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**COMPARATIVE HEMISPHERIC REPORT ON
POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PREVENT SCHOOL
FAILURE**

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INTRODUCTION

This report addresses component 3 of the first year of the "*Design of policies and strategies to prevent school failure*" Hemispheric Project developed by the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Intearmerican Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD) with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. This component includes the systematization and comparative analysis of policies, strategies and initiatives carried out by the national governments of the region in order to reduce repetition, overage, poor achievements and school dropout.

The report includes the analysis of four sub-regions of the American continent, totalizing 22 countries: ANDEAN (Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), CARIBBEAN (Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Santa Lucia, Surinam and Trinidad and Tobago), CENTRAL AMERICA (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) and MERCOSUR (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay).

There are various factors affecting the comparison of the policies reported by the countries: heterogeneous national contexts, implementation timetables (some of the policies and programs are quite recent), different policy development criteria and logics adopted by the Ministries, and the characteristics of the reports themselves. It is important to mention that the sub-regional reports are heterogeneous in shape and content, as they are prepared on the basis of national reports including different types of information and analyses.

Thus, within the ANDEAN sub-region, Ecuador and Peru have similar programs, although Ecuador's is more focused; but comparison with Venezuela is more difficult as this country submitted a more general report on its policies and educational programs. The CARIBBEAN sub-region, in turn, has a more homogenous policy, aimed at improving pre-school education coverage and quality. The CENTRAL AMERICAN sub-region also shows some similar features, in this case as regards programs focused on primary schools in poor areas (in many cases, rural schools) and emphasizes on pedagogical components. Finally, the MERCOSUR countries have implemented very heterogeneous programs/policies.

The first part of this report includes a brief description of the demographic and social context, followed by a general characterization of the school failure program, mainly based on the Hemispheric Report. The second part contains a summary of the programs and policies described in the Sub-regional reports, where the information has been organized so that it can be better understood and compared.¹ Below, there is a comparative analysis of the different programs and policies, presented according to their general approach, educational levels they target, main strategies and actions, and identified achievements and obstacles. The analysis is followed by a summary of the challenges faced by each sub-region. The third part consists of some general considerations for the four sub-regions in general.

1. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

1.1 Demographic and social characteristics of the countries and sub-regions.

a) Population

The three countries making up the **ANDEAN** sub-region (Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) have had a similar population growth rate ranging between 1,5% and 2,5% in the last ten years, which has resulted in a significant increase of the population. Since the beginning of the 80s until the year 2004, the number of inhabitants increased by 80%. On the other hand, Venezuela's percentage of urban population (89%) is significantly higher than that of Ecuador and Peru. The urban population in the latter only amounts to 72%. Finally, in the year 2005, the population aged between 5 and 19 comprises 22% of the total population.

The main characteristic of the almost 3,5 million inhabitants of the **CARIBBEAN** region is that most of the population is concentrated in only two countries (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) out of the 13 which comprise this territory. However, the highest demographic growth rates are recorded in Belize, with a 2% annual growth rate in the 90s, and Bahamas, with an annual 1.8%.

Demographic growth in the countries of the **CENTRAL AMERICAN** sub-region has slowed down between 2000 and 2005, when compared to the growth recorded in the period 1990-1995. Of the total Central American population, 36.6% is aged between 5 and 19.

In the case of the **MERCOSUR**, more than 80% of the population lives in urban areas. Between 1995 and 2005, the demographic growth has slowed down. At present, some countries have an important percentage of indigenous population (mainly Bolivia). Finally, there is a wide variety of scenarios as regards the population under 15. According to the Human Development Report for the year 2002, the population under 15 for the year 2000 ranged between 28% in Uruguay and Argentina, and 40% in countries such as Bolivia and Paraguay.

b) Economic Development

As regards economic development, there is a clear heterogeneity both within the sub-regions and in the comparison between them. The poorest countries in each region are Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Surinam. On the hand, those with the highest relative economic development are Uruguay, Venezuela, Costa Rica² and Bahamas.

Table 1. Compared GDP.

<i>Sub-region</i>	<i>Range (US\$ parity)</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Mercosur (2003)	2.714-11.514	Bolivia	Uruguay
Andean (1998)	3.003-5.808	Ecuador	Venezuela
Central American (1998)	2.140-5.990	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Caribbean (2000)	3.480-16.400	Surinam	Bahamas

Source: Hemispheric Report

c) Human Development and Poverty

Between 1990 and 2005, the **MERCOSUR** region has shown improvements in some classic welfare indicators such as infant mortality, life expectancy at birth and literacy levels. However, there are also significant disparities: Bolivia and Paraguay are the least developed countries in the region, while Chile, Uruguay and Argentina are at the forefront.

The Human Development Index³ classification for countries of the region summarizes the different degrees of socioeconomic development levels in the sub-region: Argentina, Chile and Uruguay hold the first relative positions while Paraguay and Bolivia record the highest levels of backwardness - the latter being in the most serious situation-.

Between 1990 and the beginning of the new decade, the poverty level increased in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil. On the contrary, Chile and Uruguay managed to reduce the percentage of their population below the poverty line. More than half of the households (representing more than 60% of the population) were poor in Bolivia and Paraguay in 2002. Comparatively, the situation of these countries becomes even more critical if we consider that the percentage of extreme poverty doubles - and in some cases triples - that of the other countries. On the other hand, it is also important to mention the significant increase in poverty and extreme poverty levels in Argentina as a result of the economic crisis affecting that country at the end of 2001-2002.

In the **ANDEAN** sub-region, health indicators are similar for all countries. In Ecuador, mother mortality still is a serious public health problem. Besides, 28 out of 1,000 children die before the age of one, while around a third of children aged below five suffer from some form of malnutrition. In Venezuela, the infant mortality rate (for children aged under one) in 1995 was 21 out of 1,000 babies born, while the infant mortality rate for children under 5 was 1.3 out of 1,000 babies born. In the case of Peru, life expectancy raised from 53.6 to 68.3 years old between 1970 and 1993, and INEI forecasts 68.3 for the period 1995-2000. According to the National Demographic and Social Survey (ENDES - acronym in the Spanish version), out of 1,000 babies born in Peru (between 1991 and 1996) 43 died before reaching the age of one.

According to the Report issued by the United Nations Development Program – UNDP – 1999, Peru holds the 80th position among 174 countries, classified within the medium human development category (0.500 to 0.799 in a scale where the maximum is 1). From 1990 to 1997, Peru has improved its human development level, with indexes of 0.703 and 0.739 respectively. On the other hand, the HDI for Venezuela is 0.69.

The countries of the region have similar poverty levels. In the case of Ecuador, poverty and extreme poverty affected 61% and 28% of urban households respectively in 2001. A significant number of poor households was run by women. Social indicators issued by OCEI for 1995 show that in Venezuela, 61% of the total households, that is to say, 66% of the population, is poor. Extremely poor households amount to 33%, comprising 36% of the population, and 39% of the households (34% of the population) is considered non poor. On the other hand, the Household Sample Survey shows that for the first semester of 2002, 41.5% of the households was poor, while 16.6% was extremely poor. Finally, between 1991 and 1998 poverty in Peru decreased from 57.4% to 48.5%.

In the case of the **CARIBBEAN** sub-region, if we consider the percentage of the population with drinking water as an indicator, we can say there is no homogenous result for the 13 countries which make up the region. Data available for the year 2000 showed that in only 7 countries more than 93% of the population had drinking water. It is worthwhile mentioning that the two countries recording the highest population figures (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) had at the same time high percentages of people without direct access to drinking water. The most serious case was Surinam, where 20% of the inhabitants do not have access to this service.

According to the little information available, in 2000 the population located below the poverty line amounted to 19% in Jamaica and 21% in Trinidad and Tobago. The Sub-regional Report points out that some research carried out during the last ten years states that the population in a situation of poverty in the different countries ranges between 14,5% and almost 40%, while the extremely poor population figure is between 1% and 26%, with 6 countries showing values above 10%.

In **CENTRAL AMERICA**, the countries with more unequal wealth distribution are El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. On the other hand, Costa Rica and Panama are those where wealth is more evenly distributed (Gini coefficient is 47.0 and 48.5 respectively) and where population above 25 have more years of schooling: the total average is 8,7 in Panama and 6,9 in Costa Rica. Honduras and Nicaragua are below the average as regards years of schooling of the poorest and wealthiest population above 25 years of age.

1.2 General characteristics of the school failure problem

During the 1990s, the Latin American and Caribbean countries have gone through important education reform processes aimed at improving the coverage, quality and equitability of basic education. Within that framework, there has been an effort to expand the years of compulsory education to the junior high school level (lower secondary level), and in some cases, to a section of the pre-primary level. Thus, nowadays, the average years of compulsory education is 9 in the Mercosur sub-region, 10 in the Andean sub-region and 8 in Central America. The Caribbean countries have, in general, 6 or 7 years of compulsory education.

The Hemispheric Report points out that the policies implemented in the region during the last years have been geared at tackling the main causes affecting school failure, which can be divided into two groups: the so-called endogenous causes, related to the education system itself and the schools and the exogenous causes, which include problems related to families and their environment. The information available shows that, in general, countries have implemented policies and programs to affect both types of causes. Likewise, the policies carried out since the 1990s have mostly been positive discrimination offsetting policies, devising actions to address all the issues related to the quality of basic learning in schools with high socio-educational risk

Although the repetition problem is more serious in Latin American than in the Caribbean, the countries of both regions record high repetition levels for the first grade of the primary level⁴. Table 2 shows some school failure indicators for the countries of the four sub-regions based on information drawn from the State of Affairs and Sub-regional Reports. The dropout and graduation rates are broken down into junior high school level (lower secondary) and senior high school level (higher secondary). Data is incomplete, with the exception of the MERCOSUR sub-region.

Table 2 shows that Brazil stands out in the MERCOSUR sub-region for its high repetition and dropout rate rates. Within the CARIBBEAN and in comparison with the other sub-region countries, St Kitts and Nevis and Belize have notoriously high dropout rates in the primary level, followed by Jamaica.

Table 2. Repetition, dropout and graduation rates by educational level, sub-region and country.

Sub-region	Country	Repetition rate		Dropout rate			Graduation rate		
		Primary	Second.	Primary	JS	HS	Primary	JS	HS
ANDEAN	Ecuador			4.3	6.9				
	Peru	9.2	4.6	6.4	5.4				
	Venezuela	8.2		3.3					
CARIBBEAN	Belize	9.8		20.4					
	Jamaica	5.6		12.7					
	St. Kitts and Nevis	1.8		27.0					
	Santa Lucia	2.5							
	Trinidad and Tobago	6.3							
CENTRAL AMERICA	El Salvador	14.6	7.4						
	Guatemala			7.7	9.3	13.5	83.1	57.9	67.8
	Honduras								
	Nicaragua	7.7	6.0	10.2	12.1		80.0	76.0	90.6
	Panama								
MERCOSUR	Argentina	6.0	7.0	3.5	3.8	10.5	88.7	78.3	73.2
	Bolivia	3.0	4.0	5.5	7.3	8.8	90.7	85.7	83.2
	Brazil	21.0	18.0	10.1	12.8	16.3	78.3	78.7	76.5
	Chile	2.0	2.0	1.3	1.5	4.3	96.1	95.1	89.6

2. POLICIES/PROGRAMS/EXPERIENCES AIMED AT PREVENTING SCHOOL FAILURE

2.1 Description of policies/programs by sub-region

This section describes the main characteristics of the policies and programs analyzed in the sub-regional reports. Each sub-section is devoted to a sub-region and starts with an Introduction, where the main characteristics of education systems are described, using the information drawn from the Hemispheric Report and the Sub-regional reports. Each sub-section summarizes and organizes specific information regarding the policies and programs chosen by each country and which, in turn, have been explained in the Sub-regional report. The information for each sub-region is organized in the following way:

- a. Main problems identified
- b. Policy/Program chosen
- c. Justification (principles or reasons accounting for the program)
- d. Objectives
- e. Recipients
- f. Implementation (main components, strategies and actions)
- g. Progress made and obstacles encountered
- h. Future challenges

ANDEAN sub-region

Introduction

The countries included in this analysis are Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. As mentioned in section 1.1, Venezuela is predominantly urban, while Ecuador and Peru have a significant percentage of rural and indigenous population. However, the three countries have similar levels of poverty.

The three sub-region countries have centralized education systems, although Peru is undergoing a curricular decentralization process and Ecuador is also carrying out an administrative and school decentralization. On the other hand, the “Education Transformation” process in Venezuela is worth mentioning, as it makes up one of the main pillars on which the so-called "New foundation of the Republic" is structured, within the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Although in 2001 the average schooling of the population in Ecuador reached 7.3 years, 44% of the youths aged between 9 and 14 still do not have access to basic education. Nearly two fifths (40%) of public rural schools have only one teacher, and their infrastructure is far from being adequate (98 out of 100 single-teacher schools do not have drainage system, the facilities are in very poor condition, they lack didactic resources). Of the total population, 10% is still illiterate, illiteracy being higher in rural areas (16%) and in the case of women. In Venezuela, the illiteracy rate for the population aged 10 and above was 6.4%, which represents an important decrease, i.e., 2.9% in comparison with the 1990 Census.

Like in most sub-regions, the Hemispheric Report points out that the data corresponding to several school failure indicators of the three countries is not available. In the case of dropout rates for the primary level (data corresponding to 2001), Peru has the highest percentage (6%), while Ecuador has 4% and Venezuela 3%. As for the secondary level, the percentage for Peru is 5% and the one for Ecuador 7%.

As far as repetition is concerned, in the year 2000 Venezuela had a rate of 8% for the primary school, while Peru's was 9%. It is important to mention that in Peru the results of the National Evaluation of Student Performance 2001 show that, at the end of the school year, on average only 9% and 7% of students, respectively, can reach the grade objectives regarding integral communication and mathematics/logics respectively. In the case of the secondary level, Peru is the only country that provides information, reporting a 4.6% rate. The same rate decreased by 1% during the 1998-2000 period.

Generally speaking, the Andean sub-region countries address the school failure problem from a multiple approach: a series of programs focused on the most disadvantaged social sectors, contributing in this way to offset school failure. The programs implemented involve: supply of textbooks and didactic material, improvement of infrastructure and furniture, food supply, teacher training, community participation. However, a real coordination between these programs can not be ensured, which implies that there could be unwanted duplication of efforts and costs.

The following issues are common to the three countries: (1) the concern to reduce the urban/rural gap as regards coverage and quality; (2) the concern for the continuous improvement of teachers; and (3) the problem of creating a school syllabus and implementing it via a pedagogical plan. A trend towards a progressive incorporation of all educational players to the school can also be seen.

In spite of this, there are big differences between the programs/policies chosen by the three countries. Ecuador has focused on a program for rural schools. Peru, in turn, implements a general policy, which prioritizes schools with fewer resources, and which includes a reading program. The report on Venezuela is not centered on a specific program; rather, it describes the various educational projects and actions implemented by the government⁵. Therefore, the information supplied by Venezuela is more general than that of Peru and Ecuador. Finally, it is important to mention that Ecuador's program was funded by the IDB, while in Venezuela some components have been financed by the UNDP and the IDB.

a. Main problem

The main problem in **Ecuador** is the lack of access to education, which results in low schooling levels, high dropout and repetition rates and low coverage in rural areas⁶.

The policy carried out by **Peru** acknowledges a general deterioration in the education system, which may not ensure the acquisition of the necessary skills. At the same time, the access opportunities to quality education are very unequal. It is important to spell out that the schools attended by the poor sectors of the population do not have the resources to provide quality education.

In the case of **Venezuela**, the government website states that “most people receive low quality education due to lack of teacher training, the little time devoted to education at the different levels, the deterioration of the school infrastructure, the lack of teacher stimulation and dedication to students, insufficient appropriate materials for the development of student skills, lack of contact with reality and lack of creativity stimulus”.

b. Programs

Ecuador: “Friendly Networks”⁷ Program (1999)

Peru: “Education Emergency Program”⁸ (2004)

In the case of Venezuela, no specific program was described, as it was previously mentioned. The report says that several projects “ensure access, permanence and continuity”.

c. Justification

The program in **Ecuador** focuses on policies aimed at improving rural education quality as well as on national policies for education decentralization and deconcentration, on promoting community participation and accountability, which are constitutional imperatives.

In **Peru**, where an Education Emergency situation has been declared, the poorest and most vulnerable sectors are those that mostly require urgent and priority attention; and this entails focusing investment on the poorest schools. At the same time, the report says that the investment on poor schools resources must be accompanied by a good management. This can be achieved through the school networks, as they are closer to schools than the present intermediary bodies.

The policies implemented by the Ministry of Education of **Venezuela** are within the General Guidelines of the National Social and Economic Development Plan 2001-2007, which envisions quality education for all, “with goals related to access, permanence and continuity”. On the other hand, the “Education Transformation” process aims at promoting the “Bolivarian Education Principles” as well as the development of several policies leading to the expansion of “a comprehensive and quality education that fosters solidarity and equity”.

d. Objectives

The objectives for **Ecuador's** program are:

- To give rural schools (approx. 20% of them) autonomy to manage their resources, with higher parent and community participation in the school administration.
- To improve teaching conditions in basic rural education (primary and junior high school) in the areas where the beneficiary schools are located.

Peru aims at improving the way in which public education institutions operate, starting from the compliance of 1,000 school hours a year, raising learning achievements and ensuring they provide the basic quality requirements.

The National Education Emergency Program has the following objectives:

1. To strengthen public schools and prioritize 2508 poor schools, which have been chosen because they receive assistance from the Education Programs developed by the Ministry of Education: *Huascarán* distant learning project, Rural Areas education project (PEAR)⁹, among others.
2. To foster a new Education Infrastructure Policy; the school as a safe, kind and educational environment.
3. To implement a Pedagogical Plan of Comprehensive Communication, Mathematics/Logics and values.
4. To strengthen school autonomy within a decentralization framework.
5. To launch a social campaign encouraging reading and the acquisition of basic skills. Citizen participation plays a vital role here, constituting a key element to transform education and to make changes possible.
6. To counterbalance the deterioration of education quality, evident in the school failure figures.

In the case of **Venezuela**, the National Annual Operational Plan 2004 designed by the Ministry of Education states the following strategic guideline: "To ensure access and permanence to comprehensive, free and quality education for all". It establishes these objectives:

- To increase coverage and education quality
- To meet the food needs of the school population
- To coordinate the education system with the production of goods and services
- To eradicate illiteracy
- To guarantee Basic education to children and youths who have been excluded from the formal school system.
- To incorporate communication and information technologies to the communities' education process
- To produce and disseminate educational contents through audiovisual media that promote cultural identity, folklore, science, technology, art, geography, history, ecology and sports in general.
- To enhance the facilities and the education staff at the different levels of the education system.

e. Recipients

Ecuador's program comprises 120 rural school networks, including approximately 2,400 schools which represent 20% of the total rural schools. Network participation in the program is voluntary (but there is no information about the existence of a selection process carried out by the ministry). It includes Hispanic System schools and Bilingual ones.

In **Peru**, the "Education Emergency Program" has been mainly aimed at 2,508 educational institutions located in extremely poor and vulnerable areas. The first phase concentrates on the first three grades of the primary level and the last two years of secondary school.

In **Venezuela**, the projects and actions implemented by the Ministry of Education are addressed to the whole school age population. However, coverage extension at all levels is focused on rural, indigenous and border population.

f. Implementation

In **Ecuador**, the program has the following components:

1. Support to the autonomy process undertaken by rural school networks.

Actions included:

- Creation of an autonomous and participative management capacity.
- Institutional adjustment of the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Agencies.

2. Improvement of teaching conditions in the networks.

Actions included in the component:

- The network projects (teacher training, supply of didactic material, improvement of infrastructure, equipment and community participation)
- Incentives for teachers and network authorities.

3. Follow-up and assessment.

Main Council functions: preparation, approval and implementation of the strategic plan; selection of authorities, teachers and administrative staff and implementation of control mechanisms to ensure teachers comply with the regulations.

The Coordinating Unit, which reports to the Ministry of Education, has been in charge of coordinating:

1. The program dissemination and promotion
2. The network creation and institutional consolidation.
3. The preparation of the strategic plans.
4. The support and assistance in implementing the plans.
5. The control, follow-up and assessment of the program implementation.

Each network devises a strategic plan according to its needs and considering the amount of students involved.

So far, networks have implemented two specific projects:

1. Teacher training.
2. Supply of didactic material for children and classrooms.

At the same time, a basic pedagogical support plan has been carried out. It comprises three aspects:

Development of active methodologies.
Implementation and use of learning environments.
Children rights.

In order to achieve more autonomy and participation, networks are managed by Network Councils and Community Education Agencies. These bodies are made up of teacher representatives, parents and a community leader, chosen in general assemblies by the players, who have full participation in the institutional decision-making process. Councils have carried out the following significant functions: preparation, approval and implementation of the strategic plan; selection of authorities, teachers and administrative staff and implementation of control mechanisms to ensure teachers comply with the regulations. The accountability processes have taken place within the framework of the General Community Assemblies, where the network authorities and members have informed the education community on the content and quality of their actions, and have accounted for their participation in the implementation of the strategic plan.

In order to prevent teacher absenteeism, the program included an incentive to be paid to teachers with a 100% attendance to all school activities, thus producing a significant improvement of the situation. Likewise, another incentive was paid to the members of each network government agency provided they attended at least two Council meetings a month, one of which should be on accountability.

Language and Math tests have been used to monitor the progress made in the learning process. Their results for years 2003 and 2004 were contrasted.

Perú offers a set of strategies for educational institutions, especially for the 2,508 schools assisting 330,446 students of the poorest areas. As many of these schools are also stricken by violence, they will be provided with educational materials, textbooks, management consultancy, monitoring and coaching.

Five strategic objectives have been set, each of them addressing a specific issue: 1) compensatory policies, 2) continuous teacher training, 3) learning quality, 4) management of educational institutions and 5) social mobilization.

Compensatory Policies

Strategic Objective 1:

To improve the material conditions required to supply quality education and teaching at public schools, especially those from the poorest and most vulnerable areas.

Continuous Teacher training

Strategic Objective 2:

To strengthen teacher competencies and knowledge in the areas of communication, mathematics, ethical values and diversity (disabilities, inter-cultural issues, gender, ethnic groups) which allow them to enhance the student learning process.

Learning Quality

Strategic Objective 3:

To have quality pedagogical plans consistent with the Basic Curricular Structure on the main learning topics, as well as other successful experiences which contribute to raising the public school educational level.

Management of Educational Institutions

Strategic Objective 4:

To promote autonomous, democratic, efficient and transparent educational institutions within a decentralization framework.

Social Mobilization

Strategic Objective 5:

To gather national, regional and local efforts involving educational agents, the civil society and the corresponding government institutions to address the education emergency.

During the first phase, the program prioritizes the communication between the different curriculum areas as a key factor to access knowledge of multiple fields, to foster coexistence and to build up a sense of public ethics. Its underlying objective is to develop values and to set goals for the development of mathematical reasoning skills as from 2005. The program is based on continuous teacher training.

Activities:

- a. A pedagogical proposal for communication (Comprehensive Communication, Mathematics/Logics and Values) providing teachers and schools with simple tools to promote the development of communicative competence: to understand the main ideas in a text, to be able to express them fluently, to connect two different pieces of information between them and with the personal life experience, to pass judgment, to be able to communicate with empathy and clarity, to use different codes and languages. This proposal will be based on value-related contents and will consider the different characteristics of single-teacher, multigrade and EBI (Intercultural Bilingual Education) urban and rural educational centers. At the same time, specific strategies will be carried out to promote the communication and expression of students with disabilities.
- b. Dissemination of the "Emergency Program" and of the "Pedagogical Communication Strategies", making the Pedagogical Communication Proposal, together with its strategies, tools and results available to all schools throughout the country. Thus, any school or educational institution can profit from successful and innovative experiences. All educational centers are welcome to take part in this initiative. The aim is to give the National Emergency Program a multiplying effect, increasing its impact at a national level.

- c. Compliance with the annual 1,000 teaching-hour requirement, as a minimum to achieve the learning objectives. Effective and successful schools require the commitment of teachers and the whole school community.
- d. Assessment of knowledge acquired, giving priority to the communication items before, during and after the implementation of the Emergency Plan, in order to monitor achievements and promote responsibility towards education results. Achievement of communication skills in disabled students will also be included.
- e. Training on communication strategies for authorities and teachers belonging to priority schools, as they are in charge of stimulating students and meeting the emergency plan goals. It is required that teachers do away with the traditional method of teaching reading by dictations, copies and a single textbook and adopt strategies encouraging pleasant reading, comprehension, debate, the use of various sources and creative writing. The Emergency Plan promotes teacher and school educational networks, the creation of regional teams specialized in communication and the incorporation of educational innovations in this teaching area. Likewise, the strengthening of headmaster leadership and of the Educational Councils is also encouraged, the latter being the surveillance bodies of the Emergency Plan. Another objective is to ensure teachers will have access to the necessary communication resources such as reading materials and opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences.
At the same time, and in order to guarantee equal opportunity for all students, teachers and authorities of all public schools will be trained, specially those included in the sample on the grounds of their diversity and mixed cultural influences.
- f. To create pedagogical teams in the educational institutions included in the sample, in order to implement the proposal of learning improvement. These teams will be supervised by the Regional Offices and they will be in charge of planning and implementing the communication pedagogical proposal and validating the logical/mathematical reasoning proposal.
- g. Plan for the improvement of the logical/mathematical reasoning achievements, including the design of logical/mathematical reasoning goals and the production and validation of a pedagogical proposal on the same subject to be implemented as from 2006.

Within this framework, the pedagogical proposal *Peru Reads, Peru Changes* stands out. Its main aim was to strengthen the three basic communication skills: oral expression, including different languages (music, dance, body expression); reading comprehension; and writing. First, a trial stage was carried out from August to December 2004 in eleven institutions belonging to two districts. At the moment, it is being encouraged in all educational institutions, but especially in those schools prioritized by the "Educational Emergency Program".

Other projects linked to the "Educational Emergency Program" are:

Education in Rural Areas Project: it includes some adjustments on the curriculum, educational material, infrastructure and teacher training for the rural context; improvements in school management; a stronger participation of the community in support and surveillance functions; support to multigrade schools; and training on bilingual and intercultural education strategies.

Huascarán Project – Distance Secondary Education: it addresses teenagers from rural, border and urban underprivileged areas. It includes the new information and communication technologies as well as the development of projects to provide students with job opportunities.

In the case of **Venezuela**, some of the main projects and strategies aimed at improving coverage and quality at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels are included below.

Several actions have been carried out in order to extend and improve educational infrastructure: 997 pre-school classrooms have been built; 1,114 centers of the pre-school, basic, diversified and professional secondary and special education levels have been built, refurbished, reopened, maintained and equipped; 22 technical schools have been refurbished and reopened; and 18 Bolivarian schools have been built.

The *Bolivarian Schools Project* has been implemented, with the aim of tackling the school system limitations at pre-school and basic (first and second stage) levels. At first, it will be carried out on an experimental basis, to be then gradually extended to all Venezuelan schools. A full school day is required for implementing the curriculum, developing and applying innovative pedagogical experiences, providing food and integral assistance for the students, offering complementary activities in line with the academic demands, including cultural and sporting activities. During the year 2003, a total of 3,001 schools became Bolivarian schools and provided integral assistance to 616,023 pre-school and basic education students nationwide.

The *Simoncito Plan* included the creation of 14 "Simoncito" Initial Education Centers which provide integral assistance (education, food, health, leisure and legal protection) to small kids aged between 0 and 3 (maternal) and to children aged between 3 and 6 (pre-school). Likewise, the Program for Assistance of non-schooled children and adolescents in Alternative Educational Locations carries out actions geared at reducing the non-schooled population. It guarantees basic education for children who are out of the education system or who have abandoned it due to a lack of educational institutions or the limited capacity of the existing ones.

The National Education Website has been developed as a way of providing a range of educational services in web format. It will allow teachers, students and the virtual community to share experiences in real and deferred time, through e-mails, fora, videoconferencing and distance learning. Besides, 73 Information Technology and

Telematics Bolivarian Centers (CBIT - acronym in the Spanish version) were set up in 2003 in the 23 national states and the capital city, assisting 28,458 teachers and 212,445 students of the National Basic Education.

With the aim of fostering reading in the school population and assisting teachers in their reading skills, plans such as the "All for reading" National Plan have been implemented, providing benefits to 670 teachers, 32,150 students and 3,800 community representatives. A donation from 2,000,000 books for Family Libraries was received from Cuba, and they were distributed among sixth and ninth grade students, secondary students, pre-school and basic education teachers and participants of the national Mission Robinson I.

Thanks to a financing agreement reached by the Ministry of Education and the Interamerican Development Bank, 1,577 teachers and authorities and 259 supervisors attended post-graduate courses. The National Center for Teacher Training (CENAFOD - acronym in the Spanish version) assisted 641 teachers from the Capital District and the State of Vargas.

The Bolivarian School Food Program provides food assistance, based on age groups, single/double school shifts and sociocultural characteristics, creating social and food habits and at the same time transforming it into a pedagogical experience.

The "Misión Ribas", aimed at providing all Venezuelans with secondary education, is also worth mentioning. It includes several actions to strengthen rural and indigenous education, increase Classroom Libraries, reactivate Technical Schools, develop a permanent sexual education program; grant scholarships for those students in unfavorable sociocultural conditions and implement the Community Centers for Student Protection and Development, where the school population is provided with assistance according to their social, economic and health needs.

g. Achievements and Obstacles

One of the main accomplishments in **Ecuador** has been the overachievement of the school network target: at the moment, there are 186 operating networks (the target was 120), of which 131 are "Hispanic" (70%), and are 55 "Bilingual" networks (30%), reaching a total of 2,225 educational institutions. The networks employ 6,032 teachers assisting 136,019 students and serve around 2,500 rural communities.

Besides, there is higher teacher attendance and an increase of the number of students who enroll and stay in school. It is also important to mention that the self-esteem of teachers, students, parents and community members has greatly improved.

Some Language and Communication and Math tests have been carried out in order to check on the learning progress. After contrasting the 2003 and 2004 test results, an evident improvement can be seen, especially regarding intellectual and procedure skills. Approximately 25% of the network schools are undergoing a transformation process

towards a new teaching model – more focused on learning and on the student (a more active student participation in group work, handling real material and use of "learning tools").

As regards decentralization, the report says that “school autonomy” has been achieved, as players from school communities can now make decisions on administrative, financial and pedagogical school issues. Likewise, the Network Councils and the Community Education Bodies have been institutionalized, with transparent and participative accountability processes.

On the other hand, reports acknowledge that administrative instability has been constant throughout the program implementation, as there were seven Managing Directors, each corresponding to the seven ministers of education who have accompanied the program since it started. Another hindrance was posed by the opposition from UNE (teachers union), who unsuccessfully filed a claim before the Constitutional Court, requiring that the Rules for School Network Management be declared unconstitutional.

Besides, and contradicting some of the achievements mentioned below¹⁰, reports say that: 1) over 50% of the networks have a low level of program application; 2) the urgency to create and implement the networks prevailed, reducing "pedagogical autonomy" to an "acquisition of supplies" logic, with very little coordination (furniture, textbooks, materials and teacher training), thus weakening the possibility to achieve pedagogical improvements based on the classroom; 3) it is necessary to provide teachers and authorities with a technical guidance that allows them to follow-up classroom processes; 4) the “integral” approach was absent from most of the project’s process; 5) the networks located in areas distant from the main economic circuit have had serious problems in meeting the demands of the goods acquisition and hiring process; 6) there has been an insufficient involvement of community players in the design of investment plans.

In **Peru**, in turn, some progress can be seen as regards teachers work in the students’ communication skills and the involvement of families with the school. The main obstacles identified are: insufficient teacher training; insufficient presence of the Ministry of Education in the most remote areas; coordination problems between the national ministry and local and regional agencies at the moment of implementation; communication problems between the local unit specialists and the teachers, based on few visits from the local specialists to the schools.

In the case of **Venezuela**, coverage has improved at all levels as well as infrastructure and school equipment. The report says, for example, that on the first year of its implementation, the Mision Ribas could incorporate 400,000 Venezuelans willing to resume their studies and finish their secondary education. Besides, several actions have been implemented to improve student retention and education quality, including teacher training, the extension of IT resources, food and health assistance, etc.

h. Future challenges

The general persistent challenge is posed by the fact that school failure (repetition, dropout and overage) is significantly more recurrent in the least favored sectors of the population, mainly among indigenous peoples. There is also a general lack of economic resources for education due to the low contribution received from the national budget, which requires revision and adjustment to ensure the continuity and expansion of programs and policies.

There is a need to change the trend towards implementing programs that only provide assistance, and foster the development of programs to ensure beneficiaries will have, for example, school enrolment, continuous school attendance and periodic vaccination. At the same time, a technical-pedagogical and functional coordination of the programs would be required in order to avoid unnecessary efforts and costs.

For **Peru** the main challenge is the sustainability of the “Education Emergency Program” and the generalization of the pedagogical proposal. In the case of **Ecuador**, the specific objectives are: to create a national system to measure learning results, as well as follow-ups, initiatives and program assessment; to strengthen the guiding role played by the Ministry of Education; and to reach agreements between the different players of the educational system.

Table 3. Characteristics of the programs/policies of the ANDEAN Sub-region

	<i>Ecuador</i>	<i>Peru</i>	<i>Venezuela</i>
Main problem	High dropout and repetition levels; low coverage in rural areas	Low quality, mainly affecting schools from poor areas	Low general quality, related to poor teacher training, infrastructure, materials, etc.
Program and starting year	Friendly Networks - 1999	Education Emergency Program – 2004	Several programs
Main objectives	To give autonomy and improve learning conditions at rural schools.	To raise the student learning standards, to strengthen school autonomy, to mobilize society towards reading and acquiring knowledge.	To increase coverage and quality, to meet the students' food demands, to incorporate the ICTs into the education process, to improve infrastructure.
Main strategies and actions	Creation and follow-up of rural school networks; support to teaching condition improvement projects; attendance incentive for teachers; accountability through General Community Assemblies.	Improvement of the school material conditions; continuous teacher training; autonomous management; emphasis on the communication area, incorporating a new pedagogical approach; curricular adjustment to rural and bilingual contexts.	Improvement of infrastructure; extension of school day; national reading plan; training of teachers and authorities; food, health and social assistance; creation of an educational website with contents for teachers and students.
Achievements	Network extension; increase of enrollment and retention rates; improvement of learning results; more autonomy and stronger community government.	Improvement of the students' communication skills; community participation.	Extension of coverage; improvement of school infrastructure and equipment.
Obstacles	Administrative instability; lack of technical/pedagogical support; insufficient community involvement; little coordination of supplies for pedagogical improvement.	Communication, follow-up and administrative coordination problems; insufficient teacher training.	

CARIBBEAN Sub-region

Introduction

The analysis of this sub-region includes Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Surinam and Trinidad and Tobago. In spite of all of them being small countries, the population in the sub-region is concentrated in just two of them: Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

As regards education, there is an almost universal coverage at the primary level, although there are high dropout and repetition rates, especially in the first grade (where countries such as Belize and Trinidad and Tobago report rates over 10%), as well as general quality problems at all educational levels. In spite of having data from half of the countries, dropout rates in the primary level are particularly high in Belize (20%) and St Kitts and Nevis (27%), while repetition rates for the same level reach the highest levels in Belize (10%) and Trinidad and Tobago (6.3%).

As far as the Hemispheric Project is concerned, the Caribbean countries decided to focus on policies affecting early childhood education (ECE), a priority area according to the 1997 regional plan. The growing importance given to ECE is also attributed to the actions carried out by UNICEF with the aim of raising awareness and mobilizing resources, and those performed within the framework of "Education for All" (UNESCO).

ECE includes children up to the age of eight, from the moment they are born. In the Caribbean, pre-primary education programs are mainly implemented by private institutions and NGOs, while governments are in charge of development and training activities, the regulation of education centers and the design of a curriculum common to all. During the last years, the Caribbean governments have acknowledged the importance of ECE and have played a more active role, encouraging coverage extension and providing more supervision and support for education centers. Multilateral, bilateral and cooperation agencies - especially UNICEF - have helped governments perform these tasks.

Therefore, the analysis for this sub-region is focused on policies aimed at the pre-primary level. However, some strategies for preventing school failure at other levels are also briefly described.

A common pattern in education systems of all countries and levels is the existence of strategies aimed at improving teacher training, the joint work with parents and the local community, and the modernization of the ministries management and information systems, including the assessment of student performance. Among the most important policies specifically related to the early childhood are those aimed at building new schools and education centers and to provide them with new equipment. Other initiatives establishing accreditation and supervision mechanisms to ensure a minimum quality level at early education centers also stand out. Additionally, there is a shared interest to adopt strategies

which provide an easier passage of pre-primary students to the primary level, thus reducing the dropout rates recorded in the first grade.

Regarding future challenges, the CARIBBEAN Sub-regional Report stresses on the importance of ensuring the level of financial investment required to launch and maintain the policies aimed at a quality and equitable early childhood education.

a. Problems identified

The main problems are related to access (especially at the pre-primary level) and retention (particularly at the secondary level), as well as low quality at all levels. The report on early childhood highlights the problems of insufficient access and low service quality at this level, and high dropout rates for the first grade of the primary level. Pre-school education has long been provided by private institutions in most cases. Low quality is attributed to a lack of government control on education programs. Likewise, sectors with low socio-economic levels are the most affected, as they can hardly have access to ECE centers; and when they have it, the quality of the service provided is suspicious.

School failure (dropout, repetition and low academic performance) at primary and secondary levels – of different degrees in all countries - could be partly attributed to the present coverage and quality limitations of ECE in the sub-region.

b. Programs

In July 1997, the Heads of States of the Sub-region adopted the Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development (ECECD), as part of the Regional Strategy for Human Resources Development. Since its implementation, the eight member countries have designed policies and programs aimed at improving early childhood education.

In most cases, the Ministry of Education of each country is in charge of implementing the changes required for ECE development through a set of policies and programs, and in some cases, by coordinating its actions with other government agencies. In **St Kitts and Nevis**, for example, these policies are part of the *Early Childhood Programme*, which, since 1997, has been managed by the Early Childhood Development Unit, an agency that focuses on the *Reaching Children Where They Are (RCWTA)* project. **Jamaica** provides another example with the *Early Childhood Commission*, created by law in March 2003, with participation in different sectors and with planning and coordination responsibilities.

c. Justification

At a more general level, efforts to improve quality and coverage are justified by the need to increase the labor force competitiveness in the countries of the sub-regions. Governments

regard investment in early childhood as being of utmost social and economic importance to raise productivity levels.

The Sub-regional Report points out that "research shows that the first years are critical to determine the development possibilities of children" and of the society as a whole. The report also highlights the importance of education at this stage as a key factor to prevent and compensate for learning difficulties and social inequalities. It also says that a quality education at the early childhood level can be crucial to prevent school failure at the primary and secondary levels.

d. Objectives

The main general objectives of the early childhood policies are to improve coverage and education quality, in particular for the pre-primary education programs. A specific objective common to several countries is to reduce the dropout rate in the first grade of the primary level.

Barbados' objective of achieving universal pre-primary education during the 2005-2008 period is worth mentioning.

Besides, the Action Plan adopted in the 1997 meeting of the Caribbean countries established several specific objectives:

- To pass legislation on education services for children aged 0 to 8.
- To allocate specific resources for children "at risk".
- To base education programs on local cultures.
- To educate children for parenthood before they reach adult life.
- To support parents as well as children in their first year of life.
- To provide children with stimulation within the family in the years before pre-school.
- To foster children development and learning in the early childhood.
- To implement an integral approach for children aged 0 to 8.
- To establish budget allocations for services and development plans.
- To improve training, supervision and assessment quality for early childhood education.

More recently, in July 2000, the *Third Caribbean Conference on Early Childhood Education, Care and Development* was held with the participation of professionals, decision makers, officials and researchers. Five priorities were set: 1) local and regional cooperation to ensure an integral implementation of the programs and the correct use of human and financial resources; 2) information and monitoring systems; 3) capacity building of agents responsible of introducing changes; 4) mobilization of financial, technical and technological resources; and 5) higher access and wider coverage.

e. Recipients

In most cases, ECE policies in the different Caribbean countries address the whole of the pre-primary education centers - both public and private -, and in some cases, all public primary schools. There are also some initiatives targeted to smaller or more restricted centers or populations.

f. Implementation

The Caribbean Sub-region Report provides information on the implementation of a set of general policies for school failure prevention, followed by the analysis of policies geared at early childhood education.

The general strategies adopted by most of the eight countries are:

1. To increase the education budget.
2. To have a more efficient and effective management, including the reorganization of the Ministries of Education, as well as administrative decentralization policies (Trinidad and Tobago is worth mentioning in this respect).
3. To monitor student performance. Some test results can be used to identify weaknesses and plan improvement strategies (St Kitts and Nevis is worth mentioning here).
4. To reform and update the curriculum. This strategy includes new technology and a transition program between pre-school and primary school.
5. To improve infrastructure: building and refurbishing schools, labs and libraries.
6. To provide support in areas such as health, food, books for free.
7. To maximize the teaching-learning environment.
8. To enhance training and development.
9. To strengthen the relationship with parents and the community as a whole.

With reference to early childhood education policies, the Action Plan adopted in 1997 has reached different stages in all countries. While St Kitts and Nevis has been implementing the above-described policies for several years now, most countries are still about to launch them.

The Sub-regional report classifies the strategies developed by the eight countries to improve school performance in the early childhood into five policy areas (see Table):

- Access and coverage improvement
- More efficient and effective management systems
- Training and development / Improvement of the learning environment
- Pedagogical-curriculum development / Transition to primary level

- Closer relationships with parents and the community as a whole

Some of the actions and strategies designed by each of the countries for the five policy areas are mentioned below. As stated above, many of them have yet to be implemented.

Bahamas

- To create pre-school education centers at all public primary schools; to encourage civil associations to create pre-school or puericulture centers; to subsidize independent educational institutions so that they assist children from disadvantaged households.
- To design processes and structures aimed at establishing and monitoring minimum standards for the administration of ECE centers, including private centers.
- To establish a training program for administrators of ECE centers.
- To implement a curriculum to guide the activities carried out by all educational centers and kindergartens.
- To create an ECE support system that includes health and social welfare specialists.

Barbados

- To appoint the Ministry of Education as the agency in charge of managing ECE.
- To expand the offer of pre-primary education during the period 2005-2008: to provide 455 pre-school vacancies at already existing public primary schools; to create 3 child care centers accommodating 550 people; to help child care centers to expand their operations.
- To provide all new teachers participating in the program with pedagogical training for the early childhood education and development.
- To ensure voluntary parents/tutors assistance for the correct operation of the maternal/child programs.

Belize

- To place pre-school centers within the sphere of primary schools.
- To expand the current "Beginner Summer Preschool Experience" program.
- To reorganize the Pre-school unit as a Special Unit of the Ministry of Education, allocating sufficient human and financial resources to ensure an effective and efficient operation.
- To develop and implement a training program of ECE professionals and administrators.
- To contact the Teacher Training Institute for teacher training.
- To create a model center for ECE teacher training.
- To implement programs raising public awareness on the importance of ECE.
- To involve community members in educational programs and to encourage private corporations to finance the ECE centers.

Jamaica

- To create the *Early Childhood Commission*, to be in charge of developing a comprehensive plan and coordinating all ECE services and programs.
- To establish regulation standards by law, to be applied to all ECE education and child care institutions.
- To create “infant schools”, completely subsidized by the government.
- To develop training materials.
- To develop a new and comprehensive curriculum to improve the quality of learning environments.
- To implement mechanisms for early detection and treatment of development and behavioral disorders, particularly for children aged between 0 and 3. To establish systems to identify kids “at risk” and refer them to places where they can have a more effective treatment.
- Introduction of a new curriculum for children aged from 3 to 5, starting by the schools that meet certain requirements and are considered to be in a better situation to adopt the changes.
- To support and disseminate an NGO program in rural areas, aimed at training parents in early stimulation techniques for children aged between 0 and 3 who do not attend school. Training is carried out at the parents/tutors homes.
- To carry out activities to disseminate the Early Childhood Commission functions and goals. Stress on the importance of increasing public and private investment.
- To organize workshops where all players involved in ECE can discuss about the main problems affecting the area.

St Kitts and Nevis

The main component is the *Reaching Children Where They Are* (RCWTA) project, that aims at providing parents with the skills required to stimulate and take care of children aged between 0 and 3 who do not have access to early childhood educational institutions. Specialists visit the children's homes in order to plan activities, lend them toys and other stimulation tools, and train parents and tutors.

- To establish a government system of annual inspections to control quality standards and educational centers operation licenses.
- To provide teacher training opportunities at home and abroad (seminars, workshops, etc.)
- To implement a thematic approach on the curriculum and to provide training for its correct implementation
- To train teachers on the transition from pre-school to primary school.
- To visit the children's homes in order to provide parents and tutors with stimulation skills

Santa Lucia

- To identify the communities providing insufficient education opportunities, as well as those with a significant number of children “at risk”. To design programs geared at these children and to subsidize their implementation.
- To integrate the early childhood sector administration by merging units of the ministries of Education and Social Transformation, Culture and Local Government.

- To establish and disseminate minimum standards and control mechanisms for the supply of ECE services.
- To enhance the National Early Childhood Association.
- To establish early childhood as an eligible period for tertiary level scholarships
- To make investments in training qualify as tax deductible
- To give recognition to outstanding professionals
- To revise the curriculum and incorporate improvements to the learning environment.
- To encourage the creation of parent and teacher associations and their active involvement in educational programs.
- To form alliances with key external players.
- To devise ways to allow cooperation between ministries.

Surinam

- To give the Ministry of Education the main responsibility for the general administration of pre-school education.
- To unify pre-school and primary education.
- To extend coverage to children below 4.
- To organize training activities for pre-primary school teachers.
- To evaluate and adjust the existing curriculum
- To unify the pre-primary and the basic education curricula.
- To provide training to adopt curriculum changes.

Trinidad and Tobago

- To build new ECE centers
- To provide student assistance by the expansion of the breakfast and lunch programs.
- To develop a national, far-reaching early intervention program
- To strengthen the Ministry of Education's administrative system
- To reinforce teacher training at pre-primary and primary levels.
- To provide more access to tertiary programs specialized in ECE
- To improve the quality of early literacy programs at pre-primary and primary levels, and the coordination of teacher activities.
- To provide ECE centers with equipment and materials for teachers and students.
- To update the curricular guide for ECE centers
- To improve the coordination of teaching practices.
- To appoint a team of inspectors and to establish control mechanisms to be applied to educational centers.
- To increase parent and community participation in the school/community meetings.
- To provide student support services in cooperation with other community players.

Table 4. Main strategies and actions by country and by policy area

<i>Country</i>	<i>Access and coverage</i>	<i>Management</i>	<i>Training and development</i>	<i>Curriculum development</i>	<i>Relationship with parents and community</i>
Bahamas	To establish pre-school educational centers at all public primary schools; to encourage the creation of private centers; to subsidize private institutions so that they assist children from disadvantaged households.	To design processes and structures aimed at establishing and monitoring minimum standards for the administration of ECE centers, including private centers.	To implement a training program for administrators of ECE centers.	To implement a curriculum to guide the activities of all ECE centers and kindergartens.	To create a ECE support system that includes health and social welfare specialists.
Barbados	To increase the offer of pre-primary education by creating new centers and expanding the existing ones.	To appoint the Ministry of Education as the agency in charge of managing ECE	To provide new teachers participating in the program expansion with training on early childhood development and education		To ensure voluntary parents/tutors assistance for the correct operation of maternal/child programs
Belize	To place pre-school centers within the sphere of primary schools.	To reorganize the Pre-school unit as a Special Unit of the Ministry of Education.	To develop and implement a training program of ECE professionals and administrators		To involve community members in the implementation of educational programs, to encourage private corporations to finance the ECE centers.
Jamaica	To create “infant schools”, completely subsidized by the government.		To implement mechanisms for early detection and treatment of development and behavioral disorders	To develop a new a comprehensive curriculum to improve the quality of learning environments.	To support and disseminate a community program, aimed at training parents from rural areas in early stimulation techniques.

Table 4. Continued

<i>Country</i>	<i>Access and coverage</i>	<i>Management</i>	<i>Training and development</i>	<i>Curriculum development</i>	<i>Relationship with parents and community</i>
St Kitts and Nevis	To ensure care and stimulation for children aged 0-3 with no access to education institutions by means of a program of home visits.	To establish a government system of annual inspections to control quality standards and educational centers operation licenses.	To train teachers on the transition from pre-school to primary school.	To implement a thematic approach on the curriculum and to provide training for its correct implementation	To train teachers and tutors in children stimulation skills.
Santa Lucia	To design programs geared at children “at risk” and to subsidize their implementation.	To integrate the early childhood sector administration through a merge of units of the ministries of Education. To establish minimum standards and control mechanisms for the supply of ECE services.	To enhance the learning environment. To establish early childhood as an eligible area for tertiary level scholarships.	Curriculum revision	To encourage the creation of parent and teacher associations and their active involvement in educational programs. To form alliances with key external players. To enhance the National Early Childhood Association.
Surinam	To unify pre-school and primary education. To eliminate regulation.	To give the Ministry of Education the main responsibility for the general administration of pre-school education.	Training to adopt curriculum changes.	To evaluate and adjust the existing curriculum; to unify the pre-primary and the basic education curriculums.	
Trinidad and Tobago	To build new ECE centers.	To strengthen the Ministry of Education administrative system. To appoint a team of inspectors and to establish control mechanisms to be applied to	To reinforce teacher training at pre-primary and primary levels. To provide ECE centers with equipment and materials for teachers and students.	To improve the quality of early literacy programs at pre-primary and primary level. To update the curricular guide for ECE centers	To increase parent and community participation in the school/community meetings. To provide student support services in cooperation with other community players.

		educational centers.			
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g. Achievements and obstacles

In spite of the reforms implemented in order to prevent school failure, student performance has fallen short of the expectations in Bahamas, Jamaica, Surinam and St Kitts and Nevis. Likewise, dropout rates in these countries continue to be relatively high.

The implementation of early childhood policies is quite recent, and some countries are still in the design and planning stage, which makes it difficult to identify achievements and obstacles, as well as the way in which they can affect school failure. However, the Sub-regional Report highlights the establishment of standards for the regulation of pre-primary education centers. It also draws the attention to the progress made in curriculum design and in training activities for administrators, authorities and teachers. The report for Jamaica points out a serious obstacle preventing a fair pre-primary education system: the existence of two sub-systems targeted at populations of different socioeconomic strata.

h. Future challenges

The main challenge posed is to obtain the high investment level required to carry out the identified strategies. Besides, there is a need for stronger links (and effective coordination) of the different agencies involved in ECE, including non-governmental players.

Other important challenges are: to strengthen the ministries' organization and planning skills, in particular as regards the development of administrative information and monitoring systems; to improve quality, emphasizing on pedagogical development including issues related to training and didactic materials; to supply sustainable quality services in traditionally disregarded areas in some countries (Belize, Bahamas and Surinam are specifically mentioned).

Table 5. Characteristics of the programs/policies of the CARIBBEAN Sub-region

Main problem	Access problems (particularly at the pre-primary level), retention problems (especially at the secondary level) and low quality at all levels. The ECE report highlights the insufficient access and low quality, as well as the high dropout rate in the first grade of the primary level.
Program and starting year	Various policies and programs aimed at improving early childhood education since the implementation of the Caribbean Action Plan for Early Childhood Education - 1997
Main objectives	To improve coverage and quality of early childhood education, in particular the pre-primary programs; to reduce the dropout rate in the first grade of the primary level.
Main strategies and actions	Improvement of access and coverage; Management systems for more efficiency and effectiveness; Training and development; improvement of the learning environment; pedagogical and curriculum development; transition to the primary level; links with parents and the community as a whole.
Achievements	Implementation of standards for the regulation of pre-primary education centers; progress made on curriculum design and on the training of administrators, authorities and teachers.

CENTRAL AMERICAN Sub-region

Introduction

This Sub-region report includes El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. All these countries have a high rate of extreme poverty, with the highest percentages in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, especially in the rural areas, where there is also child work.

The information on illiteracy for the region in 1998 shows an important disparity between Panama and the rest of the countries, where illiteracy rates range between 23% and 33%. Repetition rates for the primary level differ throughout the region. In Guatemala, the repetition rate is 27% for the first grade, and it remains high up to the third grade, where it decreases to 10%. Next is Nicaragua with 19% in the first grade and 10% in the second and third grades), although these rates have gone down significantly since 1990. Finally, El Salvador has a rate of 15% for the first grade, and then it goes dramatically down to 6% from the second grade onwards.

As regards dropout rates, the only data available comes from Guatemala and Nicaragua. The rate for the primary level in Nicaragua is 10%, while Guatemala's is 8%. For the secondary level, the dropout rate for Nicaragua is 12% and the one for Guatemala is 9% in the first cycle and 13% in the second one.

The programs to prevent school failure described below are part of wider educational reforms focused on improving quality and equitability. Some of the programs have been underway for several years and have been evaluated (for example, Honduras), while others are more recent. International organizations, such as UNICEF, USAID and the World Bank provided the funding for some of the programs.

A common issue for all countries is the emphasis on pedagogical methodologies fostering student participation, revising the role of teachers as facilitators of the learning process. This is accompanied by an important number of teacher training activities. Another issue is the desire to involve the community in pedagogical, assistential and school governing activities. Some countries share a special concern for rural schools and for the indigenous population.

a. Main problem

All Central American countries have repetition, overage, temporary or definitive dropout problems, as well as low learning achievements and the connection between learning results and the student socioeconomic background. Besides, some countries also show:

- The need to design a long term plan that coordinates efforts aimed at improving coverage, quality and efficiency (El Salvador)

- The lack of consensus on unified standards to carry out an assessment of student performance (Honduras).
- The fact that most children who do not attend school or quit, start to work at a very early age (Nicaragua).

b. Programs

El Salvador: “Understanding”¹¹ (2004).

Guatemala: “Abc Method”¹² (2000).

Honduras: “Successful Schools”¹³ (1998).

Nicaragua: “Learning and Progress Centers”¹⁴(2004).

Panama: “A new school, an active school. Towards a new school for the 21st. century”¹⁵ (1996).

c. Justification

The program implemented in **El Salvador** is based on the following main principles: to provide equal access to education to all children and teenagers; to create teaching resources for educational centers located in vulnerable areas; to implement programs with community participation in all poor rural areas; to train and update all teachers to ensure a better education; and adopt measures to benefit the traditionally excluded groups. Additionally, the UNDERSTANDING program is based on the assumption that an enhancement of the math and language areas will lead to prevent school dropout and repetition.

In **Guatemala**, the program focuses on a universal monolingual, bilingual and intercultural education, at all levels, with quality and equity. There is also the intention to implement assistential programs as well as programs to improve education quality, the creation of community centers to improve learning and the implementation of a national self-management program for educational development. The ABC program is part of the Curriculum Transformation, which also includes changes in teacher training.

Honduras’ program is framed within a comprehensive educational reform policy and, at a more general level, aims at improving living conditions for poor people. According to the Secretariat of Education, a higher academic performance combined with teacher consensus on evaluation criteria will allow to reduce the exam failure and dropout rates, as well as increasing the chances that more children finish sixth grade.

Nicaragua’s program stems from the need to have an educational system that develops new skills in children and adolescents in order to prepare them to face the challenges posed by global transformations and a sustainable social and economic development. It is carried out according to 3 pillars defined by the government: Structural transformation to create a quality education system: Relevance, Flexibility, Interconnection and Diversity; A

wider/more diversified offer and a more stimulated demand; Transformation of Governance, Democratization and Efficiency.

In **Panama**, the program is based on fostering fair and quality education at all levels, more democratic educational services, the implementation of a professional development system and the assistance to the poorest.

d. Objectives

In **El Salvador**, the program has the following general objectives:

- To assist the effective and efficient teaching of Math and Language in the first cycle of Basic Education.
- To monitor the knowledge acquired by students of the Basic Education Cycle in order to ensure the acquisition of the skills required for a complete development.
- To improve the Math and Language curriculum in the first Cycle of Basic Education.

The specific objectives are:

- To ensure strategies that improve performance in the above-mentioned areas.
- To promote research that supplies data on the national situation of the above-mentioned areas.
- To offer students and teachers the didactic resources for the acquisition of the skills included in the UNDERSTANDING program.
- To assess the students' knowledge of Math and Language..
- To evaluate the results of the Math and Language projects implemented in the schools in order to know the true level of acquisition of communication skills.

The general objectives for **Guatemala's** program are:

- To develop training, monitoring, assessment and follow-up programs that ensure the results derived from the implementation of the following methods: Spanish abc, Kiché abc, Mam, Kaqchikel, Qéqchi and Math abc.
- To raise the first grade promotion rate in the areas with highest repetition and dropout rates. This is to be achieved by the implementation of the Spanish abc, Kiché abc, Mam, Kaqchikel, Qéqchi and Math abc methods.

The specific objectives are:

- To develop a process for methodology updating for first grade teachers, through the abc method.
- To improve the basic teacher skills to develop logical, critical and mathematical thinking, as well as reading comprehension skills in first grade students.
- To promote the acquisition of reading and writing skills in the mother tongue and native culture by means of dynamic, entertaining and cooperative methodologies.

In **Honduras**, the program has the following general objectives:

- To reduce the high failure, dropout and repetition rates of first and second grade children.

Its specific objectives are:

- To improve the academic performance of first and second grade children.
- To identify the factors affecting failure rates for children of the above-mentioned grades.

Nicaragua's program has the following objectives:

- To increase access to a quality education by means of the Learning and Progress Centers.
- To provide technical and methodological training to all the teachers, so that they can have a new, different approach on education.
- To prepare children and adolescents for their future social and professional life.
- To improve academic performance.
- To increase the number of students finishing sixth grade.
- To develop competitive citizens for a global world.

Specific objectives:

- To strengthen the teacher-student pedagogical practice through training, advice and support.
- To maximize student skills and abilities by introducing innovative pedagogical practices.
- To integrate the members of the education community.
- To increase school retention and promotion rates.

The general objectives for **Panama's program** are:

- To improve learning results, education quality and efficiency in disadvantaged schools, especially in the rural multigrade and the urban underprivileged ones.
- To train Regional Supervisors in Methodological Strategies which allow them to advise multigrade teachers on the main principles supporting a New School, an Active School.

Its specific objectives are:

- To facilitate the shift from the traditional pedagogical model to the new school model.
- To analyze the main principles supporting a "New School, an Active School".
- To define the main factors contributing to an efficient pedagogical practice.
- To prepare the instruments to be used by the student governance body.
- To set selection criteria for the materials to be included in the learning corners.

e. Recipients

In **El Salvador** the program targets the student population of the first cycle of basic education (first, second and third grades), where 80 public educational centers were chosen according to criteria based on territorial representation and administrative organization. Later, 30 more centers were included. 25,199 students are from urban areas, accounting for 49,7% of the total, while 25,503 students come from rural areas, representing 50,3%.

In the case of **Guatemala**, the program benefits those children and teenagers from public urban and rural primary schools of the Provinces and Municipalities that are not included in other programs. The ABC method is being implemented in 12 provinces, 71 municipalities and 221 schools, assisting 9,945 children.

Honduras' program is aimed at public urban and rural primary schools. It started with a total of 40 schools in two provinces, 20 in Francisco Morazán and 20 from Atibuca, under the responsibility of the Secretariat of Education. It targets schools that hold the highest school failure, dropout and absenteeism rates in the first and second cycles of basic education, and that are on general high-risk situation.

In **Nicaragua**, the program assists the children attending 287 urban and rural primary schools. Teachers also benefit from the training, technical assistance and materials provided for the lessons.

As for **Panama**, its program is directly aimed at teachers, authorities and supervisors from primary multigrade schools. In 2004, there were 2,156 participating schools, accounting for 77.6% of the existing centers, with an attendance of 103,230 students of the 1st to 4th grades of the primary level. Priority is given to multigrade rural and underprivileged urban schools.

f. Implementation

The UNDERSTANDING program from **El Salvador** was devised with the objective of improving the learning of Math and Language in the students of the first cycle of basic education. The teaching of Language is focused on the development of cognitive and communicative skills that improve reading comprehension, writing, oral expression and hearing skills. As regards Math, emphasis is given to fostering mathematical reasoning, problem solving, the application of mathematical knowledge to the environment, and communication using mathematical language. With a new curricular and methodological approach, the program seeks to contribute to the development of basic skills that improve children performance and ensure them more success in the following grades.

The program starts by acknowledging the social nature of verbal and mathematical language as well as the role that the interaction in the construction of meaning plays in the development of thought. In the case of Language, the Ministry of Education suggests a functional communicative approach, which basically fosters the acquisition of skills from

the perspective of a particular context and social interaction, that is to say, the choice of a text as the minimum unit of meaning and the new value attributed to the actual context as an environment in which the acquisition of the reading, writing, speaking and hearing skills takes place. This approach maximizes communicative skills in the search for a more meaningful, comprehensive and global learning.

The teaching of Math is done using the socio-constructivist approach, which fosters learning as a result of an on-going activity and aims at providing effective tools to analyze the natural, social and economic world around us. Thus, it encourages the development of skills such as the interpretation and construction of mathematical models of the reality. By working on reasoning processes, Math imposes certain characteristics, such as: rigor, accuracy, logical reasoning, balance and yielding. In this case, Math education must be geared at generating active and creative thinking in children.

The first implementation stage started in 2004 with first grade students and the planning of teacher training activities in Language. The main guidelines of the UNDERSTANDING program are:

1. Teacher training

It is a permanent and local training proposal, aimed at providing teachers with a new theoretical, methodological and didactical approach on the teaching and learning of Language and Math.

2. Institutional management, including the following actions:

- Creation of academic committees made up by 1st to 3rd grade teachers.
- Creation of helping mothers committees.
- Better use of classroom libraries and student participation in Reading Clubs through the *Read, Understand and Learn* project.
- Incorporation of elderly adults through the project: “*May I borrow your grand dad?*”

3. Curriculum adjustment

Curriculum revision and adjustment, production of materials for children and teachers, skill development and creation of achievement indicators. The program defines the basic skills that teachers must stimulate and develop for each area. These are the critical skills that will help students develop a critical thinking and apply their knowledge to everyday life and to the situations they will encounter as they grow.

Support textbooks will be produced for students and teachers, so that they have the necessary resources to apply the new techniques and improve their performance.

4. Community involvement projects

These projects only target pilot schools. They are “complementary projects” whose main innovation is the involvement of different members and resources of the school community in curricular design. Their aim is to achieve better results and to provide children with links between their everyday life and their academic learning process.

Thus, mothers read stories in the classrooms; grandparents or elderly adults “tell stories they remember, and that they have been told by other people, in an oral tradition”; high grade children (7th, 8th and 9th) assist 1st and 2nd cycle students in the school library and also help keeping the library records.

These projects are not only based on the UNDERSTANDING program, but also in the National Reading Plan (PNFL – acronym for the Spanish version) implemented in 2005¹⁶. The PNFL involves the participation of cultural institutions such as universities, publishing houses, bookstores, CONCULTURA and the Ministry of Education (MINED).

Activities carried out during the 2004-2005 period:

- Training of first grade teachers and advisors
- Launching of the Understanding Program- Pedagogical Fair
- Distribution of Math and Language workbooks for 7,200 first grade students
- Training on Complementary Programs
- Implementation of the Bilateral Plan, developed by the Ministry of Education and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- Follow-up and technical assistance provided by the pedagogical advisory team
- Assessment meetings with advisors and specialists
- Design of the Understanding expansion program
- Organization of resources, strategies and activities for the implementation of the program in the second grade of Basic Education in the year 2006.

As from 2006, there will be a gradual incorporation of the educational centers that did not participate in the first phase. Some institutions with experience in similar programs will help in this process, so that by the year 2009 all Salvadorian educational centers are included in the UNDERSTANDING program.

In the case of **Guatemala**, the implementation of the “Abc method” is described. This program is made up of five components: 1) training; 2) monitoring and institutional support; 3) assessment; 4) reinforcement; and 5) improvement of materials.

Abc is an interactive method that, translated into the four main Mayan languages, allows the students to learn their native language and culture, which will in turn contribute to build-up their self-esteem. The method is in line with the curriculum transformation, adopting the new curriculum approach used for primary education. Children are protagonists of their own learning; through didactic games they can learn to read and write by using logical thinking, trial and error. It also gives students the opportunity to put into practice important values such as respect and cooperation.

This project provides 1st grade students and teachers with an innovative method which fosters the use of games in the classroom as a main tool, using simple and precise processes to develop logical thinking, process information and learn math as well as reading and writing skills. It also enhances the students’ abilities, attitudes, knowledge and values.

This method meets the demands of the primary education curriculum because:

- It focuses on the students
- Students build up their own knowledge through trial and error
- Children practice values such as respect and cooperation throughout the process

Activities to make active teachers more professional (with emphasis on first grade teachers), continuous teacher training and the training of new teachers in the higher education level are already under way.

As regards continuous teacher improvement, during the year 2004 the Ministry of Education encouraged the program “Saving the first grade”, which included, among others, three-stage training activities to assist all first grade teachers in the use of pedagogical tools with the aim of improving:

- Community skills
- Mathematical logics
- Values
- Assessment on the acquisition of knowledge

This is done by means of:

- An assistance program
- Parent participation in school life
- The organization of school meeting and the food program for the secondary level.
- A free transportation pass for the secondary level
- Scholarships for the primary level
- The implementation of the National Program of Self-Management for Educational Development (PRONADE, acronym in the Spanish version)
- The Educational Reform and Curriculum Transformation
- The Access to the Bilingual Intercultural Education-PAEBI project, which includes 70 first grade classrooms with seven pedagogical strategies: active methodology, parent participation, standard tests, and five operational strategies (coordination of education and school administrators, training, monitoring, assessment, vocational assistance)

The complementary actions are the following:

- Distribution of textbooks in the primary level
- Self-Management Education Committees
- Creation of community centers to assist in pre-school education (CENACEP)

The Curriculum Transformation entails a new education paradigm, with the introduction of deep and global changes in the whole education system, with new and better ways to address problems, mainly the areas of integral human development, the Guatemalan peoples and the plural nation. Curriculum Transformation involves teacher training activities to meet the demands of the Education Reform. Therefore, during the 2004-2007 period, work will continue on the Transformation of the secondary schools that provide

initial teacher training, focusing on the training of future teachers for the indigenous school population. Emphasis will also be given to the professional development of active teachers (Continuous Training) with the aim of improving their performance and assisting them in the correct implementation of the new curriculum.

In turn, **Honduras** reports the implementation of the “Successful Schools” program. It consists of a pilot experience carried out in several primary education centers, with the aim of motivating and helping children to acquire knowledge through play and to take on the responsibility to attend school on time and not to dropout.

The program includes: 1) a pedagogical aspect; 2) an analysis and assessment component; and 3) the search for teacher consensus on promotion/failure criteria. In order to implement the project, the schools involved were given a seminar on social motivation, self-esteem, communication and leadership. Participative methodologies were used (involving children, parents, local community members, education authorities), and textbooks and didactic materials were distributed.

The Secretariat of Education and the participating schools provided data on the initial and final numbers of students, as well as the repetition and failure rates. Each student and teacher was codified by grade, section and school. Besides, standard tests designed by the Secretariat of Education were given at the beginning and at the end of the experience with the aim of providing information on academic performance.

Then, the data on academic performance, the repetition and failure rates, the teachers’ classroom observations and the comments of the support teachers were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and multivariate regressions. Additionally, other tools were used to monitor children (progress control charts) with the objective of identifying those students with chances of failing, and thus providing them with additional assistance so that they can reach the level required to promote the grade. The factors linked to changes in academic performance as well as those factors associated with first grade repetition were identified.

Teachers with experience in social motivation and pedagogical mediation helped non-experienced teachers in the classrooms. The teachers from the first and second grades prepared a syllabus including the contents to be taught in the Spanish and Math classes, which were supported by process tests that were carried out on a monthly basis, between May and October 1998. The pedagogical strategies applied were active and participative.

Other actions implemented in order to support the participating schools included:

- Street and disadvantaged children.
- Participative rural reports.
- Febil Project (Curriculum adjustment in Natural Sciences and Spanish)
- Annual Operational Plans of Education Centers
- Community Development Council.
- Sectoral research on Education and Development.
- Reports on academic achievements.

Nicaragua has implemented the “Learning and Progress Centers” program (CAP, acronym in the Spanish version) with the aim of ensuring the access, permanence and performance of rural and urban disadvantaged children, giving the school community the opportunity to participate more actively.

This strategy started with a pilot experience involving regular and multigrade primary schools in the year 2004, with the participation of the Model Schools and the Friendly and Healthy Schools¹⁷. Ideally, schools should use the feedback received from their previous participation in the above mentioned projects.

CAP schools are within the framework of Nicaraguan education policies, which emphasize quality and relevance, as well as coverage and equity. Concepts such as quality, internal efficiency, organization, participation of parents, students and the whole community, the environment and school and environmental hygiene are channeled through the Learning and Progress Centers. Their objective is to provide education for life and to transform the school into an open and integrating center, fostering technological change and continuous learning.

Work is being done in order to:

1. Make teachers more effective
2. Improve the access of more disadvantaged populations to a quality education, supporting curriculum transformation in bilingual intercultural and multigrade schools.
3. Involve the community and parents in the education quality improvement process
4. Strengthen the support given by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (MECD) to primary education.
5. Create an educational, effective, healthy, safe, protecting and friendly school environment.

Some strategies fostering active learning have been implemented through the following main components:

- Active lessons in which teachers take the role of facilitators of the learning process
- High student participation, both in the classrooms and in the center, with the aim of contributing to a better education
- Organized and committed parents, who contribute to the creation of a better learning environment and to the improvement of academic performance.

The following components are used as a guideline to assess each school and they constitute a starting point for new improvements:

1. Ways of classroom learning. Emphasis is laid on classroom processes, especially on the transmission of relevant and accurate knowledge. Among others, it includes:
 - Role of teachers as facilitators
 - Role of the student in the learning processes

- Collaborative work, where the students benefit from interaction and exchange of ideas
 - Active parent participation in their children's learning process
 - Motivated participation in collaborative work
 - Assistance to students according to their own learning pace and needs.
 - Textbooks for all children and complete didactic guides for teachers
2. Learning planning and assessment aimed at the teacher facilitator role and based on students' needs and requirements. Some of the actions included are:
- Adjustment of learning guides and textbooks to the regional characteristics.
 - Activity planning to address individual differences
 - Use of the student academic records
 - Participation of students and parents in the preparation of the assessment process and in analyzing the results.
3. School projects. This aspect is closely related to the implementation of the School Educational Development Plan and includes the following items:
- An already existent School project, either in the preparation or the implementation stage.
 - Types of projects in preparation and implementation stages
 - Contributions from implemented projects to the school and classroom.
 - Self-managed and sustainable projects
 - Support received from parents and other education agents
 - Institutional support
 - Presence and role of Student Council, School Council and Parents Associations in the processes under way.
4. School environment, linked to the physical characteristics of the building and the natural environment.
5. Inter-training center-MIC, as a strategy to train teachers from different types of schools
- Selection of issues to be addressed in the meetings (considering the participants' needs and interests)
 - Materials available.
 - Teacher professional development
 - Contribution to the pedagogical work carried out with the students
 - Pedagogical autonomy
 - Implementation of the same strategy in other schools of the same type.
6. Learning Resource Centers – CRA (acronym in the Spanish version) in the classrooms:
- Divided into the following areas: Mathematics, Spanish, Natural Sciences, Social Studies, Workshop
 - Used by teachers and students.
 - Support to teacher planning.

- Special areas inside the classroom built with resources from the environment, no expenses incurred

- Support provided to learning skills of both boys and girls

- Parent participation and cooperation

- Didactic materials to be used in the lessons

- Impact on the community

7. Student Council

- Student Council support in the classrooms.

- Impact of the Student Council in the school

- Impact on the community

- Support given to learning processes (Committee and Commissions: monitoring, preparation of materials, etc.)

8. Parent participation

- Creation and operation of the school council

- Role of the School Council linked to different school environments (administrative, pedagogical, cultural, etc.).

- Active parent participation through the commissions making up the school councils

- Self-management, mainly aimed at improving learning processes

9. School Library

- Works in the catalogue: reference, dictionaries, encyclopedia, other general works

- Teacher guidelines to help students use the library

- Impact on the community

- Strategies to enlarge the library catalogue

- Support provided to research work carried out by the students

- Regulations for book care and replacement

10. School Hygiene and the environment

This component includes the activities ensuring drinking water and proper waste disposal practices, apart from teaching/learning processes to install sanitary habits in the students.

11. School Health and Nutrition

Emphasis is laid on knowledge and practices used to develop and improve healthy habits.

12. Citizenship and democracy

It focuses on the rights and obligations of the school community.

Panama is implementing the “A New School, an Active School” program, as a comprehensive system to provide complete primary education, including innovative strategies and resources to improve the learning process and the education quality. The program encompasses strategies aimed at improving the curriculum, the relationship with the community, teacher training and school administration. It targets school with scarce resources, mainly rural multigrade and urban underprivileged schools.

The program focuses on teacher training with the aim of changing traditional teaching methodologies, improving pedagogical practices and considering the teacher as a facilitator of the students' learning process. The training is implemented in a way that it allows to see the new changes in practice, coordinating training with the distribution of materials and fostering interaction and exchange of experiences between teachers.

The following actions are promoted: an active learning process centered on the students; a relevant curriculum, linked to the children's lives; flexible timetables and promotion and assessment systems; a closer relationship between the school and the community; the transmission of democratic values through real experiences; the distribution of learning guides at schools and libraries; and teacher training activities in order to improve pedagogical practices.

The training provided to authorities, supervisors and multigrade teachers and coordinated by the National Office of Professional Teacher Training comprises five main aspects:

- A New School, an Active School:
 - Students do different guided activities suggested by the learning guides and solve problems posed by the teacher or by themselves. Their participation is not limited to the classroom; it also extends to the school yards, the garden, the sports field, the library, the vegetable garden, the family and the community.
 - Sometimes teachers lecture, sometimes they don't; they generally watch, guide and evaluate the work done by student groups. In general, it is an active learning process.
 - Children receive a comprehensive education: cognitive, socio-affective and psychomotor aspects are considered. The school atmosphere is one of freedom, confidence respect, responsibility, cooperation, affection and organization.
 - Learning is centered on children; timetables are flexible, all children have the same participation in school activities. Teachers are permanently assessing student processes, correcting the mistakes, emphasizing the achievements and providing immediate feedback.

- School government:

It is a curriculum strategy that gives children the possibility of an affective, social and moral development through real life experiences. It seeks student active and democratic participation in school life and in community activities. Children must find solutions for the school needs and problems. They are educated in the values of freedom, peace, tolerance, mutual respect, a healthy coexistence, solidarity, cooperation, decision making and autonomy, taking on all the associated responsibilities. They are given tools that will help them comply with their obligations, exercise their rights and be responsible adults in the future.

- Learning Guides:

These are learning tools that help focus the learning process on the children; respecting their own pace and allowing teachers to improve pedagogical practices and to enhance the

role of the teacher. Thus, teachers get rid of giving routine instructions and can take again their role of class directors.

The guides assist teachers in lesson planning and development. In multigrade schools, where a teacher has to teach five or six courses of different subjects, these guides are essential. They are a combination of the traditional textbook, the student workbook and the teacher's guide.

- Learning Corners

They are classroom areas allocated to each of the basic school subjects, in which students find the didactic materials suggested by the guides or the teachers for activities involving observation, handling, object comparison, research, experiments, etc. Learning corners provide children with natural materials, materials and resources from the environment and low cost materials prepared by the teacher, the students and the community.

- The school and the community:

A close relationship between the school and the community is fostered with the aim of providing students with a personal and cultural identity, and giving them the tools to understand the society they live in and to participate and transform it.

Innovative strategies encourage children to have an active participation in their own learning process and in the development of the skills that will allow them to face the challenges posed by their school life, and later by their working life.

g. Achievements and obstacles

Generally speaking, the CENTRAL AMERICAN Sub-regional report highlights the difficulty of solving the poverty, inequality and social exclusion problems affecting most Central American countries. It is worth mentioning that some of the programs (particularly in the case of El Salvador and Nicaragua) have just been implemented and therefore, their achievements are yet to be seen.

In the case of **El Salvador**, the report says that some organizational difficulties resulted in a late delivery of the Language and Math materials to the students, which affected the program implementation, bringing about demotivation among teachers who had been enthusiastic about the new approach. Thus, the implementation was delayed and some adjustments had to be done.

The requirement that students learn to read in the first grade is still a main concern, which in some cases leads teachers to resort to traditional methods, which have proven effective but are not in line with the objectives set by the UNDERSTANDING program.

Finally, it is important to consider the socio-economic situation of families who had to pay for their own transportation and food expenses to come to the information sessions. The fact that some mothers can not read becomes an important limitation for their participation and the help they can provide. Besides, they have to deal with a feeling of embarrassment for their situation when compared to other adults and even to children.

The report on **Guatemala** states that the implementation of this project (Abc Method) has resulted in a higher promotion rate. The strategies have also had a positive impact on student permanence at school.

The program results were also positive in **Honduras**: student academic performance increased due to the use of the new pedagogical strategies. The first grade repetition rate decreased from an average of 22% (1997) to 10% (1998). In the case of the second grade, the decrease went from 15% to 6%. Student academic performance rose up to a maximum of 14.2%, which is three times higher than the 4.5% increase of academic performance resulted from the introduction of the improved textbooks according to the National Basic Curriculum applied in all primary schools. Another important aspect to highlight is the money saved as a consequence of the reduced repetition rate.

However, teachers seemed to become more aware of the need to reduce repetition rates than to improve the students' academic performance. Likewise, not all the teachers committed themselves to the experience in the same way.

In **Nicaragua**, the emphasis is laid on the need for more flexible educational institutions, with a high response level and prepared to carry out the programs. The program implementation has led to a better education quality in the classrooms, fostering community participation. The report states that 80% of first grade students can read and that the Consultative Councils have an important impact on the community. Besides, schools have greatly improved their hygienic-sanitary conditions, thus helping to prevent contagious diseases.

Panama's report identifies the following obstacles: municipal authorities pay little attention to the school center needs; there is very limited funding and/or budget to increase the number of beneficiary schools; the textbooks are not properly adjusted to the General Basic Education curriculum updating process.

On the other hand, the following achievements are mentioned:

- The experience has been implemented nationwide. Every year all multigrade teachers continue using the new approach, and train new teachers to do it too.

- This innovation in education has contributed to the development of learning skills based on actual experience and to fostering habits such as tolerance, cooperation, participation, responsibility and organization, thus helping reduce school failure.
- Parents have more self-esteem and more participation in the education process, which significantly impacts on school failure.
- A new school culture based on the shift from a traditional pedagogical model to a more comprehensive approach, which takes the emphasis out of memorization and respects student learning pace. Thus, the teacher's role is to facilitate and evaluate the learning process, fostering participation and cooperation. Children have learnt to be active, creative, participative and responsible.

Factors contributing to the program success include: the supervisors' active participation and their experience as multigrade teachers; the joint preparation (teachers and consultants) of learning guides; an active and participative methodology in and out of the classroom; parent involvement in school activities.

h. Future challenges

The main education challenges in the region lie on the reduction of poverty and the possibility to provide equal opportunities to highly diverse sociocultural contexts. Reducing overage and repetition is still a pending issue, mainly in the first and second grades of the primary level. The Sub-regional Report also highlights the social importance of education policies, which must be seen as permanent "state policies" aimed at a fairer social distribution by means of long-lasting programs.

Another relevant issue is to raise awareness among teachers, so that they incorporate the changes and innovations to their pedagogical practices, and foster active learning, critical thinking, creativity, cooperative work and tailor-made education in order to address the students' different learning paces. Besides, it is necessary to provide permanent program follow-up and monitoring if obstacles and difficulties are to be overcome. At the same time, the progress made at the different instances must be acknowledged and disseminated.

Table 6. Characteristics of the programs/policies of the CENTRAL AMERICAN Sub-region

	<i>El Salvador</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>Honduras</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	<i>Panama</i>
Main problem	Repetition, overage, low education achievements, partial or total dropout and connection between learning results and the student socioeconomic background.				
Program and starting year	“UNDERSTANDING” - 2004	“Abc Method” - 2000	“Successful Schools” - 1998	“Learning and Progress Centers” - 2004	“A New School, an Active School” - 1996
Objectives	To improve the Language and Math curricula; to make learning more effective in the same areas; and to assess student performance in all the basic education first cycle.	To raise the first grade promotion rate in the areas with higher school failure records; to develop training, monitoring and follow-up processes to assess the implementation of the Abc method.	To reduce the high repetition and dropout rates in the first and second grades of the primary level.	To increase access to a quality education, and to improve academic performance and graduation rates; to train teachers according to the new education approach; to educate competent citizens for a global world.	To improve learning results and education quality and efficiency in underprivileged schools; to train Regional Supervisors on methodological strategies to guide multigrade teachers.
Main strategies and actions	Teacher training; curriculum adjustment; community participation; academic teacher committees.	Teacher training, institutional follow-up and monitoring; assessment, extra support; better materials.	Survey to assess the current situation; pedagogical support to teachers; teacher agreement on promotion and failure criteria.	To encourage new teaching and learning models; teacher training; parent and community participation; participative school government; actions to improve the students’ hygiene, health and eating habits.	Teacher training; curriculum reform; community participation; participative school government.

Table 6. Continued

	<i>El Salvador</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>Honduras</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	<i>Panama</i>
Achievements		Higher promotion and retention levels.	Improved academic performance and lower repetition levels.	Quality improvement; community participation; improved sanitary conditions.	Program institutionalization; reduction of school failure due to implementation of the new pedagogical method based on comprehension and parent participation in the education process.
Obstacles	Late delivery of materials; use of traditional teaching methods that are contrary to the program principles; limited family participation.		Emphasis on reducing failure rates and not on raising general academic performance; lack of teacher enthusiasm.	Need for more school flexibility and response capacity.	Little attention of the municipal authorities to the school center requirements; limited funding to increase the number of beneficiary schools; insufficient adjustment to the curriculum updating process.

MERCOSUR Sub-region

Introduction

This analysis included Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. These countries show a significant diversity as regards demographic patterns and development stages (see Section 1.1). It is important to mention that Brazil and Bolivia are the countries with the biggest illiterate population aged 15 years or more (in both cases, the rates double those of the other region's countries).

All the sub-region's countries have implemented systems geared at achieving a minimum of 8 years of compulsory basic education, for children aged between 6 and 14. Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay are the countries with more years of compulsory education (11, 10 and 9 respectively). Argentina and Uruguay have expanded the compulsory cycles by incorporating the last years of the pre-school level (pre-school in Argentina and pre-school and kindergarten -for children aged 4- in Uruguay).

The main sub-region problems are connected to repetition and overage at the primary level; and coverage, overage and dropout at the secondary level. Brazil's high dropout and repetition rates stand out.

In spite of the different country situations, there is a common issue to all of them: the strong relation between repetition, overage, dropout and low academic results rates and the student's socioeconomic background. Besides, the gap between the most and the least privileged has widened during the last years.

The MERCOSUR Sub-regional report highlights the differences between the national reports. Chile and Uruguay have carried out program evaluations based on school samples; Paraguay analyzed some indicators of enrolment evolution and internal efficiency; while Argentina and Brazil give a complete description of the guidelines, focusing on the operation model and the actions, in the case of the former, and on the programs' political-pedagogical conception, in the case of the latter.

As a result of the diverse characteristics and the different development stages of the programs, the progress and actions are also heterogeneous. The starting dates of the programs coincide with the political changes undergone in the national governments, and therefore policies have very different implementation times and in some cases (Argentina and Brazil) their effectiveness and results are yet to be seen. This is connected with the selection of policies by the education administrations and also with the lack of continuity in the implementation of those policies.

Although programs in all countries are conceived within a wider education reform and within an education sector which must be coordinated with the different government areas, in the case of Brazil the program is grounded on a universal philosophy which is expressed in a set of social policies fostering change processes, unlike the others, and focusing on the most vulnerable sectors. Likewise, Bolivia's project is also framed within the context of the National Constitution, the education reform and deep social transformations.

In all cases, there is a political determination to reduce school failure indicators and to consider the programs as an integral part of a wider set of initiatives. This is more evident for Brazil, as there is an attempt to coordinate several programs with the different government and civil society levels. In the case of Argentina, this is carried out through the implementation of the so-called "new management model", based on the cooperation of the different ministries and levels. The programs of Bolivia, Chile and Paraguay are part of a wider education reform and are also complemented by various strategies and projects aimed at the same objective.

Another common issue is the search for higher community participation in order to improve the students' learning conditions. This element is included in all programs through different strategies. Additionally, technical support is provided to assist in its implementation.

The different funding sources include: use of the education budget (Brazil, Chile), part of the education budget plus some external help (Argentina), or complete external funding (Paraguay and Bolivia). External funding is provided by agencies such as the UNDP, the IDB and the World Bank.

a. Main problem

The main problem targeted by the policies seems to be relatively small in the cases of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay. Argentina's report mentions repetition and overage problems in the first two cycles of the Basic General Education, and coverage, repetition and dropout problems in the third cycle. In Chile, the secondary level is the one with the highest dropout rates, while in Uruguay the main problems lay in the high repetition rates, especially for the first grade of primary school, and in the low learning results linked to unfavorable social contexts. Bolivia's project mentions access and permanence problems with girls attending rural schools.

The programs implemented by Paraguay and Bolivia are within a wider education reform framework, while the Brazilian program is part of a national project comprising the states, municipalities and the federal district, as part of the strategy to address the severe problems.

b. Programs/Policies

Argentina: “Integral Program for an Egalitarian Education”¹⁸ (2004).

Bolivia: “Access and permanence of girls in rural schools” Program¹⁹ (2000).

Brazil: “National System of Continuous Teacher Training”²⁰ (2004).

Chile: “Secondary School for All” Program²¹ (2000).

Paraguay: “Strengthening the Education Reform in Basic School Education. Hekokatúva Living School” Program²² (2001).

Uruguay: “Full-time Schools” Program²³ (1997).

c. Justification

The **Argentine** program has been devised within a wider political sphere, in which the State is committed to improving the living conditions of the most unprivileged social sectors. It reaffirms the equality principle –on the grounds of which it encourages a mobilization of resources from the school– together with transmission and confidence as the main pillars of pedagogical relationships, community participation and cooperation. The main aim is to strengthen the teaching job and the relationship between the different offices in charge of public policies in order to provide children with better education opportunities.

Bolivia's program is a component of the Strengthening of Education Quality and Equity Project, within the Education Reform. The main aim of this reform, started in 1995, is to improve access and permanence to quality, egalitarian and intercultural education, which helps improve living conditions, promotes human development, strengthens democracy and increases the citizens’ productive and competitive skills. The Education Reform has been devised as a global transformation of the education system, both in the pedagogical-curricular area and in the institutional-administrative one. During the first stage of its implementation, the reform focused on the primary level, as it is the base of the whole national education system, which will later allow for more access to quality secondary and university education.

The program is also linked to the Bolivian Poverty Reduction Strategy (EBRP)²⁴, stemming from the National Dialogue 2000 with the aim of reducing poverty by the implementation of economic and social policies. The EBRP is committed to improving education quality and access, especially for the primary level.

Brazil has a comprehensive idea of education as a social and training practice, and a vision of man, culture and society for which the school is a privileged space, although not the only one. This is the vision that must be addressed by the policies. The program encourages the implementation of far-reaching policies that help improve learning processes through changes in management, infrastructure, participation mechanisms and teacher training policies. Likewise, there is a need to provide training processes which ensure teacher training at the secondary level, as well as continuous training programs, coordinating the activities of the training institutions and the local (state) education

secretariats. In spite of the sharp social and regional differences, teacher training policies have a universal scope, although they prioritize those working teachers who do not have enough qualifications.

Programs in **Chile** and **Paraguay** aim at improving education equity and quality in the most vulnerable sectors. Both countries define their programs as focused strategies. Besides, **Paraguay** includes the efficiency principle, but without mentioning the word itself: “concentrating human and material resources in definite and feasible actions in order to achieve the best results at the lowest possible possible”.

The **Chilean** quality and equity improvement policies have been organized within three areas or axes:

- 1) The political decision to increase the education budget. The main task was to achieve political consensus for the education change agenda. Legitimacy was sought, as well as funding for sustainable actions aimed at improving the professional conditions of teachers and educational institutions.
- 2) Direct interventions with the objective of improving learning quality and equity through "programs". They include the supply of material, technical and pedagogical support to the educational units. "Secondary School for All" is one of these programs.
- 3) Policies addressing structural aspects of the learning quality. The extension of school hours (1997) and the curriculum change (1996) are examples of these types of policies.

As far as **Uruguay** is concerned, the “Full-time Schools” program is based on thinking the school as an environment which can mitigate some of the negative experiences that children living in poverty can suffer. The aim is to improve equity by means of a curriculum that provides them with the knowledge and tools required for a creative insertion in society. The program is also based on positive discrimination: “a focused action of positive discrimination that takes into account the poverty under which an important part of the school population lives.”

d. Objectives

Argentina's main aim is to “concentrate resources and effort on the most vulnerable schools of the country”. According to the report, the "Integral Program for an Egalitarian Education" (PIIE)²⁵ has the following purposes:

- To implement pedagogical and community actions aimed at strengthening teaching and learning processes.
- To provide support for the development of pedagogical initiatives.
- To strengthen the central teaching role through teacher training programs.
- To promote education actions within the school environment with the aim of creating learning communities.
- To design and implement inter-institutional and inter-sectoral networks, and to develop strategies to assist and include children who do not attend school.

Bolivia's project aims at creating an Action Plan that encourages girl access and permanence to rural schools and that provides the resources to carry out girl education policies. From the beginning, the long-term objective was "to foster access and permanence of girls in rural schools through successful and sustainable intervention strategies and to promote a community change of attitude as regards girl participation in the school primary level".

Brazil is devoted to "ensure access to continuous training processes adjusted to the requirements, develop science and technologies applied to education and promote a teacher career criteria that acknowledges the value of teachers", carrying out "actions to strengthen a national project to provide training and support for teachers and their careers".

In **Chile**, the program is focused on "improving quality at the secondary schools serving the most vulnerable students through the creation of better learning opportunities for all, and special attention given to those students in greater risk of dropping out of secondary school". Thus, the objective is to "implement strategies aimed at preventing school failure".

In the case of **Paraguay**, the objective is: "To improve basic school education quality and equity, helping reduce poverty and fostering the country's social and economic development. To carry out comprehensive actions which go beyond providing supplies and concentrate on improving processes in order to ensure the desired results can be achieved". Its specific objectives are:

- To improve pedagogical and management processes in the first and second cycles of all public schools.
- To reduce inequalities within the education system.
- To improve access to the third cycle of basic education.
- To promote parent participation in the school through School Cooperation Associations (ACEs)²⁶.
- To improve initial teacher training quality.
- To strengthen the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Uruguay's program is focused on redesigning and implementing the "Full-time Schools" (ETC)²⁷ program in poor urban sectors. The aim is to provide children from poor households with egalitarian access to knowledge and to the possibility of developing skills. The full-time school addresses the poverty problem from an educational point of view, but does not intend to become the solution for it.

e. Recipients

In the case of **Argentina** the recipients are public urban and urban-unprivileged basic education schools that have been chosen according to a Social Vulnerability Index per Student (IVSPE)²⁸ prepared by the Ministry of Education. The program benefited a total of 1,101 schools in 2004, and 500 are expected to join them throughout 2005, 2006 and 2007.

So far, **Bolivia** has implemented two pilot experiences of focused intervention. The first one, in the Poroma municipality with the Treveris Foundation, and the second one in the Tiraque municipality, in Rodeo's *Fé y Alegría* Institution. The program targets girls in rural contexts with the objective of improving their education opportunities.

Brazil's policy comprises all public school teachers, especially those who lack the qualifications required for each level.

There are 424 secondary schools incorporated in the **Chilean** program, which are the most vulnerable institutions and those with poorest education results. These schools represent 28.4% of public secondary schools and serve 241,576 students, i.e., 31.7% of the total secondary school students. The institutions are mainly urban and municipal.

In **Paraguay**, the program includes around 1,800 public schools, which represent over 40% of the country's public schools. The pedagogical proposal focused on 1,000 rural schools distributed in six regions and 150 high-risk urban schools in three priority areas. It also benefited 27 indigenous schools, 600 schools covered by the Education Improvement Project and 115 Teacher Training Institutions. The selection was made on the grounds of the area poverty level, the coverage deficit, the non-served population, the excessive amount of students in a section, the high repetition rate and the results of the National Evaluation System. The assistance provided depends on a previous analysis carried out with the local players.

The aim of the **Uruguayan** program is to improve the educational situation of children from the poorest backgrounds. At the beginning, the program covered 59 full-time schools that had been selected in 1990. Since 1997, new full-time schools have been created reaching a total of 104 (May 2005). These schools employ 1,100 teachers working with 25,000 students.

f. Implementation

In **Argentina** the PIIE is implemented within the framework of a new model of education policy management. With that aim, a childhood inter-sectoral assistance model was established in order to provide schools with the tools to strengthen their educational function. This model includes *inter-ministry policies* (Health, of Social Development and Labor Ministries), *inter-jurisdiction coordination* (cooperation of national and jurisdictional teams), and *intra-ministry coordination* (actions carried out by the National Offices of Teacher Training and Curriculum Management, Compensatory Programs, Education Information and Quality Assessment, and School Infrastructure).

The program states the following actions:

1. Support to School Pedagogical Initiatives.

The objective is to foster pedagogical situations that enlarge, complement and strengthen teaching and learning processes at the schools most affected by social inequality. The schools are encouraged to identify a pedagogical problem and to devise a pedagogical strategy to be applied to teaching and learning activities by using the school and the environment resources, considering possible connections with some national, jurisdictional or local plans, and trying to include other community players or organizations if possible.

PIIE's support for the development of pedagogical initiatives consists of:

A- *Pedagogical assistance*: it is mainly provided by a team of provincial pedagogical assistants. Schools can consult with them in order to determine the design, implementation and evaluation of their school pedagogical initiative.

B- *Financial support*: it consists of an amount of money given to each school for the development of its pedagogical initiative. Of the total amount, 60% must be invested in materials and resources for its implementation, and the remaining 40% is used to pay for traveling expenses.

Pedagogical initiatives *don't compete against one another* for funding, but are implemented in all the schools previously chosen to take part in the Program.

2. Support to the teaching profession

It consists of seminars and workshops providing training for the different players involved in the PIIE implementation: regional coordinators, teams of jurisdictional pedagogical assistants, supervisors, school headmasters and teachers.

Two types of events are carried out: *National Training Seminars* for PIIE jurisdictional teams, and *Regional Training Workshop* to assist the job of the jurisdictional pedagogical teams. Training is given on: a) Communication and Information Technology, b) Basic Curriculum areas, c) Specific activities to define and develop pedagogical initiatives.

Within the same line of action, there are other activities carried out in coordination with other teacher training institutions such as the Federal Continuous Teacher Training Network, the "Choosing to be a teacher" program and the itinerant schools.

3. A stronger link with the community

Three lines of action have been devised in order to promote and maximize learning communities:

- *School community actions* undertaken by the school and the community. These actions exceed the school framework and are geared at creating a communicative environment that contributes to improving the children's education conditions and their total school and social insertion, bringing about a mutual cultural feedback.
- *The creation of intra-school and intra-sectoral networks*. The "school networks" are alliances that strengthen the link between the school and the community, which is represented by its institutions and organizations. Its main aim is to coordinate and maximize the proposal, projects and resources in the different network schools and organizations. The "Inter-sectoral networks" are the alliances between the school and

the governmental and non-governmental organizations. This coordination allows for a more comprehensive view on the students' problems in their specific social context.

- *School inclusion actions.* It is the alliance between the school and social organizations with the aim of providing different strategies to encourage students to go back to school.

Within this framework, the schools will be in charge of the following: convening community organizations in order to create a learning community; analyzing the context (assessment of community needs); devising a project for the school and the local organizations; creating alliances; evaluating (defining indicators to use in the assessment of the educational and social impact of the proposal).

4. Supply of material resources. The PIIE provides schools with textbooks, libraries, computer labs (including training for its proper use in the school and its extension into the community), pinafores and school materials.

5. Infrastructure improvement. In order to use the computer labs at their fullest capacity, the PIIE plans to carry out infrastructure improvement works at the schools.

Bolivia's project is divided into three stages:

- a) Quantitative and qualitative research, consisting in identifying municipalities where women are in a disadvantaged situation and determining the factors preventing and/or facilitating female school access and permanence in rural schools.

The first phase of the project was carried out in 2000 and 2001, and consisted of three different moments: documental research, statistical analysis and exploratory research with qualitative methods. The documental research sought to identify the main problems affecting access and permanence of girls to rural schools. Thus, an initial sample of 309 municipalities was taken, out of which the 50 most affected municipalities were selected. Research showed that inequality is mostly concentrated in the first, fifth and eighth grades, with a significant difference in the transition from primary to secondary school. At the primary level, the higher the school offer and the number of educational units per nucleus, the smaller the difference in school access between boys and girls. This relation changes in the secondary level, as there is a difference in school access between boys and girls, regardless of the school offer per nucleus.

On the other hand, the results of the exploratory research carried out in 31 municipalities showed that peasant families face serious difficulties to keep children in school, especially the girls. This situation is worsened by the lack of educational offers. Communities demand a thorough and quality educational offer that provides students with the skills to attend universities or other higher education institutions. The research also showed that: women have to take on new procreation responsibilities; men are more likely to finish primary school, attending schools located in other villages or cities, with the resulting impact of early concubinage, marriage or alcoholism; masculine migration forces girls to

temporarily or definitively drop out, but this factor is also affected by indirect education costs such as materials, uniforms, special celebrations, etc.

The following aspects affect girls' permanence at school: the number of school years completed by their parents, the fact of having a higher and continuous source of income and the number of children in the family. Generally speaking, education is most valued by parents, as it is considered to be the means to achieve a better economic situation and more prestige in the community.

b) Education community awareness and training

The objective is to raise awareness among the education community so that the girls' education situation in the municipalities can be identified. This stage has included some negotiations with municipalities from La Paz, Chuquisaca, Oruro, Pando, Cochabamba and Potosi with the aim of raising awareness among the different players that in some way or other take part in the education of girls. Besides, some communication products such as offprints, brochures and posters have been prepared and disseminated so that district governing bodies, educational units, headmasters, teachers and CEPOS become aware of the situation.

The workshops were attended by parents, district directors, headmasters, council members and mayors apart from representatives from NGOs, religious and political institutions. First, the research results were shown so that the factors preventing or facilitating school access and permanence of rural girls could be identified. Then, participants were asked to choose the most appropriate ways to tackle the problem in their regions, out of several alternatives offered to them.

As a result of the workshops, it became clear that boarding schools - with all the variants attached to them, such as family or Yachay Wasi hostels – are the best and most feasible option to foster girl education in rural areas. Additionally, some other complementary actions can be carried out in order to improve results: infrastructure improvements, purchase of tools and equipment, food supply, training on management and social coexistence issues.

c) Implementation of actions focused on the municipalities, according to the needs revealed by the previous analysis and considering the existing resources. After analyzing the possibilities of implementing a component, the new planning proposal was defined, including objectives, goals and activities geared at addressing the challenges with realism and accuracy.

In 2003, and with the aim of reaching the component's long-term objective, the decision was made to "encourage access and permanence of girls in rural schools by means of a general implementation of successful and feasible strategies, and to bring about a change of community attitude as regards girl participation in primary school". During the first term of 2004, three successful experiences in this field were analyzed and feasibility studies were made on the following institutions: first, to Yachay Wasi's *Fe y Alegría*, then to Pueblo Foundation family hostels, and lastly to the Treveris Foundation boarding

schools. After that, in the second term of 2004, focused interventions were made at the previously identified municipalities, taking into consideration the results of the statistical research, the systematization, the feasibility studies and the budget available.

As a result of the budget reduction decided by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank, only two focused intervention pilot experiences could be carried out. The two institutions chosen have sent their proposals and signed a letter of agreement with the Ministry of Education, as stated in the component's requirements.

The schools headmasters and teachers of the two municipalities thus chosen were provided with training activities on project management, gender equality, health and sexuality, and democracy. At the same time, some actions to raise awareness were carried out with mothers, on the grounds of the new statistical research that shows that the girl school access and permanence problem proved to be more serious in places where mothers had a higher illiteracy rate. At a more strategic level, and considering the elections that will be carried out in November, a workshop was organized for people running for political positions in the city councils, as it was important to ensure their cooperation and commitment to include actions fostering girl school access and permanence in the POA (Annual Operational Plan) of the next five years.

With the aim of reinforcing the job done by the institutions, some follow-up actions will be developed in order to ensure the municipalities are aware of their responsibilities towards girl education. Thus, the actions carried out by the institutions can be sustainable and continuous, as municipalities provide financial support for all the proposals. Finally, and in order to raise awareness among the population, there is a proposal to prepare a booklet in the original (aboriginal) languages stressing the importance of girl education. Besides, and with the same objective, a series of radio programs will be broadcast.

Some other actions geared at preventing school failure have been implemented within the framework of the Education Reform. They included the distribution of didactic materials in several languages (Aimara, Spanish, Guarani, Quechua and other native languages) and the creation of classroom libraries, with didactic guides and other materials for teachers. Finally, schools are being provided with new infrastructures, furniture and equipment.

Brazil's National System of Continuous Teacher Training includes the following programs:

- National Network of Basic Education Continuous Teacher Training: The network is made up of Education Research and Development Centers, which originated in agreements signed with universities. At present, the Ministry of Education ensures the operation of 19 centers located in 14 states, in 5 training areas. These coordinated centers are devoted to developing and producing materials and methodologies to be used in basic education continuous teacher training, in association with the states and

municipalities. The network has the following objectives: to institutionalize the supply of continuous training; to develop a new training system concept based on the principles of autonomy, cooperation, flexibility, coordination and interaction; to contribute to the improvement of teaching practices to ensure effective learning and quality education; to encourage teacher intellectual and professional autonomy; to foster interaction and knowledge exchange between the centers and the teachers; to subsidize permanent research and reflection on the teaching job, with critical thinking about the society, culture, education, curriculum components and the social, historic and institutional reality, and to strengthen collective work as a means for theoretical reflection and construction of the pedagogical practice.

- Training program for working teachers - *Pro-training*: teacher training course at secondary level, by distance learning, targeting teachers without the minimum required qualifications and who work in the four first years of basic education and in literacy courses in state and municipal school networks. The program consists of a complete distance learning course which combines self-teaching with classroom practice, supplemented by two meetings a month and a teaching assistance service.
- *Pro-Preschool*: This two-year distance teacher training program provides qualifications for pre-school education. It targets teachers from kindergarten and pre-primary public schools who do not have the required training.
- *Pro-Degree*: It is a training course designed for elementary and middle school 5th.-8th. year teachers who do not have the required degree. It is aimed at areas with teacher deficits. Until mid 2007, the Ministry of Education will finance the cost of the training courses offered by the associated universities throughout the country.
- National Program of Encouragement to Continuous Training for Secondary Education Teachers (Pro-Ifem): It provides continuous training to working secondary education teachers of state and federal district public schools. The institutions selected by Pro-Ifem promote training, concentrating on the specific fields of the secondary education curriculum, using resources from the Secondary Education Improvement and Expansion Program (PROMED).
- “University for All” Program: Its aim is to fill the places available at private universities. It targets students who attended public secondary schools, with a minimum family income per capita and basic education teachers with no higher education.
- *Pro-reading/writing*: A crusade for quality education. Within the framework of the National Network of Basic Education Continuous Teacher Training, the Ministry of Education seeks to foster teacher training activities focusing on pedagogies to develop reading/writing and math skills, as they have a strong influence on the students' learning process. Activities will be carried out using the distance learning modality, with printed materials, software, videos and CDs, so as to simultaneously reach all national teachers.
- “XXI Century University” Program: It is implemented within the framework of the Distance Learning Secretariat (SEED). It promotes the offer of distance higher education training courses for Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Pedagogy teachers with the aim of filling the positions available in the public school system.
- Degree Consolidation Program – Pro-Teaching: Its main objective is to provide opportunities for innovative projects in the teacher training pedagogical and

methodological areas, curriculum updating and flexibilization and implementation of new curriculum guidelines. Thus, by raising training standards, it stimulates student access and permanence in different higher education courses leading to a degree. In association with higher education institutions and the state secretariats, the program coordinates initial basic training with continuous training, seeking to promote course restructuring, curriculum integration between academic and professional training, cooperation among researchers, university teachers and public school teachers and the participation of undergraduate students in professional teaching activities.

- School TV: satellite TV channel featuring educational programs for teachers and students of elementary and middle schools and for school communities. It broadcasts 14 consecutive hours a day and it also provides teachers with continuous education and didactic support to use in the classrooms.
- Special Education Support Program (PROESP): It fosters the training of teachers/researchers in order to facilitate the school and social inclusion of students with special education needs. It supports 10 higher education institutions that carry out special education post-graduate courses.
- Education in Rural environments: teacher training programs including pedagogical and curriculum proposals adjusted to rural needs. These programs encourage a wide participation of farming communities in decisions regarding management activities and social control over quality in education.
- Indigenous Education: programs geared at basic and continuous teacher training and the preparation and dissemination of didactic material specifically tailored to the cultural needs of the indigenous peoples.

Apart from the above-mentioned programs, **Brazil** has a set of projects and actions aimed at improving education quality, in cooperation with state and municipal teaching networks. These projects cover different areas and issues that directly and indirectly contribute to the education of teachers and students. Resources are used for elementary education, including pre-school education (kindergarten and pre-school), youth and adult education, special education, remaining areas from the old black quarters and indigenous education. Resources are invested in teacher training activities, purchase and printing of high quality didactic-pedagogical materials, purchase of equipment and adjustment of schools providing special education courses. Funds are also used in programs such as Speed Learning, Schools at Peace and others, like the ones mentioned below, aimed at educational inclusion:

1. Programs seeking stronger participation in educational management: school councils, municipal education councils and Fundescola.
2. School health and nutrition programs.
3. National programs of School transportation.
4. Programs fostering improvement of access and permanence at different levels and modalities of basic education.
5. Didactic Book National Program (PNLD)
6. School Library National Program (PNBE)
7. Cash Straight to the School Program (PDDE)
8. Preventive education policy.

The **Chilean** program is specifically focused on providing secondary level institutions with special pedagogical support in order to prevent dropout and improve the learning process. It covers two supplementary areas at the same time: pedagogical development and psycho-social development. Both areas are part of an Action Plan which includes specific support received from the Ministry of Education as well as initiatives started by each individual school.

The program has the following three main components:

a) School Retention Scholarships

Their objective is to prevent school dropout and to encourage teenagers from poor backgrounds and with high dropout risk to finish secondary school. The scholarship consists of an amount of money that is directly handed to the students. It is not a family subsidy but an incentive for the students, based on their school performance. Beneficiary teenagers are chosen out of a study of the dropout risk factors among students of a similar socio-economic situation. The scholarships granted in 2003 benefited a total of 13,000 students, and amounted to a national investment of US\$ 2.7 million. Likewise, the scholarship for the indigenous people benefited 8,000 secondary students.

The Pro-Retention Subsidy Act was passed in 2004 with the aim of encouraging the creation of an additional and complementary subsidy system geared at school retention, in order to ensure the permanence of the poorest students. It consists of an additional payment by the national government to the extremely poor students who attend from 7th year of basic education to 4th year of middle school, as long as they promote each year and enroll for the following one.

b) Leveling-off program

As the secondary level 1st year holds the highest dropout rate, this program implemented in 2002 sought to provide students with the language and math knowledge that they failed to acquire in the previous years. The program focused on basic education skills, which are essential to meet the secondary level 1st year demands. The plan was implemented by language and math teachers, sometimes helped by monitors (more advanced students, pedagogy students or other teachers). The program contents are designed on the basis of an evaluation of the students' real performance, and students are grouped in different levels according to their skills. The materials used by the teachers tackle the different issues students need to concentrate on.

c) Action Plan by Secondary School

The Action Plan is a tool that allows the secondary school community to design and implement the actions stated in the "Secondary School for All" proposal. The plan starts with an analysis of the school situation and must be geared at reducing school dropout. It should include actions regarding the following four areas affecting the dropout problem: pedagogical development, psycho-social development, institutional management and relationship with the environment. Each educational institution receives an amount of

money – bidding for funds is not required – according to its size. The Ministry of Education provides assistance for the plan design and its further implementation. Resources are given to “private supporters” who, in turn, transfer them to the educational institutions.

The **Paraguayan** program has four components:

1. Intervention at basic schools, aimed at consolidating pedagogical and management changes in rural and urban high-risk schools and raising education quality and equity levels. It has the following sub-components: 1) Improvement of Rural Schools; 2) Improvement of Urban Schools; 3) Strengthening of School Cooperation Associations; and 4) Fund for Education Improvement Projects.

2. Improvement of initial teacher training, with the aim of contributing to a better teacher training system, providing it with the required resources and conditions to improve teaching, management and institutional evaluation. It is made up of the following sub-components: 1) Academic improvement of Teacher Training Institutions (IFD); and 2) Development of an IFD Evaluation System.

3. Infrastructure and equipment for the expansion of the EEB third cycle. The main aim is to assist in the expansion of the third cycle of the education system, concentrating investments on the construction of classrooms in complete school centers. Funds are also used for general repairs and the construction of sanitary services.

4. Support to the Ministry of Education and Culture, with the objective of strengthening its normative, policy-making, monitoring, evaluation and social communication roles. Thus, it will be possible to consolidate the implementation of the Education Reform and to ensure the sustainability and impact of its initiatives. It has the following sub-components: 1) Strengthening of the National System of Education Process Evaluation (SNEPE); 2) Support to the National Council of Education and Culture; and 3) Education Reform Social Communication Strategy.

The following strategies are also included in order to achieve the program objectives:

- To reach and train all the education community players
- Analysis of the context and the educational results in order to put forward school improvement strategies.
- To encourage team-work, promoting a new style of school-family-community, fostering autonomy, flexibility and an "accountability" culture through the design and implementation of School Improvement Projects.
- To implement and consolidate school learning circles, as analysis, reflection and training environments that will contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices in all teaching areas. Support will be provided to those leading teachers who have become valuable local resources and who can help achieve the education reform goals.
- To revise and reflect on administrative and management practices as required tools to support pedagogical management, fostering a dynamic role of the school headmaster.

- To prepare and deliver didactic materials (files and guides) to support the teaching job.
- To supply resources to implement the projects “devised” by the education community members to solve the school problems. This is based on an autonomy principle and seeks to encourage a cooperative, participative and transparent work culture.
- Information sharing. This is the starting point for a debate on the institutional reality and will become the basis of future education improvement projects. The information to be analyzed includes, for example, the data produced by the SNEPE or the one stemming from the monitoring of each beneficiary school or Teacher Training Institution.
- To develop social communication strategies geared at ending teacher isolation and promoting participative communication experiences that bring about social change, taking the school as the education community mobilizing center.

The implementation of **Uruguay**’s program is guided by the following principles:

1. An extended school timetable, consisting of seven and a half hours a day, instead of the usual four-hour timetable. Thus, the school can have a deeper influence on children education.

2. A time enriched with multiple activities providing children with a more varied and attractive educational experience. This includes:

- the design and implementation of different scientific, productive and cultural projects;
- workshops for musical, body and plastic art expression;
- a time specially devoted to sports, physical education and recreation activities;
- the incorporation of games to the education proposal;
- didactic outings to widen the children’s world;
- a resource center with multiple learning materials, including simple computing equipment which allows children to have a first contact with information technology through the production of written texts and information search;
- systematic knowledge assessment and individual support for children with difficulties.

3. An updated pedagogical and didactic proposal that follows the guidelines of the School Program common to all Uruguayan primary schools, but gives priority to updated classroom teaching practices. The objective is to develop an innovative teaching approach for the main curriculum areas - Language, Math, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences - which entails the following principles:

- a. to consider the comprehension and production of written texts as main education pillars, which shall be specially considered in all curriculum areas;
- b. to foster the construction and reconstruction of knowledge in the students, as well as their capacity to search and process information and to solve problems;
- c. to introduce playful and motivating activities to the education proposals;
- d. to promote children collective work and autonomous individual work;

e. to establish clear knowledge and skills levels to be achieved by the students, and to carry out frequent assessment and self-assessment tests that allow teachers to improve and consolidate the knowledge acquired by the students.

4. An educational environment: emphasis is laid on organizing daily coexistence, on the basis of considering all events as educational events, for example, school entry and exit times, breaks, lunchtime, etc. The objective is to create an organized environment, with explicit rules that provide a clear, organized, benevolent and embracing framework that allows children to have a different life experience, at the level of both their intellect and their emotions. The school should be an institution providing opportunities to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, facilitating the verbal expression of conflicts and offering moments to reflect on group activities and to organize children participation.

5. A school that is concerned about the relationship with families. The ETCs²⁹ pay special attention to families. They send written materials to parents, provide permanent information on the children's activities, invite parents to participate in school activities and contribute with their knowledge, visit homes, organize educational activities according to the parents' interests, provide participation and growth opportunities for mothers – for example by taking part in didactic outings with the kids - , etc.

6. A new model of teacher work and an individual Education Project by school. The success of the Full-Time School system lies on teacher quality work. The actual implementation of the principles mentioned above will only be possible if each school has a qualified teaching team, committed to the society and to the achievement of the learning goals, and capable of designing a work proposal that meets the requirements of their specific context. In this sense, ETCs show an innovative perspective as regards teacher performance. While teachers in part-time schools devote all their time to classroom work, those in ETCs have a fixed weekly time for meeting the whole teaching staff.

7. Integral assistance for children from disadvantaged background. Thus, apart from the above-mentioned pedagogical aspects, schools provide food and health assistance, as well as social assistance to families with problems.

Apart from these guiding principles, ETCs are also focused on the active training of teachers and headmasters. The implementation of Course I “Support to ETCs” started in 1998. The course is organized according to three main content areas: I) Socio-cultural characteristics of families living in a disadvantaged social situation and their implication in the school education proposal; II) the ETCs education proposal; III) Content and didactic update of curriculum areas. Course II “Support to Language, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences Projects” started in 1999, with the aim of providing didactic and content support for project implementation in the three areas mentioned. Finally, the Active Training Program was completed with the implementation of Course III “Support to Math teaching” in 2003, which fosters the creation of new mathematical concepts and the attribution of new meaning to others, based on teacher theoretical contributions on the teaching of this subject.

Some other support programs in line with the principles of the Full-time School model have been implemented in a varied number of schools:

- Several specialized organizations have implemented recreational activities including games, dancing, drama, puppets, painting and music.
- The “Strengthening of the School – Family – Community Relationship” Program has been implemented since 1999, with the participation of professionals and trainees from the Social Work and Psychology areas.
- The Bilingual Education Program introduces the acquisition of a second language by partial immersion at schools attended by children from the most disadvantaged socio-cultural backgrounds, within the framework of a “quality with equity” policy. Teachers use the target language for communication and teaching, exposing children to it during 50% of the school day. The program has three different modalities: Partial English Immersion; Dual Spanish-Portuguese Immersion in areas where Uruguayan Portuguese dialects are spoken; and Partial Portuguese Immersion in border areas without Portuguese dialects.
- The Technology Integration to the Teaching and Learning Environment (ITEEA) proposal is a global strategy that seeks the inclusion of educational technologies to the classroom and the school center. It also provides training and support so that teachers can incorporate it to everyday classroom practices.

g. Achievements and obstacles

Progress is difficult to assess in the case of programs that started recently (Argentina and Brazil). The obstacles and impediments are mainly seen in the initial analyses of the situation, especially as regards the current socio-economic situation of the countries and its impact on school life. Poverty and inequality are the most difficult ones to tackle. The main problem in Brazil is the lack of training and qualifications of their teachers, while in Bolivia, it is the lack of equal opportunities for girls in rural areas.

The main achievements in Bolivia are:

- There is a quantitative database which allows the identification of municipalities with a deficit in girl enrolment.
- There is qualitative information on the aspects facilitating and preventing school access and permanence of girls in rural areas.
- Many institutions have incorporated strategies addressing education of girls in rural and suburban areas.
- An inter-institutional committee of support to girl education has been created.

It is important to mention that the actions are integrated to the Multi-annual Operational Program (POMA) 2004–2008, which implies that they are consolidated as part of the education policy. Besides, the POMA allows for a more enhanced coordination between the different areas and levels of the National Education System (SEN) and lays the foundations for the Bolivian Education Strategy 2005-2015.

As regards implementation problems, there has been a delay in the actions planned for 2002-2003, due to some “administrative management reasons”. The reduction of the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank has been another important constraint.

The evaluation of the **Chilean** program in four secondary schools shows a positive opinion on the changes brought about by the program implementation. At the same time, the interviewees seem to have incorporated the "Secondary School for All" main principles. Even those who are critical of the program point out that it has changed the approach towards students at risk. Only one secondary school has mentioned a negative change: an increase in violence in the institution and a lower student enrolment due to a "bad reputation", caused by the entry of students with a different profile.

As far as teachers are concerned, most of the people consulted agree on the fact that "Secondary School for All" and its Action Plans have contributed to a better organization and planning of the teaching job. Likewise, the transfer of new pedagogical practices allows them to see their job under a different perspective as they can visualize their new way of teaching and their new role in the classroom as mediators in the student's learning process.

The main strength identified by the interviewees is the supply of resources (scholarships, funds to be applied to Action Plans, didactic materials, teacher training). One of the educational institutions feels that one of the program's main contributions has been the openness to the community, especially to the parents. Finally, although apparently it is not possible to weigh the impact of "Secondary School for All" by using the internal efficiency indicators, one educational institution has proudly shown an improvement on several indicators. Besides, most of them assure that repetition rates have dropped and attendance has increased.

On the other hand, there are some problematic areas: the main obstacle has been the slow delivery of resources to the schools, which hinders the implementation of previously planned activities. In this respect, secondary schools have reacted in two different ways: 1) they have done nothing, or 2) they have used other resources (for example, borrowing money) to carry out the suggested activities. This could be connected to another aspect mentioned in the report: the fact that educational institutions are implementing the action plans at a slower pace than that expected by the Ministry of Education. Another difficulty encountered, which has been overcome in at least three secondary schools, was teacher reluctance to adopt the program, as it was initially considered as a stigmatization or a kind of punishment.

Finally, there is another critical issue that, in the opinion of consultants, shakes the program's foundations: the fact that some teachers feel that the program forces student promotion as a way of reducing failure rates. Likewise, they think that some tools (psychological and methodological ones) geared at dealing with students with learning or behavioral difficulties have not been properly transferred.

In **Paraguay**, some progress has been made regarding girl access and permanence to school. However, indicators show that attention must also be paid to boys, since in the short term they may also require some sort of assistance. Another achievement has been the increasing promotion rates throughout the Basic School Education, and the decreasing dropout levels.

As regards difficulties, there is a growing need for a wider coverage, since the worsening of the economic crisis has increased the demand for public education. On the other hand, although the National Budget allocated to education has increased, most of it goes to current expenses, reducing the possibilities of making investments or using it for other purposes. There are still clear inequalities between urban and rural areas and between the private and public sector. Thus, a sustainable effort is required in order to reduce them.

The **Uruguayan** report includes an evaluation of the program results, based on a comparison of different indicators with other schools serving populations from similar and more favorable contexts. The headmasters' opinion was also taken into account. The results achieved by "Full-time schools" working in unfavorable socio-cultural contexts are above the initial expectations. When analyzing repetition, attendance, dropout and performance indicators, the ETCs are in a much better situation than other schools from the same context but with a different pedagogical structure. The accounts of the headmasters' experiences confirm ETCs are real and effective alternatives, which could transform a pedagogical proposal into positive education results, preventing school failure and promoting the acquisition of knowledge. The fact that the initial document originating the program was discussed with the full-time schools existing at that moment marked a positive beginning for the experience.

The main obstacles for the program development are: school size, the slow implementation in other schools, and teacher mobility. With reference to size, research shows that schools in unfavorable contexts can have a maximum of 8 classes and 250 students. Thus, teachers can get to know their students well and do their job without losing the human aspect of education. This leads us to the second obstacle, which could be overcome with a bigger investment and more agile mechanisms to provide more classrooms and schools. Lastly, teacher mobility to other schools prevents the consolidation of a more consistent proposal.

h. Future challenges

One of the main challenges is to achieve the sustainability of the policies and programs implemented. Lack of continuity is a recurrent problem, which is not only linked to a change in governmental policies but also to the repeated intentions to redesign the programs, implying the interruption of programs from previous administrations without the corresponding assessment and monitoring processes.

The reduction of the coverage and repetition rates – mainly in the first and second years of each level, in the case of repetition – is still an important challenge. Other pending issues

are related to the lack of equal opportunities and to the improvement of education quality, which will require much energy and financial resources.

Although each country has different priorities, both the Uruguayan and other similar experiences show the positive effects of an extended school timetable and the importance of an appropriate pedagogical proposal. The development and evaluation of said program support the need for double-shift schools in order to assist children from the most disadvantaged areas, according to the characteristics of each country.

Table 7. Characteristics of the programs/policies of the MERCOSUR Sub-region

	<i>Argentina</i>	<i>Bolivia</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Paraguay</i>	<i>Uruguay</i>
Main problem	Repetition and overage in the first two basic education cycles; coverage, repetition and dropout problems in the third cycle.	Differences between geographical areas and highly unequal opportunities for boys and girls, especially in rural areas.	Difficulties connected with teacher training and practices; high repetition, dropout and student performance rates in the most underprivileged schools.	The highest dropout rates are recorded at the secondary level.	Social, regional and racial inequality and school-related mechanisms that contribute to school failure: low student performance, high repetition and overage levels.	High repetition levels and low content level in schools from the most disadvantaged socio-cultural areas.
Program and starting year	“Integral Program for an Egalitarian Education” - 2004	“Access and permanence of girls in rural schools” Project - 2000	“National System of Continuous Teacher Training” - 2004	“Secondary School for All” Program - 2000	“Strengthening the Education Reform in Basic School Education. Hekokatúva Living School” Program - 2001	“Full-time Schools” Program - 1997
Main objectives	To concentrate resources and efforts on the most vulnerable schools, in order to strengthen pedagogical practices.	To improve access and permanence of girls in rural primary schools.	To consolidate the teacher training system; to improve their working conditions; to ensure access to continuous training processes.	To improve the quality of secondary schools serving the most vulnerable students.	To improve basic education quality and equity, access to the third cycle and initial teacher training.	To ensure a more equal access to knowledge and skill development.
Main strategies and actions	Support to school pedagogical initiatives; creation of school networks; teacher training; provision of equipment and materials; link with the community.	Analysis of the situation; raising awareness in the educational community; training; implementation of focused interventions in cooperation with NGOs.	Creation of centers for the development of materials and methodologies for continuous education, by signing agreements with universities; secondary level training programs for working teachers; several programs to complete and improve teacher training at the different levels.	Scholarships for disadvantaged students; leveling off programs; Action Plan by secondary school.	Support to pedagogical and management improvement; teacher training; extended and improved facilities for the third cycle; consolidation of the education ministry’s functions.	Extension of the school timetable; pedagogical updating; link with families; coordination of teacher work on the basis of an education project; service training; incorporation of education technologies.

Table 7. Continued

	Argentina	Bolivia	Brazil	Chile	Paraguay	Uruguay
Achievements		Quantitative and qualitative information on access and permanence of girls in rural schools; cooperation with other institutions; creation of an inter-institutional committee to support girl education.		Student recognition; changes in teacher roles; improvement of pedagogical planning; openness to the community; better use of the program resources. Lower repetition rates and higher attendance levels.	Progress made as regards girl access and permanence; general improvement of promotion and retention rates.	Improvement of repetition, retention, attendance and student performance indicators.
Obstacles		Administrative delays; reduction of the initial budget.		Late delivery of resources to schools; lack of psycho-pedagogical tools for students with difficulties; trend towards student automatic promotion.		Some overcrowded schools; insufficient program extension; teacher mobility between Full-time Schools and traditional schools.

2.2 Comparative analysis

The description of the policies and programs implemented in the different sub-regions provides a picture comprising multiple approaches and strategies. This diversity lies in the heterogeneous social and educational situation of the countries as well as in the different ways of examining the school failure problem and the mechanisms for its prevention and reduction.

Given the different approach and information provided by the countries and sub-regions, we have decided to focus our comparative analysis on four aspects: general approach; education level; strategies implemented; and achievements and obstacles. In a fifth section, we will summarize the challenges that each sub-region faces as regards the school failure problem. The section finishes with some general considerations.

a. General approach of the program/policy chosen

The different initiatives can be organized into four main groups, according to the general approach adopted for them. However, this classification is of relative value because some programs are difficult to classify and because most of the initiatives have been devised within wider reform programs or policies, complementing themselves with other actions (as explained in section 1.2, most countries address the school failure problem with a variety of programs and projects targeted at both exogenous and endogenous factors).

The first group includes programs and policies stressing on coverage and education provision aspects in order to ensure the desired access and quality levels. The approach adopted by the CARIBBEAN region as a whole falls within this category. Regardless of the differences between countries, emphasis is laid on expanding pre-primary education coverage, and on the supervision and accreditation of education institutions to ensure minimum quality standards. Brazil's teacher training policy, which seeks to impact on the quality of the whole education system, can also be included within this group. The same happens with Bolivia, although here the programs are specifically focused on the access and permanence of rural girls.

The second group is made up of programs focused on pedagogical aspects, and includes the experiences of all CENTRAL AMERICAN countries as well as the cases of Argentina and Uruguay. The pedagogical aspects in these programs are usually accompanied by actions geared at community participation and the supply of school materials and equipment. Teacher training plays a vital role in the implementation of the new pedagogical strategies.

The third group comprises programs that combine management changes (school decentralization, creation of school networks) with pedagogical components. In this approach, management changes aim at a better use of resources, which must be complemented with pedagogical improvement projects. Two countries can be mentioned

here: Ecuador and Peru. However, in the case of the latter, emphasis on management aspects is not as strong, which places the country more closely to the situation described in the second group.

The fourth group also includes focused programs, which may combine pedagogical aspects (introduction of new teaching methods, teacher training, etc.), assistance (scholarships, food and health assistance, etc.) and management aspects. The initiatives submitted by Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela (especially the Bolivarian School Project) can be considered within this group, as they seek to implement a variety of actions in order to prevent school failure.

b. Education levels

Except for Brazil, where the teacher training policy is implemented throughout the three levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary), the selected initiatives concentrate on specific education system levels.

At the *pre-primary* level, there is a clear prominence of the CARIBBEAN sub-region, with its comprehensive education policy focused on early childhood. This policy is grounded on the idea that the school failure occurring at primary and secondary levels can be overcome – at least partially – with a good pre-primary education. Another objective is to facilitate the passage from pre-primary education to first grade. Venezuela’s experience can also be mentioned here, as Simoncito Centers are devoted to children aged between 0 and 6.

Most programs target the *primary* level, particularly those in the CENTRAL AMERICAN Sub-region. The policies implemented in the CARIBBEAN Sub-region also include the primary level, especially the first grade.

Finally, and as far as the *secondary or middle* level is concerned, we can see that Chile is the only country exclusively focusing on it. Yet, Peru’s program concentrates on the last two years of secondary school (as well as on the first two years of primary school) and on a distance education project for high school, while Ecuador, Paraguay and Argentina include actions for junior high school. Likewise, it is important to mention Mision Rivas, within the policies and programs submitted by Venezuela, which is specifically geared at the secondary level.

c. Strategies

Most programs have the characteristic of combining strategies targeted at different factors. The table below shows the great variety of strategies and actions, as well as the cases of their actual implementation. Information is organized around four main categories: exogenous factors, endogenous factors, coordination with other players and research work.

Table 8. Strategies and actions included in the programs/policies selected by the four sub-regions

<i>Category</i>	<i>Strategies and actions</i>	<i>Cases</i>
Exogenous factors (student family and social environment)	Scholarships for underprivileged students/families	Chile, Guatemala, Venezuela
	Food and health assistance	Guatemala, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Venezuela
Exogenous factors (education system, schools)	Strengthening of ministries' planning, evaluation and monitoring activities.	CARIBBEAN, Paraguay, Nicaragua
	Expansion and improvement of school facilities; supply of equipment and pedagogical materials.	CARIBBEAN, Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela
	Teacher training courses	All countries, but especially in Brazil, Panama, Paraguay
	Pedagogical changes affecting classroom practices, mainly aimed at a more active student role.	CENTRAL AMERICA, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay
	Adjustment of teacher training and pedagogical proposals to rural, indigenous and bilingual populations.	Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru
	Curriculum adjustment/reform	CARIBBEAN, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama
	Extension of school hours	Uruguay, Venezuela
	Use and further access to communication and information technologies	Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela
	Agreement between teachers and the ministry as regards promotion and failure criteria.	Honduras
	Projects by school	Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay
	Management decentralization	Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua
Creation of school networks	Argentina, Ecuador, Peru	

Table 8. Continued

<i>Category</i>	<i>Strategies and actions</i>	<i>Cases</i>
Coordination with other players	Inter-ministry coordination	CARIBBEAN, Argentina
	Participation of families and other community players	All countries, but mainly CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay
	NGOs participation in the program implementation	Bolivia
Research for previous analysis and action planning		Bolivia, Honduras

d. Achievements and obstacles

This is a fundamental part of the analysis, although some countries have recently started implementing their programs and thus achievements and obstacles can not yet be seen. Some reports state the positive impact of the stages developed, in spite of not having concrete results. For example, as regards the CARIBBEAN early childhood policies, which are still at the design stage in some countries, reports mention the establishment of regulation criteria for pre-primary education centers, as well as some progress made in curriculum design and training of teachers, administrators and school authorities. Some recovery signs are also mentioned as a result of implementing the policies, although the objectives were not met yet: there is a reduction of the repetition and dropout indicators and an improvement of academic performance rates and parent participation.

Some of the obstacles encountered by the programs and policies are:

- insufficient investment, usually a long-standing factor;
- political instability;
- coordination problems between the ministry and the local levels/schools;
- insufficient support from the central administration;
- lack of dynamism or insufficient adjustment of administrative procedures;
- insufficient training provided to teachers and school authorities; and
- lack of parent and community participation.

The following experiences are worth mentioning, as they have been operating for a certain period of time and thus, could be evaluated:

- The “Full-time School” program (Uruguay). These schools have achieved results which are above the expectations of the environment in which they operate. The main achievements can be seen in the repetition, retention, attendance and student performance levels. The obstacles mentioned are the excessive number of students in

some schools, the insufficient program extension, and teacher mobility between Full-time Schools and traditional schools, which implies an inefficient use of training resources.

- The “Secondary School for All” program (Chile). It has achieved the following results: recognition paid to the student role, changes in teacher roles, improvement in pedagogical planning, openness to the community, better use of the program resources, reduction of repetition rates and increase of student attendance. However, the report mentions a delayed delivery of resources to schools, insufficient psycho-pedagogical tools for students with difficulties and a tendency towards student automatic promotion.
- The “Friendly Networks” program (Ecuador). Among the main achievements, the report mentions the higher levels of student enrolment and retention, the improvement of learning results, increased autonomy and stronger community government. As a counterpart, the following drawbacks were encountered: administrative instability, lack of pedagogical support, insufficient community involvement and little coordination of pedagogical improvement resources.
- The “A New School, an Active School” program (Panama). There has been a reduction of school failure resulting from: 1) the new pedagogical model based on a learning process focused on comprehension, where the teacher takes the role of facilitator and evaluator; and 2) parent participation in the education process. On the other hand, little attention has been paid to the school center requirements; there have been funding limitations to increase the number of beneficiary schools and insufficient adjustment to the curriculum updating process.

e. Challenges in the face of the school failure problem

In conclusion, the main challenges faced by each sub-region are the following:

In the case of the ANDEAN sub-region, the general perception is that the three countries have a serious and extended quality problem, especially affecting schools from the most disadvantaged areas in terms of retention, promotion and learning results. Their objective of involving schools and local communities in a more active decision-making process is worth mentioning. The main challenges are connected with obtaining adequate and sustainable funding for the programs, as well as with providing effective and coordinated ministry support to the schools.

Regarding the CARIBBEAN sub-region, there is a clear awareness of the education systems shortcomings. However, emphasis has especially been laid on early childhood education – apart from some other measures targeted at children in other education stages – as part of a policy geared at preventing school failure through interventions in the first years of life. Adequate funding is also required, since many strategies are still to be implemented. Besides, there is a need to strengthen the education ministries’ planning and

monitoring tasks, and to coordinate actions with several governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The poverty and inequality situation in CENTRAL AMERICA, especially in rural areas, poses a serious challenge to school failure reduction. The programs seem to be geared at a new teaching and learning model (in which students have a more active approach to their learning process and teachers take the role of facilitators) complemented by strategies providing family support. Two other challenges are still ahead: to ensure the continuation of policies aimed at the most disadvantaged sectors and to bring about fundamental changes in school culture and teacher roles.

MERCOSUR faces the challenge of ensuring policy and program continuation, apart from the search for new ways to address education quality problems. The sharp social inequalities existing in some countries and the persistent relation between school failure and low socio-economic levels make up a complex picture that calls for a variety of strategies. Thus, initiatives range from a comprehensive teacher training policy to programs focused on underprivileged secondary schools or on education access for girls in rural areas.

3. FINAL COMMENTS

The wider education offer existing in some of the region's countries has not implied the achievement of a universal basic education or the completion of the compulsory school cycle, especially in rural areas. The repetition, overage, dropout and low graduation difficulties in some social groups show that the concept of equal education opportunities is still a long-term goal.

School failure (repetition, dropout, overage, insufficient learning results) is significantly more recurrent in the most disadvantaged social sectors, and for some countries, in rural and indigenous populations. Apart from the implementation of general reforms, almost all governments are concentrating their energies on assisting the most vulnerable social sectors, partly because of the persistent education problems, but also to address poverty and social inequality issues that have been disregarded by other policies.

Given the current living conditions, and regardless of the differences inherent to the four sub-regions, it is no longer possible to think that the education policy by itself will provide the solutions to the numerous needs, unless there is interaction with other policies. One of the main challenges posed is the need to recover the importance of education policies and to transform them into state policies, conceived as a public policy aiming at a fairer social distribution, and not as a transitory program.

According to our analysis, a considerable and sustained investment in the short, medium and long term is a key element to achieve the desired results. However, it is only partially present in the hemisphere. This financial effort should be applied to integral improvement plans comprising infrastructure and equipment, initial and continuous teacher training, teacher working conditions, and materials required to carry out the teaching and learning processes, ensuring a technical, pedagogical and functional coordination of the programs and agencies involved, avoiding the unnecessary duplication of efforts and costs. Equally important is the fact that the compensatory or positive discrimination policies are included within a coherent governmental plan, which is the result of wide social consensus.

Another key aspect, especially in some countries, is the consolidation of the education ministries' organization and planning activities, especially regarding the development of administrative information systems, with teacher and community cooperation. This calls for permanent follow-up and monitoring actions in order to overcome difficulties and to value and disseminate the progress made.

Some lessons have been learnt from the frustrations of the nineties. Several programs focus on a different approach aimed at pedagogical aspects –rather than structural and management ones–, the supply and use of resources, and integration. The idea is to help teachers in the classrooms with materials tailored to the needs and objectives of the different groups, and to establish learning circles and networks, acknowledging the diversity of each disadvantaged group. In this sense, bilingualism and different contextual varieties are especially taken into account. It is also important to highlight the fact that

schools are devising their own projects, geared at improving teaching and learning conditions and processes. However, these projects require the support of the central administration throughout the development stages; in particular those belonging to the most underprivileged schools.

There is a pending debate regarding student promotion criteria and its relation with education quality and equity, since both authorities and teachers have contrasting opinions, ranging from the minimum to the maximum level of competence required. Thus, no agreements have been reached, which postpones the school failure accountability process.

The impact of ICTs on the networks, multimedia resources and the mechanisms to disseminate and socialize positive innovations and experiences have gained momentum. The extension of compulsory education to children aged 4 and 5, and the importance attributed to this level as a cornerstone for the following levels should ensure more actions and support for pre-primary education. The expansion of knowledge and the media to acquire it, and the changes undergone by economies and labor markets have contributed to bringing about a wide variety of specializations or modalities at the secondary level, where dropout rates are higher. Added to this are cultural changes and more social inequalities, thus incorporating the pedagogical challenges to assist the new types of children and adolescents to initial and continuous teacher training courses, with specific problems in the most vulnerable sectors. Therefore, the training component, which includes family and community participation, becomes a central aspect in many programs.

However, most countries and sub-regions have still to overcome the serious poverty, inequality and social exclusion problem faced by the majority of the population, which places children in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Having this in common, national and local situations show the most diverse characteristics, as a result of historical, social and cultural processes which make up a “patchwork” picture rather than a conventional map. This is a consequence of the wide variety of problems faced by hemispheric schools, which range from basic health and food assistance to conflicts between traditional and new pedagogies, teacher training difficulties and political and financial instabilities in extremely diverse countries.

¹ In some cases we use the information contained in the Systematizations in order to complement the Sub-regional reports. The Systematizations from Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and St Kitts and Nevis were used to this end.

² Costa Rica did not participate in the project and is therefore not included in the section analyzing the policies and programs designed to prevent school failure.

³ The human development index measures the improvements of a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a) a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth, b) knowledge, measured by the literacy rate for adults (with a weighting factor of two thirds) and the combination of primary, secondary and tertiary school enrolment (with a weighting factor of one third); and c) a decent standard of living, measured by the GDP per capita (PPP, US dollars). The HDI is made up of an average of the indexes of each component. Countries are ranked according to the value of this index. (To see more details, go to UNDP, Human Development Report, 2002 page 253 in the Spanish version).

⁴ Regional education indicators project: *Educational Panorama of the Americas. Regional Report .Summit of the Americas*. UNESCO-OREALC- Ministry of Education of Chile, Santiago, 2002.

⁵ The Sub-regional Report states that the information for Venezuela has been drawn from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports website, where data was updated at the end of 2003. It also says that the ministry authorities requested that the Systematization, submitted by a national consulting agency, should not be considered for the preparation of the Sub-regional Report.

⁶ The Andean Sub-region Report points out that from the total 5,814 rural schools (multigrade or single-teacher schools), 770 are bilingual; half of them have no electricity; 97% no drinking water services; 98% no drainage system and 91% no means of communication.

⁷ Translator's Note: "Redes Amigas" in the original language

⁸ Translator's Note: "Programa de Emergencia Educativa" in the original language.

⁹ Translator's Note: Acronym for *Proyecto de Educación en Áreas Rurales*

¹⁰ Apparently, this contradiction originates in different program evaluations.

¹¹ Translator's Note: "Comprendo" in the original language.

¹² Translator's Note: "Método abc" in the original language.

¹³ Translator's Note: "Escuelas con éxito" in the original language.

¹⁴ Translator's Note: "Centros de Aprendizaje y Progreso" in the original language.

¹⁵ Translator's Note: "Escuela Nueva, Escuela Activa: Hacia una nueva escuela del siglo XXI" in the original language.

¹⁶ It originates in the commitment made by the country before the Ibero American Heads of State, who in 2003 declared 2005 as the "Ibero American Reading Year". The National Reading Plan seeks to raise awareness on the importance of reading on the development of a person's basic skills, especially on the thinking skills and the accumulation of knowledge for life. Therefore, adults are encouraged to read.

¹⁷ Nicaragua's report states that "In 1997, the Basic Project and the MECD chose a number of urban and rural primary schools known as "Model Schools". The initial assistance to 68 schools was later expanded to 170 in the year 1999, incorporating bilingual schools from the North and South Atlantic autonomous regions. The activities aimed at improving education quality and promoting community participation in the school management were carried out jointly by the authorities, teachers, students, parents and the school community" (p.29). Later, some of these schools were included in the project "Friendly and Healthy Schools", focused on rural areas. Finally they became CAP schools.

¹⁸ Translator's Note: "*Programa Integral para la Igualdad Educativa*" in the original language.

¹⁹ Translator's Note: *Programa "Acceso y permanencia de las niñas en la escuela rural"* in the original language.

²⁰ Translator's Note: *Programa "Sistema Nacional de Formación Continua de Profesores"* in the original language.

²¹ Translator's Note: *Programa "Liceo para Todos"* in the original language.

²² Translator's Note: *Programa "Fortalecimiento de la Reforma Educativa en la Educación Escolar Básica. Escuela Viva Hekokatúva"*

²³ Translator's Note: *Programa "Escuelas de Tiempo Completo"*

²⁴ Translator's Note: Acronym for *Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza*.

²⁵ Translator's Note: Acronym for "*Programa Integral para la Igualdad Educativa*".

²⁶ Translator's Note: Acronym for *Asociaciones de Cooperación Escolar*.

²⁷ Translator's Note: Acronym for "*Escuelas de Tiempo Completo*".

²⁸ Translator's Note: Acronym for *Índice de Vulnerabilidad Social por Estudiante*.

²⁹ Translator's Note: Acronym for *Escuelas de Tiempo Completo*.