

Shouldn't we be there by now?



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Abstract – *The Policy Advocacy Group (GIPE-IGEP), part of the Council of Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CEAAL) has made a study of the major developments reported by the governments of the region on Youth and Adult Education.*

The study reveals a number of findings that show the lack of action on the part of most governments in fulfilling their commitments. It also reports on the existence of laws on the subject as well as on the lack of plans and policies to adopt new commitments.

A further finding has to do with the limited opportunities for learning in indigenous languages, and a marked absence of work materials in these languages.

It takes patience. A whole lot of patience. Change, if it comes, comes slowly. But how slowly? Let us have a look at how the commitments made during the UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education, CONFITEA VI, have translated into policy and funding in Latin America. A recent study by The Interdisciplinary Group on Educational Policies (GIPE-IGEP¹) presents a review of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The report is based on the national reports submitted by 24 countries to the Regional Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The countries covered in the study are:

Argentina	Guatemala
Bahamas	Guyana
Barbados	Honduras
Belize	Jamaica
Bolivia	Mexico
Brazil	Panama
Chile	Paraguay
Colombia	Peru
Costa Rica	Dominican Republic
Cuba	Saint Vincent and Grenadines
Ecuador	Uruguay
El Salvador	

Nicaragua and Venezuela are not included.

The study tries to strike a balance between progress made and progress pending. The result is a picture of the current situation of Youth and Adult Education in the region. It warns about the major obstructions blocking access to Lifelong Learning.

The reference point for this analysis is the right to education, and in this case it refers especially to young people and adults traditionally excluded from formal learning opportunities and development.

What the country reports tell us

Finding 1

The concept of Youth and Adult Education is limited

Although we have generally accepted definitions offering a comprehensive and inclusive perspective of what education of young people and adults is, official reports often reduce the phenomenon to school processes. Not only that, it is furthermore reduced to processes of literacy and basic education. Thus, the 1990 Jomtien definition, which stated that education policies should aim to meet the “basic” needs of learning, is lost. Without doubt, “the basics” of Jomtien were to be understood as the set of capabilities that allow people to become individuals, not just “cognitive needs” reduced to language and mathematical computation. This narrow reading manifested itself in all the educational reforms of the 90s of the last century. Such a restricted view has led to reduced resources for Youth and Adult Education and to lowering the goals of what has to be achieved. Rather than institutionalising Youth and Adult Education we see that it has been separated from the requirements and needs of communities and countries. In its place, didactics and methodologies have been institutionalised.

Finding 2

The problem is not in the laws

Of the 24 countries that submitted reports, only one (Barbados) has no legislation or policies that relate specifically to Adult Education and literacy. This means that the vast majority have formal provisions that explicitly support processes specifically aimed at this segment of the population.

Having laws, ordinances or policies does not ensure that public action is directed towards the relevant segment of the population efficiently and in the form indicated. But it is an element of formal order that allows the execution of processes and can also be a manifestation of the political will to provide systematic education to the adult population.

In most cases it is ordinary legislation which supports this commitment and entitles the respective public entities to develop programmes as needed.

Since legal frameworks already recognise the importance of the state offering Youth and Adult Education services, it is necessary that they make an about-face or be subject to reinvention. This is the only solution for the education systems to be guided by the paradigm of Adult Education/ Lifelong Learning as an attribute of democracy and a universal human right.

Finding 3

The majority of programmes have no specific targets

An analysis of the various official reports shows that half of the countries developed programmes directed at literacy and education of young people and adults without these being aimed primarily at specific groups in the population. Generally, these countries only identify the target groups as “vulnerable people.”

For the other half of the countries, which report on a specific target group, groups mentioned are: indigenous people, women, youth, peasants, and descendants of Africans in the following percentages:

- Indigenous: 30%
- Women: 26%
- Youth: 17%
- Peasants: 17%
- Afro descendants: 9%
- Other: 1%

Finding 4

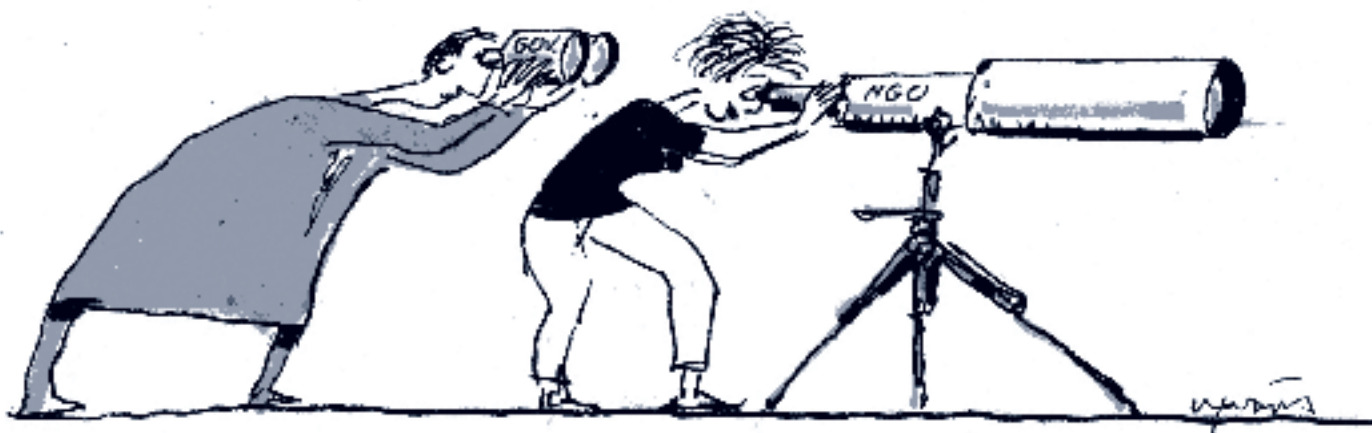
Local languages are not on offer and there is no policy on the language of instruction for adults

Most of the countries do not implement literacy processes in the languages of the respective indigenous peoples and cultures. Only 11 of the 24 existing reports (46%) recognise the development of literacy processes in languages other than the official and national languages in use.

Considering that the communities in which the phenomenon of illiteracy is usually more prevalent are typically the rural and indigenous communities speaking languages different from the national language, we have a problem when less than half of the countries in the region report the development of literacy processes in the languages of the indigenous people.

This is a very important factor, since literacy is not only the formal process of the acquisition of certain skills; more than that, it actually proposes a way to place people into various settings and situations in which they can develop as individuals, as a citizen and as an actor in the development of their community and their country.

As if this is not bad enough, we find that less than a third of the countries in the region have reported literacy materials in indigenous languages. This means that several countries report literacy processes in indigenous languages



but use materials in national languages or simply do not use any materials. This is a contradiction that has a great impact on the quality of the processes carried out in the field.

Although the use of one or more languages is a key aspect of any educational process, and although one of the main features of the region is multicultural and multi-lingual presence, not all countries have a defined policy regarding the language or languages of instruction.

Finding 5

Less than half of the countries have formulated or updated action plans after CONFITEA VI

Only 11 of the 24 countries reported having made new plans or reformulations after the CONFITEA VI conference (December 2009). More than three years have elapsed since the conference held in Belem, Brazil, and more than half of the countries in the region have not changed or updated their plans.

This demonstrates the absolute irrelevance of the commitments and international monitoring mechanisms undertaken by UNESCO and the whole international community. This aspect is highly illustrative of the lack of interest and involvement that many governments and public institutions have repeatedly been accused of when governments have made commitments that subsequently fail to be implemented.

Countries reported undertaking various activities as a result of CONFITEA VI, but these are usually actions of a more complementary nature and not substantial.

The actions most reported are (from most to least mentioned):

- Conferences, forums and other actions;
- Publications;
- Media campaigns;
- Creating committees to include learners;
- Learning festivals;
- Development of a financing plan;
- Development of a roadmap;
- Translation of the Dakar Framework for Action.

Not even half of the countries have reported these actions and it is clear that there are no official announcements from governments to work on or develop new Youth and Adult Education policies.

Finding 6

In most cases the learners have not participated in the discussion of national plans

A total of 14 of the 24 countries indicate that learners in the literacy processes and in Adult Education have not participated in the discussion of policies and plans that are available to them. This factor reflects a top-down concept in the management of public policy and the traditional lack of mechanisms for social participation.

Some countries reported involvement of the learners, for example:

- Peru reported the carrying out of a “public consultation” from which policies and plans are formulated.
- Paraguay reported conducting “people’s roundtables” through which they have achieved broad participation.
- Guyana reports having carried out “public consultations”.
- El Salvador indicates that it is implementing a process of Education Policy for Youth and Adults in which representatives of the learners are participating.
- Brazil indicates it is holding “municipal and inter-municipal conferences” in which the learners have been involved, as well as participating in forums that are created for that purpose.
- Bolivia reports the carrying out of “social summits, meetings and workshops.”

Finding 7

Technology has come to the literacy processes and education of young people and adults

Two thirds of the countries in the region have incorporated the use of technology as part of the learning processes in literacy and/or Adult Education. This is a factor that can influence the shape and quality of the learning process and has been gaining ground in these areas.

The countries not using new technology are:

- Brazil
- Belize
- El Salvador
- Guyana
- Honduras
- Paraguay
- San Vicente
- Surinam

It is necessary to look relatively at the use of technology, particularly because this is no more than a medium that can (but does not always) facilitate learning processes. The mere presence of technological resources in the educational

environment does not guarantee anything. Technology must be accompanied by methodological strategies for it to have an effect on the processes and on the final results.

In fact, the primary obstacle to the use of the technology is related to the physical arrangement and connectivity needed. When technology is available, it is necessary to monitor its use.

Finding 8

The various emphases on literacy

Traditionally, literacy processes have been accompanied by complementary aspects. These are very diverse but are usually accompanied by aspects of training and capacity-building in other areas that are traditionally used to capture the interest of the learners and to strengthen literacy permanence.

According to the reports filed, the component mentioned most is technical training related to income generation, which allows participants to solve two problems simultaneously.

In second place are processes which generally can be perceived as developing “life skills” and, in third place, the use of communication and information technologies is mentioned.

Finding 9

Multiplicity of institutions involved

The reports generally state that the steering processes are run by public entities, while there are many non-governmental entities in the implementation.

Although the information provided by official reports is very general and disparate, it may indicate that in all cases the presence of the state is manifested through various entities. In the vast majority of cases it involves the ministries or departments of education at the forefront, except in the case of Guatemala where there is a multi-sector state guiding entity for the country.

In all cases there is the presence and coordination of other state ministries and in some cases specific institutions that relate broadly to Youth and Adult Education. Civil society presence is constant in all cases.

So, what do the findings tell us?

Progress in the region has been extremely slow and limited. It is telling that less than half of the countries have formulated (or reformulated) existing plans after the CONFITEA VI Conference. This can only be interpreted as a lack of prioritisation of commitments on Youth and Adult Education.

With these poor results in the region, it becomes more urgent to modify, strengthen, reshape, correct or simply to design action plans that get the process back on track. But the opposite has happened; many countries have done nothing, despite discovering that their efforts are not on the right path.

Why are they doing nothing? It's simple. We lack laws and/or formal rules, laws which generally offer an acceptable framework for the development of Youth and Adult Education.

It is important to consider what roles other stakeholders are playing, particularly civil society, the private sector and others. While official reports give little account of this aspect, it is clear that a great diversity of non-governmental organisations are participating in the implementation process. This effort has been important over time and has been consolidated.

The question not answered in these official reports is whether the participation of these non-governmental actors is influencing policy decisions or if the participation is limited to implementation and governed by public institutions.

Note

1 / For more information, please see <http://bit.ly/1amMNZ2>

Reference

The complete reports are available at <http://tinyurl.com/oujxdph>



About the Author

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