



**DECLARATION OF PANAMA ON POLICIES OF ACCESS AND QUALITY
OF EDUCATION IN ORDER TO REDUCE EXTREME POVERTY IN RURAL
AREAS OF CENTRAL AMERICA.**

In Panama City, the Republic of Panama, the Vice Ministers of Education of six Central American countries, the Honduran Vice Minister of Finance and the Budget, the Presidents of the Educational, Social and Scientific Commissions of the Legislative Assemblies of Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and distinguished educational specialists of the region, counting on the presence of the Presidents of the Legislative Assemblies of Panama and Costa Rica, as well as the Fourth Secretary of the Guatemalan Parliament, convened by UNESCO and the Government of the Panamanian Republic, with the support of UNICEF, met on 21st and 22nd of March 2005, to analyze, within the framework of the Regional Meeting on Policies, Access and Quality of Education to Reduce Extreme Poverty in rural Zones of Central America, including Panama, the problem of education for the poorest sector of the population and the educational, social, cultural, economic and political factors that can contribute to education, in rural areas, being able to respond to the basic needs of the population.

CONSIDERING:

1. That education is a fundamental axis of development and a human right and must be ensured with quality and equity, a principle established in the Action Framework of Dakar, the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC), the Education for Rural People Initiative encouraged by FAO and UNESCO, the Millennium Development Goals, and the XIV Summit of State and Government leaders from Iberia America, developed in Costa Rica in 2004. Similarly, the 2002 Report on Human Development in Central America indicates that poverty continues to affect the developmental potential of the region.



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2. That the Central American countries, including Panama, have made decisive steps towards putting the Strategies of Poverty Reduction (ERP) into action, with sector programs of social and productive development, in which education is included as a pillar to diminish the lagging indicators in education and to incorporate affected rural areas into the virtuous circle of sustainable economic and social development.

3. That, despite these innovative and significant efforts, which in some cases have facilitated a relative reduction of extreme poverty, this scourge prevails with high figures in depressed rural areas.

4. That it is the rural population that has less access to a quality education, services, and suffers from higher rates of scholar failure, a factor that hinders the improvement of their social condition and their incorporation into the development process of their country.

5. That extreme poverty particularly affects the indigenous/native populations, afro descendants and women and children of the rural zones in our countries, a situation that requires attention and the strong development of intersectional policies by each Member State of the region, within the framework of their National Development Plans.

THEREFORE,

The participants of the Regional Meeting on Policies of Access and Quality of Education to Reduce Extreme Poverty in Rural Zones of Central America.

DECLARE:

FIRST: That the education being offered in the rural areas of our countries, faced with the accelerated processes of globalization, constitutes a priority in the agenda of national development.

SECOND: That it is necessary that the educational systems and the development sectors linked to the strategies of poverty reduction, design and execute intersectional and integral strategies that allow the rural population to access knowledge and incorporate themselves into economic and social development.

THIRD: That it is indispensable to establish a greater coordination and harmony between the sectors that constitute the social area in order to jointly promote State policies on education and the relevance of social programs of intervention in rural areas.

FOURTH: That we reaffirm our commitment to strengthening bilingual and intercultural education in the national educational systems of our countries.

FIFTH: The need to maintain an open debate inside the Parliaments and Legislative Assemblies so as to evaluate the scope of the strategies for poverty reduction, to measure the impact of the educational and social policies in the growth and well being of the poorest sector of the population and to favor the adoption of state policies of education and social investment.

SIXTH: That by means of starting up educational reforms, we will focus attention on the new role of the school, with high impact social actions.

SEVENTH: That it is necessary to encourage modernization and decentralization in the educational sector in order to promote and facilitate access and use of technologies in quality learning for the poorest rural populations.

EIGHT: That it is vital that the civil society in rural zones and the educational and intellectual communities in general, participate with the aim of actively contributing to the planning, execution and the collection of results from the initiatives for human development

NINTH: That it is fundamental to keep up a permanent fight for the right to an education of quality and relevance for the vulnerable populations, including the population with special educational needs.

TENTH: That on acknowledging education as a necessary investment in order to reach sustainable economic and social development, we urge the authorities of Education, Finances and the Assemblies and Legislative Congresses of the Central American countries to direct increasing, sustainable and irreversible resources towards the establishment and strengthening of access, quality and equity programs in the rural zones affected by high rates of extreme poverty.

ELEVENTH: That we urge UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO and other international organizations of technical and financial cooperation, as well as the participating institutions in this Regional Meeting, to continue giving attention to the forthcoming initiatives and to the follow-up of this declaration.

TWELFTH: That we recognize and appreciate UNESCO's policy of integrating the regional initiatives in order to strengthen the role of education in the transformation of our societies.

THIRTEENTH: That we recognize and appreciate the support offered by the Government of the Republic of Panama in the organization and the success achieved in carrying out of the meeting.

Held in Panama City, Panama, on 22nd March, 2005.