



Education for All in the Americas: Regional Framework of Action

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on Education for All in the Americas,
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Preface

Ten years after the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America assessed progress made within the region in terms of achieving the objectives and goals outlined in Jomtien. Meeting in Santo Domingo, 10-12 February 2000, the countries agreed to the present **Regional Framework of Action** in which they renewed their commitments to Education for All for the next fifteen years.

The countries of the region base their proposals and actions upon the recognition of the universal right of everyone to high-quality basic education from birth.

This **Regional Framework of Action** ratifies and lends continuity to the efforts made by countries during the past decade to achieve ever-higher levels of education for their peoples as attested in numerous international, regional and sub-regional meetings.¹ In these meetings as well as in the actions that countries have carried out, we see them put into practice the conviction that education is the key to sustainable human development. For education stimulates the broadening of opportunities for quality education and promotes in citizens an awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

This **Regional Framework of Action** seeks to fulfil still-pending commitments of the past decade: to eliminate the inequalities that persist in education and to see to it that everyone has access to basic education that prepares them to be active participants in development.

The diversity of situations among countries and the heterogeneity of conditions within them make it difficult to formulate homogeneous strategies aimed at reaching objectives and fulfilling commitments agreed upon by all. This means that countries must convert regional commitments into national goals, according to their own capabilities. Nevertheless, within this diversity there is a common denominator of poverty, inequality and exclusion that affects a large proportion of families in the region, who lack educational opportunities to aid their development and that of their communities. From this arises the countries' shared commitment to give priority to these individuals through differentiated strategies and focuses.

In this **Regional Framework of Action**, countries within the region commit themselves to establish national level mechanisms for public policy co-operation that express the shared

¹ Since the 1980s at a number of forums, the countries have agreed upon goals and guidelines for regional action: the Major Project in the Field of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Action Plan of the World Summit for Children; the World Conference on Special Needs Education (Salamanca, Spain); the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education; the Summits of the Americas; the Ibero-American Summits, and the meetings of Ministers of Education and of Ministers responsible for social areas and for early childhood.

responsibilities of government, the private sector and society in general to define and attain specific goals. They also commit themselves to periodic, open review of their actions. Increasingly, the new millennium demands that education, which is a right of all, be the object of State policies that are stable, long-range, arrived at through consensus and backed by the commitment of all members of society. For this reason, processes must be developed that are buttressed by information and by communication, establishing partnerships with all media involved in producing them.

The **Regional Framework of Action** also calls upon organizations of international co-operation to contribute to overcoming intra-regional disparities by giving priority to the efforts of countries that face the greatest challenges in reaching their goals.

I. Achievements and pending subjects

The **Regional Framework of Action** seeks to consolidate the major achievements of Education for All attained within the region during the decade of the 1990s. On the regional level these include:

- Substantial increases in early childhood care and education, particularly for the 4-6 year old age-group.
- Significant increases in the availability of schooling and access of nearly all children to primary education.
- An increase in the number of years of compulsory education.
- A relative decrease in illiteracy, without having achieved the goal of diminishing the 1990 rate by one-half.
- Priority given to quality as an objective of education policies.
- Growing concern for the theme of equity and attention to diversity in education policies.
- A progressive inclusion of education for life themes in both formal and non-formal courses.
- Participation of diverse actors such as non-government organizations, parents and others in school life.
- Consensus regarding education as a national and regional priority.

This **Framework** recognizes that, in spite of these achievements, a number of subjects that merit the attention of countries in the region are still pending. Among these are:

- Inadequate attention to comprehensive early childhood development, especially for children under four years of age.
- High rates of repetition and drop-out in primary school, resulting in a high number of over-age children within grades and of others outside school.
- Low priority for literacy training and education of young people and of adults in national policies and strategies.
- Low levels of student learning.

- Little attention to teacher training and professional enhancement.
- Persistent inequalities in the distribution, efficiency and quality of education services.
- Inadequate interface among different actors involved in Education for All.
- Lack of efficient mechanisms for the formulation of state education policies in co-operation with those outside of government.
- Small increases in resources allocated to education and inefficient use of those that are available.
- Insufficient availability and use of information and communication technologies.

II. Challenges recognized in the Regional Framework of Action

Subjects still pending present challenges that the countries of the region have decided to confront in the coming years. They will do so using the common denominator of the search for equity and equality of opportunity, for quality education and for the sharing of responsibilities by all of society.

The challenges are the following:

- To increase social investment in early childhood care, increasing access to early childhood development programs and improving coverage of early education programs.
- To guarantee access and retention of all boys' and girls' basic education programs, substantially reducing grade repetition, school drop-out and over-age students in grades.
- To assure access to quality education to the entire population, with special attention to vulnerable social groups.
- To give greater priority to literacy training and education of young people and of adults as part of national education systems, improving existing programs and to create alternatives for all young people and adults, especially those at risk.
- To continue to improve the quality of basic education, giving priority to the school and the classroom as learning environments, recognizing the social value of the teacher and improving assessment systems.
- To formulate inclusive education policies and to design diversified curricula and education delivery systems in order to serve the population excluded for reasons of gender, language, culture, or individual differences.
- To assure that schools encourage health, the exercise of citizenship, and basic life skills training.
- To increase and reallocate resources using criteria of equity and efficiency, as well as to mobilize other resources with alternative delivery systems.

- To offer high levels of professional enhancement to teachers and career development policies that improve the quality of their lives and the conditions of their work.
- To create necessary frameworks, so that education becomes a task for all, and that guarantee popular participation in the formulation of state policies and transparency in policy administration.
- To co-ordinate education policies that encourage multi-sector actions aimed at overcoming poverty and directed to populations at risk.
- To adopt and strengthen the use of information and communication technologies in the management of education systems and in teaching and learning processes.
- To promote school-based management, granting individual school autonomy with broad citizen participation.
- To strengthen management capacity at local, regional and national levels.

Considering past achievements, pending subjects and challenges, the countries, through this **Regional Framework of Action**, make the following commitments:

III. Commitments of the Regional Framework of Action

1. Early childhood care and education

Considering that:

- A sustained increase of resources for comprehensive early childhood care and development is essential in order to guarantee the rights of citizenship from birth, to assure better learning outcomes in the future, and to reduce educational and social inequalities;
- For this period of life, it is extremely important that joint actions be undertaken by institutions that offer services in health, nutrition, education and family well-being. It is important that these services be directed toward families and the community, and that they offer literacy training and adult education as well;
- Communication strategies are key, both for education programmes directed at families and in order to establish and strengthen the links among governmental authorities, policy-makers and communities.

The countries pledge to:

- Increase investment in and access to comprehensive early childhood development programmes for children less than 4 years of age. The focus should be centred on the family and give special attention to those who are most at risk

- Maintain past achievements and increase early childhood education for children 4 years and older, particularly for less-advantaged children. Strategies should be centred on the family, the community, or specialized centres;
- Improve the quality of comprehensive early childhood development programmes by:
 - strengthening comprehensive, continuous and high quality training and support programs for families and for others who contribute to health, nutrition, and growth during early childhood;
 - strengthening monitoring and assessment of early childhood services and programs, as well as to establish national standards that are flexible, agreed upon, and sensitive to diversity;
 - establishing co-operative mechanisms between institutions that offer services and programs related to the survival and the development of children under 6 years of age;
 - better use of communication technologies and media in order to reach families who live in remote areas that are of difficult access for institutionalized programmes.

2. Basic education

Considering that:

- By 'basic education', we refer to satisfying learning-for-life needs. These include knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that permit people to
 - develop their abilities
 - live and work with dignity
 - fully participate in the development and improvement of their quality of life
 - make decisions with access to adequate information, and
 - continue to learn throughout life.
- Basic learning occurs from birth, and is attained by children, adolescents and adults through strategies that meet the different needs of each age group.
- The empowerment of learners, the promotion of their participation and shared responsibility with families, communities and schools are basic conditions for sustaining past achievements/accomplishments and for facing new challenges.

The countries pledge to:

- Maintain and increase access to basic education already achieved, assuring that it will not diminish during emergency situations caused by natural disasters or due to serious deterioration of economic and social conditions;
- Identify groups still excluded from access to basic education for reasons of gender, geographical location, culture or individual differences, and to design and implement flexible and appropriate programmes involving diverse sectors that respond to their specific conditions and needs;
- Give priority to policies and strategies aimed at decreasing repetition and drop-out, assuring permanence, progress and success of boys and girls and of adolescents in basic

education systems and programmes until they complete the basic levels required in each country.

3. Satisfying basic learning needs of young people and of adults

Considering that:

- Over the years the region has developed its own programmes and rich experiences in the area of popular education and the education of young people and of adults;
- The demands and agreements of international conferences offer new prospects for regional action in the area of education of young people and of adults;
- Providing educational opportunities for young people and adults demands that actions be co-ordinated between social actors and those who work in the fields of health, labour and the environment.

The countries pledge to:

- Incorporate the education of young people and of adults into national education systems and give priority to these age-groups in education reforms carried out as part of the key responsibility of governments in the basic education of their peoples.
- Improve and diversify education programmes by:
 - giving priority to groups that are excluded and at risk,
 - guaranteeing and consolidating literacy training,
 - giving priority to the acquisition of basic life skills and encouraging full use of the rights of citizenship,
 - linking parenting education with early childhood care and education,
 - utilizing formal and non-formal quality systems,
 - associating the education of young people and of adults with productive activities and labour, and
 - recognizing previous experience as valid learning for academic credits.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of governments and of society as a whole in this field, as well as stimulate greater participation of society in the formulation of public policies and in the definition of strategies linked to programmes and actions.

4. Learning achievements and quality of education

Considering that:

- The quality of results is a key factor in contributing to retaining children in school and in guaranteeing the social and economic payoffs of basic education;
- Determining learning achievement requires establishing quality standards and permanent processes of monitoring and assessment;
- Systems for measuring quality should take into consideration the diversity of individual and group conditions in order to avoid the exclusion from school of children living in high-risk situations.

The countries pledge to:

- Continue to move forward with processes of curricular reform and to strengthen curricula by including within it life skills, values and attitudes that encourage families to keep their children in school and that provide people with the necessary instruments to overcome poverty and to improve the quality of life of families and communities;
- Reserve a special place within quality improvement strategies for the school and for the classroom as learning environments characterized by:
 - the recognition of diversity and heterogeneity of students and of flexibility that responds adequately to their special learning needs,
 - the encouragement of teamwork on the part of school directors and teachers,
 - normative frameworks that put into practice the rights of children and adolescents to participate, together with their teachers, parents and the community, and
 - skill development for autonomous school management and responsibility for processes and results;
- Recognize the social and professional value of teachers as essential actors within quality education by establishing agreed-upon policies for certification, improvement of working conditions, remuneration and incentives for continuing improvement of professional skills;
- Provide books and other didactic and technological resources in order to improve student learning;
- Organize appropriate systems of monitoring and assessment that take into consideration individual and cultural differences, that are based on agreed-upon national and regional standards and that make possible participation in international studies;
- Stimulate on-going action of the media in order to support student learning.

5. Inclusive education*Considering that:*

- Basic education for all requires assuring access, permanence, quality learning, and full participation and integration of all children and adolescents, particularly for members of indigenous groups, those with disabilities, those who are homeless, those who are workers, those living with HIV/AIDS and others;
- Protection against discrimination based on culture, language, social group, gender or individual differences is an inalienable human right that must be respected and fostered by education systems.

The countries pledge to:

- Formulate inclusive education policies that define goals and priorities in accordance with different categories of excluded populations in each country, including establishing legal and institutional frameworks that will effectively make inclusion the responsibility of the entire society;

- Design diversified education delivery systems, flexible school curricula and new education environments within the community. These should value diversity, viewing it as a force for social development. They should preserve innovative experiences in formal and non-formal education in order to meet the needs of all boys and girls, adolescents, young people and adults;
- Promote and strengthen intercultural and bilingual education in multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural societies;
- Implement a sustained process of communication, information and education within families that emphasizes the importance and the benefits for countries of educating those who are currently excluded.

6. Education for life*Considering that:*

- Education should provide skills for living and for developing
 - a culture of the respect for law,
 - the exercise of citizenship and democratic life,
 - peace and non-discrimination,
 - the development of civic and ethical values,
 - sexuality,
 - the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, and
 - the preservation and care of the environment;
- The inclusion of this learning into either multidisciplinary or subject curricula presents a challenge to new curricula construction, for joint work with communities and for the role of the teacher as a life skills model.

The countries pledge to:

- Guarantee that the school be a learner-friendly environment, both physically and socially, one that favours healthy lifestyles, the practice of life skills, and early exercise of citizenship and of democratic values, and that it provides opportunities for participation in decisions regarding school life and learning;
- Establish flexible curricular norms that allow schools to integrate contents and meaningful experiences into the curriculum that are relevant to the community and that permit the school to interact with the community;
- Train teachers, parents, young people and adults so that they may promote and support this kind of learning in everyday life;
- Include specific indicators on this kind of learning in order to monitor and assess it within the school and to measure its impact on the lives of students;
- Stimulate and carry out activities in education for life developed by the media, by social organizations, NGOs, the private sector, political parties and others.

7. Increase of national investment in education and effective mobilization of resources on all levels

Considering that:

- The priority of education as a key instrument for development should be expressed by the commitment to gradually increase investment in the sector to at least 6 per cent of GDP in order to achieve universal coverage of basic education and to overcome current deficits;
- Systems of information and of assessment are key components in decision-making in education. Data must therefore be sought both on the education system and on its social, economic and cultural contexts. These guide the allocation of resources for the education of children, adolescents, young people and adults.

The countries pledge to:

- Develop focus strategies for the allocation of educational expenditures in order to diminish inequalities and to assist at-risk populations;
- Increase the allocation of resources for education based on the efficiency and efficacy of their use, and based upon criteria of equity and affirmative action;
- Establish mechanisms for establishing budgets and allocating resources that include broad social participation, that lend transparency and credibility to the management of resources and that guarantee accountability, for all of which adequate and timely information is of key importance;
- Use decentralization as an opportunity to optimize the use of existing resources and to promote the mobilization of new resources, particularly those coming from the private sector;
- Actively seek alternative mechanisms for financing education, such as public/private sharing and foreign debt/education swaps.

8. Professional enhancement for teachers

Considering that:

- Teachers occupy an irreplaceable position in transforming education, in changing teaching practices within the classroom, in the use of teaching and technological resources, in facilitating relevant and quality learning, and in the development of student values;
- The value that society attributes to teachers is associated with the improvement of their performance and their working and living conditions;
- The progressive incorporation of information and communication technologies into society requires that these subjects be included in initial and in-service teacher training;
- Rural schools and those serving at-risk populations require teachers with higher quality academic training and human relations skills.

The countries pledge to:

- Offer teachers high quality academic training that is linked to research and the ability to produce innovations, and that prepares them for carrying out their duties in diverse social, economic, cultural, and technological contexts;
- Establish teacher career policies that
 - permit them to improve their living and working conditions,
 - stimulate the profession and provide incentives for talented young people to enter it,
 - create incentives for teachers to pursue high levels of pedagogical and academic training,
 - develop skills to accompany and facilitate lifelong learning,
 - increase commitments with the community;
- Implement systems for assessing teacher performance and for measuring the quality and levels of achievement in the profession, following basic standards agreed upon by teachers' unions and other organizations;
- Establish normative frameworks and education policy in order to incorporate teachers into the management of changes in the education system and to encourage teamwork within the school.

9. New opportunities for participation of the community and the society

Considering that:

- There is a growing need on the part of many in society to exercise the right to participate in education decisions that affect them, as well as to assume the responsibilities that accompany such decisions;
- Public policies that require long-term stability and continuity are made through processes in which the state and society jointly participate;
- The great potential represented by various social sectors such as workers associations, unions, business groups, political parties, indigenous peoples, young people, women, NGOs, community organizations, artistic and cultural groups, etc., is not sufficiently utilized.

The countries pledge to:

- Create normative, institutional and financial frameworks that:
 - create new opportunities for participation,
 - legitimize existing forums and
 - guarantee the participation of society in the elaboration, monitoring and assessment of education policies, and in the development of national plans and programmes in these areas;
- Create and strengthen channels for communication and consultation, facilitating the interface among different actors in education, whether governmental, private, or non-governmental.

10. Linking of basic education to strategies for overcoming poverty and inequality

Considering that:

- During the decade of the 1990s, countries within the region developed policies and programmes to promote basic education, seeking to make an impact on overcoming poverty and inequality through various measures;
- One must keep in mind past attempts to increase education opportunities that were linked to providing food, clothing, basic health services; to budgetary strategies of redistribution and targeting; to support measures for families through study grants and education activity carried out by leaders, institutions and/or community groups;
- Education, in order to have a more effective impact on overcoming poverty and inequality, must be part of more broad-based social policies and developed within a multi-sector strategic framework.

The countries pledge to:

- Bring together various activities designed to:
 - strengthen education within the ambit of social policies;
 - convert assistance policies into policies to promote the skills of people;
 - combine, at all levels, education policies and programmes with policies and programmes for generating employment, improving health and developing communities;
 - include contents and values within education that promote solidarity and improvement of the quality of life.
- Guarantee equity in the distribution of both public and private resources for education and for social development, and assure greater efficiency in their utilization to benefit at-risk populations;
- Promote programmes for the support and accompaniment of children, adolescents, young people, and adults of poor families and those affected by social and economic inequalities in order to guarantee their basic education and full participation in the design, management, follow-up and assessment of such training;
- Improve living conditions for teachers themselves as a necessary condition for their professional growth.

11. Utilization of technologies in education

Considering that:

- The current technological revolution in information and communication has produced new ways for people and organizations to relate to one another. Education cannot remain outside of these changes. Increasingly, teachers assume the role of facilitator and mediator so that students may critically utilize these new technologies;
- These technologies should be included as a key factor in the improvement of processes and opportunities of teaching and learning;

- Information and communication technologies fulfil a crucial role in the administration, planning, management and follow-up of education policies and processes;
- These technologies, which are tools, should not be merely one more factor for exclusion and discrimination; on the contrary, they should be accessible to all students and teachers.

The countries pledge to:

- Support use in the classroom of information and communication technologies;
- Promote permanent and equitable access to communication and information technologies to teachers and to communities as well as provide ongoing opportunities for training through information centres, better practices networks and other mechanisms for the dissemination and interchange of experiences;
- Adopt, and strengthen where currently in use, information and communication technologies in order to improve policy decision-making and planning of education systems and school administration. This will facilitate the processes of decentralization and autonomy of school management, and the training of administrators and teachers in the introduction and use of information and communication technologies;
- At the same time, re-emphasize the importance of books as key instruments for access to culture and as a fundamental means of using the new technologies.

12. Management of education

Considering that:

- The improvement of quality and equity of education is closely related to improvement in management at all levels of the education system;
- With increasing decentralization and greater participation of the school community, the role of school principals acquires broader and more complex dimensions;
- Information and assessment systems are vital for education policy decision-making.

The countries pledge to:

- Define administrative structures that consider the individual school as the basic unit, with managerial autonomy, progressively generating mechanisms for citizen participation and establishing levels of responsibility for each actor in the management process, in the control of results and in accountability;
- Promote national and regional mechanisms that offer school principals and teachers professional training in school and curricular management, in the use of technology, and in values, attitudes and practices that foster transparency in education management;
- Develop systems for the collection of information, data analysis, research and innovations as tools to improve policy decision-making;

- Establish parameters that identify the responsibilities of personnel that work in the education system, as well as support mechanisms and policies for personnel administration;
- Improve systems for measuring results, assessment and accountability, adjusted to comparable indicators and standards, supported by assessment mechanisms that are outside the education system itself.

IV. A call for international co-operation

The countries of the region, upon assuming the above commitments:

- Call upon the international community and co-operation agencies to increase and perfect support mechanisms to countries in order to contribute to the fulfilment of goals established in this Framework of Action and to assume a shared responsibility for their fulfilment, particularly in the support of countries facing the most critical problems;
- Agree to foster country-to-country co-operation for the exchange of lessons learned and of useful experiences for improving education;
- Appeal to international financing agencies to align their funding policies with the directions of national education policies and to increase the amount of resources dedicated to education, especially in less-favoured countries;
- Call upon governments and societies to make every effort to co-operate in the development of policies, strategies and action plans that will give a new thrust to policies that guarantee to all people the right of access to basic, quality education and to reap its benefits. ■