Chapter 3. Contemporary Education Reform Dynamics in Honduras: Privatization through Policymaking

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Abstract

This chapter addresses contemporary education reform dynamics and initiatives in Honduras, with a focus on the ways in which different non-State actors have become increasingly involved in education policy formulation and implementation. To this end, the chapter (a) describes the widely recognized role that international development organizations have had in the region since the 1980s; (b) presents the key aspects that have characterized education policymaking and the activity of international organizations in Honduras during the 1980s-2000s—especially in relation to advancing a "modernization" and "decentralization" agenda; and (c) analyzes how education policymaking has functioned more recently in the country, subject to the growing influence and formal involvement of corporations and philanthropic organizations. In addressing these issues, the chapter is attentive to the political-economic forces that have shaped the region and the country in the period and whose long-lasting effects continue to underpin education reform dynamics.

Introduction

Being appointed Minister of Education in Honduras means facing urgent, yet long-standing challenges in a context of severe underfunding. Having insufficient resources to commit to education makes Honduras highly and structurally dependent on international and donations from local and international philanthropic organizations. Unable to alter the equation of government expenditure portrayed at the outset of chapter two, the Honduran Ministry of Education works in a constant search for external "help" in the form of donations or loans from international actors. The situation is such that many government officials consider the search for assistance to be a standard feature of the way the education system works:

> We believe that the plan [(the Education Sector Strategic Plan, discussed later in this chapter)] is essential for […] mapping [the needs of the education sector] so that we can tell them [donors, international organizations, etc.], "this part we are going to cover ourselves, this part is covered by the cooperation, this part is covered by... Who is going to cover this part? How are you going to help us?" (National Board of Education official 1)

While this can be considered an inevitable part of running an education system in a context where funding is everything but adequate, the dependence on non-state actors—whether domestic or international—has significant implications for the way policymaking processes are carried out, and for the content and orientation of the education policies and programs that are ultimately funded and implemented. Chapters two and four provide various examples of the latter, such as the decentralization reforms promoted by most international organizations with

presence in the country, the World Bank-funded Honduran Community Education Program (PROHECO, for its acronym in Spanish), and the accountability initiatives funded by the German cooperation agency (GIZ). Not surprisingly, all of these share a New Public Management approach to public policy—meaning that they are conceived in terms of business principles, such as efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness. Together with the various forms in which private education provision has expanded (also addressed in chapter two), these examples fall under the endogenous and exogenous privatization modalities discussed in chapter one (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

Beyond analyzing the dynamics of exogenous and endogenous privatization, in this chapter we want to look into a third modality of privatization which operates *through* educational policymaking. This modality accounts for the involvement of non-State actors in the formulation and implementation of educational policy (Ball, 2009; 2012). As noted, in many different contexts, new non-state actors have recently gained importance in terms of education policy production—beyond the widely recognized role of international development organizations since the 1980s (Akkari & Lauwerier, 2015; Edwards, 2012). Importantly, while the erosion of the State's role at the center of policymaking affects many countries (see, for instance, Fontdevila, Avelar, and Verger, 2021; Moschetti et al., 2020; Saltman, 2009; Scott, 2009; Verger, 2016), where there is a high degree of economic dependence on non-state actors—such as the case of Honduras—this phenomenon appears to be more pervasive, shaping crucial aspects of how the system functions and how reform planning is carried out.

Thus, in this chapter we turn our attention to the education policymaking dynamics in Honduras. From an overall regional perspective, we first provide a few comments on the historical context around education policymaking, especially regarding the role of international organizations in guiding and conditioning education expansion in Central America. We then characterize the key insights from the scant literature addressing the policymaking dynamics in Honduras during the 1980s-2000s. Third, with a focus on the past decade—i.e., since the ousting of President Manuel Zelaya in 2009[1]—we turn to setting the stage for analyzing how education policymaking has functioned more recently in the country, in the context of what can be labelled as an overall 'misgovernment' of the educational system. We then focus on exploring the ways in which international organizations have been intimately involved with—and have been intensely influential when it comes to—the making of education policy in recent years. Moreover, beyond a focus on international organizations, we also document how other private actors of a domestic nature have likewise been increasingly influential. In this regard, we present the ways in which corporations and philanthropic organizations have become intertwined with—and even formally involved in—the process of policy formation. We finish by zooming in on a paradigmatic example that exposes the coupling between the Honduran government's long-standing limitations and non-state actors' influence and power to shape a much needed yet flawed "Education Sector Strategic Plan."

Historical-Regional Dynamics in Education Policymaking

Among non-State actors, international organizations have the longest record of coordinating and guiding (education) reform in Central America. Their involvement dates back to the 1950s when the first international organizations started to operate in Latin America. As we present some relevant landmarks and consequences of this long history of intertwining from

[1] For a thorough overview and analysis of this turbulent process, see Frank (2018).

a critical international political economy (CIPE) perspective, it is important to consider, first, that international organizations' involvement has occurred in formal but also informal processes of policy change; second, that it has had an impact across different scales—i.e., local, national, regional; and third, that their participation in policymaking in the region cannot be understood without considering how education fits into the tensions generated by global capitalist development (Edwards & Martin, forthcoming).

The 1950s saw the first example of international involvement through regional cooperation, which followed the creation of the Organization of Central American States (ODECA). Although this organization was born out of the will of Central American states to create an organism for essentially horizontal regional cooperation, it soon turned to international organizations outside the region for assistance and consultation. In 1956, for instance, ODECA's Cultural and Educational Council—i.e., the ministers of education of the five member countries—had its first meeting, which was followed by a series of seminars with the participation of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), the Organization of American States, and the International Cooperation Administration of the United States (precursor organization of USAID). These seminars produced high numbers of recommendations for how each area of education should be organized and why. They also espoused the objective of "'educational and cultural unity as a basis for future economic and political unity" (Waggoner & Waggoner, 1971, p. 140). However, overall ODECA "moved slowly in the area of education" (p. 141), and no major reform was agreed upon during the period. Equally important, the major limitations of ODECA's activity were that it depended on financial support from member countries, and that the supra-national approach to cooperation driven by external actors—which replaced the original, yet fleeting horizontal regional approach—did not have buy-in from the governments of the region (Edwards & Martin, forthcoming).

During the 1960s, as international organizations adopted scientific management and planning principles as the center of their efforts towards a regional development agenda, UNESCO, the World Bank, and different private foundations sent 25 missions composed of educators and economists across almost every corner of Latin America to "advise the countries on comprehensive educational planning" (Puiggrós, 1999, p. 35). The intention of technical support during this time was to "put education at the service of socioeconomic planning being undertaken by the capitalist interests in each country" (p. 36). In Central America in particular, multilateral and bilateral organizations and private foundations directed resources at creating government agencies for educational planning to guide efforts to create national education systems accordingly. Resources were also to the establishment of private universities that could be expected to produce the knowledge that would serve the development of private industry, thought as insufficient at the time for capitalist progress (Harrington, 2009; McGinn & Warwick, 2006).

The 1970s and 80s, however, brought along a different context in which countries in Central America experienced repression, revolution, foreign intervention, military governments, and social conflict. International assistance continued to play a major role (McGinn & Warwick, 2006)—although international organizations approached education intermittently depending on the changing circumstances in each territory. Generally, there is extremely scant literature that looks at the policymaking and politics of international cooperation around education in Central America during the 1970s and 80s.[2] It is likely that that governments and international organizations during this period were preoccupied with the

[2] For a couple notable exceptions, see Harrington (2009) and Lindo-Fuentes and Ching (2012).

instability and social unrest that characterized the region, which might have led to a decreased emphasis on educational development (Edwards & Martin, forthcoming).

The political-economic forces and structural determinants underpinning regional unrest and the transformations that occurred in Central America during this period are key to understanding the nature of the subsequent "stabilization" processes that took place in the region and—most importantly for our purpose in this chapter—the new wave of intense engagement from international organizations that we will discuss in the following sections. To be sure, besides shaping the starting point from which countries in the region transitioned out of conflict, these forces and processes created the conditions and basic assumptions according to which non-state actors would engage in policymaking in the way they did in the following decades. In this regard, three points are of import here as seen from a macro perspective. First, despite the gains made since the 1950s in terms of expansion and access of education systems in the region, economic development remained an unfulfilled promise for too many. The modernization of education systems could not contain—and perhaps contributed, through heightened expectations of social mobility, to—social upheaval in the region. In other words, while greater portions of the Central American population were being brought into the formal schooling system (Newland, 1995), it was also the case that the economies of the region were changing, as countries shifted to agro-export and industrial capitalist development, but with the important caveat that the benefits of this development were not distributed in such a way that would prevent social conflict—see, for instance, Chomsky's (2021) chapter on Honduras, for a description of the effects of USAID's intervention benefiting the emerging agro-industrial elite. The key idea here is that even though international organizations increasingly saw education as an input to the economy, education itself could not and did not determine the structure of the economy (Buzajan, Hare, LaBelle, & Stafford, 1987). This fundamental contradiction is something that would be further exacerbated in the following decades.

Relatedly, the second point has to do with the rapid reconfiguration of the social structure in Central America that came along with the period of successful capitalist development beginning in the mid-1960s. In this context, the tension between peasants and the traditional oligarchic structures that benefitted from agricultural production was significantly altered by the emergence of other economic elites as a result of the industrialization process and who, in the 1980s, started to benefit from the development of non-traditional agro-exports, maquiladoras, and financial services. As they became relevant economic actors, these new elites pushed for—and would further benefit from—the restructuring of Central America's economies (Robinson, 2002). Importantly, as we will explain in the following sections and in chapter seven they would later become relevant political actors via business chambers and philanthropic organizations, and by teaming up with international organizations, cooperation agencies, and other non-state actors directly engaged in education reform and policymaking.

Finally, as mentioned above, this period saw a fast-paced restructuring of Central America's economies. While this process was the expected consequence of the augmentation and integration of the global economy during the 1960s and 1970s, the late 1970s and early 1980s brought in a perfect storm with a regional debt crisis and a global recession that meant that Central American exports took a hit. To prevent economic collapse in the region, international financial institutions offered new loans that came along with strict conditions related to cutting state spending and opening further to the world economy (Robinson, 2002). As discussed in chapter one, these so-called "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAP) provided financial aid conditional on the adoption of a series of pre-defined policies in line with neoliberal principles—i.e., market liberalization, labor deregulation, austerity measures, decentralization, incentives for greater private sector involvement, market mechanisms in the

provision of public services, etc. As we will see, loan conditionalities and the structural forces described above would have important consequences for the content and workings of education policymaking in the following decades—especially since the efforts of financial institutions would be further supported by other international and domestic non-state actors benefiting from the neo-liberal restructuring.

Policymaking in Honduras: 1990s-2000s

Since the second half of the 1980s, when political stabilization processes started to take place in the region, international organizations began to engage or reengage more directly with the governments in Central America in order to produce systemic transformations and, in many cases, to roll back what was left of the weak welfare states in the region, now considered obsolete and inefficient (Paz & Morales-Ulloa, forthcoming). In Honduras, such reforms aimed not only at transforming the more bureaucratic aspects of public administration and service provision but also, and most importantly, the country's whole institutional framework (Morales-Ulloa & Magalhães, 2013). In essence, these reforms were the spearhead of the attempts to institutionalize a neoliberal project that would seek to promote a "new definition for development as participation in the world market and the transition from managed national economic growth to managed global economic growth" (Robinson, 2002, p. 233-4). Accordingly, the logic that would guide education reform from the mid-1980s onwards would change as well: Education could no longer be seen as an input to a domestically-controlled economy, but rather would have to respond more explicitly to the pressures of the global economy (Edwards & Martin, forthcoming). In Honduras, as in most countries in the region, education policy production would lose autonomy, constrained by economic policy and, more generally, by macroeconomic decisions ultimately conditioned by international organizations and multilateral banks (Tinoco, 2010).

In this context, the Honduran educational system began to be subject to reform initiatives aimed at "modernizing" the system that were successively advanced by the different presidential administrations of the country during the period—i.e., the "Education Modernization" project (1990-1994), the "*Escuela Morazánica*" project (1994-1998), "The New Agenda" (1998-2002), and the "Proposal for the Transformation of the Education System" (1999-2006). However, while these initiatives led to important developments (see Posas, 2010, and Brevé, 2016, for a discussion), what we wish to highlight here are two dynamics that have permeated the policymaking process. First, there is the issue of inconsistency across administrations:

> The fact that education reform proposals are designated with different names ("Modernization of Education" … and the "Proposal for National Education Transformation" …) has created a sense of discontinuity and has given fuel to the idea that each government designs their own education policy and that each policy has no continuity with the previous or subsequent government. (Posas, 2010, p. 31)

Ironically, while the focus of each government may not reflect the priorities of the previous administration, there is still a certain level of consistency over time—the difference is that it is the influential international organizations, rather than the government, who may enjoy longer periods of predictability with regard to their priorities and projects, thanks to their ability to offer financing and to shape the policymaking process (e.g., through the provision of consultants and through the production of knowledge to inform decisions). As explained by Posas (2010):

> the continuity and complementarity of the Honduran educational reform was guaranteed by the hegemonic educational agenda at the international level and by international organizations, such as the World Bank, which have played a stellar role in financing and deciding on the direction of the educational reforms ultimately adopted. (p. 31)

The first dynamic implicates the second one. Here, we point out that, rather than develop plans and policies to which international organizations must respond, things have, at times, had a tendency to work the other way around: The government adapts official reform plans to conform with the projects that have been negotiated with international donors (Tinoco, 2010). However, this does not mean that the programs are more likely to be implemented. Previous research by Morales-Ulloa (2013) quotes an education specialist who was previously an advisor with the Ministry of Education who explains in more depth the general dynamic mentioned above:

> If you look at public policy in Honduras, normally the State makes a declaration of principles that aligns with the proposals that the World Bank or any other organization is going to bring. The State creates the framework of legitimacy. It would seem that each government makes a new proposal in many different areas, but it's a proposal that has already been negotiated with international organizations like the World Bank. The State creates all the legal rhetoric so that these types of projects can enter, because, in fact, the funds of the Honduran State are for paying teachers, for paying personnel, they are not funds that are employed to finance projects; in fact, if you look at the list of education projects, you can verify that they are financed by external funds. So, these are the problems of a poor country that makes public policy through the projects that are going to come and that have already been previously negotiated with the World Bank. (p. 168)

It could be that, at the level of policy reform, the World Bank and other international actors have carried more weight because they offer financing and technical assistance while, at the same time, the Minister of Education has had to deal with the many other groups from the national and local levels who angle for influence. According to an ex-Minister of Education, the variety of actors who clamour for attention include at least twelve groups, namely: "legislators, mayors, political party authorities, student leaders, teachers' union leaders at the national and departmental levels, the association of school directors, leaders of teacher training colleges, civil service employees, international development partners, the Ministry of Finance, the Superior Court of Accounts, and journalists" (Morales-Ulloa, 2013, pp. 168-169). While the Minister of Education is pressured to respond to these groups, international organizations can exercise their comparative advantage when it comes to organizing and facilitating processes for developing projects and policy priorities. Crucially, though, it has been suggested that, when it comes to getting the system to respond in practice, the Minister of Education has "the real power," because of their influence through clientelistic networks and because lower-levels of the system lack both the human and financial resources to exercise independence (Morales-Ulloa, 2013, p. 316). This issue of what actually moves the system is one to which we return throughout the coming chapters.

With these dynamics underpinning the policymaking processes, the content of the reform initiatives adopted by the different administrations have, overall, responded to the principles of the New Public Management reform agenda advanced by many international organizations since the 1980s, and particularly by means of loan-funded projects and programs. Such projects and programs provided the structure and the financial and technical support to—and acted as a content continuity umbrella for—the government's reform initiatives. Among the most relevant during the period are the "Primary Education Efficiency Project" (PEEP) (1986-1997), which was promoted by USAID and "dominated the daily life of the Ministry of

Education during a whole decade" (Posas, 2010, p. 33); the "Basic Education Quality Improvement Project" (1995-2000) prompted and funded by the World Bank and the German development bank KfW; and the school-based management program known as PROHECO (1999-present, discussed in chapter four), promoted and funded by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).[3]

In long-term perspective, we can see that the Structural Adjustment Plan the country was subject to in 1990 under the auspices and surveillance of the IMF marked a turning point that would put Honduras on the neoliberal reform track many counties in Latin America had been experiencing since the early 1980s. The State Modernization Law (Decree 190/1991) embodied the flagship project of this process. In education, it triggered the adoption of the "Education Modernization" project and those that followed, which, as discussed below, in essence promoted an educational decentralization reform. By that time, educational decentralization had become an obsession for international organizations and the most popular educational reform across Latin America (Paz & Morales-Ulloa, 2020). Following the recommendations of the World Bank and other international organizations, governments perceived—or at least agreed to—decentralization as a solution to the inefficiency of centralized educational systems (as diagnosed by the same international organizations) and as an opportunity to make educational systems more responsive and accountable.

In Honduras, however, decentralization took the form of "deconcentration," i.e., a soft version of decentralization reforms by means of which the national Ministry of Education delegated some management functions from the central government to departmental and district units but maintained a centralized control over finance (Posas, 2010; Paz & Morales-Ulloa, 2020). According to Morales-Ulloa and Magalhães (2013), having learnt from the recent flawed experiences of Chile (municipalization) and Nicaragua (autonomous schools), teacher unions wielded strong opposition to the government's decentralization plans. Thus, despite pressure from the World Bank and other international organizations pushing for a hard decentralization reform, the strong organizing and mobilizing capacity of the Honduran teacher unions meant that government had to settle for a lukewarm reform. (See chapter four for more on decentralization dynamics.)

Predictably, however, the World Bank would not give up pushing for a hard decentralization reform and seized the opportunity right after the devastating strike of hurricane Mitch in October 1998 to launch the aforementioned school-based management program known as PROHECO at a much larger scale than it had originally been conceived a few months before (again, see chapter four) (Verger et al., 2017; Ganimian, 2016). According to some authors, the PROHECO program and the way it was adopted and rapidly scaled up are key examples of the Honduran State's lack of capacity to propose and implement policies that are independent of the recommendations and financial and technical support of international organizations (Tinoco, 2010; Morales-Ulloa & Magalhães, 2013).

During this period, modernization was not only conceived as decentralization but also as "democratization" of the State apparatus. Democratization thus meant 'opening the state up to the participation of other actors, especially non-state actors, and developing a culture of accountability' (Morales-Ulloa & Magalhães, 2013, p. 7). The best example of this democratization mandate was the creation of the so-called National Convergence Forum

[3] Other international organizations, multilateral banks, and cooperation agencies that have provided funding and guidance for various programs during the period include UNICEF, Plan International, the German cooperation agency GTZ, the European Union, the Spanish cooperation agency, and the Japanese government (Posas, 2010).

(FONAC, for its acronym in Spanish), which was the first of a series of public structures with participation of non-state actors aimed—in this case—at promoting and facilitating consultation processes involving different civil society organizations. FONAC was created in 1994, and in 1998, just after the devastation caused by hurricane Mitch, a national consultation was commissioned to develop an educational reform plan which was the origin of the above-mentioned "Proposal for the Transformation of the Education System" (1999). The proposal followed the logic of previous reforms by including a call to continue decentralizing the system, a series of very general considerations regarding educational quality and equity, an ambitious teacher professionalization plan, an acknowledgment of the need to increase education spending, and, of course, a call to seek financial support from international organizations and cooperation agencies.

Importantly, FONAC's proposal also updated the configuration of the National Council for Education. This executive structure originally created in 1989, was charged with 1) achieving coherent and coordinated integration of the levels of the education system, 2) proposing to the Executive Branch the policy of the State and the National Plan for Development of the Education Sector, 3) providing advice and support to the different levels of education, 4) proposing the mechanisms for evaluating the system, and 5) issuing general regulatory standards that should be met (Posas, 2010, p. 30). However, in order to understand why attaining this multiplicity of purposes became increasingly problematic, one needs to know a bit about the new composition of this high-level body, which includes a rather large membership of senior officials from a wide variety of institutions. Specifically, as proposed by FONAC, the National Council for Education is made up of the following:

> the President of the Republic; the Minister of Education; the Minister of Culture, Art and Sport; the Rector of the Autonomous National University of Honduras; the Rector of the National Pedagogic University; the Director of the Institute for Professional Training; the President of the Commission for Science and Technology; and representatives from the Federation of Teachers' Unions of Honduras, workers centers, farm worker organizations, the Federation of Professional Schools of Honduras, and the Honduran Council for Private Enterprise. (Posas, 2010, p. 47)

As one can imagine, with such a distinguished group of members, each of whom has their own priorities and distractions, it can be difficult to arrive at consensus about policy priorities. Moreover, it can be difficult to move beyond general discussion to the technical aspects of investigating and making policy. It is not surprising, then, that, as Posas (2010) explains, the National Council for Education carries out the work of making policy recommendations by "contracting local specialists and/or international consultants that choose, from within the dominant reform trends of the era, those policies that they consider relevant for responding to the educational challenges of the country" (p. 30). Interestingly, the new configuration of the National Council for Education as proposed by FONAC would include a series of State and non-state actors, among which the Honduran Council for Private Enterprise would stand out as one of its most active members. As we discuss next, the incorporation of non-state actors in different executive governmental structures marked the formal rise of the domestic economic elite in the education policymaking sphere already populated by international organizations, cooperation agencies, and other international non-state actors.

Recent Policymaking Dynamics

Misgovernment of the Educational System

One of the most evident findings reflected in the interviews is the weakness or 'failure' of the Honduran State. As we further discuss and problematize later from chapter six onwards, State failure here refers to a lack of ability, capacity or willingness on the part of the state to achieve "the collective goals specified in state projects about the nature and purposes of government" (Jessop, 2016, p. 40)—including, in our case, the provision of "quality" education. As we detail next, the weakness of the Honduran State can be inferred in various ways by looking into both the macro and local administrative levels.

Along with the problem of underfunding discussed in chapter two, many actors have pointed out what they label as an overall 'misgovernment' of the Honduran educational system. In this respect, at the macro level, two elements are worth noting. The first one is the high level of turnover of ministers of education in recent years. Specifically, after Marlon Escoto left office (February 2012–January 2017), three ministers have been appointed—i.e., Rutilia Calderón (February 2017–January 2018), Marcial Solís (January-December 2018) and Arnaldo Bueso (December 2018– incumbent). Such short terms, together with the frequent lack of experience of appointed ministers in the field of education, have contributed to generating a feeling of instability and inconsistent leadership of the system. As described by one of the interviewees:

> The Ministry should be the basis for the educational system, but there is no coordination. We have had four or five ministers in recent years. Each minister comes up with a different idea and implements it. So, there are no defined plans, there are no long-term plans. There are government plans, but no long-term, "State" plans. (Business chamber representative 2)

However, the most concerning element has to do with the fact that during the last decade the government has created a series of different, coexisting executive structures with similar or inadequately defined responsibilities, continuing the tendency initiated with FONAC's proposal in 1999. This has been the case of the recently created Commission for the Transformation of the Educational System which, along with the above-mentioned National Council for Education, is yet another structure that overlaps with the Ministry of Education. The very nature of the members of this commission generates conflicts of interest and contradictions of hierarchy which often lead to paralysis. The commission was created by means of a presidential decree in September 2018 and is made up of: Rutilia Calderón, former Minister of Education; Jancy Carolina Fúnez, former president of the Association of Private Universities; Sandra Maribel Sánchez, executive director of the National Council for Education; Alberto Solórzano, representative of the Evangelical Church of Honduras; Carlos Hernández, president of the Association for a More Just Society); Ramón Salgado, former rector of the National Pedagogical University; Gabriel Molina, manager of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP); Jorge Galeano, executive director of World Vision; and Cristian Loui, representative of the Roundtable of Education Cooperation Agencies..

Having government structures with similar—if not the same—responsibilities has created more confusion in an already baffling scenario in which it is difficult for the actors of the system to understand the role of each structure and, especially, that of the Ministry of Education. An NGO representative speaks to this by asking: "Who governs education? Who is in charge?"—and stating—"Well, I'll tell you one thing: It is not the minister" (NGO representative 3). In a similar vein, some union representatives interpret that the Commission for the Transformation of the Educational System (mentioned in the previous paragraph) operates as a government in the shadow—arguably because of the high-profile of its members. Union representatives sarcastically refer to it as an "auditing commission" with executive

responsibilities by means of which a certainly impressive collection of top (former) government officials and non-state actors dictate education policy:

> It is as if the minister had no authority... In the end, the one who makes the big decisions is this auditing commission, which has direct contact with the President; the minister only validates what the commission does, he's just a figurine. (Union representative 4)

In addition to the problems at the macro governmental level, the Honduran educational system faces severe challenges and obstacles at the local administrative level, mainly as a consequence of the "deconcentration" reform the country initiated in the 1990s. As described above, similar to what happened in other countries in the region, decentralization reform was promoted at the time by different international organizations, and its implementation was in part a consequence of the loan conditionalities imposed on the country. Most importantly, in practical terms, the decentralization reform came without proper transfer of funding and capacity to the sub-national level units now in charge of managing various aspects of the system. Not surprisingly, the data reveal that, with very few (monetary and technical-pedagogical) resources, these 'new' decentralized administrative structures are impaired to carry out their stipulated functions aimed at increasing efficiency and responsiveness (Morales-Ulloa, 2013). Interviewees agree on this point and suggest that departmental and district units "lack personnel and only carry out bureaucratic, non-essential tasks" (Union leader 2), and that "the system remains highly centralized" in practice (NGO representative 2). In the context of severe underfunding, however, some highlight the fact that the system has always been "decentralized by default" (Scholar 2) simply because technical support and resources hardly ever reach schools, with the implication that schools are left to address their problems on their own as best they can.

As mentioned in chapter two, underfunding and misgovernment have tended to propel various forms of endogenous and exogenous privatization processes[4], the majority of which respond to an overall "inertial" dynamic in which private actors are filling the gaps left by an "absent State" that does not fulfill its responsibility to provide education for all (Graham-Brown, 1991; Paz & Morales-Ulloa, 2020; Tinoco, 2010). However, as we have shown, the consequences of State failure are not restricted to privatization of service provision but extend to the policymaking arena as well. Next, we examine such trends as they unfolded in recent years.

Intervention of Non-State Actors in Policymaking

There is currently a wide range of influential non-state actors in the field of education in Honduras, including multilateral banks, international organizations, local NGOs, local and international contractors, business chambers and think-tanks. Due to the involvement of these actors, the process of education policymaking itself has been substantively privatized, particularly since the ousting of President Zelaya in 2009. As noted previously, this phenomenon reflects what Ball (2009; 2012) labels "privatization *through* education policy" in the sense that non-state actors have been incorporated into government decision-making

[4] In short, these include (1) the provision of pre-primary education by private foundations, (2) the emergence of low-fee private schools, (3) the collection of user-fees from families in public schools, (4) the private provision in secondary schools resulting from insufficient public supply, (5) the incursion of private companies in education through corporate social responsibility (e.g., by building school structures), (6) the increasing participation of NGOs and for-profit organizations subcontracted by international cooperation agencies, and (7) the implementation of accountability policies (e.g., where parents report teacher absences by telephone—necessary because of the State's inability and unwillingness to manage teachers itself) (see chapter two).

processes. In this section, we suggest that this kind of privatization has taken a step further in Honduras, with non-state actors being not only involved in such processes by means of traditional advocacy strategies and loan conditionalities, but also by occupying prominent positions in governmental structures.

One of the clearest cases in which this form of privatization has crystallized is that of the so-called "Roundtable of Education Cooperation Agencies"—or MERECE, for its acronym in Spanish. This organization seeks to coordinate the actions of international cooperation agencies and multilateral banks in Honduras, and includes, in the words of one of its representatives, "the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the US Agency for International Development, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Canada, the Organization of Ibero-American States … every single one" (International organization representative 2).

Roundtables of cooperation agencies have been common in the region since the 2000s. The general premise underpinning their formation is that agencies should cooperate with one another and be aware of their plans and initiatives so as not to duplicate or neutralize efforts. However, strikingly in the case of Honduras, MERECE has representation in some of the government's executive structures, including the Ministry of Education and the above-mentioned Commission for the Transformation of the Educational System.

The privileged and unprecedented position occupied by MERECE directly within government structures allows them to exert a direct influence when it comes to policymaking. Such influence is not limited to more frequent, formal consultation, but also includes playing an active role in shaping educational policy decisions. Interviewees in the NGO sector emphasize the decisive nature of the role played by MERECE in saying that "it is often they who end up defining the priority agenda of the education system" (NGO representative 1). Moreover, as another NGO leader suggests, there is substantial difference between the kind of influence and pressure cooperation agencies can exert on the government as compared to civil society organizations, the main difference being the ability of cooperation agencies to position themselves on an equal footing with governmental institutions:

> The way they [cooperation agencies] influence policymaking is different; they do not operate like civil society organizations, with technical proposals, in an open, transparent way; cooperation agencies engage in private, institutional conversations, they propose approaches or alternative solutions but on a government-to-government basis (NGO representative 2).

In spite of MERECE's founding premise, cooperation between different international agencies and multilateral development banks is often just a formal statement (to the detriment of the Honduran education sector). In this regard, for instance, the Ministry of Education was recently able to take a loan from the German development bank KfW to build new school facilities in areas lacking public schools. Just as importantly, however, the Ministry currently faces the paradox between the need to hire teachers for these few new facilities that were built, and the strict limits imposed on current expenditure by the agreements with the IMF, which creates "a paralysis" in the government plans to expand access. As described by a ministry official:

> We have a loan from KfW, the German bank. They are supporting us with this infrastructure issue and even the state, through its different trusts, is also providing a very large amount for the infrastructure issue. However, we have now a teacher hiring issue: The agreements with the IMF pose a limitation for hiring staff ... for a matter of ... to lower the level of expenditure. So… teachers are state personnel. [...] So that creates a great difficulty. It is not only the economic

> situation per se, [...] but that situation in the context of the state… it does not allow us to grow. (Ministry of Education representative 1)

Thus, it becomes evident that the conditioned nature of the Honduran State on external funding together with the tensions arising from the different international organizations' agendas and interests continue to be an obstacle for the expansion of the Honduran education system and for creating long-term robust and autonomous government capacities.

In a similar vein, the growing role played by business chambers is also worth mentioning. In particular, the "Honduran Council of Private Enterprise" (COHEP, for its acronym in Spanish)—which was already a member of the National Council for Education—has recently become part of the Commission for the Transformation of the Educational System as well. One of COHEP's representatives bluntly describes their role and outreach in a way that shows how naturalized these forms of hybrid private-public government structures have become in the education policy field in Honduras:

> We are now part of the Commission [Commission for the Transformation of the Educational System], and we are working to restructure the country's whole education system. One of our main goals is to reform curriculum […] so that the system is able to train students in business culture. (Business chamber representative 1)

Finally, the private business sector has also become increasingly involved in education policymaking by means of their philanthropic organizations. While not occupying positions within government structures, they are starting to merge efforts to engage in more aggressive advocacy strategies that go beyond the traditional philanthropic approach of resource donation. Showing a greater involvement in policy is one of the main features of what some call "new" or "venture" philanthropy (see, for instance, Avelar & Ball, 2019; Terway, 2019). As Reckhow and Snyder (2014) point out, education-focused philanthropies are increasingly connected to policy, "supporting groups involved in policy advocacy, funding organizations that promote competition with public sector institutions, and providing convergent funds to key groups advancing favored policy priorities" (p. 193). In this regard, philanthropic organizations in Honduras have begun to coordinate their activity through an entity called the "Honduran Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility" (FUNDARHSE, for its acronym in Spanish). As one example, FUNDARHSE has recently launched a lobby platform called 'Businessmen for Education and Employment' with direct and expanding contact with the Ministry of Education and, especially, with the National Council of Education.

The Education Sector Strategic Plan as a Paradigmatic Example

The process of definition of the "Education Sector Strategic Plan" (PESE, for its acronym in Spanish) that took place between 2018 and 2020 is an unambiguous example of the way that the different non-State actors mentioned just above influence policymaking in the midst of the difficulties experienced by State for defining its own policy agenda. As we describe here, the dynamics that led to the emergence of this initiative, the challenges and limitations evidenced throughout the drafting process, the setbacks in obtaining its approval, and its state of paralysis after two years all reflect those factors that affect the ability of the Honduran State to produce educational policy.

Concern about the need to develop a strategic plan for the educational sector had been shared by various actors for years in Honduras. In many ways, PESE was conceived as a

possible solution to the perceived lack of continuity and predictability of education policy design and implementation and, most importantly, the most optimistic saw it as a way to regain State initiative and control over the education policy agenda. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it was not until an opportunity for external funding appeared that a group of government officials was appointed to begin to draft a strategic plan. Interestingly, the triggering event was a funding opportunity brought to the Ministry of Education by chance by a ministry official who had been in contact with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). As explained by a former employee of the Ministry of Education:

> I was in the Ministry of Education back then. I was there for five years, and I was also a representative for the Latin America and the Caribbean region in the Global Partnership for Education. And I got to know that the GPE could give us a donation to help us develop a strategic plan. And so, they gave us a donation to build this plan. (National Council for Education official 1)

The plan was supposed to be drafted and approved in 2018 but after many setbacks the process took much more time than expected. In the domestic arena, after a series of formal and informal rounds of consultation with different governmental and non-governmental actors, the first versions of the plan were partially turned down and adjustment was required by the different overlapping government authorities, with the process taking almost two years. However, when an overall consensus was finally reached and the National Congress gave its approval, it was the GPE who rejected the plan for being "too ambitious," that is, being too broad and unfocused in its scope and ambition,[5] based on the evaluation of an external consulting committee hired *ad hoc* by the GPE itself (National Council for Education official 1). The report prepared by the external consulting committee noted that, aside from being too ambitious, the plan included a financial framework that did not specify the sources of the funds to pay for the different reform initiatives and programs contained in it, a basic requirement in any plan of this nature.

Strikingly enough, in the second round of evaluation with the GPE, the Honduran government came to know that the GPE was neither willing nor able to grant more than 10 million dollars for the execution of the plan in the first place, something which nobody in the Ministry seemed to be aware of when they started drafting the plan in 2018. Moreover, for the plan to get approval, the GPE set new requirements, namely, that the government (1) focused exclusively on pre-primary education, (2) had at least 30 million dollars of their own funding budgeted for the plan, and (3) obtained the 'go-ahead' from the different international cooperation agencies and multilateral banks in MERECE to cover for the needed funds the government was not able to provide itself.

Lacking the financial and technical capacities to meet these new requirements, the government reached out to yet another external actor—i.e., the World Bank—to ask for a loan to meet the financial requirements. What is more, it also hired a World Bank consultant to produce a viability plan so that the MERECE would offer its approval—something that had not yet happened as of mid-2021. A representative from the GIZ described the whole process without hiding her disappointment:

> This PESE thing is taking too long … it's been four years or something already and I feel that it is not feasible both for the government and the different aid agencies […]. We've been like 'PESE, PESE, PESE' for the last years and, in the end, the GPE does not have the funding for

[5] It is fitting, though, that the plan would be characterized this way, as this description fits the education system overall, as well.

> the PESE, and they only want to invest in pre-primary… (German cooperation agency representative 2)

The question at this point is what the experience of PESE suggests about policymaking in Honduras more generally.

Conclusion

It would be difficult to understand the policymaking dynamics in Honduras in recent decades without first having traced the processes and forces that created the conditions allowing for the growing engagement of non-state actors in such dynamics. As we have seen—and will further analyze in the following chapters—while it is the case that international organizations had been interested in setting the course for education reform in the region since the post-World War II years, it was not until after a series of trends and forces took shape —i.e., the neo-liberal restructuring of the economy, the socio-economic polarization of the social structure, and the corresponding repurposing of education—that this interest intensified. Of course, the involvement of international actors was not a new phenomenon, but rather reflected a continuation of historical dynamics and relationships, as further addressed in subsequent chapters.

Interest in setting the course for education reform gained momentum both on the external and internal front since the 1990s and 2000s, respectively. The 1990s saw a renewed wave of intense engagement from international organizations. As discussed in this chapter, this wave crystallized in a series of funded programs and projects that provided resources, orientation, and substance to the various reforms the different governments produced under the umbrella of modernization during the last three decades. Arguably, even without these funded programs and projects, the 'modernization' reforms would have still been promoted with the government unable—if only for symbolic reasons—to resist invoking the influential international educational reform agenda. Yet, the invocation of the international agenda likely would have been only discursive in nature, with the intention being to show proactivity by every new government that took office. Ultimately, in the absence of sufficient resources and autonomous technical capacities, especially since the debt crises of the 1980s and 90s, the Honduran State has had no other choice but to resort to international organizations and cooperation agencies, not only to shape but to enact policy in the education sector.

Subsequently, in the 2000s, the State opened up further to non-state actor participation. At this point, however, the dynamics were different: First, they entailed accommodation of the demands of a series of new non-state actors, now domestic in nature and specifically representing the business sector (e.g., business chambers and philanthropic organizations); and second, they entailed the incorporation of both domestic and international non-state actors in in prominent positions in governmental structures with executive responsibilities. The relevant insight here is that, in long-term perspective, we can see how the neo-liberal restructuring of the Honduran economy led to the emergence of a new economic elite with enough power to become relevant political actors, which would allow them to team up with international organizations, cooperation agencies, and other non-state actors to engage directly in education reform and policymaking. The question that remains is how these more recent developments connect with and extend the historical and evolving nature of the Honduran State. The next five chapters provide insight in this direction.

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