



Ecuador's Commitment to Youth

*by Leonardo Arízaga**

In 2006, the Government of the Citizen's Revolution was given a mandate by the people of Ecuador to undertake a radical change to the economic, social and political structures in our country. Led by the economist Rafael Correa Delgado, our political project undertakes the creation of a new Nation. Working on this new present, and guiding it towards a more just and progressive future, is in all our interests, but especially in the interest of young people. Many of our hopes reside in our country's young people to continue driving this process forward towards a more just, equal, prosperous and solidary country.

The 2008 Political Constitution, a triumph of voter turnout, put forward the main role of our country's youth in article 39, by recognizing them as holders of rights and strategic agents of development.

According to the INEC (National Institute of Census and Statistics) figures, the youth population in Ecuador, between 13 and 19 years of age, is 4,883,536. Of these, 3,306,457 are aged between 18 and 29. The main Ecuadorian public policies aimed at young people are underlined by one of the strategic pillars for transforming the country, that is: education.

As President Correa states, "without Revolution on education there would not be Citizen Revolution". The foundation of our democracy is equality of opportunities, and in education, this is reflected in the work that guarantees equal access at all levels. Furthermore, we want to rid ourselves of our dependencies and progress towards an economy based on the creation of new knowledge. Transforming the education system and orienting it towards excellence is the best way of guaranteeing the fulfilment of the academic, technical, and professional potential of our human talent, and, in this way, contributing to the grand project for change of the productive matrix.

The 2008 Constitution guarantees a 0.5% annual increase of the education budget until it reaches 6% of GDP. Nevertheless, the current government has allocated the biggest portion of the state budget, 15% in total, to the Ministry of Education. With this investment effort, this Government demonstrates that one of the most important aspects of public policy is, precisely, the education, training and specialisation of young people.

According to the Senescyt (Secretariat of Higher Education, Science and Technology), in Ecuador public spending in education increased to 2.12% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014. This figure is higher than in countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Chile and



Paraguay, and is higher than the average of countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), which is estimated at 1.7%.

The Government's education strategy focuses on strengthening state education at every level. At the base level, as well as providing public schools with enough resources, including training new teachers, the *Unidades de Milenio* (Millennium Educational Units) project marks the beginning of a new education model in the country. To date, there are 45 Millennium Schools, which guarantee equal access for everyone to a first rate education.

In terms of secondary education, through an agreement with the Swiss IB Foundations, work is being done to install the international baccalaureate in 500 schools by 2017.

In terms of higher education, four new public universities have been founded that are world-leaders in disciplines that are key to the development of the country.

The Yachay Tech University, located in Imbabura, is the first technological city planned in Latin America, with an extensive potential to become a hub for technological development and innovation. The Amazon Ikiam University is located in the biggest natural laboratory in the world. Taking advantage of its mega-diverse environment surrounding the Ecuadorian Amazon, it aims to become a reference point and a world-leader in Bio-Knowledge. The National University of Education (UNAE), based in the Cañar province, is focused on training teachers and specialists that are to become part of the national education system. And, lastly, the Arts University (UNIARTES), based in Guayaquil, is oriented towards research and training the most talented in the country in different artistic disciplines and in the area of cultural industries.

Another fundamental aspect of the Government's higher education policies relates to grants, which aims to facilitate access to education and help young people and adults to undertake their studies in first-class universities around the world, prioritising the knowledge that is needed for the development of the country. In the last eight years, the Government of the Citizen's Revolution has awarded the most grants in Ecuador's history. Currently, there are more than 10,000 grant-holders carrying out master or a doctorate programmes in the best universities around the world. This represents the largest investment on grants in relation to GDP in all of Latin America.

The transversal approach of this national effort is aimed at promoting the generation of new knowledge and quality scientific production, strategically underlined with intellectual property and how it may serve the development of Ecuador and its people.



The National Plan for Good Living (*Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir* 2013-2017)¹ guarantees quality employment in all its forms. In order to achieve this, work placement programmes work towards helping the young people in vulnerable situations; these programmes, by extension, also contribute to eliminating inequality in our country. Through the delivery programme for the Human Development Credit, in 2014 the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion gave more than \$21 million to capitalise on the entrepreneurial and productive potential of young people who find themselves in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, the Ministry of Employment, through the Sector Strategy for Youth Employment, facilitates entrepreneurship and employability focusing on equality. Finally, the National Council for Intergenerational Equality reinforces the programmes for the reintegration of adolescents and young people who have been deprived of freedom, and promotes action geared towards helping young mothers to continue with their education.

These achievements provide motivation to continue working, to strengthen our capabilities, and to improve day after day to cement these transformations and make them irreversible. Our young people are the hope of the Ecuadorian people, and of the Government, which has bestowed on them a fundamental role in this task. Our shared objective is to construct a new Nation, based on Sumak Kawsay, a new country that is fair, prosperous, sovereign, solidary and inclusive.

***Leonardo Arízaga** is the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Ecuador. This paper is a contribution to March 2015 edition of the EU- LAC Foundation on Youth Employment. This translation is under the responsibility of the EU-LAC Foundation. See the original version in Spanish via the link:

<http://eulacfoundation.org/sites/eulacfoundation.org/files/VicecancillerLeonardo%20Ar%C3%A9zaga.pdf>

¹ The *Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir* (2013-17) is the document that sets out the guidelines to reach the aims and objectives of the development outlined by the Ecuadorian government for this period.