

**IS BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL POSSIBLE IN THE 1990s?
SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS.**

Daniel A. Morales-Gómez (*)
Senior Program Officer
Social Sciences Division
International Development Research Centre

Ottawa, Canada
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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1950s, education has been expected to play a predominant role in international development. Today, in the midst of a deep development crisis, fated by economic stagnation and decline, this reasoning continues to fuel the hopes for progress and modernization of the Third World. Literacy and a minimum of basic education and schooling are portrayed as prerequisites to overcoming poverty. International commission reports, policy papers of donor and lending agencies, government declarations, and international conferences and meetings continue to place education as a cure to the illness of underdevelopment.¹ An example, crucial to education in the 1990s, is the work of the Inter-Agency Commission for the World Conference on Education for All sponsored by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (UNICEF, 1989; 1990).²

Few can disagree with the underlying principle of these thrusts: the right of everyone to education. However, international efforts seeking new ways to strengthen the impact of education on the quality of life of vast sectors of the world population, often risk contributing to the creation of development mirages. They frequently rest on complex ideological assumptions about the role and power of education in human and social development. Once again, this seems to be the case in the understanding of the relationship that should prevail between education and development in the 1990s.

Although the Third World grows increasingly skeptical of the goodwill of developed nations, international organizations make continuous attempts to bring together developed and developing countries in search of solutions to underdevelopment through education. Such efforts assume that the crisis and most of the structural problems of underdevelopment can be overcome through international partnership, better coordinated planning, political will, and targeted external aid. Efficiently planned universal basic education occupies

a central stage in this scenario. Solutions are sought and development targets proposed in which the achievement of carefully set educational goals become decisive to the fate of developing countries.

This vision of education for the 1990s involves not only establishing basic education as a necessary solution to the global development crisis, but also emphasizing that the lack of education per se is inherent to the problems of developing countries. Although this approach is not a fundamental change in the international discourse on development, it introduces a new way of looking at the role of education in relation to the sources of underdevelopment.

The new approach to education offers developed countries a politically safe alternative to explain why underdevelopment continues to exist in the Third World. Poverty and structural inequality become the results of internal factors, one of which is the lack of education among the populace. By accepting as an ideological framework the "Basic Human Needs" approach,³ education can be applied as a key instrument in the elimination of poverty, thereby shifting attention away from economic and political factors, and towards the issue of efficiency in the provision of education as a service. The unequal economic relations that form the foundation of the current crisis remain untouched and education is treated in isolation from the material base determining its socio-economic and political role. By so doing, the ethical accountability for the conditions causing the development crisis in the Third World is manipulated. The responsibility for the failures in achieving basic development goals is depicted as a shared burden. Because education is ascribed an equalizing power, developing countries are held responsible for allocating insufficient resources and for investing inefficiently in schooling, or for not having clear priorities in education and development. Conversely, developed nations are accused of not going far enough in maximizing international welfare.

The approach to education for the 1990s reinforces the belief that inequalities in education, in terms of access, permanence, quality of acquired knowledge and skills, or in politics, religion, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status are rooted in education and can be resolved by correcting

decision-making and policy processes. Thus it becomes possible to picture the educational crisis in the Third World as a phenomenon confined to the organization and management of educational systems. The burden of addressing more fundamental problems such as the debt crisis is conveniently avoided.⁴

In a broader scenario, the new vision of education creates the illusion that disparities within and among countries can be resolved without altering the structural relations of domination. This puts forward a view of the world in which the problems of development can be overcome through the sedating effect of international consensus, political will, and cooperation. It in turn reinforces the arguments that developing countries face a crisis of major proportions because they have not invested wisely in development in the past, and that to reduce inequalities among and within countries, international organizations and governments in the Third World must adopt and adhere to a new strategy in education.

The following sections discuss these issues and their implications in view of the developmental role that education is expected to play in the 1990s. It is argued that by placing education at the centre of the problems of the Third World, a new rationale is being unveiled to explain the contradictions of the prevailing mode of economic, political and scientific production in an increasingly interdependent world. The paper concludes that neither the means nor the solutions to contain the crisis of developing countries can realistically be found in education. Changes in education are by-products of more fundamental transformations that must take place in the political economy of participation and in the unequal relationships between these countries and those in the developed world. Although there is a great need for radical changes in education in the Third World, there is an even greater urgency for changing the structural economic and political conditions fueling the development inequalities that ultimately produce educational failure.

EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT REVISITED

The notion that education bears the power to effect human, social and economic advancement has been part of the international development discourse of the past decades. What has changed with the evolution of Western capitalism are the views about the type of solution education may offer. To understand how these trends may affect education in the 1990s, some of the current ideas about education and development must be brought to the forefront.

Rooted in the principles of structural-functionalism, the modernization and human capital theories have led the interpretations about the role of education (Fagerlind and Saha, 1983). Except for earlier views on development,⁵ education has been seen more as part of the solution to the lack of development in the Third World than as an inherent cause of its problems. This, however, is in process of being altered.

The development role of education is changing from a relatively focused to a multidimensional perception of the power of schooling. Traditionally education was portrayed as a process influencing personal values, behaviours, and attitudes towards the society and work. Now its influence said to be broader. It no longer acts only upon the traits of individuals but also affects other areas such as the capacity of nations to deal with economic, demographic, scientific and environmental challenges. This constitutes a holistic-systemic notion of education.

This current approach to education not only highlights its power as a solution to human, social or economic development problems, but also stresses its role as an integral part of the problems of developing countries: the development crisis in the Third World is partially an outcome of inadequate national decisions in the allocation of resources to education. Education is thus also driven by a causal notion of its role in connection with underdevelopment. More schooling in itself is portrayed as a determinant of economic growth. However, this is done within a framework of assumptions that establishes a new understanding of what is basic education and what are its minimum acceptable and measurable standards. This reinforces an achievement-

oriented understanding of education. Finally, the reproductive notion of education is reinforced to ensure that the Third World conforms to the Western vision of what constitutes an educated person given the needs of advanced capitalism. This is done by seeking consensus upon the new conditions affecting decisions about who must responsible for financing education, what and how much resources should be invested, and how, in what areas, and for how long future development in education can be monitored to keep social and economic reproduction within acceptable parameters.

Modernization, Human Capital and Achievement at the Roots of Education in the 1990s

Early modernization views contended that schooling provides individuals with basic knowledge, learning tools, and life skills. The role of education was to inculcate values leading to the acquisition of modern attitudes and behaviours. Without them, individuals would not develop the personality traits necessary for their social collective to move from traditional to modern nations. Not making this transition meant in turn to remain at the periphery of progress, as defined by Western developed nations.

This view of the development role of education has a socio-anthropological and socio-psychological emphasis. The socialization carried out by the school among other social institutions was central to the formation of the "modern man" (Inkeles, 1969:208-25). Education had a cardinal contribution to make generating conditions for political development, social participation, and economic productivity.⁶ It focused on the pre-conditions for human growth leading the individual, and ultimately the society, to master the skills and knowledge that would result in successful development.⁷ A fundamental issue taken for granted in this approach was the role of dominant paradigms defining what constituted basic traits, skills, knowledge and successful development, and setting standards for their assessment.

From an economic perspective, the complement to the modernization approach came from the human capital theory (Thurow, 1970; Schultz, 1961). This explicitly added the notion that education was a productive investment. By

equating human productive capacities with physical capital, personal and educational traits become commodities. The credentials granted by the education system are credited with a market value. They are subjected to the fluctuations of supply and demand, can be accumulated over time, and can be exchanged for employment in the labour market. Through formal schooling, individuals acquire the attitudes, currency, and differential power to acquire consumer goods, one of which is higher forms of education and training. In a cycle of economic reproduction, basic knowledge, good health, productive skills, talents, and the capacity to engage in further learning all become resources manageable through education.

The role of education is thus primarily economic. Educational decisions at a micro level, from a human and social development viewpoint, are foremost investment judgments. At a macro level, education is ultimately linked to industrial development and economic growth. The economic rationale of this framework permits the establishment of direct links between low productivity, social disparities, poverty, and education. Politically, education is a factor upon which depends the stability and well-being of individuals, communities, and nations. The individual and societal options to produce, share available wealth, and benefit from development can, in this way, be linked to more or less effective investments in human development rather than to structural problems of inequality. By investing adequately and efficiently in education, four major problems in developing societies are expected to be solved: aggregation, investment, growth, and income distribution (Thurow, 1970:8-13).

Central to this perception is the concept of achievement and its measurement criteria. For the modernization approach, individual achievement is a personality characteristic. It manifests as a "need for achievement" and as a force driving the modern man towards pre-set standards of education, economic well-being, and ultimately modernity (McClelland, 1961). Achievement has measurable parameters that, in terms of investment in education, provide an indication of what is considered to be correct or incorrect, efficient or inefficient, acceptable or unacceptable. At the society level, achievement is an institutional-systemic trait. It relates to the capacity of the school and social systems to set standards, control their implementation, and measure

outcomes. Accordingly, "success" is defined and rewarded in view of what constitutes an educated person, a productive worker, a modern society, or a desirable state of growth. This also leads to the establishment of acceptable threshold levels of achievement, efficient means to monitor and measure them, and demonstrable indicators for efficient planning.

The combined effects of the modernization and the human capital theories, and their dominant role in planning human and social development and investment decisions in education, set the scenario for the shifts in the conceptualization of education and development in the 1970s and 1980s, and constitute today one of the ideological and empirical thrusts of the vision of education for the 1990s.

The Legacy of Learning To Be

Education in the 1970s was led by the findings of the International Commission on the Development of Education in its report Learning To Be (Faure, 1972). Slightly more liberal than earlier orthodox modernization and human capital formulations, this report did not say anything substantially new to those already affected by the problems of development and education. However, it did provide the international community with a common language and an avenue by which to outline a more comprehensive vision of education. From previously static views of education, the report made an effort to project it across time and space. International organizations, donors, and governments found in this report a conflict-free and harmonious rationale of development within which to frame investment decisions in education. Carnoy argued that "in essence, Learning To Be tried, with some concepts of "universal truth," to transcend relationships of force and domination, and international, ideological, and inter-personal conflicts by ignoring that those relationships exist in the world" (Carnoy and Levin, 1976:259-68).

Learning To be installed the building blocks for today's themes in the development discourse. It established the idea of permanent education, and suggested more international cooperation and aid to education. It also stressed the importance of pre-school education, the need to make better and

diversified use of available resources, and the importance of scientific and technical know-how to enhance the options that primary education can offer.

This report was a formal step forward in the legitimization of a thrust towards the massive expansion of education. Critics considered the report "incredibly naive" in assessing the financial implications of its recommendations. In addition to suggest expanding formal education, the report advised that universal elementary education be included in the strategic objectives of educational policy to ensure education for all. The long-term impact of these recommendations become evident in the 1980s. The costs Third World countries incurred implementing these policies not only depleted their limited financial resources but delivered a serious blow to the quality of teaching and learning. Diluting educational resources resulted in the deterioration of student achievement rates, new problems of drop-out and repetition, increased youth unemployment, and further educational disadvantages for the poor and minorities.

A target of the criticisms of developing countries' decisions in the 1970s and 1980s is the apparent imbalance that has resulted from the expansion of secondary and tertiary education. This in turn has led to the argument that government must reallocate resources within the education system and curtail investing in higher levels of education, without paying attention to the serious long-term implications on their capacities for scientific and technological advancement.

Education, Poverty, and Human Capital

In the late seventies, the views about the role of education took yet another turn. The international community received two frameworks from which to look at education. These frameworks broadened the understanding of the impact of schooling. The first was the Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues chaired by Willy Brandt (1980). It portrayed development as an interdependent process. It stated that "the South cannot grow adequately without the North. The North cannot prosper or improve its situation unless there is greater progress in the South" (Brandt, 1980:33). It

recognized the profound disparities between developed and developing countries and the danger represented by the pace at which they were broadening. Although it criticized industrial countries because they "have not tried hard enough to get near the minimum aid target," it recognized that "the issue today is not only, or even mainly, one of aid; rather of basic changes in the world economy to help developing countries pay their own way" (Brandt, 1980:33).

A salient aspect of this report was its emphasis on poverty in the conceptualization of the multi-dimensional nature of development. The rural and the urban poor, and the poorest countries in the Third World, were identified as priority targets of international cooperation. Literacy became a "prerequisite for fighting hunger and disease." Education was an "elementary (need" which could not be separated from other fundamental needs such as health, housing, and food. And the centrality of the developmental power of education was established by indicating that it "is the key to much achievement in other fields" (Brandt, 1980:57).

The second framework was presented by the World Bank in its Education Sector Policy Paper (1980a), establishing its lending philosophy and vision of the role of education in development for the decade. This led to a variety of reactions including an assessment of this framework as a "modern Bible on educational development" (Psacharopoulos, 1981:141). Education was "regarded as a basic need, an instrument to help to meet other basic needs, and an activity sustaining and accelerating overall development" (World Bank, 1980a:86). From such a perspective, the Bank began legitimizing the concept of the multi-dimensional power of education. It stated that "one must think of education, therefore, not only as a "sector" of development ... but as a pervasive element that must be integrated --horizontally and vertically-- into all development efforts" (1980a:14), and that the role of education in overcoming poverty must be seen as "increasing incomes, improving health and nutrition, reducing family size" (World Bank, 1980b:46).

It has been argued that this vision of education was framed within a positivistic neo-classical economic outlook of the world and a set of "conservative theories of balanced development" (Fernández, 1981:297). By

taking an instrumentalist approach to education that highlights only the economic aspects of development the Bank paid lip service to the structural problems of underdevelopment and poverty. Emphasizing the centrality of the concepts of critical needs, efficiency, relevance, equity and cost-effectiveness, the Bank outlined a rationale for human resource development rooted in the principle that "basic education should be provided for all children and adults" (1980a:86). This and four other principles --reduction of educational inequalities, cost-effective transfer of knowledge, provision of manpower skills, and development of national analytic capacities in management, administration and planning (Habte, 1983:66)--, constituted the Bank's policy framework for lending in the 1980s (Heyneman, 1983:7-10).

This policy, however, was to be applied differently "according to conditions in developing countries" and the Bank's definition of needs (1980a:87). This power over the development of education in the Third World, has led to the characterization of programming decisions at the Bank as "ventriloquist" (Phillips, 1981), and to the argument that it is a fantasy to believe that the Bank's actions in education are only in response to developing country interests (Bujazan et al., 1987:166; Spaulding, 1981).

The emphasis on basic needs and on human resource development through basic education provides a clue to understanding the development role assigned to education. The human resources approach reduces individuals to disembodied factors of production minimizing their personal and social enhancement. By assigning an utilitarian value to human development, education becomes an item of consumption and the individual a productive resource for economic growth. The ethical implications of this approach, and the criticism that "the Bank's education policies, like its policies in health, population and rural development, are good for business" (Hurst, 1981:120) become clearer when the role given to education is examined in light of the philosophy of human capital: "There is no single lending priority in the Bank's education sector. Any area of human capital ... is a candidate for financing" (Habte and Heyneman, 1983:472). Given this axiom, this discourse is not aimed at creating awareness about the importance of basic education. Its objective is rather to legitimize a view of the world driven by economic

imperatives. The promotion of basic education for all becomes a recognition of its elemental investment value in development (Bujazan *et al.*, 1987:163).

TRENDS IN EDUCATION FOR THE 1990s

The human capital vision of basic education for the 1990s promotes as acceptable for the developing world the notion that minimum standards of achievement are sufficient to prepare the human resources for development. Just as concerns about basic health and nutrition in the past have not changed, structurally, the conditions of the poor but rather have ensured the physical maintenance and survival of the human input for economic growth, this view of basic education will ensure literated survival without effectively altering standards of living or quality of life.

There is nothing innovative or visionary in the emphasis on the developmental relevance of basic education in the new rhetoric of donor and international organizations. The foundational nature of education has already been recognized by developing countries for some time.⁸ The problem faced by Third World societies concerning education is not one of awareness but rather one of a lack of resources and inequality in the distribution of those available. Ultimately, this approach towards basic education focuses on the provision of the minimal knowledge, productive skills, and capacity to engage in further learning required for capitalist development.⁹

The narrow notion of an aseptic developmental power of education and literacy opening the decade of the 1990s moves the understanding of education even further away from the structural conflicts and contradictions laying at the roots of underdevelopment. "To be literate is not to be free, ... Just as illiteracy does not explain the causes of massive unemployment, bureaucracy, or the growing racism in major cities in the United States, South Africa, and elsewhere, literacy neither automatically reveals nor guarantees social, political, and economic freedom" (Giroux, 1987:11).

At the time of one of the deepest development crises of this century the new discourse about education has serious long-term implications. The belief that the satisfaction of education as a basic need in isolation can lead to the fulfilment of other needs and to sustain overall development (Haddad, 1983:11), reduces the dialectics between education and development to a linear link free of conflicts and contradictions. Like the Rostownian stages of economic growth (Rostow, 1971), human development becomes a self-propelled and sequential process. It begins with the satisfaction of the needs for education by training people to perform the basic operations of reading, writing and numeracy. Once these are achieved, it is assumed that individuals can engage in further learning that in turn will result in upward mobility on a ladder of socio-cultural, political and economic development. Basic education gives individuals "a base of knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills on which they can build in later life and equips them with the potential to learn, to respond to new opportunities, and to adjust to social and cultural change" (Haddad, 1983:11).

This, however, places the responsibility for development on the individual as a personal decision ignoring structural inequalities. Consistent with the criteria for investing in human capital, investing in development through education is a personal judgement. If decisions about acquiring education are properly made, by the individuals or by the government in their behalf, then other basic needs can be met and quality of life will be improved. In this manner, education explains the presence or lack of development.

A corollary of this reasoning is that the achievement of other development traits acceptable by predetermined standards, are a function of decisions about education. At the individual level, ignorance, low productivity, poor nutrition, inappropriate health practices, uncontrolled fertility, high infant mortality, backward child rearing practices, gender biases, improper exploitation of the natural environment are all outcomes of a lack of basic education. At the community level, low productive capacity, insufficient food provision, poor health services, lack of demographic policies, gender disparities and ethnic inequalities, environmental deterioration, and problems

in development management are singly associated with inadequacies in the preparation of human resources.

In a systemic view of the world, all factors in development expressed as basic needs become causally inter-connected in a closed circuit. This multi-dimensional view of the power of education leads one to see the world as being free of the structural conflicts inherent to the mode of production. Problems in the performance of education in relation to development goals, are explained by looking at the internal system's efficiency in terms of resources management. This eludes the examination of structural factors external to education determining its role in the context of larger development crises.

Education: part of the problem or part of the solution?

The presence of a new and deepening crisis in education is being highlighted as a shameful feature of the 1980s. With the mystic shadow of the twentieth first century beginning to eclipse the 1990s, there is a realization that educational targets set over the last three decades have not been achieved. Strategies to use education as a solution to underdevelopment have not worked out as expected.

Diagnoses of world education in the 1980s point at several sources of concern. Despite expressions of national will and international commitment, education for all has not been achieved. Disparities in education between rich and poor countries are broadening. The Third World still shares 97.8 % of the 889 million illiterates, over 60 % of whom are women (Unesco, 1985). This number is expected to grow to 1.1 billion by the end of the century (Lewin, 1987). Although public investments in education in poor countries increased between 1970-82 from 2.9 % to 4.1 %, at the end of that period developed countries were spending 1.5 times more as a percentage of their GNP and yet they had only 25 % of the school age population (World Bank, 1989).

During the same period, public expenditure per inhabitant in developing countries increased 6 times, compared to 3.3 times in the developed world. However, in 1982, year that marks the beginning of the debt crisis, the

actual value of expenditure was 15.3 times higher in the latter. Per student expenditures also illustrate existing disparities. By the mid 1980s, highly industrialized countries spent 70 times more per student than developing countries, 56 times more than in the early 1960s (World Bank, 1988b). The expansion of education in the developing world has not been enough to absorb its school age population. In 1985, 94.8 % of the 6-11 year old children in the world who were not in school were in developing countries, 2.4 % more than twenty years earlier. The situation of the 12-17 years old was even more dramatic. Over 94 % of those not attending school were in developing countries, representing 7.9 % more than in 1965.

There is little doubt that in comparison with the industrialized world, the picture of education in developing countries in the late 1980s is gloomy to say the least. Not only have pre-set targets not been achieved, but there is evidence of actual decline in critical educational indicators. Enrolment, quality, relevance, investments per student, and teacher salaries are decreasing. Drop-out, repetition, and illiteracy rates, and ethnic, gender, and demographic disparities are increasing or remain unchanged.

Critics of the developmental role of education often examine the causes of failure from within the education sector itself. As a result, their understanding of the factors causing failure is limited to problems of efficiency which can be overcome through solutions to be found within the field of education. From a development perspective, education thus becomes both the cause of and remedy for its own failures. Because of the broad role assigned to education, other problems in society are also explained from the same perspective. Too little, poor quality or lack of education is a causal variable in the inability of the Third World to cope with the deterioration in the conditions of life and to satisfy basic human needs. Low productivity, lack of social mobility and participation, low efficiency in resources management, poor nutrition and health, high fertility and infant mortality, and environmental deterioration are all ailments attributed to flaws in the quality, quantity, relevance or management of education alone. Disparities among countries are explained using the same rationale. Low competitiveness, lack of capacity to profit from the gains of technology, disparities in rates

of economic growth, and inability to maintain internationally set development standards are ultimately connected to flaws in education and the strategies for human resource development.

The conflict-free acknowledgement that education in the Third World is worsening, implies that this deterioration is an outcome of poor national decision-making. The state of education in developing countries becomes thus a consequence, on the one hand, of their approach to setting priorities, allocating resources, monitoring efficiency, and making investments. On the other hand, it is a result of their modes of managing the school system, delivering the curriculum, and measuring achievement. By providing a platform for placing education as a cause of its own internal problems, this view shifts the attention away from the causal effects of extreme poverty upon education, and position the responsibility for the current crisis on the capacity of the Third World to manage development.

The basic premises upon which this line of argument rests are seldom critically analyzed. It is widely accepted that basic education and literacy are prerequisites for social, cultural and economic development. It is also accepted that the failure of societies to recognize the developmental value of education, to provide learning opportunities, and to adequately invest in human resources severely limits their national prospects for further development. However, to focus the attention only on the degrees of recognition developing countries give to education, and on the efficiency of their strategies to invest in education, is a convenient and less controversial way to explain why some societies score better on a developmental scale than others. In addition, this approach does not offer new alternatives to those already explored in the past. It does not enhance the understanding about how a variety of structural, non-educational factors, interact to produce educational failure or success. Both the development and education crises thus become then self-inflicted wounds.

The development effectiveness of education, its internal efficiency, and the assessment of its impact are not insulated from the effects of the financial and political inequality between a small number of highly industrialized

nations and the large majority of economically disadvantaged nations. An overview of the problems in education in light of the external debt and the coping adjustment programs illustrate this point.

THE EXTERNAL DEBT AND EDUCATION IN THE THIRD WORLD

The progressive deterioration in the quality, quantity and relevance of education in developing countries in the 1980s is a direct outcome of the staggering debt that built up in the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s. The decline in education, health, nutrition, sanitation and social services across the developing world cannot attributed entirely to sectorial internal inefficiencies, poor development management, or unfortunate side effects of a "world recession." The decay in these social areas are an example of the social cost of years of irresponsible international development efforts that did not address the structural causes of underdevelopment. The causes of the crises in basic education, primary health care, and nutrition to name a few, are not necessarily education, health or food related.¹⁰ They are part and parcel of the inequalities within and among nations, which in the 1980s have been exacerbated by the external debt (George, 1988).

Until the late 1970s, most developing countries maintained a development path in which the main indicators showed modest growth. Between 1965 and 1980, only 14 out of 100 developing countries had a negative average annual growth rate in their GNP per capita, compared to 51 countries between 1980-86. The real GDP for 1973-80 had an average annual change of 5.4 % total and 3.2 % per capita, compared to 3.9 % and 1.8 % respectively for 1980-87. Public expenditures in education as a percentage of the GNP increased steadily between 1970-80 from 2.9 % to 3.7 %, and public expenditures in education per inhabitant at current prices grew from \$5 to \$28 dollars. Overall, the World Bank reported in 1982 that "during the 1970s the developing countries adjusted remarkably well to the more turbulent conditions in the world economy. Since 1973, they have grown roughly twice as fast as the industrial countries" (1982:1).

Although the summer of 1982 denotes the beginning of the debt crisis,¹¹ the actual decline began earlier. The profile of the crisis, in which education is only one area of impact, can be pictured as follows. By the end of the 1980s the estimated debt of the Third World was US \$1,000 billion, approximately 60 % of which was owed to commercial banks.¹² In only one year, between 1985-86, it increased by about 10 %. On average repayments represented approximately 25 % of export revenues of developing countries (UNICEF, 1989). Despite the debt, a number of countries were able to manage the crisis and produce surplus. However, repayments have consumed all available resources reinforcing the dependence upon foreign assistance and loans. Between 1978-83 commercial banks received \$125 billion in interest payments, during which time they lend \$140 billion. These figures serve as an indicator of the actual decline in international assistance. In spite of the rhetoric of international organizations, the volume of aid has shrunk as a proportion of the internal capacity of industrialized nations. In fact, what developing countries are receiving in aid is part of their own capital paid to the North to compensate for the debt.¹³

The interest from over twenty years of borrowing, the deterioration in the terms of international trade, the high impact of protectionism, substitution, and the effects of the adjustment programs forced upon the Third World by the IMF and the World Bank,¹⁴ led to a drop of at least 10 % in living standards in the Third World, and to the transfer of capital from the poorest to the richest countries. "Taking everything into account - loan, aid, repayments of interest and capital - the southern world is now transferring at least \$20 billion a year to the northern hemisphere. And if we were also to take into account the effective transfer of resources implied in the reduced prices paid by the industrialized nations for the developing world's raw materials, then the annual flow from the poor to the rich might be as much as \$60 billion each year" (UNICEF, 1989:15). Between 1980 and 1986 alone, the share of the world trade of developing countries decreased from 28 % to 19 %, while developed countries' increased from 63 % to 70 % (George, 1988:73). This was occurring in the context of a 30 % decline in the real price of developing countries principal commodities.¹⁵

Debt and Education in Africa and Latin America

The concrete impact of the external debt can be better assessed by looking at the regions most deeply affected by the crisis: Africa and Latin America. Asian countries, housing the greatest number of "absolute poor" (in India and China), have maintained a steady level of economic growth in the 1980s.

Africa and Latin America are being equally crippled by the debt burden. Accounting for already existing regional disparities between the two, average incomes in these regions fell between 10 % and 25 % in the 1980s. "For most of the countries of Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, almost every economic signal points to the fact that development has been derailed. Per capita GNP has fallen, debt repayments have risen to a quarter or more of all export earnings, share in world trade has dropped, and the productivity of labour has declined by one or two points each year throughout the 1980s" (UNICEF, 1989:2).

USAID reports that primary growth rates in school enrolment and quality in Africa fell in the 1980s (1988:8). Declines have occurred in expenditures per student, teachers' salaries, investments in educational facilities, and availability of basic school supplies. Although the deterioration of African's formal education cannot be attributed completely to the debt crisis, the accelerated extraction of resources from Africa to keep in line with the IMF adjustment programs is crippling a weak development and educational infrastructure.

Given a combination of factors, including recent colonial domination, profound political instability, widespread extreme poverty, and natural disasters, undoubtedly the debt crisis has affected African countries the most. However, in terms of deterioration of existing development standards, breakdown of development infrastructures, threat to fragile democracies, curtailment of future development options, and above all retrogression in education, health, food production, environmental sustainability, and development of science and technology, Latin America constitutes the development tragedy of the twentieth century.¹⁶ This region continues to be

the part of the world with the "grossest inequalities of any continent" (UNICEF, 1989:16). The World Bank has indicated that "statistics fail to capture the psychological dimension of what is happening in Latin America." In the 1989 Annual Report the Bank argued that "Latin America continues to suffer slow growth, as per capita GDP declined for the second consecutive year. Major areas of concern in 1988 included trade, capital flow, debt, and the environment" (1989:20).

This region is today the major net exporter of capital to the developed world. Compared to \$38 billion of new capital received between 1982-85, considering aid and investments, \$144 billion left the region in debt service, exceeding the total amount of financing obtained by all countries in the previous eight years (George, 1988). The Inter-American Dialogue argued in 1988 that "in the past two years, the World Bank boosted its lending to Latin America, but it also collected more principal and interest, so the net amount of resources transferred grew only modestly. The IMF and IDB provided even less capital than previously. In 1986 and 1987, the IMF collected more in debt service than it made available in new loans" (1988:26-27).

Between 1978 and 1987, the region's debt grew from \$160.7 to \$440.6 billion (Latin American Newsletters, 1989). The GDP, between 1980-86 fell by approximately 14 %, equal to the levels in 1976 (CEPAL, 1989). On average, per capita income in the region is 9 % lower today than in 1980, and in some countries the conditions of living are below those in the early 1970s. Urban open unemployment grew almost 40 % between 1980-84, bringing the estimated level of real unemployment close to 67 % (ILO, 1986). Extreme poverty has risen to an estimated 130 million people, and in some countries complete sectors of the population, such as the middle class, have practically disappeared. George reports that research has been able to assess the debt-mortality effect of the debt. "Each additional \$10 a year in interest payment [per capita] reflected 0.39 of a year less in life expectancy improvement over the decade [1970-80] (Sell and Kunitz, 1987:14-17). Their formula works out to an average 387 days of life forgone by every inhabitant" (1988:134).

The Inter-American Dialogue also reported that "the region has lost a full decade of growth while the demands of an expanding population have multiplied" (1988:xx). The CEPAL, in turn, indicated that "the shrinkage in expenditure on education as a proportion of the total public expenditure is more pronounced in Latin America than in other regions affected by the crisis" (CEPAL, 1987).

Education in the context of the debt crisis in these regions has not remained unaffected. In times of economic downturn education like health and other areas of social services are among the first to be affected by social spending cuts. In the poorest countries of Africa and Latin America investments per capita in health and education dropped 50 % and 25 % respectively during the 1980s. Enrolments began to decline while drop-out and repetition increased considerably. In the poorest countries of these regions inequalities are rampant. Working class children are among the large majority who do not complete basic education and instead enter the informal labour market to supply alternative sources of family income. Women and young children, ethnic minorities, and the rural and urban poor continue to be the hardest hit by poor quality or lack of education due to the socio-economic and political inequalities ingrained in their societies.

ADJUSTING EDUCATION TO THE LOWEST DENOMINATOR

To explain the crisis in education in developing countries, three types of argument have blended together in the international discourse on education and development at the end of the 1980s. The first claims that in the next ten years developing countries will need at least to double their educational capacity to serve the expected demand for basic schooling. The pressure will come from past modernization trends, from increasing rates of population growth, and from higher social participation of previously deprived groups. The second argument builds upon a growing sense of failure. It maintains that despite previously established goals to eliminate illiteracy and provide all children and adults -particularly women- with elementary and permanent education, there is still a staggering number of illiterates with limited or no prospects to profit from education. The third argument focuses on a sense

of holistic crisis in current capitalist development. It states that because of prior inefficiencies in investment strategies, basic needs throughout the Third World are not being met or are inadequately fulfilled.

These views have not contributed new ideas by which to assess the state of education over and above what Third World countries already know about the limitations they face. They do lead, however, to the establishment of a new, dominant interpretation of the causes of underdevelopment. They create a scenario in which those holding dominant positions in the relations between developed and developing world can establish a new rationale that provides the means to justify, on a world scale, existing patterns of distribution of wealth and to deal with development conflicts in the new decade.

All three arguments are built on a causal relationship between education and development, in which education is assigned a developmental role beyond its own capacity. By looking at education in isolation from a systemic approach, problems in its functioning are handled by focusing on its internal efficiency with no attention being given to structural issues circumscribing development efforts. By adopting a holistic and systemic world view of development, relations of domination and power become diffuse. Education is portrayed as a sub-system competing in a world where all other factors remain constant and ideological contradictions do not exist. "All basic elements of social and economic development are therefore linked together in a mutually retarding or mutually reinforcing relationship which can either minimize or multiply the investment in any one sector. And the quantum leap in the ration of resources to results will only come when all of the basic elements of human development ... begin to add up to a whole which is very much greater than the sum of its parts" (UNICEF, 1989:54).

Within this framework then, the answer to present and future development problems becomes, almost exclusively, a matter of reviewing development strategies and priorities, and the efficiency in planning for the provision of basic education. In its 1988 State of the World's Children, the Executive Director of UNICEF synthesizes this view. He indicates that

education needs its own equivalent of the primary health care strategy, bringing the same twin principles of efficiency and equity to the allocation of educational resources. It is to discuss this need that UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF have convened a conference, ... on the theme of 'basic education for all'. The hope is that this meeting will distil the experiences of many nations and help to point the way forward in education in the same way that the Alma Ata conference of ten years ago lit the path towards primary health care.

Such a reshaping of priorities in education would not only allow progress to be maintained towards the point where all children were able to complete a very minimum of four years at primary school, it would also increase the efficiency of education as a tool for real development (1989:53).

This thrust on basic education as the pillar of "real development" re-establishes, in the discourse of international organizations, a central role for education as a solution to underdevelopment. The emphasis is not on universal access as in the past, but on the achievement of a "very minimum" standard (four years of primary education) and on the increase of the "efficiency" of education as a development tool.

The narrow financial and political international emphasis of the past three decades on the universality of education as a solution to underdevelopment has proven to have unexpected secondary effects. The political linkage between education, social demands, and economic growth led governments to allocate large amounts of resources to expanding their education systems in order to achieve the goal of universal access. This trend was reinforced by the conditioning role of foreign assistance over policy decisions in education. Although the emphasis on universality brought about the achievement of short-term objectives concerning equality of access and literacy, it exacerbated other problems over the long-term. The large amounts of resources allocated to education established a trend of growth difficult to maintain over time. Emphasis on equality of access did not automatically lead to equality in the conditions determining students' permanence within the system or in those influencing equality in quality. The greater number of children entering the school did not result in more students reaching the higher levels of the system, or in changes in the socio-economic composition at the top of the educational pyramid. The relationship between

education and employment continued to be limited by the capacity to generate jobs to absorb those leaving the system with different qualifications.

Contrary to current interpretations, internal efficiency is not the determinant factor accounting for past and present problems in education. These are outcomes of the contradictions inherent to the dominant mode of production. Problems in the allocation of resources for education are primarily the consequence of a pattern of unequal distribution of wealth rather than of inefficiency in resource administration. Due to structural inequalities, policy-makers in developing countries have a limited number of options by which to balance the allocation of resources and still achieve universal education. This explains why even though larger numbers access the system, children from disadvantaged sectors remain deprived of education.

The deterioration of education resulting from the impact of the debt crisis does not show fundamental flaws in policy. It rather illustrates how vulnerable is education to the contradictions of uneven development. Because of this, shifting the emphasis of the international discourse on education will not produce fundamental, long lasting changes. If the conditions generating underdevelopment remain unaltered, changes in the rhetoric about education and development will not result in changes in its quality, equality or developmental power. Such shifts, however, may have potentially important implications for the development and financing of education in the 1990s.

In the past, the setting of priorities in education, the establishment of targets for planning purposes, and the processes by which policy decisions were made and implemented have been determined by Third World states with relative autonomy. At the school system level, this involved establishing national and culturally-specific standards for assessing performance achievement in connection with the acquisition of knowledge, behaviours, and skills. At the policy-planning level, it involved determining parameters for carrying out and monitoring processes of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. However, the new vision of education for the 1990s seems to be shifting towards setting common achievement standards as a means to measure educational development across countries in the developing world.

This raises a series of questions about the rationale within which such standards are to be defined, the means for their enforcement, and the approach to their measurement. Several areas of potential conflict can be identified. They relate to the questions of what constitutes acceptable levels of achievement in education from a developmental point of view; how criteria can be established and measured in international comparative terms; and what role the measurement of achievement and its outcome will play in decisions concerning the allocation of resources for education. An underlining concern is the role of the international actors involved in determining targets, levels of acceptability, and appropriateness of measurement tools.

The emphasis on setting minimum standards of performance for achievement and efficiency in education at an international scale is built on several beliefs. First, it assumes that inequalities in education can be explained on the basis of educational rather than socio-economic variables. This does not address the causes of educational failure among children in the Third World, but reduces them to a matter of learning achievement. Second, it assumes that both the concept and the indicators of development and educational achievement are value free and therefore can be set and measured objectively. This in turn creates the illusion that standards of acceptability can be set across countries in the Third World to measure achievement in education and development. Third, the new emphasis on achievement standards assumes that children and societies compete on an equal basis in the achievement of pre-established educational or development goals. This permits one to view problems in education and development as the outcome of poorly made or inefficient individual or national decisions.

What makes these issues so critical for the future of education in the Third World is the intrinsic dependent nature of the relationships between developing countries and international organizations, particularly donor agencies. Education, in such context, does not escape the relations of economic, political and cultural domination characterizing development in general. As in other areas related to the achievement of specific economic development targets or to the management of economic resources, education

becomes susceptible to becoming the subject of "adjustment" programs outlined and monitored by international centres of financial decision-making.

CONCLUSION

In the past, the development of education in the Third World has not been foreign to the power that lays under the dominant international discourse on education and development. Thus, for example, education during the 1980s in many developing countries was a by-product of the agenda set by international organizations and donor agencies. Today, the prospects for the 1990s do not appear to be substantially different. The overwhelming pressure upon the North of a decade of underdevelopment in the Third World demands a new rhetoric to sustain the Western view of education, modernization and progress. Basic education, once more, is being identified as a developmental factor that can make a difference.

The decline of education witnessed in the Third World cannot be purely attributed to mistakes made in the diagnosis, planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of the sector. Rather, the crisis in education is part of the social cost being paid by developing countries in adjusting their economies to deal with the debt. This in turn translates into fewer available resources, both in terms of those that can be allocated nationally, and those assigned to education through international aid.

Between 1982 and 1986, lending in the education sector from the IBRD and the IDA to Latin American and Caribbean borrowers, for example, dropped from \$112.8 to \$10 million. Under such circumstances, "it is not likely that either the countries themselves, or the donors, will find untapped sources of revenue to totally make up the difference between what is needed and what is available" (Zagorin and Sprague, 1988:5). This is particularly so, if the search for solutions continues to avoid addressing the structural, non-educational, factors causing the crisis in the developing world. To establish causal links between the deterioration in education and in other areas such as health, child care, sanitation, environmental management, or the capacities of

nations to participate in technological innovations, is misleading unless the structural impact of the debt crisis is also addressed.

Quality of education has declined not primarily because of failure in the efficiency of the system. There are fewer resources being invested in teachers' salaries, educational materials, and school facilities and yet the school population continues to grow. If developing countries continue to be forced to choose between investing in education and keeping their economies moving at the pace demanded by lending institutions, quality in education will deteriorate even further. Fewer poor children are attending school and more are leaving or repeating, primarily because of the differential impact of poverty at the family level and not due to internal malfunctioning of the school system. If the variable resources are not taken into account, schools in most developing countries are not, *per se*, more inefficient than schools in industrialized countries like Canada, the U.S. or the U.K. The differences in quality that do exist can be accounted for by the structural resources made available to education in terms of school facilities, teacher salaries, and textbooks and materials. Inequality will be maintained as long as school-age children in the Third World need to play an economic role in the family.

Achievement levels are also declining. The combined effects of poor quality of teaching and malnutrition are devastating on the learning capacity of students particularly at an early age. Reduction in educational and family resources has a more direct impact on early childhood development and on early primary education learning than previously estimated.¹⁷ The impact of the fall in quality is closely associated with a decline in the relevance of education. The gap in scientific and technological advancement between the developed and the developing world, together with the withdrawal of government investments in higher education in the latter impede the capacity of national educational systems keep on top of the advancement in knowledge.

Under the present state of unequal development, education should neither be seen as a cause of the development problems of the Third World nor expected to be their solution. Changing the relations of inequality under which educational systems operate is a prerequisite to redefining the direction of

the developmental role of education. Due to the long-term impact of the crisis of the 1980s, the chances are that in the 1990s developing countries will need to focus most of their efforts on recovering the levels of wealth they had in the late 1970s. This will result in even fewer funds being available to invest in education, no additional resources to reallocate from other sectors to education, fewer possibilities of making changes among pressing priorities, and no room to follow new visions of the role of education in development.

Failure to recognize that the roots of the crisis in education in developing countries lay outside the school system will lead to a continuing focus upon implementing adjustment measures within the walls of the education sector. As in the proposals made by the IMF to deal with problems in the economy, developing countries are now expected to review and adapt their educational systems and policies within a pre-set framework conceived in the North. Its guiding principles reflect a vision of development, a view of education and a rationale for the identification of solutions sketched according to parameters established in the developed world.

NOTES

1. A sample of the international documents assigning a pivotal role to education in development process include the report of the International Commission for the Development of Education, Learning To Be (1972); the report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, North-South: A Program for Survival (1980); the Education Sector Policy Paper of the World Bank (1980); the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (1987); and the World Bank policy paper on Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (1988).
2. The Inter-Agency Commission coordinated the preparation of a theoretical framework for the World Conference on Education for All, in Thailand in 1990. The framework served as the foundation of a Charter and a Plan of Action document to be discussed at the conference (UNICEF, 1989; Inter-Agency Commission WCEFA, 1989).
3. The Basic Human Needs approach has been the dominant theoretical framework of international assistance since the early 1970s when the U.S. government redirected its foreign development assistance policy (Sartorious and Rottan, 1989: 331-62). The focus has been to concentrate development efforts on food production and nutrition, rural development, population planning and health, the provision of shelter and education. Underdevelopment is the outcome of the lack of means (food, health services, housing, schools, etc.) to satisfy basic human needs. The lack of these means, in turn, is seen primarily as a problem of efficiency in the use of resources rather than as a result of inequality in their distribution, or concentration of control over the means to produce them. See also Richard Sandbrook, The Politics of Basic Needs. Urban Aspects of Assaulting Poverty in Africa. London: Heinemann, 1982.
4. One of the characteristics of neo-classical development views is the tendency to compartmentalize the causal-effect relationships that explain the dialectics of underdevelopment. This approach ignores the relations of correspondence and contradiction in society, and examines social problems from sectoral perspectives which analytically do not relate to each other.
5. The ideas of "social Darwinism" of sociologists like Herbert Spencer influenced most of the colonial views of education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The role of missionary education, for example, saw people in the Third World and native populations in the developed world as "backward" societies unable to overcome by themselves the limitations of their "primitive" cultures. Neo-colonial views of development during this century characterized the Third World as a conglomerate of countries backward in their social organization and in their cultural evolution. The lack of modernization was equated with a lack of social, cultural, and individual traits considered necessary for reaching stages of development similar to those of countries in Europe and North America.

6. Inkeles argues that "we believe our evidence ... shows unmistakably that there is a set of personal qualities which reliably cohere as a syndrome and which identify a type of man who may validly be described as fitting a reasonable theoretical conception of the modern man. Central to this syndrome are: (1) openness to new experience ... (2) the assertion of increasing independence from the authority of traditional figures ... (3) belief in the efficacy of science and medicine ... (4) ambition for oneself and one's children to achieve high occupational and educational goals ... (5) show an interest in carefully planning their affairs ... (6) show strong interest and take an active part in civic and community affairs and local politics; and (7) to strive energetically to keep up with the news..." (Inkeles, 1969:210).

7. According to this notion, to be modern is to be developed. Individuals and societies can advance in a transition that establishes a series of building blocks of modernity. These include the development and strengthening of modern institutions, the acquisition of modern values, the manifestation of modern behaviours, the formation of a modern society, and the achievement of economic growth (Inkeles and Smith, 1974).

8. In many developing countries the school systems have been considerably more liberal in accepting education as a fundamental right than in some of today's industrialized societies. Equal and universal education for women and minority groups were enforced in some developing countries at the time when countries like the U.S.A were still condoning racially segregated schools.

9. In this regard Giroux argues that "in spite of its appeals to economic mobility, functional literacy reduces the concept of literacy and the pedagogy in which it is suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital; consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labour process and the need for capital accumulation" (1983).

10. In the 1980s, for example, some Latin American countries increased their net production of food compared to the 1970s. However, the pressure to reimburse their debts has forced governments to re-direct this production for export rather than for internal consumption. Thus at the same time as agricultural production has grown, the quality of the basic diet of the poor has declined to near starvation levels. Malnutrition is an expanding problem even in agriculturally rich countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil.

11. On Friday, August 13, 1982, the Mexican government suspended all banking activity due to the dramatic impact of the debt on the Mexican economy.

12. This situation was even more critical in the case of Latin America given that approximately 80 % of the debt in Africa is owned directly to governments. In 1986, Latin America owed approximately \$240 billion to private banks in the North and \$120 billion to official bilateral or multilateral agencies (George, 1988:245).

13. One of the most recent examples of change in the developed countries' commitments to international aid is the cut-back in Canada's Official Development Assistance share of GNP.

14. During the IMF-World Bank conference in Korea in 1985, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury James Baker, made very clear the conditions imposed upon developing countries: "countries which are not prepared to undertake basic adjustments and work within the framework of the case-by-case strategy, cooperating with the international financial institutions, cannot expect to benefit from this three-point program. Additional lending will not occur. Efforts by any country to 'go it alone' are likely to seriously damage its prospects for future growth" (Cited by George, 1988:190).

15. Overall commodity prices for the developing world's principal commodities suffered a 12 year period of decline which began levelling out at approximately 30 % below 1979 levels in the late 1980s. This affected commodities such as fuel, minerals, and major agricultural products, the main source of hard currency for these countries (UNICEF, 1989: 15).

16. Unfortunately, these facts continue to be relegated to a second place by many international organizations and development agencies in the North. The combination of political rhetoric, post-colonial ties, and plain ignorance tends to result in development actions being directed towards areas of the world where poverty is most visible, ignoring the equally blatant effects of underdevelopment in those parts of the world that the North categorizes as less needed.

17. The effects of malnutrition are increasing at a steady pace. In Peru, the percentage of malnourished children grew from 28 % to 36 % between 1978 and 1983 among marginal families whose diets dropped from 1,900 to 1,500 calories per day per person. A minimum wage worker had to work two hours and five minutes to afford a kilo of rice in 1984, seven times more than in 1980. A similar situation is found in Argentina where 40 to 50 % of the inhabitants of the poorest provinces suffer from malnutrition. In Brazil, 47 % of the young people rejected by the army did not qualify for military service because of malnutrition. And in Mexico, the National Nutrition Institute estimated that close to 40 % of the population is malnourished (George, 1988:134-40).

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