

## **EDUCATION FOR ALL IN ACTION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

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În articol este prezentată o analiză a rolului și impactului strategiilor și programelor educaționale ale Organizației Națiunilor Unite (ONU) în contextul reformei sistemului național de învățământ. Un accent deosebit se pune pe elaborarea și implementarea strategiilor și planurilor naționale de dezvoltare ce asigură realizarea Obiectivelor de Dezvoltare ale Mileniului și Țintelor Educației pentru toți prin asigurarea accesului echitabil la programele educaționale de calitate pentru toți copiii, în special pentru copiii din familiile vulnerabile și cei cu cerințe educaționale speciale.

Sunt elaborate și puse în aplicare noi mecanisme care facilitează mobilizarea resurselor și folosirea eficientă a fondurilor, fortificarea parteneriatelor în educație la nivel național și global, acordarea priorităților programelor de dezvoltare timpurie și pregătirea pentru școală, cât și lansarea programelor educaționale de alternativă și instruirea continuă a profesorilor în contextul noilor cerințe și provocări.

Este evaluată experiența centrelor comunitare create în Moldova prin prisma viabilității și a perspectivelor de extindere a acestui nou model la nivel național în cadrul proiectului EFA/FTI.

În contextul fortificării parteneriatelor în educație, implementarea proiectului EFA/FTI reprezintă o practică pozitivă de cooperare eficientă între Guvern, societatea civilă, APL, mediul academic și donatori. S-a demonstrat ca abordarea participativă adoptată a asigurat compatibilitatea în stabilirea unei platforme strategice comune între toți actorii implicați în acest proces pentru a mobiliza toate eforturile sociale și resursele financiare disponibile privind sporirea beneficiilor oferite de programul "Educație pentru toți".

### **PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION**

The Education for All (EFA) is a global initiative that aims to ensure access to education to everyone, and should be attained through national priority programs.

The Education for All process in Moldova started in 2001 in follow up to the International Conference in Dakar, where all countries were called upon to prepare or strengthen their national education development plans by incorporating the EFA goals and strategies. In December 2001, the Government of Moldova convened a National Conference on Education for All in order to sensitize public opinion to EFA issues, discuss current educational problems and set up a National EFA Forum.

Following the National Conference, the preparation of the EFA National Strategy and National Action Plan started with support from a project jointly funded by UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP. The work carried out by the project allowed the Government of Moldova and the United Nations (UN) family to study, identify and prioritize Moldova's education needs; to better define target areas for their development policies in regard to EFA, as well as to better communicate the country's needs to donors, international and regional organizations and NGOs when seeking technical and financial assistance.

Significant progress has been achieved since the project's launch in March 2002. The EFA National Strategy was approved officially on April 4th, 2003. Almost all the priorities and objectives established at the national level in regard to EFA have been reflected in the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

In order to enhance the quality of policymaking and management in the education sector, a series of capacity-building events were organized for representatives of the Government at both central and local levels.

Based on the Strategy and the background papers prepared by the national team, a result-based EFA National Action Plan aligned with the national macro-economic framework and sector development policies and strategies was developed and approved by the Government on May 5 th, 2004. The implementation of this plan was considered essential to ensuring a stable operation of the education system and enhancing its role in the economic and human development of the country. Its approval was an eloquent proof of Moldova's firm commitment to meeting the Dakar objectives and the Millennium Development Goals.

Development and endorsement of the EFA policy documents by the Moldova Government was an important step forward in addressing the low access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programs. One of the main objectives set forth in the EFA Strategy is to increase the coverage of early childhood programs up to

75% for 3-5 year old children, and up to 100% for 6-7 year old children while at the same time reducing disparities between rural and urban areas and between children from disadvantaged groups versus the general population to less than 5%.

To support the Government efforts in reaching the above objective, the UNESCO Moscow Office in cooperation with UNICEF Moldova developed a joint project “Improving Quality of and Access to Basic Services on Early Childhood Development in Rural Areas with a Special Focus on Vulnerable Groups” aimed at developing community-based models of Child and Family Centres. It was foreseen that establishment of such models would improve access to quality education programs for children from vulnerable families in rural areas, who at the moment were not enrolled in kindergartens and would provide education and training opportunities for parents in the area of Early Childhood Development.

It was the first project of this nature launched in support of the EFA National Action Plan implementation and supported financially from external sources.

That joint UNESCO/UNICEF initiative fitted under the UNDAF outcome of increasing access to basic quality services and supported MDG 2 on ensuring universal access to primary education.

There should be mentioned at least some of its most significant results. First of all, it represented a positive practice of efficient cooperation between international donors, UNESCO Moscow Office and UNICEF Moldova, with the Government of the Republic of Moldova, Local Public Administration and communities. The participatory approach adopted in the implementation of this project ensured compatibility with the objective of creating a platform to reach consensus amongst all stakeholders and mobilizing all social efforts and available resources to enhance the benefits of the Education for All Program.

The establishment of the 20 community centres, supplied with office and audiovisual equipment, furniture, didactical materials and toys, as well as professional development trainings to upgrade the quality and capacity of teaching personnel, increased access for children from vulnerable families and those with special education needs to quality early education programs. Community leaders in 20 selected communities were motivated and now possess the knowledge and skills necessary to establish and maintain community-based ECD programs for children; service providers in 20 pilot community-based Child and Family Centres possess the knowledge and skills necessary to run community-based ECD programs for children and work with parents; a set of education materials for educators and parents was developed, printed and disseminated free of charge nationally.

It's worth mentioning also that in some villages the kindergartens at that time were in a deplorable state or were not functioning for more than 14 years. In those specific conditions, the newly established educational alternatives (community centres) represented a unique opportunity to assure access to Early Childhood Education for children and their parents.

As a cost-effective community-based model, the centres were relatively easy to establish and supervise across the country. As such, after being evaluated by an international expert, it was recommended that the established Community Centres should be used as a model to supplement the existing pre-school system in the country.

This joint UNESCO/UNICEF Project served as a bridge linking Moldova to the Education for All/Fast Track Initiative (EFA/FTI).

### ***Education for All-Fast Track Initiative***

The Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA/FTI) was created in 2002 as the first ever global compact on education to help low-income countries achieve a free, universal basic education by 2015 and accelerate progress towards quality universal primary education.

The Republic of Moldova became eligible to Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA/FTI) in 2005. The EFA/FTI Catalytic Trust Fund Grant is supporting the Government overall Program designed to achieve primary education for all children in Moldova according to the Consolidated Strategy and the Consolidated Action Plan for the Education Sector (2006-2008), endorsed by the local donors in 2005.

***The EFA-FTI Project*** has been designed in compliance with SWAP stipulations, PRSP and UNDAF provisions, it is result-based and aims at achieving nationalized MDGs and EFA goals. More specifically, the project supports the Education and Early Development component of the above mentioned documents and the attainment of Moldova's Millennium Development Goals, recently revised and included in the National Development Strategy (2008-2011).

The objectives of the project are: (a) to increase the rate of enrollment of children in preschool programs, in urban and rural areas and among vulnerable social groups; (b) to extend access to quality preschool education for children at risk; (c) to increase the quality and efficiency of childcare health and education facilities and programs; (d) to provide training on early childhood development for teaching, medical and technical administrative staff in educational institutions; and (e) to consolidate social partnerships and local community involvement in early childhood development programs.

The Grant is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY) and supported by the Project Management Team.

In compliance with the Operations Manual, the World Bank as the administrator of the Grant.

The official EFA/FTI documents stipulate the nomination of UNICEF as lead donor agency for the implementation of this project. To ensure the efficient use of the Grant, the Moldovan Government and the donors' community agreed to establish different coordination mechanisms that can technically assist the government staffs to efficiently manage the implementation and the decision-makers and donors to be kept informed on the implementation progress.

Among these mechanisms, it was agreed to establish an EFA/FTI Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Education and Youth and an EFA/FTI Advisory Group, chaired by UNICEF/UNESCO.

When the Project started, the situation in early childhood care and development sub-sector did not comply with modern requirements. Causes include insufficient material and financial resources, an impoverished population, and the absence of a viable educational policy for children under 7. During the period 1994-2004, the number of pre-school institutions fell by 28%, from 1 774 in 1994-1995 academic year to 1269 in 2003-2004 academic year. Compared to 1992-1993, the number of children covered by early education programmes dropped by 57.3%. The teaching staff was reduced by 50% in this period. Part of kindergartens have been closed and liquidated, which has considerably reduced the access to early education for children aged 1-5. In 2004, preparation for compulsory schooling was provided for only about 60% of the total number of children aged 5-6, compared to more than 80% in 1992.

The gap between village and city was widening. The probability that a child from a rural area would have attended an early childhood programme is 3 times lower than for a child from an urban area. According to the year reports concerning the poverty indexes in the Republic of Moldova, issued by the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, in 2004, the rate of pre-school education in urban areas was 85%, compared to 56% in rural areas.

Alternative early education was practically inexistent, at both the central and community levels. Paying tribute to old traditions and lacking social models, the vast majority of parents do not prepare their children for modern early education.

The analysis of the structure of public expenditures made by educational institutions in 2002-2004 shows that the largest share of expenditures were directed at general secondary education (53,8%) and higher education (18,5%), followed by pre-school education (16,8%). The other sub-sectors – secondary vocational education and specialized secondary education – benefited from 5,5% of the total amount of expenditures for educational institutions. Thus, it was obvious that the way the public finances used to be distributed to various sub-sectors of the educational system did not totally comply with the defined goals.

The estimation of the expenditures required for the implementation of the Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan on Education confirmed the lack of serious gaps between the estimated financial needs and the resources planned according to MTEF 2006-2008. MTEF 2006-2008 allotted to the main directions of the educational sector reform 4939 mln. lei, which covered 92% of the needs identified in the Consolidated Action Plan. The needs which remained without coverage amounted at 436 mln. lei, or 8%.

On the other hand, the thorough analysis of the structure of expenditures planned in MTEF 2006-2008 for early childhood care and development pointed out a larger gap between the expenditures and the needs of this sub-sector: the share of uncovered needs amounted to 165 mln. lei or 19% of the total amount of needs. Therefore, at the time of project design and start, early childhood care and development sub-sector in the Republic of Moldova needed an immediate support within the Fast Track Initiative.

### ***Major results***

The results achieved within the framework of the EFA/FTI Project implementation during the 1st year financing were as follows:

1. 33 kindergartens (one per district, US\$50,000 each), one pilot-rehabilitation centre for children with SEN, and 15 alternative community-based centres in localities with no pre-school facilities (on the average, US\$13,300 each) were renovated. Based on MEY and MSIF reports, the Grant interventions attracted in many cases additional resources from the local authorities and beneficiaries. Beside financing the design for renovation interventions (about US\$2,000 per pre-school facility), some communities contributed each with about US\$8,000 more funds to cover extra costs;

2. all institutions renovated under the project and other selected pre-school facilities all over the country were endowed with equipment and furniture;

3. a management information module for pre-school education was developed and added to the MEY EMIS system aimed at enhancing and strengthening the institutional capacity to monitor pre-school education. Computers were distributed to all district directorates for education and about 60 inspectors were trained so far in utilizing the system applications;

4. a pilot rehabilitation centre for children with special education needs was established in one of the kindergartens selected to be renovated in Straseni. It is expected that about 20 pre-school children with disabilities, currently out of the system, will benefit from education and care services in a friendly environment, endowed with special equipment. A specialized NGO performed a needs assessment, developed action plans, a methodological guide for parents and educators, and training of educators; the methodological guide is considered a useful tool to be widely used in the system nationally. This model is expected to be replicated in the future under EFA-FTI Year II financing and possibly under other programmes;

5. a set of policy documents on ECD (Curriculum, Methodological Guide for Curriculum implementation, learning and development standards for children and professional standards for teachers) and didactical materials inclusive of marginalized groups were developed with UNICEF support;

6. the upgrading of skills of managers, administrative staff and teaching staff in pre-school units was supported through the Grant in order to facilitate the introduction of the new curricula, to promote child-centred methodologies, to facilitate behavioural and mentality changes among educators. Generally speaking, the organized training activities aimed at improving the quality of education services and increasing the capacity for efficient partnerships with local communities. The training programme covered 210 trainers subsequently involved in a cascade training model benefiting 2,600 managers and pre-school teachers trained on managerial and ECD related issues. About 200 training sessions were organized in 33 districts and two municipalities. In addition, during two study-tours, staff from the MEY, Ministry of Finance, pre-school teachers, inspectors, etc. benefited from a direct contact with most successful ECD interventions undertaken in the Czech Republic and Northern Ireland;

7. the Grant supported a nationwide communication and social mobilization campaign aimed at promoting school readiness and strengthening social partnerships and local community involvement in early childhood care and development programmes.

As a whole, it can be concluded that the outcomes of the first year comply with the Grant's objectives and with the objectives of the Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan for Education sector for 2006-2008. The positive impact of the project's outcomes on the situation within early childhood care and development sub-sector is confirmed by:

1. increased rate of enrolment in pre-school education of children aged 3-6 from 49.2% in 2005 to 53.0% in 2006. As concerning the year 2007, the Ministry of Education estimates an increase by 10%;

2. increased rate of enrolment in pre-school education of children aged 6-7 from 75.6% in 2005 to 85.0% in 2007;

3. change of attitude and mobilization of both central and local government authorities and of the communities to solve the problems faced by early childhood care and development sub-sector;

4. updating the approaches to planning budgetary expenditures for early childhood care and development sub-sector and augmenting the amount of financial resources for this sub-sector.

### **Conclusions**

1. When the Project started, early in 2005, the situation in early childhood care and development sub-sector did not correspond anyhow to modern requirements. A large number of pre-school educational institutions were closed and the major indicators describing the situation within the sub-sector were worsening, compared to the year 1992. The way to share public finances for the educational system did not comply totally with the

established goals, while the share of consolidated budget expenditures for pre-school education was lower, compared to the expenditures for primary and general secondary education;

2. In order to improve the situation, the Government of the Republic of Moldova developed a set of policy documents which targeted the educational sector directly. The most important of them are: the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, Millennium Development Goals in the Republic of Moldova to 2015, Education for All National Strategy, Education for All National Action Plan for 2004-2008, Programme for the Modernization of the Educational System in the Republic of Moldova, Republic of Moldova – European Union Action Plan. Based on such programme documents, the Ministry of Education and Youth has developed and started the implementation of the Consolidated Strategy and Consolidated Action Plan for the Education Sector for 2006-2008. These documents set explicit objectives and tasks for all sub-sectors of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova;

3. Based on the evaluation of the Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan on Education (2006-2008) undertaken by UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank, and in accordance with developed Simulations Models, which were MTEF based, it came out that a budgetary deficit of 13.3 million US dollars restrained the Ministry of Education and Youth from achieving all pre-school education sub-sector goals. So, it was recommended to use the FTI Partnership's Catalytic Fund to cover that funding gap. Funding of specific ECD activities from the Consolidated Action Plan on Education during the I-st year financing contributed to increasing the equitable access to quality education programs and early childhood care and development for all children, especially for those from vulnerable families and for children with special education needs;

4. Responding to the Government's request, the Catalytic Trust Fund Strategic Committee, decided to disburse for the Republic of Moldova a grant of US\$ 4,400,000 for the period May, 2006 - May, 2007. Based on the Grant's resources, the Ministry of Education and Youth started the implementation of Education For All – Fast Track Initiative Project;

5. *The relevance* of the project is confirmed by the fact that its objectives comply with the needs of early childhood care and development sub-sector and coincide to a large extent to the objectives defined in the Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan for education sector for 2006-2008. As the Project cannot cover all activities related to adjustment of legislative and normative frameworks, to improving the situation of the teaching and managerial staff in pre-school institutions, to establishing a funding tool based on cost-effectiveness criteria, to encouraging private sector provide funds for early childhood care and development, the donors recommend a more energetic Government involvement in these fields;

6. *The efficiency* of the project is ensured as a result of using transparent and open procedures for disbursement of financial resources, for making procurements of goods and services, for distribution of the procured goods and services among the beneficiaries, for keeping track of the use by the beneficiaries of goods distributed during project implementation;

7. *The effectiveness* of the project is ensured due to the explicit definition of the fields of intervention and the use of relevant and measurable performance indicators. In the same time, it is recommend to include a set of indicators reflecting: (i) the number of titles of teaching aids to be edited; (ii) the volume of each edition of a title of teaching aids; (iii) number/share of educational standards to be developed/updated; (iv) share of disabled children of pre-school age involved in the educational process; (v) share of the teaching staff who implement the new curricula and standards in their daily work;

8. *The impact* of the project was assessed by donors using the basic indicators which describe the situation in early childhood care and development sub-sector: gross enrolment rate; net enrolment rate; places available to total enrolment; transition rate. The project's long-term impact on the process of early education large-scale development will be followed-up nationwide due to the fact that the Government has revised its long-term priorities and included in the Millennium Development Goals a new task and updated targets and indicators related to pre-school education;

9. *The sustainability* of the project is ensured as a result of correlating the project's major goal, objectives and fields of intervention with long-term priorities set in the Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan for education sector for 2006-2008 and in the National Development Strategy for 2008-2011. The financial sustainability of the project's outcomes will be ensured due to the allocation of a growing share of financial resources and this fact is confirmed by the trend to increase the expenditures for pre-school education sub-sector planned in MTEF 2006-2008, MTEF 2007-2009 and MTEF 2008-2010, in the Laws on State Budget for 2006, 2007 and 2008;

**10. Level of donor's participation.** Donors have been actively involved in the implementation of all project activities, both with a financial contribution and with a contribution in terms of knowledge, experience of nationwide implementation of complex projects, modern management methods, evaluation and monitoring.

***Current status of project implementation***

In March 2008 the Republic of Moldova successfully accessed the II<sup>nd</sup> year Grant tranche which amounts to US4.4 mln dollars from the Education for All/Fast Track Initiative that is supporting activities started under EFA/FTI-Grant Year I, in line with the objectives identified for the whole FTI Grant, within the same components, based on the MEY Consolidated Strategy and Action Plan on Education.

The Grant is implemented by two implementing agencies: (i) Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY), supported by the EFA/FTI Advisory Group and Project Management Team, and (ii) Moldova Social Investment Fund (MSIF). Moldova Social Investment Fund is responsible for the implementation of the Renovation Works' Component.

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