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Education and poverty in the global development agenda: emergence, evolution and consolidation[1]

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of education and poverty in the current global development agenda. It intends to analyse the emergence, evolution and consolidation of a global agenda, which attributes a key role to education in the fight against poverty. With this objective, the paper addresses four main issues: first, it analyses the context in which the emergence of the agenda must be placed, analysing specifically the changes generated by globalisation; second, it focuses on the role of the actors, and especially on the role of the World Bank in setting the agenda; third, it explains the consolidation of the agenda by the Education for All Conferences and the Millennium Development Goals; finally it presents some of the main limitations of the hegemonic agenda.

Keywords: global agenda; development; international organisms; education and poverty; educational policy.

1. Introduction

Education has played a crucial role in the global agenda for development since the 1990s. International bodies, northern and southern governments and even non-governmental organisations agree on emphasising the virtues of educational investment as a key strategy in the fight against poverty and achieving development. As a consequence, "new" objectives, priorities and goals are being established on a global scale in order to increase the level of education of the population as a whole and to increase its effectiveness as a means of reducing poverty.

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Education has obviously always played roles that go beyond the individual benefits of schooling. The social and economic functions of education are related to the very origins of educational systems (Archer, 1984). Similarly, it is nothing new to say that education is a crucial investment for national development. Since the theory of human capital was formulated in the sixties, it has been widely assumed that education is more about investment than consumption, and there is international agreement on the benefits that education generates in raising the level of national labour productivity and economic growth[2].

Nevertheless, despite the many social, economic and cultural advantages attributed to education, it was not until the nineties that it became one of the priority strategies in the global fight against poverty. What is more, it was from this point on that despite national differences and peculiarities, common objectives, targets and priorities were established to contribute to the definition of an agenda for intervention on a clearly global scale. So, what are the reasons that explain the priority attributed to education in contemporary development strategies? What factors help explain the centrality of investment in education in the fight against poverty? And how and why has a global consensus been established on this issue?

The answer to these questions has to be contextualised in the ongoing debate on the best mechanisms to reduce poverty. Reducing poverty is still a central matter of concern because the number of poor people in the world has not stopped rising. Although there is currently a greater level of global wealth than there has ever been in any previous historical period, and that the percentage of the population living in conditions of poverty, i.e. relative poverty, is decreasing, in absolute terms the reduction of global poverty is extremely limited and in some countries the situation has even grown worse with respect to previous decades (Deaton, 2002; Wade, 2004). Moreover, as Green (2007) indicates, globalisation has "inevitably involved both winners and losers in terms of how different regions of the world have fared within the global market

[2] There is well-founded research evidence documenting the benefits of education both in monetary and non-monetary terms. See Becker (1964) and Barro (1997, 2001) for addressing the monetary effects of education, both from the human capital theory and the endogenous growth analysis respectively. See Haveman and Wolfe (1984) and Wolfe and Zuvekas (1997) for a pioneer analysis of the non-monetary effects of education. See McMahon (1999), Wolfe and Haveman (2001) and Preston and Green (2003) for more recent analysis addressing the non-monetary effects of education and its social benefits in terms of health, social cohesion or active citizenship.

place" (Green, 2007: 12), thus, increasing enormously the gap between the richest and poorest countries in the world[3].

Given this situation, it has become clear that the traditionally dominant instrument in strategies for fighting poverty, i.e. economic growth, is insufficient. Growth is not enough to improve the living conditions of the population or to guarantee the development of the southern countries. Even more, growth can even have a negative effect from a social point of view if other policies are not applied that explicitly aim to improve the standard of living and welfare of the population[4].

The demonstrated insufficiency of economic growth as the dominant solution for achieving development and the persistence of high poverty and inequality rates, have led to the search of new mechanisms, new strategies and new policies. In this process, education has acquired an increasing international legitimacy as a preferential strategy in the fight against poverty. It has become the preferred mechanism to rethink the development strategies and practices. Nowadays, education is not only at the core of policies for fighting against poverty but there is also a global consensus regarding the need to make investment in education a priority in national development strategies

The World Bank (WB) – a key body in the field of educational development - has been central to the construction of this consensus. It has published many documents in which it argues for the need to adopt the "new agenda". It has encouraged developing countries to make investment in human capital the focus of their strategies and policies for poverty reduction. It has also established new ways of funding and assisting countries aimed at increasing the effectiveness of education in reducing poverty. The international summits of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), have contributed enormously to consolidating this agenda, to disseminating its recommendations and to setting specific targets to be achieved. As a consequence, a "new development compact" has been established, in which both education and poverty reduction play a key role.

[3] The effects of globalisation on world inequality are highly controversial. Specifically, it is debatable if the increased gap between poorest and richest countries can be attributed to globalisation per se since in most cases the states which have globalised least are the ones that have fallen furthest behind. However, we completely agree with Green (2007) when he affirms that beyond all this debate what is clear is that on the past 30 years accelerated globalisation has proven to be an extremely uneven form of development (Green, 2007: 13).

[4] Recent researches have acknowledged the insufficiency of growth by itself as a means of reducing poverty and achieving development. See the World Bank development report *Equity and Development* (2006) as a representative example of this acknowledgment.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the features and the logic of this "new" global agenda for development, with special emphasis on how the education-poverty relationship has been constructed. It also aims to explore some of the main failings of this agenda and some of the limits of educational investment as a means of reducing poverty[5]. The paper is structured in four sections. The first focuses on the context in which the emergence of the agenda must be placed, specifically analysing the aspects of globalisation that most significantly affect the relationship between education and poverty; the second section is centred on the role of the actors, and especially on the role of the WB in setting the agenda; the third is oriented towards explaining the consolidation of the agenda by the EFA Conferences and the MDG; the fourth and final section presents some of the main limitations of the agenda.

2. Globalisation as the contextual framework of the agenda

In order to understand the emergence and the contents of the current global agenda for development, it is crucial to take the process of globalisation into account. It is the essential contextual framework for explaining the construction of an agenda that clearly focuses on the importance of educational investment as a means of reducing poverty and stimulating development[6].

Globalisation is profoundly transforming the characteristics of the post-war world order. It is changing the socio-economic context, the political framework and, as a result, the conditions for addressing the problems of development and poverty as well as the role of education in these processes. Globalisation is becoming a central factor in explaining the emergence of new explanatory frameworks in the field of education and development (Gore, 2000). "In its name, justification has been given for new focuses, new needs and new policies for development (…) It has served as a catalyst for the introduction of new discourses, new practices and new agendas" (Bonal & Rambla, 2008).

[5] Some of the previous researches indicating the limits of education as a means of reducing poverty are for example, Morrisson (2002), Carm et al (2003) or Bonal (2007).

[6] Of course, there are other elements besides globalisation that play a crucial role in explaining the emergence of the new global agenda. As we have indicated previously, the failure of previous models of development exclusively focused on economic growth or the evolution of the worldwide indicators on poverty and inequality have had a clear influence in locating the relationship between education and poverty at the forefront of the current development strategies. Nevertheless, globalisation is, from our point of view, a key explanatory element for understanding both the contents of the new agenda and the processes for elaborating this agenda.

In fact, the changes generated by globalisation play a crucial role in explaining both the increasing importance attributed to education in development strategies, and the growing importance of international bodies in setting the agenda. Globalisation generates important economic changes that contribute to increasing the importance of education for social mobility and national development. It also causes major political changes that lead to an increase in the role of non-national agents in the definition of national priorities, strategies and policies.

The economic changes generated by globalisation, on the one hand, are leading to the emergence of a new model of accumulation and growth that crucially relies in the role of human capital. Investment in human capital, and especially in education, is increasingly important in order to gain economic advantage in the global economy; it is one of the main bases of "wealth creation" (Brown & Lauder, 1997). Although knowledge has always had an important role in the promotion of economic growth and national development, it has nowadays become consolidated as the distinctive element of the new model of production; it has become the driving force of the new global economy (Carnoy, 1993). In the so-called "learning economy" or "knowledge-based economy"[7], knowledge, learning, information and competence are the new raw materials of international trade (Brown & Lauder, 1997).

In this context, education becomes the new currency of opportunity (Brown, 2003), for both nations and individuals, to succeed. Investment in education is believed to be one of the main ways for individuals to be included in an increasingly flexible, unstable and competitive labour market. It is also perceived as one of the main strategies for ensuring national development, competitiveness and growth, and even national survival in a global context.

As a consequence of this process, the hegemonic[8] political discourses in this area use globalisation and its effects as the main argument for giving priority to education in the new development strategies. That is, globalisation is used as the

[7] As Dale (2005) indicates the knowledge economy has been one of the fundamental rationales guiding the discourses around globalisation and education. See Robertson (2005) for an excellent critical assessment on the concept, its different meanings and its implications for guiding current discourses, agendas and policies.

[8] Based on a Gramscian perspective we understand hegemony as the capacity to create consensus and consent with regard to a particular system of values, attitudes and beliefs. That is, a way by which a particular interest or idea is understood and adopted as neutral, as part of the common sense, thus contributing to support the status quo in power relations. Consequently the concept of hegemony is inherently related to the concepts of ideology and power.

justificatory tool for adopting the new agenda. These political discourses indeed can be located in what Brown (2003) names as the *positional consensus theory*. According to this theory, globalisation is clearly increasing the opportunities for social mobility since it enlarges the demand of highly qualified workers. Moreover, it is believed that globalisation not only creates more need to invest in education but also more opportunities for doing so. From this point of view, therefore, the "meritocratic ideal" of human capital theory is completely embraced, assuming that social inequalities are merely the result of individual differences with regard to talent, preferences and effort. Consequently, the unequal opportunities that both individuals and countries have to face in order to invest in education and to take advantage of the investment made are generally omitted in the hegemonic discourses in this area.

Furthermore, it is important to take into account that in a context of globalisation although education is increasingly necessary it is also increasingly insufficient (Filmus, 2001). This is one of the biggest paradoxes of the process of globalisation and it is widely omitted in the hegemonic discourses guiding the global agenda. According to Bonal (2007) this omission represents one of the biggest contradictions of the current global agenda.

The political changes generated by globalisation, on the other hand, are leading to the growing importance of international bodies in the design, financing and implementation of national policies. Although most of the international bodies were created after the Second World War, globalisation is substantially increasing their importance and it is changing their role in the regulation and implementation of educational and social policies. As Held et al (1999) point out, globalisation creates a system of multiple centres of power and different spheres of authority that go far beyond national boundaries. Within this process, the state does not disappear completely from the political scenario, but it does lose autonomy in policymaking and increases its dependency on other agents and scales. Of course, the state continues to be a crucial actor in the provision, regulation and funding of national policies, but in a context of globalisation it ceases to be the only actor or even the most important one. These changes lead to important transformations in the governance of national policies, contributing to the creation of what Robertson et al. (2002) identify as the pluri-scalar governance of education.

Moreover, globalisation not only multiplies the agents that take part in setting educational priorities and policies, but it also creates a growing convergence in the

discourses and practices in this field. This is what Roger Dale (2000) defines as the existence of a Globally Structured Educational Agenda (GSEA); an agenda that goes beyond problems perceived on a national scale and one which is increasingly being built by the need to respond to new challenges created on a global scale. This is the global dimension of national education issues: "new political worlds that globalisation creates for contemporary education" (Mundy 2005).

The changes generated by globalisation therefore not only modify the governance of educational systems, but also the "mandate" of education itself. In other words, they change the role that educational systems have to play, their aims and their purposes. As stated above, the knowledge-based economy gives a crucial role to education in both national development and competitiveness. This role is clearly reflected in the new global agenda - an agenda that gives new responsibilities, priorities and functions to the educational systems; an agenda that is set in the name of globalisation.

The global education mandate established in our times, in fact, is gradually abandoning the redistributive ideals of the post-war era[9] and adopting new commitments related to competitiveness, efficacy and efficiency. According to Mundy (1998), the process of globalisation is creating a gradual movement from a form of redistributive multilateralism, based on the commitment to promoting the bases of the welfare state of advanced capitalist economies, to a defensive and disciplinary regime of multilateralism based on support for a reduction in government intervention, the defence of the free-market model and the promotion of neoliberalism as it relates to public policy and development (Mundy, 1998). According to Carnoy (1999), the two main types of educational reforms carried out in this context are finance-driven reforms and competitiveness-driven reforms. These reforms have eroded the role of the education system as a promoter of welfare, equality of opportunities and equity and as a result have transformed the mandate of education systems in the post-war world order (Mundy, 2005). Carnoy (1999) himself acknowledges that neoliberal globalisation has put pressure on governments to focus attention on competitiveness and finance-driven reforms, relegating equity-driven reforms to a secondary position. Nevertheless, he also points to the existence of a third type of educational reform in a context of globalisation that focuses precisely on equity.

[9] See Mundy (1998) for an accurate analysis of the role of the post-war international organisms in the promotion and consolidation of the welfare state and its redistributive ideals.

The thesis of this paper is that the hegemonic global education agenda of our times is located in the interaction between finance-driven reforms, competitiveness-driven reforms and equity-driven reforms. This agenda aims to solve the main problems of the capitalist system by ensuring the compatibility of two major objectives: economic growth and poverty reduction. The new global mandate for education policy since the 1990s has been based on the quest for growth, productivity and competitiveness but in a way that reduces poverty and guarantees social stability.

3. The World Bank as the main actor in setting the agenda

The WB is one of the key actors in the field of the educational development. Since the early 1980s, its influence on education has increased enormously, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This expansion has afforded a quasi-monopoly in the area of international aid for educational development. On one hand, it has become the largest funder of education in the world; on the other, it has been consolidated as the only international body with enough capacity, power and resources to co-ordinate global initiatives in the field of educational development (Mundy, 2002). As a consequence, the WB is the international organism with the most power and capacity - financial, political and technical - for setting and spreading the current global agenda for development. Moreover, it is the international body with the most interest in developing this agenda, since it has been seen as a key opportunity for recovering the legitimacy lost by the application of the structural adjustment plans (Tarabini, 2007).

In fact, fighting against poverty has been one of the main priorities of the WB since the early 1990s. After the failure of the Washington Consensus (WC) as the main strategy to achieve development, the WB explicitly declared the need for a new development strategy with a broader scope, objectives and instruments. This new strategy not only had to extend the concept of development beyond economic growth, but also had to change the relationship between the market and the state, making complementary action between them possible and increasing state intervention both in depth and breadth (Fine et al, 2001). The 1990 *World Development Report*, published under the explicit title of *Poverty*, suggested for the first time the possibility of implementing strategies that would be complementary to the market-centred development model, and acknowledged the excessively harsh impact of adjustment policies on the poorest sectors of society. Under this "new model," the struggle against poverty appeared as the WB's top priority. Moreover, instead of trusting the virtues of

economic growth as the sole means for reducing poverty, it set a political framework in order to achieve this objective. In other words, it defined specific policies directly aimed at reducing poverty. In this way, the WB not only managed to mitigate existing criticisms of its management, but also presented itself as an organism concerned with social welfare; as the body leading the struggle against poverty on a global scale.

By the end of the 1990s, this "new strategy" was known as the Post-Washington Consensus (PWC) and it clearly consolidated a new rhetoric on development and poverty reduction. The World Development Report 2000/2001, *Attacking Poverty*, expressed the World Bank's desire to present itself as the institution in charge of overseeing "global welfare", together with the strategies and priorities that should support this objective[10]. In specific terms, it proposed a threefold strategy for attacking poverty: promoting opportunity, facilitating empowerment and enhancing security (World Bank, 2001a). Among the multiple suggestions and policy proposals stated in the document, the following ones are especially relevant: reallocation of public expenditure towards poor sectors, mechanisms aimed at making markets function more favourably for the poor, measures to stimulate participation by the poor in decision-making, strategies for reducing the vulnerability of the poor and proposals for target interventions in social and education policies. As can be seen, there are extensive and diverse policies to fight poverty (Tarabini, 2008a).

The great amount of reports and documents published by the World Bank to date not only contribute to developing and to consolidating its "new" top priority of fighting poverty, but also to highlighting the importance of education as one of the key mechanisms in achieving this goal. From the perspective of the WB, and based on the human capital theory rationale, providing basic education for poor people is understood as a crucial element for stimulating their empowerment and activation and, consequently, for increasing their capacity to create income and their chances of breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. According to the Bank, this strategy will clearly contribute to increasing labour productivity, economic growth and social development.

From this point of view, a direct causal relationship between education and poverty is constructed, on the understanding that increasing one (education) will lead to a decrease in the other (poverty) almost automatically, and that the aggregate result will

[10] Interestingly, according to Maxwell (2003), the WDR 2000/01 has become the symbol of the international consensus on how best to tackle poverty reduction.

have positive repercussions on economic growth and national development. Moreover, the WB not only defines a general or abstract relation between education and poverty, but it fixes this relation in a clear hierarchy of educational priorities and in a specific conception of poverty, both in explanatory and in normative terms. According to the Bank, the educational level to be priorized in any strategy to reduce poverty is without any doubt primary education. This is the educational level that generates higher rates of return; the one that will allow the poor to acquire the necessary capacities to participate in the labour market and to be better adapted to its demands. From this perspective, therefore, the main explanation of poverty is the lack of capacity of individuals to take advantage of the opportunities provided and, therefore, any solution to poverty entails to act on these individual capacities[11]. As it is declared in the WB's sourcebooks for poverty reduction:

> "Failure to provide basic education seriously compromises a country's efforts to reduce poverty. A large body of research points to the catalytic role of basic education for those individuals in society who are most likely to be poor. Basic education or literacy training, of adequate quality, is crucial to equipping disadvantaged individuals with the means to contribute to and benefit from economic growth" (Aoky, et al., 2002: 233-234).

This relationship between education and poverty has not only been the basis of the WB's rhetoric and political proposals since the late nineties, but has also been the focus of the "new" global agenda for development. Nowadays, the importance of education in fighting poverty is a commonplace in the discourses, programmes and policies for achieving development. It is not only the WB that is proposing a "new" development agenda on the basis of the poverty-education relationship; new international bodies and national governments are also gradually joining this agenda. By the end of millennium, poverty reduction had become the central political objective of the major development agencies, and investment in education one of the main strategies to achieve this objective[12]. In this regard, it can be argued that the WB was the first organism to promote an agenda that was immediately followed, supported and

[11] See Wright (1994) for an excellent classification of different approaches to explain poverty.
[12] Nevertheless it is important to highlight that there are different paradigms which address the relation between education and poverty, namely, the human capital approach, the human rights approach, the capability approach and the social exclusion approach. See Sayed (2007) for a schematic presentation of these paradigms.

expanded by many other organisms, consequently becoming an agenda with a global scope (Tarabini, 2008b).

One of the key elements in explaining the WB's capacity for leading and applying this agenda is related to the introduction of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). The PRSPs are in fact the main political instrument for the articulation of the PWC[13]. They enable poverty reduction to be brought to the core of development strategies, the relationship between education and poverty to be consolidated[14] and most importantly, the WB's influence to be expanded not only in the countries dependent on its funding but also in the design of the global priorities in the field of development.

The PRSPs have indeed become the inevitable frame of reference for both developing countries and for bilateral and multilateral agencies in the design of development strategies (Bullard 2003; Caillods & Hallak 2004). The following are some examples: 1) the EU has decided to base its five-year assistance programmes in African, Caribbean and Asian Pacific countries on PRSPs. In other words, all countries wishing to receive EU aid are required to develop a PRSP; 2), key bilateral donors like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom orientate their assistance strategies to developing countries on the basis of the PRSPs; 3), the PRSPs are considered by the Executive Boards of the IMF and World Bank as the basis for concessional lending from each institution and debt relief under the joint Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative; 4), having an approved PRSP is a condition for being considered in the Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

Furthermore, although the PRSPs are supposed to be country-driven strategies, which are neither compulsory nor conditional, the WB clearly indicates the general framework that has to orient any strategy to reduce poverty. In fact, all the PRSPs have to carry out the same general principles, following the instructions and recommendations of the WB's *Sourcebooks for Poverty Reduction Strategies*.

[13] The PRSP were introduced in 1999 by the WB and the FMI in order to describe a country's "macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs over a three year or longer horizon, to promote broad based growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs and major sources of financing" (World Bank, 2001b). The content of each document is formally produced by developing countries trying to reflect their specific needs and features. The five principles that underline the PRSP are as follows: a result-oriented strategy (with targets that can be monitored); a comprehensive strategy (incorporating macroeconomic, structural and social policy aspects); a country-driven strategy (i.e one that it should be oriented differently depending on the particular features of the country); and a participatory strategy (based on partnership between IFIs, governments, and other actors, like NGOs).

[14] Although the PRSP are supposed to be different depending on national specificities, the WB explicitly states the importance of giving priority to education in any national strategy for fighting against poverty and it clearly indicates the kind of educational policies that should be priorized in national strategies. For an explanation of the role of education in the PRSPs see for example Caillods and Hallak (2004).

Consequently, it can be argued that PRSPs do not only recommend but also shape and prescribe the policies to be implemented by developing countries (Bonal & Tarabini, 2009). Moreover, authors like King and Rose (2005) or Robertson et al (2006) state that the PRSPs are merely the new WB's conditionality strategy. "Essentially they are little more than 'dressed up' versions of the discredited *Structural Adjustment Policies* of the 1990s, and updated versions of strategies of conditionality" (Robertson et al., 2006: 60).

It can therefore be argued that although the PWC is clearly wider than the WC, it does not differ substantially from it. The "new consensus" and the "new" policies planned within it have attributed much more importance to social issues than the previous statements. New objectives and commitments have also been introduced in the agenda. Nevertheless, the extent to which these new objectives and commitments challenge the basic principles of the WB rationale is questionable. By way of examples, state intervention is still restricted to market imperfections and therefore private provision of social and educational services is still highly recommended in the WB proposals; the basic rationale for investment in education is still based on the rates of return and priority is therefore still given to primary education; ongoing poverty is still explained as a failure by individuals to adapt to the demands of the market, consequently omitting the structural dimensions of poverty and the need for redistribution measures; etc.

It can be concluded that the basic rationale for the WB's investment remains unchanged. The "rediscovery of poverty", as Noel points out, does not represent a significant departure from past policies. On the contrary, it is "intimately associated with the dominant paradigm of our times" (Noel, 2006: 323).

4. The consolidation of the agenda: EFA Conferences and MDG

The many International Conferences that have taken place since the 1990s in both the educational and the social field has contributed enormously to the gradual consolidation of a global agenda in which the relationship between education and poverty occupies a central position. From our point of view, the two central events in the consolidation of this agenda are the International Summits on Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The proposals stated in both conferences not only reflect the global consensus with regard to the agenda for development, but they also allow the agenda to be set in terms of specific commitments and goals and more

importantly, they show the gradual hegemony of the WB in setting and implementing this agenda.

4.1. The EFA Conferences: towards a global compact on education

The EFA Conferences held in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000) have played a crucial role in framing what Mundy (2006) calls a "global compact" on education for development. In other words, they clearly contributed to consolidating a "new consensus" on development in which education emerged as a central part. In fact, since the EFA Conferences, bilateral and multilateral development agencies have assumed that in order to achieve development it is essential to make advances in the field of education. Since that point, education has therefore become an inevitable part of the global development agenda (King, 2007).

In this respect, the EFA movement has introduced important changes in the way the relationship between education and development is tackled. It has clearly contributed to recognising the centrality of education in sustainable development, setting clear educational targets, establishing new forms of donor coordination and generating new aid flows and aid modalities, among other progress (Mundy, 2006: 26).

Nevertheless, despite the changes that the EFA has generated, since its beginnings it has had to deal with important budget restrictions and with growing conflicts between the four main agencies that sponsor the whole process – UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the WB. The consequence of these processes has been the gradual reduction of the idea of "Education for All" and the growing hegemony of the WB not only in defining its own perspective on the process but also in implementing and monitoring it.

First, the logic of "education for all" has been gradually focused on primary education, pushing secondary education, vocational training, adult literacy and non-formal education into the background. While Jomtien (1990) was much more about "basic education" than about primary education, fostering a comprehensive and inclusive approach of the concept, Dakar (2000) clearly limited the idea to primary schooling. The Dakar Forum therefore reaffirmed the limited focus of education for development as a primary education concern, leading to a narrowing of the global education agenda (King, 2007). The new development consensus has thus established a clear hierarchy of global educational priorities in which the main goal is universal access (sometimes completion) to quality primary education (Mundy, 2006: 34). This

order of priorities indicates the success of the WB in designing the agenda. In fact, since the beginning of the EFA process, the WB had been pushing for limiting the concept of basic education to primary education, and at the end of the process it is clear that it has become the organism with the most capacity to develop its own conception of the EFA (Rose, 2003).

Second, the Dakar Conference declared the need to integrate EFA policies within a wider framework of poverty reduction and development strategies. This framework, far from being neutral, entails the adoption of the PRSP, among other measures. As the Dakar Framework For Action (2000) states: "a multi-sectorial approach to poverty elimination requires that education strategies complement those of the productive sectors as well as of health, population, social welfare, labour, the environment and finance, and be closely linked with civil society. Specific actions in this regard include: integrating basic education strategies into broader national and international poverty alleviation measures such as United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, Comprehensive Development Frameworks and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers" (UNESCO, 2000: 18). Locating the EFA strategies within the new political instruments of the WB indicates a clear acceptance of its approaches, recommendations and strategies.

Moreover, in 2002 the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was launched as a global partnership between donor and developing countries in order to ensure quicker progress towards the EFA goals. One of the main purposes of the Initiative was to achieve greater coordination and complementarity between bilateral and multilateral donors in the field of education. At the same time, it was presented as a strategy to make it possible to mobilize the necessary technical and financial resources to make progresses in the EFA goals. The FTI, however, is neither led nor developed by the UNESCO, but by the WB. This is crucially important. It not only shows the weakness of the UNESCO in leading the global agenda, it also "led to the recognition that the WB needed to take on a stronger role in uniting major players around a common vision of the global initiative" (Rose, 2003: 7). The WB's coordination of the FTI initiative not only raises its international profile, but above all increases its control on the EFA process and increases its capacity to influence it.

4.2. The MDG: towards a global compact on poverty.

The MDG were launched in 2000 by the largest ever gathering of heads of state in history and they made a crucial contribution to the process of consolidating the global agenda for development. The importance of the MDG is related to their ability to link poor and rich countries in the global objective of eradicating poverty and their capacity to set specific goals and commitments in this regard. The MDG indeed made a clear commitment to work towards a world in which the elimination of poverty and sustained development had the highest priority. They also form a common framework for developed and developing countries and international agencies in order to achieve significant and measurable improvements in people's lives by the year 2015 (Robertson, et al, 2006).

In this regard, the MDG have provided a "renewed" framework for thinking and acting in the field of international development (Maxwell, 2005). They have helped to revitalize the aid debate, to energize the development community and to foster new forms of co-ordination at national and global levels (Clemens & Moss, 2005). According to Roberts (2005), they represent the most recent and the most elaborate global exercise in setting targets for international development. As a result, the MDG play a key role in the creation of a broadly based consensus about "what works" in the field of development practices. They crucially help to consolidate the growing convergence between international agencies and national governments in tackling development (Thérien, 2004). In short, according to Zammit, the MDG allow a global commitment to be created that makes it possible to target one critical priority: poverty reduction. "[This priority] has become so pervasive in the discourse of international organisations that now it is for many the new name for development" (Zammit, 2003: 8; quoted in Robertson et al, 2006).

Nevertheless, although the MDG have been viewed in rather different ways, it can be affirmed that they represent a "minimalist agenda or an incomplete agenda for human development" (Vandermoortele, 2003). In other words, they consolidate a narrow agenda for global development that clearly limits the education and poverty reduction targets to their bare minimums.

The Millennium Goal related to education is specified in the following statement: "Achieve universal primary education". This goal is set in a target to be achieved in 2015: "Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling". As can be seen, the goal explicitly reduces the EFA focus on primary schooling, completely removing the inclusive idea of basic education initiated in

Jomtien (King & Rose, 2005). The achievement of good quality free and compulsory primary education of the Dakar text is reduced to achieving universal primary education (King, 2007), and secondary, vocational or tertiary education are omitted from the agenda.

What is even more worrying is the ambiguity about the meaning of the MDG target for primary education itself (Roberts, 2005). The target explicitly declares that all children should have the opportunity to complete primary schooling. Nevertheless, and surprisingly enough, the completion rate has not been included among the indicators identified for monitoring the evolution of the process until 2007[15]. In fact, the indicator prescribed in the MDGs to measure progress towards the goal has been until recently the net enrolment rate. Rhetoric apart, the goal related to education has been again limited to primary schooling and specifically to access.

The Millennium Goal related to poverty, on the other hand, declares: "Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger". The three targets to be achieved in 2015 are the following: "reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day"; "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people"; and "reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger". Nevertheless, the indicators prescribed to measure progress towards this goal were until 2007 –when the MDG monitoring framework was revised- only related to the first and the third targets. There were no indicators to evaluate progress in the field of work creation and job opportunities. As a consequence, poverty has been limited to its narrowest aspect: lack of income and hunger. Although poverty reduction is only one of the MDG, it can be argued that the MDG as a whole prioritises material aspects of deprivation over non-material ones (Maxwell, 2003). In specific terms, the economic aspect of poverty is what dominates the approach of the MDG.

It can therefore be stated that the MDG encourage "a reductionist approach to complex problems" (Maxwell, 2003: 12) that privilege quantitative indicators at the expense of qualitative indicators and leave out structural conditions. One of the biggest omissions in the global compact on poverty reduction is in fact inequality. Under the "new consensus," inequality is not taken into account and when it is, it is only as an

[15] The targets and indicators to measure progress towards the MDGs were developed in 2002 and they were effective since 2003. In 2007 the MDG monitoring framework was revised and superseded the previous one. The current official MDG framework is broader than the previous version and includes a new set of indicators in order to better achieve the established goals.

instrumental concern, i.e. avoiding the risks that inequality could create for social stability and economic growth. The omission of inequality as an explicit goal of the global agenda (with specific targets and commitments to be achieved) is one of the main reasons that explain the failure to achieve the MDG. "Failure to tackle extreme inequalities is acting as a brake on progress towards achieving MDG" (UNDP, 2005: 5). Moreover, this omission clearly reflects the triumph of the WB in "imposing" its own perspective on the process. In this regard, although the MDG clearly represents the clearest endorsement of the new development consensus, we highly agree with Thérien (2004) when he points out that:

> "The convergence observed in recent years between the 'UN paradigm' and the 'Bretton Woods paradigm' remains superficial because both worldviews are grounded on discrete values (…) The Bretton Woods institutions speak in terms of poverty, the UN agencies in terms of inequality. The former frame the problem as one of individuals who are not well adapted to the demands of the market; the latter define it primarily as a structural issue whose solution would require global redistribution measures. The current consensus on poverty reduction can thus be interpreted as a victory of the Bretton Woods perspective" (Thérien, 2004: 14)

5. Conclusions: the limits of the agenda

In our opinion, there are three main reasons that explain the limits of the global agenda for development: first, the global agenda does not take into account that although education is increasingly necessary, it is also insufficient as the only strategy to reduce poverty and to stimulate development; second, it is an agenda that still relies on the WC's orthodoxy and which does not alter the essence of neo-liberalism; third, it is an agenda that omits both social and educational inequality as explicit goals to be addressed. We would like to conclude the paper by briefly exploring these three areas.

5.1. The limits of education as a priority strategy in the fight against poverty

In a context of globalisation, investment in education is more necessary than ever before in order to achieve development, competitiveness and growth. It is consequently both necessary and legitimate to give priority to education in strategies to reduce poverty. There is no doubt that poor people would be in a worse position if they had no access to education. Similarly, developing countries would be in worse conditions if they had no investment in human capital. If education has always generated social and economic

benefits both in individual and aggregate terms, globalisation reinforces enormously its importance for individuals and nation-states to have access and maintain these benefits.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the importance of education and its absolute centrality in any strategy to reduce poverty and stimulate development, the hegemonic global agenda omits that investment in education on its own is no longer a guarantee of comparative advantage on a national or international level. As we have indicated previously, this is precisely the main paradox of the process of globalisation. That is, while education is increasingly necessary, it is also less and less sufficient (Filmus, 2001).

It is important to take into account that the rising demand for education generates a devaluation of the social usefulness of degrees, leading to a displacement in the minimum levels of education needed for labour and social inclusion. The increase in the population's average level of education generates a parallel increase in the threshold of years of schooling that the labour market rewards with decent incomes, thus, changing the conditions to guarantee the effectiveness of investment in education.

This process explains why increasing the years of schooling of poor people could be not enough by itself to increase their opportunities for social mobility and for getting out of poverty. On the one hand, the global hegemonic agenda omits that although primary education is of crucial importance, it is highly devalued as a bargaining chip in the labour market. Consequently, when poor people obtain their credential it is already depreciated. Moreover, globalisation not only devalues the returns gained from lower levels of educational investment, but also the possibilities to invest in education (Bonal, 2007).

On the other hand, the global agenda omits the strategies of distinction and differentiation used by middle classes in order to maintain the highest value of their qualifications. In fact, the effects of globalisation in devaluing the returns of education generates a growing competition between individuals for access to the most prestigious kind of schooling and to the best places in the occupational structure, thus, leading to a reinforcement of inequalities in educational opportunities (Brown, 2003). The possibilities to invest in education, therefore, are highly unequally distributed and generate highly unequal possibilities to get the benefits that it promises.

Finally, it is important to take into account that although globalisation creates an increasing demand for high-qualified jobs it creates a parallel demand for low-qualified jobs. Consequently globalisation leads to a progressive wage polarization between

professional profiles according to their levels of qualification (Carnoy, 1999). This process increases the inequalities in the labour market between a highly qualified labour force with access to highly remunerated and highly stable labour positions and a low qualified labour force subject to constant rotation, precarious labour conditions and constant loss of purchasing power (Bonal, 2003). In this context, it could not be denied the need for educational expansion to be accompanied by substantial changes in the labour market.

If more and better education is not parallel to more and better jobs, if poor people have no options to take advantage of the educational investment, if only access to school for poor pupils is guaranteed without substantially altering the school and social conditions under which the schooling process takes place, there is a risk of obtaining a better-educated population but that is still as poor as before. A population highly disappointed by the impossibility to fulfil the "educational promise".

5.2. The limits of the "new" consensus in moving away from the neo-liberal orthodoxy

The evaluation of the "new agenda" has generated numerous academic and political debates among analysts. Some authors consider that the PWC represents a substantial change in the previous theories and practices of development. From this point of view, the PWC represents a fundamental rupture in development thinking and a gradual move away from neo-liberalism (Stiglitz, 1998; Gore, 2000; Pender, 2001; etc.). However, other analysts view the PWC with scepticism, questioning the extent to which it generates substantial changes from the previous models. According to Noel's (2006) proposal, we can identify two main approaches within this sceptical position: the first stresses the symbolic character of the new discourses and underlines the limited number of measures that have accompanied new proposals in poverty reduction; the second identifies the new focus on poverty as a continuation of neo-liberalism, and as a complement to previous policies. As we have argued in this paper, we consider that there are evidences enough to affirm that the new consensus on poverty reduction does not move away from neoliberal orthodoxy. In our view, this is one of the reasons that explain the limits of the agenda in achieving its goals.

The starting point for the "new" agenda, as we have seen, is acknowledgment of the insufficiencies of orthodox neoliberal policies in achieving sustainable development. Since the early 1990s, the WB has been the first to recognize the excessively harsh

impact of adjustment programs on the poorest sectors of society. It has also recognized the need for new strategies to complement the market-centred development model that predominated during the eighties. This is just the logic of the new agenda: to complement the previous model; to make it work better for the poor, but not to change it substantially.

As mentioned above, the new policies for fighting against poverty are absolutely complementary with maintaining subsidiary state intervention in public and economic affairs; with considering private services still more efficient than public ones; and with promoting trade openness and liberalization. The educational chapter of the WB's *Sourcebooks for Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* is quite illustrative in this respect. It explicitly declares that the impact of education on poverty reduction is strongest when "education is integrated into a broader competitiveness strategy that includes macroeconomic stability, trade openness and incentives for foreign investment" (Aoky et al., 2002: 234).

It can be concluded that poverty reduction policies remain at the margins of basically orthodox economic policies. Moreover, according to Craig and Porter (2003) the priorities of the WB under the PWC, and specifically under the PRSP, are as follows: "global economic integration first, good governance second, poverty reduction following as a result, underpinned by limited safety nets and human capital development" (Craig & Porter, 2003: 53). The main thesis of the authors is that this prioritization represents a refinement of the liberal political project and a type of "inclusive liberalism" in particular. This is a more eclectic strategy that introduces the importance of poverty reduction along with classical neo-liberal principles and policies. The logic of the PWC, therefore, is to complete, correct and complement the reforms of a decade ago but not to reverse them (UNCTAD, 2002; Cammack, 2004). This is what Robert Wade (1996) calls the "art of the paradigm maintenance".

5.3. The omission of inequality as an explicit goal of the agenda

The relation between growth, poverty and inequality has been widely discussed in some of the most recent publications of the WB. The WB, in fact, has recognised in its rhetoric that lower inequality could increase economic growth and also reduce poverty (WB, 2001a). High inequality is not only harmful to the poor, but it also hinders economic growth and often delays overdue policy reforms. In this context, equity is

good for the poor because it is good for growth. That is the logic that leads the WB to be worried about inequality - its possible negative effects on growth.

In fact, the theoretical statement on inequality has not been reflected in effective policies directly aimed at reducing social and educational inequalities. Neither the EFA nor the MDG include the need to reduce inequality as an explicit goal among their objectives. We have seen that the EFA goals are progressively being reduced to primary education, and access to schooling in particular. Access to schooling is of course a basic aspect of educational inequality, but it does not reflect the full meaning of inequality from an educational point of view at all. On the other hand, we have seen the focus of the MDG on absolute poverty and on the most restrictive expression of monetary poverty in particular. Again, increasing the income of poor people could contribute to reducing the social level of inequality, but the measure of 1$ or 2$ a day seems to be a highly limited objective for tackling the structural inequalities that affect many of the southern countries.

If education is to be the basis for reducing poverty, it seems absolutely necessary to broaden the objectives of the agenda and to introduce effective policies to tackle inequalities. These policies should find a new balance for the current hierarchy of educational priorities, at least placing completion of secondary schooling in the forefront; they should lessen the differences between public and private schooling networks, making a serious commitment to the improvement of the public network; they should take the working conditions of teachers into account; etc. All in all, they should contribute to prevent or avoid the role of education as a means of expressing and reproducing inequalities between social classes, or as a channel of social differentiation through which highly unequal opportunities are provided.

Similarly, if poverty reduction is to be the basis for development it seems necessary to go beyond the reductionist vision of poverty as lack of income. At the same time, it is necessary to go beyond an individualistic concept of poverty related to lack of capacity or empowerment. Lack of income is obviously one expression of poverty and inequality. Lack of capacity and empowerment could also be the reflection of the absence of opportunities in both the educational and social realms. Nevertheless, poverty is also associated with unequal power relations in social, economic and political contexts, and this remains completely lacking from the current hegemonic agenda. As a consequence, the introduction of new objectives onto the agenda that are directly related with redistribution and social justice is urgent.

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