

Background paper prepared for the  
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006  
*Literacy for Life*

# Real options for policy and practice in Ecuador

Rosa María Torres  
2005

This paper was commissioned by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* as background information to assist in drafting the 2006 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: “Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life*”. For further information, please contact [efareport@unesco.org](mailto:efareport@unesco.org)

## ACRONYMS USED

CAF	Andean Development Corporation: <a href="http://www.caf.com">http://www.caf.com</a>
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador: <a href="http://www.conaie.org/">http://www.conaie.org/</a>
DINECNE	National Directorate of Compensatory and Out-of-school Education: <a href="http://www.mec.gov.ec/">http://www.mec.gov.ec/</a>
DINEIB	National Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Education: <a href="http://www.dineib.edu.ec/">http://www.dineib.edu.ec/</a>
DINEPP	National Office for Ongoing Popular Education: <a href="http://www.mec.gov.ec/">http://www.mec.gov.ec/</a>
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: <a href="http://www.cepal.cl">http://www.cepal.cl</a>
ERPE	Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador: <a href="http://www.erpe.org.ec">http://www.erpe.org.ec</a>
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Programme
HDI	Human Development Index: <a href="http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes/BudTrans/LA03.htm">http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes/BudTrans/LA03.htm</a>
ICCI	Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures <a href="http://icci.nativeweb.org/">http://icci.nativeweb.org/</a>
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank: <a href="http://www.iadb.org">http://www.iadb.org</a>
ILDIS	Latin American Institute of Social Research: <a href="http://www.ildis.org.ec/">http://www.ildis.org.ec/</a>
ILTP	Latin American Index of Budget Transparency: <a href="http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes/BudTrans/Spanish.pdf">http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes/BudTrans/Spanish.pdf</a>
IMF	International Monetary Fund: <a href="http://www.imf.org">http://www.imf.org</a>
INNFA	National Institute of Childhood and the Family <a href="http://www.innfa.org/">http://www.innfa.org/</a>
IPLAC	Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute (Cuba) <a href="http://www.iplac.rimed.cu/">http://www.iplac.rimed.cu/</a>
IRFEYAL	Fe y Alegría Radio Institute: <a href="http://www.feyalegria.org">http://www.feyalegria.org</a>
LAE	Literacy League of Ecuador
LLECE	Latin American Laboratory for Educational Quality Assessment: <a href="http://www.unesco.cl/esp/redes/llece/index.act">http://www.unesco.cl/esp/redes/llece/index.act</a>
MBS	Ministry of Social Welfare: <a href="http://www.mbs.gov.ec">http://www.mbs.gov.ec</a>
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture <a href="http://mec.gov.ec">http://mec.gov.ec</a>
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance: <a href="http://www.minfinanzas.ec-gov.net">http://www.minfinanzas.ec-gov.net</a>
MOSEIB	Bilingual Intercultural Education Model: <a href="http://www.dineib.edu.ec/publicaciones_archivos/moseib.DOC">http://www.dineib.edu.ec/publicaciones_archivos/moseib.DOC</a>
MPFE	Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (1991-2000): <a href="http://www.unesco.cl">http://www.unesco.cl</a>
OAS	Organization of American States: <a href="http://www.oas.org">http://www.oas.org</a>
OCDE	Observatory of Development Cooperation in Ecuador: <a href="http://www.cooperacion.org.ec/">http://www.cooperacion.org.ec/</a>
ODNA	Observatory of Child and Youth Rights: <a href="http://www.odna.org">http://www.odna.org</a>
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: <a href="http://www.oecd.org">http://www.oecd.org</a>

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<sup>1</sup> Ecuadorian educator, linguist and education journalist, specialist in basic education and in themes of reading and writing. She was Pedagogical Director of the Monsignor Leonidas Proaño National Literacy Campaign (1988-1990) and Minister of Education and Cultures (2003) in Ecuador. She has worked as a researcher and adviser in Nicaragua and in many other countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. She was education policy adviser in UNICEF-New York (1991-1996). At the request of UNESCO, she revised the base document for the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). She is the author of many publications, the latest of which is “*Lifelong Learning in the South*” (2004), a world study carried out for Sida in Stockholm, and “*Educational Justice and Economic Justice: 12 Theses for Educational Change*”, a continental study conducted for the International Movement of Popular Education and Social Promotion ‘Fe y Alegría’. She coordinates the Latin American pronouncement for Education for All and is director of the Fronesis Institute [www.fronesis.org](http://www.fronesis.org).

OPF	Observatory of Fiscal Policy <a href="http://www.observatoriofiscal.org">http://www.observatoriofiscal.org</a>
OREALC	UNESCO Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean <a href="http://www.unesco.cl">http://www.unesco.cl</a>
PEBI	Intercultural Bilingual Education Project – GTZ: <a href="http://www.proeibandes.org">http://www.proeibandes.org</a>
PK	<i>Pachakutik</i> Plurinational Unity Movement-Nuevo País: <a href="http://www.pachakutik.org.ec">http://www.pachakutik.org.ec</a>
PRELAC	Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (2002-2017): <a href="http://www.unesco.cl/ing/">http://www.unesco.cl/ing/</a>
PRIE	Regional Education Indicators Project: <a href="http://www.prie.cl">http://www.prie.cl</a>
PROCALMUC	Education and Training Project for Improvement of the Quality of Life of Rural Women in Ecuador: <a href="http://www.unesco.cl/medios/biblioteca/documentos/programa_procalmuc_ecuador.pdf?menu=/es/atematica/alfayeduja/docdig/">http://www.unesco.cl/medios/biblioteca/documentos/programa_procalmuc_ecuador.pdf?menu=/es/atematica/alfayeduja/docdig/</a>
SIISE	Integrated System of Social Indicators of Ecuador <a href="http://www.frentesocial.gov.ec/siise/siise.htm">http://www.frentesocial.gov.ec/siise/siise.htm</a>
SINEC	National System of Educational Statistics: <a href="http://www.mec.gov.ec/n2/boletines/sinec.htm">http://www.mec.gov.ec/n2/boletines/sinec.htm</a>
UINPI	Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples <a href="http://uinpi.nativeweb.org/">http://uinpi.nativeweb.org/</a>
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme: <a href="http://www.undp.org">http://www.undp.org</a>
UNE	National Union of Educators: <a href="http://www.une.org.ec/">http://www.une.org.ec/</a>
UNP	National Union of Journalists
WB	World Bank: <a href="http://www.worldbank.org">http://www.worldbank.org</a>

## ABBREVIATIONS

ECV	Survey of Living Conditions
EDJA	Youth and Adult Education
EIB	Bilingual Intercultural Education
ENRP	National Strategy for Poverty Reduction
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

**ECUADOR: General data<sup>2</sup>**

- Population: 13 million, 61% living in urban centres, mestizo, indigenous and black population.
- Geographical regions: Sierra (with Quito, the capital, and accounting for the greater part of the indigenous population), Costa (with Guayaquil, the second and most populous city), Oriente or Amazon Region, and the Galapagos Archipelago.
- Human Development Index (HDI): *medium*, occupying the 97<sup>th</sup> position in the world: life expectancy at birth 70 years, literacy rate 91% (population aged 15 years and over), and a 72% combined enrolment rate (primary, secondary and tertiary) (UNDP, Human Development Report 2003).
- Debt: a highly indebted country (for March 2005 Ecuador's public external debt was US\$ 10,860.5 million, equivalent to a third of GDP); 40% of the national budget (9% of GDP) being set aside for the payment of external debt, while 17% is earmarked for the social area and 10% of that goes to education and culture (ILDIS 2003).
- Economy: The currency was aligned with the US dollar in 2000. Since then, Ecuador has been one of the most expensive countries in the region. The two main sources of income are now oil and family remittances from migrants. Poverty has grown in the last 10 years (from 3 to 7 of every 10 Ecuadorians). Between 2000 and 2003 there were 2 million emigrants. Child labour has also increased.
- Politics: High political instability and a high degree of social mobilization in recent years.<sup>3</sup>
- Corruption: Ecuador is one of the countries with the highest perceived rate of corruption.<sup>4</sup>
- Budgetary transparency: Ecuador is the country with the worst budgetary transparency rating in the continent.<sup>5</sup>

**Some indicators of the overall education problem**

- Average length of schooling: 6.7 years in 1990 and 7.5 years in 2000.
- Adult illiteracy rate (15 years and above): between 8% and 11%
- Combined gross primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment: 72%
- Enrolment rates: 41% in pre-primary education, 90% in primary, 51% in secondary and 15% in higher (1999).
- 64% of the population has complete primary education, and 29% complete secondary (1999).
- 9 out of 10 children under 6 years old have no access to preschool education and/or day care.

<sup>2</sup> The information included here is based on various sources, including my personal experience as an educationist and researcher on education, adviser to several ministries, Pedagogical Director of the "Monsignor Leonidas Proaño" National Literacy Campaign (1988-1990), and Minister of Education (2003).

<sup>3</sup> In the past decade there have been six Presidents of the Republic; three did not complete their term since they were removed from office amidst major popular unrest and went into exile. Four of them face charges of corruption and misuse of public funds. Political instability goes hand in hand with institutional weakness and instability, lack of credibility in the State, and discontinuity of policies. In education, Ecuador has had an unenviable average of one minister a year over the last 20 years.

The last ousted president, Lucio Gutiérrez, won the elections in late 2002 amid great expectations and pledges, and in alliance with the indigenous movement (*Pachakutik*), which withdrew from the government six months later, declaring Gutiérrez a traitor. On 20 April 2005, at the midpoint of his term, Gutiérrez was removed from office by the National Congress following mass popular protest, fled the country and sought asylum in Brazil. The Vice-President, Alfredo Palacio, assumed the presidency for the remaining two years of the term (2005-2007).

<sup>4</sup> See: PROBIDAD <http://probidad.org/regional/>

<sup>5</sup> See Latin American Index of Budgetary Transparency 2003: <http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes/BudTrans/LA03.htm>

See also Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2004: [www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/cpi\\_2004.en.html](http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/cpi_2004.en.html)

- 1 out of 10 children repeats first grade.
- 1 out of 3 children fails to complete primary education.
- 9 out of 10 children from the rural sector do not go on to secondary education.
- Learning outcomes (Spanish and mathematics) are low, as shown by the Aprendo tests: pupils of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> year scored much lower than the minimum (13 out of 20 marks) in the Language and Mathematics tests; test results worsened between 1996 and 2000.
- In the “bilingual intercultural” schools, 40% of the teachers are monolingual.
- Barely 6.1% of boys and girls with special education needs receive specialized assistance.
- Problems of infrastructure and basic service in the public system: 2 out of 10 schools have neither electricity nor clean water, 3 out of 10 schools lack plumbing, and 4 out of 10 have neither telephone nor fax. The situation is worse in rural areas: 5 out of 10 single-teacher schools lack electricity, and 9 out of 10 are without telephone access or other means of communication.
- Ecuador has one of the lowest levels of connectivity in the region—less than 5% of homes with computer and Internet access—and great inequality both between urban and rural areas and between provinces, in terms of availability of telecommunication infrastructure (UNDP 2003).
- Nearly half of Ecuador’s teachers live in homes listed as poor or vulnerable (ECLAC). The average monthly pay of teachers in 2002 was US\$ 350, in a country with a dollarized economy and one of the most expensive in Latin America.
- Fall in public spending on education between 1980 (30% of the State budget) and 2002 (12%).
- It is estimated that in the last 15 years students in the public system have lost on average one month of classes per year, owing to recurrent strikes by the teachers’ union (UNE).
- Public education is subsidized by the poor. In 2001 the monthly cost to parents for an urban school, excluding books, was put at US\$ 10.
- Public education is very much out of favour. The more education parents have, the likelier they are to send their children to private schools (Ponce, Bedi, Vos 2002).
- International cooperation and loans have not been well utilized; there is no evaluation, transparency, accountability or citizen control.

Sources: ECLAC, OCDE, SIISE, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, Torres 2004.

## 1. A review of illiteracy and literacy education, with definitions and measurements

The literacy history of Latin America, and specifically of Ecuador, fits into the world trends that have governed this field in its various periods and stages (Box 2), basically under the responsibility of UNESCO and, in recent years, with the growing weight of the World Bank, which has since the 1990s emerged as the main financial and advisory agency for the “developing countries”. Within that world panorama, Latin America and the Caribbean has made its own substantial contribution to literacy education both for adults and for children. Ecuador, for its part, has its own developments that are likewise contributions, both regionally and internationally.

Notions like *adult education*, *adult literacy teaching*, *fundamental education*, *functional literacy*, *lifelong education*, *continuing education*, *education for all*, *basic education* and, in recent times, *learning throughout life*, have filed past in the world panorama, generally from the countries of the North and the international agencies. These and other terms, which have been undergoing modification and evolution, have not been clearly conceptualized or differentiated among themselves, thus resulting in the familiar “terminological tangle” in the field of education and in controversy that continues to be bogged down more in terminological matters than in conceptual, ideological or pedagogical issues.

In Ecuador, the notion of *illiteracy* is linked to persons aged 15 years and over who cannot read or write, which is how illiteracy has been computed statistically worldwide. Hence the association between *literacy education* and *adults*. The very notion of *children's literacy* is alien to most and has proved very difficult to work into the mainstream of policies, although literacy teaching is the foremost task of the education system.<sup>6</sup>

The notions of *illiteracy* and *literacy* continue to lie close to the definition coined by UNESCO in the last century: "A person is illiterate who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life" (UNESCO, 1958). The notion of *functional illiteracy* or *functional literacy* continues to associate the "functional" side with work, production and income generation, which is how it was disseminated during the Experimental World Literacy Programme coordinated by UNESCO in the 1960s, Ecuador being one of the five countries participating at world level. Only a small group of regional specialists understood *functional* as linked to the degree of handling and use of reading and writing. "A person is *functionally illiterate* who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development" (UNESCO, 1978).<sup>7</sup> The incorporation (or otherwise) of *calculation* in the concept of literacy also continues to be debated by specialists; most people assume calculation to be part of literacy education, although in fact the two subjects constitute different learning languages and processes.

Likewise, the old manner of defining illiteracy persists on the basis of the individual's self-assessment in censuses and surveys, the unreliability of the information so obtained being common knowledge. In fact, as in many countries, there are big differences between the various estimations of illiteracy, depending on the sources consulted. No tools have been developed for assessing levels of illiteracy. Likewise, the literacy education experiments (programmes, campaigns, projects) that have concluded with an assessment of the learning outcomes are the exceptions. Generally speaking, anyone completing the programme, or even enrolling in it, is counted a literacy graduate. This practice is fairly generalized in the region.

For the education system, 1995 saw the introduction of the National System of Measurement of Academic Achievement (APRENDO tests) for assessing performance at school in *basic education*, which in Ecuador has since 1996 included 10 years of schooling, starting with a pre-school year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This happens in UNESCO itself: the base document of the present United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) states that "literacy is an ageless concept" and a learning process that goes on throughout life, but the Decade once more focuses on adult education.

<sup>7</sup> The study on functional illiteracy conducted by UNESCO-OREALC in seven countries of the region (Ecuador was not included) showed levels of functional illiteracy to be high among the young and adult population. It concluded that at least six or seven years of schooling were needed to be able to handle reading and writing functionally, and twelve for a full command; and it showed that schooling itself was no guarantee of such proficiency since functional literacy implies using reading and writing in various contexts (family, work, social, etc.) (Infante 2000). See also IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey): <http://www.oecd.org/publications/e-books/8100051e.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The Aprendo tests were discontinued in 2000, in part because of pressures from the teachers' union, which in Ecuador is highly corporatist and linked to a political party – the MPD.

## International and regional trends concerning adult literacy education

**1945-1964**

- In keeping with the state of knowledge in the field as it was at the time, the initial definitions of UNESCO were bound up with an instrumental vision of literacy, understood as instruction, and its teaching as a technical matter reduced to a problem of coding and decoding.
- In 1946 UNESCO adopted the term *fundamental education* with broader meaning. The concept of *literacy* as an end in itself was discarded and it came to be seen as a development tool. Literacy education included only reading and writing (not calculation). A distinction was drawn between *basic literacy* and *functional literacy*, both of which concepts were subsequently to evolve, the latter being understood as the effective ability to read and write.
- The notion was introduced of *functional literacy*, linked to and measured in terms of years of schooling, four years being proposed as a minimum standard for functional literacy.
- In 1961, two years after the victory of the revolution, Cuba carried out the National Literacy Campaign, a mass-scale campaign involving young students and setting a precedent for future campaigns in the region (Granada 1979, Nicaragua 1980, Ecuador 1989) and the rest of the world.

**1964-1974**

- The year 1964 saw the launching of the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP), which adopted the *functional literacy* approach agreed on at the “World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy” (Tehran, 1965). The “functional” side of literacy became work-oriented. Each literacy programme had to be linked to a project, generally of an economic nature, the assumption being that the problem of motivation for literacy would also be resolved.
- In the 1960s, with the advance of progressive ideas and liberation processes in the world, literacy education was seen as a choice field for conscientization, participation and social change. Paulo Freire was a key figure in that renewal. His criticism of “banking education” and his proposed “liberating education” struck a chord worldwide, promoting a new ideological framework for adult literacy education and for development of the Popular Education movement in the region.

**1975-1990**

- In 1975 a full review was carried out in Persepolis of the 10 EWLP years, with recognition of the programme’s failure. The Declaration of Persepolis emphasized the political, cultural and social aspects of literacy. Narrow economic functionalism was discarded and there was talk of literacy for human liberation and “critical consciousness” for the sake of “acting upon the world, of transforming it” and for “an authentic human development”, the need being recognized for far-reaching political, social and economic changes.
- The concept of *lifelong education*, publicized in the early 1970s on the basis of the Faure Report, “Learning to Be” (1973), was proposed as an integrating concept taking in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Literacy education was seen as part of a process of all-round human training.
- In the regional context, 1981 saw the launch of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (MPFE), coordinated by UNESCO, with three targets for 2000: 1. Enrol all children of school age in general education for at least eight to ten years; 2. Eradicate illiteracy and extend educational services for adults, and 3. Improve the quality and efficiency of education systems. None of the three targets had been achieved by 2000.

## 1990-2005

- "International Literacy Year" (ILY), proclaimed by the United Nations for 1990, set the target of reducing adult illiteracy to 15% by 2000. The target was not achieved. In the context of ILY, literacy was conceived as an essential life skill and the prime tool for learning with a view to development and personal and community self-reliance.
- The same year 1990 saw the holding of the World Conference on Education for All, which adopted an "expanded vision of basic education" including children, young people and adults. One of the six targets for 2000 was to halve adult illiteracy. The decade showed advances in some fields, especially primary education, but the six targets were not achieved. They were consequently ratified at the World Education Forum (2000) and the deadline was put back to 2015.
- In the regional context, during the 1990s adult education was renamed Youth and Adult Education (EDJA). The concept of *functional literacy* acquired visibility and UNESCO's Regional Office conducted a regional study on the topic (Infante 2000). National systems began to emerge for assessing educational performance, especially in the areas of language and mathematics, showing up the low standards of reading and writing in schools.
- In 2000 the Millennium Declaration was adopted (being promoted by the United Nations, the World Bank (WB), IMF and OECD), which includes 8 Goals, 18 Targets and 48 Indicators for 2015. Two of those targets refer to education: completion of primary schooling, and gender parity. Adult literacy is missing.
- During the 1990s, the World Bank discouraged governments from investing in adult literacy. The arguments about the failure of literacy education and the greater returns on primary education were later acknowledged by the WB to have been mistaken. In any case, the 1990s were a lost decade for adult education in most countries, with a shifting of responsibility from the State and an ever greater onus on NGOs.
- In the 1990s there was a notable expansion of the modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which opened up new necessities and possibilities for the world of reading and writing. There arose and extended from the North the concept of "lifelong learning", adopted as a new paradigm for education systems. In this context, literacy has become an ever more demanding and complex learning process.
- In February 2003 the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) was launched, coordinated at world level by UNESCO, proposing a "renewed vision of literacy" including children, young people and adults, both within and outside the education system, and throughout life.

Sources: A. Lind and A. Johnston 1990; Torres 2004; Messina 1993; Rivero 1994, 1999

## 2. Literacy provision before and after 1990: advances, instances of stagnation, backsliding

In the second half of the twentieth century education took a big quantitative leap forward throughout the region, and specifically in Ecuador. The expansion of educational coverage (infrastructure) has been maintained as the first priority, achieving substantial increases in net primary, secondary and higher enrolment rates. (Table 1.)

**Table 1. Net enrolment rate by level of education for different years**

Year	Primary enrolment	Secondary enrolment	Higher enrolment
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1982	68.6	29.5	7.4
1990	88.9	43.1	10.9
2001	90.1	44.6	11.9

Source: J. Ponce 2004 based on SIISE, INEC, censuses of population and housing.

While in 1950 the average number of years of schooling of the Ecuadorian population (aged 24 years and over) was 2.3, by 2001 it had risen to 7.3. Likewise, in the 1950s it was estimated that almost half (44%) of the population aged 15 years and over was illiterate, but by the start of this century the proportion had fallen to an estimated 9%. (Table 2.)

**Table 2. Percentage of illiterates (population of 15 years and over)  
Average length of schooling (population of 24 years and over)**

Year	Illiteracy	Schooling
1950	44.2	2.3
1962	32.5	2.9
1974	25.8	3.6
1982	16.2	5.1
1990	11.7	6.7
2001	9.0	7.3

Source: J. Ponce 2004 based on SIISE, INEC, censuses of population and housing.

This percentage of illiteracy is below the Latin American average and that of the Andean subregion. Together with Jamaica, Peru, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Paraguay and Surinam, Ecuador is situated as a country with an average illiteracy rate, at between 7% and 15%. Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Brazil have high illiteracy rates, between 16% and 53%. Meanwhile, eight countries of the region - Argentina, the Bahamas, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay – have low illiteracy rates, at under 5%. (PRIE 2002.)

These advances, however, have not been consistent over time. The greatest expansion in coverage and the highest budgets for education came in the 1970s and 1980s, while the 1990s – the decade of consultancy and of the major international loans and projects, of Education for All and a host of national and international commitments – were a lost decade and even one of regression for education. Social affairs and specifically education received a smaller slice of public spending, and on the recommendation of the World Bank plans were introduced for the shared financing of education (State/ families), which was a ditching of the principle of free public education. The Ministry of Education was fragmented and weakened with the creation of ad hoc units for “international (loan-financed) projects” (WB and IDB), educational policies were split up into countless projects, school enrolment came to a standstill, the quality of education further deteriorated rather than improving (as shown in particular by the Aprendo tests), and the education of young people and adults entered into a long lethargy from which it has still not recovered. Many of the figures in Table 1 reflect the quantitative and qualitative crisis affecting education in Ecuador.

### **Groups and sectors discriminated against: rural areas, indigenous peoples and Negroes**

Education itself is the main victim of discrimination in the country. In fact, social spending in Ecuador is one of the lowest in the region: in the 1990s it represented between 4% and 5% of

GDP (US\$ 55 per capita), while Latin America spent an average of 12% of GDP (US\$ 550 per capita), (Vos et al., 2003). Real social spending per capita has been falling since the 1980s, and the present levels are below those of the 1970s. The same also applies specifically to spending on education, which is lower than in most countries of the region and furthermore diminished in the 1980s and 1990s. The slight rise since 2001 is basically absorbed in higher pay for teachers (Vos and Ponce, 2004).

The above advances and averages mask serious problems of quality, efficiency and discrimination in educational provision, to the detriment of public education, of the poor in general and, additionally, of the rural areas, Indian and black peoples, and the girls and women of these groups. This is evidenced in several quantitative and qualitative indicators, inter alia (Ponce, 2004):

- The expansion of educational provision was not equal for all, with the rural areas, indigenous inhabitants and blacks being left behind, although the gender gap was closed (Table 3).
- The average length of schooling of the population nationally is 7.3 years, but in the rural areas it is 4.9 years, working out at 3.3 years for indigenous inhabitants and 5.9 years for blacks.
- Educational achievement in Language and Mathematics is low throughout the system, according to the APRENDO tests. A study breaking down the results by population group concluded that the mestizos – Spanish-speaking – achieve the best results and the blacks (Afro-Ecuadorians) the worst, followed by the Kichwa and the Shuar; in rural areas the results are worse than in the towns and cities, the bilingual indigenous schools fare worse than those in which Spanish is the medium of instruction, and girls get better marks than boys in both cases. (Table 4)
- The national illiteracy rate averages 9%, but among the indigenous inhabitants it is 28%, which is to say that illiteracy continues to affect nearly a third of the indigenous population. For the black population, too, the schooling and illiteracy statistics are below par but the distance is not as great as in the case of the indigenous inhabitants. (Table 5).
- The budget allocated for indigenous education (Bilingual Intercultural Education-EIB) per pupil is lower than for Spanish-speaking education, with a tendency for the gap to widen. Ecuador invests in the indigenous inhabitants 10% less in primary education and 40% less in secondary education, compared with what goes to the mestizo population. (Table 6)
- The internal efficiency of indigenous education, however, is better than that of Spanish-speaking education, with lower repeating and dropout because, among other reasons, the EIB system itself is designed to minimize them (being based on a system of credits). As we know, a period of four years of good-quality schooling is regarded as the requisite minimum for a sustainable level of literacy permitting the use of reading and writing to continue learning (Table 7).
- Working income increases by an average of 11% for each year of schooling (up to 31 years of experience, then decreases) but by only 9% in the case of indigenous inhabitants, who receive on average 30% less income than the non-indigenous. This is obviously a disincentive for education, which in turn feeds the vicious circle of educational and social exclusion.

**Table 3. Net enrolment by level, gender, area and ethnic group**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Primary enrolment</b>	<b>Secondary enrolment</b>	<b>Higher enrolment</b>
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<b>Male</b>	89.9	43.9	11.1
<b>Female</b>	90.4	45.4	12.6
<b>AREA</b>			
<b>Rural</b>	86.7	28.8	4.3
<b>Urban</b>	92.7	55.7	16.2
<b>ETHNIC GROUP</b>			
<b>Indigenous</b>	86.2	22.7	2.9
<b>Afros</b>	86.2	36.9	6.5
<b>Others</b>	90.7	47.1	13.2
<b>COUNTRY</b>	90.1	44.6	11.9

Source: J. Ponce 2004 based on SIISE, INEC, census of population and housing. 2001.

**Table 4. Results of achievement assessment tests (marked out of 20)  
Pupils in 5<sup>th</sup> year of basic education**

<b>Population</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>
Kichwa	6.4	3.45
Shuar	6.47	1.93
Afro-Ecuadorian	5	0
Mestizo	9.52	8.16
<b>Gender</b>		
Boys	7.23	4.45
Girls	7.46	5.09
<b>Area</b>		
Urban	9.35	8.35
Rural	6.53	3.29
<b>Type of school</b>		
Bilingual	6.07	2.81
Spanish-speaking	7.78	5.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.34</b>	<b>4.75</b>

Source: CEPLAES 2000, cited in Ponce 2004.

**Table 5. Percentage of illiterates (population of 15 years and over)  
Average length of schooling (population of 24 years and over), by gender, area and ethnic group**

	<b>Illiteracy</b>	<b>Schooling</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>(Percentage)</b>	<b>(Years)</b>
Male	7.7	7.5
Female	10.3	7.1
<b>Area</b>		
Rural	15.5	4.9
Urban	5.3	8.7
<b>Ethnic group</b>		
Indigenous	28.2	3.3
Afros	10.3	6.3
Others	7.6	7.6
<b>Country</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>7.3</b>

Source: J. Ponce 2004 based on SIISE, INEC, census of population and housing. 2001.

**Table 6. Education budget in US dollars per pupil for primary and secondary age population, 2004.**  
**Spanish-speaking v. Indigenous education**

	<b>Spanish-speaking education</b>	<b>Indigenous education</b>
Primary education	148	133
Secondary education	176	108
Budgetary execution – basic education	216	185

Compiled: R.M. Torres on basis of J. Ponce 2004

**Table 7. Internal efficiency indicators (percentages)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Spanish-speaking</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>
Promotion rate (average 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	92.2%	91.9%	98.0%
Repetition rate (average 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	2.4%	2.4%	0.1%
Dropout rate (average 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	5.5%	5.7%	1.9%
Survival rate (to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	78.0%	77.8%	83.2%
Efficiency coefficient (to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	86.6%	86.0%	102.1%
Average years to complete primary cycle	6.8	6.8	5.9

Source: J. Ponce based on SINEC, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years

What are called the “hidden costs” of education have become open and ever higher, including enrolment, uniforms, classroom supplies, transport and various forms of “voluntary” contribution. The distance between home and school has no effect on the enrolment of indigenous pupils, who are used to walking long distances (Ponce, 2004). The opportunity cost represented by the time devoted to school and homework is in many cases incompatible with child labour (both domestic and for money) crucial to the family’s survival. The poor quality of education, often starting with mistreatment and – in the case of indigenous pupils - the use of a language not understood, often ends up convincing parents that the sacrifice involved, for parents and children alike, is not worth it.

### **3. Long-term commitments and the linkage of literacy education to other policies**

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region covered by many international (world, hemispheric, regional and subregional) initiatives and plans concerned with education, acting in an uncoordinated manner and pursuing goals and targets that are superposed and often even contradictory. It has already frequently been said of “international cooperation” that it is more of a problem than a solution for the developing countries. Latin America is a clear example of this (Torres, 2001a; Torres 2005).

Like the other countries of the region, Ecuador has subscribed to all these international initiatives and plans. Here are the main ones as of the 1980s (see Table 2 for particulars of goals and targets):

1. Major Project in the Field of Education – MPFE (1981-2000).
2. Education for All – EFA (1990-2000-2015).
3. Hemispheric Action Plan in Education – PAHE (1994-2010).
4. Millennium Development Goals - MDGs (2000-2015).

5. Ibero-American Action Plan for Children and Adolescents (2001-2010).
6. Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean - PRELAC (2002-2017).

Box 3

<b>LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN            PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES AND PLANS FOR EDUCATION            (1981-2017)</b> <b>Goals and targets</b>						
<b>LEVEL/ AREA</b>	<b>1981-2000 MPFE Major Project in the Field of Education</b>	<b>1990-2015 EFA Education for All</b>	<b>1994-2010 PAHE Summits of the Americas</b>	<b>2000-2015 MDGs Millennium Developmen t Goals</b>	<b>2001-2015 PAII Ibero-American Action Plan for Children (Ibero-American Summits)</b>	<b>2002-2017 PRELAC Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean</b>
<b>INITIAL EDUCATION</b>		Expansion			- Integral development in early childhood - Extend coverage of services for children of 0-3 years - Universal access to pre-school education (3-6 years)	Gradual universalization
<b>PRIMARY/ BASIC EDUCATION</b>	8 years	Indefinite (within and out of school)	6 years	4 years	Universal access and continuation in quality and free primary or basic education	Universal access to and completion of basic education
<b>SECONDARY EDUCATION</b>			Access to quality secondary education	Gender parity	Universal access to quality secondary education	Gradual universalization, integrating general, technical and vocational education
<b>EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS</b>	Eradication of illiteracy	Halving of illiteracy	Learning opportunities throughout life			Literacy, basic education and learning throughout life.
<b>HIGHER EDUCATION</b>						New focus of higher education, integrating technical education
<b>SPECIAL EDUCATION</b>					Inclusion of children and adolescents with special needs in inclusive care services	

Compiled: R.M. Torres

As can be seen in this survey of the various international plans for education, adult literacy has been losing ground over the past two decades: we have gone from “eradicating” to “reducing” illiteracy and even the disappearance of this goal in the Millennium Development Goals, which are those on the world development agenda at present. Universal literacy was one of the three goals set for 2000 by the Major Project in the Field of Education (MPFE), with much momentum from UNESCO’s Regional Office at the time. Since 1990, however, Education for All (EFA) has in practice become Primary Education for All, the other educational goals being jettisoned.

All this is particularly marked in Ecuador’s case. In common with the other countries, Ecuador drew up a national assessment report on the Education for All decade (1990-2000); however, no EFA Plan for the decade was prepared. The technical team that did the assessment thus worked without a baseline and without clear goals and targets set in 1990. The new EFA plan based on the Dakar Forum (2000) was drawn up (2002) largely behind closed doors in the Ministry of Education, at the eleventh hour, in order to meet international deadlines and requirements.<sup>9</sup> In practice, however, the MEC policies and activities are governed by express recommendations and conditions of the World Bank and IDB, which in turn are tied to the IMF norms and conditions imposed on the economic and social policies of each country. Since 1990 these recommendations have in education been giving priority to school education, and primary education for children specifically, so discouraging investment in adult literacy education (Torres 2004c).

The reduction of illiteracy (from 10.3% to 8%) is provided for in the National Poverty Reduction Strategy of the present Government (2003-2007). (Table 8.) Nevertheless, as we shall see, the transfer of resources planned for this area in the budget pro formas for 2003 and 2004 did not come about. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Strategy is a document and one drawn up by the Ministry of Economy and Finance with the assistance of international IMF, WB and IDB officials, with scant information and social transparency, and even without any participation of and consultation with the Social Front ministries.

**Table 8. Ecuador: National Poverty Reduction Strategy  
Social targets 2003-2007**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Year 2003</b>	<b>Year 2007</b>	<b>Change (%)</b>
Real social spending	% GDP	7.7	12.5	63%
Poverty	% population	51.0	38.0	-26%
Extreme poverty	% population	25.5	10.3	-59%
Illiteracy	%	10.3	8.0	-23%
Pop. without access to health	%	23.2	17.0	-26%
Schooling	years	8.0	9.4	18%
Infant mortality rate	per 1000 inhab.	11.5	8.8	-24%
General mortality rate	per 1000 inhab.	4.3	3.6	-16%
Mains water supply	%	41.9	49.5	18%
Sewerage	%	46.1	54.4	18%
Overcrowding	%	29.6	24.9	-16%

<sup>9</sup> This happens in many other countries, thereby generating the vicious circle of having to hire external consultants to prepare the plans and reports of the great many international initiatives and projects.

#### 4. Management and financing of literacy education

Ever since the Ecuadorian State officially took charge of adult literacy education (1963), the latter service has traditionally been located in the Ministry of Education (MEC) under the responsibility of a board itself marginalized within the Ministry and today called DINEPP, with scant resources and varying names for the activity – *non-formal education, out-of-school education, compensatory education, ongoing popular education* – indicative of, among other things, the instability and lack of identity of the field. The Ministry gives those working on this a bonus at present equivalent to US\$ 90 a month (which is why they are tagged the *Bonificados*). They are generally not professional teachers and number about 10,000. The National Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Education (DINEIB), coming under the Ministry of Education, is also conducting its own literacy programmes in Kichwa [the Ecuadorian indigenous spelling for the language, Quichua] and other indigenous languages (Box 5).

Other entities concerned with education are the Ministry of Social Welfare (MBS) and INNFA (National Institute of the Child and Family), an autonomous body coordinated by the First Lady, in each case, which mainly conduct programmes for early childhood, adolescents and young people. Despite the existence of a Social Front – an entity drawing together all the ministries in this area, together with a great many governmental and non-governmental organizations responsible for coordination and surveillance in childhood and education issues – efforts are still piecemeal and uncoordinated between all these institutions, each with its own policies, programmes and plans.

The involvement of civil society in adult literacy tasks is a longstanding tradition in Ecuador. In fact, the first countrywide initiative, lasting nearly two decades (1944-1961) was conducted by two civil associations: the National Union of Journalists (UNP) and the Literacy League of Ecuador (LAE). Since then, the State has always called on civil society for the successive literacy campaigns and programmes, relying in particular on young students, teachers, vocational schools and volunteers in each neighbourhood and community. Likewise, many social movements and grass-roots organizations run their own literacy programmes, as do some NGOs, public and private schools, and universities. In addition to civil society, the Church has always played a preponderant part in literacy education; and in recent times private business has also stepped in, particularly newspapers and publishers. It is noteworthy at the same time that none of the three national consultations on the theme of education - Consulta Nacional Siglo XXI (1991, 1996 and 2004) – has specifically addressed the theme of literacy education.

Within the already low education budget (the Constitution requires 30% of the budget to go to education), literacy and basic education for young people and adults, together with bilingual intercultural education, tend to fare worst. It also needs remembering that what is planned annually in the budget pro forma, and even what is officially earmarked, does not necessarily materialize. For example, the budget (sought in 2003 at the start of the present government term) for the National Minga (Task Force) for an Ecuador that Reads and Writes was never actually allocated, although appearing in the education budget for 2004 (Table 9). The break-up

of the ruling alliance and lack of continuity in the Ministry of Education caused that Minga to be abandoned and replaced by an announced “Minga of Hope”, under an agreement with UNE, the teachers’ union. Political, economic and union pressures (in this case the possibility of a subsidy for teachers other than via a pay increase) result in education policy and budgets that depart from any rational planning and calculation.

**Table 9. Education Budget 2004**

<b>PROGRAMME</b>	<b>Codified budget 12-2003</b>	<b>Initial budget 2004</b>	<b>% Nominal growth</b>	<b>% Share of total</b>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>31,209,485.00</b>	<b>47,999,600.00</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>12%</b>
Bilingual Intercultural Education	200,000.00	200,000.00	0%	0.05%
Basic Education	nd	4,494,000.00	nd	1.09%
Secondary Education	404,560.00	401,000.00	-1%	0.10%
MEC decentralization and deconcentration	350,000.00	350,000.00	0%	0.08%
National Minga for an Ecuador that Reads and Writes	500,000.00	2,100,000.00	320%	0.51%
School Feeding Programme –PAE	17,041,555.00	30,654,600.00	80%	7.43%
Autonomous Rural School Networks	11,118,370.00	10,000,000.00	-10%	2.42%

Source: Fiscal Policy Observatory 2004

As in the other countries of the region, the bulk of funding for public education is the responsibility of the State, with “international cooperation” contributing less than 5% in this respect. The contribution of families themselves (euphemistically termed “self-management”) is ever more substantial and essential. Table 10 gives an overview of the various financing sources for the education sector at present and of the relative importance of each.

**Table 10. General State Pro Forma 2005 – Consolidated by sector (in US\$)**

<b>Ministry of Education and Culture</b>				
<b>Financing sources in US\$</b>				
	<b>Public</b>	<b>Self-management</b>	<b>External credits</b>	<b>Internal credits</b>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	889,953,266.38	181,561,406.45	8,634,000.00	24,612.91

Source: MEF, Pro forma General del Estado 2005, in: Observatorio de la Política Fiscal  
<http://www.observatoriofiscal.org/pdf/consolidadoporsectores.pdf>

It is difficult to gauge the contribution of “international cooperation” in general and in this field in particular, for a number of reasons: (a) the term “aid” or “cooperation” covers both loans and donations, ambiguity often being maintained as to the nature of such “aid”; (b) information on it (broken down by components) either does not exist or is not readily accessible, and generally remains split up in each agency; (c) there is not at the moment any suitable and stable official

body in the country responsible for international cooperation, although there is an Observatory of Development Cooperation in Ecuador (OCDE) operating from civil society;<sup>10</sup> (d) there is a growing tendency to contact and directly finance local governments, particularly municipal ones, under decentralization processes encouraged by the cooperation agencies themselves; (e) information on international funds received by NGOs and other civil society organizations is not systematically recorded and is often not to found on institutional websites. Ecuador, it should be remembered, is the country with the lowest budget transparency index in the continent, despite the existence of a Law on Transparency and Access to Information.

In any case, as already stated, the major international World Bank and IDB loans for education, initiated in the 1990s, have focused on projects for improving primary education (EB/PRODEC and Rural School Networks, respectively) through the setting up of executing units attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture. A fresh loan of US\$ 210 million (with the Andean Development Corporation, the World Bank and IDB) was negotiated and announced (January 2005) by the last Minister of Education for what is called the Bicentennial Plan for Education, focusing on basic education, namely the universal provision of 10 years of schooling.

At present, perhaps the most visible and sustained international cooperation project in the field of adult literacy is the Education and Training Project for Improvement of the Quality of Life of Rural Women in Ecuador (PROCALMUC), which has been operating in six of the country's provinces since 1993 under an agreement between UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC).<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, it remains an isolated project that has not succeeded in fitting in and, still less, having any impact on the National Office for Ongoing Popular Education (DINEPP) and the Ministry's activities as a whole in this field.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, Cuba has likewise been extending its collaboration in the field of literacy education, through the Cuban method "Yo Sí Puedo" (Yes I Can), first used in Venezuela and then taken to other countries of the region, including Ecuador. The method combines letters and numbers, is based on the development of four fundamental skills (listening, reading, observing and writing), uses primers and 65 video-recorded lessons broadcast to pupils by television. The teaching and learning process is programmed to last three months and one week. Each lesson lasts 60 minutes: 15 are spent on motivation and 30 on the television lesson, and for the rest of the time the facilitator clears up doubts and interacts with the group.<sup>12</sup>

## **5. A brief outline of literacy education experience, with successes and failures**

<sup>10</sup> The Ecuadorian Institute of International Cooperation (INECI), established in 2000 and attached to the Ministry of International Relations, has never functioned properly and is being restructured (see OCDE 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See a description of the project in :

[www.unesco.cl/medios/biblioteca/documentos/programa\\_procalmuc\\_ecuador.pdf?menu=/esp/atematica/alfayeduja/docdig/](http://www.unesco.cl/medios/biblioteca/documentos/programa_procalmuc_ecuador.pdf?menu=/esp/atematica/alfayeduja/docdig/)

<sup>12</sup> On the "Yo Sí Puedo" method see: [www.iplac.rimed.cu](http://www.iplac.rimed.cu)

On the Cotacachi experiment see: [www.cotacachi.gov.ec](http://www.cotacachi.gov.ec)

On the use of the method (Robinson Mission) in Venezuela see: [www.misionrobinson.gov.ve](http://www.misionrobinson.gov.ve)

An audio with the statement by the mayor, Auki Tituaña is available on the website of the World Literacy Congress held in Havana from 31 January to 4 February 2005:

[www.frenteinternacional.yosipuedo.com.ar/congreso-mundial/congreso-mundia.cubal.htm](http://www.frenteinternacional.yosipuedo.com.ar/congreso-mundial/congreso-mundia.cubal.htm)

Ecuador has more than six decades of sustained history of adult literacy campaigns, programmes and projects, both governmental and non-governmental, of national, provincial, municipal or local scope, with a variety of methods and degrees of success. Decentralization has advanced in recent years and this has involved the advent of local governments – especially municipal ones – as new government actors at intermediate and local level. Illiteracy nevertheless continues to be a serious problem in the country, given the weaknesses of both flanks: the education system (not just the public but much of the private system, of low quality), and the non-formal or “second chance” programmes for young people and adults.

We now outline the main mass literacy actions carried out in Ecuador, both governmental and non-governmental, most of them innovatory with respect to their own terms and times, and all fortunately documented.<sup>13</sup>

- UNP-LAE campaign (1944-1961). The first literacy programme got under way in 1944 (with an estimated 52% illiteracy rate in the country) on the initiative and under the leadership of two non-governmental institutions: the National Union of Journalists (UNP) and the Litoral Literacy Education League (LAE), the former based in Sierra and the latter in Costa. The campaign was supported by the State and lasted 17 years, from 1944 to 1961. The instructors were teachers and students. The newspapers of the time published daily the pages of the primer used (Laubach). According to official figures, 169,191 persons were taught to read and write.
- Mass National Adult Literacy and Education Plan (1963-1977). In 1963 the State took over responsibility for literacy education, establishing a Department of Adult Education within the Ministry of Education. A start was then made on the Mass National Adult Literacy and Education Plan, which lasted 14 years. Teachers were relied on as the chief resource for literacy education, for which they received additional remuneration. The Plan was backed by a decree of law providing that all professionals and all pupils in the final year of secondary education had to teach at least three persons a year to read and write, or be fined. The aim was to reduce illiteracy to 10% or 15% and to leave in place a programme of continuing education for adults.
- Experimental Pilot Project in Functional Literacy (1967-1972). Ecuador was one of the five countries (with Algeria, Mali, Nigeria and Tanzania) in which the project was initially implemented, seeking to link literacy education and work. The project was coordinated by UNESCO, UNDP and the Ecuadorian Government. The illiteracy rate for the country was then put at 32%. In the five years 17,772 persons received instruction and 9,988 attended a post-literacy cycle. The project was executed in three areas of the country: two in Sierra (Pesillo and Cuenca) and one in Costa (Milagro). In Pesillo carpentry and mechanics workshops to do with agricultural machinery were set up; in Milagro the project was to have operated around a large complex of rice cooperatives but finally was not organized; in

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<sup>13</sup> Among the Working Documents (training material) we drew up for the “Monsignor Leonidas Proaño” National Literacy Campaign, we included a specific series on History of Literacy Education in Ecuador, based on interviews with ministers, directors or technical officials involved in the experiments in each case. The summaries included here are based on those Working Documents.

Cuenca the plan was to link up the project with an industrial park but, there again, it failed to materialize, as a result of which the original project suffered delays and had to be redirected while under way. According to those in charge of the project, the experiment left trained personnel in the country but did not produce the results and impact hoped for in the areas concerned, owing basically to failures on the part of the Ecuadorian Government itself and to overambitious expectations raised by the organizers of the project at world level.<sup>14</sup>

- "Jaime Roldós Aguilera" National Literacy Programme (1980-1984). The programme was promoted by the government of Roldós-Hurtado, who restored democracy in the country after the period of military dictatorship. The welfare conception was discarded in favour of a psycho-social approach, seeing literacy as a tool of critical thinking, commitment and social action. Priority was given to the rural areas and to the population aged between 15 and 54 years. Literacy education was started in Kichwa, using various methods some of which derived from the indigenous communities themselves. According to official figures, nearly 420,000 persons were taught to read and write in the four years of the programme. The country's illiteracy rate was put at 25.4% (929,624 persons) at the start of the programme.
- Between 1984 and 1988, the Ministry of Education's National Directorate of Compensatory and Out-of-school Education (DINECNE) took charge of adult education, but did not include it in any specific programme and kept it with a low profile.
- "Monsignor Leonidas Proaño" National Literacy Campaign (1988-1989). The campaign had three phases: (a) planning and organization (8 months), (b) literacy education (4-5 months, May-October 1989) and (c) systematization and final assessment. One campaign was conducted for the Spanish-speaking population and the other for the Kichwa-speaking inhabitants, the latter with different rhythms, methods and content, and fitting in with activities under way and in the form of a programme. The theme of the Spanish-speaking campaign was human rights. The campaign mobilized nearly 300,000 learners (from 12 years upwards without any age limit) and close on 70,000 literacy educators, mostly pupils in the final two years of secondary school organized into brigades and coordinated by their teachers. The training of the literacy educators lasted eight months, with a distance-teaching mode (Library of the Literacy Educator, 32 documents distributed weekly, one a week) and a classroom mode (workshops with video backup). The learners were taught in their own communities, homes or workplaces in 25,729 Popular Literacy Circles (CAP) throughout the country. More than 200,000 persons completed the literacy course (over half of them, girls or women) and 85% attained a satisfactory level, according to the final test set. The campaign wound up with a National Meeting of Student Literacy Educators, in which the 1,000 young people present, chosen by their companions to attend the meeting, were asked to take a close look at and propose changes in the national education system.<sup>15</sup>

#### Box 4

##### **Some lessons of the "Monsignor Leonidas Proaño" National Literacy Campaign**

<sup>14</sup> See: "Monsignor Leonidas Proaño" National Literacy Campaign, Working Document No. 13, *El Proyecto Piloto Experimental de Alfabetización Funcional (1967-1972)* [The functional literacy experimental pilot project (1967-1972)], interview with Dr Augusto Benalcázar, Quito, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on this campaign, see: [www.fronesis.org/ecuador.htm](http://www.fronesis.org/ecuador.htm) where texts both in Spanish and in English can be found.

In 1989 the campaign received special recognition from the Latin American Association for Human Rights (ALDHU). In 1990 it was one of the five experiments selected by UNESCO at world level to take part in a special panel on literacy education at the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand. Among other things, this campaign shows that:

- Mass literacy campaigns with the enthusiastic participation of broad sectors of the population, in particular the young, are possible and can succeed not only in revolutionary contexts (as in Cuba, Nicaragua, China, Tanzania, and elsewhere) but also in societies following the regular channels of popularly elected governments.
- The subject of human rights is of great social validity, interest and substance, in addition to having major citizen effects not just on literacy learners and teachers but on the population, as revealed by the final assessment of the campaign.
- Acceptable results in learning to read and write are possible if emphasis is laid on pedagogical matters before ideological concerns, and if quality is put on a par with or placed higher than coverage, figures and indexes.
- Young students can become effective literacy teachers and enthusiastic organizers on the proviso of suitable and timely guidance, investment in their teacher training, and creation of the right conditions for developing their self-esteem and confidence in their teaching ability.
- The battle for public opinion and social participation (including that of the young themselves) is won by showing real processes and tangible results.
- A literacy campaign may be a highly productive mechanism suitable for building up momentum and social commitment in favour of a sustained movement of educational reform and pedagogical renewal at national level.

Source: Torres, R.M. 1990a, b, c, d, 1993.

Since the conclusion of the “Monsignor Leonidas Proaño” Campaign, there has been no major governmental effort in the country. Within the Ministry of Education, literacy teaching was maintained with a very low profile in the DINEPP and there are no reliable figures for the number of people taught to read and write in the most recent period.

In 2002-2003 a “National Minga (Task Force) for an Ecuador that Reads and Writes” was organized as a nationwide scheme for covering a whole decade of effort coinciding with the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). The “minga”, an indigenous tradition of cooperative and voluntary work for the common good, was planned as a participatory and collaborative process involving the whole of society and without any cost. However, the government of Lucio Gutiérrez cut it short and announced in its place a “Minga of Hope”, which has not so far materialized.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on the “National Minga for an Ecuador that reads and writes”, see: [www.lpp-uerj.net/olped/reformasdemocraticas/RefDemEquador/Presentaci%F3n\\_en\\_Powerpoint.pps](http://www.lpp-uerj.net/olped/reformasdemocraticas/RefDemEquador/Presentaci%F3n_en_Powerpoint.pps)

I personally drew up the proposal for that Minga in 2002 when I was adviser to the then Minister of Education, Dr Juan Cordero. I had the chance to take it further in 2003, being myself Minister of Education appointed by the

On the other hand, activities linked to civil society organizations or local governments have been maintained or initiated. Noteworthy among the former is the continued work of Fe y Alegría and IRFEYAL, that of the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE) from Chimborazo, and the education system mounted by the Shuar organization. There are likewise initiatives promoted from the universities, public and private schools, NGOs, neighbourhood and community organizations, and so on.

As of 2003, several municipalities have been adopting the Cuban “Yo Sí Puedo” method. In Ecuador, the pioneering instance of application of this method was in the municipality of Cotacachi, an area of high (Kichwa-speaking) indigenous presence under an indigenous mayor, which in April 2005 was declared the First Territory Free of Illiteracy in Ecuador; 1,700 people aged 15 and above were taught to read and write in 12 months, at a cost of US\$ 18 each, and illiteracy in the municipality was cut from 22.3% (April 2002) to 3.8%. The mayor announced the forthcoming launch of a post-literacy programme and the translation of the method into Kichwa (in this first stage use was made of the videos that had served in Venezuela). Under an agreement between ILPED and the previous government, the project will be extended to a further 12 municipalities in seven of the country’s provinces. Television and, to a lesser extent, video are common in Ecuador,<sup>17</sup> and the Cuban technicians have designed power generators for areas without electricity. An evaluation and systematization of the Cotacachi experiment – not yet available – will be essential in order to judge the validity and relevance of this method for its application/ adaptation in other indigenous communities of the country.

At governmental level, the continuity and sustainability of the activities has depended not so much on the economic as on the political aspects: political instability and the continual changes of president and education minister determine the by now familiar back-to-square-one situation regarding policies, plans and programmes.<sup>18</sup> Internationally speaking, the heavy dependence on international organizations and especially multilateral banking institutions has finally given them the say in determining economic, social and educational policy. As in many other countries, efforts and resources have in recent years put a premium on primary education, leaving aside the ample evidence of the linkages between childhood education and adult education, and between school, family and community.

## **6. Languages, gender and literacy education**

### **Gender**

All the studies and assessments regarding the situation of education in the region show that the socio-economic disparities are what have the greatest impact on educational inequality in both quantitative and qualitative terms (illiteracy, lack of access to the education system, repeating,

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Pachakutik Movement (PK). However, when the ruling alliance between PK and Sociedad Patriótica came apart, all of us PK ministers left the government and everything that had progressed with our respective measures was dismantled by the new ministers, including all the information we had put on the MEC website. See in this respect Torres 2004a and b.

<sup>17</sup> There is in fact a precedent since in 1989, in the Monsignor Proaño Campaign, we used videos for the mass training of literacy teachers throughout the country.

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 3 in this respect.

dropout, poor learning outcomes, etc.). The second adverse factor is the area of residence: urban versus rural, centre versus periphery (capital versus interior), together with differences between regions within the same country, and a manifest neglect of rural education.<sup>19</sup> The third factor, in order of importance, is ethnic and linguistic affiliation: the indigenous and Afro groups are the most neglected. Gender comes only fourth (UNESCO-OREALC 2004b). Furthermore, although age is not usually mentioned, it is in fact a very substantial factor of discrimination. Illiteracy has no priority today in international and national policies, not only because those affected are the poorest of the poor but also because they are adults.

Gender parity with respect to access, enrolment and retention in school was achieved in this region in the 1970s. The gap between boys and girls in the education system has been closing in Ecuador and many other countries, at all levels. What is more, in many countries it is now boys who are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis girls, thus giving rise to a new front of gender discrimination. Let us see (UNESCO-OREALC 2004b):

- Pre-primary: There is gender parity except in Haiti, Jamaica, the Bahamas and El Salvador, where girls predominate.
- Primary: There is gender parity except in Brazil, Guatemala and Nicaragua, where there are more boys.
- Secondary: There is gender parity, with big differences between countries: girls predominate in Venezuela, Belize, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Brazil; boys are in the majority only in Bolivia and Guatemala.
- Repeating and dropout: Boys lag behind girls at all levels, but girls are less likely to continue studying if they repeat a year.
- Learning at school: Girls do better than boys at all levels; boys get better marks than girls in mathematics, as confirmed both by national and regional assessments (LLECE 1997) and by international ones (PISA and TIMSS).
- Completion of primary education: There is still a low completion rate (30% of pupils entering school). In Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic girls come out on top, and in Bolivia and Peru boys.
- Illiteracy: Illiteracy in the region is put at 13% (41 million persons aged 15 and over). Women continue to account for a majority (55%) of illiterates.
- Gender-discriminatory attitudes in education:
  - Boys and girls are treated differently at school.
  - Female teachers have discriminatory attitudes towards girls at school and in their own homes regarding their daughters.
  - Male teachers have discriminatory attitudes against female teachers and sometimes earn more for the same work.
  - There are few male teachers at primary level and hardly any at all at pre-primary level.
  - Mothers, and not fathers, are the ones to participate in school matters and be involved in the homework of their sons and daughters.

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<sup>19</sup> In the case of Ecuador, for example, there are big differences between the country's four regions: Sierra (with Quito, the capital, and the greater part of the indigenous population), Costa (with Guayaquil, the second and most populous city), Oriente or Amazon Region, and the Galapagos Archipelago. Two facts illustrate the situation: statistically, indigenous people living in Costa are 26% less likely to enrol in school than those of Sierra; and the indigenous inhabitants of Quito enjoy higher incomes than those living in smaller cities (Ponce 2004).

- Discriminatory attitudes with respect to work and pay: Given similar levels of education and experience, women receive on average 51% less income than men (Ponce 2004). Likewise, indigenous women receive on average 38% less income than similarly qualified men.

All this information brings us to the conclusion that:

- a. Gender is not the greatest source of inequality in education.
- b. Gender inequality and discrimination operate on both sides: with girls and boys.
- c. Gender inequality goes beyond quantitative indicators of primary school access, retention and completion.
- d. Illiteracy continues to be a major field of discrimination against women and has an impact on discrimination against their children and themselves in education and in society.

The Ecuadorian case bears out these general trends and conclusions. As we have already seen, the area of residence (urban/rural) and ethnic affiliation are the two major factors of educational inequality in the country, which come on top of the degree of poverty. Discrimination against women continues to be present through behaviour patterns that cannot readily be gauged, and to affect indigenous groups in particular.

In this context, initiatives should be highlighted such as that of the “Dolores Cacuango” Training School for Women Leaders, promoted by ECUARUNARI (Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador), an important proposal setting precedents in the country and the region. It is a political training school stemming from the organizations themselves for their women leaders. The school has been operating since 1996 and has 78 leaders of the 12 provinces covered by ECUARUNARI in Sierra, who are shaping up as leaders, stakeholders and promoters of their communities, peoples and organizations. The content is organized along three main lines: Identity and Culture, Development and Self-management, and Organizational Policy.<sup>20</sup>

## **Languages**

Ecuador is a multilingual and multicultural country made up of indigenous peoples, a black population and a mestizo population.<sup>21</sup> The indigenous peoples are to be found in three of the country’s regions: Costa, Sierra and the Amazon Region, each with its own language and nationality. The nationalities are: Awa, Achuar, Chachi, Kichwa, Mestizos, Shuar, T`sáchila, Afro-Ecuadorians (blacks), Huaorani (Huaos), Siona, Secoya, Shiwiar, Cofán, Epera, and Záparos.

Spanish is the language of national communication, coexisting with 14 indigenous languages. The right to learn in one’s own language is recognized in the National Constitution (Article 27): “In the education systems in operation in the areas of predominantly indigenous population, Kichwa or the language of the respective culture shall be used as the principal medium of instruction, and Spanish as the language of intercultural relations”.

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<sup>20</sup> See in this respect: <http://www.ecuarunari.org/>

<sup>21</sup> In the Survey of Living Conditions (ECV), ethnic affiliation is based on the language criterion.

As of November 1988, the indigenous peoples and nationalities won their right to their own Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Education (DINEIB), operating autonomously within the Ministry of Education (MEC). Under the General Regulation of the Education Law, DINEIB is responsible for the “development of an appropriate curriculum for each of the systems and modalities of bilingual intercultural education, and for the design of educational modalities consonant with the needs of the population”.

Indigenous education, and specifically bilingual intercultural education (EIB), has progressed substantially in Ecuador and in the Andean subregion in general. In the Ecuadorian case, the Bilingual Intercultural Education Model (MOSEIB), officially recognized in 1993, takes in the vision of the indigenous nationalities and peoples regarding education and learning at school, in the family and in the community. MOSEIB comes as the result of the educational experience amassed in indigenous contexts in Ecuador in recent decades (Box 5), and of the legal action, social mobilization and ongoing struggle conducted in the country by the indigenous movement.

The EIB goals are: (a) to support enhancement of the intercultural character of Ecuadorian society; (b) to strengthen the cultural identity and the organization of the indigenous peoples, and (c) to contribute to the quest for better living conditions for the indigenous peoples.

The MOSEIB goes on the assumption that educational coverage for the indigenous peoples, given their special social, cultural and linguistic characteristics, requires specific policies and strategies. It envisages that the traditional school mode should be replaced by Community Educational Centres retrieving the role of the family as the entity immediately responsible for the all-round training of the individual. Those in charge of the centres should be people of scientific vocation and training. The main thrust of the educational process is “the development of the individual and of the indigenous communities on the basis of their culture, the appropriation of universal knowledge, and respect for nature”, with the promotion of such values as law, equity, loyalty, identity, self-esteem, integrity and ethics. The MOSEIB gives the community a proactive role in managing and assessing the educational process, and in cultivating and transmitting the ancestral and practical skills for survival, life, the family, work, community organization, tradition, culture and the arts. The MOSEIB proposes the oral and written development and effective use of the indigenous languages in all areas – information, communication, research, science, culture and literature – keeping Spanish as the language of intercultural communication.

Translating the MOSEIB into specific curriculum and material is a challenge that is beginning to materialize, as is the model for management, assessment, training and accountability. The DINEIB and EIB in any case continue in the shadow of “Spanish-speaking education”; their autonomy was threatened during the last (Gutiérrez) government. The State’s contribution has always been limited, forcing indigenous education into heavy reliance on external funding, which in fact gives rise to dependence in many spheres. Criticism of the conventional model of “international cooperation” was a key point among the conclusions of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Indigenous Parliament of America, held in Quito in June 2004.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://icci.nativeweb.org/cumbre2004/>

**Previous experience of indigenous education drawn upon by MOSEIB  
(Bilingual Intercultural Education Model)**

**Indigenous schools of Cayambe.** In the 1940s an experiment in indigenous education was conducted, one of whose teachers was Dolores Cacuango. With the support of Quito women and local indigenous leaders of Cayambe, Pichincha province, she organized a group of indigenous schools. The Lauritas order of nuns then extended them to the province of Imbabura. Indigenous teachers from the actual communities worked in these schools, using the mother tongue and giving a boost to culture and defence of the land. The last school closed in 1963, during the rule of the military junta.

**Summer Language Institute (ILV).** The ILV, of United States origin, began its work in 1952 and wound up in 1981. It operated in communities of three regions of the country, its main goal being evangelization and translation of the Bible into the indigenous languages. The ILV therefore conducted linguistic research and used mother tongues in education and the training of indigenous teachers. The language policy was marked by maintenance of writing based on dialects of one and the same language or imposition of the most prestigious dialect in other geographical zones.

**Andean Mission.** The Mission began its work in 1956 in Chimborazo province with funding from the International Labour Organization (ILO). Its activities concerned community development, education, health, farming assistance, craftwork training, rural industry, civil engineering, social services, and personnel training. In 1964 the military junta nationalized the Andean Mission and made it responsible for implementing the rural development plan of the National Development Plan. It was established in Sierra in areas at an altitude of over 1,500 metres. In the early 1970s the Mission was incorporated in the Ministry of Agriculture and then disappeared. Readers were prepared in the Kichwa language on subjects including mythology, social aspects and others relating to nature. The local dialects of Salasaca in Imbabura and Chimborazo were used.

**Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE).** These schools, concerned with literacy education for the Kichwa-speaking adult population, started up in 1964 on the initiative of Monsignor Leonidas Proaño, Bishop of Riobamba. Its coverage was Sierra but the work was centred in Chimborazo province and in Tabacundo, Pichincha province. The purpose of using the mother tongue was conscientization rather than its use in education. At present they only broadcast in Spanish.

**Shuar Radio Education System (SERBISH).** Since 1972 Shuar-Achuar radio schools have been operating that began with primary education and then included secondary. They now also have a Bilingual Intercultural Pedagogical Institute. They introduced the classroom mode in the provinces of the Amazon region and with sectors of migrants in the Costa region. The System was officialized in 1979 and operates under the auspices of the Salesian Mission, the Inter-provincial Federation of Shuar and Achuar Centres, and the Ministry of Education. The mother tongue is used and Spanish in materials for primary and secondary education, although the content has been centred on translating those of traditional education into Spanish. An important aspect has been the training of indigenous teachers and radio auxiliaries.

**Simiátug Indigenous Schools.** These schools operate within the indigenous organization “Runacunapac Yachana Huasi Foundation”, in the parish of Simiátug, Bolívar province. They are supported by the Simiatuccunapac Jatun Capari Institute and the Foundation’s radio station. The educational activities of the schools fit in with the work of the Institute given that the teachers study there. A text was produced for teaching children to read and write using the unified writing system for Kichwa, which came up against the difficulty of indigenous children not having Kichwa as their mother tongue.

**Cotopaxi Indigenous Schools System (SEIC).** This programme began in 1974 under the auspices of the Salesian monks of the Pastoral Group of Zumbahua and Chucchilán with coverage in various communities of Cotopaxi province. The mother tongue is used as the main medium of instruction and teachers of the communities themselves have been trained. Education-linked productive projects have also been organized. For the secondary level SEIC has the “Jatari Unancha” school, operating in a semi-classroom mode.

**Bilingual schools of the Federation of Union Communes of Ecuadorian Amazon Natives (FCUNAE).** The FCUNAE began with a few schools in 1975 before extending to some 50 communes of the Federation. Research was conducted in the field of history, Kichwa-language teaching material was produced for children, and teachers of the communities themselves were trained. The project ended for want of support from some leaders of the local organization.

**Kichwa Literacy Subprogramme.** This literacy scheme began in 1978 in the Institute of Languages and Linguistics of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE), and operated between 1979 and 1986 under the responsibility of the Indigenous Education Research Centre (IERC/ CIEI). A precedent for the programme was the Degree in Kichwa Linguistics that functioned between 1974 and 1984 in the PUCE Institute of Languages and Linguistics, where many indigenous people were trained. In 1980 the “Macac” Educational Model was developed, and material was prepared for literacy education in the Kichwa, Secoya-Siona, Huao and Chachi languages; material was produced for post-literacy courses, education of children, and teaching of Spanish as a second language for Kichwa-speaking children and adults.

At that stage the process began of unifying the Kichwa writing system. The mother tongue was used as the main medium of instruction and Spanish as the language of intercultural relations, and many of the future leaders of the indigenous communities were trained. The educators were indigenous inhabitants of the communities themselves. Of all the bilingual education projects carried out up to 1988, this was the one with widest coverage since the programme was national in scope.

**Chimborazoca Caipimi.** Alongside the Kichwa Literacy Subprogramme, an exclusive project was carried out for Chimborazo province in which a primer and reading materials were prepared for adults. In this project use was made of the writing of the local speech forms.

**“Macac” National College.** The College started the Kichwa intercultural bilingual self-education programme in 1986 as part of the activities of the “Macac” Educational Corporation, serving the secondary education level with the training of nautical pilots and technically qualified school leavers, and advising the “Atahualpa” bilingual school of the Chaupiloma community, Pichincha province. Besides the students, members of the communities also participate through the programme of out-of-school education, which is national in coverage and constitutes a continuation of the “Macac” Educational Model. Kichwa is the main medium of instruction and Spanish the second language; the unified writing system is used and production is incorporated in the educational process.

**Intercultural Bilingual Education Project (PEBI).** This project started up in 1986 with the signing of an agreement between the GTZ, an entity of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Ecuadorian Government.

Source: Taken from DINEIB (National Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Education) <http://www.dineib.edu.ec/>

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<http://www.pachakutik.org.ec/>

Municipality of Cotacachi

<http://www.cotacachi.gov.ec/>

SIISE (Integrated System of Social Indicators of Ecuador)

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MEC (Ministry of Education)

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MOSEIB (Bilingual Intercultural Education Model)

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UINPI – Intercultural University of the Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples

<http://uinpi.nativeweb.org/>