

Report on the evaluation of the first year of implementation of the project „Școala Mea”

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 Evaluation mandate

The project “Empowered Citizens Enhancing Accountability of the Education Reform and Quality of Education in Moldova” – „Școala Mea” („My School”) is implemented by the Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup in the December 2013 – December 2018 period. The project is financed by the World Bank Group through the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), with the informational support of the Ministry of Education in the Republic of Moldova.

The present intermediary evaluation, conducted after the project’s first year of implementation, was contracted based on a public contest organized by the project’s management team. Taking into account the specificities of the project, the present evaluation represents one of the steps meant to maintain a transparent relationship between public interventions and citizens on the one hand, as well as between the financing institution and beneficiary institutions, on the other hand.

I.2 Evaluation purpose and objectives

The purpose of this evaluation report consists in the intermediary evaluation of the project „*Empowered Citizens Enhancing Accountability of the Education Reform and Quality of Education in Moldova*”, after the first year of implementation (December 2013 – February 2015), in order to support the improvement of the implementation process in the next four years. The specific objectives of the evaluation refer to the assessment of predefined in the ToR such as:

- Relevancy of the project in relation to the needs of the education system in the Republic of Moldova;
- The project’s contributions to meeting the objectives which were set initially and the efficacy of programming and implementation;
- Impact on the main beneficiaries as well as on the secondary education system in the Republic of Moldova;
- Elements relating to the project’s sustainability and to the social accountability tools which were introduced;
- The contribution of social partnerships to promoting social accountability;
- The project’s contribution to changing the internal culture regarding social accountability in the educational field.

Apart from these aspects, the evaluation focused on identifying the elements which will make up the reference framework for managing the project. At the end of this process we propose an evaluation plan which will be applied until the end of the project.

I.3 The justification and utility of evaluation

As established in the programming phase, the project will be evaluated both internally and externally. If on the one hand the internal evaluation is based on outcome and output indicators for each component in the project, an independent external evaluation was considered to be necessary in order to identify elements regarding

the efficacy and impact on beneficiary groups. Thus, the evaluation exercise proposes to determine the way in which the project contributes to the implementation of reforms in the secondary education system in the Republic of Moldova.

The usefulness of the evaluation consists in the fact the information which is going to be gathered during the evaluation process will be forwarded to the project’s implementation team in order to guide them in the next stages of the project. After conducting the evaluation, through the present report, the implementation team will be given recommendations for improving the implementation of the project’s activities, the creation and application of different instruments for social accountability, as well as the involvement of partners and interested parties.

I.4 Structure of the report

The present evaluation report is structured in the following parts:

- The first part presents aspects regarding the evaluation mandate, its purpose and objectives, as well as the justification and usefulness of evaluation;
- The second part describes the evaluation approach and methodology;
- The first part consists in the application of the evaluation design and presents the main findings of the evaluation;
- The fourth part sets out the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the evaluation of the first year of project implementation.

This structure enables the users of the report to better access information and the components of the evaluation design.

II. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

II.1 Evaluation design

The mechanism of change which is the basis for the measures for social accountability assumed in the “Școala Mea” project for education reform, in the context of the implementation of the Strategy for developing education in the 2014-2020 period “Education 2020”, implies the following causal linkage: (1) the elaboration of a solid normative framework will create the premises for 2) elaborating and implementing models of social accountability which will 3) generate an environment oriented towards empowering stakeholders and decision makers, which will contribute to 4) creating responsible, inclusive and evidence-based educational policies and to 5) an increase in the quality of educational services.

To this end, taking into account the objectives and activities of the “Școala Mea” project, a CIPP – Context, Inputs, Process, Product (Results) design was used for evaluating the first year of implementation¹. In the figure below we can see the main elements which were identified and followed in the process of evaluating the project.

¹ Conceptualized by Daniel Stufflebeam.

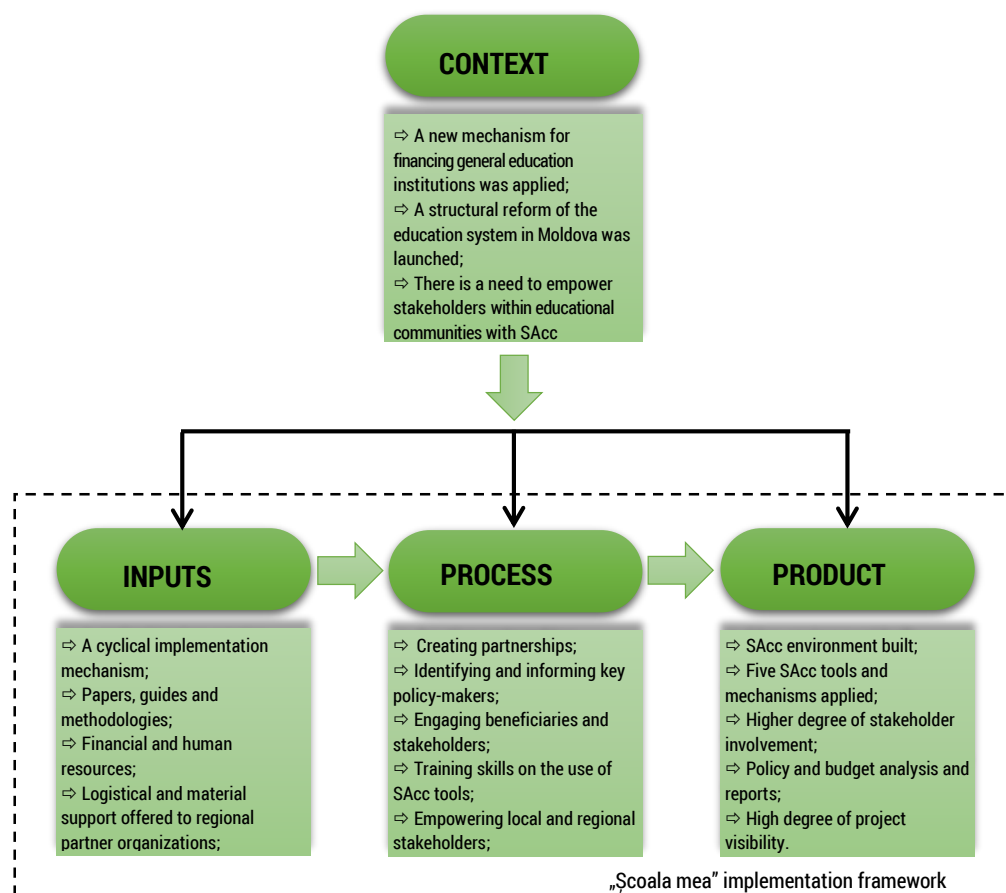


Fig. 1. „Scoală mea” intervention logic based on CIPP evaluation model

The evaluation process began from the following evaluation questions:

- Is the project relevant in relation to the needs of the beneficiaries of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova?
- To what extent has the first year of project implementation contributed to meeting the objectives which were set initially?
- Has the project had an impact on the main beneficiaries, on the secondary education system in the Republic of Moldova and on the internal culture regarding social accountability?
- Is the introduction of instruments for social accountability in participating schools in the first year of project implementation sustainable?

The application of this design resulted in a series of findings regarding the achievement of results during the first year in comparison with expected results and assumed indicators. What is more, another result is represented by a set of recommendations for improving project implementation in the following years.

II. 2 Evaluation methodology

From a methodological point of view, the evaluation is based on the following elements of qualitative investigation:

- Document analysis, which focused on the one hand on the analysis of the legislative framework and of policy documents, and on the other hand on documents from the World Bank which establish the conceptual and applicative framework of the GPSA. What is more, under the auspices of this element of investigation we also analyzed the documentation regarding the project’s implementation and existing

reports at the moment of conducting the evaluation. We also conducted an activity for identifying relevant information in the media space (electronic) of the Republic of Moldova regarding the project’s implementation;

- Discussions with representatives of project management and people who participated in the project design;
- Semi-structured interviews with representatives of the central government institutional framework. Interviews were applied at the level of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finances;
- Semi-structured interviews with representative of partner organizations at the regional level: Chișinău, Bălți, Cahul, Ungheni and Soroca;
- Discussions with a series of experts in the field of educational policies whose activity is relevant in relation to the project’s objectives.

In order to supplement the data which was collected, the management team provided the results gained from processing questionnaires for measuring the satisfaction of the project’s beneficiaries, which were applied prior to the evaluation. Taking this into consideration, from the discussion with the project management team we concluded that it was not necessary to apply quantitative inquiry instruments to the following categories of beneficiaries: representatives of school management, representative of local authorities, parents and students. However, in order to periodically collect evidences regarding the beneficiaries’ degree of satisfaction, the implementation team will periodically apply questionnaires until the project ends. At the end of the project the data which has been collected through these questionnaires will be processed in order to ensure a quantitative approach on the project’s results.

In order to establish the degree to which the state of affairs has changed since the project’s beginning and up to its evaluation, we analyzed the reference situation necessary for the comparison “*before - after*” the first year of implementation. From this perspective, in the process of creating the evaluation instruments we considered determining the contribution of the intervention – in comparison with the evolution towards this end of schools in which the project was not implemented. With regard to the analysis of results the focus was put on emphasizing elements of efficacy and relevance of the measures which were applied as part of the intervention. This entailed establishing the degree of achievement of quantifiable outputs according to the pre-established indicators.

III. APPLICATION OF THE DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

III.1 The context of the project’s implementation

The “Școala Mea” project is the first national-scale intervention implemented by the Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup in the field of educational policies. Prior to this project Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup implemented interventions in multiple domains specific to economic policies, as well as in social domains such as those regarding human development and eradication of poverty². Thus, the project which is being evaluated is considered to be a challenge for the implementing organization. At the same time, the project represents an impulse for interested stakeholders in the field of educational policies, which can benefit from another approach regarding the development of social accountability in the general education system. Determining the needs of stakeholders within the system, as well as the problems and opportunities of the latter was crucial for planning the project’s implementation process, as well as for achieving the output and outcome indicators which were set.

In the programming phase, the design team and, later on, the implementation team of the “Școala Mea” project, explored the policy window regarding the empowerment of stakeholders within educational communities to establish the development priorities of educational institutions. First of all, this policy window took into consideration the implementation of a new mechanism for financing general education institutions in the Republic of Moldova. The new financing mechanism provided the necessary framework for applying innovative methods for monitoring the efficient and relevant use of financial allocations. For the most part the monitoring methods which

² The projects and analyses previously implemented by the Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup in the field of education Economy focused more on higher education and the research, development and innovation sectors, which have different institutional and organizational characteristics in comparison with general education.

are used should be based on the application of social accountability instruments. During the construction phase of the “Școala Mea” project it was pointed out that there is a need to apply processes of creating school budgets based on instruments which would ensure the representation of the interests of stakeholders in the educational process.

This change of view regarding the financing of general education took place at the systemic level beginning with the 1st of January 2013. In the absence of the normative and methodological framework, the effects of the “Școala Mea” project on the way of creating school budgets and their development strategies would not have materialized. On the other hand, conditionalities regarding the context of gradual implementation of the new financing mechanism, as well as the stipulation of the Education Code from 2014 compels school managers to assume more responsibilities with regard to the management of funds. Thus, in order to ensure that the criteria of public accountability is respected, managers need to organize and sustain activities of gathering and consulting representatives of educational communities, in order to establish priorities for developing schools. However, this process cannot be efficient if:

- School managers will not take action to increase the involvement of stakeholders in the process of increasing the social accountability of schools;
- stakeholders will not be involved in the process of making schools more accountable

Translating these interdependent practices into the activity of schools will contribute considerably to the improvement of elaborating and monitoring budgets and strategies for developing schools. To this end, the current normative framework regarding the funding of general education is based on the following suppositions: the higher the degree of stakeholder participation, the more decisions taken by Administration Councils and school managers will correspond more to the expectation of direct and indirect beneficiaries. As a result, by applying this action logic at the level of schools, the culture of managing financial resources would improve considerably, having the direct support of the community. The project’s implementation aimed to create the context through which this process could take place bi-directionally, both through “*bottom-up*”, as well as “*top-down*” mechanisms. In order to substantiate the intervention mechanism the project’s design team took inspiration from international models of practice.

Apart from the framework generated by changing the financing mechanism, the project also had to take into account the context of elaborating and beginning the structural reform of the education system in the Republic of Moldova. In spite of the fact that certain administrative and consultative structures provided for under the previous legislative framework could have used instruments for social accountability, they did not act to this end for almost two decades³. This situation was generated as a consequence of the fact that neither the way in which the respective structures were constituted nor their mandate for functioning and accountability were based on principles of responsibility towards the educational community.

Over time several projects were implemented which were meant to contribute to increasing the degree of SAcc in the decision making process at the level of educational communities. However, these initiatives were unable to lead to the creation of a critical mass sufficient for changing the dominant paradigm – decisions being taken unilaterally by the management of educational institutions. Only in the context of recent initiatives regarding the application of the Education 2020 Strategy, as well as in that of the debate and approval of the Education Code did the elements of the new approach of educational institutions’ governance start to gain substance. This approach is mainly oriented towards using instruments specific to SAcc. With this occasion, in the context of the lack of a common understanding on the elements of social accountability, the project was meant to make the necessary preparations for implementing such mechanisms. For example, according to the approach of the Education Code, the application of deliberative methods in the process of establishing priorities for the strategic development of educational institutions is considered to be essential in the process of ensuring quality in education. Thus, both internal, as well as external evaluation, are based on participative and deliberative principles for elaborating strategies and actions for developing educational institutions.

³ See for example the case of school administration boards, which were referred to in art. 46 lit. c from the Education Law no. 457 from 21.07.1995

Another important contextual element refers to the fact that in the general education system lots of evidences are produced, collected and centralized at the level of the Ministry of Education. In spite of this fact, we can notice the existence of a weak culture of processing and systematically analyzing the collected data and, at the same time, of using them as a basis for tactics and policy and program options. This is why, taking into account the institutionalization of quality assurance at the level of some educational institutions, expectations regarding the “Școala Mea” project focused mainly on developing competencies for data collection and processing, interpreting results and using them as a basis for defining the development priorities for educational institutions.

In the absence of the habit of using open data in the education system of the Republic of Moldova, by mid-2014 there were no regulations for this and no human resources who would process the data. This is why, at the level of the Ministry of Education, expectations towards the “Școala Mea” project pointed out the need for human resources with training for processing and analyzing collected data. From this point of view there is an expectation for the project to contribute to the consolidation of the Education Management Information System, through actions such as training the different categories of stakeholders in the education system in data collection, processing, interpreting and using data in the substantiation of public policies and programs.

The main critical observation regarding the project’s context refers to the fact that in the process of elaborating it, the Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup team did not benefit from a deep knowledge of the way in which the general education system of the Republic of Moldova works. After reading the application and having discussions with the people who participated in the elaboration of the project, as well as with representatives from the Ministry of Education, we can state the fact that in the process of elaborating the project, the general education system was seen as a system similar to that of public health, social assistance etc. The assumption which was made by the team which elaborated the project was that within these public systems elements of social accountability should function in a relatively similar manner.

Taking these aspects into consideration, the intervention’s logic was substantiated on a normative perspective regarding the functioning of the education system, based on elements such as:

- the functioning of the contract between the parties (educational institution – parents);
- ensuring a transparent and deliberative process of establishing the strategies for supplying educational services;
- collecting, systemizing and distributing evidences regarding the functioning of educational institutions.

This normative perspective was mainly approached as a consequence of the age of the members within the elaboration team, who, in their capacity of recent direct beneficiaries of services offered by the education system, have established a series of expectations for improving the system. At the same time, the experience which was gained from the other projects implemented by Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup guided the team towards using the presupposition that if a mechanism of SAcc functions within a public system, then it would function and offer similar results in the educational system. If the documentation process would have taken into consideration the internal specificities of the general education system, certain risks and uncertainties could have been diminished since the first year of implementation. For example, a deeper understanding regarding the functioning of the system for collecting, processing and interpreting evidences specific to the education process would have created the necessary conditions for establishing targets and intervention mechanisms more clearly.

The expectation of the project team from the approach which was used was that of effectively contributing to sustaining change at the level of beneficiary communities and of encouraging processes of reform in education. In the programming phase the team which elaborated the project used several sources of documentation, such as reports, analyses, strategies and public policy documents. Furthermore, the team also used the method of extrapolating from the experience which was gained from implementing previous projects of Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup (for example the project “Budgetary process in the Republic of Moldova: monitoring transparency and promoting public control”, financed by the Soros Foundation in Moldova). An important aspect which needs to be mentioned refers to the fact that in the programming process, which took place between January and March 2013, the elaboration team was visionary in establishing the reference institutional framework in the process of implementing the project, according to the versions of the Education Code which were

in public debate at that time (for example, the direct reference to the Administration Council of schools which should become a pivot of educational institutions' governance etc). As a result, this documentation turned out to be a successful one, taking into account the fact that from the 216 applications⁴ in the first call for project proposals conducted within GPSA, the Independent Think-Tank Expert-Grup proposal was selected together with 11 other proposals from 10 countries. However, such an intervention requires a deeper knowledge of the way in which the education system works. An increased involvement of national experts in the field of educational policies would have diminished this structural limit of the project.

III.2 Structural elements (inputs)

From the analysis of the documents provided by the project management team, as well as from the interviews which were applied, it appears that the intervention's objectives were designed in a realistic and relevant manner in relation to the problematic situation in question. Achieving the goals is feasible for the planned period of implementation. A contribution to this is also made by the philosophy of the project implementation mechanism, which is a cyclical one, based on recurrently conducting activities, in each of the five years of implementation. However, this logic also has disadvantages, since maintaining the results obtained during one year of implementation cannot be guaranteed from one year to another, as a consequence of the lack of a monitoring mechanism or longitudinal activities, which would maintain the beneficiaries from selected schools involved during all the five years. Furthermore, regional partner organizations were not involved in the programming phase of the intervention, consequently the intervention's design was not based on their considerations. This aspect has already been identified by the beneficiary organization as being a lesson learned.

From the analysis of documents regarding the project's implementation we can notice the fact that the papers, guides and methodologies which guide the project's implementation, including the planning of activities, ensure a high level of clarity and coherence. The aspects which were unclear are mainly connected to the existence of inconsistencies between the project's calendar and the school year calendar (for example convening meetings with parents in November, given that, in practice, it is observed that the highest rate of participation of parents is at the first meeting scheduled in the school year, which takes place in October). From the accounts of the implementation team we noted the fact that in the first months of the project's implementation it was foreseen that some inconsistencies might appear in the first year of implementation in relation to the school calendar.

The logistical and material support offered to partner organizations was for the most part sufficient to the real needs of the project's implementation. The local partners mentioned the fact that more flyers and even brochures about the project would have been needed in order to enhance the project's visibility at the level of beneficiary communities. As in the case of support and methodological materials, the promotional materials were created with a slight delay, which can be explained by the limited number of human resources involved in communication and promotion activities. In spite of this fact, the people who were interviewed appreciated the quality and adequacy of methodological, informational and support materials to the specificities of the measure applied through the intervention. A considerable input of the first year of project implementation refers to the creation of the www.scoalamea.md website. The purpose of the website is to maintain contact with all the beneficiary schools, but also to inform the public regarding the project's activities and results. The project's implementation team relies on the supposition that for now face to face discussions and experience exchanges are better understood and accepted by beneficiaries. In the social context of the Republic of Moldova the supposition is an adequate one. This is why, from the perspective of using the website as a means for feedback and exchange of experience we can notice that, in generating bidirectional communication channels, the website does not yet use the mechanism of forums which would enable the direct exchange of ideas between users.

With regard to the sufficiency of financial resources and the adequacy of allocating these resources to activities and sub-activities within the evaluated intervention, from the discussions with the implementation team we concluded that more financial resources should have been allocated for awareness campaigns and for

⁴ According to data published by GPSA at <https://www.thegpsa.org/sa/funding/grant-making-process#> 12 more project application were submitted by non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Moldova;

developing the project's website. Indeed, these considerations are justified by the fact that, due to the nature of the type of intervention, the project's website gradually gains a more interactive nature than in the initial logic. The website is not only a channel for communicating the project's results, but also an instrument for storing analytical resources produced through the project and for offering information such as open data regarding school budgets.

With regard to the human resources which were used for conducting the project's activities, after our inquiries we can state the fact that they are adequately trained in relation to the needs of members within beneficiary communities. Thus, the training teams demonstrated they had sufficient competencies for working with adults, a fact which was also appreciated by the beneficiaries of training, who granted, on average, a grade of 4.5 out of a maximum of 5 in questionnaires which were applied to them. The training activities were orientated towards practicing the way of organizing processes for the effective application of Social Accountability Tools and Mechanisms (SAcc tools).

In spite of these facts, a critical aspect which derives from the way of defining the project's structural elements refers to the planning of Component 3 in the project, which was concerned with conducting detailed analyses of the budgets of schools supported through the intervention. The purpose of these analyses is to contribute to a deeper understanding regarding the budgeting process, as well as to offer the necessary arguments for ranking financing priorities. Simultaneously, mini-guides (how-to-notes) were created for the independent analyses of budgets. The materials offer minimal guidance to stakeholders for analyzing the budgets of educational institutions. However, in spite of all these facts we can notice that, in terms of planning, this activity involves only a partial empowerment of some of the stakeholders (school principals, accountants), who are involved in collecting and synthesizing data, but not in analyzing and utilizing them. Thus, the activity's logic rather focused on offering schools a final analytical document based on the collected data, elaborated by the experts within the project's beneficiary organization, and not by stakeholders. The fact that at the end of the data collection process the management of schools is provided with a detailed analysis concerning the budgets of the respective educational institutions has no direct effect in changing the action model and the budgetary culture of the beneficiary educational communities. From the perspective of supporting the process of change there is a need for the assistance given to schools towards this end to be oriented on empowering stakeholders to elaborate such analytical documents on their own. The mini-guides represent an essential step, but not enough for enabling stakeholders to conduct independent analyses of school budgets.

III.3 The implementation process

According to the implementation mechanism which was developed, the project's activities support reforms in the education system through two major areas. The first area relates to supporting the efficient use of resources in education, especially financial resources. The second area of support concerns the contribution to the development of partnerships for sustaining the educational process and for facilitating a greater involvement of all societal actors in making decisions for improving the quality of the educational process. Both areas of support should contribute to generating and maintaining a transparent and participative framework for decision making, as well as to the collection of evidences regarding the perception of parents and students regarding the educational process.

A consequence of the limit specific to the programming phase, which was detailed in section III. 1, consists in the fact that, during the first year of project implementation, in order to obtain effective and efficient results, the implementation team would have needed more informational and time resources, as well as more contacts at the level of the education system. This aspect emerged from the analysis, taking into account that the members of the implementation team within the project's beneficiary organization did not have up to that moment networking experiences with representative of the general education system. Consequently, documenting and elaborating an adequate plan for implementing the project's activities, which would be in accordance with the language and administrative culture specific to the general education system, required a greater amount of time than initially estimated.

The informational and methodological support provided by the personnel in the Ministry of Education during the first year of implementation was a substantial one. This aspect is appreciated by both parties. Thus,

during the interviews which were conducted, the project’s implementation team pointed out that the support offered by the Ministry of Education was consistent and prompt. At the same time, representatives from the Ministry of education appreciated the ability of the members in the implementation team to understand and adapt relatively rapidly to the approaches and practices which are specific to the education system.

In the same manner, representative from the Ministry of Finances stressed that the project’s implementation team, together with the representatives of the five regional partner organizations which were selected, managed to capture the essence of the financing mechanism for schools based on the standard cost per student, by using adjustment coefficients as established by the normative framework. Thus, the SAcc tools which were used in the project’s activities were well adapted to the current financing mechanism, which offers credibility and added value to the activities which were conducted.

Concerning the relationship with central and local public authorities on the one hand, as well as the relationship with beneficiary communities on the other hand, the project offers a functional communication model. In the case of the data collection process we noted that the programming phase considered the transposition of a constructive communication style that the project’s beneficiary organization had consolidated over time, during its previous activities. This communication style had previously been used in an effective manner in the relationship with ministries such as the Ministry of Finances, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of External Affairs and European Integration etc. Its use during the project, in the relationship with the Ministry of Education, was also an element which was appreciated by both parties. Representative from the Ministry of Education pointed out that fact that until now the communication with the project’s implementation team was well organized and oriented towards problem-solving situations. By applying this strategy, the project’s implementation team managed during the first year of implementation to surpass or minimize a series of risks assumed in the programming phase.

Furthermore, representatives from partner organizations pointed out the fact that during the first year of implementation the communication with the project’s management team was effective. The main focus was on communication by electronic means, and the information was dosed optimally so as to provide clarity in the previous steps.

In spite of these aspects, representatives from partner organizations mentioned that during the first year of implementation no debriefing meetings were organized either face to face or through electronic means (skype, google+ etc.). Thus, the positive and negative experiences accumulated in the process of applying SAcc tools could be reported mainly through asynchronous methods of communicating impressions and conclusions (through feedback questionnaires, or by accounts in electronic messages), sometimes using telephone calls or skype. However, no events were organized in order to ensure the participation of all the members in the extended project team (the management team and the regional partner organizations). This is one of the reasons why the experiences and lessons learned were not discussed and analyzed together in order to establish strategies and next action steps. Such an approach would have diminished the character of the principal – agent relationship, which inevitably generates a series of blockages and situations of distrust in the process of project implementation.

In this line of thought, the project’s implementation team focused on diminishing the risks regarding the functioning of Administration Boards. Thus, the methodological support offered by the Ministry of Education towards this end was obvious. The context which facilitated the diminishing of this risk was that of the debate and adoption of the Education Code, a period in which these aspects of institutional architecture were intensely debated at the level of educational institutions which are participating in the project. However, from the collected data we can observe the fact that in the 20 schools participating in the project the Administration Councils were largely functional. This latter aspect explains the fact that these schools had an advantage in the selection process in comparison to other educational institutions.

Another conclusion of the documentation process is that in the selection process of participating schools during the first year their interested to be involved in the project was quite high. However, during the activities, their level of interest decreased. One of the reasons behind this refers to the fact that during the implementation human resources from schools were not financially stimulated for their activities.

A factor which facilitated the proper and timely creation of social partnerships at the level of beneficiary communities refers to the successful and adequate selection of regional partners. Some of these partners have a vast activity in implementing projects in the educational field or in interacting with educational communities. Their personnel and volunteers have sufficient competencies for working with groups and for monitoring administrative processes, or professional experience in the general education system.

Regarding the adequacy of training methods concerning SAcc tools, the beneficiaries of training activities who were interviewed specified the fact that for the most part the methods were useful and that they were satisfied with the quality of training. However, the examples and case studies which were used in the training process should have been closer to the characteristics of the general education system.

All the people who were interviewed appreciated the accessibility and adequacy of the style of elaborating the methodological support guides which were created under the project. Thus, from the statements of project beneficiaries, especially from people in the administrative body of the educational institutions, it was appreciated that methodological guides and support which were well conceived, very clear and easy to use, were supplied for the implementation of activities. The project's implementation team is aiming to annually update and complete the guidelines and methodological materials elaborated during the first year of implementation, which will be distributed to all the schools involved in the project. At the same time, within the limit of available resources, the implementation team aims to invite representatives of schools from the previous year or years to events which they will organize.

With regard to ensuring the transparency and representativeness of public hearings subsequent to the first year of project implementation, it was successfully accomplished. Thus, in the process of constituting local coalitions, the project team aimed to involve all categories of stakeholders, in order to ensure representativeness, but also to give legitimacy to the decision which was made. Thus, the local coalitions were formed on average by 19 representative people at the level of educational communities. Another positive aspect which was identified during the evaluation process refers to the fact that an extended number of categories of participants was involved in the deliberative processes organized during public hearings. The deliberation process was not limited only to the structure of the Administration Boards, succeeding in expanding categories so that the decision which was made would have greater support from actors specific to the school community.

Almost univocally, the people who were interviewed or participated in discussions during the evaluation process appreciated the degree of ensuring the visibility of informational and analysis documents elaborated under the project. These are considered to be credible and relevant in promoting an environment of SAcc approach in the education sector. The interviewees pointed out the fact that they offer a high level of information regarding the project's activities and results. The project's implementation team ensured an increased distribution and visibility of the video spot, but also of other information regarding the project. The project's acronym ("Școala Mea") also contributed to a rapid spread of information regarding the project due to the fact that it personalizes and generates a feeling of institutional attachment to the school in the city or neighborhood.

An important aspect which is attributed to the project refers to the fact that, due to the information and awareness campaign implemented under the project, the internal mass-media presented more news with a positive and constructive character regarding the changes in the general education system, in the context of the application of the Education 2020 Strategy, as well as of the application of the Education Code. An important element specific to the first year of the project's implementation refers to the fact that the implementation team managed to have an active presence in the internal mass-media. The messages which were communicated were targeted and dosed in such a way as to be adequately perceived by the public and to arouse their curiosity towards accessing the project's website.

At the same time, from the documentation which was conducted we noted that the implementation team also focused on ensuring the international visibility of the project. Thus, some members of the implementation team participated in different events and conferences with a specific thematic in the field of social accountability.

III.4 The project's first year results (product)

An important result of the project refers to the fact that the project's implementation team managed to establish an efficient collaboration with specialized governmental institutions. From this point of view, the project's implementation team was actively involved in the process of finalizing the Education Code, as well as in the elaboration of the regulation regarding the creation and activity of Administration Councils in educational institutions.

With regard to the contribution of social partnerships to the promotion of social accountability among the members of the beneficiary educational communities, we found that during the first year of project implementation five SAcc tools and mechanisms were used. The successful application of these instruments is owed for the most part to the experience held by regional partner organizations which were selected in the first year of implementation. Furthermore, a contribution was also made by methodological documents, guides and instructions for applying the five SAcc tools and mechanisms.

In the case of beneficiary communities where activities were conducted in order to facilitate the involvement of stakeholders we can observe the existence a higher degree of stakeholder involvement in the dialogue regarding school budgets and in establishing development priorities for schools. Thus, a relatively high degree of transparency was obtained in the development of the ODRA system, as well as an openness towards cooperation on behalf of the representatives of public institutions which were involved.

As a consequence of the creation of social partnerships, school managers exhibited greater trust in using the SAcc tools and mechanisms, as well as an openness towards the process of collecting, processing and interpreting evidences in order to establish development priorities of schools and implicitly their budgets. In some cases we can see that the process of involving the interested parties has led to the generation of savings. Thus, the savings which were recorded were allocated to activities which could not be implemented in the past. In some cases, the application of the SAcc tools led to mobilizing the respective communities towards making in kind contributions for conducting extra-curricular activities.

In the case of some of the communities we notice a very active and responsible involvement of local authorities. Some situations were also reported regarding the fact that the experience and instruments developed under the project were used by local authorities in order to establish local development priorities and to include the necessary resources in the local budget. On the other hand, there were also situations where local authorities had low involvement, despite the fact that the process of conducting activities at the level of communities was adequate.

Regarding the motivation of participant schools, in the case of some of the regional partners complementary resources were identified so that the communities' active involvement would be rewarded. For example, the regional partner, with the support of the Ungheni District Council equipped the four participant schools in the Ungheni district with smart boards.

The project contributes to the consolidation of the unitary national system of open data in education, due to the fact that the implementation team boosted the process of diversification and expansion of the types of data and improving access to data. To this end we found that the objective of evaluating the availability of data in education has been achieved. What is more, the Ministry of Education has acknowledged the report and has begun to implement the specified recommendations.

The targets for indicators subsequent to the first year of project implementation have been met. Some of these targets have in fact been surpassed in comparison to the initial estimation, especially those regarding the number of stakeholders participating in the project's events, the number of unique visitors of the project's website and the number to agreed and signed memorandums. Surpassing these targets indicates the fact that the project has every chance of boosting the processes of increasing the degree of participation and responsibility of educational communities in establishing the development strategies of schools.

Regarding the analysis of the measure to which the first year of project implementation contributed to achieving the objective initially assumed, taking into consideration the criteria of the effectiveness of activities for mobilizing the community, the following aspects can be mentioned:

- The experiences gained by school managers in the first year of project implementation, especially those regarding their responsibilities for managing the budget, are going to be collected and used for establishing the criteria for the internal and external evaluation process of educational institutions.
- In the first year of implementation, through Component 1, the project contributed to the consolidation of the unitary national system for open data in education, by facilitating the process of diversifying the existing types of data and by improving access to data. From this point of view, the pressure exerted by the project's implementing organization is considered by the Ministry of Education as a positive, constructive and useful one, especially from the perspective of mobilization, as well as of the substantiation of the procedures and instruments which were instituted.
- A critical aspect which can be pointed out here refers to the fact that the process of collecting, processing and interpreting data could be better substantiated from a methodological point of view. The intervention's philosophy seems to be based rather on the fact that the openness of data is a priority in comparison to ensuring the quality of data. Thus, there is a risk of supplying inconsistent or erroneous open-data. However, it can be observed that the objective of evaluating the availability of data in education has been achieved. Thus, the Ministry of Education acknowledged the findings in the evaluation report and has begun to implement the recommendations. As a result, the Open-Data Catalogue and forms for opening data have been elaborated and approved by order of the minister. Moreover, in the process of implementing the recommendations included in the evaluation report the job description of the chief of the *E-transformation and computerization Direction* has been modified, in order to include the obligation of opening data. Complementarily, the *E-transformation and digitization Direction* within the Ministry of Education benefited from the support of two interns who conducted the process of extracting data from the databases. However, there was no monitoring of the degree of transposition of the recommendations included in the report. Such a monitoring process could offer data regarding the degree and dynamic of change concerning ODRA. From the discussions which took place, the representatives of the Ministry of Education pointed out the fact that such monitoring would be welcomed.
- There is a number of 10 schools which want to become involved in conducting the project's activities on their own, benefitting however from the project's methodological support.

Also, from the point of view of representatives from the Ministry of Education, even if the Education 202 Strategy and the Education Code would not have been adopted and entered into force, for the first year of activities the project would have met most of its assumed targets. This consideration is argued by the fact that the project initiated the mechanism of empowering members from 20 educational and local communities to participate actively and responsibly to establishing development priorities for educational institutions. Once begun, the process would have multiplied, both due to the capitalization of media resources and the dissemination of information elaborated under the project (audio and video sport, flyers, website, awareness campaign, presentations, articles and interviews), as well as due to becoming aware of the fact that in a short amount of time the new approaches in the governance of educational institutions would become real facts.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IV.1 Conclusions

Based on the findings mentioned above, for the first year of project implementation we can formulate the following conclusions:

- During the programming phase a pertinent identification of the policy window was made;
- The implementation process was well planned. In comparison to the initial programming, the project's activities were not significantly delayed, which could have led to delays in other future steps;

- From the way it was elaborated and implemented in the first year of activity, the project is strongly connected with the provisions of the Education 2020 Strategy, as well as with approaches specific to the Education Code;
- The action model and practices used turned out to be adequately selected and applied at the level of beneficiary communities in order to support social accountability
- There is a necessity for a greater accent on monitoring the degree of implementation of recommendations included in evaluation reports and elaborated under the project, including the using of follow-up methods regarding the progress which has been made.

IV.2 Recommendations

- In spite of the fact that the project’s area of intervention targets the empowerment of stakeholders, the finality of the project inevitably contributes to increasing the quality of educational services. Consequently, the project’s activities need to gradually capitalize of the instruments for quality assurance in education. For example, the analysis of school activities, by using the instrument for elaborating school charts, as well as independent budget analyses, would have needed to also look at aspects regarding the educational process and its quality. These aspects regarding process and quality will soon gain an important significance in the application of the mechanism for financing schools, especially after the first national external evaluation and accreditation of educational institutions will take place. Once applied and multiplied, the elements of SAcc tools and mechanisms will be introduced in the processes of internal and external evaluation of quality. This is why it is important for the project’s activities to take into consideration this dimension of input in the process of institutionalizing the national system of quality assurance in general education.
- There is a need to ensure greater quality of the data collected at the level of educational institutions, as well as a need to ensure their validity. For the next years of implementation, the expectations of decision makers in the education system regarding the project towards this end refer to training stakeholders in the process of collecting, systemizing and processing data, as well as in using data in the process of ranking development priorities of educational institutions. In spite of the fact that this is not connected to the project’s area of intervention, it will have added value if trainings will be held for local stakeholders, as well as activities for offering methodological assistance in the elaboration by stakeholders of analytic documents, as part of the project’s activities.
- There is a need to create a framework for corroborating the activities of the “Școala Mea” project with those of the Project for Education Reform financed by the World Bank. The two projects intersect on several aspects which require a more efficient collaboration and communication. Thus, a framework of complementarity can be ensured, as well as an improvement of the intervention at the level of beneficiary communities.
- A more intense promotion of the project’s website is recommended – the website needs to become a platform which will facilitate the interactive exchange of experiences between communities, including by offering facilities for the online broadcast of some of the project’s activities.
- We recommend the adaptation of several instruments and working methods to the level of knowledge and understanding of the different categories of stakeholders. For example, Report Cards for students in the 5th and 6th grades need to be adapted so that they can be understood and properly completed by this category of students.
- The implementation team needs to elaborate and apply instruments for empowering stakeholders to conduct their own independent analyses regarding school budgets, through two areas of action. The first area refers to the active participation in elaborating standards and procedures for quality assurance in general education, while the second area refers to organizing online or face to face tutorials for conducting independent analyses regarding school budgets.
- In order to reach effective results there is a need for representatives of the regional partners who are involved in implementing the project at the level of schools and communities to benefit from a deeper training regarding the governance of the general education system, the way in which the provisions of the Education Code and other subsequent normative acts impact school governance, the connection between social accountability and quality assurance etc. They will, in turn, use this information in the process of working at the level of communities so that benefits and conditions will be better transmitted. What is more, in the limit of available

funds, in order to better understand how SAcc tools work it is recommended to organize a study visit in a country in the region where these instruments are already applied at the system level and function efficiently. Partner organizations, as well as representatives from the most active school which are part of the project could participate to this visit.

- We recommend the diversification of the means of enhancing the visibility of the results obtained after the application of SAcc tools and the promotion of best practices. A greater focus needs to be put on communicating results through media channels such as TV, radio or written press. Best practices can also be promoted through flyers or brochures, which need to be printed out in a greater number of copies.
- The data and supporting documents regarding the degree to which targets are achieved in relation to those assumed in the funding application which were supplied by the project’s implementation team turned out to be credible and truthful. However, there is a need for the evidence collection process to be better substantiated from a methodological point of view, so that after these exercises the data which is collected can offer the possibility of measure the degree of change at the level of beneficiary communities, as well as measuring the way in which the processes instituted under the project will continue to be applied (measuring sustainability). The indicators specified in the Results framework are based only of data extracted from the questionnaire which has been applied, in which all the items have scale-type answers (unsatisfactory – very good). This restricts the investigation of change from the perspective of the mechanisms which have been produced. Towards this end complementary in-depth methods would have been useful, such as interviews of focus-groups, which would offer information regarding the changes which have taken place, and not only an appreciation selected from predefined choices.
- Greater focus needs to be put on the project’s sustainability, especially on determining the degree of sustainability of activities conducted in each year of the project’s implementation. For example, it is not clear what will happen until the five years of implementation to the first 20 schools which are supported under the project. In order to support the process of change at the level of beneficiary communities there is a need to the implementing organization, with the support of the World Bank or other donor organizations, to identify the means and resources for supporting them. SAcc tools will continued to be applied and will become institutionalized if there will be a mechanism for monitoring, encouraging and methodological support for their continuous adequate application. Furthermore, in the case of some of the 20 schools, the school managers were changed after the project’s activities ended, which leads to a rupture in continuing to apply SAcc tools. In these cases there is a need to inform the new managers regarding the specificities and activities of the project.
- If there already is a significant number of schools which will continue to apply SAcc tools and mechanisms on their own – the opportunity is for the project’s website to be adapted with complementary instruments and content in order to offer the necessary methodological support for the proper application of SAcc tools. These complementary solutions could be, for example, tutorials. What is more, in the case of selected schools there is a need to identify solutions for motivating their representatives to become more involved in the project’s activities.
- In order to support reform in the education system from the Republic of Moldova and to ensure the sustainability of the application of the Social Accountability Tools and Mechanisms in the next years of implementation, through the project’s activities, the implementation team can experiment with the sets of competencies specific to managers of educational institutions, as well as with indicators which would allow the development of the quality assessment system.
- It is necessary to periodically organize debriefing reunions with the extended implementation team (the management team and partner organizations).