Abstract

The research presented in this article concerns la Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation—AECI) and its growing presence in Latin America since the late 1990s. The aim is to evaluate the transformative potential that bilateral funding can have on educational reform in the region. The article starts with a brief history of Spain’s past and present strategies for educational initiatives in Latin America, and then it focuses on three of AECI’s successful projects: basic and adult literacy; gender mainstreaming in development projects; and multicultural and bilingual education. The article explains the effectiveness of Spanish-sponsored projects.
in Latin America and compares their strategies with those of other bilateral and multilateral donors, such as PREAL. The article concludes by analysing multi-sectoral development efforts that are the foundation of educational strategies sponsored with Spanish funds, based on the grounds that elimination of poverty will not result from projects that focus exclusively on the individual or the family, but rather from those at the community level. AECl’s efforts are directed at cultivating internal capacities already present in the communities through training human resources and deploying financial resources.

Introduction

In 1996 the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed upon a strategic plan for worldwide development aid to help more than 1 billion people living in poverty (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996). Consistent with this plan, the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Spanish Agency for International Co-operation—AECl) redefined its goal for international aid so as to focus on increasing access to basic education as a means of reducing poverty. Collaborating with governments and non-governmental organizations, AECl has financed a wide range of development and education programmes in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Latin America is now the agency’s priority region, with Bolivia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru as the agency’s top-priority countries. These countries are the ones that have the lowest degree of economic development in the region or that have a high concentration of indigenous groups living in poverty. AECl seeks to promote global human development with an emphasis on fighting poverty and promoting equality of opportunity through its programmes.

The research presented here concerns AECl’s growing presence in Latin America since the late 1990s. It starts with a brief history looking at Spain’s past and present strategies for educational initiatives in Latin America. The aim of this piece is to focus on three of AECl’s more successful projects: basic and adult literacy; gender equity; and multicultural and bilingual education. Finally, the analysis moves on to explain the effectiveness of Spanish-sponsored projects in Latin America and compares their strategies with those of other bilateral and multilateral donors such as PREAL (Partnership for Educational Revitalisation in the Americas).2

The history of Spanish co-operation with Latin America3

The post-colonial history of Spanish co-operation with Latin America starts during the rule of Francisco Franco, when the objective was to overcome the isolation in world affairs that Spain had suffered since the Spanish Civil War. As a result, in 1942 the Consejo de la Hispanidad was created and in 1946 the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica. These two institutions were the predecessors of the AECl. During those years,