

ADVANCED HUMAN CAPITAL TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

The knowledge society brings forward the importance (precisely, and as it would be expected) of knowledge as the source and essential basis of the competitive advantage of nations, organizations and persons. As foreseen by Peter Drucker, formal education is ever more advanced and more demanding in order to perform with social efficacy in society nowadays.

Nations having an advanced social capital, with a cutting edge training, have a 0.25-0.44% growing potential for each year of average schooling of the population, according to studies by Robert Barro. In addition, the creation or generation of ideas and the development of intangibles such as innovations, trademarks, patents, organization systems, organizational routines and knowhow, constitute forms of knowledge that are some of the main determinants of the success of organizations. In turn, at the level of the people, knowledge as expressed in the level of education, generates a larger individual productivity and better remuneration, which is around 5-10% per additional schooling year, according to Barro.

Therefore, knowledge is fundamental and a priority for progress and for the individual and collective development of persons and nations. In this context, the advanced training of human capital at the level of tertiary education should be a strategic priority, since it is essential for countries to get adequately inserted in the knowledge society.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, significant efforts have been made in this direction. The enrollment in universities of the region has gone from less than seven million students in 1990, to a current level above 24 million students. Correspondingly, an average weighted gross registration rate of 20% has increased to about 54%.

Nevertheless, the region still maintains an important challenge inasmuch as the coverage. While countries like Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico exceed 50% of coverage in higher educations, another group of countries: Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Panama, Bolivia, Cuba, Paraguay, El Salvador, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Guatemala, Belice, Nicaragua, Santa Lucia, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago, Surinam, Guyana and Dominica maintain levels of gross coverage below 50%.

The question is: if the majority of persons in a nation do not reach tertiary education, how could this nation incorporate itself into the knowledge society? The following question is: if the majority of the countries in a given region have systems with a coverage under 50%, how can this geographic region insert itself, as a whole, in the society of knowledge? The answers suggest the importance to continue betting in a decisive manner on the training of the future generations.

For Latin America and the Caribbean, notwithstanding notable advances, the access to higher education remains an unsolved problem, at least in the magnitude needed to compete successfully in a society where the advanced human capital is the basis of competitive advantage.

The fact that the quality assurance systems constitute vital platforms to warrant not only coverage but also the adequacy of the intellectual training in tertiary education, has to be added to the previous challenge. In several countries of the region quality assurance has advanced in the culture of the institutions and in the establishment of formal quality requirements. However, in Latin America and the Caribbean does not exist as yet a consolidated quality assurance system that could warrant sufficiency in the training of people at an advanced level and its subsequent successful insertion in the labor market and in society.

Recognizing the advances experimented in the region, the coverage of higher education and the quality of tertiary training continues to be, in the short term, a pending challenge. It is indispensable to continue investing, in the necessary amounts, in order to reach higher levels of amplitude and depth, both in quantity as in quality, of the trained persons.

At a longer term the necessary articulation within the regional space has to be added, incorporating research, development and innovation as central elements that should coexist and generate synergies with the training processes, in view of a strengthening of graduate programs, mainly at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels.

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