

**“KNOWLEDGE-BASED INTERNATIONAL AID”  
DO WE WANT IT, DO WE NEED IT?**

**Rosa-María Torres**

**Instituto Fronesis**  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
[www.fronesis.org](http://www.fronesis.org)

Paper prepared for the International Seminar on  
“Development Knowledge, National Research and International Cooperation”,  
CAS/DSE/NORRAG, Bonn, 3-5 April 2001.

Included in: Gmelin, W.; King, K.; McGrath, S. (editors), *Knowledge, Research and International Cooperation*, University of Edinburgh, 2001.

## **“KNOWLEDGE-BASED INTERNATIONAL AID” DO WE WANT IT, DO WE NEED IT?**

**Rosa-María Torres**

### **PRESENTATION**

This paper approaches “knowledge-based aid” *in vogue* today within the international aid community from some specific perspectives: a) a view “from the South”<sup>1</sup>, that is, from countries traditionally considered repositories and beneficiaries of such aid, which in turn is typically facilitated by “the North” through International Assistance Agencies <sup>2</sup>; b) a critical perspective, thus acknowledging that there is an uncritical South -- and a critical North; c) a regional focus on Latin America, with which the author is more familiar with; d) a focus on education (reform) as a specific field to analyze some of the assumptions and practical consequences of such “knowledge-based aid”, particularly over the last decade; and e) a focus on the World Bank (WB) as a paradigmatic Agency, given its contemporary leading role in shaping the North/South cooperation mode and in promoting “knowledge-based aid”, specifically for (school) education reform. The “WE” used in the title of this article refers to the South in general, and to the Latin American region in particular.

The increased global concentration of economic and symbolic power (information and knowledge) and of the means and resources to access, synthesize and disseminate such information and knowledge is supported by an instrumental ideology about all these issues (development, knowledge, information, education, learning). In this context, and without fundamental changes in North-South relationships and cooperation patterns, as well as in knowledge and learning paradigms, there is little hope that the announced “knowledge society” and “lifelong learning” will bring the expected “learning revolution” and a more equitable distribution of knowledge.

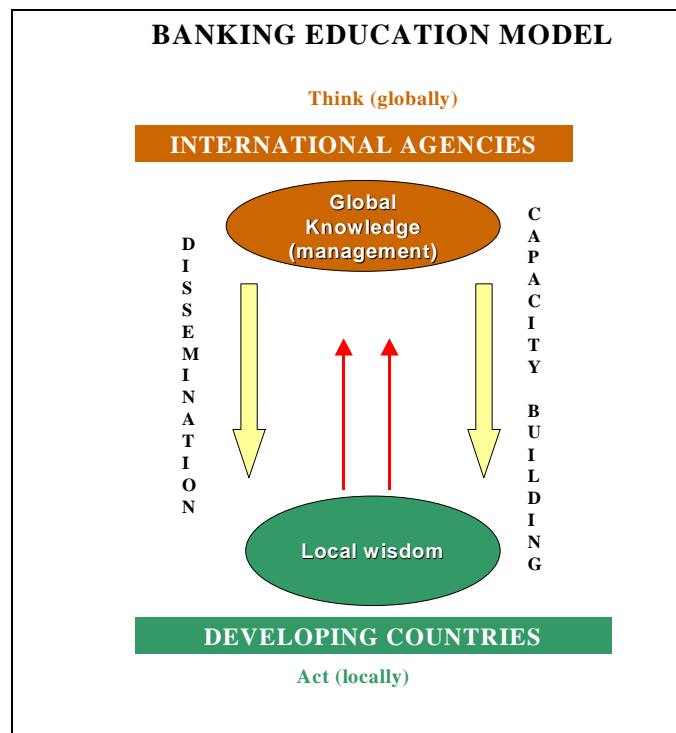
On the contrary, we are experiencing a major epochal paradox: never before have there been so much information and knowledge available, so varied and powerful means to democratize them, and so much emphasis on the importance of knowledge, education and learning, but never before has the *banking* education model been so alive and widespread at a global scale: *education* understood as a one-way transfer of information and knowledge, and *learning* understood as the passive digestion of such transfer. Many enthusiastic global promoters of “knowledge societies”, “new networking” and “lifelong learning” dream today with a world converted into a giant classroom with a few powerful global teachers, and millions of passive assimilators of information and knowledge packages via telecenters, computers and the Internet.

In an era characterized by change, uncertainty and unpredictability, knowledge-disseminators and technology-promoters appear to have just too many certainties about the present and about the future. Recommendations and solutions are at hand and become global – “global development knowledge”, “global education reform”. “Global” here means in fact [for] “the South”, “the developing world”, “the low- and middle-income countries”, “client countries,” “the poor.” “What works” and “what doesn’t work” are offered as clear-cut black and white alternatives, without the obvious questions that should follow: what works -

-- where, when, for what, with whom, for whom, under what circumstances? Knowledge-based aid rhetoric insists on avoiding the discussion of issues such as power and vested interests, not only within governments but also within civil society and within and among Agencies themselves.

**“KNOWLEDGE-BASED AID” FOR “DEVELOPING COUNTRIES”**

**What *development*? What *knowledge*? What kind of *aid*? Who is “countries”?**



There is nothing new about “knowledge-based aid”. Knowing, and transferring knowledge to “developing countries” under the form of technical assistance has been the *raison d’ être* of Agencies. It may be new, however, from a bank perspective, since banks are supposed to provide money, not ideas.

WB’s decision -- in 1996 -- to become a “Knowledge Bank” made explicit the evolution of its role over the past few years into an institution that provides both expert advice and loans – in that order of importance, as the WB explicitly states. This new role includes lending no longer as the most important role, but technical assistance, knowledge production and knowledge sharing; expanding clients and partners beyond governments, also incorporating organizations of civil society (OCS); and aggressive support to, and use of, modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a critical tool for putting such strategies in place.

In WB's terms: there is something called "development knowledge", which is available at the WB/Knowledge Bank, has been (and continues to be) compiled and synthesized by the WB, and needs to be "disseminated" (with the assistance of ICTs) or transferred through "capacity building" not only to "developing countries" – from government officials and decision-makers all the way down to OCS and school agents – but also to other Agencies. The Global Education Reform Website and the Global Education Reform course offered by the WB to a wide range of learners (Ministries, OCS, Agencies, etc) are some of the recent tools put in place for the global transfer of education reform knowledge to education reformers at various levels in the whole planet.

"Knowledge-based aid" is fundamentally "North/ South asymmetry-based aid": donor/ recipient, developed/ non-developed, knowledge/ ignorance (or *wisdom*), teach/ learn, think/ act, recommend/ follow, design/ implement. The North views itself essentially as a knowledge provider, and views the South as a knowledge consumer. The North thinks, knows, disseminates, diagnoses, plans, strategizes, does and validates research (including that done in, or referred to, the South), provides advice, models, lessons learned, and even lists of desired profiles (i.e. effective schools, effective teachers); the South does not know, learns, receives, applies, implements. The North produces, synthesizes and disseminates *knowledge*; the South produces data and *information*. The North produces global policy recommendations to be translated, by the South, into National Plans of Action. "Global knowledge" versus "local wisdom." "Think globally, act locally."

For international cooperation purposes, "countries" have typically been thought of as *governments*. Cooperating with governments has been assumed as equivalent to cooperating with *countries* and with the *people* in those countries, thus avoiding critical questions related to the representativeness of concrete governments in terms of public and national interest. Also, Agencies' widened perception of "countries", incorporating the notion of "civil society", has remained narrow, simplistic and NGO-centered, ignoring the various actors interacting in real civil societies: political parties, social movements, the academic community, workers' unions, grassroots organizations, mass media, private enterprise, the churches, etc. It is only in recent times that the term Organizations of Civil Society (OCS) has been incorporated. As a result, many key political, social and economic sectors and actors in the South – especially those unrelated to government and NGO circuits- have remained alienated from the resources, mechanisms, information and discussion surrounding international cooperation in their own countries.

We will briefly discuss here some of the assumptions and consequences of the "knowledge-based aid" concept in action, as per WB's and other Agencies' involvement in (school) education reform in the South, and in Latin America in particular.



### **Are we (the South) striving for and heading towards "development"?**

"Development" (in the sense of *progress*) seemed achievable in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the very term *development* has virtually disappeared from political and academic discourse, from social debate and from social expectations in the South -- very much so in the case of Latin America. Development discourse and goals have been

substituted by “poverty alleviation”, “debt relief”, “combating unemployment”, “improving the quality of education”, etc. The overall spirit is that of “reversing decline” rather than that of “ensuring development”. In the education field this is reflected in minimalist goals that do not go beyond augmenting (enrolment, instruction time) or reducing (illiteracy, drop-out, repetition) rates, aiming at “preventing school failure” or “improving academic achievement” (among the poor) rather than at “ensuring school success” or “ensuring lifelong and meaningful learning” for all.

Realities and analyses show that globalization is not moving in the direction of a more equitable world and that economic growth is no guarantee for human (even for economic) development. “Alleviating poverty” has become a condition for, much more than a result of, the very possibility of getting access to education and learning by the majority of the world population. And yet, Agencies continue to speak of “development” and “developing countries”, of basic education as a strategy to alleviate poverty, and of economic growth as inevitably leading to economic and social development.

The very meaning of *development*, as well as the means and strategies to get there, are by no means consensual and remain an issue of debate and controversy not only in the North and in the South but also among and within Agencies themselves.<sup>3</sup>



### **Is there is something called “development knowledge”?**

How much does “development” depend on knowledge? What is the knowledge required to make “development” happen in “non-developed” contexts? Is there such a thing as “development knowledge” in general? Is it available, waiting to be “disseminated” or transferred through “capacity building”? Who possesses and who should possess such knowledge in order for development to occur? Is it a problem of dissemination and capacity building?

Most of these questions are already answers, or unraised questions, within the international cooperation community. Agencies, just as schoolteachers, *must* know -- or act as if they knew -- because this is their role and their business. And just like bad teachers who have poor expectations of their students and think for them, Agencies have in mind clients that are avid for ready-made diagnoses, recipes, transportable and easily replicable success stories.<sup>4</sup>

Conventional international aid has operated under one central assumption: the South has the problems, and the North has the solutions (for such problems in the South). If the solution proposed does not work, a new solution will be proposed, and countries will be held accountable for the failure. And again, just like the conventional school system that homogenizes students to facilitate its role and to ensure the prescription of universal curricula and rules, Agencies prefer to think of “developing countries” as a distinctive but uniform world, homogenized by poverty and by a number of problems that are well-known (by Agencies and countries in the North) and that differ at most in their magnitudes.<sup>5</sup>

Paradoxically, the very concept of *ownership* is framed within an accepted asymmetrical relationship (nobody thinks of ownership as an issue associated to the North). Thus, *ownership* – “*having* countries in the driver’s seat” – appears as a promise, as a donation, conceded and monitored by Agencies.<sup>6</sup> Or, even more bluntly, as a matter of “countries *having a sense of ownership* for the initiative.” (UNESCO, 2000)

No wonder donor-driven, top-down, one-size-fits-all policies have resulted in repeated and costly failures. If we are to judge the direction and quality of future changes in international aid by the lessons Education for All (EFA) partners say they learned during the 1990s, we should not expect meaningful changes in the 15-year EFA extension agreed upon at the Dakar World Education Forum.<sup>7</sup> Changes acknowledged by Agencies, in the context of increasing pressure by the South for Agency responsibility and accountability, are not visible yet. On the contrary, many such problems – i.e. lack of coordination and enhanced competitiveness among Agencies and specifically among EFA partners – may have worsened. On the other hand, as many have started to alert, the new solutions aimed at amending previous problems (i.e. the “sector-wide approach”, which attempts to correct the damage done by the extensive Agency-promoted “project” culture) may initiate a new wave of improvised solutions, without really affecting the core of the problems, including those of conventional aid culture. Just as ineffective teacher training results in teachers incorporating new terms but not necessarily embracing new concepts and changing their practices, Agencies have fully incorporated politically correct jargon such as *participation*, *consultation*, *transparency*, *accountability*, *empowerment* and *ownership* and haven given them their own meaning and functional use.



### **Is [“good”] knowledge only to be found in the North?**

Both related assumptions must be put into question: that the North produces good quality and universally accepted knowledge -- in general, about itself and about the South – and that the South does not. In fact, both the North and the South have good and bad schools and universities, produce good and bad quality research and knowledge, and have competent and incompetent professionals in all fields. The difference is that the North has far better conditions than the South to develop research and to enhance professional competencies and work conditions, and that the North socializes its professionals with a “run the world” mentality where “knowing” what is best for the South may appear as an in-built professional competency.<sup>8</sup> However, when one looks at the tremendous North/ South asymmetry, one wonders whether the North is making the best use possible of its comparative advantages. One also wonders how much more and better the South could do if we would have similar national and international conditions in place.

Knowledge produced in the South is disqualified or ignored altogether. The education field is a good example of this. Those reading about education only in publications produced in the North, and specifically those produced by Agencies (which is the case of many education specialists in the North and of millions of students in universities around the world), probably come to the conclusion that there is no research, no intellectual life and no debate on education going on outside North America and Europe, and that most of it – if not all of it – happens to be written in English. (Torres, 1996) And yet, the South has a vast

research and intellectual production, much of it of similar or better quality standards than that produced in the North, but much of it is invisible to the North. Arrogance and prejudice are important explicative factors as well as linguistic limitations. Here, the asymmetry and the comparative advantage may operate the other way round: while researchers and intellectuals in the South are often multilingual or at least bilingual readers, and can thus have access to a wider variety of literature and views, many researchers in the North are monolingual (specially native English-speakers) and thus have limited access to the intellectual production available worldwide. However, this does not prevent them from speaking for the entire world and for “developing world” in particular, even when they access only to North-produced syntheses of South-produced research.

Linguistic limitations should not be a valid reason if the production of scientific knowledge is at stake and, moreover, if such intellectual production claims international validity and aims at interpreting and influencing realities in the South. Minimum scientific rigor would demand to acknowledge the limitations and scope of such reviews based on limited sources. Being professional and aiming at serious professional roles at international level today requires not only multidisciplinary but multilingual teams.



### **Is “good” knowledge expert knowledge?**

The “knowledge-based rhetoric” reinforces the expert and the technocratic culture (“the symbolic analyst”). National and international *experts* have multiplied and the term has been abused to a point where anybody can be called such or believe he/she is one. The expansion and costs of the international consultancy industry have been analyzed and documented by various studies and for the various regions. The situation is particularly critical in the case of Africa, as highlighted in one of UNDP’s Human Development Reports (UNDP, 1993).

The perverse consequences of the expert and consultant drive in the South are enormous.<sup>9</sup> The expert culture reinforces technocratic and elitist approaches, social *participation* and *consultation* as mere concessions to democracy rather than as objective needs for effective policy design and action. It cultivates the separation between thinkers and doers, reformers and implementers, both at the national and global scale. It reaffirms the tradition to locate problems on the implementation side, never on the side of those who diagnose, plan and formulate policies.

Effective and sustainable policies and reforms require not only (good, relevant) expert knowledge, but also the (explicit and implicit, scientific or not) knowledge and will of all those concerned. Policy in practice – i.e. educational *reform* not resulting in effective educational *change*- shows the perennial insufficiency of expert knowledge and the indispensable need for consultation, participation and ownership – whether it is governments, institutions, groups or individuals- not only for implementation but as a condition for good policy design.

We have reached a point where, more than expert knowledge, common sense can make the difference between good and bad policy making, between good and bad program design.

### **Is “expert” knowledge good knowledge?**

“Experts” make – and have made many -- expert and costly mistakes. WB experts have been behind the cyclical mistakes admitted by the WB in WB-assisted education policies and projects over the past decades, notably: the strong emphasis placed on infrastructure in the 1960s and 1970s; the priority given to primary education in the 1990s and the rates of return argument behind such priority; the abandonment of higher education (admitted as a major mistake by J. Wolfensohn himself during the official launching ceremony of the Higher Education Report on March 1, 2000, in Washington); and the “project approach” (now being amended with the SWAP - “sector-wide approach”). All these mistakes, and their long-term consequences, were based on expert WB knowledge and paid by countries in the South in both monetary as well as political and social terms.

The faulty grounds of WB research in the education field has been highlighted and documented by many researchers in the South and in the North, and by WB people themselves. Problems mentioned include overgeneralization, oversimplification, lack of comparability of many studies that are anyhow compared, poor theoretical and methodological frameworks, lack of conceptual rigor, mechanical translation of research results into policy-making, and, more generally, use and abuse of research (and of comparative international research in particular) and of evaluation to legitimize recommended policies, funded projects and selected success stories.

And yet, good or bad, this is the research that sustains technical advice provided to client countries in the South (and to other Agencies). And the one that is now attributed global validity that is made available through a global web portal and offered to decision makers in face-to-face intensive seminars.

The opaque relationship between knowledge validation and (Agency) power is a critical, un-mentioned, factor. Many of the ideas and trends that become dominant do so not necessarily because of their merit or proven efficacy to explain or transform realities, but because of the (ideological, political, financial) power that is behind them.

### **Are information, communication, knowledge, education and learning the same?**

In the age of “knowledge” and “learning”, scientific research on learning -- from the most varied fields: Biology, Psychology, Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, Pedagogy, History, etc. -- has begun to show its highly complex nature, mechanisms and processes. And yet, we assist to a tremendous banalization of these notions, particularly by Agencies and by many international and national advocates of the “learning revolution”.

*Information, knowledge, education, learning* are easily confused and often used indistinctively (see Box below). Ignoring current scientific knowledge available on these issues, and in the best tradition of the banking school education model, *knowledge* and *learning* continue to be trivialized as a matter of *access* (to school before, to the computer

and the Internet today) and/or *dissemination* (of information, of knowledge, of lessons learned, of models to be replicated).

## INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATION, LEARNING

### Is different from

<p><b>INFORMATION</b> Information society</p> <p><b>INFORMATION</b> Information society</p> <p><b>INFORMATION</b> Use of ICTs</p> <p><b>INFORMATION</b> Information technologies</p> <p><b>EDUCATION</b> Lifelong education</p> <p><b>ACCESS</b> Access to school, to ICTs, etc.</p> <p><b>DISSEMINATION</b> Disseminating information</p> <p><b>CAPACITY BUILDING</b> Teaching</p>	<p><b>LEARNING</b> Learning society</p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE</b> Knowledge society</p> <p><b>EDUCATION</b> Distance education</p> <p><b>COMMUNICATION</b> Communication technologies</p> <p><b>LEARNING</b> Lifelong learning</p> <p><b>LEARNING</b> Access to learning</p> <p><b>LEARNING</b> Democratizing learning</p> <p><b>LEARNING</b> Learning</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

There are reasons to believe such trivialization and confusion are not just the result of ignorance but of deliberate blurring. Anyone aware of such distinctions might conclude that the “knowledge bank” may be more appropriately called a “data bank” or an “information bank”, and would reflect on many assertions that tend to be taken for granted. Consider the following:

- Information can be disseminated but knowledge must be built.
- Information dissemination does not necessarily result in knowledge or in learning.
- Education (and schooling) does not necessarily result in learning.
- Learning exceeds education and education exceeds school education.
- Information dissemination does not imply or include learning.
- Having access to the Internet is no guarantee of being informed, much less of learning.
- While lifelong education is something that no society or person could afford, lifelong learning is a fact of life and can be enhanced by various means.
- ICTs and distance education are much more effective for information than for knowledge and learning purposes.
- Good distance education requires face-to-face interaction.

The “knowledge society” many people have in mind is closer to an “information society”. The “lifelong learning” many are advocating is “e-learning” and big business, with everyone buying computers and connected to the Internet. For others, “lifelong learning” entails the burial of the school system and of formal education, and the multiplication of non-formal and/or informal learning opportunities and arrangements.

Unless North and South engage in serious analysis, research and debate on all these issues and their implications for a *global* “knowledge and learning society”, the “learning revolution” may be a new false alarm, an illusion created by the technological revolution, or a revolution only for a few, with many victims and wider gaps, controlled by central powers and benefiting strong economic interests.



### **Is there a positive relationship between (expert) knowledge and (effective) decision-making?**

The weak linkages between information/ knowledge and public policy design/ decision-making are an old and well-known problem in both the North and the South. However, the “knowledge-based aid” rhetoric appears to take such relationship between (expert) knowledge and (effective) decision-making for granted, as well as between their respective assumed agents – Agencies, on one hand, and countries (now governments *and* civil societies) on the other. The *whos, whats, what fors, wheres* and *hows* of such knowledge and knowledge transfer are not put into question.

The WB claims that the gap between knowledge and decision-making is getting smaller in client countries – where we would be seeing “more effective policy making”. However, the EFA decade assessment showed very clearly that education policies conducted in the 1990s did not accomplish the goals. In the case of Latin America, “quality improvement” in school education is not visible, at least not in the domain that matters and that was supposedly targeted: learning. It is accepted that these reform processes did not “reach the school”, did not improve teacher performance and morale, and did not modify conventional pedagogical practices in the classroom. Even some of our publicized “success stories” have deteriorated - - such as *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia -- or show persistent problems -- such as the *900 Schools Program* in Chile -- when looked closer at the school level. (Carlson, 2000; Torres, 2000a; Avalos, 2001) A closer, more analytical look at the micro levels and dynamics might reveal the same of many other “success stories” and “best practices” hastily labeled as such and enthusiastically disseminated by Agencies all over the world.

On the other hand, the “Cuban success story” has been hard-to-digest and little publicised. The evaluation of learning achievement (in language and mathematics among third and fourth graders in both public and private schools) conducted in 1997 by UNESCO Regional Office (OREALC) in 13 Latin American countries, showed Cuba’s absolute superiority over all other countries studied – which include among others Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico. (UNESCO-OREALC, 1998) Cuba is facing a very difficult economic situation, and it is the only country in the region that has no loans for its education system and reform, and that did not follow WB education reform recommendations over the 1990s.

While some attribute the failure of reform processes conducted in Latin America to lack of attention to research results and policy recommendations, many others – included the author of this piece – believe that part of the problem was too much attention to such recommendations (the educational reform recipe of the 1990s) and too much reliance on national and international “expert knowledge” for policy design and decision-making, too

little social and teacher participation and consultation, and too little value given to domestic research, indigenous knowledge, and common sense.

The fact is that many countries in this region are today “reforming the reforms”, reviewing previous approaches, acknowledging the limitations of top-down reforms and the importance of involving teachers and teacher unions in more meaningful ways as well as the need to put pedagogy and the school at the center. Growing disillusionment and loss of credibility in reform efforts has come together with a growing regional movement demanding responsibility, transparency and accountability both from governments *and* from Agencies. The 2001 regional meeting of Ministers of Education (Cochabamba, Bolivia, 5-7 March 2001), and the Cochabamba Declaration and Recommendation, put for the first time aid-related problems and issues high on the agenda.<sup>10</sup>

In this respect, the experience with the Latin American Statement on Education for All (a 6-page document prepared on the occasion of the Dakar Forum, circulated widely by e-mail and the web, and signed to date by over 2000 people in the region) represents an innovative and promising development, that contradicts conventional North/South aid patterns: it is an endogenous initiative, born in Latin America, out of Latin American concerns, and conducted in Spanish and Portuguese (*ownership* is here a fact, not a concession); it is critical of the role of governments and Agencies *vis a vis* education development and reform in the region, and proposes the need for a new aid framework; it is not an NGO but a social movement, involving a wide spectrum of sectors and groups, including civil society, government and Agencies; information disseminated regularly to the list of signers is both local, regional and global; and it operates on a voluntary basis, with no international funding and thus with total intellectual and financial autonomy.<sup>11</sup> (Torres, 2000d)

### **DO WE WANT AND NEED “KNOWLEDGE-BASED AID”?**

Why would we *want* such aid? It has been ineffective and costly, it has increased our dependency and our foreign debt, it has not allowed us to develop our own human resources (while we have paid external consultants to learn and become experts while working in our countries); it has not allowed us to identify and develop our own ideas, research, thinking, alternatives, models. And it has not allowed us not learn along the way about both our achievements and mistakes.

Do we really *need* such aid? In most, if not all, countries in the South we have the knowledgeable and competent professionals we need to put in place sound education policies and reforms. Moreover, if qualified and committed, nationals (and non-nationals who end up sharing these characteristics and ideals as their own) have two important advantages over non-nationals: they know the national/ local language(s) and share local history and culture, and they love their country. Motivation, empathy, ownership, sense of identity and of pride, sense of being part of a collective- building project, are key ingredients of effective and sustainable policy making and social action. There is an important difference between living in a country, and visiting it on technical missions. External consultants may leave ideas, documents and recommendations, but it is those living in the country, zone, or community who will finally do the job. Separating and differentiating the roles of those who think and recommend, and those who implement and

try to follow recommendations, remains the key formula for non-ownership (or for fake ownership) and thus for failure.

### **A few final conclusions and recommendations**

If Agencies really want to assist the South, they must be ready to accept the need for major shifts in their thinking and doing. It is not just a matter of more of the same, or of improving cooperation mechanisms and relationships. What is needed is a *different kind of cooperation*, operating under different assumptions and rules, to be discussed and devised together with the South, in professional dialogue. *Partnership*, but not for business as usual.

What can Agencies do to assist the South?

- Work not only addressed to the South but, most importantly, to the North Development and *non-* or *under-*development are intertwined. Development can only occur in the South if major changes are introduced in the North and in North/ South relationships. Awareness raising, critical positions and pressure within the North, with both governments and societies, for the building of a more equitable world, is the single most important contribution international Agencies and critical intellectuals and activists in the North can make to the South. In this, they are not substitutable.
- Acknowledge diversity and act accordingly Homogeneous understandings and approaches to the South are not admissible. Just as we, in the South, learn about the North, and are aware of the diversity that characterizes the various countries and regions in the world, we expect the North to get better acquainted with the realities and the diversity that characterize the so-called South. Universal recipes, formulas and ready-to be transplanted models offend intelligence, deny scientific knowledge and learning as a possibility, and have proven ineffective as strategies for development.
- Revise international cooperation assumptions based on asymmetry and unidirectionality. Deficit approaches to the South must belong to the past, once diversity is acknowledged. Knowledge production, synthesizing, sharing and dissemination have and continue to take place both in the North and in the South, and must thus be viewed as two-way avenues. There is no reason why the North, international Agencies and the WB in particular should monopolize the function of global catalysts, synthesizers and disseminators of knowledge. There is much Agencies can do to collaborate with the South in disseminating (to the North and within the South) what the South produces and does.
- Support social watch and enhance professional dialogue with the South Social watch and participation of civil society are critical requirements of national development and of effective international cooperation for such development. This has been emphasized by Agencies themselves, so here is a common platform for partnership and alliances with “the critical South”. This implies from Agencies a coherent institutional behavior (democratic, transparent, accountable, open to learn), a wider and more complex understanding of “civil society” that goes beyond the traditional NGO-centered approach, and enhanced professional dialogue and exchange with the intellectual community in the South including

universities, higher education and research institutions, as well as teacher and other professional associations.

- Sound understandings and critical approaches to information, knowledge, education and learning Critical thinking and critical approaches to information, knowledge, education and learning are today more important than ever. Ensuring that all information and knowledge transactions -- including of course those between countries and Agencies -- incorporate such “critical” component should be part of any modern international development cooperation model and of any modern knowledge management system.
- More questions and more learning together Agencies have too many answers and too few questions, while we in the South – and everyone else in the world – have more questions than answers. Admitting ignorance and the need to learn, and to learn how to learn, is at the very heart of a new international cooperation model. Only honesty builds confidence, and mutual confidence is fundamental for a healthy and collaborative relationship. North and South, Agencies and countries, must learn to learn together and from each other.
- Assist countries identify and develop their own human resources and capacities If ownership is essential for development, it is time that it is considered seriously by both countries and the international development community. The most effective way to assist the South is by making sure that such assistance is sustainable, non-directive, empathetic, invisible: assistance to help countries in the South do our own thinking, our own research and experimentation, our own networking and sharing, our own search for alternative models, our own learning by doing, in our own terms and at our own pace.

## REFERENCES

- Analysys. 2000. *The Network Revolution and the Developing World*. Final Report for World Bank and infoDev. Analysys Report Number 00-216, 17 August 2000.
- AVALOS, B. 2001. “Policy Issues Derived from the Internationalisation of Education: Their Effects on Developing Countries”. Paper presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement “Equity, Globalisation and Change. Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, Toronto, 5-9 January 2001 (mimeo).
- BUCHERT, L.; Epskamp, K. (eds.) 2000. New Modalities of Educational Aid, *Prospects*, Vol. XXX, N° 4, Open File N° 116. Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.
- CARLSON, B. 2000. Achieving Educational Quality: What Schools Teach Us. Learning from Chile’s P-900 Primary Schools, *Serie Desarrollo Productivo*, N° 64. Santiago: ECLAC.
- CORAGGIO, J.L and R.M. Torres, 1997. *La educación según el Banco Mundial: Un análisis de sus propuestas y métodos*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila-CEM.
- LOCKHEED, M. and A. Verspoor. 1991. *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*. Washington: A World Bank Publication, Oxford University Press.
- NYÍRI, J.C. 2000. “The word *information* and its soulmate *data*”, in B. Smith (ed.) *The Monist, An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry*. The Monist Online Service.

- POPKEWITZ, T.S. (ed.) 2000. *Educational Knowledge: Changing Relationships between the State, Civil Society, and the Educational Community*. New York: Sunny Series Frontiers in Education, State University of New York Press.
- TORRES, R.M. 1996. "Education Seen Through Anglophone Eyes", in: *CIES Newsletter*, N° 111, Washington: Comparative and International Education Society.
- TORRES, R.M. 1999. "Improving the Quality of Basic Education? The Strategies of the World Bank", in: Stromquist, N.; Basile, M. (ed.). *Politics of Educational Innovations in Developing Countries, An Analysis of Knowledge and Power*. New York-London: Falmer Press.
- TORRES, R.M. 2000a. *Itinerarios por la educación latinoamericana: Cuaderno de viajes*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- TORRES, R.M. 2000b. *One Decade of "Education for All": The Challenge Ahead*. Buenos Aires: IPE UNESCO.
- TORRES, R.M. 2000c. "What happened at the World Education Forum?" in: *Adult Education and Development*, N° 55. Bonn: IIZ-DVV, 2001.
- TORRES, R.M. 2000d. "2000 Voices from Latin America: The Latin American Statement on Education for All", in: K. King (ed.), *NORRAG News*, N° 27. University of Edinburgh: December 2000.
- UNDP. 1993. *Human Development Report 1993*. New York: Oxford University.
- UNESCO. 2000. Dakar Follow-up Bulletin, First Meeting of the Working Group on EFA (Paris, 22-24 November 2000). Summary of the intervention by Maris O'Rourke, World Bank.
- UNESCO-OREALC. 1998. *Primer Informe. Primer estudio internacional comparativo sobre lenguaje, matemática y factores asociados en tercero y cuarto grado*, Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación. Santiago.
- UNITED NATIONS-Economic and Social Council. 2000. *Development and International Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century: The Role of Information Technology in the Context of a Knowledge-Based Global Economy*, Report of the Secretary-General, Substantive Session of 2000, New York, 5 July-1 August 2000. E/2000/52
- WORLD BANK. 1995. *Priorities and Strategies for Education: A World Bank Review*. Washington: World Bank.
- WORLD BANK. 1999. *Educational Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*. The World Bank: Latin American Social and Human Development.
- WORLD BANK. 2000a. *Education for All: From Jomtien to Dakar and Beyond*. Paper prepared by The World Bank for the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, April 26-28, 2000. Washington DC.
- WORLD BANK. 2000b. World Development Report 2000/2001 "Attacking Poverty". Washington, D.C.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “South” refers here to three regions: Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It does not include the so-called “transition economies”.

<sup>2</sup> The term International Assistance Agencies is used here to refer to international organizations – both inter-governmental and NGOs -- whose mission is stated in terms of “assisting” or “cooperating” with “developing countries” either financially (grants and loans) and/or technically for the purpose of “development”. This paper focuses on some dominant trends in such assistance, but is also aware of the diversity of such Agencies and their important differences in terms of mandates, ideologies, structures, scopes, and *modus operandi*.

<sup>3</sup> WB 2000 World Development Report, “Attacking Poverty”, led to the publicized resignation, in early 2000, of its former author, Ravi Kanbur. At the launch of the report (Washington, Sep. 12, 2000) WB officials present explained the disagreement in terms of a “low emphasis” given by Kanbur and his team to “opportunity” (metaphor for “economic growth”) as key to development. The sequence *empowerment-security-opportunity* was changed, in the final version, to *opportunity-empowerment-security*. Behind each sequence there is of course a very different understanding of, and approach to, development. See: [www.worldbank.org/html/extme/ts091200a.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/html/extme/ts091200a.htm)

<sup>4</sup> In 1996, at the CIES annual conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, the book “Improving primary education in developing countries” was criticized, mainly by US academics, for being a recipe book, with a weak research base. One of the authors present explained that the book was not meant for them – academics, people in the North – but for “decision-makers in developing countries.” (My personal notes from that conference).

<sup>5</sup> The case of Latin America is illustrative of this point: this is a region with over 90% of primary school enrolment, and parity in such enrolment between boys and girls (with various countries and zones where boys face a more critical situation than girls *vis a vis* access, retention, completion and achievement) and with an important expansion of secondary and tertiary education. However, EFA partners and goals continued to emphasize primary school enrolment in the 1990s and now girls’ education in the 2000s. Also, English continues to be imposed as a *lingua franca* in a predominantly Spanish-speaking region, thus alienating Latin America from most EFA and international documents, meetings and discussion fora.

<sup>6</sup> “The pilot country experience has shown that developing genuine ownership is a process that requires: a) time for broad ownership to take root; b) space to allow it to be nurtured; c) political will - both of countries to step into leadership positions, and of donors to step aside. (Who owns the Development Agenda? Eighteen months into CDF, country ownership is a key issue. <http://www.worldbank.org/cdf/story2.htm>)

<sup>7</sup> The WB says it learned eight lessons during the Jomtien decade: 1. Strong political commitment is the cornerstone of success; 2. Quality is as important as quantity; 3. Governments cannot deliver on EFA alone, partnerships are key; 4. Countries make better progress when they have developed sector policy frameworks; 5. Inefficient utilization of education resources constrains progress; 6. Education must adapt quickly to new economic, technological and social challenges; 7. Education must be cushioned during crises; 8. Educational expansion needs to be supported by a growing economy. (World Bank, 2000a).

<sup>8</sup> Typically, researchers from the South are more cautious about delimiting the realities for which they speak or write. Intellectual and technical production in the North, and particularly that of Agencies, is generally less concerned about making explicit the conditions of production of their discourse and the scope of their recommendations, thus creating – deliberately or not- a sense of ubiquity in space and time. Translation to other languages, without the necessary editorial work, often reinforces among foreign readers this sense of a-historic, a-cultural universal truths.

<sup>9</sup> Just one story to exemplify this. After a meeting with Ministry of Education officials in a small and poor African country, I felt very enthusiastic with their ideas and experience on the ground. However, the project (document) presented was dull, standardized and full of jargon. After reading it, I raised a number of

---

questions. The consultant they had hired to draft the project said he was no longer available because he was busy drafting projects for the WB and various other agencies: one on agriculture, one on HIV/AIDS and one on girls' education -- he mentioned all this as an asset and as an indication of professional competency. Everyday, wonderful people and wonderful ideas get trapped in the project-consultancy business, because people who know and who can take decisions and act, not necessarily speak or write in English, do not have the "expertise" (or the software) to draft projects according to the specific formats required by each Agency, or simply do not have the time or the spirit to go through all this.

<sup>10</sup> See UNESCO-OREALC web page: [www.unesco.cl](http://www.unesco.cl)

<sup>11</sup> See: [www.fronesis.org/prolat.htm](http://www.fronesis.org/prolat.htm) and [www.observatorio.org](http://www.observatorio.org)