Introduction

Public policies have more impact in their design and implementation when there is active collaboration between government institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs). Moreover, public policies and programs require locally generated information and analyses which respond to the needs of citizens, thus increasing their impact and sustainability.

The following is a presentation of the Educiudadania (Edu-citizenry) experience, an initiative sponsored and co-funded by the European Union that has enabled collaboration between a public entity (the Ministry of Education) and five CSOs to develop long-term educational policies in Ecuador.

Background Information

During the 1990s, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank provided a US$160 million credit for educational initiatives address to quality improvement and decentralization of the education system in Ecuador. Nevertheless, the “Red Pen, Blue Pen” study concluded that the decision to carry out these projects outside the Ministry of Education significantly reduced their ability to achieve the desired institutional impacts and changes in the education sector (Whitman, 2004).

Although there has been a significant increase in public spending on education over the last five years, the challenge of improving not only the coverage but the quality of the education system with more transparent management, based on evidence, and with civil society participation still persists.

Cooperation through Budget Support

The European Union defines budget support as the transfer of non-reimbursable funds from a cooperation agency to the treasury of the partner country (European Union, 2008). Budget support may be of two types:

a. General budget support, which is a transfer to the national treasury for allocation to a national development policy or strategy; and,

b. Sector budget support, which is a transfer to the national treasury to fund a specific sector.

Key Points:

• International cooperation strategies work best when brought to bear on public policies.

• Public policies have greater sustainability and impact when public institutions and civil society organizations collaborate through clearly defined and autonomous roles.

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The budget support strategy of international aid has been accompanied by various rationales. In the first place, this strategy aims to strengthen the partner government’s appropriation of international cooperation. In addition, budget support, unlike aid supplied outside of the State budget, aligns development cooperation with the receiving country’s public policies. Finally, this form of aid to development encourages a culture of results-oriented management and a focus on goal fulfillment and accountability regarding the results obtained.2

Still, the budget support strategy poses a number of challenges, as well. In countries with weak institutions, it may contribute to resource use being concentrated in the State without involving other actors in society. Furthermore, there is a risk of discreptionality and diversion of funds for purposes other than those intended by the international cooperation. These risks may be counteracted by jointly defining the indicators and goals to be met since they are part of the State’s sector or national policy itself as prior conditions for the provision of the non-reimbursable budget support.

The Educiudadania Experience in Ecuador

The 2006 – 2015 Ten-Year Education Plan (PDE, as abbreviated in Spanish) is a set of eight public policies intended to improve the quality of education and bring about greater equity, ensuring universal access to and continuance in the education system. Civic support in its implementation and operation is important, as this can help to identify critical snags and to create viable action proposals to enhance accomplishment of objectives. The PDE is funded through State General Budget resources and international cooperation.

The PDE enjoys broad social legitimacy, having been approved by 70% of the citizenry in a national referendum in 2007 and later ratified along with the new Constitution enacted in 2008. Given the importance of the PDE for Ecuador’s socioeconomic and democratic development, the European Union supports the Plan with a non-reimbursable sum of 41.2 million through sector budget support. As a complementary measure to this aid, the EU entered into an agreement with the Government of Ecuador to co-finance an initiative that would encourage civic participation in monitoring and following through on implementation and fulfillment of the PDE’s goals. Such initiatives are supported by the Constitution of 2008, which provides for establishing a system of accountability in public policy implementation.

The three-way collaboration model behind Educiudadania

European Union budget support involves both the Ministry of Education and civil society. Through a competitive process, Grupo FARO and four other CSOs were selected to form Educiudadania. The aim of this initiative is to create a citizen-based system of education indicators and to encourage the development of civic skills for more active participation in PDE implementation, including the formulation of policy proposals. Figure 1 shows the actors participating in this initiative.

To facilitate collaboration between these actors, a tripartite commission was created that meets regularly to determine key aspects of the initiative, including reporting and challenges in information development and PDE policy implementation. Each commission member has defined roles

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2 The European Union has established effectiveness as a fundamental objective of its cooperation policy. The process began in 2005 with the Paris Declaration on Development Aid Effectiveness, which gave shape to a global commitment to increase efforts in international aid harmonization, alignment and results-oriented management.
geared toward providing opportunities for synergy among the citizenry, which participates not only by monitoring the impacts of the PDE but also by inputting policy proposals intended to improve the ability of the Ministry of Education and of the resources contributed by international cooperation to achieve the proposed goals.

**Cooperation - State - Civil Society Relationship: Some Policy Guidelines**

Educiudadania has created a space for collaboration between key actors without whose participation the success of educational policies would be hampered. This is particularly important in a country like Ecuador, where the levels of regional fragmentation and ideological polarization make it difficult to establish relationships of trust between public and private actors.

The initiative still poses several challenges, however. The first, and probably most important, concerns the ability of the actors involved to identify their roles in the process: that of international cooperation agencies to provide support through funding and technical assistance; that of the Ministry of Education to direct the implementation of educational policies; and that of the CSOs to democratize the process to enrich it with ideas and participation by parents, students, private enterprise and organizations present at the local level.

This collaboration is not without its tensions, but may be handled productively to the extent that the actors recognize the benefit to society of working as partners, albeit from different spheres and with distinct and autonomous roles.

It is also important to take into account that it is not enough to generate information if it is not conveyed to different audiences, not only to actors that customarily have such access, but also to those who require it for more informed participation at the local level. Educiudadania, in partnership with several municipal governments, is thus encouraging the use of cellular telephones and a website to spread information on PDE progress and challenges at the local and national levels.³

³The Educiudadania website address is www.educiudadania.org.
Finally, Educiudadania faces the challenge of instigating civic participation that is not limited to observation, but also involves eliciting policy proposals that can improve the PDE’s execution and outcomes.

Conclusions

- International cooperation strategies work best when focused on public policies. The results-based approach to policies can induce collaboration between public institutions, civil society organizations and international cooperation agencies, and determine the role they play in bringing about the fulfillment of goals.

- Public policies have more likelihood of accomplishing their objectives if they are based on locally generated information and knowledge. International aid can play an important part by supporting information development at the local and national levels by actors in civil society, both public and private, as well as capacity building for improvement of public policy design, implementation and evaluation processes.

- Citizens have a key role in promoting more transparent, higher quality policies. Initiatives like Educiudadania demonstrate the feasibility of establishing alliances between state entities and civic organizations that, buttressed by international cooperation, can reinforce a public sphere where the State, civil society and the private sector cooperate in deciding the public policies necessary for society’s development.

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References


Project Information

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