THEMATIC AREA: 12.2 – The development and future of Higher Education in the Caribbean

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **Balance:**

Latin America and the Caribbean are recognized as regions with significant inequality, but it is important to note that they are not a homogeneous block. Their internal differences must be considered when addressing their needs and initiatives. In the Caribbean, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities beyond the traditional concentration of wealth. This is due to the disruption of traditional educational paradigms, demographic changes, and the widespread use of virtualization - all occurring amid an economic crisis and profound geopolitical changes, influenced by climate change and natural disasters. These factors have compounded historical problems such as increasing dropout rates and reduced enrollment, particularly among vulnerable groups. The Caribbean region is strategically important, and as such, it is working to overcome structural gaps in education, improve its systems and institutions, and address challenges such as access and equity, quality of education, financing, technological integration, and the changing needs of a globalized labor market.

2. **Priority challenges:**

The future of higher education in the Caribbean region should focus on strengthening its substantive processes, including teaching, research, and extension, through contextual responses. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on developing a communication and support infrastructure that unites Latin America and the Caribbean. Caribbean higher education institutions face economic restrictions, permanent contraction of public resources, and limited financing. Therefore, it is crucial to use resources optimally and increase efficiency, especially in terms of the matriculation-graduation relationship. This means satisfying the demands for access and permanence and designing diverse and dissimilar trajectories in correspondence with demographic trends. Education is a basic human right, and higher education institutions must foster an environment that values diversity and promotes equity and social justice. This should not compromise new educational paradigms. Governments and stakeholders should develop and implement appropriate and relevant models for the governance, financing, and development of higher education systems. These models should be guided by the principles of decolonization, inclusion, equity, quality, efficiency, autonomy, participation, and accountability. Decolonization requires transcending curricula and moving towards the transformation of academic structures, processes, governance structures, organizational culture, and the vision of quality. Furthermore, it involves considering reparation for victims, All of these aspects together pose significant challenges.

Recommendations:

Based on the balance and the challenges identified, the following recommendations were made::

- Universalization of quality higher education for al in the Caribbean Regionl, at all stages of life.

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- Promotion of innovative teaching and learning processes, continuous review of curricula that contribute to comprehensive training and are aligned with the technological changes, socioeconomic needs and demands of the national, regional and global labor market.
- Commitment to the responsibility of States with the financing of higher education, rebalancing of budgets and optimization of accountability and transparency in the use of funds.
- Establishment of public policies and systems for inclusive access, permanence, and diversity.
- Creating effective governance structures that enhance efficiency and effectiveness, while maintaining high quality standards.

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