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Chapter 8. School-Based Management in Post-Conflict Central America

Undermining Civil Society and Making the Poorest Parents Pay

Margriet Poppema

Introduction

School-based management (SBM) has been on the educational reform agenda of International Organisations (IOs) since the 1990s and is regarded as the most radical form of educational decentralisation. Although the models might differ, the main rationale given for the implementation of SBM is that by enhancing the participation of local stakeholders, decentralisation will lead to more efficient services and boost educational achievement. Most analysis of SBM programmes (SBMPs) evaluate the functioning of the programmes and their main outcomes. In this chapter, the focus shall be placed on the specific political and economic context that gave rise to the two first SBMPs in the Global South, namely, the Autonomous Schools Programme (ASP) in Nicaragua and the EDUCO Community-Managed Schools Programme in El Salvador. They were implemented at a time when major (post) conflict transformation processes in Central America (CA) were driven through the direct intervention by the United States (US) and their Agency for International Development (USAID).

Since then, these SBMPs have been implemented in countries where IOs have great leverage, as in (post-) conflict countries (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, etc.) or in countries that are undergoing significant political, social and economic change. Next to USAID, the World Bank is the major promoter of SBM and has continuously expanded its support for this kind of decentralized reform. A review of World Bank's lending portfolio over the years 2000–2006 shows that SBM projects amount to US\$1.7 billion, representing approximately 18 per cent of total education financing (Barrera-Osorio *et al.* 2009).

The EDUCO programme in particular has been cited as the *best practice*, arguing that the project was built on the experience of at least 500 community-run schools operating in conflict-affected areas in the 1980s. 'When the country emerged from war, the new Ministry of Education launched Education with Community Participation (EDUCO), a programme that gave these schools official recognition and financial support.' (UNESCO 2011, p. 224). This appreciation has been highlighted in all the World Bank documents on the topic (see Jimenez *et al.* 1999; Meza *et al.* 2004; Sawada *et al.* 2005; Gropello 2006).

According to the World Bank website, SBMPs take on many different forms:

both in terms of who has the power to make decisions as well as the degree of decision-making devolved to the school level. While some programmes transfer authority to principals or teachers only, others encourage or mandate parental and community participation, often in school committees (sometimes known as school councils). In general, SBM programmes transfer authority over one or more of the following activities: budget allocation, hiring and firing of teachers and other school staff, curriculum development, textbook and other educational material procurement, infrastructure improvement, setting the school calendar to better meet the specific needs of the local community, and monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

World Bank reports mention that 'SBM emphasizes the individual school [...] as the decision-making authority' (Barrera-Osorio *et al.* 2009, p. ix) and continues that 'by giving voice and decision-making power to local stakeholders who know more [...] decentralization can improve educational outcomes and increase client satisfaction' (2009, p. 1). SBM has been implemented in high-income countries as well^[1]. However, after more than fifteen years of implementation, there is still no conclusive evidence that SBM yields significantly higher student achievement, either in the US (Cook 2007) nor in the Global South. This is even recognized by the Director of Education at the World Bank, Elizabeth King, who states that the evidence base that SBM can improve the quality of teaching and learning is limited (2009, p. ix). Nonetheless, SBMPs continue to be promoted by the World Bank.

If SBMPs do not foster higher student achievement, why are they propagated and financed by USAID and the World Bank? In recent years, five major background reports were published which uses the examples of EDUCO and ASP for dissemination purposes (World Bank 2007; 2008a; 2008b; Barrera-Osorio *et al.* 2009; USAID 2010). In this chapter, I will examine the implementation of these first SBMPs in countries that were hot spots of US government intervention. The SBMPs were developed as a solution to counter the educational legacy of the left wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and to undermine the influence of educational civil society organisations in El Salvador. The US, through USAID and in conjunction with International Financing Institutions (IFIs), played an early role in mediating overall change in the region. Here, I will first outline the historical and contextual background of CA, and then will look at the two countries, beginning with the changes in the decade preceding the implementation of SBMPs. This will be followed by a short history of the education system and an appraisal of the contextual aspects of the SBMPs, identifying the actors that were key for the conceptualisation, implementation and prolongation of the programmes, as well as which stakeholders were excluded. This will be done in chronological order for each country, although the processes in the different countries are closely

interlinked. In the conclusion, the major changes, the main stakeholders and the consequences of the two SBMPs are analysed.

Contextual Background of Central America

The first SBMPs were implemented in two very small countries, both with a current population of around six million^[1]. These CA countries share the history of Spanish colonialism until 1821 and, since the end of the nineteenth century; the US has played a dominant role in the region in order to secure their commercial and political interests. The successive authoritarian leaders and the policies of accumulation led to a highly unequal land ownership and deeply rooted relations of injustice, with high rates of poverty among the majority of the population. Even the booming agro-export model of economic growth from 1950 to the 1970s only enriched foreign investors and a handful of national families^[2], while landlessness, a skewed income distribution, and lack of education for the greater part of the rural population continued, leading to growing discontent among popular sectors and other politically and economically excluded groups (Pearce 1998; Robinson 2003).

During the Cold War period, the US did not tolerate any moderately progressive or nationalistic government in the region, framing any progressive movement as communist, and acting upon it^[1]. Many popular movements and civil society protests challenged the socio-economic injustices, the lack of political freedom and human rights. The fierce repression of any opposition movement strengthened the armed liberation movements until in 1979 the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua unexpectedly overthrew the Somoza dynasty and installed a left wing revolutionary Sandinista government^[2]. In El Salvador a similar kind of opposition was active, posing a revolutionary challenge to the authoritarian and US-supported right wing government.

In the aftermath of the US military defeat in Vietnam in 1975, these small CA countries became the hot spots for US intervention, combating the so-called 'Soviet beachheads' in order to keep the region open to free-market principles. El Salvador, in particular, became the laboratory of the most extensive US *low-intensity-warfare* up to that moment; while in Nicaragua the US organized a massive destabilisation programme and financed the Contra military forces. Many researchers on CA point out that analysing the US counter-insurgency is crucial for understanding the current international post-war strategies of liberal peace building (Foley 1996; Robinson 2003; Quan 2005; Kurtenbach 2010). Here it will be shown that this is also valid for the post-conflict educational strategies.

Nicaragua

From the Sandinista Educational Reform to the Autonomous School Programme (ASP)

The Political and Socio-Economic Context of the 1980s

When the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) came to power in 1979, they tried to install an alternative development model to free-market capitalism. Their political view was based on nationalism, popular democracy and anti-imperialism, and included a commitment to a mixed economy, political pluralism and a non-aligned foreign policy (Carnoy *et al.* 1990; Arnove 1995; Robinson 2003). Their main policies focussed on a long-demanded land reform and the expansion of social programmes in the areas of education, health and housing, together with some more direct forms of income distribution (Forsberg 2007).

Just shortly after the installation of the Sandinista government, the US started a complex interventionist strategy, organising a massive destabilisation campaign to undermine the national cohesion and to isolate the government from international markets and credits (Robinson 2003, p. 72). In 1981, all aid from the US to the government was suspended, while aid and assistance was given to opposing groups and parties. At the same time, international diplomatic pressure was intensified, resulting in the World Bank and IMF withholding all loans, and culminating in a full trade embargo in 1985, and under the banner of 'democracy promotion', the US organized and financed the Contra military force (Posner 2004)^[1].

When the Sandinista project collapsed and the right wing National Opposition Union (UNO) won the elections in 1990, all the sanctions were lifted and the US, jointly with the IFIs, returned with their grants, loans and prescriptions. They had great leverage as the foreign debt had grown from US\$1.6 billion in 1979 to around US\$10 billion by 1990. The restructuring of the debt with the IFIs was followed up by structural adjustment policies, fiscal austerity and the opening up of the economy to the global market. In addition the UNO government gave ample space to USAID who laid down the US policy for Nicaragua in a Strategy Statement that took a year of study and 'which involved a counterreform in every institutional and policy arena'^[1] (Robinson 2003, p. 75). All neoliberal measures were stoutly implemented, including public sector reconstruction, social spending cuts, privatisation and deregulation of the economy.

Education during the Sandinista Period (1979–1990)

Under the Somoza regime (1933–1979), poverty was widespread and spending on education was limited. In the late 1970s, only 65 per cent children were enrolled in primary education and just 22 per cent of them would complete six years (Carnoy *et al.* 1990). Most rural schools would only offer one or two years of schooling, and more than 50 per cent of the population was illiterate. Due to this historical neglect, education became a prime focus of the Sandinista government; their policies were based on the right to education for all, defined as 'popular'^[1], and seen as an important element in the creation of a 'new person'^[2] and in the construction of a more equal and just society (Arnove 1995).

The Ministry of Education (MINED) worked closely together with the teacher union ANDEN as well as with many popular civil society organisations. The education budget more than doubled from 2.9 per cent to 6 per cent of GNP, and the main objectives were the expansion of the public education system, the promotion of qualitative change, and the transformation of the system (Carnoy *et al.* 1990). They were inspired by socialist thinking and both educational and political objectives were a central part of the process of social change and liberation (Forsberg 2007).

Education was thus given a key role in political socialisation, focussing on critical and participatory citizenship, especially in adult education. The establishment of a basic education system for adults (PBEA) and the National Literacy Crusade were some of the major accomplishments (Arnove 1995). More than 13,000 PBEAs were established and illiteracy was reduced from 50 per cent to 23 per cent. International recognition came from the United Nations as access to the different levels of the education system between 1979–1984 more than doubled and the teaching force tripled. After 1985, the growth slowed down due to the US-sponsored Contra war that conceived schools and hospitals as key military targets^[1].

The role of the World Bank during the Sandinista period was notorious for its absence; even though they had strongly supported the Somoza dictatorship with two educational loans in 1968 and in 1976, a third loan to the Sandinista government was unilaterally suspended in 1981 in accordance with US policies. This occurred in spite of the World Bank's recognition that the Sandinista government had 'education among the top development priorities of the country' (World Bank 1981, p. 1).

The Autonomous Schools Programme (ASP) from 1990 to 2007

When the UNO government took over in 1990 and the support of the US and the IFIs returned, USAID took the lead in the field of education to wipe out any political and ideological legacies of the Sandinistas. With the support of USAID and the IFIs, the conservative Minister of Education, Humberto Belli, transformed the education system in three ways: first, by dismantling the strong role of the state through decentralisation and privatisation of the public school system; secondly, by abolishing the adult education system and focusing mainly on pre- and primary education; and thirdly, by introducing a conservative agenda reinforcing religious and patriarchal values through the introduction of civics, morality and politeness.

The ideological approach was sweeping; all textbooks developed during the Sandinista period were shredded or burned, and USAID allocated \$12.5 million to replace them with 7.6 million new textbooks copied from other LA countries (Arnové 1995). The new textbooks emphasized strong conservative and Catholic values, and women were invariably depicted as housewives and men as productive workers. This stood in stark contrast to the strong participation of women during the Sandinista period, and the fact that 80 per cent of the teaching force was female.

The reorganisation of the role of the state in education was facilitated by the USAID-financed redundancy pay for the massive lay-offs in the public sector. The Ministry of Education (MINED) staff was cut by more than 50 per cent, the regional offices were dismantled, the teaching force reduced, and teacher salaries decreased (Arnové 1994). This had direct consequences for student enrolment, which declined by nearly 25 per cent (150,000 children) in 1990 (Picón *et al.* 1994). The educational policy changed toward decentralisation and privatisation of the public school system, of which the ASP became the main strategy (Arnové 1995).

The ASP programme started in 1991 with 20 secondary schools and was steadily extended to include 63 per cent of all students in urban and rural areas by 2005. The idea of *school autonomy* was based on the introduction of market mechanisms, cost efficiency and the creation of some accountability through parent participation in school councils. The introduction of school fees was a sensitive issue; hence the introduction of the ASP was carefully prepared by the MINED. With the support of USAID, a cadre of loyal local representatives was trained to become the intermediary educational staff in the municipalities. They were educated in the philosophy, goals and components of the reform and the strategies for promoting it, 'making sure that its ideology was presented in the most attractive possible light' and that they could counter the opposition to the ASP programme (Gershberg 1999, p. 16).

These municipal delegates played an important role in the establishment of the autonomous schools. With the promise of better salaries on the basis of school fees, the principal and teachers were persuaded to become an autonomous school^[1]. Other mechanisms used were higher pay for the pro-autonomy teachers and for their schools, or sometimes dismissal of teachers if they voted against autonomy. This located the political battle at the school level as the teachers that would vote against the ASP were members of the teacher union ANDEN (Fuller *et al.* 1998; Gershberg 1999). Although teacher approval was formally needed, together with sufficient enrolment, it would be the principal alone who would sign the school co-management agreement at the central MINED office. Within the ASP-system, the individual school received monthly transfers that were earmarked for teacher salaries. This funding was to be supplemented with fees, donations and other incomes to complement teacher salaries and to acquire educational resources. In the beginning, the fees were mandatory; however, after much controversy they were abolished for primary education in 1999. Notwithstanding, parents were still expected to pay quotas and the average parent expenditures represented approximately half the total cost of sending a child to school (Arcia 2000, cited in Gershberg 2005, p. 300). This system privileged parents and schools with greater capacities and resources, as poorer parents were less able to contribute significantly.

The management of the autonomous school itself was delegated to the principal jointly with the school council (principal, teachers and parents) in which the elected parents had a voting majority, though, in practice, it was the principal who had the real power (Forsberg 2007, p. 103). The school council was charged with the management of the budget and personnel, and (officially) some curricular decisions and evaluation and planning functions. However, they were under the strict control of the MINED. According to Forsberg, 'the central office has the right to dismiss the school principal and to suspend members of the school council if they do not adhere to the norms and procedures laid down in the General Regulation for Education' (MINED 1999, p. 31 cited in Forsberg 2007, p. 101). All these policies were strongly contested by organized civil society actors such as the teacher union ANDEN and by women's organisations due to the high cost of education for the poor, the highly conservative curriculum and the marginalisation of civil society organisations. This left the ASP for more than a decade without any legislation, which was only enacted in 2002 via the Education Participation Law (Forsberg 2007).

Within the international context, the ASP has been considered to be the most radical educational reform in Latin America, and USAID and the World Bank have played a central role in advising the reform and making loans available (Gershberg 1999; Robinson 2003; Forsberg 2007). Moreover, it is framed as part of the pacification and democratisation attempt (Gropello 2004), where democracy is defined in terms of individual freedom from state indoctrination and intervention, in areas best left to the family and intermediate associations (Arnové 1995, p. 37). The ASP programme remained controversial during the entire period of implementation and was abolished on the first day the new Minister of Education of the reformed Sandinista party FSLN took office in 2007.

To sum up, I have argued that education in Nicaragua has been part of an intense economic and political struggle. The enormous effort of the Sandinista government during the 1980s to expand and improve all levels of education was strongly based on collective action together with mass organisations, such as the teacher union and civil society actors. Nevertheless, as soon as the UNO government came to power in 1990, this enormous expansion of education and the participatory manner of decision-making was eliminated. Education became key in a well thought-out counter strategy developed by USAID, which was further implemented by the World Bank, aiming to dismantle fully the Sandinista education system in every aspect. The main elements were the restructuring of the role of the state, the introduction of market mechanisms through ASP, the abolition of the adult education system, the introduction of conservative values and the marginalisation of all civil society organisations. The new SBM system of *autonomous* schools demanded *voluntary* funding and labour from (poor) parents through a hierarchically controlled system of so-called *participation*. Through ASP, a top-down and highly regulated form of participation by parents and teachers was installed in each individual school, without any possibility of representation to influence national education politics and policies.

El Salvador in the 1980s and the Community-Managed Schools Programme EDUCO

The Political and Economic Context of the 1980s

During the 1970s, the circumstances in El Salvador were quite similar to the Nicaraguan situation with the presence of a massive popular movement that struggled to change the highly unequal socio-economic system. Yet the victory of the Sandinistas in 1979 and the perceived threat of an insurrectionary triumph of its Salvadorian counterpart, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), substantially changed the conditions in El Salvador. As in Nicaragua, the US instigated a massive intervention; however, in this case, not attacking but rather supporting the government, leading to a full civil war that was waged between the armed forces, death squads and right-wing supporters on one side and a guerrilla army of the FMLN and its mass-based supporters on the other side (Robinson 2003, p. 87). During the next 12 years, El Salvador became the laboratory for the most important and expensive *low-intensity-warfare* developed by the US after

the Vietnam defeat (Schwarz 1991; Sepp 2005; Nelson 2008). An investment of US\$6 billion was made in economic, military and covert aid, while approximately US\$1 billion from the IFIs was mobilized to transform Salvadorian society (Robinson 2003, p. 89). This approach has later served as a template for Iraq (Maass 2005)^[1].

These massive investments created the opportunity for USAID to play an important role in the restructuring of society. A detailed study by Foley (1996) gives a revealing insight into the key role of USAID in the transformation of civil society. USAID developed a dual strategy: on the one hand, building political power and influencing a segment of the Salvadorian business class to establish private foundations, while on the other hand supporting the government's fierce attacks on all popular organisations associated with the leftist opposition^[1]. At the national level, USAID supported the foundation of the Salvadorian Foundation for Social and Economic Development (FUSADES)^[2] led by the wealthiest members of society and, in the field of education, the Business Foundation for Educational Development (FEPADE) was created in 1986 (1996, p. 73). Moreover, with funds from the USAID programme Strengthening Associations (FORTAS), many mini-foundations headed by local landlords were established throughout the country to carry out social services in rural areas (1996, p. 77). This overall strategy permitted these new private foundations to develop a vast network within the civil society sector. At the same time, all unions and popular organisations suffered fierce repression, and many leaders were persecuted, murdered or joined the FMLN. The violence increased exponentially leading to the killing of more than 75,000 people, 95 per cent of whom were killed by the US-supported military or related forces (Amnesty International 2001). The education sector and especially the public teacher union ANDES were not excluded from repression^[3].

Not surprisingly, owing to the marginalisation and the physical silencing of almost all oppositional civil society organisations, FUSADES could rapidly become the most influential neoliberal socio-economic think-tank in El Salvador. In the field of education, FUSADES, alongside FEPADE, played an early role in the establishment of the EDUCO educational programme (World Bank 1994).

Educational Situation during the Period of Violence

During the twelve-year armed conflict, the already poor socio-economic and educational situation of the 1970s deteriorated and became even worse as finances for public expenditures were diverted to the defence budget. Education as a percentage of BNP dropped from 3.7 per cent in 1980 to 1.9 per cent in 1992 (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 149). During the 1980s, more than 800 schools were closed down, particularly in the rural areas, affecting around 1,500 teachers, while leaving more than 100,000 students without education (Alvear-Galindo 2002, p. 87). Dropout rates in 1986 reached approximately 90 per cent of the student population in certain areas and the illiteracy rate was in the vicinity of 40 per cent in 1985 (Moncada-Davidson 1995).

Education was especially neglected in the regions in conflict, thus different communities and popular organisations assumed the responsibility and became active actors in organising their own education. This alternative movement for education was based on the principle of 'education of, by and for the people' and developed in Christian-base communities^[1], in refugee camps, and in FMLN controlled areas. The popular schools fostered a political and emancipatory vision of education based on the work and methodology of Paulo Freire, combining education with participation in the struggle for social justice and dignity (Hammond 1999). According to Reimers (1997), they provided education to some 17,000 students in rural areas during the conflict.

The Peace Accords and the Establishment of EDUCO

Following the electoral defeat of Nicaragua's Sandinista government in 1990 and the US presidential change, the US lost its main rationale to interfere in El Salvador and the stage was set to embrace the peace negotiations between the government and the FMLN. In the meantime, the ultra right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) won the elections in 1989 and would stay on for the following 20 years^[1]. The new president Alfredo Cristiani invited the USAID-funded FUSADES to join his administration and to implement a set of proposals to tackle socio-economic issues, including the educational sector. The previous general manager of FEPADE was appointed Minister of Education and would remain in office for almost a decade (1989–98) while the World Bank stepped up financial and technical support for education. As in Nicaragua, education became one of the key areas of socio-economic and political reform, through decentralisation, privatisation and a strong focus on building new forms of socio-economic co-existence at the local level. However, public investment in education remained low: 1.9 per cent of GNP in 1991, to 2.4 per cent in 2002 and 3.1 per cent in 2007 (UNESCO 2009).

The new education policy and the EDUCO programme were developed with 'exceptionally close relations and trust between USAID, the implementing partners, and MINED officials' (USAID 2010, p. 81). The overall vision was, like the Nicaraguan ASP, inspired by cost-effectiveness and human capital theory. EDUCO started in the 78 poorest municipalities with the lowest health/nutrition and education indicators, and expanded primarily to the former conflict regions (World Bank 1994, p. 1; Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 146). USAID was directly involved in the conceptualisation of the EDUCO strategy. Their subsequent funding was channelled through the 1990–1999 Strengthening Achievement in Basic Education (SABE) project, funded with US\$33 million (2010, p. 70) and focussing on the problematic parts of the education system: the quality of the curriculum and textbooks; pre- and in-service teacher training to support curriculum implementation; and achievement tests to assess the new core curriculum. According to Darlyn Mesa, Minister of Education, 'the main support and the life of the Ministry revolved around the SABE project' (USAID 2010, p. 70). Thereafter the EDUCO programme became actively supported by the World Bank and the IADB, and although the Bank reduced its direct financing of EDUCO in 1996, it continued supporting the long term sector-wide educational reform process with technical and financial assistance. The total World Bank loans for education in El Salvador from 1991–2005 were US\$271 million (Meza *et al.* 2004, p. 16; World Bank 2004) and jointly with the loans of the IADB, the total amount was well over the US\$ 552 million for the Salvadoran education sector (USAID 2010).

Within the EDUCO schools, the management and administration were transferred to community education associations (ACEs)^[1] each consisting of five parents. The ACEs receive per pupil financing directly from MINED, and they supplement the state funds with their labour, material resources and through school fees. The ACEs are responsible for the hiring, firing and monitoring of teachers on an annual basis and for buying the necessary resources (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003; Meza *et al.* 2004, p. 3). The parents in the ACEs are not paid for their work, and the contract between MINED and the EDUCO schools has to be renewed each year^[2]. Furthermore, MINED controls the curriculum, provides the textbooks and organizes the national assessments as well as teacher training; however, in practice the execution of these educational services is often contracted out to private institutions (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 152). The EDUCO schools are established in the existing local infrastructure, either in schools or private institutions. EDUCO teachers, contracted by the ACEs, are not part of the Ministry's teaching staff like public school teachers and have no job security; they lack freedom of association and have no pension rights. This has led to a high turnover rate in EDUCO schools, because teachers leave for official positions whenever they have the chance.

Over the past decades, EDUCO has become the main schooling option for approximately 80 per cent of the municipalities in extreme poverty (UNESCO 2009, p. 153), enrolling around 50 per cent of all children in rural areas (World Bank 2003). With EDUCO, the total enrolment has increased from 76 per cent to 83 per cent (Gropello 2006), and internationally EDUCO has gained recognition for its promises to be the *best policy option*. It was honoured with the World Bank's Presidential Award for Excellence (1997) and considered a successful programme by the IADB (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 156). The World Bank states that 'the EDUCO model [...] has been successful in improving efficiency and effectiveness as a result of strong leadership and government commitment, consensus-building across communities, teacher unions and opposition leaders, and a culture of institutional and pedagogical innovation.' (2005, pp. 118–19). Nevertheless,

in spite of the fact that teachers spend more time in schools, this has not resulted in promoting higher achievement scores (Sawada *et al.* 2005; Barrera-Osorio *et al.* 2009).

Criticism of EDUCO

The claim that EDUCO is based on the experiences of popular education in rural areas during the 1980s has been questioned by many. Reimers (1997) mentions that EDUCO was perceived as a policy to neutralize the network of popular teachers, who identified with the opposition. Moncada-Davidson (1995, p. 65) states that in communities EDUCO was seen as an imposition by the government attempting to weaken the political power they had gained during the 1980s and as 'a strategy to propagate the government's political and economic ideology to the population' (Moncada-Davidson 1995, p. 68). Moreover, EDUCO was established disproportionately in the conflict-ridden areas of the eastern part of the country, in spite of the fact that there were higher percentages of out-of-school children in the western part of the country. Thus it can be argued that the experiences of popular education have merely been used as a discursive justification.

Cuéllar-Marchelli considers EDUCO to be a 'very particular privatisation strategy, through which "not-for-profit parents" associations are contracted to administer schools financed by the state' (2003, p. 146). These parents are the only ones not paid within the education system, while the amount of time parents of one school would spend on administration and training was 576 hours per year. The sum of parent labour constitutes 805 full-time jobs, representing 28 per cent of the work done by all the MINED staff (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 159). Thus if parents' time investment had been included in the unit costs in 1993, the cost of official public schools and EDUCO schools would be the same (World Bank 1994, p. 48).

These labour donations *are* paid by the poorest parents as EDUCO schools operate in the most disadvantaged areas. Only 39 per cent of EDUCO children's households have electricity and 18 per cent have piped water; 70 per cent of their households do not have built floors and only 3 per cent have sanitary services available. This contrasts with official public schools' households of which 71 per cent have electricity; 37 per cent have piped water and 51 per cent of their houses have built floors (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003, p. 158). In 2006, nearly 90 per cent of the EDUCO parents were working in the agricultural sector, two-thirds of whom work as day labourers under very precarious conditions in terms of income and access to social services. These parents have very low levels of education as more than 50 per cent have had less than three years of schooling (Briones 2007, p. 14). However, as EDUCO is the only option, it makes the poorest parents work *voluntarily* to guarantee some education for their children.

The best organized opposition against EDUCO has come from the teachers union ANDES that opposed the programme from the beginning as a move to privatize education and to eliminate job security and tenureship. The many teacher strikes have demanded free education for all, an increase in educational investment, an increase in salaries and the unification of the labour conditions for all teachers (Polo 2007, pp. 99–100)^[1].

To sum up, as in Nicaragua, EDUCO can be deemed to be part of a much broader USAID and World Bank driven socio-economic and political reform. USAID financed the neoliberal think tanks, such as FUSADES and FEPADE, which together with MINED and USAID itself have been strategic in the development of EDUCO. The EDUCO reform has a clear political and ideological framework; it is *finance-driven* as it locates the highest cost for education with the poorest families. It introduces top-down structures of technical *participation* of the poorest parents. Furthermore, it establishes *market mechanisms* in education with the introduction of per pupil financing and the outsourcing of intermediate services to the private sector. EDUCO is also part of a political strategy to undermine popular forms of education and to marginalize the teachers and communities involved. It is not surprising that as soon as the new FMLN government came to power in 2009 and the former teacher and ANDEN union leader, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, was appointed Minister of Education, steps were taken to abolish EDUCO.

Comparing the ASP in Nicaragua and EDUCO in El Salvador

Both SBM reforms were introduced after a decade-long *low-intensity-war* that was supported by the US to keep the CA region open for their free-market interests and to oppose any initiative that would endeavour to redress the highly unequal socio-economic order. In Nicaragua, the educational gains at all levels of the education system during the 1980s were countered by neoliberal shock therapy to wipe out the Sandinista legacy and to introduce a conservative ideology. The highly successful adult education system was abolished and the main strategy to restructure the education system was the introduction of the ASP in secondary and primary education. In El Salvador, the EDUCO programme was introduced in parallel to the existing official public system to promote educational services in rural and war-affected areas. Both educational reforms aimed at undermining and sidelining any form of civil society collective action, by replacing it with a system of vertically delegated management responsibilities to parent councils. In Nicaragua, the ASP reform was mainly concentrated within the MINED, from the central offices to the municipalities and then directly in the school councils. In El Salvador, the EDUCO office would directly fund the school councils, while the intermediate education services were outsourced to the private sector. The functions of the school councils in both SBMPs coincide, giving not-for-profit parents the responsibility to administer the budget, raise extra funds and to hire, fire and control teachers.

Following nearly two decades of implementation of these internationally celebrated SBMPs, enrolments show expansion in the first years of primary school while the equity and quality of the education system is especially worrying. According to the latest statistics, enrolments up to the fifth grade have increased to 95 per cent. However, only 69 per cent of all students in El Salvador and just 50 per cent in Nicaragua will survive to the last grade of primary education (UNESCO 2009). In the field of quality, the second regional study of LLECE (2008) shows that both countries are among the least performing in terms of learning outcomes in Latin America^[1]. They show poor achievement in language and mathematics in grades 3 and 6, with only two out of ten students reaching the high level in El Salvador and Nicaragua, while in Cuba and Uruguay this accounts for 75 per cent of students.

The figures are also characterized by deep inequalities; rural urban differences in performance are more than double in El Salvador, to the disadvantage of the rural students of whom 50 per cent are enrolled in EDUCO. An urban student has a six time better chance of achieving at the highest level. In Nicaragua, there are huge disparities in wealth, revealing a difference of seven years of education between the richest and the poorest households from 9.2 to 2.2 years (UNESCO 2009, p. 74), reflecting the great inequalities in financial capacities of families to contribute to the education of their children.

Thus nearly two decades of school-based reform has delivered neither quality nor equity in education. The low achievement reflects the low investments in SBMPs and the high costs for the poorest population. Probably the political and socio-economic motives behind the programmes are likely to account for these meagre results, as the labour market for the agricultural and the manufacturing sector in the region mainly calls for a cheap and low-skilled labour force and not a well educated population.

Conclusion

This chapter can be taken as a post-analysis of the origins, objectives, outcomes and the main stakeholders involved in the SBMPs in Central America, as the ASP and EDUCO programmes were abolished shortly after the FSLN and the FMLN governments came to power in 2007 and 2009.

The first and most radical forms of SBM in the Global South emerged under the very specific contextual conditions of CA. El Salvador was the main testing ground for the political and economic restructuring of society, and USAID was the key sponsor behind these major changes. During the 1980s, USAID started to build a new framework of allies in the region through the creation and support of new right-wing private sector organisations at national and local level: from the creation of the social economic think tank FUSADES, to directly involving private enterprise within the education sector through FEPADE. These *soft* policies of stimulating private sector organisations worked in unison with the US-backed Salvadorian armed forces that fought the *hard* battle by terrorising all civil society organisations that were thought to be associated with the FMLN opposition. In Nicaragua, during the same period, the US financed a Contra War to destabilize the Sandinista government, which led to the right-wing UNO government in 1990. Accompanying this change, USAID developed a counter strategy to break down all the vestiges of the successful public Sandinista education system. In addition, the enormous debt burden created much leverage for the reinforcement of economic and political conditionality according to the Washington Consensus.

Within this context, USAID stimulated the development of the most radical SBMPs, and the World Bank took up its financing, at times jointly with the IADB. USAID continued their further involvement through the funding of the SABE project in El Salvador and BASE in Nicaragua, addressing the most problematic sectors of the education system. Moreover, USAID, jointly with the World Bank, the IADB and some private US Foundations, supported the creation of a regional neoliberal think-tank called Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL) in 1995. This has become, as is stated, 'the strongest private voice on education in Latin America to build a new constituency for education reform.' (PREAL 2011). Regionally, PREAL works in close collaboration with national organisations like FUSADES and FEPADE and, in Nicaragua, with EDUQUEMOS and FUNIDES, as well as with similar organisations in Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Costa Rica. At the same time, it has intimate relations with Washington-based global stakeholders. This powerful network of think-tanks and aid agencies is consolidating a long-term neoliberal influence through its presence within the educational sector with policy advice, the financing of research and the organisation of seminars¹¹.

This multi-scalar financial and discursive power explains why the EDUCO model has been promoted in the Global South as a *best practice*, arguing that the project was built on the experience of at least 500 community-run schools. At the local level, these celebrated SBMPs turn out to be much less *empowering for communities* than has been claimed. In fact, EDUCO opposes everything popular community schools had fought for. The popular experiences were participatory and communitarian, it was education 'of, by and for the people', with voluntary teachers fostering a political and emancipatory vision of education through collective participation in the struggle for social and economic justice. EDUCO is the mirror opposite of these popular experiences as it was used to neutralize or weaken the power of these communities, their teachers, as well as the teacher unions.

These SBMPs should be analysed as part of top-down decentralisation and privatisation strategies that have focussed on the depoliticisation of socio-economic relations and on the building of new forms of socioeconomic co-existence at the local level. *Participation* only includes parents of children that attend the school, and thus the broader *community* is not included. The participation of these parents is controlled through a strongly regulated form of decision-making in each school, and non-compliance with rules and regulations can lead to the withdrawal of educational funding. The direct financing of individual school councils makes it hard to organize collectively and to formulate alternative proposals for changing the policies. It is the poverty of parents that keeps them hooked to EDUCO and ASP as it is the only option of guaranteeing at least some form of education for their children. In practice, these SBMPs contradict the title of the 2004 World Bank Development Report 'Making Services Work for Poor People', as in this case *the poorest parents have paid the highest price to make the educational services work for their children*.

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Notes

^[1] Mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries like the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand.

^[1] In 1996, the SBM PRONADE programme was implemented in Guatemala. For a contextual analysis, see Poppema, M. 2009. It was followed in 1999 by PROHECO in Honduras.

^[2] Fourteen families in El Salvador and, in Nicaragua, the Somoza family was the main owner of most of the arable land.

^[1] Like the 1954 CIA-backed military coup in Guatemala against the democratic nationalist president Jacobo Arbenz in order to stop a moderate land reform.

^[2] The party was named after Augusto César Sandino who led the Nicaraguan resistance against the US occupation in the 1930s.

^[1] The US secret involvement in Nicaragua, 'the Iran-Contra Affair', became a major political scandal in 1986, when it was discovered that President Reagan had permitted the CIA to use the profits from the sale of illegal arms to Iran to finance the Contra military forces in Nicaragua. In 1986, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favour of Nicaragua and against the US, which was judged to have violated international law by supporting Contra guerrillas. The US did not recognize the jurisdiction of the ICJ and, after 1991, the new UNO government withdrew the complaint (Posner, E.A.2004).

^[1] At the beginning of the 1990s, the USAID mission became the largest in the world, staffed with over 300 diplomats. Since then, USAID has provided Nicaragua with over US\$2 billion in assistance.

^[1] The term 'popular' education was widespread in Latin America. Generally speaking, it means that education is the right of all (especially the peasant and working classes) and that '*educación popular*' should be constructed with active and conscious political participation and the mobilisation of mass organisations (Carnoy *et al.* 1990).

^[2] An altruistic, cooperative, critically conscious and participatory citizen, motivated by collective goals.

^[1] In 1984 alone, 98 teachers were killed and 171 were kidnapped (Prevost 1987).

^[1] The salary benefit could range somewhere from 0 to 50 per cent for secondary schools and from 0 to 30 per cent for primary schools.

^[1] 'After the invasion the US soldiers and officers are increasingly moving to a Salvador-style advisory role' (Maass 2005).

^[1] The 'Reagan administration didn't leave any space for left-wing organisations out of fear of an "inevitable" communist takeover' (Nelson 2008).

^[2] From 1984 to 1992, USAID contributed US\$150 million to FUSADES alone.

^[3] ANDES 21 claims that during the war 376 teachers were killed, 106 disappeared and 500 were jailed (Alvear Galindo 2002).

^[1] Many Catholic priests were inspired by 'liberation theology' and supported popular education. They also suffered from the repression; most well-known was the killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980.

^[1] According to Robinson (2003), the US(AID) intervention, jointly with FUSADES, was able to create a consensus of the private sector and civil society for the new economic and political model. This made it possible for ARENA to continue until the current global economic crisis.

^[1] From the Spanish 'Asociación Comunal para la Educación.'

^[2] This in contrast to the 50-year contract that FEPADE obtained in 1990 to manage a post-secondary technical institution (ITCA).

^[1] As teacher salaries had fallen by 50 per cent during the period 1984–92 while the per capita income rose by 5.4 per cent.

^[1] Jointly with Guatemala, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

^[1] Many of the consultants of these think-tanks had high ministerial positions during the implementation period of the SBMPs, reflecting a sort of revolving door between the Ministries and these private sector organisations.



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