

## Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality

Meeting of Country Teams' Representatives, Central Research Team and Advisory Board

**To:** All attendees  
**From:** Daniel Pop  
**Date of meeting:** January 15-16, 2008  
**Location:** Belgrade, Serbia

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### 1. Attendance

<b>Attending</b>
Gordana Miljevic, project advisory board
Suzana Gerzina, project advisory board
Lana Jurko, project advisory board
Snjezana Mrse, project advisory board
Dzenana Trbic, project advisory board
Mimoza Gjika – responsible for coordination, logistics, communication, Albania
Bardhyl Musai – country researcher, Albania
Ajla Sisic – research assistant, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Nora Tafarshiku – responsible for administration, logistics, communication, Kosovo
Petar Atanasov – country researcher, Macedonia
Suzana Kirandziska – responsible for coordination and communication, Macedonia
Spomenka Lazarevska – the representative of the national foundation, Macedonia
Rima Bezede – researcher assistant, Moldova
Viorica Postica – responsible for coordination, Moldova
Maja Kovacevic – the representative of the national foundation, Montenegro
Ajsa Hadzibegovic – responsible for coordination, Montenegro
Nevena Cubrilo – research assistant, Montenegro
Nicoleta Voicu – responsible for coordination, Romania
Ovidiu Voicu – country researcher, Romania
Tanja Stojic – the representative of the national foundation, Serbia
Jelena Vranjesevic – country researcher, Serbia
Daniel Pop, central research team
Steve Powell, central research team
Veljko Djuric, central research team
Milos Becic, central research team
Johanna Crighton, external Advisor
Tunde Kovacs Cerovic, external advisor
<b>Absent</b>
Igor Repac

## **2. Aims of the meeting**

- a)** To meet and create an opportunity for all those involved in the implementation of the project to exchange ideas and opinions related to Phase I of the initiative.
- b)** To share existing information and to discuss, improve and refine the draft documents (the literature review, the focus group guide, the good practice guide, etc.).
- c)** To debate project plans regarding data collection and handling procedures and discuss the proposed methods to be used in the planning and implementation of the school principal survey.
- d)** To discuss and clarify methodologies, procedures and plans to achieve a joint understanding of project objectives and goals and their relevance to the main debates in each country where the survey will be carried out.
- e)** To debate and agree on the main steps, the role of each person/ team, the specific quality checks to be used in the different stages of Phase I and to set the main deadlines.

## **3. Main topics discussed**

- a)** The context of the larger, three-year initiative and the main theme of the research activities to be carried out under Phase I – i.e. the national surveys of school principals.
- b)** The draft review of existing conceptualizations and findings on the participation of educational stakeholders in school level decision-making.
- c)** The research plans with discussions on the extent to which they are appropriate and whether the selected survey methodology provides optimal value for money.
- d)** The research design, with emphasis on the evidence standards and the principles guiding sample selection.
- e)** The main steps of the survey process with the outline of the participating research teams' different responsibilities.
- f)** The focus group guide, logistics and structure of the focus group meetings with school principals.
- g)** The guide for good practice selection.
- h)** The role and responsibilities of country research teams in the different research related activities.

#### 4. Meeting overview

The main outcomes of the meeting include:

- a) Discussions following the presentation of the main project documents showed that some concepts are under-defined and there are inconsistencies in terminology among the different project related documents.
- b) Furthermore, some concerns were formulated about the limited clarity of the aims and objectives of Phase I of the initiative and the role that specific research activities play in the planned evidence based advocacy and community level interventions.
- c) Another important matter discussed was the possible limited reliability of the information obtained by interviewing exclusively school principals on parental participation in school level decision-making.
- d) Following roundtable discussions on the research theme of the initiative the need for a clearer definition of the research theme was agreed on. To meet this need the central research team, with the kind support of Johanna, proposed the following formulation for the research theme:

**regulation and equitable implementation of parental participation (in decision-making, in extracurricular activities, and in the education of one's own children) in state elementary schools; in relation to school level factors and to the attitudes and beliefs of school principals; both at national and international comparative level.**

- e) A tentative agreement on the research design and sampling selection criteria, which will be further developed by the central research team.
- f) The planning of tasks and responsibilities for those involved in the implementation of the initiative.
- g) The good practices collection component of the project is seen as necessary. It can be implemented as the separate sub-project activity. However, it should be rethought in relation to the available funds and the project focus.

#### 5. Main discussion

Several participants expressed doubts regarding the value of the data that would be obtained by interviewing school principals exclusively, as the latter represent a group with high stakes in school level governance and therefore have incentives to provide biased responses. In order to reduce the likelihood of biases and improve the reliability of the data collected, it was agreed that the identification and use of other sources of data (for instance, interviews with parents) will be planned.

To address the possible problems related to the reliability of data the following factors related to the school principal survey were identified:

- *School level requirements for and implementation of parental participation (involvement)*
  - Does the school make any effort to recruit parents?
  - How are candidates identified, elected?
  - How are vacancies publicized?
  - How (and if) are disadvantaged groups included. Etc.
- *School principals*
  - resources available/needed – skills (community relations), procedures, support from the ministry,
  - perception of main obstacles, history of events,
  - participation related values, attitudes.
- *Categories of schools – demographic variables*
  - size – number of students,
  - rural/urban,
  - presence of a given program, etc.

Regarding the good practices collection component, there was the concern that it was under-funded. The next steps (i.e. establishment of the working group, finalisation of the guide) may commence only when the budget is determined and the funds secured.

## 6. Tasks

### a) Central research team

- To revise all project documents to ensure consistency in the aims and the terminology and to refine research objectives according to the newly adopted research theme.
- To finalize the development of the focus group guide according to the changes agreed on and the proposed suggestions (e.g. exclude question on pupils' involvement, and include issues of equitable participation of parents).
- To finalize the literature review according to comments and suggestions made (e.g. to include besides academic papers the experience of similar initiatives, etc.).
- To develop a full research design with special emphasis on evidence standards and the sampling procedures taking into account value for money.
- To assemble the country content grid.

- To finalize the time schedule of activities planned in Phase I.
- To send all revised and finalized project related documents to country research teams.

**b) Country research teams**

- To finalize the country context papers according to the agreed criteria (i.e. including a section on the legal definition of school level governance structures from the point of view of the decisions taken at school level, and the formal structures of parental participation in school decision-making).
- To inquire about the possibility of obtaining a support letter from the Ministry of Education using the template transmitted by the central research team.
- To identify the sample frame (the list of schools grade I-VIII with other available information – urban/rural, size of the school, etc.).
- To submit country budgets for good practice collection on the basis of at least 20 examples per country.

**7. New issues**

- a)** To deal exclusively with the research theme as defined at point 4d.
- b)** To complement the school principal survey with information collected from parents (either using OMNIBUS studies, or focus group meetings with parents).
- c)** To address the issue of inequity of parents' participation in the school principals' survey