The Formulation of Policies and Availability of Information About the School System

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Introduction

Based on an initiative of the Board of Directors, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) created the Regional Policy Dialogue, which offers member countries that are loan recipients a forum to discuss policies and develop strategic thinking in priority areas for national development in these countries. The Education Network addresses the education sector and human resources training.

The objective of the dialogue is to create a place where senior officials that are responsible for making decisions and establishing policies in Latin American and Caribbean countries can share their experiences, learn about the activities of other countries in the region and the rest of the world, and explore opportunities for regional cooperation. The Education Network has already organized seven regional meetings during the last five years.

In this case, the meeting to be held in Santo Domingo during the month of October will be devoted to examining the quality and quantity of information available in each educational system and the use of this information by those responsible for making decisions and establishing policies. This is a very important topic, especially if the current global context, which makes progressively greater demands on governments and public services, is taken into account. Around the world, accountability is an increasingly higher priority in almost all countries. In our time, the effective use of information is becoming a need for everyone.

The paper presented here is still preliminary and is based on a study with strict time limits, based on responses to the questionnaire sent to senior staff members at the ministries of education in Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries.

The objective of this effort is to produce a sub-regional exchange that can support the development of a frame of reference for the analysis that needs to be carried out on the topic. Rather than provide complete answers, the study seeks to present material for reflection, and although still unproven, avenues toward greater progress. The study does not aim to produce original research results, but to serve as the basis for producing more effective policies.

Background

After multiple efforts and more than a decade of educational reforms, growing demands for greater effectiveness, through the achievement of results that justify the expenditures realized, can be observed in the majority of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean[1]. While those responsible for the policies in force defend their initiatives, critics of these positions persistently question why educational problems seem to lack a solution and why progress is very limited in spite of, in some cases, high levels of investment. The debate has become more generalized in some countries with: increased participation by parents and communities who demand better results; and a lack of consensus among the groups involved in the sector on the issue of evaluation mechanisms used to measure the effect of the policies of change that were designed and applied and the level of the proposed objectives.

As several members of the Education Network expressed at the last meeting of the Policy Dialogue (17-18 February 2005), given the high level of priority normally granted to evaluating the outcomes of the policies being implemented, countries need to identify the most logical, acceptable and legitimate ways to measure the progress made. Taking this into account and considering the importance of specific, reliable information in the decision-making process, the following questions were presented: How to evaluate the impact of educational policy options? What are the best mechanisms and indicators to evaluate progress? How to evaluate specific policies and programs? How to achieve the best implementation of policies and programs? How to effectively collect and convey the information? How to evaluate the student results obtained? How to assure that the results of the evaluations are available to those responsible for decision-making and policy design?[2]

Obtaining the responses to questions like these can have important implications for developing the ability of ministries of Education, and more generally, education reformers, to design and implement their efforts to achieve medium and long term results. This could contribute to determining the feasibility of obtaining the necessary political support and the required level of financial support for the educational policies they want to implement. This could have an influence on the way in which expectations are handled and the manner in which mass communication campaigns to support educational reforms are designed and conducted. In short, they could have a substantial influence on the content, scheduling

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[1] In fact, this is a global phenomenon that extends beyond the region and the education sector. In the world of the XXIst century, there is profound awareness about the need to have an effective State. There is profound consensus about the fact that this is a critical element for achieving the desired level of sustainable development.

[2] Taken from the terms of reference prepared to guide this study.

and sequencing of interventions in the sector, and on the policies of change that are designed and implemented.

As a consequence of governments' needs and desires, not only to be more effective, but also to be in a position to demonstrate this effectiveness, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has been evolving as a professional field and part of modern management. The current trend is to move away from traditional models based on monitoring implementation to those based more on results. The goal is no longer to verify that the programmed actions have been carried out, but to focus on the consequences of these actions. In this context, having systematically gathered, rationally organized, reliable information is a critical need. The need for good basic information from the outset and for good indicators is a necessary ingredient for showing how governments and different sectors are fulfilling their mission and the expectations generated by society. In our case, this refers directly to Ministries of Education and the reforms carried out.

The present document focuses on these needs and the situation that has generated them. It aims to identify how certain important officials interpret their situation and to provide an exploratory analysis of what they think is happening, helping to identify what they consider to be the greatest problems.

Methodology

As already noted in the introduction, this paper is exploratory and mainly descriptive in nature, which means that providing definitive responses to the problems posed goes beyond its frame of reference. What it principally seeks to achieve is simply to motivate dialogue, to guide the different countries of the sub-region toward acquiring a more profound level of awareness about existing problems, and to put countries in a position to seek joint solutions, or at the least, solutions stemming from a diagnosis developed through an exchange of ideas.

It is also not a research project whose principal objective is to succeed in establishing the truth about certain hypotheses or contributing to knowledge development. It is a study that instead aims to facilitate reflection and exchange, and in the end, to generate practical actions. It seeks to influence in some way the affairs of the educational systems of the countries included in the exchange.

The sample is not random. It is comprised of seven countries that were selected by the Bank following a series of criteria established *a priori*. First, all of the included countries are members that receive loans from the IDB and are geographically located in the sub-region. In the second place, they have not participated in another similar study in the recent past. Finally, in the third place, they are relatively easily accessible in order to be able to gather the necessary information. This final requirement is more than justified given the small amount of time available for completing the process of data collection, analysis and pooling of results in order to be in a position to present a completed version at the general meeting to be held in Washington at the beginning of November.

The information was obtained primarily through the administration of a questionnaire, the preliminary version of which was designed by the consultant Jorge Max Fernández. It was subsequently enriched through the opinions of the Education Network coordinators, Viola Espinola and Ana Cristina Accioly de Amorim, the consultant Henry Wolfe, and several Bank staff members linked to the countries included in the study. These improvements were used to prepare a second version of the questionnaire, which was subsequently reviewed by the consultant Santiago Cueto. At its third formulation, the questionnaire was considered to be ready to send to the countries included in the sample.

The questionnaire results were complemented with a series of interviews carried out with important staff members from the Ministries or Secretariats of Education involved in the study. The interviews were in

principle guided by the questionnaire and developed primarily to complete the responses; however, opportunities to open new lines of thinking were also pursued. They were open interviews, with a very flexible guide that sought to promote free expression by the interviewee.

It is useful to indicate that given its design, the study is not focused on establishing an objective truth or even identifying a widely shared belief. It simply aims to determine the subjective interpretation of what the participants in the study perceive to be happening in their respective settings. This represents something important since this is a group of significant actors who are going to speak about the manner in which they focus on the processes that take place around them. The paper is therefore exploratory and descriptive in nature. It does not in any way attempt to establish causal relationships; the objective is more limited.

All of the responses received were included in this preliminary version of the report that was supposed to be presented at the sub-regional meeting to be held on 13-14 October of the present year in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and that, due to the hurricanes that ravaged the region, had to be suspended. An additional consequence of the effects of these natural phenomena is that some of the interviews could not be carried out in sufficient time to be included in the document.

The available information was also complemented by a bibliographic search. Several sources, written and on the Internet, were reviewed. It is necessary to recognize, however, that resources about this issue in the sub-region are not very abundant, with the majority of references found in parts of project-related documents.

It is necessary to highlight the cooperation of the majority of the countries that, with a single exception, produced their responses in a relatively short time period. Clearly the greatest value of the study is this exchange.

The situation in the sub-region

The sub-region is formed by the countries of Central America[3], Venezuela, and the Hispanic Caribbean. This last group is limited to only the Dominican Republic due to the special situations in Puerto Rico and Cuba.

This region is made up of mainly small countries and economies where the dominant influence of the United States is evident, although not without opposition. During a period of time, the livestock sector was the most important, although at the present time in some of these countries, it has now lost this place to, in many cases, Tourism. There is an abundance of duty-free zones, whose factories are known as *maquiladoras*. According to the statistics, the group of countries could be categorized into three levels of development: High, comprised of Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic; medium, with only El Salvador; and low, with Honduras and Nicaragua.

Table I–Comparative Table of Economic Statistics

Country	Domestic Product *	Place in the world**	Population***	Per capita GDP US $
Costa Rica	38.0	87	4.0	9,600
El Salvador	32.4	91	6.7	4,900
Honduras	18.8	114	7.0	2,800
Nicaragua	12.3	129	5.5	2,300
Dominican Republic	55.6	71	9.0	6,300
Panama	20.6	109	3.0	6,900

Sources: The World Facts Book. Using 2003 and 2004 estimates.
* In billions of United States dollars. ** Of a total of 232 *** In millions.

The educational situation varies considerably from one country to another, although it is possible to find a series of general, shared characteristics. The indicators for this sector, according to the table provided by UNESCO, follow the economic ones, with some surprises.

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[3] The political concept of Central America is not as clear as it would appear to be and merits clarification. With respect to Panama, not all opinions agree on placing this Canal nation in this group. Its history and origins are different from the rest of the group. However, in this paper, Panama is considered to be part of this conglomerate.

Table II–Comparative Table of Educational Statistics

Country	Students/ teacher ratio	Percent of repeaters	Percent of transition from primary to secondary	Percent of GNP on education	Percent of public spending on education
Costa Rica	23	7	86	5.1	22.4
El Salvador	N/A	7	93	2.9	20.0
Honduras	34	N/A	N/A	4.0	N/A
Nicaragua	35	9	99	3.1	15.0
Dominican Republic	39	6	76	2.3	12.4
Panama	24	5	57	4.5	7.7

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Upon studying the recent history of education in this group of countries, it stands out that all of them have been recently involved, in one way or another, in a certain reform movement in their educational systems. It is interesting to observe that very similar social movements develop, in which the goal is to design and then implement broad-reaching educational reforms with very similar instruments.

The presence and influence of a range of projects and programs co-financed by international agencies or through bilateral agreements is also evident in the development process of these initiatives.

A brief look at each country can facilitate a better understanding of these assertions.

- Costa Rica

In 1973, there is a reform to the Political Constitution, whereby Basic General Education is compulsory, and Basic, Initial and Diversified Education are free and paid for by the State. On 23 June 1997, the Legislative Assembly approves draft legislation to reform article 78 of the Political Constitution, which declares Initial education to be compulsory. Furthermore, it establishes that public spending on the education sector cannot be lower than 6% of the Gross Domestic Product, which guarantees financing of education, from Initial up to higher education.

The Division of Educational Planning and Development, through the Department of Education Research, has carried out the Evaluation of the Costa Rican Educational System in light of the Educational Policy towards the 21st Century since July 2003. The development of this evaluation is carried out at the mandate of the Higher Education Council.

With the goal of improving current educational development and creating opportunities for those who have been excluded for different reasons, the

Ministry of Public Education (MEP) proposed concrete goals in four critical areas of educational development:

1. Develop educational opportunities that permit educational access, permanence and success under equal conditions.

2. Strengthen students' knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes and aptitudes in order to strengthen the integral development that permits a balance between the cognitive, emotional and environmental, in order to reach a healthy, responsible co-existence.

3. Strengthen the mechanisms for integration and relevance between the educational offering for technical education and the requirements and needs for national and local economic development.

4. Improve the management of the MEP through the achievement of administrative efficiency, transparency of processes and resource allocation, rationality and resource optimization.

- El Salvador

After many years under a bloody civil war, the country initiated its recovery, which took shape in the education sector starting in 1991 with the pilot program EDUCO, applied in poor municipalities with the objective of restoring basic education. In 1993 the program was in a position to demonstrate its achievements; however, its acceptance in society was limited.

At the end of 1993, after a series of consultations, Harvard University, with the participation of the Central American University of El Salvador (UCA) and FEPADE[4], conducted a diagnostic study of the education sector, which produced a great deal of information and analysis and was the basis for an extensive discussion process with a high level of participation. In 1995, a consultation was carried out to strengthen the education reform process. The National Commission on Education, Science and Development was created, which was instrumental in national dialogue on education and in the production of the report that laid the foundations for the reform proposal.

This movement provokes in the same year the adoption, under the Ministry's leadership, of a ten-year plan, designated the Ten-Year

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[4] Non-profit foundation created by the business sector with the objective of influencing education and human resource development.

Educational Reform Plan (*Plan Decenal de Reforma Educativa en Marcha 1995-2005)*. The entire education sector has been influenced by this initiative that is still in effect, and is almost coming to an end.

- Honduras

The start of the development of public education in Honduras was somewhat late, initiating its development at the end of the 1950s. Prior to the 1957 reforms, education was limited to only those families with sufficient financial means to be able to pay for the attendance of their youngest members at private schools. It is during the 1957-63 period that the reforms necessary for the development of national public education and the beginning of a school construction program are introduced.

In Honduras, primary education is currently free and compulsory for all children between seven and 14 years of age. It is still considered that there is a great deal of work to do in the schools that lack personnel and equipment. The winds of reform can be felt in the country. In the last 15 years, 34 different programs have been designed and implemented with international co-financing. This situation is linked to the development of studies and diagnostic tools that should have produced a significant amount of information and of actions designed to improve the educational quality and equity in the country.

The National Forum for Convergence (FONAC) presented to the State and civil society the *Proposal of the Honduran Society for the Transformation of National Education,* product of more than a year and a half of consultation, convergence and socialization throughout the entire country.

Many reflections offered by the people consulted constitute valuable contributions for the process of building the plans, curricula and policies that will have to be implemented and that will therefore solve to a great extent many of the problems identified in the consultation carried out by FONAC. A positive aspect of Honduran education is the effort that a few committed sectors make to overcoming deficiencies, obstacles and difficulties. However, there is a high degree of agreement in the most recent diagnoses about which educational problems are the most pressing.

- Nicaragua

During the last decade of the XX century, Nicaragua also initiated a broad movement of education reform and growth. The principal objective of these efforts was to improve the educational status of the work force. A

reduction in illiteracy and increase in Basic Education coverage was sought in order to achieve this result.

At that time, this movement to improve education was part of the Strengthened Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (ERCERP), presented in 2002. This Strategy is the basis on which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank considered the inclusion of Nicaragua in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

One of the central elements of the Nicaraguan government's strategy for educational sector reform is the decentralization of school management within local (school centers) and municipal entities, including parents, teachers, students and local authorities in the process. Within this context, the new mission of the Ministry of Education is to set standards for the operation of school centers and the basic content of educational programs, to define quality standards for educational materials, to certify teachers and physical school facilities, and to channel budgetary resources for financing public education.

The principal objective of the educational decentralization policy is to increase the level of efficiency in the use of available public resources for education and to promote greater interest on the part of educational service users in contributing to the operation of the schools.

The model that shapes educational decentralization is School Autonomy, which is carried out through school directive councils. The autonomous center has certain competences with relative, but real, independence, with respect to the Central Government and the Local Governments. The prerogatives that the laws or regulations grant to them cannot be reformed by any local or state entity, but only by subsequent laws with general validity.

Decentralization at the departmental and municipal level consists of the system for distributing functions and responsibilities among the central government, local authorities or entities and civil society through their representatives from the educational community in order to ensure enhanced School Autonomy.

- Dominican Republic

The 1980s were really difficult times in Dominican education. All of the indicators demonstrated the existence of serious problems. There were no books in the schools and the faculties of Education lacked students. That desperate situation led to a social movement in which universities, professional groups, non-governmental organizations and teacher unions

participated, along with the Ministry of Education itself, spearheading the process.

The widely participatory manifestation led to the formulation of the ten-year Plan implemented in the 1990s. Although it still faced problems, Dominican education was significantly strengthened. It can be said that optimism returned to the classrooms. A broad reform process was developed, based on the introduction of constructivist pedagogy, in which they began to apply national tests and the teaching profession became attractive, at least partially, once again. Extensive efforts to achieve professionalism in teaching were carried out, and utensils and equipment were taken to the schools.

In recent years, the dynamic of progress has been maintained in some ways through the participation of donations and loans from international organizations and bilateral agreements.

- Panama

During the 1990s, Panama, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and other bilateral sources, already spoke about a Ten-year Educational Strategy with the implementation of two important projects, one sponsored by each international bank.

Today the Ministry proposes to develop, over the next 10 years, a sustained, creative process of educational modernization, with the goal of implementing Education Law 34 and along with it, the comprehensive review of the principles, structure and operation of the educational system in order to renew, democratize and adapt it to the rapid, diverse and profound changes taking place in the economy, science and technology, the labor market, culture, and learning theories.

The effort aims to build a model of democratic, quality education, capable of educating all of the country's people, from all regions and social conditions, so that they acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills that make it possible for them to live and participate actively in modern society.

- In conclusion

After this brief examination of the situation of the group of countries in the sub-region included in the study, one can reach a few conclusions that can better guide the rest of the paper and perhaps provide a backdrop to some of the ideas that will be presented later as a result of the questionnaire and interview responses.

1. In all of the countries in the group, there is a certain dissatisfaction with the educational situation. At different levels, each country expresses a clear desire to improve the quality of its performance in the sector.

2. In all cases, there are also national educational reform movements in the recent past. All of them have prepared a national strategy using a very participatory process. In many cases, these movements emerge as a reaction to a previous crisis.

3. The presence of international financing mechanisms is observed in the entire sub-region, permitting a much higher level of investment and influencing educational policy decisions. The projects generated in this context are an important source of information due to the diagnoses produced in their design and planning phase.

Available Information

In the sub-region, there is a series of diverse types of empirical information sources. The majority of the independent production is done through secondary sources, citing other studies sponsored by governments or international agencies interested in the sector. It is worthwhile to provide a holistic view in order to better understand the situation.

- National Reports

In the sub-region all of the countries have some type of statistical information system that periodically updates the available information. In these cases, the information systems produce mainly descriptive information about the educational system, such as the number of school centers, teachers and students, percentage literate, population composition and similar data. They are not always kept up-to-date and data collection and processing frequently involves some difficulties. It is notable how frequently many people involved in Education, and sometimes including the ministry staff members themselves, manifest some type of mistrust toward these statistics.

Another factor to take into account is the difficulty of comparing the information obtained in different countries and even in a single country over time.

These statistical systems are supplemented by activities such as censuses and national standard of living surveys that help to obtain a certain quantity of information on the national situation and particularly in this case, on the education sector.

Previously, much of this information was difficult to access. It is currently much more within the reach of different types of users. The use of electronic media makes it possible to access a large number of web portals where it is possible to find information, no longer only statistics, but also strategic plans and projects maintained by the ministries[5].

- International Sources

There are currently many international sources that provide information about educational indicators in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Several can be cited as examples:

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[5] All of the Ministries in the sub-region maintain a presence on the Internet through one or more web portals.

1. UNESCO maintains a series of indicators through the web portal of its Institute for Statistics, as well as through its reports related to the Education for All initiative. There are a series of progress reports based on the goals established at the Dakar meeting in 2000.

2. The Partnership for Education Revitalization in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL) has published a series of reports about the educational situation in the region. In addition, it has completed national reports for El Salvador (2002), Honduras (2002), Panama (2002) and Nicaragua (2004) and is currently working on reports about Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

3. The Regional Information System (SIRI) is sustained by UNESCO in order to generate, collect and disseminate information about education in the region. The Education for All project and the Regional Education Indicators Project (PRIE) are part of this system.

- Assessments of school performance

In this section, only information related to student performance is mentioned. A short individualized analysis of each country is provided. When carrying out this analysis, the report about the issue produced by G. Ferrer (2005) is used in a privileged manner.

Costa Rica

In this country, there is a long tradition with respect to assessing student achievement. The use of standardized tests dates back to 1986. The tests are currently the responsibility of the Division of Quality Control and Macro-evaluation of the Education System (Department of National Tests) in the Ministry of Education.

The Secondary Education tests, as well as the National Tests at the Conclusion of cycles II and III of Basic General Education, are standards-based, census and cumulative (promotion and graduation). They are tests with so-called "high stakes" since they constitute 60% of the student's final grade.

The Division of Quality Control produces differentiated results reports for high-level MEP authorities, regional authorities and schools, including parents and students. Furthermore, technical reports are produced for

researchers and academic professionals, as well as for the press. In addition to the formal reports, in-depth studies are frequently conducted.

Test results to date have had a limited impact on educational policy decisions at the national level, with the exception of specific modifications carried out based on the assessment agendas or on the tests themselves.

El Salvador

The National Directorate for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Ministry of Education is responsible for the SABE project, to assess learning in basic education. The project's assessment objectives have undergone changes throughout the last decade, depending on changes in sectoral management, in the monitoring requirements of international financing agencies (mainly USAID and the World Bank), and in assessment programs contracted out to private organizations (INCRE - Intercultural Center for Research in Education). As part of another effort, the tests for students who are secondary school graduates (PAES), although they are official and governed by the General Education Law, are designed and administered in a decentralized manner by the Central American University of El Salvador (UCA).

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The PAES test of graduation from secondary school is a census test and, although originally conceived as a standards-based test, is currently criteria-based. In general, the SABE test results have not had an impact on policy decision-making. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the assessment system worked during many years in isolation from other Ministry technical teams, and that campaigns to sensitize and promote the educational community to participate in assessment processes were not carried out.

Honduras

The current assessment system has its origins in an agreement between the Public Education Secretariat (SEP) and the World Bank for the monitoring of PROMEB – the Improving Basic Education Program. Previously (1990-1994), there were efforts to carry out standardized assessments within the framework of the Primary Education Efficiency Program (PEEP), financed by USAID. However, those assessments were never systematized or institutionalized.

In 1995, the UMCE - Educational Quality Measurement Unit– was created, administered by the Francisco Morazán National Teaching University. The national operatives, which participate directly in the process of test application and data collection, are organized through a

Deconcentrated Evaluation Network, which functions in the 18 departmental Bureaus.

The tests applied by the UMCE are sampled at the national level, criteria-driven and based primarily on a multiple-choice response model. In addition, the language section assesses writing and oral reading.

The official reports are sent to the SEP political authorities and regional educational authorities. It is also expected that they reach schools, parents and the general public, although various operational and budgetary obstacles have limited this type of dissemination.

Limited communication and weak agreements between the UMCE and the SEP regarding the goals and uses of the assessment stand out as primary issues, which result in the under-utilization of the data for policy decision-making.

Nicaragua

The standardized learning assessment is carried out by the Directorate for Evaluation at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, within the framework of the Second Basic Education Project (APRENDE). Until 1999, the assessment efforts carried out by that Directorate were relatively unarticulated and in need of a clear objective with respect to the potential use of the information collected. In 1999, the SNE - National System for the Evaluation of Basic and Secondary Education - is created, which has the support of APRENDE, BASE (USAID) and SIMEN (UNESCO), and which has rethought the assessment strategy and its specific goals. The assessment system is registered within a context of important reforms for decentralizing the administration of public schools, especially through the School Autonomy Program (1992) and the distribution of the School Participation Law (2002).

The learning assessment tests are sample-based, criteria-driven and based on a multiple-choice response model. They are accompanied by questionnaires about the school and extracurricular context for teachers, directors, students and parents. In addition, a process for self-evaluation of educational centers takes place in a small non-representative national sample.

Data dissemination is still not sufficient enough to impact public opinion and to mobilize civil society's demand for higher levels of educational quality.

Panama

During the last two decades various assessment projects were attempted, under the responsibility of different agencies, but none of the projects were institutionalized, and there are no registries of the data obtained during those processes. The last standardized assessment project was carried out by the Directorate for Evaluation at the Ministry of Education in 2000 and 2001. It was, however, a pilot assessment with a reduced sample. In 2002, as a result of an extensive Inter-sectoral Dialogue, a presidential decree was signed for the creation of a new Directorate for Evaluation, with renewed functions and more explicit guidelines for developing new procedures and integral assessment processes.

Based on the prior experiences gained, the National Pilot Test "Comprender" for 3rd, 6th and 9th grades at General Basic Education Centers was designed in 2001. The purpose of the test was to measure students' verbal and mathematical abilities and attitudes.

The results of the 2000-2001 tests have been disseminated more broadly, except for the distribution of reports to regional authorities and sampled schools. The utilization of data within the Ministry of Education has also been insufficient.

Dominican Republic

Currently, the unit that measures academic achievement is the Department of National Tests, an agency that is dependent on the Directorate for Evaluation and Control at the Ministry of Education. Originally, the National Tests project was financed primarily through funds from international loans (IDB and World Bank). At present, most of the assessment programs are financed through the Secretariat's regular budget.

The National Tests are used, in the first place, as a partial indicator of academic achievement in order to determine the promotion and graduation of students at the levels and courses assessed. The delivery of results, both to schools and to individual students, is carried out in a manner that is useful for the curriculum in order to improve the results of the learning process.

There are organizational problems within the Ministry of Education that impede an adequate flow of information and the synergistic work among the different management units. The evaluation efforts overseen by different sections tend to overlap, and the national test results do not always have a significant impact on decision-making for the design of integral or complementary quality improvement policies.

Survey Results

The first two survey questions are combined in order to investigate the existence of formal evaluation mechanisms[6] to monitor the nine areas considered to be important in educational affairs. The first approximation aims to establish their existence, the second to obtain details about the manner in which they function.

- In terms of Equity, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras affirm that they have those formal mechanisms while Costa Rica, Panama, and the Dominican Republic do not. Honduras carries out monitoring of its equity indicators within the framework of the Education for All Plan (EFA). It is envisioned within a 12-year framework (2003-2015) and produces reports annually.

  El Salvador explains that it does not necessarily have a formal evaluation process. However, it organizes and analyzes information based on the data on educational coverage, quality and gaps by sectors, areas, levels and gender.

  Meanwhile, Nicaragua accomplishes this through the use of general statistics on coverage and efficiency broken down by areas, sex and other relevant categories. Panama, although it states that it does not have a formal mechanism, speaks about the country's special emphasis on indigenous areas and areas of "social risk," thus seeking to respond to the need for equity in education.

  It would therefore seem that the responses obtained in this area follow a gradation. In some cases, specific indicators are used to periodically measure the progress achieved. The following level would be those ministries that use their general statistics to evaluate, by approximation, the level of equity they have been able to achieve. The third level would be formed by those that rely primarily on policy-making.

- The second aspect is Teacher Quality. It is very significant that the responses in this area are unanimous: No country states that it has a formal mechanism to evaluate progress. This response is surprising, even though on the other hand, it could have been anticipated.

  It is surprising, because "quality" has become a very popular term in the educational arena in recent years and there are several approximations and systems to measure this specific dimension. On the other hand, it could be expected due to the difficulty of developing a universally

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[6] This is the first dimension that reflects the flexibility provided in the concepts from the outset of the design of the study. "Formal mechanism" is interpreted strictly in some cases, provoking a negative reponse by several countries. In other cases, the interpretation is much broader.

accepted operational definition with a real possibility of being applied through indicators.

The general view in this area seems to be that the only monitoring of teachers is in terms of personnel lists and actions, which in the majority of cases takes place in a centralized manner. El Salvador refers to certain census tests that are administered to all teachers at the time they graduate from the university with their degree. They have to pass this examination to be able to work as teachers.

Another question linked to this one is number 17, which deals with the existence of mechanisms to evaluate teachers[7]. In this case, Costa Rica states that it has a mechanism for evaluating teacher performance that influences the remuneration that the teacher receives. The Dominican Republic speaks about evaluations carried out in 1993 and 1999 and the fact that there is currently an initiative to revisit this process within the framework of the Regulation of the Teaching Profession. Honduras also mentions the fact that the Ministry is currently working on a medium-term evaluation mechanism.

Another mechanism, very related to the one just discussed, was also included in the first question: Teacher Training. Only the Dominican Republic states that it does not have a formal monitoring mechanism in this case. El Salvador explains, however, that its system is limited to the initial preparation of teachers and does not encompass in-service training.

Costa Rica speaks about semi-annual monitoring of compliance with the CSE directives and the development of the courses programmed in the system. Honduras mentions a Comprehensive training Plan that coordinates all actions in this area. Nicaragua speaks in turn about a qualitative study conducted in 2001 and about In-Depth Analyses of Empiricism (*Radiografías del Empirismo*) carried out in 2002 and 2004. Panama then discusses its Annual Training Plan.

The general view provided regarding this dimension is that certain important initiatives exist, but that they still have not reached their full maturity. Teacher education is addressed in the majority of cases, but without providing a measure of its impact on the teaching-learning process. If measurements are made, these are for the most part related to process and not to results. On the other hand, there is no systematization of the monitoring of teacher development.

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[7] The terms teacher and professor are used without distinction in the paper and the survey. It should be recognized that in some countries, there is a specific difference in the use of these terms.

- Student Performance

  This is one of the areas that demonstrates the most progress in the sub-region in terms of development of monitoring mechanisms. In the questionnaire, it is covered by these first two questions in two areas: that which deals with student performance and that which touches on the grade-level promotion of students. Furthermore, it is subsequently addressed in questions 9, 13 and 14. As was to be expected in this case, almost all of the countries affirm that they maintain formal monitoring mechanisms. The only exception is Panama.

  Costa Rica, as was stated before, has an expansive tradition in this area, carrying out tests since the beginning of the 1990s. Honduras uses standardized tests in addition to each educational center maintaining up-to-date information on initial and final enrollments and carrying out so-called "process tests." Nicaragua has organized a time series of academic performance starting in 1997, which provides up-to-date statistics on the percentages that passed and were held back. National Tests of third and sixth grades at the Primary level were carried out in 2002. It is expected that in 2006, through national participation in the SERCE study, a census test will be carried out at the third and sixth grade levels, with the goal of making it comparable to the 2002 results[8].

  The country states that these tests, over time, have become an instrument for determining the promotion of students from one level to another and have lost their diagnostic character.

  El Salvador states that it makes extensive use of the results of the academic achievement assessment processes at the Basic and Secondary level for improving the curriculum and general educational planning. Various comparisons are also made across time periods and among geographic areas and social sectors.

  Honduras states that their test results make it possible for them to identify which educational centers require greater support in achieving quality-related goals. According to the Ministry, the tests guide the teacher training plans and the support provided through educational materials and infrastructure. In-country, these tests are considered to be "low stakes," since they are not used to determine promotion from one grade to another.

  In the Dominican Republic, as a result of the Ten-year Plan 1992-2001, the tradition of national tests in the areas of Spanish Language, Mathematics, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences was restored at several levels.

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[8] This laudable enthusiasm does not seem to be very feasible.

In Panama, although it does not have a testing system, the directorate generals provide statistical data from all assessments and the percentages passing. The country reports that at this time it is developing the Bank of Items necessary for proceeding with the establishment of tests.

The responses to question 12 complete the table. In this case, all countries except Honduras state that they publish the results of their tests and assessments. In Costa Rica, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) is responsible for this task. In the Dominican Republic, the statistical yearbooks are available on the Ministry's web portal. In this case, certain advances in technological progress can be seen in this regard.

In response to question 13, all countries except Panama affirm that they use assessment results to make comparisons over time. Costa Rica states that samples of the results are used to monitor the process. The Dominican Republic refers to the broad debates catalyzed by the test results each year, although they are not always comparable.

The Dominican Republic mentions that the national test results have been used to guide the process of developing regional and district strategic plans (120 in total) in the country.

Nicaragua, upon speaking about its only test of this type in 2002, refers to the manner in which it helped to identify the areas of greatest need and provided significant support for the subsequent development of the *Pedagogical Guide*. The country points out that those tests served as inputs for the preparation of lines of action linked to the issue of educational quality, which today are part of national educational policies and were shaped in the *MECD Common work plan: Strategic priorities for the 2005-2008 period.*

The vision proposed in the results to these questions is not completely consistent with the results obtained by G. Ferrer (2005) in his study cited earlier, where he expresses that the test results do not have a significant impact on countries' educational policy decisions. Clearly, one of the variables that affects this behavior is the origin of the tests, which in many cases aim to sustain and control the individual assessment of the use of education in schools. Another clear example is the disconnected use of information in the ministries. A third variable that probably also affects the explanation is that the planning processes could still be guided more by process than by results indicators, making it more difficult to incorporate assessment results into systems' processes to consider options related to strategic decision-making. Simply, progress

indicators are not linked to these results and the analytical methods to make this possible do not exist.

- Costs and Financing

  This is an area that clearly needed greater preparation when it was presented as part of the questionnaire. Further on, this assertion will be a little better explained. Number 16, in addition to these two initial questions, address this area. In general Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama state that they have formal mechanisms to carry out this evaluation, while Costa Rica, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic[9] affirm that they lack such mechanisms.

  Honduras speaks about a mechanism established through its Indicators Manual [10] and through reports that deal with the principal macroeconomic indicators. The country mentions, as explicitly indicated in the response to question 16, that the Ministry does not currently have its own financial information system, but that it is linked to the Integrated Financial Management System (SAFI), which functions on-line through the Ministry of Finance.

  Nicaragua has information on per-student costs and uses the Ministry's annual budget as a percentage linked to the Gross Domestic Product and to National Public spending. On a general level, the country is part of the Integrated Financial Management and Auditing System (SIGFA) that makes it possible to make inquiries about financial information. Meanwhile, Panama speaks about the use of its budget as a general frame of reference. The Dominican Republic did not provide a response to question 16.

  El Salvador differentiates between its negative response about possessing "formal evaluation mechanisms" for educational costs and financing and the assertion that it owns and utilizes a financial information system. The apparent conflict is resolved when they distinguish between budgetary control systems and accounting information, and databases and analysis directed at establishing costs and identifying financing sources for each cost. In the former case, the country has a budgetary management and accounting system. It does not, however, have a system to analyze costs and financing mechanisms.

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[9] There appears to be a significant case of differences in interpretation regarding the terminology "formal mechanisms."

[10] This allusion is extremely significant. The Ministry could be in a position to have a formidable mechanism to measure its progress and gain legitimacy in the eyes of society.

Some general conclusions that might be interesting can be drawn from this group of responses. First, the sub-region, similar to the English-speaking Caribbean, has the tendency to develop integrated systems for public financial management. This can be considered healthy in more than one sense. However, this needs to be complemented by an internal sub-system within the Ministry that permits budget management by unit managers and that can serve as support for the studying variables of this type that are linked to educational practice.

- Management and Administration

The following criterion taken into account is the effectiveness of the administration and management. In this case, only two countries say that they have a formal evaluation system in the area: Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The others, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Honduras, state that they do not have one.

Costa Rica mentions its Operational Plan and its budget as instruments for monitoring the degree of effectiveness achieved. Nicaragua speaks about its four School Autonomy studies[11]. Panama, despite having said that it did not have a formal system, discusses how each "component" of the Strategic Plan should present a form with percentage advances toward meeting its goals.

- Leadership Capacity

This is a relatively esoteric dimension in terms of the consideration that the sub-region can give to formal evaluation mechanisms. Only Nicaragua speaks about some type of monitoring in this regard. The country makes reference once again to its advances in the area of school autonomy and its four studies that make comparisons between diverse school centers.

A reflection that becomes almost compulsory at this point is the limited level of leadership and self-management that some countries in the sub-region offer to the local leadership, that is school directors and regional directors. Centralization, absolutely dominant and unquestionable in the past, is no longer widely accepted. Countries have started to think about the important role that this level of authorities must play if the sector wants to be really effective at the point of service delivery. The concept and practice of the Educational Projects or Curriculum Centers, and other similar ideas, are beginning to demonstrate their effects.

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[11] Here, there is an interesting concept that has been broadly debated in more than one place in the sub-region.

The third question on the questionnaire seeks information about establishing responsibilities and accountability in educational systems. The responses are interesting.

Costa Rica says that since 2001, there is an established formal accountability process in which the results obtained are responded to through the activities established in the operational plan. Furthermore, responsibilities related to the strategic actions incorporated in the National Development Plan are also established and included in the monitoring provided by the National Evaluation System (SINE), coordinated by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy. The Ministry of Finance also requests a semi-annual self-evaluation of resources budgeted.

El Salvador states that it has a well-structured system, especially if the fact that it is a decentralized experience, both in terms of administration and financing, is taken into account. The country affirms that it is in a position to establish responsibilities and develop an acceptable level of accountability.

Honduras points out that the system in effect makes it possible to establish responsibilities, but that there are still no consequences based on accountability.

The Dominican Republic takes a somewhat different point of view in its response and speaks about Meetings for Reflection at the Regional and District level, in which there is broad participation and which are used to formulate a local improvement plan. In each one of these localities, Quality management teams were constituted to monitor the effort.

The Dominican State Secretariat of Education (SEE) also speaks about a study on time use in school, carried out by Gallup, which led to an extension of the school year and the establishment of National Evaluation Day (third Wednesday of the month of October), during which the efforts and achievements at the different levels of management of the educational process will be recognized.

Panama states that it does not have a unified system to evaluate teaching activity or the results of the actions carried out in the system. At the secondary and pre-secondary levels, teachers complete a self-evaluation, while in primary school, the directors evaluate the teachers.

Nicaragua mentions that its educational system is in the midst of decentralization through the school pro-autonomy initiative and

municipalization. This makes it possible to establish various degrees of responsibility and promotes citizen participation.

The Ministry states that accountability takes place at every level in the country, from the school up to the central level. "School Reports" are currently designed as part of a program co-financed by the World Bank. The goal of the Reports is to provide relevant information on school performance to the different actors in the Educational System, thus contributing to a greater level of commitment on the part of families.

In response to questions four and five, four countries state that they have an information system that is capable of providing relevant information to those responsible for decision-making on educational policy, and two countries state that they do not have such a system[12]. The following question provides an evaluation of the available system.

The Dominican Republic speaks about a Management Information System that, although it currently functions with limitations in both its coverage and availability, is called on to play an important role in the future, especially with respect to National Tests (see www.see.gov.do).

The country explains that at this time several computer applications are being developed that will make it possible to link data from different sources in order to be able to monitor the development of quality indicators.

El Salvador affirms that it has information production processes that provide support for decision-making on educational policies. However, it prudently cautions that these processes need to be reviewed and strengthened with an organizational, functional structure that provides greater fluidity and quality in information production and use.

Panama explains that there is a National System of Educational Statistics located in the Ministry of Education. It expresses that the system provides sufficient quantitative information, but that qualitative information has only recently started to be obtained through the National Directorate for Evaluation.

In Nicaragua, the Directorate of Statistics at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports headquarters has a statistical system that makes it possible to collect information from all of the country's schools. During the year, five censuses are conducted: Initial Enrollment, School

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[12] The surprising fact that some countries respond negatively when it is evident that they possess what others mention as their information system, makes it seem that the interpretation of the term "information system" has not been consident and that, therefore, answers are not comparable. They maintain their interest, however, given the subjective content they reveal.

Infrastructure, First Semester Academic Performance, Work Force, and Final Academic Performance. These censuses are conducted at three points: beginning, middle and end. They generate information that is relevant to maintaining the monitoring of the indicators that are considered to be most important.

The country is currently incorporating new technology (optical readers) in order to make the process more efficient and a series of categories will be included to expand the information available. According to the response, the level of error is acceptable in terms of the systematization process, but control processes related to the origin of the information are lacking. Although verifiers are used, it is difficult to confront the challenge of high mobility that exists in the country.

Questions seven and eight refer to the quantity and quality of the information that is available to support decision-making in the countries. In terms of volume, Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua manifest a greater degree of satisfaction with their situation, while El Salvador, Honduras and the Dominican Republic express that, in many cases, they have a lower quantity of available information than they would want to have. In the case of quality, only Costa Rica and Panama say that they receive relevant, well-organized information; while El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic say that that is not always the case.

Costa Rica expresses, particularly, that the available information is not concentrated in a single information system and that in the majority of cases, it is necessary to locate it in the dependency that generates it. However, the country considers the information to be reliable and sufficient for making informed decisions.

In the case of El Salvador, it states that there is always a need to further break down and make more concrete the statistics related to national educational development. On the other hand, the country points out that the information produced by the Ministry of Education, due to its different breakdown, does not always coincide with the data available from other sources.

Honduras and the Dominican Republic issue a similar complaint in terms of lack of integration of information. Honduras states that it has a prompt, constant and efficient flow of information, but that at times it cannot respond immediately to demands.

Nicaragua repeats the assertion that data collection is difficult, since there are educational centers that are quite remote and difficult to access. The problem of lack of quality is also listed on the forms. The country also comments on the difficulty of obtaining certain information, such as ethnic

origin and socioeconomic level. It also mentions the weakness of not having a single registry of students. This is a shared reality, although it was not mentioned by other countries.

Question 10 refers to participation in decision-making. Almost all of the countries state that they have a greater or lesser degree of civil society participation, through the use of diverse mechanisms. In fact, this facet received a great impetus in the sub-region in the 1990s, accompanying the production of national strategies and ten-year plans.

Costa Rica speaks about the implementation of national and local forums in which educational authorities, civil society and educators participate. Event participants produce proposals based on regional priorities, with the support of diagnoses that are conducted. Private enterprise actively participates, particularly on issues related to technical education. The country states that the goals of the national plan are adapted to the needs of each region, with the participation of the regional councils that are active throughout the country.

El Salvador explains that there is a commission for monitoring the objectives of the Education for All program (EFA), made up of Civil Society representatives and, interestingly, without the participation of Ministry staff members as formal members.

In the month of March, the country launched the National Education Plan 2021, with a presidential commission in charge of monitoring its implementation. The Plan, as is usual in the sub-region, was preceded by an extensive consultation.

Honduras refers to the fact that since 2000, the country has had consensus on the priority lines of action that should guide educational affairs. This achievement was obtained through the National Forum for Convergence (FONAC). These lines of action coincide with the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Sectoral Strategic Plan (2005-2015). In addition, the participation of Civil Society and the Round Table of Donors in Education (MERECE) is notable.

The Dominican Republic speaks about a series of activities carried out under the framework of the strategic planning process and in the National System for the Evaluation of Quality. Furthermore, and under the initiative of the Executive Branch, the country has developed forums for debate that are devoted primarily to diagnostic activities and the redefinition of action plans.

In addition, the country has a series of open-ended opportunities for participation. This is the case of the National Board of Education, the

External Advisory Council to the Education Secretariat and the Socio-educational Forum, where non-governmental organizations participate.

Panama comments on the preparation of the Strategic Plan with extensive participation by the educational community. It states, without elaborating, that the structure of the Ministry favors the active participation of diverse social sectors.

Nicaragua reports that multiple sectors of civil society were consulted in the preparation of the National Education Plan. However, there are no permanent mechanisms for participation by external sources. The National Education Forum was developed in the last nine months.

Question 11 covers the internal participation of staff members and possible tensions between technical personnel and politicians, and teachers and administrators. Costa Rica explains that those responsible for decision-making are the Minister and his/her two Vice Ministers, one of whom is Technical and the other, Administrative. The country speaks about tensions between teachers and managers that are provoked by the normal development of administrative and technical processes.

Honduras provides a broader list that includes the general and departmental directors, program and project staff, and often up to the President and the Cabinet. The country affirms that there are many tensions among the teaching organizations and the Administration, normally around the issue of wages.

In the Dominican Republic, the tensions that have occurred result primarily from the existence of different points of view at the local, regional and national levels, although they have not constituted an obstacle for creating a shared vision.

Panama includes the National Board in the decision-making process and recognizes the existence of diverse types of tensions.

In Nicaragua, all of the directors are taken into account, with the goal of implementing a team-based management model. With regard to the tension between technical and policy-related issues, the country states that its situation is the same as the one in all of the countries, in need of accommodation in order to seek the best solution.

The goal of question 18 was for participants to provide examples of decision-making processes about educational policies, based on the use of information. The majority of experiences (see details in the Annex of the questionnaire) resulted in partial satisfaction. In all cases, information was available and more than acceptable levels of participation were sought.

The example presented by the Dominican Republic, which deals with the review and extension of the school calendar, is interesting. It includes the following steps:

1. Carry out a search for information through a survey prepared by the Gallup on time use at school.

2. Present the results to the national community through a public event.

3. Present the results to the National Board of Education.

4. Make pertinent decisions in accordance with the Education system's procedures.

5. Create a mechanism for control and monitoring.

Question 19 proposes the dilemma of the reliability of the information system and of the use of this system by those responsible for making decisions. On this occasion, Costa Rica says that it has solid foundations for implementing technical proposals in educational policy. Meanwhile El Salvador makes the interesting assertion that the problem should not center around the need for more information, but on the development of systems that permit more efficient use of existing information.

Honduras says that its information systems are still undergoing consolidation and that it expects that in 2006, the information received can be reliable, analyzed, systematized and of quality that is appropriate for dissemination.

In the Dominican Republic, the information system still has to increase its degree of integration. Greater availability is needed in order to not limit the flexibility of the decision-making process. The country says that it is currently taking positive steps in that direction.

Panama thinks that it needs more information from the sectors involved and Nicaragua believes that its problem is mainly due to lack of resources.

Question 20 addresses the monitoring of the decisions that generate policies. El Salvador states that it has a series of predetermined indicators that are periodically evaluated and analyzed. Honduras carries out a series of periodic evaluations, while the Dominican Republic makes use primarily of opportunities for dialogue that have emerged between the system's actors and users. The country still lacks a national evaluation system that issues periodic, systematic decisions. It is expected that the

National System for the Evaluation of Quality will ultimately assume that responsibility.

In Panama, there is no results evaluation. In Nicaragua, on the other hand, the policies and actions undertaken are evaluated each year through a series of indicators that are linked to related objectives.

Discussion

The first necessary step is to establish the fact that the result of the regional examination undertaken on this occasion provides a significantly different picture than the reality of 20 years ago. What was previously a very closed environment - where all information was practically considered confidential, where statistics were collected with certain precariousness, where the division of planning was a second-class unit and where the level of available technology was beyond low and discouraging - has been left behind. Today it is common in the sub-region to hear talk about strategic plans, indicators, statistics and various advanced technologies. It is clear that there is still room for a great deal of progress, that a great deal remains to be done, but the advances are evident and significant.

One of the findings that stands out upon finishing the analysis of the responses is that all of the participating countries have at their disposal abundant information on what happens in the system. There are still problems with data collection and processing but, without exception, there are always possibilities of finding data to guide decision-making. In some cases, this information is considered very reliable and sufficient. In others, it remains somewhat below the desired level. In almost all cases, the influence of international financing in introducing changes, new concepts and technology is apparent.

This assertion is even more remarkable when the similarities that exist in the selected strategies are observed. The points of emphasis, produced by the experiences of these institutions, are evident. However, the necessary expertise is being developed in the sub-region so that initiatives can emerge within the national environment itself, although they continue to need international financial support.

The issue of "information systems" is interesting due to the diverse interpretations of its meaning by the countries that took part in the study. The impression remains that this concept is often focused on the availability of statistical data, without reaching its more sophisticated expression as the implications of the inter-connectivity and sharing of data. There are, however, a few projects in the sub-region that have the potential to change the situation. Meanwhile, the complaint is almost universal: the information is scattered, it costs time and work to process it, and it is not always available for decision-making. Perhaps the missing link is the conceptual development of the system. On many occasions, the sector's technical staff member is observed dealing directly with the information systems staff member capable of handling the infrastructure base... machines and programs. Between the two they try to produce what is needed, but an important element remains absent: The capacity to

develop the system's architecture and coherently integrate the necessary information with an effective, efficient flow. That function goes beyond the use of computers. It involves defining the use of the information and not of the machines or technologies that make it possible.

On the other hand, in some countries it may be necessary to develop more of a user culture, especially when dealing with the local levels. Although the development and participation in the electronic world is more than notable, significant groups of people still persist that do not have a sufficient understanding of the phenomenon so as to receive sufficient advantage. For many people, the computer is no more than a glorified typewriter.

In closing, it can be said that in the sub-region, information is, at least potentially, available. The technology has already been acquired and in many cases, is also available. Why then are there so many difficulties in supporting decisions with significant data? In developing a good information system? An explanation based on two groups of variables can be attempted.

The first one has to do with time use. The principal staff members, those in charge of decision-making, are too busy to be able to devote to this process the time that it demands. There is too little time, too much insistence placed on control, and the support that they receive is not the amount they would want to have. On the other hand, the information is scattered and it is not easy to integrate.

The other group of variables is environmental ones. There are perhaps too many external pressures, which come from the trade associations and even the government itself, that require attention, that prevent more technical, more carefully considered actions. On the other hand, the organization of the ministries does not always respond to new needs and contributes to the lack of integration of information. Finally, on some occasions, a clear intent to be able to lead effectively is lacking.

In closing, it must be repeated that a great deal has been done and that there has been progress, but there is a long road ahead to reaching the desired destination.

Annexes

1) Questionnaire results

2) List of participants

3) Bibliography

Annex 1

Questionnaire Results

Results

1) Does the Ministry of Education have formal evaluation mechanisms to monitor progress in the following areas?

Area to Evaluate	Yes	No
Equity	H-N-S	CR-RD-P
Teaching quality		CR-H-RD-P-N
Teacher training	CR-H-P-N-S	RD
Student performance	CR-H-RD-N-S	P
Educational costs and financing	H-P-N-S	CR-RD-S
Effectiveness of the administration and management	CR-N	H-RD-P-S
Leadership capacity at the different levels of the system	N	CR-H-RD-P-S
Teacher performance level	H	CR-RD-P-N-S
Student grade-level promotion	CR-H-RD-N-S	P

2) In those areas in which your response was positive, please explain how they operate:

Area	Explanation
Equity	(2) There is not necessarily an established evaluation process, but it is organized and analyzed based on the data on educational coverage, quality and gaps by sectors, areas, levels, gender, etc. (3) The yearly indicators are monitored within the framework of the goals of the Education for All Plan EFA (2003-2015). (6) In order to achieve equity, special emphasis is placed on indigenous areas and areas of social risk. (4) General statistics on coverage and efficiency broken down by area, sex, etc.
Teaching quality	(2) Takes place through census tests that are administered to the teacher at the time s/he graduates from the university with

	the Lic. in Education degree, and that s/he needs to pass in order to be able to choose to work as a teacher.
	(6) The record of all of the courses and titles obtained by the teaching and administrative staff are maintained in human resources.
Teacher training	(1) Semi-annual monitoring of compliance with the CSE directives and development of the different programmed courses.
	(2) If related to initial formation, it exists; if related to in-service training, it does not.
	(3) A Comprehensive Training Plan is being worked on, which aims to coordinate all training activities.
	(6) A training plan for all teachers is applied annually.
	(4) Qualitative studies in 2001
	In-depth analyses of empiricism in 2002 and 2004
	A Work Force Census is conducted annually, which makes it possible to identify the percentage of empirical teachers. In addition, during the information collection processes, information is requested to identify training needs.
Student performance	(1) Diagnostic tests, carried out at different levels.
	(2) This is carried out based on academic achievement assessment processes at the Basic and Secondary Education levels.
	(3) Each educational center fills out a record for each student by academic subject during the year.
	A data collection form on initial and final enrollment.
	National Standardized Tests
	Process Tests
	(5) Through the application of National Tests in Spanish Language, Mathematics, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences in 8th grade at the Basic Level, the Third Cycle of Adult Formal and Non-formal education, and the 4th year at the Secondary Level. These tests are worth 30 points of the final grade and are applied at the end of course.
	(6) Statistical data from all evaluations and the percentages passing are reported bi-monthly to the regional directorates.
	(4) The Directorate of Statistics has a time series on academic performance (AP) from 1997 to the present.
	AP understood as % passing and % retained
	National sample-based tests for 3rd and 6th grade at the primary level in 2002.
Educational costs and financing	(3) There is the mechanism through the Manual on Educational Indicators handled by each educational center and the Departmental Education Directorates, as well as reports with macroeconomic indicators.
	(6) Through the budget of the Nation.

	(4) Per-student cost, Ministry of education Budget as a % of GDP and % of government expenditure.
Effectiveness of administration and management	(1) Monitoring of activities programmed in the annual operational plan and the national budget, assigned to education. (6) Each component of the Strategic Plan should present a special form with percentage advances toward meeting its goals. (4) Advances in the School Autonomy comparison of types of centers (4 studies)
Leadership capacity and performance	(6) Not measured (4) Advances in the School Autonomy - comparison of types of centers (4 studies)
Teacher performance level	(3) A proposal is being worked on that is expected to be ready for use starting in 2006, beginning with basic education. (6) The teacher and director carry out a joint performance evaluation at the end of the academic period.
Student grade-level promotion	(1) Application of national tests, in sixth and ninth grades and in secondary school. (Standardized). (2) Census processes are used to administer academic achievement tests for students who finish secondary school (general or technical). This constitutes a graduation requirement and is worth 20% of the grade for final promotion. (3) Each educational center applies learning tests throughout the entire academic year. (5) The National Tests are compulsory and census-based, and have "high stakes," that is, they are taken into account in the consideration of passing the course and promotion to the next course. In the case of the Basic Level and the Third Cycle for Adults, the cut-off or criterion passing score is 65 points. At the Secondary Level, it is 70 points. In both cases, the weight of the National Tests is 30% of the Final Grade. (6) In primary education, the student passes to the next grade with a general average of 3.0 (out of 5.0). In pre-secondary and secondary, the student can only fail a maximum of three subjects per year, which s/he should retake during the vacation period. (4) % of students who pass to the next level Promotion by grade level. Primary and secondary school completion rates.

3) Do you consider that the education system in your country makes it possible to establish responsibilities and develop an acceptable level of accountability? Please explain your response.

(1) Establishing responsibilities and accountability is a process that recently began in Costa Rica, with the monitoring of the activities programmed in the annual operational plan on a quarterly basis starting in 2001. Responsibilities are also established in the strategic actions incorporated into the national development plan, which are evaluated through the National Evaluation System (SINE), coordinated by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy.
The Ministry of Finance also requests the completion of a semi-annual and annual self-evaluation of resources budgeted and the achievement of the management products and goals in each budgetary program.
 (2) Yes. The system is well-structured, especially if we take into account that it is a decentralized system, both in terms of administration and financing, and the qualitative dimension, which makes it possible to establish responsibilities and develop an acceptable level of accountability.
(3) The system makes it possible to establish responsibilities, but there is still no system for reward or sanction based on accountability.
 (5) Important efforts that promote and encourage social responsibility and accountability are currently being undertaken, among them:

   a) Days for Reflection at the Regional and District level, with the participation of community members, for diagnosis of the local educational reality and definition of an improvement plan. In each Region and Educational District, there are Quality Management Teams that were constituted to coordinate and lead the planning processes and development of plans from the perspective of "transforming management in order to transform the school."
   b) Study of the actual time required for teachers' work in the Center and in the classroom carried out by Gallup, under the auspices of the SEE and Educa; this study resulted in the decision to extend the School Calendar, increasing the number of days and the number of hours in the school day.
   c) The establishment of the National Evaluation Day (third Wednesday of the month of October each year) in order to recognize team-work, by granting this recognition to the Educational Center, Educational District and Region that had the highest general averages (equal to and higher than 65 points for the Basic Level and the Third Cycle for Adults, and 70 points and higher for the Secondary Level) on the National Tests.
   d) Submission of Reports on the Assessment Results from the National Tests by students, sections and centers, where the averages are shown for each subject, as well as for the performance levels, through the percentage of responses achieved on each test, comparing each case with similar sections and centers (according to financing and area) at the District, Regional and National level.
 (6) There is no evaluation at any level of teacher performance or of the results of the actions carried out. There is self-evaluation at the pre-secondary and secondary levels; directors evaluate teachers at the primary level.

(4) Our educational system is undergoing decentralization through School Autonomy and Municipalization, which makes it possible to establish different degrees of responsibility and promotes citizen participation, as well as greater involvement by actors that were previously relegated to the educational policy decision-making process and direct interventions carried out at the local and school level. In this regard, the central level is gradually becoming the system's facilitating and regulatory agency, which means that the responsibilities are being clarified and adjusted.

Accountability occurs at every level, from the school up to the central level. The Directing Council informs parents about how the national budget on education and educational centers is spent.

Furthermore, the general public is informed on a yearly basis about the progress and difficulties experienced in achieving educational goals related to coverage, efficiency, investment, quality and equity.

Currently, as part of a Program financed by a World Bank loan, "School Reports" are being designed. The goal of the Reports is to provide relevant information on school performance to the different actors in the educational system and to contribute to greater parental involvement and participation in their children's school performance.

4) Does the Ministry of Education in your country have an information system that is capable of providing relevant information to those responsible for making educational policy decisions?

Yes	RD-P-N-S
No	CR-H

If your response was No, please go to question # 7

5) If your previous response was yes, please explain how the system is organized and how it works:

(2) Information production processes that provide support for making educational policy decisions definitely exist. However, these processes need to be reviewed and strengthened with an organizational, functional structure that provides greater fluidity and quality in information production and use.

(5) The SEE has a Management Information System that functions, although with limitations both in the coverage and systematic availability of information. In the case of information related to National Tests, this System immediately provides passing data for students for each Competition (three) to which students present themselves. This information is shown at the national, regional and district level. The categories included are: students invited, present, passing, pending and/or repeating. Moreover, the statistical reports for 1999 to 2005 are already available on the Ministry of Education Web page (www.see.gov.do).

Several computer applications are currently being developed, which will allow:
  a) Linking of different databases (National Tests, Human Resources, Infrastructure, Statistics, School Mapping), in order to be able to study the principal indicators of advances in quality.

b) The students and Centers, as well as the Educational District and Regional authorities, will have access to the information from the evaluations via the Intranet and voicemail.

Moreover, the implementation of the National System for the Evaluation of Educational Quality is being developed, which will make it possible to systematize and analyze information and issue findings on the state of the development of educational quality, both at the level of results and of inputs and processes. This System will be fueled primarily by information from the various databases that are already available in the SEE, and by developing initiatives to construct those that have not yet been developed.

(6) There is a national system of official educational statistics at the Ministry of Education.

(4) The Directorate of Statistics at MECD Headquarters has a statistical system that makes it possible to collect data from all of the country's schools, according to programs, grade, sex, etc.

During a calendar year, five censuses are conducted: *a) Initial Enrollment, b) School Infrastructure, c) First Semester Academic Performance, d) Work Force, and e) Final Academic Performance.* It should be pointed out that these censuses are conducted at three points: at the beginning, middle and end of the year.

Following data collection, the information is processed and registered in the information system in order to carry out subsequent analysis of the indicators' patterns and compare them with previous years according to program, grade, sex, area of residence, etc. Among the principal indicators constructed the following stand out: crude and net enrollment rates, percentage of retention, desertion and passing, primary and secondary completion rate, promotion rate, percentage of empiricism, deficit of desks, classrooms in poor condition, etc.

Furthermore, a series of reports and studies on the educational system, its progress and difficulties are conducted, and various analyses are prepared, in order to determine if certain policies or programs are having the expected results, and to analyze indicators requested by lending or donor agencies, and indicators requested by UNESCO and other Agencies, etc.

In order to modernize and facilitate the digitization of information, next year optical readers will be used to introduce the principal data so that the basic statistics will be ready in a shorter amount of time.

6) Does this system work according to the Ministry's expectations and needs? Does it offer all of the information that is expected of it?

(2) The Ministry of Education's expectations center on making the information system operational. Based on the progress to date, the system has increased its operational functioning in terms of the opportunity, fluidity, quality, relevance and operationality of the information produced. Clearly the Educational System and educational policy decision-makers will always need to expand the diversity of information.

(5) This System is still not functioning in accordance with expectations or needs. However, one of the most important aspects for the development of the system is the availability of inter-connectivity and voice and data communication, which the SEE

already has, as well as the existence of processes that systematically produce databases containing information on National Tests, Statistics, Human Resources, etc. At this time, important efforts are being carried out to make this information available to different users.

(6) Partially. The system provides quantitative information. Qualitative information recently started to be obtained through the National Directorate of Evaluation.

(4) It is always necessary to make improvements. Specifically, the strategy to begin to utilize optical readers to process the consolidated forms from the different censuses addresses the need to facilitate the capture and collection of information.

With regard to the information that is expected, it should be clarified that each year, items are incorporated according to the information needs or requirements demanded by users. Currently, as a part of a program financed by the World Bank, variables related to ethnic group will be incorporated into forms in order to be able to determine the educational access of native peoples.

There is an acceptable margin of error in digitization but the quality of the information received from the field still cannot be confirmed even though verifiers are sent. The information is ever-changing due to the mobility of the population in search of better living conditions.

7) As someone responsible for making decisions in educational policy matters in your country, do you think that you usually receive a sufficient volume of information in order to do your work effectively?

Mark the response that best describes your situation:	
We usually have sufficient educational information on which to base policy decisions.	**CR-P-N**
We usually have information available, but not the amount that we would like to have.	**H-RD-S**
We usually do not have information available when we need it.	

Please, explain your response:

(1) There is sufficient information, but there is no system to integrate those relevant indicators that make it possible for us to make decisions in a timely fashion. The information exists, but is very scattered among the different ministry entities.

There is a statistical information system that is kept up-to-date, with clearly defined indicators that provide timely information for managerial decisions.

An information system for educational planning, which integrates the current various scattered modules, is currently in the process of being developed and implemented.

(2) The processes of formulating and/or monitoring educational policies always requires greater breakdown of and more concrete statistics related to national educational development, particularly given the variability proposed by national and international objectives. (for example, EFA, MDG, etc.)

(3) Most of the information corresponds to students, and is mainly related to initial and final enrollment. The information on teachers still requires more detail in order to make

it timely. The information on educational costs and financing is being developed.
(5) There are currently five important databases that contain important information on inputs, processes and outcomes: National Tests, Human Resources, Statistics, School Mapping and Infrastructure. Each one is at a different stage of development with regard to its organization and availability. This means that even the available information is fragmented and not always available. An area with barely developed information in terms of its availability is budgetary execution, which does not allow for measurement and evaluation of the level of implementation of the different units' projects and actions.
(6) The different Ministry agencies and related institutions have basic information. They receive data from the country's different school regions.
(4) The information is available, perhaps not in the desired amount of time, but in a relatively timely fashion. Due to this, we are working to use the optical reader to process the most important data at the consolidated level.
The policies should be backed by good, pretty and inexpensive (*BBB- buenas, bonitas y baratas*) strategies that, although sometimes not as effective, are what we can finance. We need a response to the shortage in the personnel necessary for all of the work that needs to be developed.

8) Do you think that the quality of the information you receive is satisfactory for sustaining the educational decision-making and policy development process? What would be your greatest complaints?

Mark the response that best describes your situation:	
The available information is usually relevant and well- organized.	**CR-P**
The available information is usually only partially relevant and organized.	**H-RD-N-S**
We usually do not have relevant or organized information.	

Please, explain your response:

(1) The available information is not concentrated in a single information system, but in most cases, it is necessary to locate it within the dependency that generates it. The information is, however, reliable and sufficient for decision-making.
(2) In general, the quantitative information generated by the Ministry of Education should be for specific calculations, cross-checked with information produced by other sources (example: Population censuses carried out by the Ministry of Economy) that do not always follow the same time periods as the information produced by the M. of Education.
(3) Given that processes are beginning in the different areas, greater efforts are required in order to succeed in having relevant, organized information.
(5) As was stated previously, the information is scattered and atomized, and an Information System that integrates it and makes it possible to construct a global vision of the performance of different management areas is still not available. That is, there is still no prompt, constant and efficient flow of information that is useful for decision-making. On many occasions, the information should be gathered and processed

according to the demand. However, it should be noted that important progress has been achieved, such as the availability of statistical information and information on student achievement on National Tests. Today, greater quantity, higher quality information is available as compared to only 8 years ago.

(6) Continuous statistical information organized by levels, as well as quantitative indicators, are available.

(4) Data collection is quite difficult, above all due to the existence of school establishments located in places that are very far from modes of land transport, which means that they experience delays in the process of sending the information to the municipal delegations and in turn to Headquarters.

Furthermore, there are some omissions or errors in filling out the data collection instruments (slips or forms). Given this, a cycle of training seminars is being carried out, targeted at the municipal technical personnel in charge of supporting the data collection process for educational statistics. In addition, there are certain data that are difficult to obtain, such as enrollments according to ethnic groups or socioeconomic stratum, since we do not have one unique student registry and it has only been possible to advance at the level of consolidated information from the schools.

9)   Given the use of national tests at different levels in your country, do you believe that these tests are used as a diagnostic instrument for measuring the performance of the schools and the system? As guidelines for policy development and decision-making? Or are they used only to determine children's admission at different school levels?

(1) They have become an instrument that is more for promotion, rather than evaluation, of the system.

(2) The use of the national test results is available as a diagnostic and as a proposal instrument on which to base educational planning for the system's different levels and structures. It is therefore used for curriculum design, in-service and initial teacher education, and for its principal purpose: the planning of teacher management at educational centers.

(3) The national tests serve as a diagnosis because they make it possible to identify the educational centers that require greater support in achieving the quality-related goals.

They guide the plans for training and serve as support with educational materials or infrastructure.

They are not used for promotion from one grade or level to another.

(5) For some years now, the National Test results have served for the debate around educational quality, as well as for decision-making with regard to educational policies and remedial actions.

This year they have become an important input for the diagnosis and preparation of strategic plans at the Regional and District level. At this time, there are 120 strategic plans available in these areas that are guiding the actions of these different entities.

(6) National tests still have not been administered. The items are currently being prepared. They will be used to measure the performance of the schools and the system by observing the achievement of the proposed objectives.

(4) The only national test carried out in 2002 was given to a representative sample of

Nicaraguan students in third and sixth grade of primary school, with the objective of measuring the level of general academic achievement in the subjects of Spanish and mathematics.

Furthermore, last year a study on the factors associated with academic achievement was conducted. The results of this study were presented to the MECD authorities so that they could take the measures they considered relevant.

The areas with the greatest problems were determined based on low student response. A Pedagogical Guide will be prepared so that teachers have a tool to improve teaching activities in the areas that need to be strengthened.

It should be pointed out that the results of such tests provided inputs for the preparation of the different lines of action linked to the quality of education issue that are part of Nicaragua's educational policies and have been molded into the MECD Common Work Plan: strategic priorities for the 2005-2008 period.

Other individual, per-child matters were not determined (they are not promotion-related).

10) Are educational policy decisions made in a participatory manner? Are there mechanisms to permit the participation of sources external to the Ministry? Does Civil Society participate?

(1) Strategies are developed based on national and local forums in which educational authorities, civil society and teachers participate. They design proposals for educational development based on regional priorities, and with the support of previously implemented diagnoses.

Private enterprise actively participates in defining education at technical institutes through the realization of business roundtables in which different sectors participate.

The goals of the national development plan are adapted to the needs of each region with active participation of the sectors involved in the regional councils that function throughout the entire national territory.

(2) Yes. The country has a commission for monitoring the fulfillment of the Education for All (EPT) objectives, made up of different civil society representatives. Although the Ministry of Education is not part of the commission, meetings with the Ministry are held periodically. Furthermore, in the month of March of this year, the National Education Plan 2021 was launched. The President of the Republic named a Presidential Monitoring Commission for the aforementioned Plan, which is formed by different high-level people, including civil society representatives. Periodic reports and observations related to the development of Plan 2021 are submitted to them. Broad citizen consultation with all of the sectors related to educational affairs was carried out prior to drafting the National Education Plan 2021.

(3) Since 2000, there has been consensus, always with the participation of Civil Society and the Round Table of Donors in Education (MERECE), about the priority lines of action that the Educational System should prioritize through the National Forum for Convergence (FONAC). These lines of action coincide with the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and are clearly present in the Sectoral Strategic Plan (2005-2015).

(5) There have always been and there continue to be important levels of participation in the activities developed both within the framework of strategic planning and of the creation and implementation of the National System for the Evaluation of Educational

Quality.

At this time, and at the initiative of the Executive Branch, forums for debate and participation have been developed within the framework of the Presidential Forum for Educational Excellence, a space that promotes participation in the diagnostic discussion and in the redefinition of action plans. The debates around the II Millennium Goal should also be mentioned. Furthermore, there are other opportunities for different sectors to participate in national life, such as the National Board of Education, where participation has been expanded through delegations of students and fathers and mothers. Moreover, the External Advisory Council and the Socio-educational Forum have been continued. The latter brings together NGOs from the education sector, as well as other sectoral representatives of national life.

(6) Positive. A Strategic Plan has been prepared with widespread participation by the educational community. Furthermore, the structure of the Ministry includes the active participation of all social actors.

(4) In order to prepare the National Education Plan, multiple sectors of civil society were consulted and the principal objectives of the MECD were selected. The latter clearly demonstrate the educational policies of the sector.

There is no permanent mechanism for the participation of external sources, but a National Forum on Education was developed 9 months ago, with widespread participation by civil sectors. The goal of the Forum is to exchange ideas and determine several actions in the national education arena.

11) Who are the staff members involved (what are their positions) in the decision-making process? Are there tensions caused by the difference between teachers and administrators, between concerns of a political and technical nature?

(1) The minister and his two Vice Ministers, one in the academic field and another one in the administrative field, are responsible for decision-making.

There are tensions between teachers and management in the education system, which are provoked by the normal development of administrative and technical processes.

Since the educational system is part of the social sector, decisions that are made have high political content that evolves out of the administration's long-term plans.

(2) Incumbents: Minister: Darlyn Xiomara Meza; Vice Minister of Education: José Luis Guzmán; Vice Minister of Educational Technology: Rafael Salomé.

Directors: Of Educational Planning: Rolando Arturo Aguirre; General: Carolina Ramírez; National, of Education: Lorraine of Varela; of Administration and Finance: Sonia de Melgar; National, of Youth: Silvia Martínez; National, of Educational Technologies: Carlos Urías; National, of Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning: Edmundo Salas; National, of Infrastructure: Maryxenia de Salazar; National, of Higher Education: María Isaura Arauz.

(3) Ministers, Vice Ministers, the Director-General, Departmental Directors, Program and Project Directors and often, the President of the Republic and the Cabinet.

Since Honduras has the Teacher Statute, there are many tensions between Teacher Organizations and the Administration. The Statute targets on a priority basis the wage issue, which has been demonstrated to be impossible to fulfill financially.

(5) Under the framework of the strategic planning meetings, participants included senior

officials (Under Secretaries of State, Director General, Regional Directors, Departmental Directors) as well as other staff members and administrators (District and from Educational Centers), and even National, Regional and District Technical Personnel, Public and Private Center Directors, Teachers, Fathers and Mothers, and even community members.

Tensions arising within this framework have been due to the different standpoints and visions, mainly among the local, regional and national levels. They were not, however, an obstacle to constructing a common vision-mission, and to developing private strategies to face the problems identified. This has been a broad process of non-exclusive participation, respectful of differences and diversity.

(6) Minister, Vice Minister and National Directors, and the National Education Council. There are indeed tensions.

(4) All of the Directorate Generals (DG of Education, of Training, of Technology, Administrative - Financial, of Investments, of Exploration and Policies) are taken into account.

On limited occasions, the Administrative part issues complaints about the Substantive part, or vice versa. This involves acting as a team to achieve all together the set objectives.

With respect to the issue of the technical and political dimensions, the situation is similar to all of the countries. Constant accommodation and translation of the two visions is needed in the search to improve educational quality. One of them sometimes prevails over the other one.

Please answer the following questions by placing an X in the indicated space. If you would like to, you can comment on any of the questions, since it will always be useful for our work.

Questions	Yes	No	Observations
12) Does the Ministry publish its statistics annually?	CR - RD - P - N-S	H	(2) MINED Web page (3) Starting in 2005, this is being worked on in coordination with the National Institute of Statistics (INE), in order to ensure their annual publication. (5) At this time, the Statistical Yearbooks from 1999 to 2005 are available on the Secretariat's Web page. (4) As of a few years ago, the Statistical Yearbook is no longer prepared. However, the statistics are available on the Web and through electronic media. It is expected that the custom of publishing the yearbook and other bulletins of an analytical

			nature will be revisited as soon as resources are obtained.
13) Are the results of examinations and other similar evaluations used to compare academic achievement at different points in time?	**CR-H-RD-N-S**	**P**	(2) The results make it possible for us to make longitudinal comparisons across periods (years) and across geographic areas and sectors. (3) Samples of results are collected to monitor the process. (5) These comparisons have been and continue to be made, although these tests are not designed or administered for this purpose. (6) The pertinent tests still have not been made. (4) Next year the country will participate in the SERCE study at the regional level and will administer a census test in mathematics and Spanish to the 3rd and 6th grades. It will aim to achieve comparability with the 2002 tests using appropriate weighting.
14) Are the results of the system's national tests and other similar indicators published?	**CR-RD-P-N-S**	**H**	(5) They have been partially published. At this time, the following reports are available on the Web: personalized by student, as well as by section, educational centers, districts and regions, with emphasis on the average values and the performance levels. (6) Quantitative indicators are published. (4) Yes, in several formats. They are also on the MECD Web page and in digital format. There are PDF publications and the databases used can be found in SPSS.
15) Does the Planning Unit, or its equivalent in the Ministry, provide the analysis necessary for policy development and decision-making?	**CR-H-RD-P-N-S**		(3) It is expected that with the efforts being carried out with the INE, it will be possible to carry out analysis for decision-making. (5) For the time being no, although there are important efforts underway to organize the databases that make it possible for the Office of Planning to play a more effective role as the entity

			that should provide information of a highly strategic nature for management, planning and decision-making processes. (4) A team of specialists located in the Directorate General of Exploration and Policies has prepared a set of documents that serve as input for decision-making based on analysis of current statistics. In addition, it is noteworthy that the Common Work Plan 2005-2008 has used previous analyses to formulate the principal lines of action, as well as to analyze the gaps in financing.
16) Does the Ministry have a financial information system?	**P-N-S**	**CR-H**	(3) Integrated Financial Management System (SIAFI), which works on lines of action with the Finance Secretariat. (5) Unanswered. (4) At the national level the SIGFA (Financial Management and Auditing Information System) is available, which makes it possible to make inquiries about the MECD's financial information.
17) Are teachers evaluated at least every three years? If the response was positive, please comment on the possible consequences (rewards and sanctions).	**CR-S**	**H-RD-P**	(1) The director of each educational center is responsible for evaluating teacher performance, which affects the staff member's annual pay. (2) Yes, teachers who enter the system (Initial Formation) are evaluated. (5) Evaluations carried out date back to 1993 and 1999. At the present time, this process is being revisited within the framework of the Regulation of the Teaching Profession. (4) To date, it has not been carried out, but a strategy for medium-term evaluation is being worked on.

18 Give us an example of an important educational policy decision that was recently made in the Ministry. Please describe the process that led to that decision. Are you satisfied with the process? Was the information available sufficient? What would you have liked to be different?

(1) Generating the process of change in curricula, with the goal of updating and incorporating transversality into the Costa Rican educational curriculum.
I feel relatively satisfied with the process, given that greater explanation is lacking in some elements.
The information was relatively sufficient.
The monitoring and evaluation processes, as well as greater commitment by the different dependencies that were related to the process in general.
(2) The National Education Plan 2021: A long-term Plan that expects to achieve results in 16 years, that is by 2021.
That decision led to the culmination in a Ten-year Plan 1995-2004. In addition, the need to have objectives, strategic lines, clear goals and indicators, which guide the national education sector's actions and programs as a whole, was clearly established. The span of time respects the understanding that educational results are not observed in the immediate term.
We are satisfied with the process that was carried out. We had information, and although we would have liked to have more, the main problem is not the lack of information, but the need for better systems that make it possible to efficiently use the information that we have.
We would have liked what was just mentioned to be different.
(3) School Textbooks. The provision of textbooks was carried out since classrooms that lacked basic texts, mainly in Spanish and Mathematics, were among the factors associated with low student performance.
(Support materials for the educational center. The provision of materials for day-to-day use is being initiated with Basic Education centers.
Provision of furniture and equipment.
Provision of School Lunch in Basic Education centers, where its coverage increases significantly each year.
Development of a Comprehensive Training Plan targeting the new National Basic Curriculum and the school texts, as well as the Evaluation System.
(5) Review and extension of the School Calendar and measures for greater, better use of and benefit from the time in the school day.

1. Study conducted by the Gallup Survey Company, under the auspices of the SEE and Educa, about the level of use of school time.
2. Provision and discussion of its findings to the national community through a public event.
3. Presentation and discussion of these results at the National Board of Education.
4. Decision-making, through a Departmental Order, to extend the school day.
5. Creation of a mechanism to control the fulfillment of the provision and recognize the regions and districts that showed the highest level of fulfillment.

(6) Preparation and implementation of the Strategic Plan 2005-2009, to improve quality,

equity, efficiency and community participation. We would have liked to have greater resources for the implementation of the Strategic Plan's fundamental projects.

(4) In the MECD Common Work Plan for the 2005-2008 period, a set of lines of action are proposed, which should be carried out in order to achieve the fulfillment of the Nicaraguan educational system's key goals, as well as coherence with the MECD policies and the National Education Plan.

I did not participate in the process, but opinions from many sectors both related to and outside of the education arena were taken into account. I consider that, in general, the policies are well-focused.

With regard to information limitations, unfortunately the greatest limitation is related to the budgetary demand projections that, due to our country's characteristics, depend significantly on donor cooperation and political negotiations of the different parties with partisan power. Accordingly, there are aspects whose implementation is planned but that in light of delays in donations, should be postponed or even eliminated.

New analyses can determine a few special policies for certain sectors.

19 Would you say that the decision-making process in your country's education sector is based on a system that collects sufficient reliable information and that that information is well-analyzed, systematized and shared in order to sustain a solid educational decision-making and policy development process?

(1) From the technical standpoint, there are solid foundations available for carrying out the technical proposals in educational policy.

(2) I repeat my response from the last part of the previous question, concerning information availability, and lack of adequate systems for better information use.

(3) The information systems are still undergoing a consolidation process. It is expected that starting in 2006, the information will be reliable, analyzed, systematized and disseminated so that each decision-maker can carry out the task in a more structured, secure manner.

(5) As was previously proposed, the SEE lacks a Management Information System that efficiently integrates all of the databases available for decision-making. This detracts flexibility and a sense of opportunity from decisions not only related to policy, but also to analysis and diagnosis of the state of progress in the system, as well as the different plans that are being carried out by the different units. At the current time, important steps are being taken to link these databases through an Information System.

(6) No, further information on directly related sectors is needed.

(4) I believe that policies in our country are well-defined, but there are not many possibilities of assuring that they are developed through defined actions, especially due to lack of resources.

There can be very good policies, but they serve little purpose if the funds necessary to achieve their development are lacking.

20. After the decisions are made and the policies are implemented, how does the system evaluate the results? How are these policies and decisions evaluated?

(2) There is a series of predetermined indicators that are evaluated and analyzed periodically, according to each case.
(3) It makes it possible to identify student performance in terms of those who pass, fail, drop out and are excluded from the system.
Quarterly evaluations are carried out based on the physical and financial execution of the annual goals.
Joint revisions between the Education Secretariat and the External Donors in Education are carried out periodically at least two times per year.
(5) In the different spaces for participation that were previously mentioned, the policies, as well as their implementation, have been subject to debates. This is the case, for example, with the curriculum proposal, the system for evaluating curriculum development, automatic promotion in the first grades at the Basic Level, etc. This debate has made it possible to carry out updates of these policies, although there is still no National Evaluation System that issues periodic, systematic and evidence-based findings on these policies. However, we understand that this function will be an important part of the National System for the Evaluation of Quality that is in process.
(6) There is no system for evaluating results.
(4) Every year the policies and actions undertaken are evaluated through a series of indicators linked to objectives. These results are used to study whether the strategies employed are the correct ones and to make decisions.

Annex 2

List of Participants

No.	Country	Person	Position
1	Costa Rica	Carmen Campos	Director of the Division of Educational Planning and Development.
2	El Salvador	Rolando Aguirre	Director of Planning.
3	Honduras	Elia Argentina del Cid de Andrade	Under Secretary of Technical-Pedagogical Matters.
4	Nicaragua	Nora Mayorga	Director-General of Exploration and Policies.
5	Dominican Republic	Julio Valeirón Josefina Pimentel	Director-General of Evaluation and Quality Control. Technical-Pedagogical Under Secretary of Education.
6	Panama	Miguel Angel Cañizales	Minister of Education.

Annex 3

Explanatory note: This Bibliography is not a reference list but instead a list of possible sources for consultation. It is not complete and primarily reflects the sources in English used by the author. The final version will be more extensive and with more material in Spanish.

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