Education Policies and Strategies

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Educational planning and financing in the Republic of Cuba: An approach to the fulfilment of the objectives of the Education for All programme

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**GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL REPORTS**

**I. Introduction to the topic**

A survey carried out by UNESCO in 2002 shows that the plans, whether ready or still in the process of being developed within the framework of the follow-up to the Dakar Forum, have taken different forms, such as: (i) sector development plans, (ii) existing plans revisited or strengthened, (iii) EFA-specific plans, (iv) EFA programmes or projects, (v) projects focusing on specific needs or areas such as quality improvement and lifelong education, etc.

Whatever forms these plans or programmes have taken, one of the major and immediate concerns is how they are going to be implemented. Authorities and specialists involved in their elaboration are asking the following questions:

- Will the plans, once arduously developed, be effectively implemented, or once adopted, will they be shelved once more?
- Will there be enough resources, not only financial but also human and technical, to carry them out? Are the institutional capacities sufficiently strengthened to ensure their implementation?
- Will the commitments made by the present governments be respected by the following?
- Will the funding expected to come from or promised by the international community arrive, if yes, up to what scale?

The conditions of the effective implementation of these plans are therefore numerous and complex. Of these, the financial factor is certainly one of the most important. However, other equally important aspects, like the necessary reforms and the strengthening of institutional capacities, should not be neglected.

The seminar entitled *Financing and implementing education development plans* is part of a series of UNESCO activities aiming to help the Member States to effectively achieve the objectives of EFA. This seminar, devoted to one of the three retained themes in this regard, will attempt to show how countries effectively implement their plans, what main difficulties they face and how they have overcome them.
II. Aspects to be examined in the reports and the debates

As mentioned above, this international meeting, part of a series of seminars whose respective themes were designed in a way to complement one another, will focus on the theme of implementing national plans once they are ready.

The actions foreseen in the plan are often numerous, ambitious and complex. Sometimes the education administrations have not prioritized them at the moment of the plan's preparation, and even if these actions were designed with a certain order of priority, the question to know how to proceed with their actual implementation has yet to be resolved. Some would say resources, financial in particular, should first be ensured, others would say that before everything else, political, institutional, and administrative reforms should first be put in place, in order to create the favourable environment and conditions for the efficient and rational use of allocated resources.

How then could the implementation of these plans be started, which are supposed to have been designed on a solid and technical foundation, and approved according to a process of social consultations and democratic validation? Can the reform measures, the rationalization and improvements foreseen in the plans be immediately applicable without a deeper sub-sector analysis, and without a preliminary negotiation on the foreseen measures concerning the teachers for example, especially on those concerning their status? The same applies to the local groups if they deal with decentralization. Are the institutional capacities able to manage and monitor the planned actions?

The question of resources necessary for the implementation of the plans should also be debated and resolved. It is not only about sufficient allocation of resources, human and/or financial, but also their rational and efficient utilization. What measures have been taken in order to ensure a more efficient management of resources? How could the quality of educational services be improved? What is important here is not only to make some savings on the costs but also, and above all, to use the allocated funds in a more equitable, transparent and efficient manner.

This seminar also finds its justification in the premise of the Dakar Framework for Action: « no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources ». In this regard, several options and objectives would be explored, such as - to cite only those included in the Dakar Framework:

« (i) increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education;  
(ii) ensuring greater predictability in the flow of external assistance;  
(iii) facilitating more effective donor coordination;  
(iv) strengthening sector-wide approaches;  
(v) providing earlier, more extensive and broader debt relief and/or debt cancellation for poverty reduction, with a strong commitment to basic education; and  

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(vi) undertaking more effective and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets, including periodic assessments."

The options mentioned above justly summarize the major tendencies and current debates surrounding financial co-operation in the field of education. In developing countries as well as in industrialized countries, in the context of budgetary constraints and/or economic difficulties, national or international services, financial in particular, exert growing pressures on education administrations to make them demonstrate that allocated funds are being used efficiently. Bilateral and multilateral agencies expect that development actions are planned in a more transparent, accountable and efficient way.

This requirement changes the way agencies collaborate with the beneficiary countries. Gradually and in a more and more accelerated way, the project approach gives way to programme approach. Instead of financing sub-sector and sometimes fragmented projects, some agencies prefer financing sector plans and programmes. Sometimes financing goes directly to national budgets, provided that these plans and programmes are credible and transparent. This implies that they have the right to examine and "interfere" with the plans and programmes. The external partners are being more and more involved in upstream activities of educational development, meaning in the definition of educational policies, plans and programmes. The agencies would feel more concerned and "aware of their responsibilities" in the implementation of the plans and programmes developed in this way. The question of increased financing must therefore be addressed not at the moment of implementation, but "upstream", meaning at the moment of designing the plans.

There is no one programme approach, but several sectoral approaches, ranging from a simple co-ordination mechanism to SWAP (sector-wide approach) which, finally, consist in financing the national budgetary expenditures, and not specific projects, by putting all the external contributions together to finance the national plans and budgets. Some countries, notably the least developed countries (LDCs), are experienced in this sector co-operation and co-ordination approach between the governments and the partner agencies. They have succeeded in mobilizing the technical and financial resources, first for sector planning, and then for the implementation of education development plans. Others were not able to succeed for one or some of the following reasons: (i) they do not know these co-operation approaches; (ii) the constraint that their complexity involves; (iii) the preference for or the relative simplicity of financing by project, or (iv) the perception of the SWAP approach seen as an infringement on national sovereignty.

In the light of the foregoing, the reports and the debates of the seminar will be structured around national experiences, lessons, and good practices, accompanied by insightful examples. Participants will attempt to answer the following five questions:

(i) How do governments intend to create the conditions favourable to the implementation of these plans, in particular the reforms they foresee? In the case
where countries have to rely on international financial co-operation for the implementation of the plans:

(ii) How can the partnership in the formulation of educational policies and development plans be reconciled with the leadership role of national governments?

(iii) How can the national capacities for the execution and the follow-up of plans, as well as those for co-ordination of bilateral and international co-operation be strengthened?

(iv) How can plans be made reliable/feasible, and projections credible, from the perspective of potential donors?

(v) How can external financing be increased for the implementation of the plans?

Let us examine each of these five questions closely:

• **Conditions favourable to the implementation of the plans**

The plans should be prepared on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the current situation of the education system and of its probable evolution, through a technical, participatory, and transparent approach. Their implementation, in the context of a coherent economic and social development, calls for a synergy between the concerned actors and the adaptation and renovation efforts with regard to sector management and monitoring capacities. The reform and improvement of the education sector is therefore a continuous process which should be planned and managed. In this regard, the participants of the seminar will try to answer the following questions:

(i) Is the preparation of your plan based on a reliable education management information system, and on an in-depth and critical analysis of the education sector?

(ii) Has a general consensus been built on the main political orientations and on rationalization and reform measures, through the consultation with and the participation of all the stakeholders, including other public departments, the legislative body, the teachers, the private sector, the civil society, etc.?

(iii) What main rationalization measures have been taken on human, technical, and financial resources, and how are they (or how will they be) implemented?

(iv) Are the development and reform actions designed in an efficient, realistic and prioritized manner?

(v) Are the institutional and administrative implementation arrangements satisfactory, if not, what measures are foreseen in this regard?
• **Government/agencies partnership in the formulation of plans or plan**

It is assumed that national authorities are the first responsible for their education system and that international co-operation can contribute to the formulation of coherent policies. The reports could take up, among others, the following questions:

(i) What are the mechanisms and practices for partners’ participation in the development of education policies and strategies?

(ii) Does the participation of partners provide an added value or does it serve as a substitute for national skills?

(iii) Does the "interference" of co-operation agencies in the elaboration of education policies and plans represent an inconvenience, an asset or a fatality that should be managed?

(iv) Are the different approaches (project, programme, sectoral, SWAP, etc.) mutually exclusive or complementary, and how are they applied in practice?

(v) Are the efficiency measures often recommended by external agencies necessary remedies or bitter pills to swallow?

• **Strengthening of national capacities for plan implementation and monitoring, and for donor co-ordination**

This concerns the strengthening of institutional capacities in the fields of planning, management, monitoring and follow-up/evaluation of the development of the system. The institutions should be able to plan and organize the actions in a coherent manner, to design and to implement the reform policies, (and in the case where the country would depend on external aid) to guide and co-ordinate the co-operation actions and to provide the necessary arguments for the assistance of external partners in priority fields. Some criticize the fact that international co-operation is sometimes substituted for national skills. Therefore, we should ask ourselves if the countries' capacities for designing and implementing education policies are adequate. Most particularly:

(i) What are the institutional weaknesses? In what important priority fields should national capacities be developed?

(ii) Do the national actors have the expertise to steer the process and techniques of design, implementation and follow-up of education policies?

(iii) Does international co-operation contribute to the strengthening or weakening of national institutional capacities?

(iv) Can co-operation with external agencies contribute to a more transparent management and a more rational allocation of resources for the implementation of the plans?
• **Reliable plans and credible projections from the perspective of potential donors**

The EFA plans should be prepared by governments for their own citizens. They are, above all, national plans which should be carried out by the mobilization of national resources. They should first be credible to public opinion? Unfortunately, in numerous countries, the economic situation and development prospects, in addition to the debt problem, are such that it is difficult to attain the Dakar objectives with national resources alone, even if these were utilized in the most rational way possible. The plans and their projections have to be viable, realistic and credible, in order to facilitate the mobilization of additional internal resources as well as external financing. In this regard, we should answer the following questions:

(i) How can the experiences of co-operation with technical and financial partners be characterized in this field?
(ii) Up to what point does international co-operation contribute to the viability and the credibility of these plans?
(iii) Can the satisfaction of social demand, the necessity to ensure political stability, and the "pressure" of external partners for efficiency matters reconcile?
(iv) To what degree are the projections of your plans credible?
(v) In your opinion, what are the most important criteria of credibility in an education plan?

• **Increasing external financing**

In principle, the country's external financing for education should be complementary in relation to its internal resources. Governments should therefore take all the necessary measures and arrangements to rationalize and increase internal resources, including those of the private sector, communities, NGO's, etc. Then comes the question of knowing how to increase external financing, preferably in the form of grants, for the development of education. More specifically:

(i) What concrete examples do you know in this field?
(ii) How can the transparency in management and the reliability of information system contribute to the increase of financing?
(iii) To what degree does the role of international co-operation in the formulation of educational policies contribute to increasing internal and external financing?
(iv) In your opinion, do the criteria for an increase in external financing differ depending on whether they are defined by beneficiary countries or donor countries?
(v) Is the external financing fairly distributed between the regions and countries?
(vi) In your opinion, what are the most important solutions to the problems of increasing external financing for education?
EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND FINANCING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA: AN APPROACH TO THE FULFILMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME

Rosa Alvarez Cardenas¹

I. A Necessary Introduction

Inside the wide range of social transformations that began in Cuba starting from 1959, the education plays an important role in the Government's strategy to achieve a solid technological, professional and ethical pattern in the population. From the sixty’s, actions have been taken to reduce the illiteracy and the National System of Education is reshaped, with universal and free access to all the citizens, without discrimination on behalf of sex, race or social status.

This social politics has its development along the revolutionary period begun in 1959, reaching different stages according to the specific social, economic and historical conditions, (Ministry of Education, 1979) being summarized consequently in the creation of mechanisms and ways to overcome illiteracy, to raise the educational levels of the whole population by means of Adults Education and the battles for the sixth and the ninth grades, to guarantee universal educational services and the continuity of studies for all the citizens until the grade twelve, the extension of the higher education services and its present universal access, to form the necessary teachers in every stage of development and maintaining a system of social control of the education as a conquest of the people and guarantee of their future well-being (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Actions were adopted to elevate instruction massively. It was extended to the whole territory the campaign to reach the sixth grade and in the eighty’s, with the reinforcement of the National System of Education, a consistent effort was made to achieve the nine years of study in the whole population, reaching levels of equal development in the different territories, aspect in which the work continues with the application of policies and educational programs that provides a democratic and massive participation of the civil society as a whole to reach higher goals.

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During the decade of the eighty, new guidelines were adopted, among them, the increase in the training of human resources and the necessary infrastructure to maintain the universal access to education in sight of the demographic changes and their influence in the different teaching levels; to improve the quality in the education of the necessary professionals for the economic and social development and to implement new curricular contents.
II. Strategies, Policies and Objectives developed in the Educational Sector.

A synthesis of the main educational policies based in the basic strategic ideas developed is:

• The solution of the problems related to the quality of the education without giving up the massive education of all the citizens, and without discrimination of sex, race, religious belief or residence.

• The necessity to materialize in practice the relationship between the unity of the educational system and the diversity, by means of which education takes place in the school practice.

• The appropriate relationship between centralization and administrative decentralization in the whole educational system, what means to bring near the decision making process to the management levels that carry out the educational policies.

• The creation of a scientific movement in the whole Cuban teaching staff that implies the necessary solution of the present problems and perspective view of the educational system with a scientific approach, that is equal to say, with objectivity, creativity and a democratic participation of all the essential factors that interfere in the teaching learning process.

• The education and training of high quality professionals and technicians, in a massive way and looking for their access to higher levels of education.

• The improvement of the human resources and the necessary infrastructure to extend the education to the whole country and to train and upgrade with the highest quality the necessary professionals to carry out the future economic and social development.

• The extension and universality of the principle of the combination of the study with the work, as the foundation of the Cuban pedagogy.

The development of the education is assumed as a process of continuous and systematic improvement to adapt the educational process to the changing society; consequently, there is a continuous process of adapting the curricula, new texts are elaborated, and there are variations in the management structures in the national, provincial and municipal levels, as a consequence of the scientific research carried out in the different educational branches.
At the beginning of the decade of the nineties, the sector, as well as the rest of the economy, suffered the effects of the lack of material resources and financing to confront the challenges that can be classified as ambitious for a country facing a severe economic crisis, due basically to external factors.

The effective principles present in the educational policy and in shaping the educational system were firmly preserved. These are: the massive and free character of education, the combination of study and work with educational purposes, the coeducation that allows equal access to girls and boys and the principle of the participation of the whole society in the educational endeavour.

Additionally, the sector has developed a policy of organizational improvement of the management structures focused on the achievement of a wider social justice and equal opportunities for all, a bigger economic efficiency, the respect and stimulation of diversity and in getting the most of the available material, financial and human resources.

The management and administration of the Educational System was made more flexible, in search of improving the schools work, starting from giving greater autonomy to the principals and their staffs in fulfilling their tasks. Starting from this policy of decentralization, better results are observed, conforming unity of actions on the basis of a common interest in each community.

Consequently, facing the present changes in the world economy and in the international environment, modifications of the study programs has been introduced, with the incorporation of new subjects and the amplification of the specialization profiles, with the conception of training an integral specialist that can be allocated in a diversity of working posts.

The training policy, re-qualification and the teachers upgrading process in all levels of education, early childhood, primary, secondary and higher education, has been a constant concern of the government and the educational authorities, so that the teachers are able to transmit to the pupil the flow of more upgraded knowledge, framed in a more effective context. In this respect it is developed a strong unfolding of postgraduate courses, masters degree, PhD programs and in-service training. Top priority has being granted to in-service primary teachers studying in higher education and 70 % of them have already obtained their university graduates diplomas.

These were, among others, the main policies of the sector and the adapting strategies developed by the Cuban education in the ninety’s, to face the restrictions of resources, the reduction of the imports and the strengthening and worsening of the economic blockade on the Island, carried out by successive united states administrations, with educational development inserted with top priority in the process of economic reforms that took place in the country, preserving the social goals and equity already achieved and fating hard to develop them further.
From 1997, transformations in the educational system were strongly guided to quality issues, without neglecting the massive and democratic access for all, to improve the relationship between the unity of the educational system and the diversity in which it is discernible; to establish adequate proportions in the centralization and decentralization processes; to create in the teaching staff a scientific approach (objective, creative and participative, based on scientific research) in solving the present and perspective educational problems in order to develop an optimal educational process. It was not only to maintain what had been accomplished, but to advance qualitatively in spite of the financial limitations, linking efficiency with effectiveness.

Three fundamental action lines were summed up: to make the school the most important cultural centre in the community; to perfect the work of the management structures and the suitability of the cadres and teachers; and to promote an integrated work between the Pedagogic Universities and the provincial management and administrative structures of the educational system.

Starting from the year 2000, it is pointed out that the main objective of the education is to rises the human development of all the Cubans, when propitiating to general and integral culture from the childhood and younger generations, promoting the assimilation of wide and deep knowledge. It is emphasized that, it is lifelong education for all, with values harmonizing with the Cuban social patterns, paying attention to the diversity of the students, and integrating them as active participants, together with the institutions and the staffs of the schools, with the families, institutions and health personnel, social organizations and social workers.

To carry out these goals, knew educational and social programs are being implemented in short and long range, to meet the aspirations and to increase the opportunities of each boy, girl, adolescent, young and adult to have democratic and universal access to education, employment and culture. The objectives of these programs are strategic, because of their impact in increasing the general and integral level of knowledge, their impact in the amplification of the general culture and in providing technical and scientific knowledge for all the population, and in their positive impact on the living standards, all of it placing the Cuban Nation in much better conditions to face future challenges. (Alvarez, E., 2002).

Work is being done to improve the quality of the primary teaching, with not more than twenty students per class and the repair and construction of knew classrooms with that purpose. In consequence, the emergent training of primary teachers began to assure the teaching staff in these schools, especially for the territories that were not able to satisfy such needs. Subsequently, schools were supplied with computers, TV-sets and VCR; all the primary schools that didn't have this possibility were electrified; an intensive word is being done in the production of software and educational videos for all the educational levels and in creating specialized centres for that purpose; consultation and literature books were sent to the schools libraries for the students and, in particular, for the teaching staff.
The qualitative advance of the basic secondary education is also a fundamental objective and it has received the effects of a series of educational programs. The repair of schools has been basic, for the existent deterioration in the secondary educational network; in the last stage of this period, work has been done in the increase of the capacities to reach the daily double session for all the students, goal that is to be achieve in the school year 2003-2004.

The training of an integral professor for the basic secondary education (seventh to ninth grade of general education) is another substantial transformation, because it will allow the descent of the number of students per teacher to fifteen and a more direct attention to the student from the overall educational point of view. The allocation of TV sets and VCR in all schools have made possible the use of a knew Educational Channel, as an aid to the teacher’s work. The improvement of the educational curricula and the increase of calculations are also aspects that will influence the improvement of the quality of teaching, as well as the upgrading of the teachers.

For youths that for different reasons are out of schools and not working, programs are being implemented to incorporate them to the classrooms, in courses of integral improvement for those between 17 to 29 years of age, like a special form of employment, because they receive a salary for doing so. These courses have the appropriate infrastructure from the resources point of view, wit teaching facilities, audiovisual means; as well as upgraded bibliography. When concluding their curricular training, equivalent to senior high, they will be able to apply for university careers or for available employments with their new qualification.

In the university level of education a number of new programs are implemented that will outcome in fomenting a qualitatively higher human capital without any doubts. In the first place, with the Programme of Municipalization of Higher Education it is sought to decentralize, even more, the university training to the local communities in a group of specialties, all through the different territories of the country and to increase the opportunities and different ways to have access to university studies.

This implied the creation of university branches in all the municipalities of the country, with the use of the facilities of existing secondary schools in alternative schedules, and it has allowed to engage other professionals living in the community as university professors on partial time, properly categorized for this educational activity and willing to support the program. Especially, university programs are introduced for people of the third age, pensioners or housewives that have an interest in continuing studying.

The creation of the basis that will allow the informatization of the whole society, is one of the programs of more impact. The technical means have been increased dedicated to the children and young people from the earliest ages as well as the number of specialized teachers with the accelerated training of about 20 thousand for this purpose and the qualification in the use of these technologies of to more than 165 thousand teachers, professors and schools principals of the whole country; it has been multiplied
by seven in the last three courses the enrolment to prepare these specialties in the medium level technological schools; as well as in higher education in which the number of universities that develop these specialties have been increased.

In this same line of action, it was enlarged and completed the national network of “Computers Clubs for Children and Youths”, facilities built in all the municipalities of the country, so that the children from early ages, have access to the computers and are able to develop these abilities. It has begin to work a computer science university, with the required technological facilities and with the objective of accelerating the training of higher education professionals in this specialty.

In terms of international collaboration and as an aid to the development of other countries, Cuba has founded two international university centres for the training of doctors and sports specialists, granting scholarships to students, largely from Latin Americans and African countries.

Lastly, the most ambitious objective is to achieve the increase of the integral general culture of the whole society. For it was put forward an Educational Channel with programming for the scholars, the youths and accessible for the whole adult population, and culture in the community is promoted through video clubs, arts houses and community computers centres.

Through the television programme “University for All”, courses are transmitted on science and technology, environment, arts and literature; universal history, languages, and geography, among others. This allows to enlarge and to upgrade the knowledge of the different population segments.

As it is appreciated, the strategies and deployed policies to reach the educational objectives have been changing along these years, with an emphasis in taking advantage of the existent potential in the country, and to prepare the population for a globalise context, where science and technology will have an essential role, and the economic and social development will be based in the acquired knowledge.

Among the objectives of the Summit of the Millennium referred to the Education the need have been set in achieving an universal primary education, pointing out the goal that all the children and girls complete their primary education. (Alarcón, D., 2002). As it comes off from what has been previously pointed out, this goal and the indicators proposed have already been reached in Cuba long ago, for what the educational system emphasizes know in increasing the quality of education and the general and integral culture of the whole population.

The summed up social projects from the World Conference of Jomtien to the one taken place in the year 2002 in Dakar, made us improve the mechanisms of integration of the educational efforts and the prevention of health in the community work, along with the education of responsible sexuality and the fight against AIDS, in Education for Life and
in the attention to the social disparities that regrettably, are still present in the Cuban society.

The Cuban society projects toward the future its educational work from the perspective of a deep educational revolution that intends changes in the concepts and ways of the teaching process, and the increase of the levels of culture already reached by all the citizens. The main goal of the Government's social efforts and the Cuban State for the next ten and fifteen years is to upgrade the culture levels of the Cuban society to the highest in the world.

The National Plan of Action for the Education For All Programme has as its main goal: to promote the actions of the different educational agents, organizations and institutions of the country guided to the elevation of the quality of the education and of the cultural and spiritual life of children and citizens, to achieve the objectives of “Lifelong Education for All” in terms of massive access and social justice promoted by the Government, the State and the Cuban Society as a whole. (Ministry of Education, 2002).

It is sought to surpass previous indexes of educational quality in terms of teaching facilities, the quality and volume of the instruction and the spirituality in terms of human values and a general and integral culture; and to educate and transform each citizen and person into a being of this concrete historical moment in which, all becomes manufacturers of the new society, with more equity and social justice, implementing the guidelines and principles present in the Socialist Constitution of the Republic.

The Plan of Action moves among fundamental dilemmas for the Cuban society such as:

- The massive admission and the quality that supposes the universal access to the educational services for all with the major possible quality and without distinction of geographical areas, sex, race or religious credo.

- The centralization and decentralization that bears to assist and to bring the decisions making to the levels in which the educational process really takes place.

- The unity and diversity that looks after the unity of the nation and of the national identity, taking into consideration the reality of the local differences of the citizens in different scenarios and contexts in which education takes place and it is carried out, with the interest of contributing to the process of stable changes toward human development.
III. The Structure of the System of Education and the Main Actors in the Execution of the Educational Policies

The National System of Education in Cuba is conceived as an articulate group of educational levels and types of schools. The primary level contains early childhood education, primary, secondary (general and professional), Adults education and special education for handicap children. The secondary level contains the junior and senior high schools and the medium level Technical and Professional centres. In the tertiary level the different types of university institutions are grouped. (See Annex). This structure is present along the Island, allowing the flow and the students in a continuous articulation from some levels to others in the different provinces and municipalities.

Only starting from the systemic operation of the parts and of the relationships of the educational system with the different ministries and social organizations, it is that the higher results can be achieved in educational matters, and that is what Cuba shows, in spite of existing economic problems and limited teaching facilities, and to face a more and more adverse international context. The reached indexes, reflects that the country compares and overcomes in some education indicators other countries with a higher industrial and technological development.

The structure of the current educational system allows the continuity of the youths studies from some subsystems to others, and it also allows to rescue dropouts during one period, due to the existence of several different courses, the regular during the day, the evening courses for youth, workers, farmers and housewives, and other non-formal modalities of distance education. Also, a group of university careers can be studied through self- learning modalities, by which the possibility exists to obtain a second career or to obtain a university diploma, on the basis of personal effort.

It is also significant the number of postgraduates courses, masters degree programs, and doctorates (PhD) offered without cost for those registered, since they run totally in charge of the Government Budget, with the only purpose to upgrade knowledge and to facilitate the exchange of experiences among specialists that act in a dynamic world of high technological changes.

In correspondence with the Constitution of the Republic, the benefit of the educational services is a function of the State, as it is reflected in the institutionalism created for it. This philosophy has its starting point on the principle that the Education is a task of society as a whole, by means of all the educational agents, such as the family, the schools and the diverse social organizations, insisting from their own perspectives, in favouring and promoting the benefit of the free educational services for all provided by the State. The education is a civic right supplied free of charge, without distinctions and
it is available in every corner of the country (Political publisher, Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1997).

In general sense, local government's organs coordinate the efforts and resources of all the educational agents and suppliers, to guarantee the application of the educational policies and to reach the benefit of the educational services, and in the meetings of their executive committees, they discuss the necessary measures to make this benefit effective and adjusted to the educational projections of the country and the local communities in each stage of its development.

The management and administration system of the Cuban Government is determined by the guidelines contained in the Constitution of the Republic that establishes the principles by which the National and local governments are organized, complemented by other laws of the Cuban Government and State. (Varela, M. y otros, 1995).

The provincial and municipal divisions in charge of education works under a double subordination, on one hand, they are subordinated to the local governments in the operative and administrative aspects and on the other hand, they are subordinated to the Ministry of Education in the normative and methodological matters.

The decision making faculty of these local management divisions expresses the decentralization, since these instances are responsible for the appointment of the teaching staff, the principals, other officials and workers of the different schools. They adapt to their territorial conditions the study plans and programs based on previous diagnosis, in the same way that they maintain the unity of the National System of Education taking into consideration general objectives.

The management and administration of the educational activities, in this conception, involve the dialectic combination of centralization and decentralization processes.

A peculiarity of the educational work in this last decade has been the change to a more participative style of management and administration and the search for a major integration at the local levels and also at the national level, that forced the adopt of more effective working methods.

A general outline of this strategy can be summarized as follow:

- Conformation of a Plan of Action, with participation of all the Organisms of the Central Administration of the State, the mass and political organizations. (Ministerial Plans of Action in terms of Objectives).

- Elaboration of the Local Government's Plans of Action and empowerment of the territorial decisions and community actions.

- The development of the integration of efforts between the central, provincial and local levels and the study of the best experiences and their generalization.
Direct exchanges among the organisms at each level of the institutional and civil structure in concrete aspects.

- Control and systematic monitoring of the indicators that measure the behaviour of the educational and social policies and their adjustment, in terms of the regional and local characteristics, with measure indicators for each stage.

The educational policies in their more general sense, are elaborated following the guidelines and postulates of the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba and approved by the maximum organs of Party and Government, which are preceded by a wide social debate until national consensus is reached. These policies are countersigned in the National Assembly of the Popular Power, when their nature and social extension require it and they generally are preceded by a social debate between the educators and the students.

Peculiar aspects of the educational policies are elaborated and adopted by the Government's superior organs and the Ministry of Education and, frequently, they are the product of consensus and previous consultations with the different educational and social agents and of previous research and pedagogic experiences.

It is significant the inter-sectoriality reached in the different administration levels, like a very effective strategy that has especially propitiated the participation of the most diverse social agents in the design and execution of the educational policies. (Ministerio de Educación, 2000).

To have involved the people, by means of their civil and social organizations, in the educational process, constitutes the key of the success in the implementation of the most complex educational tasks and of the existence of a commitment and national consensus, as they all think.

Of supreme importance in the organization and execution of the educational policies are the bilateral contacts and collaboration among the Ministry of Education and other Ministries, social organizations and institutions, to guarantee the collective work for the achievement of an increasing quality in the educational process. These bonds depend on, also, in the agreement of the council of Ministers (I Agree of the Executive Committee of the council of Ministers, May 6, 1986) that establishes the necessary coordination between the ministries and organisms dealing with production and social services and the municipal and provincial management and administration of the educational activity.

In this fashion, between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, the strategies are coordinated in artistic education and cultural work in the educational institutions; with the Ministries of Agriculture and of Sugar, the linking of study and work and the reinforcement of the feeding of the students in the schools by means of parcels of self-consumption. With the Ministry of Public Health it is analysed the work
of the doctors and nurses in the educational centres, and the health education in the schools and communities.

On the other hand, the social organizations of the community are in charge of looking after the appropriate operation of the schools and to those ends they participate in the Council of Schools. They also contribute with the operation of the Municipal Council of Minors, under the leadership of the educational authorities, in the preventive work with the children, adolescents and youths in social disadvantage and the educational work in general.

From beginnings of the year 2000 and being intensified in the last two years, the civil society stays informed of the Government's plans to transform the education with the purpose of elevating the levels of integral general culture of the population to the highest in the world. These plans are part of the battle of ideas in which the nation is unwrap in its current context and are associated with “Lifelong Education for All”, responding to the goals of Dakar, most of all already accomplished by Cuba. There are national consensus and commitment of the whole society with the efforts that are carried out to guarantee the highest quality of education for all.

Only starting from the systemic operation of the parts and of the relationships of the education system with the different ministries and social organizations, is that the highest results can be achieved, as Cuba is able to show in the educational process, despite of the existing financial and material problems, and the more and more adverse international contexts. The reached indexes reflects that Cuba compares and overcomes a large number of countries with a higher industrial and technological development, in several educational indicators.

IV. Financing of Education

The Cuban State assigns important resources to the financing of the social services, occupying a prominent place the current expenditure in education inside the State budget. The current expenditure in education in relation with the total current expenditure of the national budget is of 22 percent and with relationship to the total expenditure of the budget it reaches 14 percent.

The current expenditure of education as a percentage of the GDP in the whole period beginning in 1990 have never been inferior to 6 percent. With the gradual improvement of the economy after 1993, a consistent increase of the current expenditure in education is observed and as a percentage of the GDP, it reaches 9.3 % in the year 2002.

The expenses in education 1997-02 grew during the period in more than 1 million pesos and they have been directed in more than 80% to the teaching staff in early childhood, primary and secondary level. Salaries represent around 54 percent. They include the basic salary, the remuneration for in-service training and upgrading, the bonuses for
good results reached in the school year and the payments of the social security by licenses of maternity or illness. (MFP, 2002).

Starting from the year 1998 a salary stimulation is applied, based on the results of the school-year evaluation as a teacher; and starting from 1999, it was carried out a salary reform that increased the salary of the teachers and other workers in the education system. This implied an amount near the 250 million pesos.

In other expenditures, priority is given to the acquisition of goods and services like: foods, teaching facilities, school uniforms, transport, repair and maintenance of the school buildings, construction of new schools, among others. (MFP; Presupuesto del Estado, 2002). Also, it includes the social security. The biggest payments in year 2002 are concentrated in foods, 27 percent, social security (18 percent) and repairs (14,3 percent).

The material resources with which the sector operated were affected between 1992 and 1995, in correspondence with a real decrease of the country's economy, as a consequence of the contraction of our import capacity due to the loss of the traditional markets in which we bought teaching facilities, school equipment and other educational services, alongside wit the strengthening of the blockade imposed by successive EE.UU. administrations.

The constructive deterioration of the network of educational centres, for the lack of maintenance and repairs, has been one of the most urgent problems to solve. Starting from year 2000, a maintenance and repair programme for primary and secondary schools began, together with the remodelling of a significant number of schools and the enlargement of capacities, to make possible the objective of diminishing the number of students per classroom.

Another interesting element to stand out is that the local budgets finance 77 percent of the national educational expenditure. Starting from 1995 the degree of decentralization of the public expense is increased and it is authorized to the Council of Administration
in each territory to define and to approve, within the total expenditure approved in the national budget, the specific destination of the expenditure, according to the particular needs of each region. In the same way, they can, in the course of the year and, according to the behaviour of the execution of the budget, transfer resources from a branch to another by means of budgetary modifications without having to receive authorization from the superior budgetary level. (INIE, 2003)

The funds for the payment of the salaries in the sector, comes from the Budget that the State assigns for the educational activity. The monthly salary that the teacher receives is determined by the following elements: the level of professional qualification, the type of school in which the teacher is working, the years of experience in the teaching activity, leading responsibilities and the final result of the year's evaluation.

The university graduate in pedagogic careers receive a basic monthly salary of 280.00 pesos that can reach up to 330.00 pesos in relation with the final result of their evaluation. This basic salary can be increased with the referred additional payments, reaching the monthly average of 425.00 pesos. This amount is calculated as being 73% higher in relation with the average national salary.

The parents of the students don't have participation in the financing of the centres, but there are mechanisms that allow the active participation of the whole community in the attention to the educational problems of the children, their families and in their preparation for family education. Also, they contribute with volunteer work to the hygiene and maintenance of the schools.

The decentralization of the administration of the public expenditure is directed to elevate the efficiency in the assignment of resources according with the needs and priorities of each municipality, educational level and requirements of the schools; to strengthen the responsibility and the discipline of the educational workers communities; to guarantee the quality of the educational process, and the reinforcement of the participation and control carried out by the community in relation with these services.
V. Impact of the main educational programs in course with the purpose of elevating the integral general culture of the whole population

It is considered of great interest the advance, complexities and outcomes in the quality assurance in the sphere of education of some of the main programs in implementation, because they constitute an example of how much can be achieved, mainly in the long term. (MINED, 2003).

By means of the **PROGRAMME FOR THE INTEGRAL ATTENTION OF THE STUDENTS IN THE PRIMARY EDUCATION**, it is intended to diminish down to twenty or less the number of students per class and that the teacher goes along with the same group of students through the six years of primary education. It will also improve the school organization and in particular, the differentiated attention to the students, the work with the family and the community. This programme has achieved that 74 percent of the total enrolment of the primary education benefits from it, and especially that 68 percent of the pupils of the urban area are in groups of twenty or less students. In the capital city of the country the programme has a 100% coverage. In the case of the groups that are still with more than twenty students, the solution has been that their specific attention is carried out by two teachers.

As a complement, more than 80 percent of the primary teachers are being trained to go along with the same group of students from the first to the sixth grade, as well as work is being done in the improvement of the school organization and the schedules, in order to facilitate a better level of the children's learning, alongside with the use of television, VCR and computers as teaching aids.

Through the **Programme of Emergent Training of Primary Teachers**, answer has being given to the demand of teachers in the Capital City and in other punctual areas of the country, favouring the reduction of the number of students per class, as outlined in the previous program. The results of these courses have had a significant influence in reaching a retention of the students in schools of 98,1 percent at the national level in the school year 2002/2003, and the final promotion without extraordinary exams rose to 92,6 percent of students approved. During this period a number of 8,4 thousands of teachers have been trained through this alternative, and now, jointly with their work as teachers in the classrooms, they have continued university studies.

The Audiovisual Programme together with the allocation of more than 81 thousands televisions and 21 thousands VCR in all the schools, has allowed the increase of the quality of the teaching-learning process. A qualitative leap has been accomplish with the introduction of new Educational Channel that will soon can be seen in the whole country, that will not only have a significant influence on the learning process or the
students, but, at the same time, will make a large contributes to upgrade the knowledge of the whole society. They are transmitting already a total of 3200 educational programs, by means of 1400 hours of transmission.

Classes telecast and complementary programs have been included, together with programs for the increase of the population's general culture, but a significant element for primary education has been to be able to include the classes of musical and plastic education that were lacking in this level.

By means of the Programme “University for All” courses of general culture are imparted by television aimed to the whole society. Literature courses have been developed, Spanish and spelling, English, French, geography and history of Cuba, reviews for the entrance to higher education, and seminars for educators, among others. Linked directly to the school work, it has constituted an indispensable vehicle for the elevation of the culture and the preparation of the youths and the teachers and it has played an important role in the upgrading of the teaching staff, empowering their influence in students and their families and communities.

During the school year 2002/03 have been linked to this program, the students of the boarding centres, the schools of primary teachers emergent training and qualification, the pedagogic universities, the schools of art instructors and principals and others educational leaders. In the courses already finished, 750 thousand students, teachers and educational leaders have participated; in addition, 36.9 thousands of the twelve grade students have received reviews for the entrance to higher education.

With the purpose of increasing the text books for the teaching-learning process, the “Editorial Programme Freedom” has been issued, with a low cost. With this programme the availability of dictionaries, encyclopaedias and classic works and books of History of Cuba has been increased in more than 834.4 thousands of copies, and an increment of the reading habits is being appreciated, together with the use of other materials in the libraries and documentation centres. Work is carried out to integrate this programme with those issued for Educational Computers and Audiovisual aids.

By means of the Programme for the Training of Arts Instructors, the vocation of the students is fomented taking advantage of the existing capability. 15 schools were created, one in each province and in the municipality of the Youth's Island, and at the moment, they are going through their third course. The enrolment of the course 2002/2003 were of 11.6 thousands of students in music's specialties, dance, plastic and theatre, being created the conditions so that in each school there is more and more a better promotion of the culture and arts.

Another of the Programs with more social impact is the “Educational Computers Program”. This programme has provide all educational centres with computers for the educational work of the students and to achieve the informatics society. Computers has already been assign to all the primary schools and there are more than 46,3 thousands computers in the school network, diminishing the relationship pupil/computer to 45 in
primary, 50 in basic secondary, 39 in senior high schools, 20 in the accounting polytechnics and 15 in those training in computer science. It is necessary to point out that of the 9 thousand primary schools of the country, 4700 have up to 40 students and 1036 between one and five children, and all of them have computers for the development of the program. Parallel to this fact, more than 4500 schools were electrified in the last two courses, so that they are able to use this new technologies, computers and audiovisual aids; an important group of these schools were supplied with solar panels.

On the same way, the internal capacity of 13000 computers have been increased, together with other hardware resources. Starting from the existent capacity in NTIC and with reformed and new study plans, a student should receive around 550 hours working with computers during her/his school time, and that implies that they will be able to achieve a general training in computers and informatics in the future.

There are 20 thousand computer teachers in the educational system, with the creation of 12,6 thousand new employments in the sector, and of them, 12,2 thousands are working in primary schools. 144,7 thousands of teachers and professors have been qualified for this task, and 20,2 thousands of principals and other educational leaders. In spite of the advances in the training of leaders and teachers in computers, the practical application of this equipment still has inadequacies, since their potential is not used to the maximum in preparing educational activities as teaching-learning aids, neither like a fundamental tool to achieve a larger learning of the students.

In this effort of computerizing the society, the country increased to more than 20 thousand the enrolment in the polytechnic centres to prepare more technicians in computers, and in addition, two careers with a profile in computers were created in the pedagogic universities, being developed by students and teachers more than 85 educational software’s.

One of the most novel programs is that of Improvement of the Basic Secondary Schools, not only integrated to other existing Programs (repair of schools, audiovisual, education computers, among others), but aiming to train an integral teacher, capable of dealing with various subjects. This gives answer to the deficit of basic secondary teachers due to the new approaches (reduction of the number of students per class and double school session for every student). This way, there were qualified in this new modality more than 4 thousand teachers that in the school year 2002/2003 began working in an experimental way in several municipalities of the country.

Lastly, one of the programs of more impact in society, with a high popular acceptance and favourable changes in the life stile of the included youth is “The Integral Upgrading Course for the Youth”. It offers general upgrading courses to the youth without educational neither work bond, and they receive a monetary stipend to study. It has been generalized to all the territories and 114 thousands youths between 17 and 29 years are enroled in the school year 2202/2003. The daily attendance (94 percent) to these courses is high and, besides the educational actions, the students have developed numerous
activities that have favoured their training and integration to society. The retention is of the order of 87 percent, but the biggest quantity in dropouts are due to their incorporation to different employments, going to the military Service and transfers to other existent courses.

The programme is assisted by 8300 teachers, of which 55 percent belongs to the Adults education and the outputs of these courses with the senior high school level have the possibility to continue university studies in correspondence with the priorities for professional training and the availability of employments after completion of their studies.

As a synthesis, it should be pointed out that these programs with specific objectives have implicit a long term strategic philosophy, when they elevate the quality of the teaching-learning process in the schools and the increase of knowledge in the whole society, preparing the youths and the citizens in general not only with the basic knowledge for life and employment, but forging study habits and helping to accomplish the general integral culture for all, with domain of the new information and communication technology as a weapon to develop a better society for the future generations (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The successful development of these programs will contribute to the execution of the objectives of Lifelong Education for All, because there is an institutional commitment fully supported by the civil society; they are fundamental axes that will guarantee the traced goals of our National Education for All Action Plan.
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