

## **Equity, Knowledge, and Development: Towards a Policy on the Advancement of Knowledge in RELAL**

Research Policies Preparation Team of RELAL (Lasallian Region of Latin America)

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### **The Context**

The Latin American and Caribbean Region is going through significant social, political, economic, and cultural transformations that evidence how its potential is making it one of the most promising territories on the planet in terms of biodiversity, cultural plurality, productivity, social mobility, and development. Nevertheless, in spite of this encouraging reality, it is necessary to recognize that it continues to be the region of greatest distributive inequality on the planet<sup>1</sup> and, for that reason, economic, social, and cultural gaps continue to be factors that slow the growth and well-being of its nations.

There are advances, but innumerable situations persist that reveal the distance that exists between the current situation, characterized by manifest inequalities, and the permanent aspiration to a just, democratic, and participatory society. The economic, social, and educational indicators reveal important advances,<sup>2</sup> but at the same time show that Latin America and the Caribbean should design an agenda that proposes equality as the essential pivot point for their development.

Besides the aforementioned points, crucial themes are arising in the region that still cause worry and pose overwhelming challenges, like climate change and the need for a new model of development based on sustainability that reverses the loss of natural resources and the deterioration of ecosystems;<sup>3</sup> the protection, guarantee of, and education on human rights;<sup>4</sup> the financing of an agenda of regional integration focused on the strengthening of the democratic systems of the member states; and, the joint resolution of common problems of political and social order, such as inequalities based on age, ethnicity, and gender, as well as a sustained reduction of poverty and the social inclusion of vulnerable and excluded minorities,<sup>5</sup> such as occurs with children and youth in indigenous and Afro-American populations.<sup>6</sup>

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In this context, the Lasallians of Latin America and the Caribbean, conscious of the importance highlighting the need to contribute to and work toward the improvement of the quality of life of our nations, recognize the potential that institutions of higher learning and other educational and distributive programs possess to respond to the dynamics, contexts and problems inherent to the region. Such institutions are ready to collaborate in the search for and development of new routes conducive to a tangible transformation of those situations of inequality that make our countries vulnerable, by means of the incorporation of relevant programs of study and the production of knowledge within local, national and regional reach.

In this way, prepared to recognize this enormous potential, and the pedagogical and social legacy consolidated in the last two centuries in different areas of our region, we accept the commitments proposed by the first International Assembly for the Lasallian Educational Mission of 2006, the Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America (PERLA) document,<sup>9</sup> as well the other Regional Assemblies that have taken place in RELAL, in order to respond firmly to the pressing challenges that emerge in this sector of the continent.

Accordingly, contributing to a better social, economic, political, educational, and cultural atmosphere in our region requires the Lasallian Institutions of Higher Learning (IESL) to develop a Regional Policy on the Advancement of Knowledge that reflects on the incorporation of decisive factors such as work on the web and the generation of processes and experiences of inter-institutional cooperation; the production of knowledge in connection with specific problems that privilege inter- and transdisciplinarity; the strengthening of processes associated with the democratization of knowledge, political participation and social mobility; and, assessment of real impact on the formation of programs and policies at different levels, whose purpose is the improvement of the quality of life, and therefore, the reduction of poverty and social inequality.

To address this urgent commitment proactively and with regional leadership is a challenge that should be faced in a joint manner based on our strengths, commitments, and the dynamics of production of knowledge that are generated in the IESL of the region and the varied districts' educational works. Opening routes and creating possibilities towards this horizon of agreement through a policy on advancement of knowledge, in addition to strengthening the inter-institutional connections and the progressive configuration of a robust and significant presence on the web of Lasallian higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, also contributes in a direct way to the understanding and resolution of problems inherent to the social, political, economic, educational and cultural panorama of our region.

### **The Justification**

One of the priorities proposed at the Tenth RELAL Assembly in October 2007 points out that it is necessary to “assure that PERLA is a reference point and articulating axis of the Region, made up as a movement that inspires our lives, generates processes and gives us identity as a Region and energizes the mission in all educational works for the service of the poor.”<sup>8</sup>

This priority materialized during the Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America (PERLA) approved by the first Regional Assembly for Mission in 2011 where it took on the option to fight to overcome poverty in the twenty-first century through education, especially that

which affects children, youth, and adults so that they may achieve their full human development, following the Lasallian charism.

This option for hope has as one of its strategic factors the advancement of knowledge,<sup>9</sup> understood as an essential element in contributing to the reduction of poverty and the transformation of educational communities into organizations that learn. The theme of the advancement of knowledge is proposed through various means for each of the following priorities detected by the Assembly:

- Creation of research and reflection teams focused on the commitment to academic quality and the problems of poverty (Priority: Democratization of Knowledge, Objective 5, Line of Action b).
- Implementation of common research and development projects (Priority: Democratization of Knowledge, Objective 5, Line of Action d).
- Development of research that supports PERLA objectives: new cultures and the language of young people in the region, the situations and rights of children and youth, proposals for catechesis and evangelization (Priority: Democratization of Knowledge, Objective 7, Line of Action d).
- Development of programs that generate synergies and promote implementation of the PERLA project (Priority: New Technologies, Objective 3, Line of Action a).
- Promotion of applications and spaces that permit the production and generation of pedagogical knowledge for educators (Priority: Quality Education, Objective 2, Line of Action c).
- Development of actions that arise from the dialogue of diverse experiences and knowledges of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean related to sustainable development, to consolidate social relations and commitments that answer the needs of the beginning of the twenty-first century. (Priority: Education in and Based on Respect for Human Rights, Especially of Children and Youth, Objective 2, Line of Action c).
- Promotion at the regional, district, and delegational levels of educational monitoring centers for the rights of children and youth in Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategy for analysis, advancement, formation, and research centered on these rights. (Priority: Education in and Based on Respect for Human Rights, Especially of Children and Youth, Objective 2, Line of Action d).

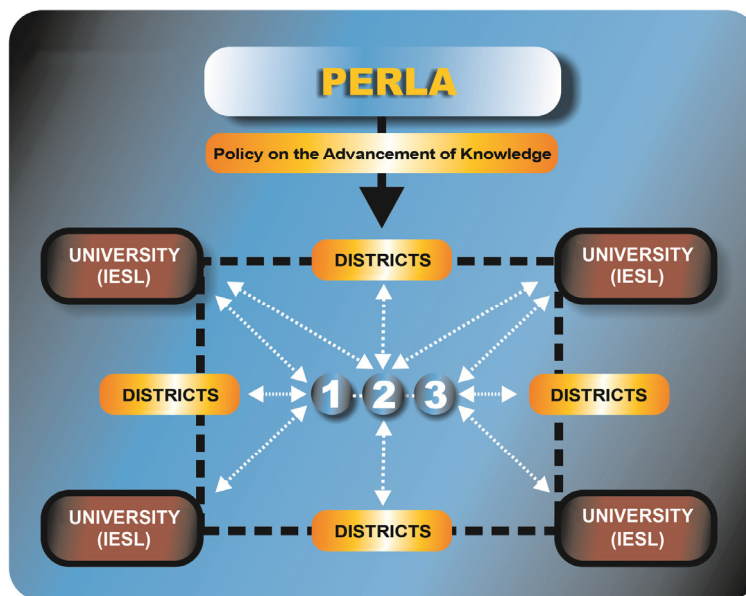
In addition, the Regional Conference of Visitors (CRV), in conformity with the goals of PERLA and with Priority #5 of the first Regional Assembly for Mission, approved the creation of a regional policy of research (Regional Plan of Action 2011-2014), here denominated as the Regional Policy on the Advancement of Knowledge, with the objective of positioning the processes of generation, appropriation, and application of knowledge as a designed commitment

based on strategic areas to address at the level of higher education as well as in our other district works.

## The Vision

That in 2020, the Lasallian Institutions of Higher Learning (IESL) that make up RELAL be recognized, by international organizations, based on the social impact of its dynamic development of knowledge that permits it to participate actively in combined processes of research and innovation, oriented to contributing in a significant way to the fomentation of social equity and sustainable human development of the region, in consonance with the educational priorities posed by PERLA.

**Figure 1:**  
**Policy on the Advancement of Knowledge, Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America (PERLA)**



## General Objective

To promote in Lasallian Institutions of Higher Learning that make up RELAL joint actions of creation, socialization, and application of knowledge that respond in a significant way to the Educational Urgencies posed by the Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America, prioritizing the strategic areas of Promotion of Knowledge for Social Equity and of Integral and Sustainable Human Development with a Focus on Human Rights.

## Strategic Areas

**Promotion of knowledge for social equity:** Education and knowledge are factors that significantly impact the processes of cohesion and social integration,<sup>10</sup> permitting citizens to

increase their freedoms in order to achieve equal enjoyment of a basic quality of life. This supposes, therefore, that societies whose educational systems function on a base of criteria such as universality, free and mandatory education, quality, and equity are found to be associated with better levels of development.

The preceding means that equity and education are two sides of the same coin that assures a society's participation in qualified levels of well-being. For this reason, education and knowledge become significant areas but, at the same time, vital elements that should be taken into consideration at the moment of profiling actions that contribute to the reduction of inequalities in the region, especially in sectors where the gaps are evident.

Also, different realities associated with regional and world order, like climate change, food and nutritional safety, access to water, and the imperative need for the use of renewable energies among others,<sup>11</sup> place the pressing responsibility to implement a model of sustainable development that functions in the different dimensions of human life at the center of debate and political action.

Such a responsibility carries with it the evaluation and incorporation of processes of production of knowledge and citizen formation that privilege the sense of responsible use of natural resources, participation, mobilization and social inclusion, visibility and application of ethnic and common knowledge in the resolution of local problems, as well as the advancement of initiatives that favor the progressive reduction of other gaps linked to geographic location, access to science and technology, as well as dynamics of employment and institutional labor.

Along these lines, the present strategic area reflects on encouraging research initiatives focused on citizen education for democracy; the commitment to public policies of education, science, and technology; the perspective of gender in the processes of construction of knowledge; and, social and political attention to and empowerment of vulnerable population sectors, especially children, youth, women, and indigenous groups.

**Integral and Sustainable Human Development with a Focus on Human Rights:** Human development by definition consists of both economic development as well as elements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which makes it a cohesive concept that tries to represent and measure the quality of life of human beings within the context in which they are found. Particularly the concept implies the creation of structural conditions that guarantee the exercise of freedom of choice between options to satisfy basic as well as complementary needs. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of the needs of the current generation cannot compromise the fulfillment of the needs of future generations. For this reason, development and the overcoming of inequalities should be based on consideration of environmental, economic, and sociopolitical sustainability.

Therefore, these aspirations are framed by a focus on rights, recognized by the United Nations in its Millennium Declaration,<sup>12</sup> where among other aspects it contemplates specific objectives such as: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; gender equality and women's autonomy; guaranteeing the support of the environment, etc. These aspirations are considered priorities in

our contemporary society, especially considering the case of the Latin American and Caribbean Region where there exists high and persistent social inequalities.<sup>13</sup>

Various factors contribute to this inequality and, to reduce it, it is necessary that individuals have opportunities to access goods and services. In order to stop the spread of poverty and inequality it is necessary to be aware of and act upon certain aspects that influence this problem such as: low socioeconomic mobility; precarious political representation; the absence of adequate concrete public policies geared to the reality of each context; and historical and cultural factors, among others. The guiding principle in the design of actions, programs, and policies of development should be a focus on rights, the social thought of the church, and Lasallianism.

In this way, it is important to not lose sight, according to the Lasallian tradition, of what it means to take on, evangelically and from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, the pressing tasks of the dignification of the human being and to work together with other citizens and institutions for the common good. It requires the development of a social, economic, and political order that reduces social inequality, promotes the values of justice, solidarity, and charity, and facilitates constructive dialogue for the necessary social consensuses, where citizens effectively can be the subjects of their own growth and development.

### **Orienting Criteria**

- Collaborative, systemic, inter-institutional, interdisciplinary, and/or transdisciplinary work that assigns the Districts and the IESL of the region as decisive partners in research processes.
- Permanent participation and communication through different technological media with specific goals and results.
- Interaction and contribution from practical and academic knowledge as capital with specific transformative potential for the region.
- Leadership tied to concrete responsibilities that permit the coordination of research, the dissemination of information, and the assessment of achievements gained.
- Generation of research projects that privilege useful, relevant, and pertinent knowledge.
- To join the work developed in RELAL with other organizations, as much in processes of socialization, participation in experiences, and completed works as well as in active, interdisciplinary, and inter-institutional connections.

### **Lines of Action**

- Creation of a mediating interdisciplinary and inter-institutional team that coordinates, accompanies, and assesses the corresponding actions of this strategic area.

- Design and development of at least four research projects dealing with specific problems contained in these strategic areas during the next two years.
- Establishment of two Regional Forums for socialization and feedback about projects executed in the years 2013 and 2014.
- Generation of joint research projects of local, national, and regional impact.
- Participation in the RELAL Assembly that makes visible the good practice of synergistic work and the impacts produced in this strategic area.
- Institution of the Regional Meeting of the Governing and Responsible Rectors and Administrators on research of the IESL and RELAL.
- Design and implementation of strategies to publicize and exchange experiences, research and existing publications in the Lasallian Institutions of Higher Learning (IESL).
- To incentivize and consolidate lines and groups of inter-institutional research that respond to the criteria proposed in these strategic areas.
- To design strategies to circulate and disseminate the experiences and results of existing research in these areas, among the IESL, and at the regional level and including other non-Lasallian institutions and organizations.
- Creation of an interdisciplinary team in the IESL and in the Region that coordinates, accompanies, and evaluates the corresponding actions in these strategic areas.

### **Notes**

1. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), United Nations. May 2010. *Time for Equality: Closing Gaps, Opening Trails*. CEPAL: Santiago, Chile.

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3. United Nations Development Programme. 2011. *Human Development Report 2011: Sustainability and Equity: A better future for all*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

4. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-OREALC). 2007. *Quality Education for All: A Human Rights Issue*. UNESCO-OREALC, Santiago, Chile. Also, CEPAL, *Time for Equality*.

5. Ki-moon, Ban. 2010. "Remarks on the Occasion of the Launch of the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report." United Nations Headquarters, New York, NY: 23 June 2010.
6. CEPAL, *Time for Equality*.
7. Lasallian Region of Latin America. 2011. *Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America (PERLA)*. RELAL, Bogotá, Colombia.
8. RELAL, *PERLA*.
9. The function of the development of knowledge is to plan, implement, and control all activities related to knowledge and programs required for effective administration of intellectual capital. K. Wiig. "Integrating Intellectual Capital and Knowledge Management." *Long Range Planning* 30(3): 399-405.
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11. United Nations. 2012. *Report of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*. United Nations: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
12. United Nations. 2000. "General Assembly Resolution 55/2: United Nations Millennium Declaration."
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