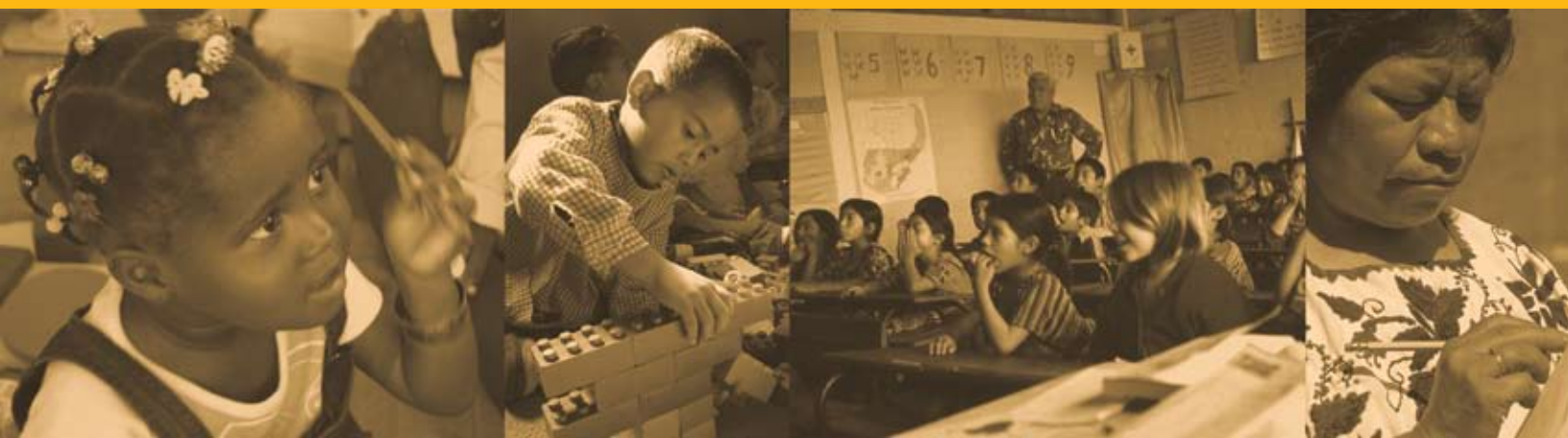

Regional Education Indicators Project (PRIE)

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

EDUCATION INFORMATION SYSTEM DIAGNOSIS MISSION ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Regional Bureau of Education for
Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCO Santiago



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The Regional Education Indicators Project of the Summit of the Americas - PRIE exists thanks to contributions from the Secretaría de Educación Pública de México (SEP), the Organization of American States (OAS), and UNESCO through its Institute for Statistics (UIS) and its Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO Santiago).

BACKGROUND

The Summit of the Americas brings together 34 heads of governments and States for the purpose of discussing and building a collective action platform on political, economic, and social issues that concern us all.

At the Second Summit, held in Chile (1998), it was stressed the importance of education as a key element in the comprehensive development of our people, and an Action Plan was agreed upon to establish hemisphere-wide working mechanisms was designed to meet the desired goals by 2010.

Thus, the Regional Education Indicators Project (PRIE) was created as one of the mechanisms to facilitate the monitoring of the proposed goals. PRIE aims essentially three objectives: construct a basic set of comparable education indicators for the Americas, considering the already existing initiatives; improve and strengthen the national education statistical systems, working jointly avoiding duplications; and publish them and promote their use in the design of educational policies. It is expected that the production and publication of relevant and comparable educational indicators will contribute to assess the progress towards the agreed commitments and allow informed decision-making.

The comparability of PRIE indicators is guaranteed through the use of information gathered by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS), annually submitted by the Ministries of Educations' National Education Statistics Offices, and complemented with information from other sources that comply with international standards defined by both the UIS and other specialized entities.

Hence, and in order to ensure the availability and quality of the generated indicators, the project proposed to work with the member countries to enhance and strengthen National Education Statistics Systems through a Technical Cooperation Component.

TECHNICAL COOPERATION COMPONENT

PRIE's Technical Cooperation Component was thought of as an initiative that promotes the convergence of efforts with those currently underway in the region working for the improvement of the education information systems.

In this respect, PRIE, through the use of its working mechanisms and networks, makes an important contribution to UNESCO's National Educational Statistics Capacity Building Program by creating synergies and work communities in line with the mandate of Member States of the United Nations System.

The actions envisioned as part of the Working Plan of this component include:

- Elaboration of Data Plan missions to support the accurate reporting of international data collected annually by UNESCO for the production of internationally comparable indicators.
- Diagnostic missions that provide insight into the integral functioning of education information systems and, based on their results, promote improvement initiatives and foster horizontal interchange among countries.
- Training and information exchange workshops on sub-region-specific topics with a view of promoting effective use and dissemination of the resulting information.

During the 2004-2007 period, 12 cooperation missions were undertaken:

- 8 education information system diagnostic missions in member countries. In Latin America these involved: Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. In the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago.
- 4 data plan elaboration missions in the Caribbean countries: Barbados, Bahamas, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda.

Additional past activities include:

- 17 data plan elaboration missions conducted in the 2001-2003 period. In Latin America these involved: Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic. In the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

The aforementioned diagnostic missions complement various interventions carried out by UNESCO in other countries of the region, namely, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The methodology used to perform the complex task of analyzing the state of information systems was developed jointly by UNESCO and the World Bank, based on the methodology developed by the International Monetary Fund for reporting on national accounts. Six quality analysis dimensions have been defined. These include data collection,

processing, analysis and dissemination of information methodologies and techniques, as well as the institutional settings where the statistical work is undertaken. Evaluation is based on interviews with those responsible for the process and involves actors from the national level up to school principals, including both desconcentrated or decentralized entities, besides internal and external users; and relevant documentary analysis.

In June 2007 an assessment meeting was held which addressed past cooperation missions. This meeting provided the framework for the preparation of this Executive Summary. The present summary is intended to provide the Ministers of Education of the Summit of the Americas' member countries, during the V Ministerial Meeting within the Interamerican Council for Integral Development of the Organization of American States, with general conclusions pertaining strengths and weaknesses of the education statistics systems from a regional perspective. As well, it identifies challenges and proposals for future action aimed at improving goal-monitoring data bases and sustaining the formulation, execution and assessment of education policies.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In general, all the visited countries need –to a greater or lesser extent– to improve their education statistics systems through actions that strengthen their functionality and timeliness. This can be accomplished through the strengthening the analysis, access and dissemination stages, key elements for short-term actions. In turn, all countries gave proof of having –in varying degrees– the necessary ingredients to make a smooth transition into an integrated, relevant, reliable and quality information system.

¿WHAT STRENGTHS WERE IDENTIFIED?

- In most of the visited countries, the Education Statistics Offices of the Ministries of Education were acknowledged as reliable providers of official data and responsible for carrying out –most of them already consolidated– collection processes. However, in some countries institutional changes are in place assigning permanent or temporary responsibility to other areas which, all too often, do not observe the guidelines and lineaments that guarantee the production of quality information in compliance with accepted education statistical criteria.
- Actions undertaken during the implementation of the various chains of production stages reflect the adoption of objectivity principles and a high degree of commitment which ensure impartiality and professional integrity.
- Worthwhile noting are the efforts made in all the visited countries towards structuring their statistics system consistent with concepts, definitions, classifications and technical standards recommended by UNESCO, while incorporating necessary national adaptations, an essential condition to ensure the international comparability of PRIE's indicators.
- Data availability to ensure the elaboration of most of the indicators defined by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, main source of the Regional Education Indicators Project.
- Permanent efforts aimed at expanding coverage are evident. These have yielded better results in the public sector and faced greater difficulties in the private sector.
- Significant improvement in terms of the quality of information reported to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and, hence, increased availability of data for assessing progress towards the goals achievement.
- Every country has incorporated good practices that deserve being shared.
- Worth mentioning is the open attitude shown by national officials regarding observations on perceived weaknesses, and the immediate implementation, by some, of corrective actions or specific technical assistance activities.

WHAT PRIORITIES AND WEAKNESSES WERE IDENTIFIED?

Major weaknesses can be found at both ends of the statistics chain production, with shortfalls concentrating on the initial conditions required to ensure efficient performance by statistics offices as well as accessibility to the data. These are core components of quality information systems and provide their *raison d'être*.

- Genuine “integrated information systems”, broadly speaking, are generally absent. Insufficient access to basic data forces the various education system offices to administer their own surveys, both at the central level and at the desconcentrated or decentralized levels.
- A major complaint voiced by top ministry’s authorities and qualified users has to do with the lack of suitable mechanisms that allow accessing data timely, and the lack of analytical information and relevant indicators that facilitate monitoring goals and policy assessments.
- Many countries showed lack of conceptual frameworks for the analysis and interpretation of indicators, and the need for developing more relevant indicators linked to sub-national analytical units, particularly when information at a suitable level of disaggregation is available.
- Mention should be made of the inadequacy of human resources –both in terms of numbers and level of qualifications– at the central levels and particularly at the desconcentrated or decentralized levels. This is especially important considering the increasingly active roles played by these actors in statistics process development. And while on-going training efforts have been deemed positive, there is a need for reflecting on the relevance of these training programs and make whatever adjustments are called for.
- The “quality of statistical systems” is seen restricted to the coverage and internal data consistency, while there seems to be an apparent lack of understanding that other dimensions such as relevance, accessibility and dissemination of the information, are indeed key axes of quality.
- The consistency of computer-generated information is often seen as a more important requirement than the methodological consistency of the statistical process. This has led to serious problems concerning the quality of the data generated.
- Data consistency and validation are generally evaluated from the perspective of an “expert”. No written methodology exists to support these activities.
- Few countries had methodology designed for the treatment for lack of information or data depuration.
- Not enough attention is given to comprehensive and systematic process evaluations that include reviewing the models, methods, contents and different profiles of internal or external users and producers.
- A point that deserves some criticism is the priority given to data collection and processing, disregarding –as part of their regular practice– the all important sharing of results with policy designers and decision-makers, relevant actors who can verify whether the system is in fact yielding the results they require.
- Most officials focus their work on operational activities and have little expertise on data use and analysis.
- Policies regulating the publication and dissemination of information are either scarce or non-existent.
- Integration with other ministerial areas responsible for producing administrative data –human resources, financial, complementary services– was scarce or null. These data are important and could be used for statistical purposes. A few cases involving duplication of production efforts and analyses were also identified.
- Efforts to articulate cooperation activities with the National Statistics Offices and integration with other informa-

tion sources such as Permanent Household Surveys—an important input for regional entities—as complementary sources in the production of relevant follow-up indicators, were found to be rather weak.

- Advances in new information and communication technologies have significantly contributed to operational aspects. However, this, in turn, calls for reviewing traditional school census schemes in the light of modern automation techniques designed to process teacher and student administrative records, thus avoiding duplicated or overlapping processes or data capture.
- The great majority of the visited countries lack a consolidated Metadata¹ system suitable for the multiple needs of users.
- As regards basic data collection, both in terms of international reporting and internal use, gaps were observed—with some differences between subregions—in the following areas:
 - Higher education.
 - Private sector provision: low enrolment coverage, particularly with reference to pre-primary education.
 - Education financing.
 - Early childhood.
 - No information on first grade entrants based on pre-school attendance.
 - Incomplete classification of technical/vocational secondary education.
 - Teachers' statistics; particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels, broken up into first and second cycle, a particularly important segment for the Caribbean countries. If the purpose is to shed light on issues affecting the teaching profession and build a broad and comprehensive approach to policies aimed at improving teachers' professional development and quality of life, information on teachers is clearly insufficient.

¹ The term Metadata summarizes conceptual references (definitions, scope, classifications, sources) statistical techniques, methodologies and procedures that support information systems, in terms of their conception, development and outcomes.

OUTLINES FOR FUTURE STRATEGIES

In order to overcome the identified shortcomings, several key initiatives deserve looking into, among them:

- Reconstructing the dialogue between staff and Ministry of Education decision makers and the National Statistics Offices.
- Encouraging reflection within Statistics Offices on the new challenges posed and promoting efforts towards:
 - Continuing evaluation of education policy needs in order to better respond to current demands for information.
 - Implementing innovative practices facilitated by the incorporation of ICTs and developing them to their full potential.
 - Promoting the development of analytical data as a complement to the basic data being currently disseminated.
 - Flexibilizing techniques and instruments and adapting them to meet their needs.
 - Fostering spaces of education and training to keep pace with the new challenges.
- Paying more attention to various statistical areas and providing them with the necessary human, technological and financial resources.
- Promoting among comparable countries the exchange of good practices in order to assess those areas in need of improvement.
- Adapting Administrative and Statistical Information Systems to meet both the needs for production of statistical and management-related information.
- Overcoming the ambiguity and confusion arising from incorporating information systems into computer-based systems.
- Highlighting the difficulties associated with producing reliable statistical data.
- Moving away from the historical view that Statistics Offices should only process student-related data and incorporating other dimensions that make an Integrated Education Information System, through joint collaboration or the creation of strong links with the various data-generating entities.
- Reappraising multidisciplinary efforts and work across different areas, and promoting collaborative initiatives.

.. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION ..

In order to consolidate the progress made to produce internationally comparable information, that allowed the analysis contained in publications such as Education Panorama, and move forward on issues and dimensions still lagging behind, regional efforts aimed at strengthening education information systems must be steadily pursued.

- Through the recognition of weaknesses and strengths identified in the diagnostic and data plan missions, and based on the interests expressed by the countries, the elaboration of short and medium-term activities is suggested. The following actions are foreseen:
 - Production and dissemination of analytical information.
 - Strengthening the capacity for statistics elaboration and analysis, promoting training programs that further allow to understand the meaning of the indicators and their links to educational policy, data reliability, and their implications.
 - Appropriate integration with other sources of information.
 - Development of national indicator systems.
 - Development of dissemination policies of information.
 - Improvement the data collection activities from private institutions.
 - Improvement the education expenditure data collection.
 - Enhancement and development of new teacher-related data collection.
 - Production of early childhood education data.
 - Improvement the higher education information collection.
- Organizing training and experience exchange workshops that address common characteristics and problems to participating countries. These workshops should involve all team members of the various national statistics offices. These actions must be complementary, convergent and fully in tune with UNESCO's Strengthening National Education Statistical Information Systems program, as well as complying with the non-duplicity principle set forth by PRIE.
- Elaboration of specific documents containing examples of GOOD PRACTICES identified in the diagnostic missions. These should refer to different stages of the statistics production process and represent potential improvement opportunities for comparable countries, through the mediation of OREALC/UNESCO (Santiago) Regional Information System (SIRI), and their national coordinators, under UNESCO's coordination.
- Maintain and intensify data planning/diagnostic missions and thematic workshops, by subregions and/or groups of countries.



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