

Educational Policies for Better Lives

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The sources of growth are geared by innovation,
skills, knowledge-based assets and green growth.
(Angel Gurría-OECD Forum 2013- Message)

Abstract:

The UN MDGs, started in 2000, is projected to join eight goals before 2015. One of the most meaningful is “Education”. It is also a general objective, since it will achieve universal primary education for all.

At the bells’ sound of 1000 days before MDGs ending, several institutions have organized conferences and summits in order to discuss the progresses already made along the path of those which are not been gained, or only partially reached. One of the last conventions has been held in Paris at the OECD quarters on 4-5th April 2013. OECD is trying to find the best solutions for development and for that is preparing the post MDGs Agenda. Two main routes have been chosen: one to gather more data and information about countries’ problems and possible solutions; the second: to adapt actions to the specific needs of each country, that means: to be geographically concerned. For that reason, as a delegate at OECD, I propose to research, among many possibilities, suitable solutions for Albania in the field of education, since education is not only one of the 8 MDGs, but the first topic always focused by the OECD President Mr. Gurría.

Education is considered the élite engine for development. In order to be effective, it should be general, multidisciplinary, multitasking and inclusive. In order to be inclusive, the educational process in transition countries, such as Albania, must involve youth, adult and old people in a single global project, since time and opportunities have been lost during the past regime. If a State will manage only the children or young adults, a great gap will persist in the next generations, that means in the future generations of the children born from people without education who doesn’t understand the value of a long, expensive and some time difficult process for obtaining a school title.

Escaping the inclusive process should mean to generate educated people only from the privileged middle and upper classes.

Keywords: Adult Education, Tertiary Education, New Skills, Job, Employment.

Introduction: the eight MDGs

In the year 2000 UN launched a global program for development, put into action until 2015. The Program named “ The Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs) encompasses eight points for development:

- 1- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2- Achieve universal primary education
- 3- Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4- Reduce children mortality
- 5- Improve maternal health
- 6- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7- Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8- Global partnership for development

We are now in the middle of 2013, and, sadly, we must admit that not all the goals have been reached in their full outcomes, even if many progresses have been made around the world. Some criticism has been raised against these goals, especially from other organizations, which state that instead of development goals we have to speak of development tools (EU, ERD, 2013).

Certainly, some points are so general that they must continually be checked and enhanced, sure for ever, and not only until 2015.

Education and innovation

The first of the UN points is a basic one, affording the theme of life sustainance; for that it has been posed as the first one: hunger. All points are important, but one of the most decisive, in the sense that it can influence many others, is the second one, education. It has implications on many other aspects of personality and society as a whole, for example on health, sustainability or governance. This UN goal focuses on the basic educational level for all, as an essential step. In this matter, several progresses have been made in many countries, especially in the poorest ones, where international aids and funds have demonstrate to be effective (OECD, 2013 a).

Another question should be afforded both in developed countries and in developing countries, it consists on how to reach the levels of secondary and tertiary education.

High education is nowadays a basic necessity, generated by the progresses of technology, and the exigences of creativity and innovation. Adapting a statement of Pekka Pessonen, one can say that “since innovation is not an option nowadays, but more of an imperative, it is necessary to comprehend the relation that innovation and technological development have to the changes in educational public and private institutions (2009, p. 94). “The strategy formation should be a dynamic process reacting or even being proactive to the external, as well as internal, situations. (*ibidem*, p.96). This is also confirmed by Teece who states: “Nowadays, continuous renewal by firms is considered as an essential organizational process in coping with technological progress” (*et al.*, 1997, p.87).

A digital and education divide

The educational policies in many states have joined the point of complete literacy for all, but the updated economic situation of globalization is requiring the achievement of at least the tertiary education for affording the technological society. To complete the gap with present and future needs, adults should be more educated than what was required when they were young, in order to fill the gap with digital students.

The world has changed a lot after the digital revolution in the sixties. Started in US, this scientific and technologic revolution has gained all the edges of the world before the end of the millennium. What is remarkable is the velocity of the progress that this silent revolution has sparked since then, but, when it put science and technology in advance, it widens, at the same moment, the gap among people at large, differentiating between who doesn't know or use it, and who follows the continuous software evolution.

It is surely hard for everyone to run at the same rhythm of technological discoveries, even in developed countries, since many economies are in financial troubles and subject to public debt, particularly after the 2008 global crisis.

Scientists and technicians who follow the innovation's paths accumulate a substantial amount of expertise, and only thanks to that expertise, they are able to continue to go along the alley of the *mise au jour*.

It is thanks to these people that everyone of us can be educated, but it derives that everyone of us needs a never ending apprentice. For instance, during a new software release presentation, the scientist mathematician, who presented that complex program, told to the participants that he had learned from his father, that knowledge hasn't an ending point, and for that he became a scholar, following his father exortations.

The concept of an unending instruction is supported since many years by EU which launched the phase of Long Life Learning (LLL) program, both directly and indirectly, inserting the process in other stabilized programs.

If we look at the past decades, we can notice that the innovative idea of continuing learning was first posed in one of the most advanced countries of the world, Sweden, where it produced several positive effects.

The concept of continued advancements, even if not focused in formal education, was posed as open goal in career and personal assessments of businessmen in US.

More than ever, is the crisis today which sparks a continue educational need, since traditional occupations are abandoned or they reject workers from their fields. In order to follow the market and the new globalized economy, not only unemployed, but everyone of us has to follow the changes in technology and the advancements in science, or adjournement in political matters, in order to be considered a good citizen. Global trends create an undoubted need for a dynamically reshaped innovation strategy. The results prove that innovation development requires still strong inter-organizational collaboration; however, the nature of cooperation has changed towards being more strategic (Rilla, 2009). The expectations of the outcomes and importance of cooperative arrangements have increased; therefore, it is natural that companies put emphasis on partner evaluation (*idem*, p.99); rising multi disciplinarity of new technology is shaping business and, at the same time, the innovation environment (Pesonen, van der Have, 2009). In order to respond to these challenges companies are often forced to look for external know-how and knowledge sources because of insufficient internal innovation resources (Symonds et al., 2011).

The process of education is cyclical, in the sense that it performs an endless predisposition to knowledge.

Education has the power to change personal attitudes and vocations; educated people tend to have educated children, generally it could be possible to find a correlation between the years of instruction of parents and the school's years of their sons. In fact, "the evidence shows that parental involvement – regardless of the economic and social constraints – can make a difference in their children's cognitive and social development" (Schleicher, 2013).

The lower level of female education can be connected to the same reasons, since old patterns continue to repeat themselves. At the opposite, the strategy formation should be a dynamic process reacting or even being proactive to the external, as well internal situations (Pesonen, 2009, p.96).

The long-terms results of adult education

An enhanced education creates nevertheless a distorted pattern: after the economic boom, population could be educated longer and a lower price than ever, also because governments understand the importance of instruction and put money and actions in the field.

Population could be educated better and longer - we hope even better and longer - but at the same time, this creates inequality among generations, specifically, inequality in the richness of cultural background, since the past generations had less possibilities to study than the new generations. This intangible richness has the possibility to be translated into economic and monetary richness, more widening the gap even in the same country, not only among the different continents. In my opinion, it derives that, for restricting the gap, we must connect the engine for adult education.

Even if adults were educated, their number and percentage were not the same as today. The results of the new needs are such that in some profession all the employees are rejected by new more skilled workers before their official retirement. In fact, public and private administrations, require skills that all employees don't possess, but they can choose new skilled workers to fit new rules and duties.

Successful secondary education achievement gives individuals better employment and healthier lifestyle prospects, resulting in greater contributions to public budgets and investment. More educated people contribute to more democratic societies and sustainable economies, and are less dependent on public aid and less vulnerable to economic downturns (OECD, 2012, p. 9).

Moreover, this allows to get equity as inclusion and as fairness for all the people on every socio-economic circumstances (*ibidem*). Angel Gurría stresses that “high unemployment and precarious jobs are fuelling inequality, with the trend getting worse as long-term-unemployment persists. “Education and training are needed to help the jobless” “governments cannot neglect the longer-term goal of fostering sustainable and inclusive growth: that means equipping citizens to succeed on a global stage where knowledge is the greatest asset, so that the benefits of increased prosperity are shared more fairly” (Gurría, 2013). This is also sustained by Andreas Schleicher, special advisor on Education Policy at OECD, “The Great Recession showed that even in times of economic crisis, high skills levels offer some of the best protection for both economies and individuals. It is clear that having a higher level of education helped people to keep or change their jobs during the recession” (OECD Forum, 2013).

As an educator, I do have some experience on that. As a teachers instructor, I noticed that in Italy primary school teachers are requested to go back to school in order to attend university and gain an university degree, since the teachers' high school diploma is not more sufficient.

I saw teachers coming back on the school stalls, on their free days, on Saturday and Sunday, after the Italian Ministry gave them the possibility to reach the title through their free time, since many of them were already employed as teachers. The primary teachers made that effort not to lose their already enrolled jobs in favor of new younger comers. The same behavior I noticed in my teaching at the University of Shkodra where, when the masters were opened, more adults come than young people. These students told me that the study was undertaken for gaining a better job or not to lose their jobs in favor of young adult, coming directly out from their formal education after gaining higher university degrees.

For a country like Albania, it is a great task to accomplish the necessary steps rendering it able to enter the free global market.

Like all the former communist countries, the primary level of education have surely been respected in Albania. A general public education is a requirement of a democratic duty, but in these countries - Russia included - the high levels of education were restricted to the most culturally gifted students and from them a great effort was requested, in order to maintain the highest scientific standards or to make the investments more efficient. The same was requested in sport, theatre, dance, music... This is the same policy followed in China. We know, on the contrary, that children and adolescents don't have an unique physical and mental development or follow fixed patterns. In pedagogy, like in psychology, we recognize a mental age and a chronological one which often don't fit together. Stated that for granted, it is better to continue a "forced education" in order not to lose some intelligent students ripening later.

To do that, a strong educational public system will be requested.

Surely, high education is expensive, both for families and States, but a demographic pattern which is expanding is that of lowering birth rates, first occurred in the most developed countries, like Sweden, Singapore, France, Germany, Italy, and now Spain, enlarged presently until Brazil or some developing zones.

The one child policy, compulsory in China, has demonstrated positive effects on education, since even if primary education is not free, parents are certainly able to pay schools for one child and more and more they are glad to pay for high education and lately they send their sons to study abroad at the best universities, in order to learn together with other disciplines, the English language, able to open all the doors of high careers. A more positive range is obtained when the lowering number of siblings is coupled together with an enhancement of GDP or private revenues and a betterment of living standards.

According to the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi's Report (2009), investments on education or human resources will have a return, four times higher than investments in physical features.

Politicians and planners have to avoid this mental trap: physical features are growing very fast and they emerge in all their appeal; at the opposite, some time, progress in human education is difficult to assess or to be judged. Physical facilities have a return only in their related sector; human richness has always large effects in all the human activities. Physical facilities need renovation; human richness will continually reproduce itself in cyclical manner (Gurrià, 2013).

In West Europe and North America, an already universal schooling in primary and lower secondary education has provided a basis for development drives on the other levels. Educational expenditure has continued to increase, in line with GDP and often more rapidly. The expectations of society change as living standards rise.

Number of children in families

Family nuclei with at least one child by family nucleus, number of children and total number of family nucleus members

Qarqet dhe lloji i bërthamës familjare Prefectures and type of family nucleus	Bërthama familiare me numrin e fëmijëve Family nuclei with indicated number of children					Anëtarët gjithsej të bërthamës familjare Total family nucleus members
	Gjithsej Total	1	2	3	4+	
Gjithsej/Total	544.250	188.611	226.221	95.688	33.730	2.104.746

Source: World Bank Data 2013.

The educational situation in Albania

Culture is an essential dimension of development: development solutions should be tailored to locally relevant traditions and institutions and these activities should make use of local expertise and knowledge. ([http:// www. WB.org](http://www.WB.org)). The World Bank works to ensure that people, their cultures and society, and their organizations and institutions are taken into account in economic development, and that such development improves the lives of people, especially the poor.

Culture contributes to core development objectives by helping to:

- Provide new opportunities for poor communities to generate incomes from their own cultural knowledge;
- Catalyze local-level development through communities using their diverse social, cultural and economic resources;
- Conserve and generate revenues from existing assets, that is, reviving city centers, conserving natural resources and generating sustainable tourism revenues;
- Strengthen social capital by providing marginalized groups a basis to pursue activities that enhance their self respect and efficacy, and to strengthen respect for diversity and social inclusion;
- Diversify strategies of human development and capacity building for knowledge based, dynamic societies: e.g. through support to local publishing, library and museum services.

All what we stated should be compared with Albania. In Albania the level of education is growing, due to numbers of universities, both public and private, due to economic advancements, the liberalization of public debate, the openness to the global horizon - rejecting the closure of the past¹ - the decreasing number of family members, the need to know foreign languages and the need to respect the requested parameters to enter the EU. The EU great market could open and enlarge the tendency to attend tertiary and upper tertiary education in Albania, due to the lower university enrolling fees compared to North Europe and even Mediterranean Europe, even for students rejected by their national universities because of “*Number Clausus*”.

This is an opportunity for Albania, since lymph from outside, could help the functioning of its institutions and profits its citizens, teachers and students.

Surely, the educational system must respect high standards of performance in scientific contents and ethical requirements, in order to attract good students and to stay at the top of quality, offering services even better than those at old institutions, affirmed at a global level.

All that could be improved through the geographical position which favors the exchange along the Mediterranean Sea, between North and South, East and West.

Inclusive education

¹ The threat of opening borders to outsiders for many reasons can be potentially dangerous to authoritarian regimes. Incomers, for example, can contaminate the mindset of the general populace with ‘foreign’ ideologies, spread political unrest or, by producing additional domestic wealth, create a new class with greater economic and political influence to contest the dictatorship’s authority (Purdy, 2010).

In the United States, a recent study, called “Pathways to Prosperity” (Symonds *et al.*, 2011), highlights the important value of Vocational Education and Training (VET) for the development of well balanced young people, who acquire a combination of work oriented and academic skills to support their transition from school to work. So we can argue that the future of equitable education involves the praxis of inclusive education for a global citizenship and economic competitiveness. The global need of inclusive education is inserted also in one of the development decades of UN. One of the last UN program has been stated on the Dakar Framework for Action in which the world community collectively committed itself to achieving education for “every citizen in every society” (2000, p. 12). The Dakar Declaration points out at “The life skills”, since certain skills are needed not only for schools but for being able to meet the changes in society.

The Dakar Education for All implies the involvement and commitment of all to education as it is inserted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Dakar the representatives acknowledged the achievements of the decade after the Jomtien Conference held in 1990 which included massive reduction in adult illiteracy; increase in early childhood education strategies that involve parents and that support vulnerable families. Further massive reduction of illiteracy and promotion of technological learning and life skills are, on the other hands, the new topics of Dakar statement.

The Dakar Framework for Action approved, among others, these points which stimulate both young and adult education:

- 1 - (iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs;
- 2 - (iv) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- 3 - (v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- 4 - (vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The expression “life skills” is representing the role education plays today, as a tool of improving personal capacities and competences, enabling for better jobs, meanwhile combating poverty and unemployment which is the devil of this long crisis.

Tab. 2 – Educational Performance in Albania
(updated 2012 - data 2008)

Literacy rate	Adult (15+)			Youth (15-24)		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
	96	97	95	99	99	99

Source : World Bank: Albania: a focus on Official Data 2012.

Albania has made important strides in re-integrating into the international and European communities, and has been an important contributor to regional stability in the Balkans. Albania is well on its way to achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but remains an outlier among its European neighbors on most health and education indicators. Albania is considered an IDA success story. The World Bank has been playing a major role in supporting reforms, strengthening institutions, and financing investments across the full range of sectors. Albania graduated from IDA and is now creditworthy for IBRD and entered the ranking of upper-middle income countries.

Tab. 3 - The Population educational performances in Albania in 2012

Sex and age group	Total	Never attended school		Highest diploma attainment					
		Literate	Illiterate	Without diploma	Primary	Lower Secondary	Secondary	First stage of tertiary	Second stage of tertiary
Gjithsej Total	2.454.948	29.755	63.475	30.416	385.464	986.181	697.018	258.938	3.701
10-14	233.376	597	1.692	17.522	187.717	25.848	-	-	-
15-19	268.746	3.496	2.289	1.641	12.923	171.056	77.167	174	-
20-24	243.645	6.747	3.040	1.094	4.602	84.501	91.564	52.097	-
25-29	191.906	2.708	3.037	790	4.760	86.355	49.155	44.705	396
30-34	163.975	1.907	2.357	573	3.827	85.118	43.585	26.097	511
35-39	167.499	1.543	1.971	499	2.625	75.006	63.052	22.241	562
40-44	186.451	1.384	1.825	496	3.050	84.382	72.050	22.675	589
45-49	192.924	1.289	1.712	493	3.915	88.774	78.079	18.236	426
50-54	195.480	1.184	1.794	579	6.625	86.809	79.780	18.327	382
55-59	162.745	1.048	1.663	588	12.785	65.898	61.922	18.524	317
60-64	130.616	1.114	2.220	800	23.443	51.958	35.373	15.488	220
65-69	103.332	1.110	3.401	885	34.245	35.490	19.290	8.781	130
70-74	92.497	1.473	5.956	1.163	38.792	25.670	13.612	5.751	80
75-79	63.818	1.813	10.450	1.572	26.374	12.373	7.717	3.475	44
80-84	35.085	1.359	10.213	1.066	13.007	4.675	3.153	1.581	31
85+	22.853	983	9.855	655	6.774	2.268	1.519	786	13

Source: World Bank Data 2012

Conclusions

Culture is an essential dimension of development, but growth should be sustainable and inclusive, that means education should be for all. The fact is that young people from poorer families are underrepresented in higher education. Economically disadvantaged students have the possibility to benefit from a mix of grants and loans in third-level education, but they also need better support from the earliest years of their school careers.

The great recession showed clearly that no social group or country is totally immune from the impact of a major slowdown, but it also showed that, even in times of economic crisis, high skill levels offer some of the best protection for both economies and individuals.

OECD data show that the already wide gap in earnings between people with higher education and those with lower levels actually grew during the global recession.

A young person with at least one parent who has a degree is, on average, almost twice as likely to be in higher education compared with the proportion of these families in the population.

Parents with higher education are more likely to send their children to tertiary education.

Nearly 8 million young people are neither in employment, education, or training, a generation that could be scarred for life by lower wages and precarious employment.

High unemployment and precarious jobs are helping to fuel inequality, and the trend risks getting worse as long - term unemployment persists.

Education and training are needed to help the jobless. Education is an essential element of entrepreneurship. Studies show that students who receive entrepreneurship education are not only more likely to be employed, but also more likely to start their own companies. With that in mind, the European Commission has proposed a series of actions that will help expose students to entrepreneurship and, as a result, help create jobs throughout Europe.

In the global stage knowledge is the greatest asset.

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