CHALLENGES OF THE CHILEAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Based on the presentations and conclusions of the seminar “Perspectives for Education in Chile”
MINEDUC - OECD - UNESCO
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The educational challenges presented in this document are a product of the collective analysis and debate during an experts meeting organized by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC) in Santiago, on 22-23 January, 2010.

Chaired by Education Minister Mónica Jiménez, the event was attended by national and international experts from organisations including universities, ministries, foundations, the National Commission for UNESCO, the World Bank, as well as the OECD education team Director Ms. Barbara Ischinger, and part of UNESCO Education team headed by the Director of the Regional Bureau of Education based in Santiago, Mr. Jorge Sequeira.

**Background**

Chile’s increasing social and economic development over the past few years has led to progress in the areas of social wellbeing and guarantee respect for the rights of a greater part of the country’s population. Social policy has been adjusted in order to respond to the needs of citizens that are evolving towards greater human development. Chile’s progress has been widely recognised, including reaching important milestones, such as recently becoming a member of OECD. However, the policies that met those needs during the first phase of the reforms must now be reviewed and updated to meet the new challenges imposed by development itself, particularly through education.

The document aims to provide the new education authorities with perspective to help visualize possible paths for further progress towards quality education for all. In this document stakeholders have expressed what they consider to be challenges for education in Chile in the coming years. The challenges are presented in the order they were discussed during the seminar, not in order of importance. The list of participants is attached.

The meeting ended with an agreement of the participants representing both the government in force, Mrs. Michelle Bachelet and the elected government of Mr. Sebastián Piñera, to hold the seminar on an annual basis, to be organised by UNESCO and OECD at the beginning of each year.

**CHALLENGE 1. Educational system centered on quality for all**

Once Chile reached a high level of coverage in education (over 99% in primary school and over 92% in secondary school), the focus of the educational system changed gradually towards quality, which is now the most important challenge. As a result, creating a ‘culture of quality’ throughout the system and improving standards and results in order to move towards the level of the most developed nations is an imperative.
According to UNESCO, quality education for all is understood as a public good and fundamental human right that governments are required to respect, promote and protect in order to ensure equality of opportunities in access to knowledge, the quality of educational offerings and the results of learning for the entire population. Quality and equity are not only compatible but are inseparable from this perspective. This is the basis of the Education for All program that the agency is leading at the global level and that focuses on areas that require most urgent intervention.

Both the monitoring of the performance of the educational system implemented in the context of the oversight of the global goals and the results of national assessments and Chile’s PISA test\(^1\) scores have established low performance and high social inequality as key points for the development of quality education in the country in the context of the OECD member states.

While Chile has achieved equal access to education in terms of gender, there are notable disparities in favour of boys in math and science while the difference in the area of language favours girls, though the difference is less pronounced. As these results no doubt affect the beliefs of teaching staff, the school and the community, the influence of teachers and the teaching-learning process require in-depth analysis in this country.

Special attention must be paid to the surprising increase in the drop-out rate at the secondary school level\(^2\). In total, approximately 120,000 young people are not attending school, which demonstrates a lack of adequate responses to their educational needs. In order to address this problem, solutions must be developed starting at the level of primary education.

Although ‘second chance’ programs for promoting learning among young people and adults have been created through the Chile Califica Program, which has certified 30,000 people, this valuable effort is not sufficient. Considering the magnitude of the problem and the system’s lack of preparation for addressing it, profound institutional change must be implemented promptly.

The Ministry of Education has begun to change its educational policy agenda in response to this evidence. It has established a systematic vision of a support and oversight model, introducing standards and offering support to schools. Concern over the segmentation of the school system has led to the introduction of compensatory measures. The curriculum has been adjusted in order to provide students with life skills, and changes have been made to the national student assessment system (SIMCE)\(^3\).

The new context that the General Law on Education (which is in the final stages of the legislative process) establishes for the educational system will undoubtedly maintain the attention and efforts of the agency that is to implement it over the next few years. In effect, as its main objective is to improve the quality of education, the law modifies the institutional structure, creating the Agency for Quality, the Superintendency of Education, and the National Council on Education (formerly the Superior Council on Education) and assigning or reassigning roles and attributes to each agency within the system.

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1. PISA, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, is designed to evaluate the degree to which students who are close to the end of compulsory schooling in their country have acquired certain knowledge and skills necessary for full participation in the society of knowledge.


3. SIMCE, Chile’s national student assessment system, is designed to improve the quality and equity of education by providing information on student performance.
CHALLENGE 2. Strengthening public education

Public education in Chile is composed of a mixed system in which municipalities and private actors may become the sustainers of a school that receives a government subsidy for each student. In the case of the former, this is the only resource available. However, private entities may charge families additional fees according to what the market allows in their specific contexts. The past few years have seen a significant reduction in the coverage provided by the municipal system, which currently serves 43% of students, a number that has been decreasing⁴. Changes must be made in order to ensure that education continues to be public, free, pluralist and high-quality.

According to UNESCO, in order to guarantee the right to education, it must be mandatory and free, and both of these conditions can only be guaranteed in public education. Due to the fundamental role that it plays in social cohesion because of its impacts the bases of coexistence, and in the interests of ensuring equality of opportunities in the right to education, public school is an imperative, particularly for those who need it the most. The use of public funds also ensures that the service that is developed will not be discriminatory in any way.

In regard to the public or private status of the school, OECD studies have shown that private schools generally achieve better results. However, if the analysis takes the school’s socio-economic context into account, this performance advantage generally disappears.

MINEDUC has prepared a bill for a Public Education Law based on the criteria of decentralization, autonomy, the professionalization of administrative technical teams, transparency and accountability. It is currently in the initial stages of discussion in Parliament. Monitoring this bill and its development is one of the educational issues that cannot be postponed in the coming years.

CHALLENGE 3. Promotion of comprehensive education

Citizen formation and education for peaceful existence are key aspects of the educational curriculum of the 21st century. While there are bases for citizen formation and coexistence in Chile, there is a need to expand and accelerate the progress that is being made by mapping this development, introducing standards and measurements and curricular adjustments and taking other steps that consider the need to strengthen the Ministry of Education in order to develop policies and plans in this area.

For UNESCO, education in diversity is a fundamental medium for learning to live together and developing new forms of coexistence based on pluralism, mutual understanding and democratic relationships. While school alone cannot satisfy all of the challenges of peace, it can instill democratic values and promote respectful coexistence through policies focused on values as the nucleus of the formation of the personality and learning oriented towards opening up possibilities for being, doing and learning and favoring human coexistence, assuming ethnic and cultural diversity as a positive factor. The agency made significant progress in the development of conceptual frameworks and policy recommendations that it could contribute to the design of programs that must necessarily be addressed in the country in the near future.

⁴ Official data from MINEDUC, 2008.
ChallENgE 4: Continuing to move forward on policies for Early Childhood Care and Education

Chile has made important progress in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), particularly over the past four years, which show acceleration in the implementation of state programs. Public spending on ECCE has increased; childcare centres increased the number by about 4 times; kindergartens, about 1.5 times in the past 5 years. With this important development, the country has now shifted its focus on quality assurance on the basis of ensuring equity; being effective in achieving educational objectives; and respecting diversity.

The objectives to be reached include the introduction of an assessment and monitoring system. This would require sufficient time and resources allocated to the implementation phase. It would also require the roadmap that will layout the sequence of actions in the most effective and feasible way. International country experiences could provide implications for Chile: 1) reviewing existing assessment and monitoring practices; 2) defining or refining the purpose of assessment and monitoring (e.g. summative or formative); 3) deciding on whether to set up a centralized system, built on existing systems or support local initiatives which may constitute a national system 4) build capacities to implement the system(s) – teachers and staff for assessment and monitoring in class rooms; managers of schools, in schools; regional leaders, in local authorities; and national leaders, at the national level; 5) embed evaluation and research on the effectiveness of the assessment and monitoring practices.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has offered support for developing accreditation, evaluation and information systems. UNESCO is developing indicators on early childhood in the context of the work of its Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education starting from the belief that each child’s early development is related to the whole of society. In consultation with the UNESCO Global Monitoring for Education for All team, the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care is also collecting indicators on financing and costs. As such, investing in early childhood care and education programs is the natural beginning of human development policies and programs.

OECD has provided policy orientations geared towards achieving greater stability in funding for infrastructure and services based on pedagogical quality objectives. It has also developed a set of tools with this purpose in mind. The agency has stated that key needs include creating governance structure necessary for system accountability and quality assurance; establishing a broad guide and curricular standards for all actors; support for the family and a participatory approach; improving working conditions for teachers; providing appropriate training for ECEC staff; generating an agenda and stable context for research and assessment in the long-term; developing a systematic approach to the monitoring and gathering of data; and creating/utilizing comprehensive and complete international indicators.

There is no doubt that both the challenges that are unique to the development of this educational level and Chile’s pre-school institutional structure must be addressed in the coming years. Today there are three institutions (MINEDUC, JUNJI, Integra) that work in parallel to design and implement early childhood education policies that are complemented by comprehensive policies for

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5 The Ministry of Education designs curricula and programs. JUNJI, the National Board of Preschools, implements and oversees preschool education in a network of public schools, as does Integra, a foundation that depends on the Presidency of the Republic.
protecting childhood issued by the Ministry of Planning (through its program Chile Crece Contigo). There is increasing pressure to arrive at improved institutional definition in a sector that still has a lot of growing to do.

Priority actions for Chile would include: 1) more public spending to ensure equity and improve quality of child outcomes, 2) strengthening monitoring capacities and practices to implement a quality accreditation system, 3) upgrading and up-skilling the workforce in the ECEC sector, and 4) enhancing communication networks on the local level, between different authorities and ECEC centres, to share good practices more effectively about family and community engagement.

CHALLENGE 5. New policy for secondary education

With the accelerated dynamism that the global context imposes on development and the educational system and the changes required by the new General Law on Education (GLE) and increased coverage of secondary education, there is a need to arrive at new definitions of policies and strategies in order to strengthen and complement them and connect them to higher education in Chile. Special attention must be paid to the fact that the drop-out rate has increased in recent years\(^6\).

UNESCO states that secondary education should be valorized as a stage of formation that is capable of guaranteeing all young people knowledge, abilities and skills that allow them to successfully continue their studies at the level of higher education or join the work force and participate with full responsibility in civic life. In order to respond to a growing demand for attention by its member states, the organization has proposed working intensely for the development of recommendations that contribute to the design of appropriate and effective policies for this educational level.

A study completed by Universidad Diego Portales\(^7\) that identifies the requirements for ensuring that all Chileans complete secondary school with the skills necessary to go on to college provided the Ministry with a basis for reflecting on actions to be undertaken. Coordinating efforts for continuing teacher development and optimizing the system’s financing have been identified as key aspects of a new policy that generates opportunities for students from all quintiles to continue to make progress and access higher education. There will be a pressing need for a new policy on secondary education in the coming years.

CHALLENGE 6. Redesign of professional technical training

Approximately 40% of Chilean students are enrolled in technical schools. Most of the students in these programs come from vulnerable socio-economic groups. The financing system is not equitable, and there is a need to modify the system of degrees and grades to allow for better coordination with university education.

UNESCO states that in order to respond to students’ varying interests, expectations and needs, the educational system must have open and flexible curricular structures that have the bridges necessary to allow students to move between one modality and another. There is a need to identify mechanisms for diversification while avoiding the excessive division of knowledge. Based on some desirable minimums, there is a need to design diversified curricula without losing the com-

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\(^6\) See footnote No. 2.

\(^7\) See MINEDUC, “Calidad para Todos, Ministerio de Educación: Cuenta pública 2006-2010”, Op. Cit., P. 121. This study was mentioned during the meeting by the Minister of Education.
prehensiveness and integration of disciplines. These curricula must identify new sectors of learning and integrate areas of skills, particularly in the vocational area, in order to avoid the atomization of specialties.

In response to its debt with technical education, the country which has one of the lowest public budgets for such education in the world⁸, developed the “Guidelines for technical-professional training policy in Chile”⁹ and established a permanent institution for the formulation and execution of policies in this area. This valuable effort must be complemented with effective coordination of different levels of technical-professional training through a framework of assessments; improved pertinence of lessons and linking to the requirements of the labour market; coordinating and facilitating communication between students, professors and employers; and involving all system actors in policy design.

There is a need to apply the principles of equality and neutrality in funding; increase the supply in this area; improve information and orientation regarding these programs of study; strike a balance between technical and general skills; develop the concept of life-long learning; improve the quality and pertinence of studies; and allow MINEDUC to exercise key leadership with the participation of all of the institutions involved in order to establish the bases for the technical education policy that must be developed in the near future.

**CHALLENGE 7. New context for higher education**

Notable efforts have been made to increase the influx of students into programs at this level over the past few years in Chile. However, as the OECD/World Bank report on the Chilean system notes and as was concluded during a meeting of international experts organized by UNESCO in 2009¹⁰, there is a long way to go in order to achieve a reform that introduces a new regulatory framework, improves and broadens financing mechanisms, makes the system more flexible, increases the pertinence of training, evaluates the quality assurance system, redefines the government’s role and strengthens the country’s scientific and technological base.

Governance in this area currently consists of a combination of central government agencies, institutions and the market. The key institutions for said governance are the Ministry of Education, Superior Council, National Accreditation Commission, CRUCH (Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities) and the National Commission on Science and Technology. The system presents an unresolved fragmentation between public and private that generates tensions and contradictions between these different agents, each of which has its own agenda.

In regard to the distribution of prizes and scholarships, there is an important distortion in Chile as a result of discrimination on two levels. First, there is a gap between universities that receive public financing and the so-called ‘private’ ones that do not that means that only one fifth of the student body receives financial aid. There is an urgent need to modify the Indirect Fiscal Contribution (Aporte Fiscal Indirecto, AFI)¹¹ in order to put an end to the discrimination faced by talented stu-

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¹¹ The AFI is directed at all institutions of higher education (universities, professional institutes and technical training centers). It is a source of funding that is accessed through a competition based on enrollment of first year students with the best 27,500 scores on the University Selection Test (Prueba de Selección Universitaria, PSU).
students from the most vulnerable schools who do not compete on equal footing due to the university selection system.\footnote{The university selection system is composed of one test (the PSU) that only minimally recognizes the efforts made by the students throughout secondary school. Students can prepare for the test through private institutions that charge high fees to ‘train’ students to perform well on the PSU. Students from less favored sectors do not have an opportunity to access such programs.} This is a very frequent demand made by students and actors from organized civil society who promote quality education.

In order to endow Chile with a great amount of high quality human capital, there is a need to analyze and adjust the relationship between higher education and the job market in order to achieve coherence between the skills that the system produces and key areas of development. If the system can provide high quality human resources in large quantities, equity and return will increase. As such, there is a need for an adequate and sustained flow of information.

The most urgent issues for addressing the multiple challenges of the higher education system include revitalizing quality assurance as a means to improve teaching and learning – and not an end – for institutional promotion and the consolidation of a broad and transparent information system. In regard to the former, progress must be made in the development of an evaluation that allows the assurance agency to verify quality without replacing the institutional commitment to it, valorizing diversity without standardizing institutions that respond to different expectations and purposes. Information and transparency is a key area of intervention. Though significant progress has been made thanks to the establishment of the Higher Education Information System, there is a need to continue with efforts to include all system institutions and achieve clear regulatory frameworks in this respect. The improvement of quality and transparency should be actively accompanied by steps to be taken towards the implementation of a system of transferrable credits that responds to skill-based training and the implementation of ad-hoc curricular reforms that favor student mobility and international legitimacy.

In summary, in the coming years it will be necessary to sustain efforts to modify university selection tests; increase financial aid and considerably increase public financing including the modification of the AFI; move forward in the certification of skills and professional training; strengthen research capacities; develop closer territorial links; and increase the flexibility of the management of government institutions. The government will need a strategic vision that will allow it to oversee and manage the system as a whole while increasing investments in research in higher education in order to supervise this system, which is constricted by the forces of the market.

**CHALLENGE 8. Construction of a new professional teaching career in order to create effective spaces for teaching and learning**

One of the most complex challenges for education is undoubtedly the updating of the professional teaching career, which must provide adequate responses to the population’s new requirements and demands for quality education.

According to UNESCO, full exercise of the right to education cannot occur unless substantive changes are made in teaching policies. Their role and training must focus on effective teaching and generating conditions that allow students to exercise their right to learn.

In order to support the design of teaching policies, the OECD recently designed the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The main issues addressed by the survey are effective teaching through evaluation and feedback, preparation of a high quality teaching workforce,
and school leadership. Chile has been invited to participate in this survey in an effort to uncover information that will allow teachers to offer meaningful lessons and open the doors for life-long learning.

There is no doubt that the development of TALIS is very important for Chile and Latin America, particularly in regard to the teaching beliefs and practices that present a specific problematic and directly impact performance and the achievement of learning. The survey reveals the existence of two contradictory paradigms among the teachers of the participant countries: the constructivist approach and the ‘traditional vision’ that refers to the ‘instruction of learning’. The survey shows that while teachers’ actions are in keeping with the traditional vision, they actually believe that better education takes place when the teacher builds knowledge with students. This issue presents an additional challenge for teacher performance and public policy decision-makers because experience clearly shows that a hard nucleus of disciplinary knowledge must be transmitted to students as a fundamental basis for continuing to learn and develop in the face of the diverse factors that influence learning. Above and beyond the adoption of paradigms, in order to provide quality education, teachers must be open to ideas that allow them to combine the elements necessary for awakening their students’ interest and imparting pertinent and relevant information. This is particularly important for those who teach in contexts of poverty, where a minimum guarantee of the right to education is to provide basic knowledge in an environment in which the only institution that is capable of making a difference and generating mobility is the school. There is thus a need to review teacher training in this regard.

The Ministry of Education is developing a teaching career proposal organized in ascending rungs that is based on merit and quality, with significant increments in pay. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done. This will undoubtedly be one of the greatest sources of pressure on public policy decisions during the next few years.

**CHALLENGE 9. Strengthening mobility in research and knowledge as well as innovation in education**

Across OECD countries it has been observed that there is generally (not only in Chile) a lack of high quality educational research and development, a low level of investment in its development, and weak links between research and educational policy. This situation is exacerbated by limited methodological capacity and weak knowledge networks or intermediary brokerage agencies designed to aid in knowledge transfer from research to policy. For its part, the Chilean Ministry of Education also presents weaknesses in the area of research and studies, and must strengthen this area at the institutional level. There is thus a need to move forward in the generation of an educational ‘knowledge network’ comprised of researchers, decision-makers and practitioners.

According to the OECD, the challenge includes using policy dialogue to overcome the dichotomy between the ‘scientific ideal’ of researchers who are always looking to make their analyses more complex and that resist reaching final conclusions and ‘the best possible’ approach of legislators or decision-makers who want information that is direct and easy to understand and communicate and allows them to take action. There also are weaknesses in the link between researchers and teachers, which makes it difficult to build research into practice or support teachers to use research in their work.

UNESCO has stated that there is a need to strengthen the role of the school as a center for training and professional development and teacher evaluation as a strategy that promotes research and reflection on educational practices and makes schools generators of pedagogical knowledge.
As a clearinghouse, this organization could play the role of intermediary in the responses to this challenge.

It is thus necessary to use the limited resources available to build capacities and to decide whether or not it is advisable to strengthen small and specialized groups or broaden the scope of these efforts to include a larger number of researchers who have more general knowledge. The definition of capacity building also must be clarified by the beneficiaries, which include universities and teachers. Key questions for funding agencies include a) which capacities are most in need of strengthening, b) who is best placed to undertake this work, and c) how is it best done. For their part, intermediary brokerage agencies can help to re-establish and strengthen links between legislators, researchers and practitioners, generating trust and cooperation. Functions of such agencies include identifying which information is relevant and which is not, legitimating the rigor and quality of information, and disseminating said data.

According to the OECD and its Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, innovation has traditionally been considered a motor of economic growth. However, more work needs to be done on the development of an innovation system that includes innovation in the public services and links to education. Systematic innovation is necessary when producing changes that are system-wide and it should thus be a guiding principle for policy development. There is a clear need to establish a formalized knowledge base that can guide policy making in most areas of education. Stronger links between research and innovation also need to be developed. Finally, informed, evidence-based dialogues must be generated with the actors involved.

The OECD recommends that monitoring, evaluation, and assessment become key elements of the innovation and policy making cycle. Building innovative education systems requires consensus building, political vision, evidence derived from research and intermediary agencies that serve as advisors and promote knowledge in education. The OECD’s Innovation Strategy is centered around five policy lines: empowering people to be innovative; strengthening the bases of innovation; investing in innovation not only in the financial sense but also through knowledge transfer; using innovative approaches to resolve global problems; and improving governance of innovation policies.

All in all, in order to implement appropriate social interventions there is a need to move forward over the next few years in the development of knowledge for decision-making and innovative actions that allow for impacts in the long-term.

**CHALLENGE 10. School leadership**

School leadership is directly related to the quality of education because, when it is exercised properly, it improves performance, assessment and teaching quality and puts the student at the centre of the educational development process. Thus, in many countries school leadership has become a priority for educational policy, now focused more on the benefits of strategic planning based on results, self-evaluation by schools, teacher improvement, accountability, decentralization, autonomy, new ways of teaching and learning, investment in the generation of knowledge and development of new skills, all of which are central to school leadership. Overall, school leaders are responsible for implementing educational reforms and are thus central to the improvement of the systems. Chile still has a long road to travel in this area.
UNESCO states that educational policies must ensure that administrators develop the skills necessary to give sense and cohesion to the pedagogical action of the teaching team, facilitate management processes and educational change and achieve a harmonious institutional climate. However, leadership should not only fall to the director. The schools that achieve the best results are those that have decision-making models that involve a larger number of actors from the school community as well as more horizontal relationships and complementarity between administrators and teachers.

The lack of recognition of the role of administration and exercise of leadership is generally expressed in the lack of coherent training programs, specialized evaluation and specific support. It is therefore necessary to redefine the responsibilities of leadership, based on improving school results, offer initial and ongoing training and provide support to be able to exercise autonomy. According to OECD, key responsibilities of school leaders include supporting, assessing and developing the teachers; engaging in assessment and accountability; collaborating with other schools; and establishing frameworks. OECD also recommends that leadership be distributed, recognizing those who participate in leadership teams through training and incentives. There also need to be efforts to develop knowledge and skills by providing training throughout the different stages of school leader careers, and to ensure coherence in the offerings of the various institutions; making the program of study comparable to that of other public sectors. Finally, what is more important is to make school leadership an attractive profession for potential candidates and those in service, by planning succession, ensuring that wages are aligned with the responsibilities of the position and providing further career alternatives.

Leadership is built in the practice of the profession and as a team. In Chile, it is possible to prioritize school leadership policies and further focus the role of school leaders in improving school outcomes; define leadership training with quality standards and clear criteria for training programs; accredit pre-service, initial and in-service training programs; create grants for study in accredited programs; finance research projects on modalities of effective training; and generate incentives for leadership. Adequate training of directors should be understood as an investment in the system's sustainability that also should be capable of training teams that handle school management, sharing responsibility for leadership. In this context, it is necessary to recognize the “Framework for Good Leadership,” which has represented an initial step forward that should be replicated in coordination with the teachers’ association. Furthermore, the program to train 400 people in direction and leadership that was designed by the Ministry of Education is making progress in the development of these new criteria. It will be interesting to see how this effort, which will be the beginning of a necessary intervention process in the years to come, will be evaluated.
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<td>Michael Gallagher</td>
<td>OECD, invited expert from Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Crawford</td>
<td>World Bank, Vice President, Private Sector Development (Bank-IFC) and Chief Economist, IFC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jorge Sequeira</td>
<td>UNESCO, Director, Regional Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paz Portales</td>
<td>UNESCO, Programme Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atilio Pizarro</td>
<td>UNESCO, Chief of Planning Section</td>
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