

**ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND EDUCATION JUSTICE:  
BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF “POVERTY ALLEVIATION” AND “EDUCATION  
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT”**

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**Abstract**

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The rhetoric on Poverty Alleviation on the one hand, and on Improving the Quality of Education on the other, has come to a dead end, because of its reiteration and because of its lack of results. Progress on both fronts (intimately inter-related, as we know) is non-existent or “modest”, despite the structural adjustment policies, the compensatory social policies (aimed at alleviating the human suffering of such adjustments), and the education reforms conducted over the past twenty years by governments in “developing countries”, with international advice and loans. The continued mistakes and economic and social costs of bad advice and bad national political and administrative management are not assumed by advisers and managers but by countries and peoples, and especially by the poor, under whose name plans are elaborated and new loans negotiated.

We see that the problems increase, while the aspirations and goals decrease, and the deadlines are extended. The historic ideal of “equality” and of “social justice” was substituted by achieving “equity” through compensatory, short-term measures. “Development” was abandoned by “alleviating poverty”, now further focused on “eliminating extreme poverty.” “Developing countries” became “client countries” and “partner countries”, with increased dependency and external debt. Basic Education (Education for All) was reduced to Primary Education and this to four years of schooling (Millennium Development Goals). External Debt and Corruption, two major allies of poverty, and also in expansion, continue to be unnamed by world reports, events and fora on poverty, social development and education. The vicious circle goes on and on: poverty – loans - external debt – corruption - reduced social budget – degradation of public education and of the right to education.

“Crisis”, “alleviation”, “improvement” do not seem appropriate terms to refer to long-standing and structural situations demanding major change. More of the same and quick fixes are not the solution, and yet this is what continues to be done, and it is not because of lack of information. Those who promote “poverty alleviation” and “quality improvement” at the global level, also promote the globalization of the neoliberal economic model that is deepening and amplifying economic and social injustice to a global scale.

Economic justice is a major condition for education justice, and viceversa. Lifelong learning and the right to free, universal quality education, require another education model, which in turn requires another economic and social model, and another North-South “international cooperation” model. Thus, rather than following the traditional narrow sectoral approaches, the challenge today is embracing wide, multisectoral and convergent visions and paths: State plus civil society, Education as part of Social Policy and Social Policy as part of Economic Policy, education and work, school and out-of-school learning, face-to-face and virtual tools, school and the media, school and family, family and community, the local, the national and the global. Such synergies are emerging in many alternative proposals and experiences in the South and in the North, and are embryos of a growing critical social movement engaged with the promotion of human development and the integral defence of citizen rights - political, economic, social, educational and cultural.

\* The full text of this conference is based on the results of a macro study on this issue conducted in 2004 for the 'Fe y Alegría' International Movement for Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion <http://www.feyalegria.org/>