

## REFLECTION ARTICLE

## Education in Colombia: A Tool for Improving Socio-Cultural Conditions. A Journey Trough Public Policies

La educación en Colombia: herramienta para mejorar las condiciones socio-culturales. Recorrido desde las políticas públicas

A educação na Colômbia: ferramenta para melhorar as condições socioculturais. Passeio a partir de políticas públicas

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### ABSTRACT

This article provides a detailed documentary review of the main policies and regulations that, since the early 1980s, have been developed and promoted in Colombia in terms of education. The objective is to compile the laws, projects and plans that have guided educational processes to generate an improvement in living conditions and general welfare. The documents that have been promoted in Colombia during the last 40 years in terms of education were taken into account. After a preliminary review, development plans, ten-year education plans, the Washington Consensus, the Dakar 2000 Forum on Education, the 1992 ECLAC proposal and the 2019 International Mission of Wise Men were selected. Also included were the two major laws that currently serve as a pillar and reference in education: Law 115 of 1994 or General Education Law and Law 30 of 1994, which governs Higher Education. It is concluded that Colombian public policies have been consistent in having education as the axis for social transformation, but there have been inefficiencies in execution and an inability to reach the entire Colombian territory, as well as in guaranteeing equality and equity for all. Another important finding has to do with the fact that although adjustments are made and initiatives are proposed in accordance with global changes and trends, they do not have sufficient clarity or continuity.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## RESUMEN

El presente artículo da cuenta de una detallada revisión documental sobre las principales políticas y la normatividad que, desde comienzos de la década de los ochenta, se han gestado y promovido en Colombia en términos de educación. El objetivo es recopilar las leyes, proyectos y planes que han guiado los procesos educativos para generar una mejora en las condiciones de vida y bienestar general. Se tuvieron en cuenta documentos que en materia de educación se han promovido en Colombia durante los últimos 40 años. Luego de una revisión preliminar, se seleccionaron los planes de desarrollo, los planes decenales de educación, el Consenso de Washington, el Foro sobre Educación Dakar 2000, la propuesta de la CEPAL de 1992 y la Misión Internacional de Sabios de 2019. También se incluyeron las dos grandes leyes que sirven de pilar y referente en educación actualmente: la Ley 115 de 1994 o Ley General de Educación y la Ley 30 de 1994 que rige en Educación Superior. Se concluye que las políticas públicas colombianas han sido consistentes en tener a la educación como eje para la transformación social, pero han existido ineficiencias en la ejecución y una incapacidad de llegar a todo el territorio colombiano, así como en garantizar igualdad y equidad para todos y todas. Otro hallazgo importante tiene que ver con que a pesar de que se hacen ajustes y se plantean iniciativas acordes con los cambios y tendencias mundiales, estos no cuentan con la suficiente claridad o continuidad.

## RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma revisão documental detalhada sobre as principais políticas e regulamentações que, desde o início dos anos oitenta, foram desenvolvidas e promovidas na Colômbia em matéria de educação. O objetivo é compilar as leis, projetos e planos que têm orientado os processos educativos para gerar uma melhoria nas condições de vida e bem-estar geral. Foram levados em consideração os documentos que foram promovidos na Colômbia no campo da educação durante os últimos 40 anos. Após uma revisão preliminar, foram selecionados os planos de desenvolvimento, os planos decenal de educação, o Consenso de Washington, o Fórum de Educação de Dakar 2000, a proposta da CEPAL de 1992 e a Missão Internacional de Sábios de 2019. Também foram incluídos. duas grandes leis que servem como pilar e referência na educação hoje: Lei 115 de 1994 ou Lei Geral de Educação e Lei 30 de 1994 que rege o Ensino Superior. Conclui-se que as políticas públicas colombianas têm sido consistentes em ter a educação como eixo de transformação social, mas houve ineficiências na execução e incapacidade de atingir todo o território colombiano, bem como na garantia de igualdade e equidade para todos e todas. Outra constatação importante diz respeito ao fato de que, apesar de ajustes serem feitos e propostas de iniciativas em consonância com as mudanças e tendências globais, estas não têm suficiente clareza e continuidade.

## Introduction

The generalized conception that a country's development depends largely on the educational level of its population (ECLAC, UNESCO 1992; Ten-Year Education Plan, 1996-2005; Sen 2000), has led governments and institutions to propose a series of policies and action plans in this regard. In a country as diverse and dispersed as Colombia, initiatives have historically failed to reach all sectors of the population. There are large educational gaps, especially those related to public and private, rural and urban, and gender (Peña, 2013), which have halted the country's comprehensive development. The lack of continuity or non-compliance with the proposed plans, as well as some inconsistencies in the policies generated have hindered the access of many citizens to quality educational processes. For those who have achieved access, education means an improvement in living conditions and social scalability. Therefore, guaranteeing this access for all is imperative if Colombia is to be positioned as a developed country in times to come.

The following is a review of the most relevant and pertinent documents in this regard. We examine the approaches, planning and vision that governments have sought to promote in recent decades and determine whether these have been fulfilled with respect to the promise of education as the axis of human and social development.

### National Development Plans

Development plans are essential components of governmental public policies in which, according to Herrera and Infante (2004), the economic and social projection of a country is crystallized. The National Development Plan -hereinafter PND- 1978-1982 had as its starting point the advancement of economic decentralization, so that a good number of political, economic, and social initiatives would be managed directly from the different regions of the country, which implied great efforts in terms of strengthening communications, roads and means of transportation.

Decentralization was based on the diversity offered by the regions, as well as the demographic trend of population displacement towards the main cities where the country's development had traditionally been concentrated; the investments foreseen in this PND would be extended to the regions in each of the particular sectors, including education, generating public policies that would allow for efficient management and social progress.

For the education sector, the PND 1978-1982 recognizes some quantitative advances in comparison with previous years:

The proportion of children enrolled in primary school increased from 67.1% in 1970 to 80.9% in 1979. Enrollment in higher education went from 85,500 students to 271,300 in this same period, for an average annual increase of 13.7% (National Planning Department, 1979, p. 11).

In addition, it states that unrealistic diagnoses led to the overvaluation of education as a condition for increasing social welfare, without considering its link to the country's economic evolution "the 1960s, when it was believed that by increasing the educational level of the population all social problems would be solved" (National Planning Department, 1979, p. 29). Recognizing the limitations in the scope of the policies, the PND points out as problems of the sector illiteracy, school retention, coverage in general, the differences between urban and rural education, the lack of technical education, a curriculum that incorporates the reality of the country, and the scarce contribution to the scientific and technological development of the country, among others.

Regarding higher education, the aim was to promote research, organize technological professional education, rationalize the demand for university entrance, offer professionals the opportunity for permanent updating and achieve greater linkage to national and regional development through research and community outreach (National Planning Department, 1979, p. 109). To achieve this goal, the creation of technological institutions of higher education and the equipping of university libraries with emphasis on research and postgraduate training were proposed.

The PND 1982-1986 had three guiding criteria: stability, growth and equity. Stability was aimed at containing the country's economic difficulties derived from the international situation and its effects on national life, as well as the policies implemented by the outgoing government. Growth sought to generate economic reactivation strategies, recover the country's development path and counteract the difficulties in national production and employment. Equity was framed in the notion that the benefits of development should go to the entire population and not just to a few.

The PND 1982-1986 proposed an ambitious program of reforms and actions to reorient the country's educational policy. It began by recognizing the structural problems that had been brought about over time, which, although they had received attention from previous governments, continued to present indicators of low impact: preschool education as a component of the educational system was not contemplated as a structured program; little effectiveness of the State in implementing primary education in the national territory and complying with its compulsory nature, a situation associated with the great difficulties of the educational system to retain students; the rural sector presented problems associated with the lack of teachers and thus the impossibility of having differential educational levels; in secondary education there was high dropout, lack of updating of the curriculum, concentration in urban areas and lack of specialized teachers, due, among other things, to the absence of an educational policy conceived as a country project.

The same Plan, in terms of higher education, evidences a sense of exclusivity in who could access it, both in the private and public sectors, with the consequent educational exclusion for the lower socioeconomic strata, lack of

Integration between the different educational levels, generating educational disconnection and lack of educational objectives in the country; low level of research in universities that did not contribute to development; high levels of illiteracy distributed throughout the country without a clear response to reduce it; and an apparent disconnection between labor needs and human capital formation processes, including training by the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA). Within the framework of this PND, it was proposed to consider education as:

A condition of an authentic democracy, the foundation of peaceful and civilized coexistence and the primary means of affirming sovereignty. Education is the bridge between generations: through it, society anticipates its future and establishes the link with its past (National Planning Department, 1979, p.13).

The 1986-1990 PND had a social and citizen participation emphasis. It highlighted the need to strengthen decentralization, as it considered that resources were not being allocated in accordance with local and regional realities. In this Plan, education is recognized as a basic need that must be guaranteed for all citizens, since together with food, housing, social integration and health, it is vital for the exercise of democratic participation and control of the budget allocation of the projects formulated in each municipality of Colombia. It proposed to achieve universalization and coverage of primary education from a differentiated vision, that is, to promote a higher level of schooling of the population and that education should be curricularly adapted to the social reality of the municipalities, with special mention of the rural and indigenous population. In order to achieve an increase in the coverage and quality of education, the PND proposed three main focuses: a) school retention, b) institutional and financial strengthening, and c) articulation of education with the country's needs. All of this was based on diagnostic figures that indicated that students in urban areas had an average of 3.7 years of schooling, and in rural areas, 1.7 years. Coastal areas, on the other hand, had the lowest schooling levels in the country.

Regarding permanence and retention, two main strategies were presented: automatic promotion and the increase of food in rural areas and poor urban areas to address malnutrition among students. In fact, the government proposed the articulation with the Children's Homes of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute as one of the social development programs.

In reference to institutional and financial strengthening, the Plan proposes an optimization of processes in the Ministry of Education and in the regions and a prioritized investment in education in poor, rural and coastal areas. To address the articulation of education with the needs of the country, the Plan proposes the adaptation of educational policies, school activities, academic efforts and curricula to the local reality of the regions.

The 1990-1994 PND highlights the importance of expanding education coverage with a view to overcoming poverty and the country's economic development. Arguments are presented about the effects that the absence of educational processes generates in society; among others, the loss of opportunities and the limitation of the development of the economy, as well as the need for training in environmental care and technical and vocational training of students in educational institutions to generate a social impact, since it is expected that "with the strengthening of investment in human capital, economic growth would continue to accelerate until the year 2000" (National Planning Department, 1991, p. 11). Similarly, some strategies are proposed that would seek to impact the social and educational sectors: (a) the implementation of year zero in the public school system; (b) the gradual elimination of technical institutions due to high costs and problems associated with outdatedness and conformism that prevented graduates from seeking higher education options; (c) unification of primary and secondary in single educational institutions; (d) access to higher education with aid from Findeter and support for the creation of more postgraduate programs that would contribute to the solution of national problems; (e) increased budget allocation for education through the transfer system, which would seek to overcome the investment rate of 3.2% of GDP.

In this PND, the importance that should be given to decentralization is again mentioned. This is intended to enable mayors and governors to solve problems by having more proximity for local action. The Ministry of National Education would act as "the governing and defining entity of policies, strengthening the functions of planning, design, evaluation and control of the educational system" (National Planning Department, 1991, p. 17), p. 17). Considering the preponderant role that the 1990-1994 PND gives to education for the movement of the economy and society, a greater visibility is given to technical, technological and professional education in order to improve the basic needs of society.



The 1994-1998 PND had as its main goal: to form a more productive, supportive and participatory citizenry as a strategy to face the great economic and social challenges of the time. The country was going through very difficult times linked to rising unemployment, human displacement caused by violence, increasing poverty and political scandals.

Regarding the educational system, an analysis of the state of the country at that time was made and the need to improve teacher training and remuneration was found (National Planning Department, 1995). It was determined that there were deficiencies in the quality of education and emphasis was placed on the inequity in terms of access, especially in higher education. The PND presented a proposal to improve the quality of programs and to make universities more autonomous. It also proposed some policies about the relationship of higher education with the labor market, through which more would be invested in professional training and coverage would be expanded. The educational aspect being one of the articulating axes of this Plan, a close relationship was established between education, culture and civic values, among which the promotion of a greater awareness of environmental care was highlighted.

The 1998-2002 PND proposed the search for peace through negotiation with illegal groups and the fight against drug trafficking, so a large part of the national budget was allocated to security, defense, and the strengthening of the national army.

In addition, towards the end of 1998, one of the worst economic recessions in the country's history occurred, which triggered a strong financial crisis and a high fiscal deficit, so that public spending was even more limited and investment in education was significantly lower than what had been budgeted. The PND reflected an interest and a need to modernize the educational system in general and proposed the creation of policies to improve access and quality in higher education, such as the accreditation system for universities through which a system of regulation of institutions at this level is established. The Plan also reflects on the need to redefine the relationship between the State and education in order to determine educational and economic standards that would allow citizens to become competitive on a global level. Education should therefore be the most important social investment made by the State, and in this particular case, one of the conditions for achieving peace.

The PND 2002-2006 is based on participatory, managerial and decentralized conceptions, in order to ensure the purpose of building a Community State that involves all citizens in the achievement of social goals. Along this path, the country would move towards regional autonomy, territorial equity, multicultural competence and community participation.

Social equity was proposed in association with the strengthening of education in terms of coverage and quality, social protection and security, solidarity economy, social management of the countryside in relation to the rural structure and housing, productive alliances, scientific and technological development for the countryside, quality of urban life, prevention and mitigation of natural risks, strengthening of ethnic groups and the development of the "women builders of peace and development" program. This from a perspective of recovering economic growth as a tool for social welfare. Achieving social equity is associated with the educational revolution (coverage and improvement of quality), expansion of security (health, nutrition and public health) and social management of the countryside (protection of farmers as an essential element of economic and commercial policy). It is proposed that social inequality has grown, in part, due to the growth in the demand for skilled workers, that is, there are not enough people trained for the requirements of the economy, as well as a commitment to the construction of a fairer society in which all Colombians benefit from growth, development and equal opportunities.

One of the pillars of the PND is to generate, transfer and appropriate science and technology in order for the country to produce knowledge and innovation, increase wealth, take advantage of natural resources, enter the international market and achieve social welfare. Therefore, it considers that the development of scientific and technological competencies are fundamental for the achievement of these goals. In this sense, Colciencias and SENA would strengthen and promote applied research and technological development with the intention of improving the competitiveness of the productive sectors. To this end, credits would be granted for innovation projects, as well as tax incentives.

The 2006-2010 PND conceives equality as the product of the intervention of education and its intended purposes through public policy. In this sense, it proposes the need for redistributive policies that make possible benefits for all (as a result of coverage efforts, results in urban areas are significantly higher than in rural areas) and that equality has as indicators access, quality education, equal opportunities, and a close relationship between the purposes of education and the labor market. The PND proposed guaranteeing universal access to basic education; providing relevant and quality education for all; improving the efficiency of the educational system; reducing the school dropout rate; training Colombians to respect human rights, peace, democracy and the practice of work and recreation for cultural, scientific and technological improvement and for the protection of the environment. It was conceived that early education is fundamental to achieve greater equity and a better academic, affective and emotional development of children and that the educational policy is for everyone and must be oriented to the reduction of regional and population gaps.

The 2010-2014 PND analyzes the approaches to education and development from five fundamental areas: a) the global idea of development, b) innovation for the promotion of knowledge and research, c) education and human capital formation, d) development of competencies, and e) higher education. It maintains the classic concept of development associated with increased competitiveness, the generation of wealth or economic growth; it adds, as a novel factor, the promotion of scientific knowledge and research. Thus, the Plan presents five essential aspects for development from a regional approach, which mobilize the country's growth: housing, innovation, infrastructure, mining and agriculture. In each of them, education is recognized as a cross-cutting tool for the different objectives, goals and guidelines.

In addition to the above, the Plan's conception of innovation is linked to business entrepreneurship, financial instruments and productive schemes and alliances; in other words, to the production of ideas that foster economic growth. It questions the current educational offer, especially at the higher education level because "[...] it still does not adequately respond to the needs of the productive sector" (National Planning Department, 2011, p. 72). From there, the education bet is introduced in the formation of human capital to strengthen and certify the knowledge of citizens, which allows accelerating innovation and technological progress in the country.

The development of competencies is proposed to formalize the association between education and economic growth; in particular, the aim is to strengthen training in labor competencies that can subsequently be measured in labor productivity. In this framework, education is conceived as the "[...] most effective tool to reduce inequity and achieve equal conditions for income generation [...] [because it allows] easy access to formal employment or to undertake an entrepreneurial initiative with a greater chance of success" (National Planning Department, 2011, p. 324).

The educational system must have strategies for the adoption of new learning technologies, curriculum reform, bilingualism, propaedeutic cycles and the promotion of master's and doctoral programs, all linked to the National Evaluation System. A constant measurement at the different levels of formal education would show in the medium and long term the results of public policies translated into coverage rates and quality achievements. With this data, decisions can be made and new programs formulated to improve the quality of education.

The 2014-2018 PND takes into account global trends in education. Its vision contemplates a time frame longer than the four-year period, stating that by 2025 Colombia should be the "most educated" country in Latin America. Equal opportunities are highlighted as the framework for the country's true development and emphasis is placed on the development of competencies for both the local and global labor market, in line with the previous government's Plan. In accordance with world trends, where there is an appropriation and knowledge of the so-called 21st century skills or competencies, education is framed as the one that will provide citizens with these skills and make them competitive not only for the country, but in a much broader context, that is, citizens of the world capable of speaking more than one language, handling technological tools, having soft skills, respect for differences and a global vision.

The PND favors initial education as a starting point and characterizes it as a relevant stage in the process of human formation. In order to guarantee the quality and soundness of early education, it recognizes the need for well-trained human talent and proposes a training plan to achieve it. Likewise, as a central axis, it refers to the establishment of strategies to guarantee the quality of education through the promotion of the

teaching career as a well-paid and professionalized life option. Likewise, as a central axis, it refers to the establishment of strategies to guarantee the quality of education through the promotion of the teaching career as a well-paid and professionalized life option.

This Plan presents the need to facilitate the transit of young people to higher education, describes the route to follow to support training in rural territories and proposes to implement a national system of qualifications that would seek to "classify and structure knowledge, skills and attitudes, in a scheme of levels according to a set of criteria on learning achieved at each level" ( National Planning Department, 2015, p.95), which would also facilitate the articulation between the competencies that employers need from graduates and the competencies targeted by training programs.

The 2018-2022 PND identifies the need to provide quality education opportunities to vulnerable populations in order to contribute to social mobility and equity. It seeks to prioritize the strengthening of public education considering a scheme of gradual free education, deconcentration of supply and the promotion of virtual education. Inclusive education processes are expected to be strengthened through a teacher training plan to permeate the classroom in an articulated work with the education secretariats. Another aspect to highlight is the inclusion of the productive sector in the implementation of special programs for secondary education, as it could ensure greater alignment with the real needs of the country and would allow students to connect with what they want to project in the future.

Regarding the quality assurance system, dual education is introduced for the first time, which involves the use of the real sector by linking the company in the training framework and seeks to have exposure to the working world and academic training at the same time.

### **10-year Education Plans**

The ten-year education plans are guidelines for educational policy as fundamental references that strengthen the public sphere through exercises of participatory democracy (Ten-Year Education Plan 1996-2005) in accordance with the guidelines of the 1991 Political Constitution.

The *first Ten-Year Education Plan (1996-2005)* - hereinafter *PDE I* - starts from considering education as a national issue and a strategic axis of development and social organization, for which it is pertinent that there be unity on its principles and goals, as well as on its implementation and scope in all the country's territories. It assumes that education is the way through which Colombia can achieve its other objectives, so that the future of the country will depend on the actions taken in this regard, since without education the country's progress is limited and access to a more equitable society and welfare is not possible. Education is seen as the opportunity for individuals to enhance their psychological, social and economic capabilities; being a cultural process, it allows individuals to access tools that increase the level of complexity of interactions with the environment and thus the incorporation of more democratic and respectful ways of being and being with the environment.

It is emphasized that the educational institutions are where all educational processes are centralized, so it is there where most of the objectives, goals and actions of PDE I will be registered, and for this it is necessary to provide them with elements and tools that make it possible to do so. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to train a new educator to energize the institutions and respond to the needs of the contexts. Another of the purposes of PDE I refers to the production of knowledge: the country needs to generate strategies that allow it, through research, to generate and apply knowledge to contribute to the resolution of its problems.

The *second Ten-Year Education Plan (2006-2015)* - hereinafter *PDE II* - is based on the Ministry of National Education's definition of education as the fundamental right that every Colombian citizen should enjoy. It proposes the advancement of the educational system through a comprehensive training process that contributes to the economic and social development of the country; this process must be achieved through the formation of human and social competencies in students, to enhance all the dimensions of being; in the same sense, it establishes the design and implementation of public policies of coexistence within civil society, focused on the rights and duties of citizens, that is, on their social responsibility.

In order to achieve this purpose, it is proposed to allocate investment resources to guarantee the right to education, that is, access and permanence at all levels of the Colombian educational system; additionally, the PDE II seeks to boost the economy and the generation of social wealth through the educational sector. Thus, it seeks to guarantee a quality and equitable education system that coherently articulates the knowledge and skills required by today's world so that citizens can successfully integrate into the world of work and entrepreneurship.

Another of the highlights of the PDE II is the incorporation of new technologies and science into the curriculum, for which it is intended to improve the infrastructure of the educational system and the use of ICTs at all levels. The document states that technical and technological education must be strengthened to meet the needs of the labor and productive market. The design of curricula based on research and scientific knowledge will enable innovation for the country's development. It is also planned to promote a culture of research in science and technology through the training and updating of teachers.

The *third Ten-Year Education Plan (2016-2025)* - hereinafter *PDE III* - seeks an education based on equity, which compensates for socioeconomic detriments and generates equal opportunities. Its fulfillment requires the State to have a series of programs and actions for the transformation of the education system. PDE III frames education in the post-conflict, peace and the power of the recognition of the other as drivers of equitable development, the closing of territorial gaps and the promotion of equal opportunities. In general terms, this Plan proposes a national agreement to build peace and personal, social, economic and cultural development, with education as a pillar, since it is considered a tool for transformation that enables democracy, social mobility and, in turn, reduces socioeconomic inequalities; it also allows for the full enjoyment of human rights. These elements lead to the need to guarantee access and ensure quality, permanence and relevance at all educational levels.

The definition of education here contemplates a conception of educational quality to be achieved by 2026, which entails raising the level of academic institutions and programs through high quality accreditation and teacher qualification, as well as reviewing the relevance of programs with respect to the socioeconomic needs of the regions and promoting flexible models of professional training.

### **The Washington Consensus**

The Washington Consensus was a macroeconomic policy proposal led by economist John Williamson (1989) and the Peterson Institute. It received its name because the policy advisory institutions that promoted it were based in Washington (International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the U.S. Treasury Department).

The Washington Consensus proposed a set of ten recommendations or measures seeking greater freedoms for countries in terms of foreign trade and their financial systems, attracting foreign capital and reforms to state intervention in economic policies. These recommendations were presented by John Williamson in 1989 to assist developing countries experiencing economic crises. These measures constitute a set of actions to intervene in the policies and economies of countries requesting support, guidance or economic advice, especially those in Latin America. The measures were: a) Fiscal discipline, b) Redirection of public spending, c) Tax reform, d) Financial liberalization, e) Adoption of a single, competitive exchange rate, f) Free trade, g) Elimination of barriers to foreign direct investment, h) Privatization of state enterprises, i) Deregulation of market entry and competition, and j) Secure property rights.

According to Gentili (1998), these measures affected education systems by presenting them as systems that were not productive and that needed to have a better distribution of resources and not necessarily an increase in them. For example, more teachers would not be needed, but better trained teachers; there would be no need to build more schools, but rather to make more efficient and rational use of existing school space. The idea, says the author, was to "transfer education from the sphere of politics to the sphere of the market" (p.108).

### **Education and Knowledge: The Axis of Productive Transformation with Equity**

The proposal of education and knowledge as the axis of productive transformation with equity, led by the Economic Commission for the Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and formulated



in 1992 had as its central idea the incorporation and dissemination of a system of technical progress within social development. It recognizes the link between the educational system and scientific and technological development and proposes the need to develop international competitiveness to raise the standard of living of the population by increasing productivity; it maintains that the incorporation and dissemination of technical progress is the pillar of productive transformation and for this it is important to strengthen the business base, technological infrastructure, openness to the international economy and the training of human resources. Education represents opportunities for social and economic advancement. The project (with equal opportunities for all citizens) seeks to deepen the interrelationships between the educational system, training, research and technological development.

It is intended that citizens see education as a necessity to acquire competencies that will allow them to be more productive and integrate into the labor market, in which knowledge that can be applied and not the degrees obtained are the priority, that is, people should demonstrate and apply the knowledge learned not in a theoretical way but in practice. Hence, it is proposed to integrate the secondary education level with the labor market rather than prepare individuals for university entrance, since the percentage of secondary school students who access higher education is low compared to those who join the labor force.

### **World Education Forum (Dakar)**

In this Forum (Dakar, 2000), a paper is developed based on the analysis of the progress, failures and projections of the one held in Thailand in 1990. It emphasizes that education is a fundamental right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but that after a little more than half a century, many citizens are still excluded from basic education, with the social and cultural consequences that this entails. The common vision of the participants is that all children, adolescents and adults should be able to develop the basic literacy and numeracy skills that will enable them to be citizens, workers, family members and fully realized individuals with full rights.

At the Thailand Forum in 1990, the goal was set to achieve the provision of universal basic education for all and to meet the basic learning needs of children who so required; in this sense, one of the fundamental tasks of the Dakar Forum was to evaluate the 1990 goal, what was achieved and why the goal was difficult to achieve, as well as the projection of actions to be carried out in this regard. In the final plenary session, the Framework for Action "Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments" was established, setting specific goals to be met by 2015, taking into account that there were several political and economic challenges, an essential need for well-conducted educational programs and the need to view education as the best investment for development. The commitments that emerged around improving the quality and equity of education for all, suggest fundamental aspects such as a) access, equity and quality, b) technology at the service of basic education, c) overcoming barriers to girls' education, d) addressing special and diverse educational needs: making inclusive education a reality, e) making primary education universal and free, e) expanding access to early childhood development programs, f) developing the content of basic education to respond to the needs and values of society, g) helping teachers to help learners, and h) assessing learning achievement.

### **2019 International Mission of the Wise**

The International Mission of Wise Men 2019 was made up of a group of expert scientists appointed by the Presidency of Colombia, so that for ten months they could carry out a study, analysis and reflections that would guide the policies of the State in terms of "science, technology, innovation and education, the strategies of social organizations and productive sectors, and the collective action of society during the coming decades" (Presidency of the Republic, 2019, p. 15).

The Mission's work is presented in two volumes. The second volume, Colombia towards the frontiers of knowledge, synthesizes the specific recommendations of the eight foci of the Mission: Basic and Space Sciences; Social Sciences and Human Development with Equity; Life and Health Sciences; Biotechnology, Bioeconomy and Environment; Oceans and Hydrobiological Resources; Creative and Cultural Industries, Sustainable Energy and Converging Technologies and Industry 4.0. For the purposes of this review, the focus of Social Sciences and Human Development with Equity: education and the construction of human development with equity, although

some elements were subtracted from the Basic Sciences focus; the latter recognizes the need to promote a positive image of the social status of the teacher as part of the strategies for education to generate the desired impact.

The Mission identifies key areas for the generation of strategies to facilitate the role of education as a transforming agent, including teacher quality, education-research integration with implications for the quality of education, equity and the development of society as such.

It is emphasized that making value propositions for people to improve their conditions requires recognizing that there are unequal conditions which represent critical challenges at the moment of transforming education. The relevance of focusing on equity comes from the analysis that there is a clear relationship between access to education and income distribution. It is argued that it has been shown that, by restricting education, other elements relevant to development and productivity are directly affected. It is also established that the socioemotional capabilities of individuals are closely related to higher levels of participation and social capital, which in turn translate into development. The role of education is therefore to guarantee the development of these capabilities. In this sense, the Mission suggests the implementation of policies aimed at overcoming the barriers that prevent individuals from developing these competencies and taking advantage of the opportunities available to them, thus requiring decisive actions and interventions.

The Mission proposes the creation of the Instituto Superior de Investigación en Educación y Alta Formación de Maestros (ISIE) in order to take on teacher training, produce and manage knowledge through research, offer continuing education and promote national reflection on education. Moreover, to link social sciences and scientific studies in education with the plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Mission proposes to revive the program of scientific studies in education, in addition, the increase in funding for research projects in social sciences and the creation of research centers on these topics. It introduces the concept of industrial education where the need to include in the agenda and educational projects, business sectors in order to achieve an efficient system based on the equity where it builds joint knowledge and promotes innovation that companies need.

#### **General Law of Education (Law 115 of 1994)**

The commitment to the integral conception and dimension has been present in public education policy documents for several decades. The integral conception and dimension includes aspects linked to the human person, focusing on dignity, rights, duties, development of knowledge, development of skills, development of aptitudes and development of values; it is also present in the general objectives of basic education: access with critical and creative capacity to knowledge in all its forms; development of communicative skills, logical and analytical reasoning, understanding of the national reality; investigative attitude; and, promotion and development of values are the pillars for this educational level.

In secondary education, the objectives that contemplate the integral dimension are also enunciated, adding the element of preparation for work.

The General Education Law establishes two types of secondary education: academic and technical. Academic secondary education has objectives that would be more closely associated with higher education: deepening in a field or activity of knowledge and incorporation of research into the cognitive process. Technical secondary education is designed for labor performance in production and services; it is a level designed for young people to have a level of specialization at the end of secondary education, without this necessarily resulting in in-depth knowledge and labor and social institutions that will accept them as mid-level technicians. The specific objectives of secondary technical education are directed, among others, to initial basic training for work.

#### **Higher Education Law (Law 30 of 1992)**

Law 30 of 1992 reiterates the nature of education as a permanent process, development of potentialities, integrality, full development of students, academic or professional training, reflective spirit, personal autonomy, freedom of thought and ideological pluralism and universality of knowledge and the particularity of the cultural forms existing in the country.

This law regulates higher education in Colombia. Since its enactment, it has been the subject of debate and criticism; academically, because of its strong regulation of higher education and its inconsistencies with respect to university autonomy, and economically, because it tied the financing of official institutions to inflation, not foreseeing that the law itself obliges them to become technological, accredited, self-evaluated, improve infrastructure and advocate for the welfare of students and the educational community, among other actions that require financial injection from the State.

### **Methodological Considerations**

This documentary review, defined by Hurtado (2010) as "a process that encompasses the location, collection, selection, review, analysis, extraction and registration of information contained in documents" (p. 851), is part of a study currently underway on whether or not the socioeconomic conditions of people change due to their access to and completion of vocational training programs.

A documentary review is part of the qualitative methods for research in education. It was conducted following these steps: 1) selection of information sources with special emphasis on digital books, articles downloaded from the internet and electronic journals; 2) review and organization of the information, where the most relevant data and information for the object of the study were classified; and 3) analysis of the data and information, which would support the conclusions of the research.

The main initiatives, regulations and policies that have been promoted in Colombia during the last 40 years in the field of education were taken into account. A preliminary review was made and the country's development plans since 1978, the three ten-year education plans that have been formulated to date in Colombia, the Washington Consensus, the Forum on Education that took place in Dakar in 2000, the ECLAC proposal of 1992 and the International Mission of the Wise of 2019 were selected. Also included were the two major laws that currently serve as a pillar and reference in education: Law 115 of 1994 or General Education Law and Law 30 of 1994, which governs Higher Education. The following categories were considered in each one: a) Social scalability b) Impact of education on the quality of life c) Purpose of education d) Education policies e) Education in rural areas f) Investment in education.

After a thorough reading, elements were extracted from these documents that were considered important to support the conception of the promise of education as an instrument to improve the well-being, quality of life and social mobility of citizens. A general description of these elements was made, followed by an analysis of them.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The implementation of policies that enhance the strengths of the Nation is based on the knowledge that both the State in general and specific governments in particular have of the country (Roth, 2002). That is to say, how the economy, social and cultural aspects work, knowing what people live on in terms of livelihood, how they are socially and culturally, in order to establish differentiated programs and projects that lead to a true decentralization, as has been the purpose of most of the regulations of the last decades.

In spite of this, it was observed that, in general, the National Development Plans (NDPs) analyzed in this context, ignore comprehensiveness and articulation for economic rather than socio-cultural reasons. In this sense, when referring to processes such as the reactivation of the economy, the generation of wealth (PND 1978-1982), sustainable economic growth, the generation of employment, the construction of social equity - seen as the capacity to improve income distribution and economic growth - (PND 2002-2006); economic competitiveness and innovation linked to business entrepreneurship and productive schemes and alliances that promote economic growth (PND 2010-201), the emphasis is on productivity, rather than on social and cultural welfare, which energizes non-economic sectors of progress such as education or personal development.

This is based on the fact that, since the end of World War II, the political and economic environment has been marked by a dichotomous vision of the world (capitalism or socialism) and, as a result, economic agendas and political control over territories have been established, aligning them in one of the two aspects.

As spearheads, the model of deregulation of the economy by the states was imposed, giving way to the liberation of markets or to what is commonly known as liberalism, assumed in most cases as an economic doctrine. In this context, in 1990, through the Washington Consensus, a unilateral policy aimed at the dependent countries was established, which had among its central elements the focus on the budget deficit to contain public spending by the states and submit it to a balance where the income was oriented both to avoid the correction of the economy from regularizing policies by these, and to limit social spending policies.

In Colombia, the governments of Turbay (1978-1982) and Betancur (1982-1986) articulated this principle as a structural part, particularly when the need to adjust budgets to efficiency and effectiveness policies and to investment in infrastructure was raised. Since then, the sale of state enterprises and actions to frame rights such as education in the category of services have been a constant. In fact, the General Education Law defines it as such. It should be noted that a particular argument underlies the pressure to privatize and that is to consider public administration as deficient: "The main rationale for privatization is the belief that private industry is managed more efficiently than state enterprises" (Washington Consensus, 1990, p.80).

The tendency of public policy has been to give education -like health- an investment character and not a fundamental right, in spite of the regulations that so indicate; it is related to the formation of human capital (PND, 1982-1986; PND, 1990-1994), establishing that in this way the less favored would be helped. In other words, no actions are projected for the benefit of social groups, but rather processes of containment of the economy (dependent on International Funds and Agencies) and of the population are produced.

Associating education to the dynamics that were emerging in the world around knowledge, specifically to the new technologies that would lead to the longed-for integral development, the concepts of learning to learn, permanent education, continuity in all cycles and the incorporation of new methods and strategies (PND 1982-1986) became a reference in most of the PNDs and regulations. This conception is inscribed in the belief that in order to overcome the problems present in Colombian education, changes must be made in teaching and not in the educational system as such; that is, according to this, the problem has to do with what is taught and who teaches it, with the training processes of teachers and the administration of the curriculum that do not provide an integral learning that connects the different actors of society, and not with the misalignment of public policies and the inability of the State to articulate the different sectors.

When it is argued that there is a need to reorient public and private resources for education in terms of institutional disorganization and a lack of effective financial tools adapted to the evolution of the educational sector in the country (PND 1986-1990), the criticism is based on the fact that the State has not made constant efforts at the elementary school level and then moved on to secondary and higher education. The basis of this criticism is that the role of the State is to guarantee the universalization of education from the first levels to the most advanced ones, an aspect that was not corrected and that, despite its progress, is still unresolved, inasmuch as there is still no universalization of elementary school and the places where it does not reach are the most socially and culturally disadvantaged (Peña, 2013). The General Law of Education states that the planning and design of the State's educational policies by its administrative representatives is fundamental, but the realities are different.

However, not all the *National Development Plans* prioritized the economic over the social, but they do relate them. In the 1982-1986 period, it was considered that democracy depends on equity and justice, establishing that the conditions for democracy are better provided by greater development; a bet that from the outset generates controversy because by stating that the economic aspect is a condition for democracy, it could be understood that there is no full democracy because the economy does not generate sufficient resources, which can become a vicious circle. The 1986-1990 PND raised a social policy oriented to meet the Colombian education with the aim of generating a country that has a human capital capable of boosting the economy. So raised itself, it will improve the social investment, create new sources of employment and improve the educational system (PND 1986-1990) aspects that, if they were well represented, were still needed.

The latter proposals were not implemented due to an economic emergency, reflecting the Colombian tragedy: either there is no clarity in the proposals, or if there is clarity, unforeseen circumstances arise that prevent their implementation.



Sometimes it is even due to the prioritization of projects, actions or programs that are considered a priority, such as, for example, the achievement of peace (1998-2002). It is worth noting that, since the governments of the 1990s, the system of scholarships and credits to improve access to higher education has been increased, which is still in force and has led to a growth in the coverage of higher education; this growth has been more relevant in the non-official sector and has weakened the official sector, not so much in coverage as in its sense. The last years of the 21st century show that official enrollment in higher education has leveled off compared to the non-official sector, but not the public sector. The governments (PND 1998-2002; PND 2002-2006; PND 2006-2010; PND 2010-2014; PND 2014-2018; PND 2018-2022) tied support at this level, associating it with indicators and goals that left official education at a disadvantage.

There are inconsistencies between the development plans and other regulations in relation to proposals that had good purposes and others that deviated from the purpose of the former as the main educational guidelines. Regarding the former, Law 115 of 1994 states that it is the responsibility of the Nation and the territorial entities to guarantee educational coverage in terms of coverage and quality. Along this path, the first Ten-Year Education Plan (1996-2005) <sup>2</sup> was important because it considered education as a right; although this was enshrined in the 1991 Constitution, in the Plan, the understanding of the right to education refers to the possibility of access to cultural, social and economic goods through education; this understanding is different from the conception prior to 1991 when education was considered as a basic need. The right to education acquires preponderance in the organization of the State "[...] education is placed in the rank of fundamental rights. Perhaps after the right to life, it is the most important right in that it guarantees the possibility of developing life." (Ten-Year Education Plan, 1996, p.6). Likewise, the World Education Forum held in Dakar (Unesco, 2000) recalls that education is a fundamental right, so it would be right to condemn states and governments that did not implement clear and concise measures to guarantee it. Highlighting its quality as a right means that there is no excuse for subjects not to have the guarantee that they will benefit from it and that it will be effectively carried out in the best conditions. Reference is also made to the financing of education, pointing out the need for resources to be proportional to the problems that arise and for governments to opt for clear and coherent solutions.

In relation to the proposals that deviated from their purposes, during the periods corresponding to 2002-2006 and 2006-2010, discourses and actions linked to competencies were strengthened. The belief of those in power is reinforced that by intervening in education through indicators, achievement indicators, competencies, innovation, technology and quality assurance, among other aspects, the problem of inequities, inequalities, low quality, classicism, differentiated opportunities and the weakening of public education will be solved, as well as the swaying of public policy, that is, education as a fundamental right is circumscribed to indicators, a totally counterproductive aspect. Although the need for redistributive policies through quality education is pointed out (PND 2006-2010), the mechanisms to make it possible are not proposed and the statistics that this has not been achieved are clear in this regard. Although there are many references to quality education (PND 2006-2010), this is directed to programs that make possible the human capital plan, such as having more years of education and access to the entire population, among others, leaving aside aspects such as health, recreation, quality jobs, housing and infrastructure for schools that benefit students and their families.

In addition to the discourse on competencies, the need for flexible models took shape starting in secondary education and continuing in higher education (PND 2006-2010); in this sense, it should be noted that such integration is of a productive nature and not of a formative nature, which leads to individuals being educated to access the labor market and to benefit from economic development without considering the participatory aspect of education.

In the same direction, the concept of entrepreneurship is gaining strength (PND 2010-2014; PND 2014-2018; PND 2018-2022). Universities are proposed to consolidate innovative entrepreneurship with learning in and with companies and to increase university-business agreements. It should be noted that in the NDP documents there is no reference to the place of the academic community in this relationship and in the diagnosis of higher education and, despite the regional approach, there is no differentiation of the regional supply and demand of higher education. The sources of financing for public universities are not stated either and, therefore, several proposed strategies are left without goals or indicators; for example, the mechanisms for evaluating teachers,

the diagnosis of their research capabilities and the generation of supply of master's and doctoral programs in the regions, among others. Among the goals of education, social mobility is recognized as a product of the generation of income and assets (2014-2018), not referring to the acquisition of cultural capital, but to the participation of individuals in productive activities based on knowledge and skills.

### Conclusions

The National Development Plans show an evolution of their own trends in accordance with global trends which, although they show an effort to be in tune with what is happening in the world, also persist with inequality in the allocation of resources and the development of projects with impact.

Specifically, in most development plans, ten-year education plans and in the development of other public policies, there is evidence of the decision to maintain education as one of the central axes of government agendas, identifying it as an essential tool for the country's development. However, despite the efforts and the projection made from these regulations, little impact has been achieved by the educational system to break social inequality in general.

It is evident that the quality of education is different between sectors depending on the resources available; the less favored sectors do not manage, through education, to advance in access to better cultural and social goods, their marginalization remains as well as their economic conditions; on the other hand, the most favored receive a higher quality education with the respective benefits that this entails. This is also evident in rural education, which is still far behind urban education and lags far behind in terms of development.

On the other hand, it is found that promoting quality as a central element of education has generated an over-regulation that has also failed to promote equality or equity, but has contributed to the existing gaps between different populations.

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## Endnotes

1 Emphasis is placed on these governments for being before the promulgation of the Washington Consensus in order to establish whether their policies already included the application of the ten principles enunciated by the consensus. It is recognized that the implementation of these principles was most developed from 1990 onwards.

2 The mandatory nature of the ten-year education plans is due to Law 115 of 1994.