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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Education for All up to 2015 and Beyond Consultation summary: Latin America and the Caribbean

October 2012



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Consultation summary: Latin America and the Caribbean

Background paper prepared for the
Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation
of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)

by the
the Latin-American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE),

October 2012

This paper was prepared as background information for the Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA). It has not been edited by UNESCO. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to UNESCO. The paper can be cited with the following reference: "Background paper prepared for the Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)"

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Education for all (EFA) up to 2015 and beyond

Summary of the Latin America and the Caribbean region's contribution to the Collective Consultation of Non-Governmental Organizations on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)

This report, compiled by the Latin-American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), summarizes the contributions from the coalitions and networks working to promote the human right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially those that expressed their views in response to the questionnaire: in addition to CLADE itself, participants included the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL), the Latin American Forum on Educational Policy (FLAPE), the SES Foundation, the Popular Education Network among Women, the Faith and Joy Movement, the Colombian Coalition for the Right to Education, the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, Costa Rica's Education Platform of the Citizen Control Network, the Dominican Republic Socio-Educational Forum, and the Guatemala Education for All Collective.

2. Reaching EFA goals by 2015

2.1 What are the bottlenecks slowing down EFA progress in your country/region/special field of action?

There are various types of obstacles slowing down EFA progress in Latin America and the Caribbean. First, it was emphasized that these obstacles go beyond the EFA goals themselves. In order to understand the challenges faced in achieving the education rights in our countries, **it is necessary to consider the inherent structural issues, particularly the social inequalities and discriminatory practices that exist.** Taking into account this relationship is fundamental to the achievement of EFA. Furthermore, a number of barriers specific to the educational context in Latin America and the Caribbean were identified.

- The first of these obstacles concerns the **growth of privatization and commodification of education** in the region. The implementation of educational policies that weaken public education and foster the commodification of what are referred to as “educational services” was noted as a matter of great concern. Consequently, there is a general absence of long-term State educational policies that stem from consensus and transcend the policies of a particular government.
- Another obstacle hindering EFA is the **lack of attention to diversity and the different forms of discrimination** in educational policies. First, the attention and budgets given to groups outside primary education – such as early childhood, youth and adults – are insufficient. Furthermore, these levels of education do not have educational strategies to suit the characteristics of their students. Moreover, it is difficult to specify effective actions of educational inclusion with a broad focus on diversity (gender, disability, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, LGBT, etc.). There is little progress in matters of gender equality and, together with a lack of cultural and linguistic adaptability and relevance of education or attention to people with special educational needs, these are aspects that EFA has addressed only incidentally, but their absence causes the failure and early dropout of students or direct exclusion from the system.
- In the context of educational policy, **the meaning of education, its purposes and its relevance** were also noted to be lacking from the debate. There has been a persistence of policies aimed at a minimum and instrumental content, to the detriment of education that values human dignity and diversity. The concept of “quality” that prevails in Latin America and the Caribbean emphasizes the measurement of learning achievements through standardized tests that do not encompass all the aspects of implementing the human right to education established by international frameworks: availability, accessibility, adaptability and acceptability. This issue has direct implications for the predominant forms of evaluation which measure the learning of minimum and instrumental content whereas they should measure the relevance of the entire educational process.

- Another persistent obstacle to EFA progress in the region is the lack of attention paid to **teachers**. In addition to the precarious working conditions and low wages, the inconsistency in regulatory policy of the teaching profession, inadequate teacher training and indeed training for professionals at all levels of education were highlighted. This is due to the lack of public teacher-training systems.
- Another obstacle that figures prominently in the current debate between the Latin America and the Caribbean education coalitions is the **insufficient funding to ensure the right to education in all of its dimensions**. The fact that free public education does not exist in many countries seriously violates the human right to education and even so, obstacles to free education persist at all levels. Although significant efforts have been made in the region to increase investment in education, in many countries the education budget is insufficient. Therefore, free education is not guaranteed for all. Furthermore, budget allocation and implementation mechanisms are not transparent, making it difficult for the funds to actually reach their destination and for citizens to be able to exercise control.
- Another factor preventing the achievement of the EFA goals is the **lack of dialogue with civil society**, particularly with the education community in the discussion and decision-making processes concerning the legal and political frameworks of education. The prevailing lack of democratic management processes hinders the progress of social control mechanisms and appropriate educational policies to meet needs of each country.
- The **lack of cooperation between the different federal entities with the same State** regarding educational policies was also mentioned. In Brazil, for example, there is no code of conduct for cooperation between federal entities concerning the management of public policies, particularly social policies. The Brazilian State offers no technical or financial assistance to departments and municipalities, which account for 85% of basic education provision. Policies must be implemented by local, regional and district authorities, but they face budget constraints, because the receipt of funds is concentrated at the federal level.

2.2 Which policies and practices have been successful in your country/region/field of action with regard to progress towards the achievement of EFA goals?

Despite the challenges and obstacles to ensuring the right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular regarding the EFA goals, some progress has been made in the areas of legislation, policies and practices, for various reasons that differ from country to country across the region.

- First of all, **in some countries, new education laws have been established** that treat education as a right, not a service. In the noteworthy case of Brazil, for example, a funding framework has been approved that increases resources to ensure the human right to education (HRE) with the goal of expanding enrolment. The Fund for the Development of Basic Education and Appreciation of the Teaching Profession (Fundeb), established in 2007, provides resources to improve access to basic education, including for children aged from four to 17. Nonetheless, financial resources still need to be guaranteed for the Fund to be fully operational. In terms of legislation, significant advances have also been made towards recognizing and appreciating diversity. By way of example, the Government of Guatemala has adopted regulations concerning the National Languages Act, which recognizes the 24 languages spoken in the country. Countries such as Brazil and Bolivia have also passed legislation on non-discrimination.
- The **strengthening of civil society** has been essential to the progress made in the area of the human right to education. A political culture has developed that used networks, rights claims, social mobilization and participation, cooperation, analysis, political debates and research to move the EFA agenda forward. This movement has fought for issues that are fundamental to guaranteeing the right to education, such as free education, the end of for-profit education, improvement in teachers' working conditions, overcoming direct or indirect barriers to education, and non-discrimination in education. This strengthening of organized civil society has allowed it to enter strategic national and international

arenas, as well as departmental and municipal education secretariats, and to draw up rights-oriented plans and frameworks.

- Another factor facilitating progress has been the **spread of a broader human rights culture in the region**. To the extent to which governments and civil society are beginning to treat education as a right, new strategies are becoming possible, such as putting pressure on the justice systems in the region to guarantee this right. In some countries, it has been suggested that lawsuits be launched to demand enrolment, quotas for specific groups, funding, free education and so forth. Internationally, the regional and international human-rights protection systems have been strengthened, including, in our case, the Inter-American Human Rights System, which can now receive, handle and judge cases of the violation of the human right to education. In this respect, States can be held accountable when groups or individuals report rights violations. Such practices facilitate progress in the area of EFA.
- **Issues around the human right to education are becoming more visible and generating debate**, making progress more possible than in past periods. Marginalized groups, for example, are becoming more visible, although still not visible enough, which is giving rise to the need for policies to meet their hitherto unrecognized specificities. This is the case, for example, for people with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, girls and women. In some cases, progress with regard to redress policies has been made by means of quotas in universities.
- Some countries have also implemented **intersectoral revenue-transfer programmes** that are conditional on school enrolment, including programmes for scholarships, internships and meals. Governments of Latin American countries have thus developed policies enabling children from low-income families to stay in school. In this way, such programmes help to increase the number of enrolments.

3. What should UNESCO do between now and 2015, both in terms of EFA coordination and in terms of its collaboration with the civil society?

UNESCO plays a crucial role in the current scenario from the standpoint of civil society organizations dedicated to the defence of the right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- In regard to the actual achievement of the already established goals, **UNESCO must continue to exert pressure and call on States to fulfil EFA commitments undertaken for 2015**. One possibility would be an international campaign throughout 2013 and 2014 to remind them of the importance of new efforts. Another would be the promotion of opportunities for inter-country exchange, boosting the conduct of diagnostic reviews by States and civil society in order to identify reasons for which EFA goals have still not been achieved.
- Furthermore, UNESCO has a crucial role to play in guiding the post-2015 debate. The first point highlighted was its role in **directing the debate on the EFA goals towards the human rights framework**. UNESCO is expected, in dialogue with civil society, to direct the debate towards improving harmonization under the post-2015 agenda with United Nations instruments and bodies that conduce to the achievement of human rights (protective mechanisms, monitoring bodies, rapporteurs, commissions, etc.), thus strengthening the theory and practice of the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights.
- UNESCO must **stress the achievement of the human right to education for all**, with emphasis on the most marginalized groups, and must exert pressure on behalf of the least served persons (adults and very young children, for example). In an international scenario marked by tension and disputes, UNESCO must not lose its capacity for independent decision-making, nor must it join initiatives that do not promote education from a human-rights standpoint.

- **UNESCO’s monitoring role** was highlighted, firstly, regarding the need to monitor not only the actual achievement of the goals, but also obstacles to their achievement – for example, it is becoming necessary to monitor world trends towards the commodification and privatization of education at all levels, and the weakening of public education systems – and, secondly, the need to rethink the establishment of country bodies responsible for the monitoring of EFA agreements concluded by the government and civil society.
- Moreover, it was important for UNESCO to support States in compiling and adopting indicators on the right to a more inclusive education and to discuss aspects of the achievement of the human right to education (availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability).
- Lastly, emphasis was laid on the importance of UNESCO’s efforts leading to sustained dialogue with civil society striving to achieve the same goals nationally, regionally and internationally.

4. The post-2015 education agenda

4.1 Are you participating/aware of processes related to the definition of the post-2015 education or development agenda in your country/region/ field of action?

Most education coalitions and networks in Latin America and the Caribbean are participating in some way in this important debate. The Latin-American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE) encourages its members and associates, in particular, to become involved. Information is therefore being uploaded routinely at

<http://www.campanaderechoeducacion.org/participacion/?p=785>, which hosts international discussion forums, primarily through the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).

4.2 What are the priorities for the post-2015 period in your country/region/field of action?

Please be as specific as possible and include links to further information as appropriate.

For the post-2015 period, the Latin American and the Caribbean coalitions have reported a variety of priorities, as set out below.

- **Link action for the human right to education to others that determine social justice.** The interdependence and indivisibility of human rights must feature much more prominently in the post-2015 EFA agenda.
- The agenda for the achievement of the **human right to education** must include its four aspects, namely availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. The education system must therefore be redefined at all levels by implementing management criteria that subordinate the administrative and technical management approach to educational goals and the strategic direction of the purposes of rights-based education.
- **Its content and aims must reflect international human rights instruments.** In other words, education must be directed towards Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which provides that “... education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Curricula, content and methodologies must be fully revised so that education and learning will be directed towards human rights.
- As the State is the guarantor of the right, one post-2015 agenda priority must be the guarantee of **adequate funding so that this right can be achieved for everyone**, thus strengthening the public education system and reversing trends towards privatization. To achieve the human right to education

for all, an adequate funding policy, entailing transparent management and effective corporate control mechanisms, must be adopted.

- **Special attention for previously non-priority levels**, such as early childhood, adult education and secondary education, must be placed on the agenda. Each of these levels has its own specific challenges that must be taken into account in the design of public policies in order to be relevant to the target groups.
- Take effective action **to achieve the right to education of groups most subjected to discrimination**, by adopting an inclusive approach geared to diversity (gender, disabilities, indigenous peoples, persons of African descent, LGBT, etc.).
- Greater emphasis on **centrality in the democratic management of education systems**, in which civil society and education community actors are guaranteed a place as participants in decision-making on education policies with a view to the formulation of agreed national agendas. That depends on the promotion of social dialogue and the involvement of all workers connected with education, thus encouraging the establishment of State agreements on the subject.
- Devise a comprehensive framework on **the question of teachers** and formulate related policies, such as initial and in-service teacher training, admission to teacher-training courses, lifelong training for that professional category and decent working conditions and salaries.