as well as contribute to strengthening democracy, fostering dialogue and conflict resolution, thus mitigating all forms of extremism and violence.
- Educational systems should offer under- and unemployed out-of school youth with viable alternatives to allow for social and workplace integration.

Emerging trends likely to impact on post-2015 education development

Considering the regional education progress as well as current analyses and trends, various themes are identified as likely to shape the emerging post-2015 education agenda. These can be grouped under the following categories:

- ✓ Innovative programmes and curricula on citizenship education, focusing on young people, for a culture of peace through “coexistence¹”, civic education, physical education and sports, sexuality education, students’ participation, respect for teachers and families, and conflict resolution.

¹ From the Delors Report: “Learning to live together”

- ✓ Expansion of ICTs in teaching, learning and in education management, to improve learning outcomes, reduce the digital gap and to facilitate the insertion of young people in the workplace.
- ✓ Beyond the traditional concept of education, programmes that focus on lifelong learning thus generating multiple opportunities for training, competency-based education (basic, transferable, technical/professional), as well as permanent training opportunities for decent work.
- ✓ Consolidation of the ongoing expansion of tertiary and higher education with quality programmes and the strengthening of institutions to accompany scientific and technological production, thus contributing directly to local and national development.
- ✓ Development of comprehensive intercultural and multicultural education programmes, in cultural, pedagogical, linguistic and institutional terms.
- ✓ Enriching education systems with contents and methods on sustainable development, green practices, climate change and disaster prevention, as a follow-up to Rio+20.
- ✓ Significant, verifiable and accountable improvement of educational planning and financing, in its broadest sense, for the design of sound, evidence-based education and social sector policies, more relevant to national and sub-national contexts.

The roadmap ahead

First and foremost, the Ministers agreed that the region **can** and **must** formulate more ambitious education goals given that the current economic, social and cultural conditions are favourable to defining long-term strategies and objectives that consolidate and expand the progress already achieved.

The road map to design post-2015 education needs to be flexible and inclusive to incorporate national and sub-national specificities so that educational policies may be more relevant to the context of the countries, as they strive for social equity.

This implies advocating for more integration between the upcoming post-2015 Education Agenda and the post-2015 Development Agenda, which is innovative in its approach and where education is to play a key role given its essential role for sustainable human development.

Consequently, since education is an essential component of sustainable human development in its multiple dimensions, be they social cultural, environment or economic, there needs to be a strong articulation between education and the other development sectors (health, environment, poverty, etc).

It is thus crucial to generate strategic alliances and coalitions in the broadest sense possible, to get better outcomes and consolidate educational gains. It is vital to achieve greater convergence as well as improved interagency coordination and joint work planning.

A major commitment by countries is also needed to formulate national plans that include objectives and goals agreed upon as a result of the above-proposed convergence.

For this reason, both South-South and North-South-South cooperation are critical as are innovative financing mechanisms for education. Databanks of good practices, exchanges of students, teachers and education decision makers are some examples of such cooperation.

Next steps in 2013

- Draw up a road map that includes all agencies and partners that can genuinely contribute to designing jointly post-2015 education e.g. regional coordination mechanisms, UN agencies, CSOs, Foundations, and the private sector.
- Disseminate the recommendations adopted by the Ministers at the ministerial meeting in Mexico, January 2013, as well as the above-mentioned reports on the state of education in LAC.
- Provide a response to the monitoring question “*why are we where we are today?*” with respect to education in the region i.e. the causes of the present situation and why some countries are lagging behind and may not meet the 2015 goals.
- Use the launch of the EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2013 (October 2013), to highlight the importance of teaching and learning for development in a changing world, and explain how investing in teachers and reforms to strengthen equitable learning can transform individuals and societies in the long-term.