THE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN LATIN AMERICA:
PROSPECTS AND CRITERIA FOR ACTION

(Discussion Paper)

Prepared by
Daniel A. Morales-Gómez
and
Benjamín Álvarez

International Development Research Centre
Social Sciences Division
Ottawa, April, 1985
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

1

## LATIN AMERICA FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

3

## THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN THE REGION

7

## THE IDRC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- Emphasis by Funding Areas 15
- Emphasis by Thematic and Methodological Approaches 19
- Emphasis by Countries and Geographical Areas 21
- Emphasis by Institutions 24

## CRITERIA FOR ACTION IN THE REGION

27
- Diversity of Treatment and Response 30
- Priority to Less Developed Countries 31
- Focus on Social Relevance 32
- Involvement of Governments 33
- Integration of Research Activities 33
- Interdisciplinary Focus 34
- Scientific Quality 34
- Attention to basic Educational Needs and Problems 35

## CONCLUSIONS

36
INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the IDRC, Latin America had been the region of the world which concentrates the larger number of the Centre's activities. Between 1974 and 1983, the Centre has supported 592 research projects in the region of which 48.0% were funded by the Social Sciences Division. In terms of the total Centre's allocation, Latin America has received the second largest proportion of funds (26.6%), after Asia (28.3%), corresponding to approximately eighty million dollars.

During this period, 41.4% of the projects funded by the Division were in Latin America. This represents close to 33.5% of the Centre's allocation in the region and 36.3% of the total allocation of the Division around the world. The Education Programme has funded a total of 86 projects in the region representing 30.3% of the Social Science projects in Latin America and approximately 52.1% of the total number of projects supported by the Programme around the world. In terms of allocations by region, Latin America represents close to 47.2% of the total Programme's budget. These figures indicate that, in the past, Latin America has represented one of the key areas in the world in terms of the Centre's and in particular the Social Sciences Division and the Education Programme's efforts to strengthen research capacities among developing countries.

Today, Latin America poses new challenges to the Division and to the Programme which cannot be ignored. The current educational, political, and economic trends in the region, the rapid development of the research capacity in education compared to other parts of the world, and the rich and active network of contacts with institutions and researchers established by the Centre over the
years, suggest that future demands for research funds will increase rather than diminish. Current conditions of limited financial resources in the Centre, a severe economic crisis in the region, a potentially higher demand for funds from Asia and Africa than in the past, and the withdrawal of other agencies funding education research in Latin America, create the need for the Programme to critically review its policies and strategies towards the region.

The purpose of this paper is to open an internal discussion in the Education Programme concerning its future role in supporting research in Latin America. The paper will attempt to review the past and current agenda of the Programme for supporting research initiatives in order to present an alternative approach that could lead to strengthening its role and improve its effectiveness among the developing countries in the southern hemisphere.

The paper focuses on several broad but inter-related aspects. First, a general characterization of the political economy of education in the region. Particular attention will be paid to the factors which affect the development of education and educational research, and condition, to a large extent, the actions that the Education Programme could take to accomplish the Centre's mandate. Second, a review of the role of the Programme in Latin America over the last years. Third, a description of the institutional differences in research capacity in education and the factors affecting its development, including an analysis of the implications for Programme priorities and strategies, of present socio-economic, political, and educational conditions affecting the region. And fourth, a preliminary identification of possible criteria of work for the next two to three years.
It is expected that this paper will serve the Programme as a base for discussion and analysis of problem areas and issues that could constitute its thematic priorities. It is also expected that this paper will assist the Programme in exploring alternatives to complement and strengthen current approaches to support educational research; to implement specific mechanisms to bring together researchers and institutions and assist in the dissemination of research results; and to identify new modalities and funding mechanisms that could better serve the educational needs of the region.

LATIN AMERICA FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Serious controversies have risen in the past among development analysts attempting to identify and explain national development approaches in Latin America. In many of the attempts to understand and explain underdevelopment from outside the region, there has been a tendency to compose regional profiles and to describe the historical evolution of countries in the hemisphere as a unified and uniform conglomerate of societies. Latin America thus has been perceived as a large geographical area, supposedly unified by a common language, a common Christian-Catholic doctrine, and a common indigenous culture and population. The fact is, however, that without including the English speaking Caribbean, the region is comprised of 17 countries with a variety of socio-economic characteristics, 429 ethnic groups involving more than 30 million people, over 30 languages and dialects and, over 15 religious cults. In the past, ignorance of this situation has led development experts to assume that development can be seen as a relatively uniform process throughout the hemisphere. In this context, development efforts have been directed toward finding appropriate economic and political mechanisms that could bring the
countries in the region to a secure stage of "take-off" in a relatively short period of time. However, with the possible exceptions of Brazil's and Mexico's economic bonanza in the late sixties and the limited growth of some oil exporting countries in the seventies, no major or long standing economic miracles or development breakthroughs have occurred. This raises doubts not only about the long term impact of governments' development policies but also about global strategies for financial and technical assistance designed in the North and implemented without paying attention to the socio-economic differences among countries or geographical zones in a country, or to the cultural diversity of the societies in the region. Development has been promoted under the assumption that it is a linear process by which, through a series of sequential stages, poor and backward societies would advance over the years to achieve a paradigm of modernization similar to that of developed countries.

The perception of an homogeneous Latin America, and the belief that national development can be effectively stimulated through external assistance have given place to rather simplistic views of development. For several decades the evolution of the countries in the region and the development of their political, social, and economics institutions have been seen not only as being rooted in common traditions but also as being affected by common problems. In this context, externally supported development plans have provided a limited space for local initiatives to strengthen indigenous development capacities. This phenomenon becomes more evident looking at the fact that although for over four decades Latin America has been one of the principal recipients of massive economic and technical assistance from the developed world, the countries in the region still face serious development problems both in terms of equality in the distribution of wealth, and in terms of the satisfaction of basic needs of the more disadvantaged population.
Decades of prescriptive external assistance indicating how to produce development and by what means, have proven to be of little effect in generating wide spread development in terms of aspects such as industrialization, production and adaptation of technology, and implementation of social services for marginal, rural and indigenous communities.

Local governments' efforts to implement development plans over the last thirty years, have shown relatively low rates of success in assisting the larger sector of the population. Thus, massive poverty, social and economic inequality, social and geographical concentration of wealth and political power, recurrent stages of political disequilibrium and turmoil, periodical emergence of politically repressive regimes, imbalance between rural and urban development, formation of enclaves of modernization in traditional communities, increasing inflation and external debt, and lack of basic education are just as prevalent today as they were years ago.

Latin America continues to be treated today as a few clusters of countries occupying different positions in the priorities of international organizations and developed governments. Thus, for example, Andean countries continue to be considered as a cluster of societies with cultural, geographical, and economic commonalities which affect the long range development of this area. Southern cone countries have been seen as going through similar political and economic problems and therefore common solutions, mechanisms of assistance, and strategies for economic growth and modernization are still applied. Most recently, Central America has become the focus of attention as a new area of concern for which common strategies to deal with underdevelopment are being explored.
From a more positive perspective, it could be argued that development, being a complex and slow process, produces results that should be expected in the long rather than in the short run, and that most countries in Latin America are better-off today than in the past. In fact, some of these countries today do have more commodities available for those who can afford them compared to three or four decades ago. The technology available is also more advanced and sophisticated, as is the production of scientific knowledge, the provision of basic services, and the general material conditions, particularly for those who live in major urban centres. The most immediate effects of modernization, in terms of transportation, communications, and basic urbanization are also more noticeable today than in the past. By no means, however, can these indicators be extrapolated to all countries, or even to all the zones in any single country in the region.

Most Latin American societies today are not more equal in their internal distribution of economic or political power, more stable in their basic national institutions or in their democratic systems, or less economically dependent at the international level simply because gross indicators such as the GNP, infant survival, literacy, or number of TVs per capita are higher today than in the forties. The fact that some countries in the region tend to be identified as more developed than others, is not an accurate indicator of the actual conditions of extreme poverty and underdevelopment in which 40% of the population in the hemisphere lives today, nor of the conditions of internal socio-economic inequality in those societies.

Development today in Latin America is not simply a problem of modernization, for without a comprehensive local strategy to improve social equality
modernization will continue to benefit only a small, relatively well-to-do sector of the population. Development, as the region faces it today, is still a problem of satisfaction of basic needs, provision of minimum standards of living, sufficient health services, food, and housing, respect for basic human rights, opportunities of non-exploitative employment, and basic quality of pre-school and primary education in terms of access and survival. This spectrum of the region raises several questions: How can these needs be better identified?, what kind of local mechanisms should be implemented to facilitate developing countries to identify alternative development responses and to allocate resources more effectively for their implementation?, and what kind of impact or change could be realistically expected and achieved, in the short, medium, and long terms from the perspective of development assistance? Education, in this context, has an important role to play in answering these questions, both as a key component of the processes of social change and as a means for the development of social consciousness and participation.

THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN THE REGION

The development of education and of educational research capacity in Latin America shows cultural, economic, and political characteristics which are substantially different from those in other regions of the world. Even from an inter-regional perspective, comparing countries or sub-regions, Latin America shows different and sometimes contradictory trends in regard to each specific country or sub-region's identification of priorities in education, design and implementation of educational policy, planning and implementation of educational innovations, and practice of educational research and use of its results.
Although today education in the region is reaching a comparatively larger proportion of the male and female school age population than in other developing parts of the world, in practice, education still does not equally benefit all sectors of society. More access into the system has not resulted in higher retention rates at the school level, higher quality of the education delivered, higher social mobility, higher income for those entering the labour market, or better employment opportunities for the most disadvantaged sectors of society. The attempts to reform the formal school systems, to implement literacy campaigns, to expand enrolment at primary levels, to implement technical-vocational programmes, to increase the number of teachers through training and re-training, and to provide more opportunities to access higher education have proven in some cases to be of little impact, and in some instances they have generated new problems.

Still only 8.9% of the children between 3 and 5 years of age have access to pre-school education in a region where 21% of the total population is under six years old. Universal access to primary education has in fact moved selectivity up in the system. Primary education is now almost universal in many countries, but of those children entering grade one in a given year, 61.6% will leave school before grade three. And still less than 1.5% of students entering grade one have the possibility of entering university, and of those only .1% will finish higher education. Thus, from the point of view of the quality and quantity provided, education continues to favour individuals from the higher socio-economic strata, and to therefore benefit only a relatively select group of individuals.

Universal enrollment in many countries is presenting new dilemmas in terms of lack of educational facilities, higher desertion rates, youth unemployment, and
the production of a higher number of educated low-paid workers. At the same time, the establishment of goals of universalization and democratization of educational systems is creating a greater demand for more and better prepared teachers in societies with poor and traditional mechanisms for teacher training. A massive expansion in the physical and human infrastructure of the educational systems at all its levels has transformed education into a reality that will be difficult to manage under traditional administrative centralization. The need to extend education to marginal and rural sectors of the population through informal and nonformal programmes is increasing the level of confrontation between higher demands for social participation and governments' interests in using education and the schools as a means to reinforce traditional values and control social participation. The increasing population growth rate and the resultant demand for more and better educational opportunities have put governments in a situation where they cannot continue to increase even further their investments in education as proportion of the GNP. The newly literate are faced with an almost hopeless battle in retaining the reading and writing skills they have acquired in societies without mechanisms to provide them with post-literacy programmes, low cost books, or opportunities for retraining or continuing education. The rapid development of scientific and technical knowledge is presenting more and more challenges to educational systems characterized by traditional curricula and by very slow capacities to innovate and implement changes. Technology such as TV and computers, at the same time, is being introduced into the school system at an accelerated rate as a tool to assist the teaching and learning processes, without the parallel implementation of training programmes for teachers, or new designs of evaluation mechanisms, or adaptation of the imported software to the educational needs of the country.
This portrait of the performance and effectiveness of education in the region is not, in fact, an exclusive product of today's socio-economic and political conditions, but a manifestation of the confluence of a variety of factors that have historically affected these societies over the last fifty years. The approaches applied by researchers and policy-makers to understand the specific educational phenomena in each social context reveals a recurrent preoccupation with and impotence in dealing with certain basic educational problems. At the same time, the modalities adopted over the years to investigate and study education have changed according to shifts in the ideological and political approaches to understanding society as a whole. The specific strategies used to solve educational problems, both at the formal and nonformal levels, are not new in their nature but in the emphasis they receive under the present historical circumstances.

Contrary to what is believed in the North, complex questions such as: what is the role that education could play to impact development and affect social change; what are the types of educational changes and innovations required by countries in the region; what are the most feasible mechanisms by which to implement and carry out the development of education under the current socio-economic and political circumstances; what are the research areas, topics, modalities, and mechanisms which could be more suitable for producing concrete results in terms of better educational services; and how can research results in education be more effectively disseminated and applied, have been raised in Latin America from several different perspectives. Attempts to seek for an answer through participatory approaches to education, to bring together theory and action, to understand education from an anthropological rather than empirical perspective, to integrate education with production, to relate the
school to the labour market, and to see education as an integral component of a process of social change, are not discoveries of the last ten years, or the outcome of some donor's initiatives as we would like to believe.

In spite of these multiple efforts of the past, there has not been, however, one standard theoretical model developed to provide these societies with universal answers to their educational questions. The way in which educational research problems have been defined and approached in the past has been a product of a number of factors. During the sixties the "developmentalist" approach identified as major issues in education those related to the role of education in development through its contribution to the preparation of human resources, the reform of curricular structures, and the modernization and expansion of the formal education system. The belief at the time was that education could effectively contribute to the redistribution of income, to the provision of full employment, to the increase in social participation, and to the alleviation of social marginality. In other words, education was seen as the mechanism to change conditions of social inequality and create upward mobility.

During the late sixties and seventies, rapid changes in the political and economic conditions of the region led to a change in the view of education as the magic tool for growth and modernization. Education began to be seen primarily as a means by which to service the most disadvantaged sectors of society. Popular education received new emphasis as an educational-political tool; action and extension projects became fashionable, and attention to the "popular culture" was a condition sine qua non of any attempt to understand the interaction of social factors.
Today, there seem to be several new perceptions of education and its role in society. There is a general emphasis on the role that formal and nonformal education can play to increase popular participation in the society, to re-educate the population on democratic values, and to raise people's consciousness and awareness about the role of the State, and the political and economic forces which have kept these societies highly stratified. There is the realization that the universalization of services is not enough to improve the conditions of the poor if changes in education are carried out in isolation from structural changes in the economy and in the patterns of distribution of economic and political power. There is also increasing attention being given to the role that education could play in assisting specific groups of rural, indigenous and marginal populations in becoming more integrated in the society. And there is an increasing awareness about the limitations of education in regard to the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to the population, given the changes affecting these societies in terms of the rapid transformation in the production and application of scientific and technical knowledge.

The questions facing those concerned with development education in the region are thus many and varied. Contrary to what many believe, however, the answers are not easy to find. Not one single person, group, programme, or organization has the right answer, the appropriate prescription, or the comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the educational development phenomena to propose or adopt one strategy as the most effective. Experiences in the field indicate that development can be rarely produced or even affected by focussing on specific problem areas, such as education, in isolation from the overall conditions affecting a society at a particular point in time. No single
mechanism to inform policy-makers, to influence government officials and bureaucracies, to implement specific development actions, to finance concrete development initiatives, to produce successful interventions, or to promote particular forms of international cooperation can be designed or implemented with the expectation of having immediate or impending impact on economic growth or on social change. Both, development and education are complex areas, difficult to define, intricate to plan, and hard to influence in the short run.

This does not mean that education and educational research do not have a role to play in development, or that such a role cannot be facilitated to become more effective. In regard to this latter aspect, several questions need to be constantly addressed by organizations working in the field of development, such as the IDRC: What are the basic educational needs affecting the countries in the region? What are the research issues, problem areas, and educational research priorities that presently exist in Latin America? How can the role of education and educational research in the region be better understood so that strategies of assistance toward research and action that are responsive, innovative, and likely to have the potential to impact development can be designed?, and what institutions, doing research in education and undertaking action to serve the poorest sectors of society, should be approached to strengthen educational research capacity?

The response to these questions, however, cannot be independent from the consideration of other more specific issues related to our internal capacity of response. In this regard, organizations such as the IDRC should be prepared to constantly identify the type of Programme directions that need to be implemented to make the role of education and educational research in development more
relevant to the conditions and needs of the countries in the region; to identify and implement the changes in style, direction, and emphasis which are required to achieve results that are of greater benefit to the countries in the region; and to explore new areas of work that may help the Programme to continue being responsive to the changes in priorities in each of the countries in the region. More specifically, the questions that need to be addressed are: what issues, from the point of view of the Education Programme should constitute priority targets for strengthening local education capacities and facilitating the satisfaction of basic educational needs? What are the groups and institutions of educational researchers and educational practitioners that may offer the means in the long range to affect social change at the grass-roots level?, and what are the most suitable and effective programatic criteria that could be used, within the framework of IDRC, to operate with more effectiveness at the popular level in the region?

THE IDRC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The degree of involvement of the Education Programme in Latin America and the Caribbean over the past 14 years has been substantial not only in terms of the number of projects (81 in Latin America and 5 in the Caribbean), and total funds allocated (over seven million CAD) compared to other developing regions, but also in terms of the thematic coverage, the type and variety of institutions supported, the research methods and approaches explored, the modalities of funding and the efforts made to disseminate and publish research results and connect researchers and institutions with each other. A word of caution is required, however, at this point: the achievements of the Programme have been far more substantial in the Spanish speaking Latin America and the Caribbean than in other parts of the region.
Emphasis by Funding Areas

Five broad and overlapping funding areas can be identified as those which have benefited most from the relative impact of the Programme in the region. The first area is the development of institutional research capacities in education. Through the support to discrete projects and to comprehensive research programmes, assistance has been provided to consolidate well established institutions (such as IICA in Brazil, PIIE and CIDE in Chile, FLACSO in Argentina and Chile, SER, and FEPF/CEDEN in Colombia, and UCM in the Dominican Republic). On a more modest scale, support has been directed toward strengthening relatively new and small institutions (such as CEM and CIE in Argentina, CEBIAE in Bolivia, CEPLAES in Ecuador, APEIC in Peru, and CIEP in Uruguay), and toward contributing to preserve the role of regional institutions (such as FLACSO, CRESALC, and CERIAL). Despite this relative institutional diversification, however, the Programme has tended to support research which originates from a small elite of well established institutions and professionally reliable groups of researchers, who represent a low risk to the investments of the Centre. Little effort has been made to adopt a more widely regional approach and to explore new and small institutions in countries where research capacity in education is weak and where an internationally recognized tradition of quality in education research does not exist. The support of the Programme has been concentrated in specific countries or parts of the region (i.e. Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Peru; the southern cone), where the return to investment has the potential of being relatively high.

The second funding area has been research oriented toward increasing the academic, social, and political awareness about general issues closely related to the human and social development of more disadvantaged groups of the
population, to the education of culturally and socially marginal groups, and to the performance of children from these groups in the formal school systems. Adult education and literacy, teacher effectiveness, rural education, primary and pre-school education, and the relationships between the society, traditional cultural values, and the school, have been some of the areas that have received particular attention. These attempts to focus on global issues have resulted in the implementation of a broad and sometimes contradictory thematic agenda which limits the capacity of the Programme to identify the specific problems and needs as these are being considered by researchers and practitioners in the region.

The third funding area has been the encouragement of interdisciplinary approaches to educational research for the benefit of teachers, researchers, educational practitioners, and policy makers. This has been done by supporting areas in which education is one of a multitude of components affecting development. Studies on cultural policies, women and development, communications research, and non-formal learning fall into this category. Support to activities which represent methodological innovations in educational research, such as studies on the use of qualitative and ethnographic methods, action and participatory research approaches, and the use of audio-visual and video technology in the school, have also contributed to the promotion of multidisciplinary educational research. This has also led, however, to an over diversification of approaches and thematic areas which has jeopardized the capacity of the Programme to focus more systematically on basic educational issues affecting the school system.

The fourth funding area has been the development and implementation of interaction mechanisms at the local and regional levels. This has been directed
toward strengthening communication among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, toward disseminating and using research results more widely, and toward the modification of the direction in the flow of information on education issues, from a vertical (North to South), to a more horizontal approach within the region. Activities, such as seminars and workshops, short training courses, and more systematic initiatives such as the development of the Qualitative Research Network, have been supported as a means to create conditions for local and more effective interaction. In these attempts, however, the Programme has not been able to go beyond a relatively small elite group of researchers and institutions, usually individuals who are already part of a well developed research community with access to the international networks of information and therefore, with better means of professional development.

Fifth, the Programme has also had some relative impact in supporting more traditional research on the performance and effectiveness of the education systems. Studies on the delivery of mass primary education, pre-school and primary school interaction, student achievement, educational financing, and teaching and learning processes in specific subject areas, have been aspects in which support has been provided for research. There needs to be greater effort in this regard, however, to focus more directly on issues of concern to government level policy-makers in those countries in which the State continues to play a direct and democratic role in the development of education.

In terms of the overall style of operation of the Programme in the region, there seems to be three characteristics in the way in which it deals with educational research priorities and local demands. There seems to be an attempt to operate on the basis of a selected responsiveness to local concerns, to apply a relative
relative flexibility in the assessment of local priorities, and to manifest willingness to explore new ideas and areas of work. These characteristics, however, have been the source of controversy not only in terms of the role that the Programme is expected to play within the Division and the Centre, but also in terms of its role in the donor community.

Given the educational research issues which the Programme has supported in the region, the institutions to which it has related, and the methodological approaches it has accepted as valid for investigating educational problems, several criticisms have been raised over the years: from the Programme being too narrow in its priorities, to its being all over the place; from its being too ideologically motivated, to its being naive in its consideration of local situations; from its not being sufficiently focussed on the school and the education of children, to its being too formal and school oriented and too preoccupied with education at the classroom level; and from its being too theoretical and not concerned with practical results, to its being biased towards action and extension approaches to research. In summary, although the Programme has been seen as having covered a wide range of activities within a relatively large variety of institutions, it faces a constant dilemma due to the large demand from the region, its limited resources, and conflicting pressures from different parts of the Centre. As a result, the Programme tends to be viewed as being in a constant state of "crisis of identity and role".

Given this broad picture of the Programme's activities, the questions that need to be addressed in terms of its future role in the region are several and highly complex: What are the criteria and priorities that will guide the operations of the Programme over the next three years? How could such criteria
and priorities be determined while keeping a responsive attitude toward local needs and demands? What type of institutions and research groups should be served? What problems, areas, and themes should be explored? What type of research related activities should be supported?, and what modalities of funding should be maintained and what new modalities should be explored?

**Emphasis by Thematic and the Methodological Approaches**

To answer the above questions it is necessary first, to quickly review the thematic approaches and overlapping emphases adopted in the past. A general overview reveals that the area of non-formal learning has received special attention, involving topics such as cultural policies, the role of communications and mass media, community organization, popular education related to specific groups in society, and issues related to social learning. Approximately 29% of the projects supported by the Programme over the past ten years in Latin America have been related to these types of issues. The area of formal education has also received a high degree of attention. Pre-school, primary education, and school and society issues have been one of the main points of attention of approximately 20% of the projects supported during the life of the Programme.

*Education and Society* has been a broad research area overlapping most of the activities. Close to 19% of the projects funded in the past have had, as a particular focus, the relationships between education and society in terms of aspects such as education and work, economy and financing of education, social change, social equality and income distribution, ethnicity and social minorities.
The study of the **actors in the education process** is another area favoured in terms of projects funded in the past (15%). In this regard particular attention has been given to groups such as teachers, students, the family, women, the child, and to a minor extent peasants and rural groups. **Curriculum and instruction** or issues related to what is being taught at the school and how it is being taught, have been included as a research aspect in approximately 11% of the projects funded in the region. Literacy, curriculum planning, teaching and learning methods in general and in relation to specific subject areas, and curricular content in terms of the curriculum messages and values transmitted have also been the focus of support by the Programme. Finally, the Programme has also given attention to broad issues related to the **research process** itself. Approximately 6% of the projects supported in the past have dealt with research modalities and methods, priorities, and with the overall state of development of the research capacity in education in the region, among other issues.

In terms of the areas of the Programme of work and Budget and considering the total number of projects supported by the Programme by thematic areas around the world, 36.7% of the projects related to the areas of pre-school and primary education, 51.03% of the projects related to adult and non-formal education, 45.7% of the projects related to the quality of teachers and teaching, 87.52% of those issues related to education and work and technical vocational education, 63.04% of the projects related to women and development, and 69.2% of the projects dealing with issues of education, society and the State have been in Latin America. Thematically, therefore, Latin America has played a determinant role in shaping the agenda of the Programme.
Looking at the support given by the Programme in the region to specific methodological approaches, the majority of the projects funded have been for the development of diagnostic-descriptive research, followed by projects emphasizing experimental-evaluative research and theoretical-analytical research. This distribution tends to reflect not only major overlapping methodological tendencies in the region, but also the degree of concentration of the Programme’s focus in terms of the emphases given to specific types of research approaches. Only slight changes can be seen in this regard over the last three years.

In regard to activities funded to complement support to research in the region, 39.5% of the funds of the Programme for travel support, 18.8% of the funds for support of meetings and workshops, 10.4% of the funds for support of consultants, 48.1% of the funds for support of various training activities, and 31.9% of the funds for support of miscellaneous activities, including dissemination and publications have gone to Latin America.

**Emphasis by Countries and Geographical Areas**

From the point of view of the countries and geographical areas where the Programme has concentrated its activities in the region, it could be said that there have been specific geographical points of emphasis, leaving other parts of the region practically unexplored. This situation seems to respond to both a lack of a systematic regional strategy by the Programme, and the uneven development of research capacities in the region. The countries receiving most emphasis in terms of number of projects and amount of funds, tend to have been those with the strongest research institutions and universities, and with the
better prepared research communities. In terms of the number of projects supported in these countries, Chile (23), Colombia (13), and Argentina (11) have received the most assistance.

If the countries in the region are broken down by their level of economic growth, according to the classification of the World Bank, the support of the Programme has been directed primarily toward Medium High Income countries. A total of 56.0% of the projects funded in the region have been in Medium High Income countries (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela). Forty-four of the projects supported have been in Medium Low Income countries, with Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic being the main beneficiaries.

These trends tend to show that at the national level the Programme has strongly reinforced research in education in those countries which have already achieved a comparatively higher level of development overall. The emphasis of the Programme has not necessarily been directed toward supporting those countries which are most likely to have the weakest educational systems, the larger proportion of the population living under poverty levels, or the least developed research capacity in education. The support in the region over the last decade has been directed towards those societies with the higher standards of living, with the better educated researchers, and with the institutional and infrastructural facilities to do research in education.

It is indeed possible to find a strong rationale to explain these tendencies. The most obvious would be the correlation that exists between higher development overall and individual and institutional development to do research in
education. Countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Colombia are not only the societies with the higher levels of development, compared to countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay and those in Central America, but also the countries with the stronger educational systems and the more solid educational traditions. The questions to be answered, however, are: Should the Programme continue working primarily with the better institutions and researchers which show a solid research capacity, or should it attempt, simultaneously, to explore new and weaker institutions, even if the potential for success and impact is smaller? and what efforts have been made by the Programme to develop contacts and support projects in countries which are the poorest in the region, with the weakest institutions, and which may offer a lower degree of assurance of success?

Within this general spectrum, the Southern Cone of Latin America has received the highest support from the Programme. Approximately 50.0% of the projects funded in the region have come from countries in this area, and approximately 30.0% of the projects have been in Chile alone. Two factors may help to explain this situation: the perception that these countries have higher educational standards and better educational research capacities, and that they have faced particular circumstances over the last 15 years in terms of the emergence of authoritarian political states which have threatened the survival of educational research institutions and researchers. The Programme faces, however, a very concrete dilemma in regard to its future strategy toward the Southern Cone. Although the political situation in some of these countries (Argentina and Uruguay) has changed over the past few years, the need for support to conduct research in education has not and will not diminish in the near future. The Programme, on the other hand, cannot maintain the proportionally high support to all these countries, if new areas are to be explored in other parts of the
region, if other institutions are to be assisted, and if more emphasis is to be given to those countries which are more needy. Brazil, particularly the north east, Central America, and most countries in the Caribbean remain practically unexplored in terms of activities of the Programme. Should the Programme pursue a more active strategy to identify institutions and to fund research projects in education in these countries? If so, on the basis of what criteria?

**Emphasis by Institutions**

A key element in reviewing the role of the Programme in the region refers to the assessment that could be done of the educational research institutions. The institutional spectrum in Latin America offers a complex panorama: relatively few regional institutions working in education, in addition to those depending upon the OEA and UN network; an increasing number of private research centres; and a relatively small number of universities and government departments directly involved in research in education.

From the point of view of the overall quality of the institutions, in terms of staff and research infrastructure, there are few institutions which have been able to develop solid research programmes and even fewer about which the Programme is aware. Most of the private institutions in the region are small research groups, heavily dependent upon project by project funding, weak in terms of data processing capacity, library facilities, and management and administration skills. Compared to the larger institutions, small research centres are fairly disperse in terms of their main research interests. Only a few of them focus exclusively on education research, and even fewer take the educational system as the main target for their studies. Small research
institutions in the region range from groups interested in highly theoretical education/social sciences research, to groups heavily involved in action/extension projects in which education is one of many components.

Government institutions present completely different characteristics when compared to private centres. They are usually associated to the Ministries of Education, are highly hierarchical in their structure and heavily influenced by the State bureaucracy. Usually, they are involved in large national projects, heavily funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies for the implementation of their projects, and directly oriented toward solving specific problems affecting the education system which have particular political relevance.

Over the past fourteen years, excluding the Centre administered projects, private research centres have developed 73.0% of the projects funded by the Programme in the region. Only 5.0% of the projects has been funded among government organizations, and 11.0% among universities or university related centres. Over fifty different institutions in the region have been supported by the Programme through the total allocation of over seven million dollars. By the distribution of projects and funds, however, it is possible to detect a large concentration of the Programme's support among a relatively small number of institutions. Thus, for example, CIDE and PIIE from Chile have absorbed approximately 28.0% of the Programme's budget spent in the region over the last 14 years; FLACSO, also in Chile, has absorbed approximately 10%, the Ministry of Education in Jamaica close to 8.0% (through one major project) and FUNDAEC in Colombia close to 5.0% of the funds for the region. Between 1980 and 1983, the 30 projects funded in the region (totaling 2.6 million) were developed in only 11 institutions. And between 1979 and 1983, a total of five institutions
(CEBIAE, IICA, PIIE, CCM and Universidad del Valle) received support for second phase projects for a total of 1.14 million or approximately 16.3% of the funds allocated in the region for the whole period.

Looking at these figures, it seems obvious that the Programme should not continue to operate with the same degree of institutional concentration in the future. The identification of projects and institutions in other parts of the region, the identification of new institutions in those countries where projects already exist, and the exploration of new problem areas and themes, would necessarily imply substantially reducing funds going to the institutions forming the small network with whom the Programme has operated in the past.

One of the questions that has been raised in regard to the option of reducing support to some institutions in order to be able to serve others, has been related to the future stability of those centres. Do these institutions face a high risk of failure if funds from the Programme are reduced in order to maximize resources across the region? In most of the cases, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that although some institutions will suffer more than others, those receiving the highest proportion of funds from the Programme are also the institutions better connected among international donors, and the more diversified in terms of their sources of funding. A reduction in funding by the Programme to these institution is therefore not likely to result in their failure, if such change in strategy is communicated to them in advance.

The continuation of a trend of support to a select number of institutions also presents the question about the effectiveness of this approach to funding in terms of the development of capacities beyond the institutions themselves.
There is little doubt that the institutions which have received the larger amounts of support from the Programme, and on a more constant basis, are also the institutions in the region which have better international contacts, and in which the high quality and relatively high salary researchers are concentrated.

What seems clear from the point of view of the Programme's strategy to support educational research in the region, is that changes need to be made if the Programme is interested in covering a wider range of problems and issues, and if it wishes to attempt to strengthen research capacities across the region by identifying new institutions, and by working in countries which have received little attention in the past. The approach by which to reach these objectives is not through the establishment of rigid agenda, but through the identification of the general criteria that could more systematically guide the activities in the region. The following section presents some of these operational criteria.

**CRITERIA FOR ACTION IN THE REGION**

Perhaps one of the main risks in defining and implementing a strategy to support educational research in Latin America is the tendency to determine, a priori, themes and fundable research topics, and to prescribe certain research approaches as more appropriate than others for the understanding of educational problems. Traditionally in the Programme, this has been done both as a way to comply with the requirements of the PWB process, and as a way to respond to the question of what the Programme is supporting in the region. Although such a pre-determined list of areas, themes, and topics may help achieve certain administrative objectives, (mainly related to future distribution of funds) or
to regulate the overwhelming demand coming from the region, the fact is that they create a false sense of flexibility and responsiveness.

More important than determining specific thematic areas that may involve topics to be funded is, however, the need for the Programme to determine criteria regarding the basis upon which the priorities established in the region could be assessed and decisions could be made. Such criteria should be sufficiently broad so as to take into account aspects considered most relevant to the environments in the region, and sufficiently sensitive to enable the Programme to respond to individual requests, that may not fit into a specific thematic area, but which deal with issues considered important by researchers and institutions at the local level.

Determining criteria for action, should not take place in a vacuum, apart from the scientific reality they are intended to norm, or disconnected from a base of knowledge about the central phenomena to which they are related: education. While these criteria should be based on the philosophy of the Centre and the Programme, their main focus should be upon the questions, issues, and problems which are being identified today as relevant by the local research communities for the development of education in the region.

Several factors could be identified as operational points of reference in determining specific criteria for action. They refer to broad perspectives from which educational issues in the region could be observed. Five of these preliminary factors can be identified. First, national-geographical factors: consideration of these would allow the Programme to look at educational development in the region taking into account the key national and geographical
differences which characterize each local environment. Operationally, this perspective would help establish emphases in terms of specific national and geographical traits, and it would help the Programme to better understand local priorities and capacities. Second, factors related to local socio-philosophical assumptions: consideration of these would allow the Programme to better understand the main theoretical tendencies determining each individual research environment at particular points in time. Operationally, this perspective would serve to orient the Programme in the assessment of the social and scientific relevance of specific issues, even if these do not correspond to the main tendencies of educational research in vogue at the international level. Third, institutional factors as these relate to the internal strength of local institutions and research groups and to their potential role in and impact upon the society at large. Operationally, this perspective would permit the Programme to assess the research capacity of institutions and the aspects of their role that could be reinforced. Fourth, technical and scientific factors as these relate to aspects of research content, research process, and research results. Operationally, this perspective would permit the Programme to make case by case assessments on the basis of scientific quality (as it relates to the definition and methods of the research), on the basis of scientific relevance (as it relates to the potential value of the research in understanding specific problems and issues in education), and on the basis of the capacity of "scientific reproduction" of the research (as it relates to the potential impact on dissemination of research results and training of human resources).

From the point of view of specific action criteria, the following could be broadly determined:
Diversity of Treatment and Response

The complex social, political and cultural diversity that exists in Latin America and the Caribbean suggests adopting a differential approach in the assessment of research initiatives coming from the region and in the implementation of activities oriented toward developing educational research capacities. The Programme should be prepared not only to assess individual initiatives (both in terms of their origin and content) on a case by case basis, but also it should be prepared to be innovative in terms of its responses, the mechanisms applied to processing and approving projects, and the establishment of standards of quality. Efforts should be made in this regard, to avoid the application of implicit criteria of comparability in assessing capacities, problem relevance, and research quality. This criterion would open the possibility of being more effective in responding to requests from new or weak research institutions, from geographical areas with poorly developed research capacities, and to respond to topics which do not necessarily fit into the traditional agenda outlining what themes should be the target of research in education in developing countries.

This criterion would imply exploring more actively than before, different modalities of funding and different grant sizes, and searching for new and more innovative activities to support and complement specific research undertakings. This criterion would also imply, for example, moving from the continuous support to the consolidation of large and well established institutions and research groups, toward supporting new, small, and weak research centres. Consolidation of strong institutions on a permanent basis should be exceptionally considered in view of their potential in training and dissemination at the national or
regional level.

Priority to Less Developed Countries

Looking at the past actions of the Programme, it is possible to conclude that the Programme has tended to reinforce capacities in countries and institutions where a relatively strong research infrastructure in terms of human resources, clarity in the definition of research priorities, and financial networks for funding already exists. By giving priority to less developed countries and institutions the Programme would be emphasizing support to countries in the region that are weak in terms of their educational systems and research capacities, which are more socially and educationally needy, and which have not been served by the Programme in the past. Similarly, this criterion will allow the Programme to restore a balance among the institutions in which research in education is supported and developed. By no means, however, should this imply abandoning key institutions at the national or regional level. Discrete support to such institutions must continue. Higher standards in their work could be expected and demanded, and some evidence of potential national or regional impact should be ensured. By all means, however, the Programme should avoid generating conditions by which specific institutions become dependent in the long run upon Programme funding.

At the operational level, this criterion would allow the Programme to actively initiate project development activities in areas such as the Caribbean and East Caribbean, Central America, and Northeast Brazil. It would also further encourage activities of collaboration at the cross regional level between the strongest institutions in the South and those in other parts of the region.
Focus on Social Relevance

A potential impact on the development of countries in the region would be achieved only if the activities of the Programme are guided by some evidence that what a particular individual or group proposes is relevant beyond their individual perceptions and interests. This criterion would allow the Programme to focus more directly not only on educational aspects which are relevant to the development of education according to the views of those doing research, but also on the relevance of such aspects as social equality, social participation, and social equity. Although the Programme in the past has made an effort to be particularly sensitive to specific circumstances affecting the societies in the region, in many cases, the initiatives which have been supported have responded, primarily, to specific academic/intellectual interests of individuals, or to the specific perceptions of the members of the Programme regarding topics or themes that appear to be relevant in a given country or part of the region.

Operationally, this criterion would allow the Programme to act on the basis of a clearer rationale concerning the potential and actual "impact" of specific initiatives, even if such impact is seen in terms of long range effects. At the same time, this criterion would allow the Programme to operate on the basis of a clear understanding of its own role and of the role of education in developing societies. In this regard the realization that education, and therefore the support of it, is not neutral in practice, and that as such it can promote modernization as well as repression or revolution, leads to giving primary importance to the social and educational actors involved in the process of developing educational capacities.
Involvement of Governments

Due to a number of reasons, few activities have taken place in the past involving governments and Ministries of Education. There is the recognition, however, that governments in the region continue to be one of the principal actors in the development of education. From the point of view of the formal education system, the State in many countries continues to be the main source of funding and the main implementor of changes and reforms. And from the point of view of nonformal education, governments have also played a substantial role in implementing programmes directed toward different sectors of the population. This criterion would allow the Programme to strengthen its links with Ministries of Education in the region, thus making it more likely that research will have some impact at policy and decision making levels.

The potential rebirth of democracy in the region also gives a fundamental role to the State in reforming the structures of the education system. The Programme should play a more effective role in bringing together Ministries of Education and private research centres in democratic societies.

Integration of Research Activities

In spite of efforts made in the past, the region is still unevenly developed in terms of strength of educational systems and in terms of research capacities. The criterion of integrating research activities would allow the Programme to encourage and give special attention to initiatives directed toward strengthening mechanisms of cross regional fertilization, in terms of commonality of interest, broad themes, as well as dissemination of research
results and training. The actions of the Programme in this regard should lead to the institutions in the region learning from each other's achievements and mistakes.

Interdisciplinary Focus

A long standing controversy seems to indicate that education is one of the few scientific areas of knowledge upon which a confluence of disciplines may have its strongest effects. This seems to be particularly true in the case of Latin American education. Overwhelming evidence tends to indicate also that as the societies become more and more complex, the understanding and improvement of the role of education in society is not limited to the classroom or to the traditional teaching-learning process, or to the manipulation of educationally defined categories, but also includes the integration of different areas of scientific knowledge. Operationally, this criterion would allow the Programme to encourage multidisciplinary approaches to research in education which could facilitate the understanding of the factors interacting with and influencing the development of education in the societies of the region. It would also allow the Programme to continue being flexible in the consideration of different scientific approaches to research although they may not fall within the research orthodox.

Scientific Quality

Pretending to ensure a priori "good" research results is not only unrealistic but also naive. To assume, however, that because the Programme has a high opinion of a given group or institution the research process and the research
result will be of high quality, is misleading as long as it helps to create false confidence and false expectations. This criterion should lead the Programme to assess initiatives on the basis of their own internal coherence rather than on the basis of artificial standards accepted as scientifically valid at a particular point in time. Operationally, this criterion would allow the Programme to demand sound initiatives that can stand on their own to a critical scrutiny of their internal theoretical and methodological logic and consistancy. This criterion should include three major stages in the development of research: the assessment of project proposals, the monitoring of project implementation, and the evaluation of research results. In each case, this criterion will allow the Programme to assess the quality of the research in view of the specific strengths of each institution, research group and research environment, rather than on an institutional or cross regional comparative basis.

Attention to Basic Educational Needs and Problems

To a large extent the Programme has operated in the past by relying on the perceptions and interpretations of particular individuals or groups in the region, in the North, and in the community of donors, to identify the key educational issues in the region and in each country. In most cases such an approach involves the danger of being responsive to the views, priorities and demands of a selected number of opinions and interests of people involved in education at a macro level and heavily determined by specific intellectual and ideological views about what needs to be studied and why. It also involves the danger of misreading the issues and problems that, in everyday practice, are affecting the educational systems, the schools, teachers, administrators,
parents and children, and in general educational practitioners. In this regard, this criterion would permit the Programme to operate more closely to the "grass-roots" level as this refers to issues related to quality of education, delivery systems and education services, training and implementation, and actual capacity of the system to satisfy basic educational demands.

CONCLUSIONS

The Programme's capacity of response is limited and is becoming more so with the reduction in financial resources. The future capacity of response, therefore, must be determined by a clear set of priorities established after a diagnosis of the key educational problems faced by countries in the region.

The Programme cannot pretend to respond to all demands or to pursue all the new ideas with which it is confronted. In the past, the Programme has tended to operate on the basis of a view in which education has been simplistically equated with development as if they were one and the same thing. Led by a "romantic" understanding of the region, it has ignored the fact that the people and groups that it serves represent only a small proportion of those who have needs.

Responsiveness and flexibility, therefore, do not imply operating with loosely defined priorities or attempting to do a little of everything because the demand exists. Clearly defined priorities, on the other hand, do not imply loosing the capacity of being receptive and responsive to the views and recommendations of educators and of the research community in the South. In this regard, the question about how explicit the Programme should be in determining these
priorities must be seen in the context of the Programme's understanding of the
region and its capacity to listen rather than as a change towards
directiveness. If priorities are identified with the participation of
researchers in the region, and if such priorities are constantly reviewed, the
risk of being directive could be minimized, although not eliminated.

The need to operate with priorities is not necessarily satisfied through the
preparation of the Programme of Work and Budget. As long as the primary purpose
of such an exercise is to serve the process of financial planning at the
organizational level, the strategic planning of the Programme in regard to its
activities at the regional level will remain undefined. The Programme should
consider in the future to operate on the basis of medium term strategic planning
documents by regions, in which policies, criteria, and priorities are made
public to the Centre and to the recipients.

The Programme must also be aware of and understand the environment in which it
operates both in the Centre and in each region. Further awareness in this
regard may bring several potential benefits. First, it would help programme
planning process by understanding that education, development, and the role that
education can play in affecting social change, is viewed differently by our
recipients, by the Division, and by other parts of the Centre. Recognition of
this fact would facilitate making a constant effort in finding the most
appropriate language to explain the Programme's priorities, objectives, and
actions. In this regard, the Programme should recognize that an important
aspect of its success depends upon the effectiveness with which the message
about what it does, why it does it, and how it operates, is delivered.

Secondly, the Programme must be aware that the actions of the Centre and those
of the recipients respond to specific policy assumptions which do not take place in an ideological vacuum. In spite of the positive differences that seem to exist between the Programme at IDRC and those of other international donors, the Programme operates within the context of and transmits a particular view of development from the perspective of the North. Similarly, in spite of the professional commitment of most of the recipients to the development of their own societies, it must be recognized that researchers in the South operate under numerous constraints in which survival is a basic and determinant factor conditioning both their professional response and their reasons for approaching the Programme for funds at a time when not many other donors are supporting education research in the region. In this regard, the Programme should explore alternatives for assessing research capacities and needs, as well as for establishing relations with other organizations in the donor community.

Thirdly, the Programme must also pay attention to the fact that it operates within a network of researchers and institutions which does not necessarily represent the complexity of views, resources, and factors interacting in the development process in the region. Most of the researchers and institutions receiving support from the Programme belong to a relatively select socio-economic and intellectual stratum of these societies. An understanding of this phenomenon should lead to the exploration of new approaches, to the identification of new recipients, and to the establishment of new contacts outside the network of more recognized and well established institutions.

In determining what the Programme should or should not do in Latin America, and through what strategies, it is necessary to situate the role of the Programme in the context and mandate of the Centre. From the point of view of this mandate,
the Programme should focus upon the encouragement and support of research for
the purpose of development according to priorities established by the developing
countries themselves. To translate this mandate into operational terms in Latin
America presents a series of difficulties in regard to the most appropriate
balance of the Programme's activities.

The development of education and educational research over the last years has
unveiled two major areas of priorities which interact with each other. One is
the satisfaction of basic educational needs both at the formal and nonformal
level in regard to the poorest sectors in society. The other is the development
of local capacities to investigate and produce knowledge focusing upon how
scientific and technical knowledge is produced and transmitted. The former is
usually seen as directly related to the development process, while the latter
tends to be seen as an activity whose effects upon development are relatively
obscure and not directly related to the immediate satisfaction of development
needs. There seems to be enough evidence to believe that for the countries in
the region these two areas of priority are not in contradiction with one
another. On the contrary, the ultimate objective in the process of development
is to strengthen autonomy and self-reliance through the satisfaction of basic
needs and the solution of basic problems.