

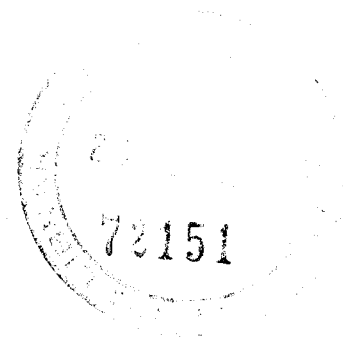
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Developing Educational Research Capacity

from above: The Case of the IFER



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Introduction

Over the last five years, increasing concern has been expressed by members of the international research community about the need to pay more attention to issues of research capacity building in education. This concern, however, has been limited to a relatively select number of individuals operating in close collaboration with the international organizations that are establishing the major policy trends in education research or with the agencies which are allocating financial resources for education research as part of a network of international aid.

A number of international conferences, seminars, and workshops have been organized in the past, and a variety of studies have been funded by international organizations, to discuss existing trends in educational research, to delineate new approaches and strategies that may strengthen national and regional research capacities in the developing world, and to document the state-of-the art of education research in the Third World. These efforts have largely been directed toward identifying major areas of interest among educators and policy-makers, toward examining the problems affecting the production of education research, and toward assessing the conditions affecting national research capacities.

The results of these efforts have been as varied as the attempts themselves, focusing upon the interaction of theoretical and the empirical

factors in a research milieu. They have attempted to make policy recommendations to government and private institutions involved in research in education, and to present for discussion alternatives for action in regard to research areas, research methods, and use of research resources. Although some of these efforts have produced positive outcomes, there are still many aspects of the research environments of developing countries which remain unchanged, indicating that the gap between developed and developing countries in regard to education research capacities could become even greater in the years to come.

This paper will discuss one specific attempt initiated to strengthen educational research capacities in developing countries: the creation of an international consortium to channel educational resources and research funding to "less developed countries". Specifically, the paper will focus on the initiative put forward by the World Bank and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to create an international fund to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of developing countries' capacity to investigate educational problems.

A First Attempt

Between 1981 and 1983, the Education Department of the World Bank, in conjunction with the IEA, made several attempts to design the basic organizational and operational structure of what was to be called "the International Fund for Educational Research in Developing Countries" or IFER. As outlined in several documents, the IFER was to use the existing infrastruc-

ture and organizational framework of the IEA, and its experience in managing research projects in education, to channel resources, both financial and technical, to member countries of the Association. It was expected that the research to be undertaken would fall within the areas, priorities, and methodological approaches identified by the consortium as the most appropriate for dealing with the problems of education in the developing world.

The funds to be allocated by the consortium were to come from the contributions of bi-lateral and multilateral agencies and donor organizations interested in supporting education research in developing countries. Thus between 1981 and 1983, in order to generate agreement about this initiative both the Bank and the IEA approached over this period several international donors and presented various versions of this proposal in various international fora.

Serious concerns were voiced by individuals and organizations not only about the actual proposals, but also about the potential implications of implementing an organization such as the IFER. Three basic questions were raised in this regard: How would the IFER affect the availability of research funds for education on a global scale? How would the access of researchers and research institutions from developing countries to existing educational research funds be affected?, and how would the mechanisms for selection of recipients, allocation of funds, and identification of research priorities to be used by the IFER, affect the autonomy of local

researchers in making decisions about their countries' research needs and priorities?

Several issues merit further scrutiny to better understand the implications of these questions. First, the idea of creating an international fund in North America that would assist the development of educational research capacity in the Third World was raised at a time in which the relationships between developed and developing countries were under increasing pressures due to substantial shifts in the political stance of some of the major world powers. As a result, of these shifts major changes had also occurred in terms of technical assistance and aid policies directed toward developing countries or regions that represented an actual or potential economic or geopolitical risk to the foreign policies of the donor countries, and therefore, to their major money lending institutions.

Looking at this situation alongside the major trends which conditioned the relationships between developed and underdeveloped countries at this time, such as the effects of a world economic recession, highly unstable interest rates, and political changes in the Southern Cone and Central America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that in the future the tensions between developed and developing countries are likely to increase rather than disappear. In fact, this evidence indicates that the future access of developing countries to the financial and scientific resources of developed countries will be even more limited than in the past, in terms of both actual resources available and conditions established to qualify for these resources.

A second issue to be considered is that the initiative of creating the IFER was presented at a time in which developing countries' research communities in education and in the social sciences had become especially sensitive to the role played by most donor organizations and the mechanisms they use in carrying out their operations. Over the past five years there had been increasing concern among social science researchers in developing countries not only about reduction of funding opportunities resulting from changes in donors' policies, but also in regard to the types of research which were funded and the types of conditions that needed to be fulfilled in applying for the few resources available.

Third, there also seems to be evidence indicating that the mechanisms used by the IEA and the Bank to consult with the international community of donors, researchers, and practitioners were inadequate. Few international donors, and even fewer researchers from developing countries (except for those involved in the IEA network), were consulted in order to obtain a wide range of opinions regarding the usefulness of the IFER proposal, its potential implications, and its mechanisms of operation.

Fourth, it would appear that little attention was paid by the proponents of the IFER to the potential side-effects of such an organization which, in practice, was designed to monopolize a substantial proportion (approximately 21 million dollars over a six year period) of the resources available for education research among the major international donors supporting this field of activities at the time.

Finally, and in direct relation to the potential implications of creating a monopoly of research funds for education research, a fifth issue arises which should also be taken into account. Both the IEA and the World Bank tend to represent a particular understanding of what, how, and by whom, education research should be done in order to impact the development process. The experience in several developing countries where large scale empirical research has been undertaken, following the IEA-World Bank approach has demonstrated to raise serious ideological and methodological concerns among local educational researchers.

The Proposals

One of the first documents outlining the IFER, "Assisting Educational Research in LDCs: A World Bank Proposal" (Gorham, A.B.: 1981a), defined the initiative as "a multinational research proposal aimed at strengthening the educational research capacity of Less Developed Countries (LDCs)". The IFER was portrayed as "an international research consortium of Third World countries" that would focus on problems of "educational quality and productivity". It was expected that such a consortium "could constitute an effective international framework for the provision of financial and technical assistance to educational research". The final outcome, as outlined by the document, was to "facilitate the development of educational research capacities at the national levels, and enable a greater number of LDCs to participate in, and benefit from, international research in education." (1981a:1). Part of the rationale for such an attempt was described in another document "Research and Education Productivity in LDCs" (May 1981)

prepared by the Bank which indicated that "as in agriculture, research on and assessment of education productivity require a multinational, institutional structure. To pursue identical or even similar questions independently in every country, in an uncoordinated way, would prove expensive and inefficient" (1981b:3).

A later document, "The International Fund for Educational Research in Developing Countries (IFER): A Proposal for its Creation" (World Bank, Education Department: 1982) indicated that, in the view of the Bank, there were a number of factors affecting developing countries' research capacities. Among them, the most pressing was the fact that "developing countries will never be able to acquire a level of educational productivity and learning comparable to more wealthy countries unless they have more information on what works in their own countries, and why" (1982: 4). And that despite the "substantial range of research support activity, the ability of developing countries to generate relevant scientific research on education is crippled by a number of factors." This led the Bank to suggest that "what is required is an international network of institutions capable of:

- (i) identifying the questions relevant to all national environments;
- (ii) framing the methodological approaches so that validity is nowhere knowingly sacrificed; and (iii) managing the research and analysis efficiently and in different countries simultaneously." In this context, the IFER was seen as a program that would "facilitate the participation of developing countries in international research projects which generate empirical information on national education problems and practices" (1982: 8-9).

According to a third document, "The International Fund for Educational Research in Developing Countries (IFER). An Exploration Paper" (World Bank, Education Department: 1983), the specific purpose of IFER was "to provide local education and fiscal planning authorities with information which will do two things. First it will help them improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their educational investments; second it will help them improve their local capacity to investigate other critical educational problems "(1983:1).

It is important to make explicit the assumptions which were underlying the formation of the consortium. In fact, there were fundamental contradictions between what it seems to be the conceptualization of this initiative in terms of its proclaimed purposes, related to what to study and how to conduct efficient and effective educational research in developing countries, and the actual understanding of the IFER about the problems which developing countries face today, and the capacity of these countries to determine research priorities and find means to undertake research in education.

The perception of developing countries as research environments which lack financial resources and adequate technologies to do effective and efficient research --understood by the Bank and the IEA as research which involves empirical analyses, measurement of learning and productivity functions, control of educational experiments, and large scale surveys--, which also lack appropriate expertise to do comparative research, and which in general do not have a "suitable research climate" (1982: 8-9), led the proponents

of this initiative to take a paternalistic approach toward the development of local research capacities in developing countries.

The presentation of the IFER as "multinational" and "international" seemed to suggest that the proposals called for the integration and participation of developing country researchers in planning, designing, and implementing research in their national settings using their own initiatives and priorities, and funds from the consortium. In fact, however, the multinational and international character of the IFER was resting in a more nominal understanding of collaboration. Despite the fact that the IFER would use funds from different international donors and would involve different countries at various levels of its organization, the distribution of funds was intended to be made only among a limited number of recipients. In the 1983 version of the proposal it was explicitly indicated that one of the specific purposes of the IFER was to "assist those research institutions in developing countries which have already expressed a wish to participate in five cooperative research studies designed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)" (1983: 5.1,i). It is important to indicate also as a point of information, that only those countries which were members of the IEA network were to be permitted to apply for the IFER's funds.

There was thus little indication that the IFER was conceived as an international organization from the point of view of being open to any developing country that may decide to apply for its funds. And even those countries that were eligible to apply for the IFER's funds were not able to determine

their own research priorities, apply their own methodologies, or determine their own theoretical approaches.

Some Assumptions Behind the Proposals

In developing Third World countries' capacities to do research, the main concern cannot be, as suggested by the IFER, the research technology alone or the effectiveness of external mechanisms to transfer such technology to researchers in isolation from local priorities. The questions that the IFER proposals did not address were how researchers could improve the existing capacities and local mechanisms to ensure better research results, and how they could design their own approaches to achieve the educational objectives of their societies.

The whole idea of the IFER was based on the assumption that only one type of research in education was important from the development point of view, this being research which produces "effective" and "efficient" results in terms of improving educational productivity. Research in education as understood by the IFER was empirical in nature, sufficiently broad in scope to be replicable in different socio-economic contexts, and ideologically neutral.

The 1982 version of the document gave some indication of the IFER's understanding of science underlying the conceptualization of education research. The document indicated: "the central issue in all science is the degree to which a phenomenon is or is not universal, and why. Nothing

else matters quite as much, whether the field is education or physics. By holding out the possibility of genuine comparability across countries IEA-sponsored research is potentially one of the most powerful sources of information in the history or research on human capital. By leading the support for such endeavor the IFER can do more than claim leadership in helping to generate better education in developing countries" (1982: 18).

This argument raises a fundamental controversy regarding the appropriateness of some of the existing conventional criteria for assessing the adequacy and quality of education, by assuming that educational research in developing countries can only be assessed from the point of view of a scientific paradigm valid in the context of natural sciences. This argument also leads one to question the potential impact of IFER in terms of the potential benefits of an international body designed not only to control funds from a number of contributing donor agencies, but to decide on behalf of developing countries how research in education should be done, and on what issues.

One of the first versions of the document (1981a), indicated that the consortium could constitute an effective framework for the provision of financial and technical assistance to education research, and that it would facilitate the development of educational research capacities at the national level, enabling a greater number of countries to participate in, and benefit from, international research in education (1981a: 1). The 1982 version reinforced this idea by arguing that "such an institutional structure could facilitate cross fertilization, international comparability, and

standards of education research excellence while, at the same time, meeting the necessary degree of national relevance, methodologies, and training." (1982: 9). Finally, in the third version of the proposal (1983), the IFER was presented as a mechanism that could serve to educate developing country researchers and government officials to make their educational investments more efficient and effective, and to improve their local capacity to investigate critical problems (1983: 5.1).

There were several assumptions implicit in the perceptions of the potential impact of the IFER. Most of the benefits as outlined by the proposals would result in teaching researchers how to better understand and investigate the problems affecting their local education. In doing so, it was expected that the products of research would become more relevant to and more effective in improving the outcome of national educational systems. This, however, would lead one to question the understanding implicit in the documents about current educational problems in developing countries, the socio-political contexts under which these problems occur, and the most appropriate solutions to deal with them. To follow the approach proposed by the IFER implied both to subordinate developing countries' scientific autonomy to the priorities and paradigms of empirically-biased organizations in the North and to view developing country researchers as junior partners in terms of research competence.

The proposals seemed to assume that educational problems in developing countries are predominantly quantitative in nature and related to factors of educational productivity (number of students going through the system,

number of teachers trained, number of textbooks produced, number of schools built, etc.). Within this perspective, the difficulties associated with solving such problems were seen as primarily related to weaknesses of a technical nature (the way in which research is done, the type of data collected, the utilization of such data by policy-makers, etc.), thereby reducing the complexities of development in these countries to a very narrow understanding of education. This viewpoint resulted in the proponents of the IFER expecting that the benefits that could be derived from an organization that provides funds to do a particular type of research could also be limited to technical solutions. It is not clear from the proposals, how genuinely local educational research capacities were expected to be developed if the type of problems to be investigated, the methodologies to be applied, and the resources to be utilized were to be determined from the North by an organization external to the environments where such capacity was to be built. Current trends in the relationship between donors and recipients tend to indicate that by concentrating even further the financial resources and decisions about funding research in education, developing country researchers would be in an even more restrictive position, not only in terms of access to the few resources available, but also in terms of determining the problems to be investigated and the research modalities to be used. Studies on the conditions affecting research capacities in developing countries have indicated that a series of factors affect the production, dissemination, and use of research results. In many cases, these factors are not necessarily related to the quality of the researchers, the appropriateness of the research areas, or the availability of technical or infrastructural resources. An example in this

regard can be found in some of the countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America, where in spite of educational research environments of international reputation and relatively constant flows of funds from various international organizations, educational research has had little impact on changing or even influencing local educational systems.

There were another two issues to which the proponents of IFER paid little or no attention. These were, first, that the funding of research in education in developing countries depends to a large extent upon political factors outside the arena of education or that of the practice of research; and second, that although researchers may operate in their own environments with relative freedom, as recipients of international funds, their relationship with donors is one of dependency. Politically, research in education is dependent upon various factors. At the national level, education research is determined by the governments' development plans, by the amount of public expenditure allocated to education, by the governments' priorities in regard to the expected role of the educational systems, by the political philosophy of the regime in power concerning education and social sciences research, and by the degree of freedom individuals may have in society as professionals and citizens. At the international level, education research is determined by the changes in research emphases among the developed centres of scientific knowledge, by the role and priorities of international networks of researchers, and by changes in philosophy and priorities of funding organizations resulting from shifts in the foreign policies of donor countries and changes in their perceptions about what should or should not be done to stimulate development in the Third World.

From the point of view of the relation between donors and recipients, research in education is dependent upon factors beyond the nature of the research itself or its potential impact. Due to the lack of local financial resources and to the low importance given by government to research in education, developing countries have become heavily dependent upon international funding to do research. The possibility of doing research in education comes thus to depend upon funds available from donor agencies to pay salaries, cover infrastructural costs, acquire materials and technology, undertake field work, and train junior researchers nationally or abroad. Given these situations, it is not clear how an alternative such as the IFER was expected to contribute to strengthening educational research capacities by reducing rather than expanding the scope of funding options available to developing country researchers.

This point becomes even more relevant if one considers the fact that under the present circumstances the agendas of what is and what is not funded are strongly conditioned by the philosophies and policies of the various donor agencies funding education research. In many cases, if researchers in developing countries want to do research in education, they not only have to approach the proper agency, but they also have to be prepared to respond to the donors' programmes and priorities.

Most donor agencies usually determine their regional priorities, the type of research and areas to be funded, and the countries where funds should be allocated according to their views about how scientific knowledge must be produced, disseminated and used to impact development. The input from the

recipients in regard to the needs of developing countries, is often nominal and secondary to the donors' policies. In this context, the chances are that an organization like IFER, heavily supported by one of the largest donor organizations in the world, would reinforce rather than change these relations of dependency between developing countries and funding organizations in the field of education research.

Several arguments have been voiced in different international fora criticizing donors' philosophies such as the one supporting the IFER. The Bellagio Meeting of representatives of donor agencies and foundations that took place in West Berlin in 1981, provided the opportunity for a selected group of researchers from developing countries to bring to the attention of donors the biases and inequalities implicit in their styles of operation. More recently, internationally known academics, developing country researchers, and even some donor agencies have reacted somewhat negatively to the documents. As a result of this relatively wide spread concern, several attempts have been made to create conditions that could permit donors to utilize feedback mechanisms, and to assess the effectiveness of their funding activities on the basis of the recipients' opinions. These efforts have included attempts to organize international and national workshops and seminars to provide a forum in which programme policies, implementation of new programmes of funding, and new areas of priority have been discussed together by donors and recipients.

These attempts, however, have not resulted in substantive changes. The fact that the IFER proposal was presented and that it found some echo among

a sector of donors and potential recipients, demonstrated that there is still a long way to go in making the relations between donors and recipients more equal and participatory. In general, the relations between donors and recipients, still remain largely vertical. The few consultation mechanisms currently in place depend heavily on the views of selected groups of individuals who, in fact, belong to an elite group even within their own local environments and who maintain close ties with the donors community. The participation of developing country researchers in donor's decision-making processes, constitutes a token representation, which in practice tends to legitimize the present status quo rather than to bring about actual changes toward more participatory and consultative decisions.

It would be misleading to think, however, that the IFER proposals were random products of isolated minds in the international research community. On the contrary, the proposals did not emerge from within a vacuum or without a rationale. Early in the 1981 versions, and later in the 1982 version, the rationale for the initiative was described as stemming from the belief that developing countries are unlikely to achieve a level of quality or productivity comparable to that of wealthier countries unless more information was provided to them about the factors which affect education in their own countries and how.

What the IEA-World Bank initiative argued in fact, was that poor quality and productivity, as these relate to the production of educational services and educational research in developing countries, is primarily a problem of

lack of information not only in regard to the latest developments in scientific knowledge, but in terms of basic information about what the problems are. An issue the proposals did not raise, however, was that the scientific development of underdeveloped countries and their capacities to offer viable solutions to their problems have been historically conditioned by the same factors that have made these countries dependent upon dominant centres of economic and political power.

The IFER initiative also argued that acceptable levels of quality and productivity in education, and in education research, can be measured by standards accepted by the developed countries. The proponents made no attempt to look at the history of developing countries or at their educational traditions. If they had done so, they could have realized that most of the differences found today between developed and developing societies are the result of years of colonial dominance and unequal scientific exchange.

A more realistic view of development than the IFER's proposal would have shown that the chances are that developing countries will not be better off in the future only if they adhere more closely to the trends in education research of developed countries. Evidence tends to indicate that the imitation and replication of development and modernization patterns following the standards of quality and productivity found in developed countries without consideration of the local socio-economic conditions, traditions and culture have, in many cases, proven to reinforce conditions of dependency. Developing countries will not have better educational systems.

better educated people entering their labour markets, or better quality research, simply because they have become more sophisticated in terms of the information they use or the technical tools at their disposal only as a result of the donors' influence. In this context, the quality of educational research will not be better only because they are able to follow more closely "quality" and "productivity" standards of the richest countries, but because they are actually able to decide what to investigate and how.

To argue that the problems affecting developing countries' educational research are due to lack of information, and more specifically information about themselves, is to pretend that the problems of underdevelopment, including education, are exclusively explained by each country's own circumstances. Lack of information in developing countries, according to the proposal, is a result of various factors such as: "lack of technological facilities", "lack of research clarity", "a widespread belief that educational problems are essentially culture-specific", and lack of a "relevant educational research programme and suitable organizational framework" to channel resources.

The proposals also argued that developing countries are unable to produce research in education of a quality comparable to the one produced in wealthier countries, not only because they do not know what factors are affecting their education and research environments and how, but also because they "lack research clarity". In other words, the condition of underdevelopment in research capacity in developing countries is due to the

fact that educational researchers in these countries are scientifically backward (compared to those in wealthier countries) and ignorant about what they must do concerning the problems affecting education in their countries. This essentially hierarchical understanding of development leads to the assumption that one of the ways to assist in the solution of development problems is to bring these countries, and their researchers, to a level of knowledge, technical sophistication, and understanding of their reality which is seen as appropriate by those countries considered to be modern and developed or by those organizations which are believed to represent the views of what development is all about.

To develop research capacities was seen by the IFER mainly as a problem of efficiency. Efficiency in the use of technical tools, in the interpretation of information, and in general in the production and dissemination of a meaningful research output. This approach led the proponents of IFER to assume that by providing the LDCs with technological facilities many of their difficulties will disappear. It also implies that research in education, and the research process itself, is a neutral and technical phenomenon that exists apart from the political, economic and cultural conditions affecting developing countries.

The disregard of IFER of individual country differences that exist in the Third World, was reinforced by the proposals when it was argued that lack of "research clarity" with regard to educational problems, resulted from the belief of developing country researchers that educational problems in their countries are "culture-specific". In this regard, what actually the

IFER was arguing was that what is "good" for one society must be good for any other going through a similar stage of development. Although this kind of argument may look surprising, it is not at all irrational. Such an approach helps to justify and maintain a system by which international aid and assistance to education research is often reduced to a flow of financial and technological resources and tools, the transfer of empirical research models and designs, the involvement of foreign experts, and the replication of research practices accepted as reliable by and from the North.

This same approach, allows one to argue that one of the constraints for the development of educational research capacities in developing countries is the "absence of a relevant international education research programme and a suitable organizational framework" to channel resources. The fact is that the possibility of implementing an "international education research programme" in the IEA style is only possible if the assumption that all societies are similar except for their different positions on the scale toward development, is accepted.

Implementing an Idea: Steps toward a final proposal

In the analysis of the IFER initiative, it is important to pay some attention to the way in which the proposals visualized the development and final implementation of the consortium, thus giving some ideas about the actors that were to be involved in the process and the ways in which decisions were to be made.

The final document to establish the consortium to which the proposals were leading, was planned to include four sections: "a review of the educational research situation in IDCs and a presentation of the rationale(s)" for assistance, to be "prepared by Bank-appointed consultants in the U.S.A.", and three other sections to be prepared by the IEA in Stockholm. In accepting this final document, the World Bank was prepared to play a major role. After the approval of the final draft document by the Bank's Education Department and the Bank's Board of Directors, the document was then to be presented "to interested development agencies for their reactions and suggestions."

Several questions could be raised concerning this procedure, for example: why other "interested development agencies" were to be included only in the final stage of the process, when essentially all the major decisions had been already made?; Why were these agencies expected to commit that part of their resources to be channeled through the consortium, when, at the same time their expected input was only to give "reactions" and "suggestions" after the IFER initiative had been approved by the Bank?; why were the original proposals not discussed with LDCs' researchers and representatives of other donor agencies at an earlier stage?, and why did the whole process ignore the need for more direct participation of so called "less developed countries", if the real concern of the IFER was to assist these countries in the development of their educational research capacities?

The proposed consortium was planned as a permanent super-structure. One of the documents indicated that "assistance (for the consortium) would be

requested for an initial 2-3 year period (1983-85)", and that after an evaluation "a request would be made to extend the programme through the period 1985-90." This aspect of the proposals must also be carefully analyzed. The IFER initiative did not involve in fact an activity planned to end once certain objectives were achieved, but rather involved the creation of a permanent structure for the decade of the 1980s, through which an important proportion of the available international donor funds for research in education in developing countries was to be channeled and therefore controlled.

The final document was also planned to explain, and in so doing to justify, the decision to use the IEA structure to implement the consortium.

Throughout the proposals, there was no real explanation of why the only alternative considered to achieve the goals of the consortium was to follow that particular institutional and infrastructural pattern: what made this an effective model to follow and what led the proponents to assume that research capacity problems in education could be better solved by reproducing IEA patterns and styles of research.

Although the proposals used terms such as "international consortium of IDCs", "research network for IDCs", and IDCs and institutions members of the IEA, it did not appear that implied actual participation by these networks or member groups in decisions regarding the potential use of consortium funds. In fact, the network or consortium was seen as "international" only because at some point in its structure there were IDCs' institutions and/or countries involved following the research schemes of the

IEA, or receiving funds. Neither did the initiative imply, that a country could have the opportunity to state its own priorities beyond those of the IEA, or that the idea of "cooperation" as used in the proposals referred to horizontal rather than vertical interaction between the consortium and the beneficiaries. If possibilities of cooperation were to exist, they would take place within the IEA framework and within the consortium's structure of power. If LDCs were to become involved in the consortium they could do so as long as they became members of the IEA structure. Only by doing so could they have formal representation within the power structure. Finally, the fact that the proposed network was adapted to "the existing structure of IEA" implied not only the acceptance by recipients of a particular organizational pattern imposed from without, but also the acceptance of a particular mode of administration of resources, a particular understanding of how research in education was to be conducted, the areas to be studied, and the methodologies to be used: In other words to be considered a part of the network, recipients would be required to accept rules and guidelines established by the IFER.

The proposals of the IFER also indicated that the cooperative approach which was being proposed "would stress four major considerations". These were, "orientation...to problems of educational quality and productivity", "relevance as an instrument in dealing with specific educational problems in LDCs", "relevance as an instrument for monitoring national education systems in LDCs", and "potential for institution-building". These considerations would give place to the development of a specific section of the final document, that was planned to include an outline of "the problems of

educational quality in LDCs and the suitability of IEA-type research in improving qualitative aspects"; the "importance of IEA international network for promoting comparative approach"; "the potential of the existing IEA structure for linking educational research in developing countries"; the main point for "a discussion of the specific research capacities required in LDCs, ..and the relative advantages of the IEA approach for supporting international research in LDCs", and other aspects related to the status of IEA as a Category B NGO, and "the cooperative nature of the IEA decision-making process".

Concentrating the power of funding

Perhaps the most important aspect in the design of the consortium presented in the draft proposals was related to how the resources would be managed and by whom, how they would be allocated and to whom, what they would be used for and when. This was one of the most developed parts of the proposals and according to the proponents of the IFER the part which had received the most attention.

How resources will be managed and by whom?

The proposed consortium was planned to operate on the basis of the IEA organizational structure which includes the General Assembly and its Standing Committee, the project councils, and the international project coordinating centres. However it is necessary to focus our attention on the two ad hoc organizational mechanisms identified with the consortium

itself: the "special IEA/LCD Committee" and an "IEA/DC Consortium Centre", that in practice were to manage the resources.

The IEA/LCD Committee, according to the documents, was to "include representatives from IEA institutions in developing countries and from supporting development agencies", as follows: the IEA Chairman, five representatives from IEA institutions in LDCs, four representatives from other supporting agencies, one representative from the World Bank, and the Executive Director of the IEA/LCD Consortium Centre. More interesting however, than the composition of the committee was the way in which its structure was designed to be controlled. The documents stated, that "the IEA General Assembly/Standing Committee would nominate the five representatives from IEA institutions in developing countries while the World Bank would nominate the four representatives from supporting development agencies. Both the IEA Chairman and the World Bank representative would be permanent members of the Committee. The World Bank representative would be the Chairman of the Committee and the IEA Chairman would be the Vice-Chairman of the Committee." (Emphasis added)

Regarding the management of resources, the proposal indicated that "the IEA/LCD Committee would be the policy-making body ... It would consider all proposals received ... and decide on subsequent funding ... the Committee would decide on the eligibility of LDCs for programme resources, the amount of matching funds required and the allocation of funds for the four main types of programme activities ...". Thus, all major decisions about what countries could participate, in what specific areas of research, how much

money they were to receive, and how much was going to be needed as matching funds, were to be made by this Committee. Given that this Committee was to meet only twice a year, an "Executive body" was to be created to make all major decisions on a day to day basis. This executive body included the Chairman (the World Bank representative), the Vice Chairman (the IEA representative) and two LDC representatives (selected by the IEA).

This proposed structure of the IFER reflected, in fact, the main purpose of the consortium it was to be: a means for the concentration of resources for education research at a global scale. Through this initiative, two institutions (the IEA and the World Bank) were giving themselves power of decision making about a potentially large amount of money committed by a number of donor agencies. Not would these two institutions assume the actual and permanent management of the new consortium, but they would also assume the right to choose both the representatives from developing countries (only from among those members of the IEA) and the representatives of other funding agencies.

The Consortium Centre

The Centre was defined as the "overall coordinator of programme activities" responsible for implementing and executing the decisions of the Committee. With a mainly technical staff, its activities were oriented toward administering and monitoring activities and actual fund allocation. In considering proposals for participation in existing projects the centre was to

have final decision making power. And in the consideration of proposals for new projects, the centre was expected to make decisions on the basis of "quality" and "productivity" criteria as defined by the IEA model. In regard to both aspects, the centre was expected to take care of the complete process of project development, from assessing the capacities of the LDCs applying for support, to evaluating their proposals, providing data processing facilities, organizing programme activities, and establishing editorial procedures. In other words the centre was designed to be the operational arm of the IEA-World Bank structure in selecting, distributing, monitoring and disseminating the various components of the research development process in developing countries as this related to educational research.

In terms of who would be eligible for receiving support from the consortium, the documents indicate that "all Less-developed Countries, as defined by the U.N., would be eligible for programme resources." This in fact gave the impression that developing countries were able to apply without constraints, for the resources available through the consortium, thus reinforcing the idea that the IFER's main purpose was to channel resources for educational research as needed by those countries. In practice, however, there were explicit conditions that had to be fulfilled in order to qualify for the funds of the consortium. The document indicated in this regard that "the allocation of such resources (programme resources) would be conditional on participation in an IEA-sponsored project". This in fact meant that for a country to be eligible to receive research funds it had to be part of the IEA network, and therefore accept all the conditions that

such membership implied. The consortium as the operational arm of the IFER was structured to "determine which countries/research institutions receive support (and how much), as well as the priorities governing which countries would receive support in a situation of scarce resources." However, again it must be emphasized that this selection was only from those countries that were a part of the IEA.

In terms of potential sources of funds, the proposers of the IFER expected that donor agencies (bi and multilateral), foundations, and the private sector would be the main sources for the funds to be administered by the consortium. At the same time, however, it was indicated that those organizations donating money could be represented on the committee only as ex officio members, in other words without actual power in the decision making processes.

Conclusions

There were several questions regarding the IFER initiative for which an adequate answer was never found throughout the documents presented for the creation of IFER. The most important, however, was the actual purpose of this effort. Although the proponents mentioned in several places that the effort was oriented toward assisting less developed countries in which the quality of educational research was poor and the production of educational research was low, the arguments developed in the documents, the kind of structure proposed, the assumptions underlying the initiative and its implementation, make it difficult to accept the notion that the main

purpose of the IFER was, in fact, to assist the "less developed countries".

What appeared more evident—although implicit-- was that the proposed consortium was a vehicle by which to sustain alive a particular type of organization and a particular approach to research in education. The continuous references to the participation of developing countries, which in terms of the actual operation of the proposed consortium was minimal, appeared as a necessary element to attract funds from other donor agencies and foundations that could be potentially involved in the IFER initiative.

Social science and educational researchers in developing countries do not exist in a vacuum. What social scientists and educational researchers can do in their fields is part and parcel of the mode in which they relate to their own socio-economic and political environments and of the place they occupy in the structure of the international research community.

Researchers from developing countries do not need a new super structure responsible for decisions regarding the distribution of the few resources available for educational research. They do not need to have a politically and economically powerful organization conditioning their decisions regarding their needs, their problems and the "most appropriate" ways to solve these problems. What they need is the establishment of participatory mechanisms for decision making at the international level, in which their own political, economic and cultural identity is respected and taken into account.

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