Education for All Youth

Carmen Siri

Director, Latin America Portfolio
Global Education Center
Academy for Educational Development

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A new vision… a new strategy…

This analysis is based on the need to reach all young people of the developing world with an education strategy that is appropriate to their specific needs and conditions. The Dakar Education for All Framework proposes that we "*Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.*" The analysis calls for a change of vision in that we must provide education to *all* young people, and for a change of strategy we must be comprehensive as one educational track does not work for all. What is proposed is that to address education for all youth, we must first understand the needs and conditions of youth in developing countries. The heterogeneous nature of youth requires a creative public education strategy for youth that is specific to developing countries, that includes --but goes beyond secondary education--, that is focused on quality and relevance of learning, and that includes successful experiences from what is known as alternative education. This strategy must pay specific attention to reaching the existing out-of-school population, and should not wait for the development of the formal secondary system.

What are youth like in the developing world?

As a result of the efforts of the last decades in expanding basic education, the education systems in most developing countries have expanded to reach almost all primary school age children. The existence of numerous youth who have completed primary education is now creating tremendous pressure on weak formal secondary education systems. About half of the 439 million youth from developing countries are out of school.[1] Furthermore, many of the out-of-school group repeated grades in primary school and are thus overage for post-primary education.

[1] Population Reference Bureau, The World's Youth. (Washington, DC:PRB,1996).

The EQUIP seminar series is designed to share ideas and experiences from the three Education Quality Improvement Program awards, and their respective Associate Awards, with all interested USAID staff, program partners, and the education community at large.

The purpose of EQUIP 3 / Youth Trust is to prepare and engage out-of-school children, youth and young adults for their roles within the world of work, civil society and family life. The project focuses on activities that strengthen the capacity of youth and youth-serving organizations to prepare those leaving school and out-of-school youth to earn a livelihood. It works in school and community-based settings.

Youth in the developing world are an exceptionally heterogeneous group. Their life experiences, needs and opportunities vary greatly from country to country, as well as their perspective of education and its value for improving their future. Let's imagine we had a typical group of youth[2] from the developing world. We would see that although increasing numbers have completed primary education only 50% are currently in school. The out-of-school population is mainly living in poor urban and poor rural areas, their parents are more likely to be illiterate, and many are from a minority or ethnic groups with language or other integration needs. Many of the youth are already working or involved in economically productive activities, although few would be likely to be employed by others when adults. In some countries, many would be associated with youth gangs or with crime, and in some countries up to 36 may have HIV/AIDs. Furthermore, a significant number of young people already have children of their own, and many of the girls are single parents[3].

Moreover, if you asked youth who are out-of-school why they did not continue their studies after primary education, 50% may say they have to work or cannot afford the cost of schooling, 30& would say that what school teaches is not relevant, and only 20% would say that there is not a school available for them to go to.[4] Thus, even if they had a school built in front of their house, only two out of every ten of those out-of-school would go back to classes.

What educational options exist?

Formal secondary education.

This option has been in the past a path for the children of the governing classes to enter university. Public secondary education is often a low-quality option that leads to unemployment. In the developed world, alternative programs to build relevance, higher order learning skills, and employability into the curriculum have been emerging particularly since the 60's, with different degrees of success. Most developing countries have experimented with distance education and other alternative programs with various partners to serve the needs of out-of-school youth.

Vocational and technical education.

Another track often provided by the formal system is vocational or technical education, but it is constrained by high costs and lack of flexibility. This track may also lead students to terminal programs that disassociate them from the formal system. Many countries have developed national workforce development programs, often directed by the sector of government responsible for labor, or with the involvement of the private sector. Alternatively, in recent years, efforts have turned towards school-to-work strategies and developing self-employment opportunities.

Alternative education.

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[2] The age range of what is considered youth by different organizations and countries varies greatly and will be applied flexibly in this analysis.

[3] Data is illustrative and projections estimated from different sources.

[4] As referenced in Honduras Household Survey, 2000.

Alternative education is characterized variously by different authors, but for this analysis it is defined as an alternative to public school-based formal education. An enormous variety of alternative and non-formal education programs exists throughout the developing world, mostly created by NGOs, religious, government, and other organizations outside of the public education sector. These programs respond to a range of youth development needs, including social integration, crime prevention, democracy building, girl's education, workforce development, and health education, among many others. These programs have been characterized by creativity, and by a profusion of partners from other sectors of government and from civil society, including communities, private business, and volunteers. Youth are increasingly being considered as active partners in the process. The approaches and methodologies used are unconventional to the extent that they are usually not part of national education strategies.

Although many of the alternative education programs have been characterized by lack of sustainability, and appraisals of their scope and achievements have been limited or not used for decision making, the collective impact of alternative and non-formal education for youth in the poorest countries could be equivalent to that of the formal public system.

Relevance and quality of formal systems.

Post-primary education for youth in developing countries is continuously confronting the need for quality and relevance. Particularly for the out-of-school population, that tends to be overage for re-entering the school system, what is taught in school does not address their interest or needs. Often efforts to expand secondary education consider youth as children, which is not the case in much of the developing world. Young people, as adults do, analyze what the program will provide based on its relevance, its quality and the flexibility of its schedule.

Cost of formal systems. Now, why is alternative education particularly significant for developing countries? A formal education track for youth, including lower and upper secondary, vocational, and higher education, is evidently needed. This track should provide quality learning that assists youth in becoming productive adults and citizens. Countries are seriously concerned about how to expand this track to reach their national goals of poverty reduction and education for all, and are being faced with a task that requires massive investments that are beyond their reach. For example, a study recently commissioned by USAID in Honduras[5] on the cost of achieving national poverty reduction goals for lower secondary education (grades 7 to 9), concluded that using only the traditional school system the public sector financing for teachers would have to increase by the year 2015 from $25 million to about $52 million, the cost for new infrastructure would increase from $1.5 to $5.7 million per year, and the national pedagogical university would have to increase expenditures by at least 50%. The study also analyzed the cost of alternative systems and concluded that they could do it for much less, as the estimated annual cost per student of alternative programs like Educatodos was only $70 compared to $200 or $300 in the different modes of formal education at this level.

[5] ESA Consultores, Honduras, 2002.

Youth education strategy required for the developing world

What is not yet widely understood is that the unique characteristics of youth in the developing world necessitate that donors and governments design an education strategy that responds specifically to the conditions and needs of youth. Given the heterogeneity of challenges that youth in the developing world face, this strategy will include, but also must go beyond, traditional secondary education. The approach used for expansion of basic education in the last decades, focusing on including "children," will not respond adequately to the uniqueness of "young adults." In developing countries, a significant portion of the young population lives in the same conditions and has the same responsibilities as adults. Those that are out of school-of-school will consider the option of returning to school from the same perspective we know adults do: does the program provide a likely payoff for the time required and compensate for current earnings, and does it offer flexibility, relevance and quality learning at a reasonable cost?

Successful examples of alternative education for youth

EDUCATODOS: Alternative to school-based education in Honduras

Educatodos is a USAID-supported alternative delivery program for out-of-school youth and young adults attending grades 1 to 9 in Honduras. Partnerships are established with private business, NGOs, local government, and religious or community organizations. Learning centers are established within homes, *maquilas*, prisons, schools, vocational centers, and other available locations. The first phase of the program started in 1995, and by 2002 had provided over 250,000 person-years of schooling, with over 4000 volunteer facilitators assisting at learning centers throughout the country.

In 1999 the development of the 7th to 9th grade program was initiated by the Improving Educational Quality Project. The grade 7 to 9 curriculum is built on an approach in which activities of interest to youth are the foundation for integrating the basic subject areas. It is delivered through print and audio learning materials, and volunteer facilitators, in sessions that last approximately 2 hours a day. A service-learning component is introduced through community projects designed, implemented and evaluated by youth. Several external impact assessments were conducted; the most significant findings are summarized below:

1. An external evaluation conducted by the External Evaluation Unit of Evaluation Quality (UMCE) of the National Pedagogical University analyzed the academic performance of the 7th grade alternative program and showed that results in Mathematics and Spanish from the Educatodos centers were equivalent to the results of the regular schools.

2. A qualitative study and a self-assessment study both revealed that the new integrated curriculum is highly attractive to youth because they become active in their own learning through problem-focused activities. Furthermore, the development of values and community service learning among youth was notable.

3. The same qualitative study indicated that flexibility of scheduling is particularly attractive to teenagers and young adults who are working or have responsibilities that inhibit their returning to regular schools.

4. The study on volunteer facilitators indicates that they contribute the equivalent of $650,000 worth of time per year for grades 1 to 6. These facilitators tend to be community leaders, and strengthen their leadership after their involvement with Educatodos. Of volunteer facilitators, 94% indicate that they are involved mainly to serve their communities. This leads to volunteer facilitators becoming role-models who exemplify values and leadership for the youth in the program.

5. An impact study related to gender reveals that for young women participation has changed their self-perception, improved their self-esteem, and encouraged them to play an active leadership role in their communities.

6. The total cost for a participant to complete a year of schooling is approximately a third of what the government invests annually per student at this level in regular schools, which for the most part covers only teachers' salaries.

PROJOVEM. Alternative to traditional vocational education in Brazil

Projovem is a rural development project in seven poor municipalities in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The program was developed in 1995 as a partnership between the Agricultural and Rural Development department of the University of Sao Paulo and the Paulo Souza State Center for Educational Technology with funding from the Kellogg Foundation. Its objective is to prepare rural youth to manage small farms or agribusinesses, increasing productivity and increasing the standard of living of rural families. The philosophy is based on constructivism and pedagogy of *alternancia* in which students are active participants in the development of knowledge. Students, over three years, develop individual projects with the family property serving as a laboratory for learning, while academic subjects are integrated into the learning process. Projovem sites belong to families, and the community is involved in decision-making. Students and parents work together to determine the efficiency of their farm and compare it with research-based techniques. The student projects are intended to teach students how to conduct diagnostic studies, market research, design, implement, manage and evaluate projects.

Projovem can be analyzed as an alternative to traditional vocational education that faces the problems of high costs, low efficiency and lack of relevance for actual business management. Projovem can be seen as an example of a non-formal rural education program that provides work related skills as well as basic skills usually considered to be the output of formal education.

A cost-benefit study[6] was conducted of Projovem to understand the economic benefits of participation in the program and the value of the economic investment, as compared with agricultural technical schools. Projovem presented the most cost-efficient investment because the ratio of benefits to costs was significantly higher than the agricultural technical program. From 1996-2001, the average per student cost for the vocational technical program in Brazil was about 4,297 real per year. In 1998, the start-up year, the Projovem cost-per-student was 5,888 real per year. At that time, the project had a lot of upfront training investments as well as many sites and almost half the students it has

[6] Moore, Audrey-Marie Schuh (2003). "Education in Brazil: Meeting the needs of rural students." Presentation, Annual Meeting CIES, New Orleans, LA.

today. The costs have been steadily dropping since 1998. In 2000 and 2001, per student costs were 2,958 real per year.

The study concludes that "Projovem has the ability to not only entice the student to remain in the rural area and contribute to rural development, but through their personal agri-business projects, students can increase production on the property, have the possibility of providing others with employment, transfer technology to rural families, act like an agricultural technician… and become more entrepreneurial."

Education for All Youth

The change of strategy proposed calls for a new vision that includes education for all youth in the developing world. An education system for youth is that addresses the needs of all youth, under the conditions which they currently live. The education system for youth needs to build in quality and relevance of learning, and be less tied to traditional notions of schooling. It needs to value successful alternative delivery mechanisms to reach the young population. It needs to use the results of evaluations and cost-benefit data for making decisions on budgets and programs. A bold new strategy for providing educational opportunities to all youth in the developing world is urgently called for.