
SPANISH BILATERAL INITIATIVES

FOR EDUCATION

IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

The research presented in this article concerns la Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation—AECI) and its growing presence in Latin America since the late 1990s. The aim is to evaluate the transformative potential that bilateral funding can have on educational reform in the region. The article starts with a brief history of Spain's past and present strategies for educational initiatives in Latin America, and then it focuses on three of AECI's successful projects: basic and adult literacy; gender mainstreaming in development projects; and multicultural and bilingual education. The article explains the effectiveness of Spanish-sponsored projects

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in Latin America and compares their strategies with those of other bilateral and multilateral donors, such as PREAL. The article concludes by analysing multi-sectoral development efforts that are the foundation of educational strategies sponsored with Spanish funds, based on the grounds that elimination of poverty will not result from projects that focus exclusively on the individual or the family, but rather from those at the community level. AECI's efforts are directed at cultivating internal capacities already present in the communities through training human resources and deploying financial resources.

Introduction

In 1996 the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed upon a strategic plan for worldwide development aid to help more than 1 billion people living in poverty (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996). Consistent with this plan, the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Spanish Agency for International Co-operation—AECI) redefined its goal for international aid so as to focus on increasing access to basic education as a means of reducing poverty. Collaborating with governments and non-governmental organizations, AECI has financed a wide range of development and education programmes in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Latin America is now the agency's priority region, with Bolivia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru as the agency's top-priority countries. These countries are the ones that have the lowest degree of economic development in the region or that have a high concentration of indigenous groups living in poverty. AECI seeks to promote global human development with an emphasis on fighting poverty and promoting equality of opportunity through its programmes.

The research presented here concerns AECI's growing presence in Latin America since the late 1990s.¹ It starts with a brief history looking at Spain's past and present strategies for educational initiatives in Latin America. The aim of this piece is to focus on three of AECI's more successful projects: basic and adult literacy; gender equity; and multicultural and bilingual education. Finally, the analysis moves on to explain the effectiveness of Spanish-sponsored projects in Latin America and compares their strategies with those of other bilateral and multilateral donors such as PREAL (Partnership for Educational Revitalisation in the Americas).²

The history of Spanish co-operation with Latin America³

The post-colonial history of Spanish co-operation with Latin America starts during the rule of Francisco Franco, when the objective was to overcome the isolation in world affairs that Spain had suffered since the Spanish Civil War. As a result, in 1942 the *Consejo de la Hispanidad* was created and in 1946 the *Instituto de Cultura Hispánica*. These two institutions were the predecessors of the AECI. During those years,

scholarship programmes for Latin Americans funded by Spain began. Once Spain returned to democracy, it soon became clear that the emphasis of the government's policy would be on Latin America. Spain started its international aid policy for development in *Iberoamérica*.⁴ This designation facilitated the expansion of funding by the government. In 1977 the *Instituto de Cultura Hispánica* was restructured into the *Centro Iberoamericano de Cooperación*. The new term "cooperation" became the distinctive feature of the centre's work on development. In 1998 the *Agencia Española para la Cooperación Internacional* was formally created. The newly created AECI was entrusted with helping developing countries, especially the former Spanish colonies, to advance economically, socially, culturally, institutionally and politically, and to increase exchanges with other developed countries, especially with the European Union (EU). The Secretary-General of AECI affirmed that in the last few years Spain has "rediscovered America", not only because of the large increase of Spanish investment in the region, but also because Spain has become a partner with these countries through its aid for international development (Gracia Aldaz, 2001).

The European countries have become the world's largest source of funding for international development. In 2004 the total official development assistance from European countries was 50% larger than that of the United States at US\$2.7 billion compared with US\$1.8 billion flowing from the US (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006, pp. 22–65). Spain and Portugal came to the conclusion, however, that the EU was not paying enough attention to Latin America's issues, and they formed a coalition that lobbied within the EU to increase funding directed at the needs of Latin American countries. Following the dramatic transformation of Spain from a poor to a relatively wealthy country, and from a dictatorship to a democratic country since returning to democracy in 1975, this nation has become the third largest donor of economic resources to Latin America, after the US and Germany. Between 1998 (when AECI was created) and 2004, the official development assistance of Spain to Latin America increased by 100%. In 2004, Spain's net disbursement of official development aid to Latin American countries was US\$631 million. Germany's aid was US\$660 million, a growth of 42.1% between 1998 and 2004 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006, pp. 22–65).

Spain, in support of the United Nations (UN) (2000) Millennium Development Goals, has followed a well-defined policy of co-operation built upon three premises: language and culture; economic investment; and democratic government. Spain's strategy for improving education in Latin America varies depending upon the country in question. Each Latin American country's strategy of bilateral co-operation is developed in close collaboration with each of the governments to reflect the country's priorities and educational needs (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2004). For each of the priority countries, a strategic co-operation document has been created for 2005–2008. Each document is extensive and well researched with specific goals and justifications. The priority countries are: Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Paraguay.⁵ Amongst these countries, Bolivia is the one receiving the most—more than €45 million in direct Spanish assistance. The bilateral strategies for development for each country are based on AECI's core value of strengthening the existing capacity of the

countries for the delivery of services by providing financial, managerial and technical resources. The investment and participation of AECI in each country is intended to further the UN Millennium Development Goals, which touch upon all of the development needs of the country, such as increasing economic productivity, strengthening governance and supporting institution-building. In this article we are focusing primarily on education, even though the strategic plans are focused more broadly than education alone. But education is one crucially important sector of the multi-sector development efforts.

Spanish co-operation strategies in education

The Spanish strategy of assistance to Latin America has developed five overall priorities for all the development projects. All AECI projects have the following goals: eliminate poverty; strengthen human rights; be environmentally sustainable; promote gender equity between women and men; and respect cultural diversity (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005a). Education is considered a fundamental part of each of these priorities, along with other basic social services, such as gaining access to health services and the provision of clean water. Education received more than 20% of AECI's budget in 2006 (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2006). One of the main challenges of Spanish co-operation is to help developing countries attain equality in access to educational opportunities for all from elementary to high school, and including vocational training. In bringing about these goals, AECI gives priority to the needs of historically underprivileged and vulnerable groups, and it focuses on educational projects in basic education, hoping to obtain a major impact on overcoming poverty.

Since its conception, Spanish co-operation has contributed to developing and introducing various educational projects in Latin America in order to help to implement the international goal of "Education for All" (UNESCO, 1990). Spain's technical assistance and resources are focused on helping to universalise basic education in Latin America and to promote projects and policies aimed at diminishing inequalities between urban and rural areas, urban and marginal-urban areas, indigenous and non-indigenous groups, and early school drop-out—primarily by girls.

In this article, we focus on three types of projects that have obtained positive reviews from external evaluations or that have received praise because of their contribution to the improvement of education. Most of these projects have been implemented in several of AECI's priority countries in Latin America. The projects are: adult literacy and non-formal education; bilingual and multicultural education; and gender mainstreaming in development projects.

ADULT LITERACY AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

In an effort to overturn international policy trends promoted by the World Bank's policies in the last decade, particularly the diminishing resources for adult education (Klees, 2002), and in support of the World Conference on Education for All convened in Thailand in 1990, AECI's commitment in Latin America supports basic education and

adult literacy.⁶ This commitment is of great consequence given the high percentage of adult illiterates amongst the underprivileged and vulnerable groups in the Americas.

In consultation with the ministries of education in Latin America and the Organization of American States, Spain financed the pilot programme Literacy and Basic Education for Adults (*Programa de Alfabetización y Educación Básica de Adultos*—PAEBA) in 1993 in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, two of the countries with the most critical literacy problems in Latin America. PAEBA's main objective is to reduce the adult illiteracy rate in each country by 20–25% during the 5-year cycle of the project (GPI Consultores, 2000; 2005). After the success of the initial programme, Honduras and Nicaragua have also implemented PAEBA projects since 1996. Starting in 2000 and 2002, Paraguay and Peru started PAEBA projects as well. In more than a decade since its implementation, PAEBA has served more than 700,000 people and has become one of the most important of AECI's programmes. The PAEBA projects from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua have received international literacy prizes from UNESCO.⁷

Each of the five PAEBA countries has its unique way of implementing projects according to its specific needs and the characteristics of the adult population. However, PAEBA projects follow established guidelines. In terms of funding, in the first stage the Spanish government offers monetary and technical support and is in charge of the management of the project; each country's ministry of education is in charge of implementing the projects. In the second stage, AECI gradually reduces its funding in order for each government to assume the costs of the project within its education budget until total transference of the project to each government is achieved. The objectives of PAEBA reflect AECI's priorities of completion of basic education of young adults and adults (15 years or older) who are illiterate and live in rural or urban-marginal areas, giving special attention to reducing the illiteracy rates amongst women.⁸ It is also designed to strengthen each country's systems of adult education by incorporating resources and Spanish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into the improvement of the teaching skills and techniques of adult educators, and to promote the social, productive and democratic inclusion and participation of young adults and adults.

The PAEBA programmes are built around the living and working conditions, as well as the interests, of the participants. It is also important that these programmes are located in proximity to the participants' residential area and have schedules adapted to the working conditions of the participants. Finally, the design of the programme includes the expectation that community members, as well as residents with advanced levels of education, will become adult educators in their communities.

The learning activities of PAEBA consist of literacy courses or literacy circles. Each circle has between 14 and 17 participants, and meets in schools, community centres or in the adult educator's home. Three levels of circles meet for 6–8 months each with materials specifically created for that level. When the participants finish the three levels, they have completed the equivalent of elementary education in each country. The PAEBA from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru have also implemented, but on a limited scale, *Educación para el Trabajo* (Education for Work) in which the graduates from the initial PAEBA have the opportunity to pursue additional courses that

will give them the opportunity to enter the job market or become self-employed. Amongst the majors offered are electricity, carpentry and bread- and pastry-making.

PAEBA is one of AECI's more effective and representative educational projects. Women especially have benefited; their rates of participation ranged from 48.5% in Honduras and Nicaragua to 90% in Peru (GPI Consultores, 2005). Several Latin American countries will carry on adult education as an educational priority at least until the year 2008. In Paraguay, for example, AECI will fund a second stage of PAEBA (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005b). In Bolivia, the plan is to start adult education courses that will go hand-in-hand with economic development programmes to fight poverty (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005c). This is especially important given that 64% of Bolivia's rural and indigenous population lives with significant levels of poverty and adult illiteracy rates are elevated, especially amongst the rural population, women and those who speak languages other than Spanish—Aymara, Quechua or Guaraní. The average years of schooling for the adult population are just 4 years; for men it is slightly higher (5 years) than it is for women (3 years) (Getino Canseco, 2001).

One of the main contributions of PAEBA has been to move adult education from being a secondary priority in educational policy for many Latin American countries to one of greater prominence. Although PAEBA has provided literacy as well as basic educational attainment to hundreds of thousands of adults, the adult illiteracy rates in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic have continued to increase. These countries have not been able to improve the conditions at the root of illiteracy, particularly extreme poverty and the barriers to better job opportunities for the majority of the population, especially in rural areas. A final challenge that AECI has experienced with PAEBA is the process for institutionalising the projects in each of the countries when the 5-year AECI funds ended. Although some countries have obtained external or internal funds for the continuation of PAEBA, the funds are still too limited for the amount of work that needs to be done to overcome adult illiteracy in the continent.

BILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Overall in Latin America there are few development programmes that focus on the cultural diversity of the population, even though multiculturalism is a factor that is present across all societies. AECI's strategy with indigenous groups is to provide assistance for self-sustained development and to recognise their rights to uphold their own ethnic identity (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1997). In several Latin American countries with indigenous populations, AECI has co-sponsored bilingual and multicultural programmes. Approximately 75% of its funding for indigenous groups is channelled through Spanish NGOs that manage development programmes with basic education components (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000a).⁹

Bilingual and multicultural education programmes are geared towards improving inclusion and respect for Latin America's multilingual and multicultural realities. Paraguay is an example of a country where the education system did not reflect the multilingual reality of the country's population. According to the 1992 Paraguayan

Census, 50% of the population used both Guaraní and Spanish languages, 7% used only Spanish, 37% only Guaraní and 6% other languages (Soriano, Rodriguez & Pulido, 2001). Until 1993, the education system in Paraguay used primarily Spanish as a language of instruction. The bilingual education programmes implemented were of a transitional nature; Guaraní was used as a way to learn Spanish, and once the students had learned enough Spanish all instruction in Guaraní was abandoned. This form of bilingual educational proved unsuccessful for the linguistic reality of the country since most people use Guaraní as their everyday language. The transitional bilingual programmes reinforced the higher status of the Spanish language, using Guaraní solely until the achievement of Spanish fluency, and excluded the socio-cultural context of the Guaraní culture that allowed children to reaffirm their identity (Soriano, Rodriguez & Pulido, 2001).

In 1994, Paraguay started a bilingual and multicultural educational reform in which the two official languages of the country, Spanish and Guaraní, were to become the languages of instruction at the three levels of education: elementary, high school and university. AECI co-financed this reform along with the Paraguayan government. According to the linguistic breakdown of the population, students would be placed in either a Guaraní-medium or Spanish-medium school. For example, students whose native language is Guaraní would attend a Guaraní-medium school in which, during the first years, they would learn to read and write through Guaraní and would learn Spanish as a second language. Students whose native language is Spanish would attend Spanish-medium schools and would learn Guaraní as a second language.

Starting in 2001, Paraguay implemented bilingual and multicultural education as a pilot programme in 400 Guaraní-medium and 6,500 Spanish-medium schools. A research study has identified the benefits of the bilingual education reform in Paraguay, where children who have been schooled in Guaraní with Spanish as a second language have enhanced their ability to communicate and have increased their participation in school. Moreover, these students have outperformed older students who have been educated solely in Spanish in academic achievement measures in both Guaraní and Spanish (Elias & Walder, 1998).

The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation has also partly sponsored Paraguay's distance education programmes for the professionalisation of untrained teachers, which include bilingual education methods as part of the curriculum. AECI has partially funded NGOs in Paraguay, such as *Fe y Alegría*, in a bilingual and multicultural distance education programme (by radio) for rural areas. Established in 1955 in Venezuela as a project by Friar José M. Velaz, *Fe y Alegría* currently works in twelve Latin American countries and started its work in Paraguay in 1992. The *Fe y Alegría* bilingual and multicultural distance literacy education programme is provided in Guaraní with Spanish as a second language. It consists of ten terms, 5 months each of literacy and basic education consisting of daily 30-minute radio literacy lessons in which the participant follows and fills out materials especially prepared for the course. The daily radio lessons are complemented with weekly group meetings with a facilitator to follow up and assess the content of the classes. At the end of the ten terms, the participants have finished elementary education.

The sustainability of bicultural and bilingual education in Paraguay is part of AECI's long-term plans. Building upon the experience developed so far, at present they are focusing on programmes for teachers' professional development, the development of bilingual educational materials, and the design and implementation of an educational policy to achieve bicultural and bilingual education in the education system of that country (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005b).

In Peru, AECI has co-funded bilingual and multicultural programmes in the Amazonian region. Since 1996, Spanish co-operation has supported a training programme for bilingual teachers that has resulted in the creation of a diverse curricular programme responding to the needs and demands of the 15 indigenous groups of the Amazonian region. In 2000 the programme trained 81 young bilingual teachers (Virella Gomez, 2001). Since 2004, AECI has supported an additional programme that focuses on improving the quality of administrative management and teaching in bilingual schools in the Peruvian Amazonian region of Loreto.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

To implement the international agreement addressing women's rights and opportunities reached at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, within the OECD, and in accordance with the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2000, AECI is determined to establish itself as the premier agency for promoting national policies for equity in education in Latin America. To promote equality of opportunities between women and men, AECI provided more than €25 million in 2000 (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000b). These funds were allocated towards the training of the human resources that manage development projects, for scholarships that directly benefit women, to participating NGOs, and through bilateral programmes. The priority within development projects with a gender perspective is the improvement of health services provided to women and their children (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000b).

In Guatemala and Honduras, Spanish funds are directed towards alleviating poverty by combining rural development projects with basic education. Training and basic literacy form the core components of rural development projects that the Spanish government is sponsoring all over Central America. At the middle-school level, educational programmes are devoted to training personnel working in Spanish NGOs and local NGOs that are delivering programmes. AECI is supporting training programmes in higher education for women leaders—businesswomen, professionals, politicians and university faculty. In Bolivia, Guatemala and Paraguay, AECI has helped to shape national policies on equal educational opportunities for women and men. The objectives are to highlight how gender mainstreaming is conceptualised in training courses and basic education projects.

Guatemala, the first country where a gender perspective became a priority, introduced gender equity as a goal in a development project in 1997. The indigenous population of Guatemala represents 41% of the total population. Some 57% of this group live in poverty, and 22% live in extreme poverty. For this reason, most of the development

projects in Guatemala are focussed on the indigenous population (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2005d). Spain's support attempts to strengthen the municipal services since those services are directly related to the indigenous communities where the projects are being developed. Spain is working with 32 NGOs with as many as 92 projects that have a gender perspective, many of them at the municipal level. Some examples of these projects are: setting up spaces for women to participate in municipal politics; preventive and reproductive health; appreciating the life experience of women and the work they do as part of the municipal women's committees; and developing projects designed to improve the quality of life (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000a).

Those project goals were introduced in Bolivia in 1999 and 2000 with economic development programmes aimed at eliminating poverty. One project was dedicated to increasing the use of solar energy by installing panels for the production of electrical power in rural communities. The electricity is used within households and by the community in computing centres, radio communication facilities, electric spinning wheels and pumping stations for local water supply.

An example of the interrelated circumstances that benefit women and children in the Bolivian highlands is the solar energy pumping stations that saved 2 hours of women's time a day in obtaining fresh water, thus generating family income by giving them more time for the production of embroidery. It is calculated that each woman participating in the project was able to produce an additional garment per day. Moreover, solar energy also made electric spinning wheels possible. Solar power also benefited the girls and boys in the community by generating electricity for school use. At the same time, the project focuses on improving access to health and reproductive health services, reducing family violence and programmes to prevent cancer amongst women. The project also promotes the self-sufficiency of women by offering credit to develop productive projects. At the community and municipal level, human rights are promoted through training provided for those working in the legal system. Women are also taught to protect the environment for sustainable development.

The contribution of AECI goes beyond economic development projects. It also focuses on improving the quality of the teaching force so as to be able to attain the goals of the educational reform in providing access to schooling for all. The Bolivian educational reform includes the goals of multiculturalism and bilingualism. Spanish assistance is being directed to the professional development of staff in teacher-training institutions and the training of pedagogical advisors to promote educational innovation inside the classroom. Moreover, technical teams are being sent to each national education system to provide assistance (Getino Canseco, 2001). Within this larger framework, gender mainstreaming is supported by encouraging access to teacher-training institutions from the most remote places and by including gender in the content of the professional development of faculty in teacher-training institutions.

Quoting Elena Getino Canseco (2001, p. 12), the former representative of AECI in Bolivia, it is clear that:

the computing centres and the overall programme reach beyond the professional development of teachers and of girls and boys. The computing centres represent the recognition of the rights of isolated rural areas with high indices of poverty and poor conditions in their quality of life to receive quality education, respectful of their own culture and traditions, and to provide a qualitative push towards the future of rural areas.

Bolivia, in contrast to other Latin American countries (PREAL, 2001), still shows a significant gender gap in the educational attainment of girls and boys. For every 47 male illiterates there are 100 female illiterates, nearly a two-to-one ratio of females to males in illiteracy (Getino Canseco, 1999). For this reason, initiatives funded by AECI for the professional development of teachers in Bolivia place a high priority on equality of opportunity for girls and boys.

Comparing Spanish Co-operation with other development aid

Spain's strategy of development assistance in Latin America stands in contrast to programmes sponsored by other members of the EU and the US. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds large national programmes in the hope of involving the private sector of host countries in providing resources for education. USAID relies on private consulting firms in the design and implementation of educational projects without involving local actors in the planning (Cortina & Stromquist, 2000). Other European countries besides Spain, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, primarily fund local NGOs as providers of education and social services for poor communities (Cortina & Stromquist, 2000). An earlier research article (Cortina & Porter, 2000) contrasts the Spanish strategy with that of the US and the Netherlands, and concludes that the collaboration of Spain and the Latin American governments is achieving significant rates of success in educational programmes. In what follows, we explain the reasons why the Spanish-sponsored projects seem to be so effective in Latin America, and we compare their strategy with those of other bilateral donors.

Spain's strategy of development assistance is supported by detailed evaluation of the grants and their impact. Moreover, in comparison with USAID, AECI's funding cycles are longer. AECI renews project funding when there are positive reviews from the evaluations, and this helps to improve the sustainability and long-term impact. The grants primarily fund local NGOs as providers of literacy and economic development projects in poor communities.

The individual countries' strategic documents published by AECI are important sources of information to understand the specific situation of each country and how financial aid for education intertwines with the broader goals of Spanish financial support for each country. These strategic documents are more than just a listing of the programmes and projects that AECI supports. They also include a description of the main problems confronting each country and how Spain is going to deploy its human and financial resources to reach the goals of international aid.

In the following paragraphs we compare the Spanish strategies for education with those advanced by PREAL, which began in 1995 as a joint project of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, DC, and the Corporation of Development Research (CINDE) in Santiago. Funding for PREAL comes from USAID and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

PREAL's trademark is its report card on education in Latin America. Two have been published so far, *Lagging behind* (PREAL, 2001) and *Quantity without quality* (PREAL, 2006). The purpose of both reports was to provide information on issues of quality, quantity and equity and the state of education in Latin America. As the titles of both reports suggest, their overall evaluation is not positive. The reports confirm that access is improving but the overall quality of student learning remains low when measured by international standards. Beyond providing information about education in the region, the purpose of PREAL is to promote a certain vision of how to reform education.

One of the main elements of this vision is to decentralise education. PREAL's justification is that education will improve if local communities take responsibility for it and teachers are accountable to the communities they serve. PREAL's reform proposals follow the lending priorities established by the World Bank. For the World Bank, the way to improve education is through partnerships with the private sector, through privatisation, and the integration of business management models to increase efficiency and productivity in the delivery of educational services. It follows from this perspective that the proposals endorse decreasing public investment in the professional development of teachers. The replacement for this lack of investment is teaching and learning alternatives by means of online courses, distance education and the use of television channels to provide instruction. All these alternative methods of providing education are indeed more efficient within a cost/benefit matrix, but they do not address the main criticisms that the PREAL reports advance regarding education in Latin America, which can be summarised in two points: the quality of education is not improving; and equity is decreasing.

Even though both reports present harsh criticisms of the provision of educational services in Latin America, neither addresses the main underlying issues confronting educational advancement in the region. The reforms proposed and sponsored by PREAL undermine the capacity of the national governments to gather the needed political will and resources to achieve equitable results for all groups in the population, including women, indigenous groups, urban-marginal groups and the rural poor. Moreover, while both reports recognise the shortage of resources devoted to education, this deficiency is never questioned. The priority is to focus on the most efficient use of the available resources, but not to think how additional resources could be invested. Nor do they raise the issue that in most countries the educational budget is heavily concentrated on higher education, a sector designed to serve the upper classes and elite. The concentration of the educational budget on higher education is one of the greatest sources of inequality in the access and mobility of people who are in the lowest quintile of income distribution.

Critics of the World Bank have emphasised over the years the lack of pedagogical content in the educational reforms recommended by this organization. It has also been noted that there is a lack of clarity in World Bank reports about the kinds of educational

programmes that might be more effective to serve high-risk groups. In contrast, the latter is a central concern of Spanish aid. Amongst the ideas put forward by AECI is the transformation of school practices so that schools become a starting place for appreciation of the ethnic diversity of Latin America, rather than focusing on a deficit model for non-mainstream cultures and ethnic groups, as is prevalent in most of the national systems of education. Spanish funds are contributing to incorporating indigenous languages and cultures into the schooling of the young in those communities. The support that indigenous communities are receiving to strengthen their community identity and to overcome poverty are top priorities of Spanish involvement, aiming to overcome what PREAL points out as a weakness of Latin American education, namely, that “poor and rural students tend to score lower on achievement tests” (PREAL, 2001, p. 9).

Multi-sector development efforts are the foundation of educational strategies sponsored with Spanish funds, based on the rationale that elimination of poverty will not result from projects that focus on the individual or the family, but rather from those at the community level. AECI’s efforts are directed at cultivating internal capacities already present in the communities through training stakeholders and deploying financial resources. Similarly to PREAL, AECI proposes a decentralisation of resources and decision-making in education, but the strategy is different. PREAL seeks administrative decentralisation, while AECI works to empower communities. From AECI’s perspective, the professional development of teachers is part of the development of community resources, so the goal is to strengthen teachers, starting with additional training, preparation for non-certified teachers, introducing bilingualism and multiculturalism, and the establishment of computer centres that make knowledge available to the school and the community. Beyond the local communities, AECI’s strategies for deploying assistance go to the heart of overcoming the “information divide”, which not only has been one of the greatest sources of inequality between urban and rural areas, and between the North and the South, but also has been on the increase under the pressure of globalisation.

One salient contribution of AECI is its definition of gender issues in education, emphasising equality of opportunity for girls and boys. This priority is present within all professional development that takes place for NGO personnel, teachers, professors in universities and personnel in the judicial system. The insight that drives this priority is that gender discrimination stems from entrenched cultural patterns at the root of the male or female disparity in average years of schooling amongst adults belonging to indigenous groups in Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru, as well as in other countries across Latin America.

To strengthen the community’s capacity in education, governmental capacity is also needed at the municipal and State levels to provide lasting support for the projects and to solidify the partnership established between Spain as a donor country and each one of the countries to which Spain is contributing aid. Many of the projects are based at the municipal level in order to increase managerial capacity to sustain community-level efforts. Spanish co-operation is an example of how donor countries within their bilateral initiatives are becoming more powerful in influencing the conceptualisation of educational problems and the type of interventions that are needed to attain the UN Millennium Development Goals.

In the case of Spanish co-operation, Spain's own assessment of each country's development needs and the type of intervention needed is guiding its negotiations with the national governments and other social and political actors, as well as its relations with other international donors and the Spanish NGOs. Rather than isolating the analysis of education, AECI views the education sector as part of the broader quest across all sectors to alleviate poverty.

The academic literature on how to reform education has been critical of the one-size-fits-all reforms promoted by the World Bank. These criticisms highlight the monopoly that the World Bank has in the development of a global education reform agenda and in the methodologies deemed appropriate towards that end (Heyneman, 2005). In contrast to the Bank's lending priorities, and rather than dictating an educational policy for all the priority countries, Spain is working intensively with each country to develop the type of initiative required and to tailor its aid as faithfully as possible to those needs.

Notes

1. The initial impetus for the research presented in this article was the conference Bilateral Initiatives for Education: Spain and Latin America, which Regina Cortina chaired and organized at New York University on 9 March 2001. Dr Cortina is grateful for the support received in organizing this conference from Ambassador Emilio Cassinello, former Consul General of Spain in New York, and from the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional. Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations of Spanish documents are by the authors.
2. Additional information about PREAL can be found at www.preal.org
3. Information about AECI's history was obtained from Arias (2001), as well as from the AECI's web page www.aeci.es/01aeci/4antecedentes/4.2.htm. Retrieved on 12 September 2006.
4. The words "Latin America" do not appear in the official publications and statements of the Spanish Government. Their preference is to use the word "Iberoamérica", a derivative of the Iberian Peninsula and refers to both Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries of the Americas.
5. For each priority country a *Documento estratégico* for 2005–2008 is available in the AECI website: www.aeci.es
6. Agreement reached in Madrid during the second *Cumbre Iberoamericana de Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno*, 23 and 24 July 1992. The document can be obtained from: www.oei.es/iicumbre.htm#8
7. Every year UNESCO recognises the services of institutions, organizations or individuals that have effectively contributed to the struggle against illiteracy. In 1998, PAEBA El Salvador received the King Sejong Literacy Prize; in 1999 PAEBA Honduras received the Noma Literacy Prize; and in 2000, PAEBA Nicaragua received the International Reading Association Literacy Award. The complete list of awards can be found in: www.nald.ca/info/awards/internat/unesco2.htm
8. PAEBA defines as an adult anyone 15 years old or older, but it is also serving people younger than 15 years given the difficulties that children have in accessing formal schooling, as well as the high drop-out rates in many rural areas.
9. The total contribution is €6.3 million for indigenous programmes during that year.

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