

MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER AND DONOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR OF SHIRAK MARZ OF ARMENIA



Yerevan 2005

Project is implemented by:

Center for Regional Development/
Transparency International Armenia

Project is funded by:



Oxfam Great Britain

Registered Charity No. 202918

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special acknowledgements to ***Oxfam Great Britain Armenian Branch*** for providing financial support to the Project

Acknowledgements to the following institutions and individuals:

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia

Shirak Marzpetaran

Secondary school of the village of Aghin

Secondary School N1 of the village of Akhuryan

Secondary School N2 of the village of Akhuryan

Secondary school of the village of Arapi

Secondary school of the village of Aregnadem

Secondary school of the village of Bagravan

Secondary school of the village of Garnaritch

Secondary school of the village of Gyullibulagh

Secondary school of the village of Karmravan

Secondary school of the village of Metc Sepasar

Secondary school of the village of Poqr Mantash

Secondary school of the village of Poqrashen

Secondary school of the village of Saratak

Secondary school of the village of Torosgyugh

Secondary school N1 of the town of Maralik

Secondary school N3 of the town of Artik

Secondary school N1 of the city of Gyumri

Secondary school N19 of the city of Gyumri

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INTRODUCTION

The need for education is one of the basic social needs of the individual. Poverty makes impossible meeting not only biological, but also social and cultural needs of individuals. The accessibility and quality of education are among the characteristics of the “social” dimension of the poverty in the particular country. The transition period of 1990s in Armenia had serious negative impact on the Armenian education system. The reduction of funding from the state budget brought to the deterioration of the quality of education. In addition, the widespread poverty among the population entailed to the reduction of the number of pupils in the secondary schools, especially in the higher grades (9th and 10th grades). The parents could not afford paying for their children’s expenses, connected to their attendance to schools, such as expenses on textbooks, clothes, shoes, etc. Also many pupils dropped from the schools and started to work to support their families. The current level of education funding of from the state budget and impossibility for the substantial part of the population (up to 31%) to incur incremental expenses necessary for education of their children¹ will bring to the further deterioration of the quality of education and its accessibility. These negative trends were revealed through the results of recent projects, and among them the one implemented by the Center for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia (CRD/TI Armenia) with the financial assistance from Oxfam Great Britain from June 2003 to July 2004. The schools receive insufficient funding from the state budget, which could only secure their survival, but not their development.

Considering these circumstances education was included in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). It was adopted by the Armenian Government Decision N994-N from August 8, 2003. Its implementation started in 2004. The main objective for the education sector is to improve the quality of education and enhance its accessibility². To achieve this it is envisaged to substantially increase public expenditures in the education sector and enhance the efficiency of the education system. In the secondary education sector the increase in the public expenditures will be mainly channeled to the increase of the salaries of teachers' and administrative and support personnel, provision of textbooks for the elementary school by the state, reconstruction and heating of the school buildings, and the printing more teaching and learning materials. To increase the efficiency of the public secondary education system, the authorities plan to increase pupil/teacher ratio from 11 in 2002 to 16 in 2008, increase the workload of teachers to 22 hours per week in 2005 (from 18 in 2002), etc³.

¹ *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. pp. 46-47. Information Analytic Center for Economic Reforms. Yerevan 2003

² *Ibid*, p. 50.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 123-124.

In order to achieve these objectives, a number of specific measures are planned to implement within the PRSP framework in the public secondary education sector. These measures are listed in the main directions of PRSP implementation policies for 2003-2006 (see Annex 9 of PRSP document⁴). Based on this, the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science developed a specific set of measures. These measures were included in the list of the measures to be implemented by the Armenian Government in the PRSP framework. The list was approved by the Government by its Decision N100-N from January 22, 2004⁵, which gave the start to PRSP implementation.

In addition, various donor organisations are either implementing themselves or funding the implementation of projects by Armenian governmental and non-governmental entities in the Marzes (provinces) of Armenia to assist public secondary education. In particular, in Shirak Marz such projects are funded by the World Bank, Open Society Institute Armenia Assistance Foundation, USAID, World Vision, Armenian Caritas, UNHCR, UNICEF and others.

The authors of the PRSP document accept that “...active participation of civil society in the PRSP implementation is one of the prerequisites for the successful implementation of the program.”⁶ Such participation will contribute to the formation of a more transparent and accountable governance system in Armenia and reduction of corrupt practices, especially in managing pro-poor programs. An efficient tool for the participation of civil society structures can be their involvement in PRSP monitoring.

From December 2004 to July 2005 the Center for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia (CRD/TI Armenia) implemented a project entitled “Monitoring of the PRSP Implementation and Donor Assistance Programs in the Public Secondary Education Sector of Shirak Marz of Armenia”. The Project was funded by Oxfam Great Britain and aimed to evaluate PRSP measures and donor-funded projects in the public secondary education area in Shirak Marz implemented during 2004. That was to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency in the implementation of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects. The Project Team monitored the implementation of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects in the 19 selected schools of Shirak Marz. The monitoring was preceded by the selection of the schools based on the predetermined criteria and selection of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 176-190. Measures related to the public secondary education are listed on p. 188 (see measures 153-160).

⁵ See *Official Bulletin of the Republic of Armenia* N14 (313) March 10, 2004 pp. 129-184.

⁶ *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p.164

The major stages of the Project implementation were: a) desk research; b) collection of information on PRSP measures and donor-funded projects implemented in 2004; c) selection of schools, PRSP measures and donor-funded projects to be monitored, d) verification of collected data; and e) analysis and finalization of Project results. Activities implemented at these stages are described in detail in the *Project Methodology and Implementation* section of the publication.

This project is the first effort to conduct a comprehensive, qualitative evaluation of PRSP implementation by civil society group at a provincial (Marz) level. Though the participation of civil society is envisaged by PRSP, until now no projects specifically focused on the outcomes of the measures implemented by the responsible agencies mentioned in Annex 9 (The main directions of PRSP implementation policies for 2003-2006) of PRSP and Government Decision N100-N. This is especially critical considering the fact that “...PRSP will be reviewed once every two years, taking into account the recommendations presented by all stakeholders and the results of monitoring”⁷. Such evaluation could contribute to the increase of the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects in the public secondary education sector. It was also the first step in the cooperation between civil society structures (in this case – CRD/TI Armenia) and those structures of the government (Ministry of Science and Education, Marzpetarans), which are responsible for the implementation of PRSP measures in education area. The Project also helped to evaluate the contribution of donor-funded projects in the improvement of the situation in the public secondary education.

The involvement of Shirak Marz NGOs⁸ at certain stages of Project implementation facilitated the cooperation between these NGOs and schools, which are the primary targets of PRSP measures in the education area. The representatives of local NGOs, who were facilitating focus group discussions with teachers and parents of the selected schools, became more prepared to undertake in the future monitoring and evaluation efforts related to schools. The implementation of this Project also contributed to the development of certain capacities and competence in local NGOs. In particular, they learned to conduct focus group discussions, as well as became more informed about the problems of the schools and possible ways of their involvement in the solution of these

⁷Ibid, p. 164

⁸ Those NGOs were Mush-2 Community Center (Gyumri), Khoran Ard (Gyumri), Center for Community Initiatives and Advocacy (Gyumri), Sirarpeni (Gyumri), Krtutyanyan Asparez (Gyumri), Civic Activity Auditorium (Gyumri) and Amasia Community Center (village of Amasia).

problems. Finally, by working on the same project, these NGOs got an opportunity to cooperate with each other, which could facilitate their consolidation and make their voice heard.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The methodology of the Project was based on the methods of participatory monitoring, when the monitoring effort is undertaken by citizens through the initiative groups they form or civil society organizations, in particular, NGOs. In this case CRD/TI Armenia and local NGOs acted both as a group of citizens, who obtained information from the government, and intermediary entities, representing the Armenian civil society, who appealed to the citizens of Shirak Marz to provide information for the evaluation of PRSP implementation. The information was provided at the data verification stage through focus group discussions and expert interviews conducted with the major service provider and recipient groups connected with the secondary schools (teachers, parents and school principals).

The implementation of the Project started with desk research (January-February, 2005), during which the Project Team collected and analyzed current legislative and regulatory acts concerning the secondary education system and PRSP. Data on PRSP measures and donor-funded projects were collected through official inquiries to the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science and donor organizations, as well as interviews with the representatives of donor organizations in Yerevan and Gyumri, administrative center of Shirak Marz. Part of the data was acquired from the Department of Financial-Economic and Social Development of Shirak Marzpetaran (Office of the Marz Governor) and Shirak branch of the National Institute of Education. As a result of the desk research the Project Team selected the PRSP measures and donor-funded projects for further monitoring. In ***Appendix 1*** Table 1 shows the PRSP measures and Table 2 - donor-funded projects, which started, completed or were in process by 2004.

Prior to the verification stage, the Project Team selected the schools based on two criteria. First, the sample of the selected schools should represent all regions of Shirak Marz and its administrative center – Gyumri. Second, there have been selected the schools with the most number of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects implemented during the year 2004. Thus, 19 schools have been selected – three schools from each region (except Akhuryan region from which 4 schools have been selected) and city of Gyumri. This sample, in the opinion of the Project Team, can be considered as representative for Shirak Marz. The table of these schools is presented in ***Appendix 2***.

The verification of the collected data was conducted in May 2005. The main goal of data verification in this Project was to reveal if the mentioned measures and projects have been implemented in the selected schools, and, if yes, *how* the implementation of PRSP measures

facilitated the achievement of the goals and objectives declared in the education section of PRSP (and first of all quality of education), as well as *to what extent* the donor-funded projects supported the implementation of PRSP measures in education area.

Two methods were used for data verification. First, focus group discussions have been held separately with the teachers and parents of the selected schools. The facilitators of the focus group discussions were the representatives of local NGOs of Shirak Marz with whom CRD/TI Armenia cooperated in its previous projects implemented in Shirak Marz. Prior to the start of this stage, they received brief training as facilitators. The sizes of the focus groups were varying from 6 to 15 people. The members of the parents' focus groups did not include those parents, who were at the same time teachers of those schools. Because of the shortage in human resources focus group discussions with pupils have not been held. However, in the opinion of the Project Team members, this deficiency was not so critical, as the parents in the focus group discussions were rather aware of the problems of the schools and actively and impartially discussed them. Simultaneously with the focus group discussions the members of the Project Team conducted expert interviews with the principals of the selected schools.

Each question asked to the teachers and parents during focus group discussions, and principals at interviews corresponded to one PRSP measure (see below in the next section of the publication). In addition the participants were asked about the implementation of donor-funded projects in their schools. The number of questions varies depended on the number of PRSP measures implemented in the given school⁹.

During the data collection the Project Team figured out PRSP measures implemented in the particular school. Each question consisted of two conceptual parts. The first part was aimed to confirm the fact of the implementation of the particular PRSP measure or donor-funded projects. The second part was aimed to reveal the extent of the relevance of the given measure to its officially determined goal/objective measure or extent of usefulness of the given donor-funded project to the school.

After the pretest of the questionnaires for the focus groups and interviews carried out on May 5 in the School N19 in Gyumri, the Project Team clarified the questions to be asked to parents, teachers

⁹ Based on their nature, part of PRSP measures are or have to be implemented in all schools of Armenia (for example, increase of teachers' salaries or "Best Teacher of the Year" contest). Other measures, such as repair works in school buildings or provision of desks and chairs to schools, are implemented in those pre-selected schools, where there is a need to implement such measure.

and principals. Generally, the questions were aimed to reveal two aspects of implementation of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects. The first aspect was to fix the fact of implementation of the given measure or donor-funded project, and the second - to find out the impact of the implementation of that measure or donor-funded project on certain aspects of education (quality, accessibility, etc.). The Project Team took into account the fact that the parents could have difficulties in answering to the questions on a number of PRSP measures (such as, for example, teachers' training, national contest for the best teacher and the best principal, etc.). For that reason, the parents had to answer to smaller number of questions. Also the parents were asked to evaluate general performance of the teachers, and the responses then were analyzed considering the responses of the teachers to the questions on the certain PRSP measures, such as increase of the teachers' salaries, training and others. Questions asked to the teachers and principals were almost the same, with the exception of the question on the national contest for the best school principal, which was asked only to the principals.

After the completion of the focus group discussions and interviews, the facilitators and Project Team members transferred the texts of the discussions and interviews into computer files, and the contents were analyzed. The analysis was focused on two major issues: a) verification of the implementation of PRSP measures and donor-funded projects in the selected schools, and b) qualitative evaluation on how the mentioned implemented activities facilitated the achievement of their official goals/objectives. The evaluation of the activities was performed based on the comparative analysis of the opinions of all three groups of interviewed – teachers, parents and principals.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

As it has been mentioned above, the Project Team not only verified the implementation of the activity under monitoring, but also evaluated how the implementation of the particular activity reached its goal. The description of the Project results given below is categorized by PRSP measures and donor-funded projects. For each measure or donor-funded project the opinions of all participant groups (teachers, parents and principals) were analyzed and compared.

a) Increase of teachers' salaries

The increase of the teachers' salaries is one of the two priorities of public spending in the general educational system (the other is training)¹⁰ in PRSP. It is considered as a precondition to the increase of the quality of education. In 2004 the salary of the teachers increased and, on average, was more than 30,600 Armenian Drams (about \$61) or 70 per cent higher compared with 2003 when it was only 18,600 Drams (about \$37).

In all selected schools both the *teachers and principals confirmed the increase of the salaries*.

Based on the opinions of the majority of the teachers participated in the focus group discussions, ***the increase of salaries had little or no effect on the quality of education***. This opinion was especially prevailing among the teachers and parents, according to whom the quality of education was the same, compared with previous years. Obviously, as it was expected, none of the participating teachers, parents or principals pointed to the negative causal link between the increase of salaries and quality of education.

The analysis of the responses of the most of the teachers revealed that the quality of education more depends on other factors, rather than salaries. Partially, as many teachers noted, the absence of the casual link between the salaries and education quality could be explained by the fact that the increased amount was not enough to meet even their personal minimal needs. As one of the teachers noted "... let them (the state – *Author's Note*) pay us 300 USD, then we'll talk about the quality of education". Even the current level of the teachers' salaries (officially, in average, 50,000 Drams or about 110 USD) is much below the level mentioned by teachers during the discussions (200 – 300 USD). As a result, the

teachers, especially in the rural areas, are forced to think more about how to make the ends meet, rather devote their leisure time to self-education and improvement of their pedagogical knowledge

and skills. Another explanation of such absence of correlation between the salaries and education quality is the mentality of teachers. Most of the teachers mentioned that "... the true teacher should not pay attention to the salary". As one of the teachers said: "If we worked in much worse conditions in 1990s, we will definitely continue to work now." However, some teachers appreciated the increase of their salaries, considering such measure as the first step in the further improvement of their material conditions. There was also an opinion that the increase of salaries more positively influenced on the sense of the teacher's responsibility, than quality of education. Teachers became more disciplined, their absenteeism dropped, though many of them pointed that the teachers now simply fear to lose their jobs, as they witnessed large-scale layoffs of their colleagues as a result of the rationalization of the public secondary education system in 2003-04.

The teachers also mentioned poor physical conditions and absence of water-sewage system as a very important factor, negatively affecting on the quality of education. As one teacher mentioned: "... when the issue is the increase of the quality of education, then first of all the conditions in the school should be improved. In our school we do not have even toilets." Many teachers pointed to the absence of necessary teaching materials, even textbooks in the schools.

At the same time, often the teachers pointed to the factors influencing on the quality of education outside the schools. Poor economic conditions of the most of the Armenian families make unaffordable continuation of the tuition in the universities and other higher education establishments. As a result, many talented children from poor families, who studied well in the schools, lose their motivation to be good pupils. In the words of one teacher "Suppose the quality of education is high and the pupil graduates with excellent grades and wants to continue his/her education. However, because of hard social conditions he/she will not be able to continue his/her studies. In our school we had many such pupils, who did not continue their education because of money." Many teachers claim that the new generation of pupils has no desire to study, they see that the success comes not to those with better and more knowledge and skills, but to those who have rich and influential parents. They also see that money and personal or kinship ties, rather than knowledge are the decisive factors in getting jobs. Finally, in the teachers' opinion quality of education suffers, because those pupils who plan to continue their studies in the higher education institutions, take private lessons on the subjects required for the attendance exams to these institutions, and they almost do not attend the schools.

¹⁰ *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. pp. 121-122.

Focus group discussions with parents in some sense confirmed the proposition that the increase of the salaries of the teachers had little or no effect on the quality of education. Only in one school (School N3 of the town of Artik) some parents claimed that “if the teachers’ salaries reach 200 USD, there will be no need for pupils to take private lessons”. Many parents of the same school stated that pupils take private lessons from their teachers, in order to avoid receiving lower grades from them. Moreover, some parents claimed that even these salaries are more than enough for the teachers, as during winter the class hours are reduced from 45 minutes to 15-20 minutes, but the teachers continue to receive the same amount of salary. In Aghin village school one parent suggested to link the size of the teacher’s salary to the proportion of pupils with higher grades from all pupils.

Meanwhile, the parents, especially in the rural areas, are satisfied with the professional level of their teachers, especially, as they mentioned, taking into account, low salaries the teachers receive and their hard material conditions. They mentioned the fact that though the teachers do have sufficient professional level, not all of them understand the psychology of children. In many remote rural schools there is a persistent problem of the lack of qualified teachers. Some parents complained about the low quality of textbooks, arguing that this is the main factor affecting on the quality of education. Another factor negatively affecting on the quality of education, according to parents, is the shortage of teaching materials and aids. In order for pupils to understand such subjects as physics or chemistry, laboratory experiments are required, but in the most of schools there are no such labs. Moreover, in some schools they were closed as a result of optimization, as the laboratory assistants were laid off, to maintain the needed size of the school staff.

Some remote rural schools benefited from the state program of placement of the teachers laid off from urban schools (as a result of optimization) to the remote rural schools, where there is a shortage of qualified teachers (see more in detail below). Now, as the parents of such schools mentioned, their children have qualified teachers.

Among other school-specific factors affecting on the quality of education, the parents mentioned insufficient heating of the classrooms in winter (“If the classroom is not heated normally, what then could be said about the quality of education.”) and, in some cases, forced retirement of pension-aged teachers¹¹, many of whom were highly qualified.

¹¹ Among the measures of optimization was the retirement of teachers who reached the pension age.

The principals of the selected schools gave rather insightful answers. In general, the principals accepted that the increase of the teachers' salaries had positive effect. For example, now the teachers' absenteeism dropped, which obviously had a positive impact on the quality of education. Also, with the increase of the salaries, it will be more legitimate to require better performance from teachers. Many principals mentioned that the increase of the salaries allowed solving part of the social problems the teachers face, which also had positive impact. However, like the teachers, the principals also noted that even the current level of salaries is far from being sufficient to satisfy the teachers' material needs, considering the existing level of prices on goods, services, utilities, etc.

At the same time, like in the case of teachers, the principals also had serious reservations in the existence of clear causal links between the increase of salaries and quality of education. As one principal noted "...The increase of the salaries would hardly increase the quality of education, as there are teachers who are not pedagogues neither by their nature, nor education, and, hence, it will not be possible to improve their teaching quality, no matter how much you pay them." While discussing the education quality issues, the principals also mentioned many other factors, which they argue, have more decisive impact on the education quality, than the increase of salaries. Some factors are more related to the general socio-economic situation in the country, others are directly related to the current situation in the public secondary education area. Obviously, these factors are interrelated.

In this respect, some principals of the schools of remote villages wanted to understand the rationale of replacing a good teacher of pension-age or without special pedagogical education, but by another one from other place (mainly from Gyumri). In this case the government spends additional funds from the state budget¹², while keeping the previous teachers on their jobs would save these funds. Some principals pointed to another unexpected consequence of recent reforms in the public secondary education system negatively affecting on the education quality. As most of the schools now are funded on the per-pupil basis, many schools in the cities, towns or big villages (with two and more schools), sometimes use unfair methods to attract pupils from other schools to increase the number of their pupils and, thus, get more funding from state budget. As one principal from a school of the town of Maralik mentioned "...when you try to be stricter to the pupils, they threaten to transfer to another school, where it will be easier for them to receive higher grades." Apparently, the quality of education suffers. Finally, the principals mentioned the decreased quality of younger teachers, who graduated recently. According to them, an urgent problem now is the improvement of

¹² See the *Decision N1412-N* of the Government of the Republic of Armenia from September 25, 2003.

education quality in the higher, especially, pedagogical, educational institutions, as their graduates are not appropriately prepared.

Similar to teachers and parents, the principals also think that the current difficult socio-economic conditions and general moral-psychological atmosphere in the country have a profound negative impact on the quality of education (as one principal put it “... these conditions made people to lose their habit to work”). Many principals argue that the pupils have no desire to study well. This desire becomes even stronger, when they see that it is easier to get higher grades by transferring from one school to another. The principals also note that the pupils, especially at high school level, now are more pragmatic. They study, and mainly privately with tutors, only those subjects which they will need for their admission exams to the higher educational institutions. As a result, at the high school level only few pupils attend the classes, and most of them skip the lessons.

b) Organization of training and qualification improvement courses for teachers

The professional level of Armenian teachers needs serious improvement and that is stated in PRSP¹³, which could be achieved through the involvement of teachers into training programs. The official goal to be achieved through the implementation of this measure is the improvement of the quality of education. In the framework of PRSP during 2004-06 the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science plans to involve in the training courses 35000 teachers. According to the information received from the Ministry, in 2004 8-9% of them already received training.

According to the desk research conducted in the framework of the Project during 2004 the training courses have been conducted: a) by the state (funded from the state budget), and, b) local and international organizations in cooperation with relevant governmental entities. Four types of state-funded training courses have been conducted – long-term (90 - 120 hours) courses (2500 teachers participated), short-term (30-45 hours) courses (4300 teachers participated), topic seminars (6350 teachers participated), and group and individual consultations (conducted with 13000 teachers). The training courses were carried out based on the curricula developed by the National Institute of Education of the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science. After the completion of the training courses the participants passed tests and received certificates. Special attention has been paid to the introduction of new teaching methods. Also in many cases the training methods of international NGOs have been applied, for which the trainers themselves have been initially trained.

¹³ *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. p. 119. Information Analytic Center for Economic Reforms. Yerevan 2003

Simultaneously, a number of training courses designed or approved by the Ministry of Education and Science have been carried out with the financial support of several organizations. Among them:

- training of 760 teachers from Shirak, Vayots Dzor and Syunik Marzes on the subject of the “History of Religion” supported by the Armenian Apostolic Church;
- training of 500 teachers on the group of subjects on law (State and Law, Civic Education, Human Rights) in cooperation with “Junior Achievements” NGO;
- training of 250 teachers from 100 experimental schools on the “Life Skills” subject in cooperation with UNICEF;
- training of 250 teachers of middle school classes on integrated topics in cooperation with IREX;
- training of 80 teachers on the experimental curriculum of civic education supported by AED;
- training of 341 school principals and 2100 members of school boards from Yerevan and all Marzes of Armenia supported by the World Bank and Armenian Social Investment Fund;
- training of teachers of military training in cooperation with the Armenian Ministry of Defense.

In order to increase the efficiency of the mentioned training courses, the trainers (including 70 part-time ones from Marzes) were trained and participated in the seminars, organized for that purpose, as well as received necessary materials have been developed. In contrast to previous years in 2004 the training courses conducted outside Yerevan significantly increased and, as a result, 70% of trainees were from Marzes.

Similar to the previous PRSP measure (increase of teachers’ salaries), in this case also the participating teachers and principals confirmed the fact of conducting the training courses. At the same time the opinions on their quality, usefulness and contribution to the improvement of the quality of education vary. Analyzing the teachers’ responses one can distinguish different attitudes depending on the topic of training. In general, these topics could be classified into three categories. First were the training courses on the new subjects, such as Economics, Civic Education, Human Rights, Law, History of Religion, Life Skills, Computer Science and others. The second type of training courses related to the introduction of new teaching methods, in particular, different types of interactive methods. Finally, the third type was training on the subjects the teachers are teaching (namely, the recent changes in the curricula of their subjects, etc.).

Almost all teachers who received training in new subjects mentioned the positive effect from it, though they also mentioned some problems. For example, considering the fact that Armenian pedagogical universities still do not have departments preparing teachers on the new subjects, these subjects are taught by teachers of other subjects, it would be more effective to have longer training courses and periodically repeat them. As one teacher put it "... you cannot learn a five-year course in five days." Actually, the members of the Project Team had discussions on this issue with the representative of "Junior Achievements" in Shirak Marz, who carried out training courses on the group of subjects on law (see above) and before that conducted such training courses on economics. He told that currently "Junior Achievements" is promoting the idea to open departments on these new subjects in the Yerevan and Gyumri Pedagogical Universities.

Some teachers mentioned that as these subjects were new for the teachers their workload became much more intensive. As one teacher noted "...we spend additional time for the preparation (to the lesson) on understanding this subject ourselves". As she noted the pupils are also not eager to learn these new subjects, considering them as extra burden for them.

Another shortcoming is the lack of teaching materials and aids, such as posters, manuals, overhead projectors, markers and others. A specific problem is the lack of computers to teach Computer Science. As one teacher mentioned much more computers are needed to install in the schools to make the pupils knowledgeable users. Also he argued that the training courses on computer science gave only general understanding on what is computer. It did not give real skills on how to work with computer and how to teach using computer. Hence, the effectiveness of training was seriously declined.

Much more controversial were the teachers' opinions on the training courses aimed at the introduction of new teaching methods. Together with positive opinions there was also criticism by many teachers. In some cases the facilitators of the teachers' focus group discussions revealed (through asking clarifying questions) that many teachers after returning back from these courses continued to use the same methods as before. The major point of criticism was that Armenian schools still neither morally, nor materially are prepared to introduce new teaching methods. As one teacher noted "This is one of the main deficiencies of our reforms, instead of first creating the necessary basis for reforms, and then carry out them, our government did the opposite."

Physical conditions of the schools (classroom sizes, heating conditions, lack of instructional materials, absence of labs in many schools, etc.) are part of the problem. Another facet of the problem is the absence of synchronization between the new methods and existing school curricula. According to some teachers, the introduction of new teaching methods, especially interactive ones, requires serious changes in the school curricula, as well as the existing way of organization of teaching process. It also requires certain new skills from teachers, especially needed to involve all pupils in the teaching process or maintain discipline in the classroom. Many teachers argue that such methods do not give fundamental knowledge to children.

Among other problems the teachers mentioned logistical issues, especially occurring with state-sponsored training courses. They pointed to the problems in providing transportation to training sites (and not only for the participants but also trainers from Yerevan) or absence of compensation of the teachers' expenses for transportation to training sites. Finally, according to some teachers these courses were conducted in a formal way and did not give anything useful to them.

Regarding the training courses on the existing subjects, the teachers mentioned that they mainly remained the same as in Soviet times with little innovations. Some teachers argued that those courses would be useful for those teachers, who, as a result of optimization, started to teach subjects they never taught before (for example, teacher of history is now teaching also geography).

The issues of training were not discussed specifically with parents, and they did not initiate such discussions as well. As to the principals, their overwhelming majority positively evaluated the training courses, arguing that they definitely contributed to the improvement of the quality of education. However, there have been cases, when the principals complained on some logistical aspects of training. In the opinion of the members of the Project Team, those were isolated specific cases more characteristic to the schools in remote villages, rather than regular problems occurring everywhere. The problem, which was mentioned by some teachers as well, was connected with transportation, when the trainers, relying on public transportation, were forced to stay only 2-3 hours in order to catch the bus. The same situation occurred with the teachers, who were sent on training courses from such villages to Gyumri.

Some principals mentioned that the introduction of new methods should be done smoothly, preparing to it both the teachers and pupils. The concern of these principals was that if the pupils are not graded, then they could lack incentives to study well, and the overall results of introduction of new methods could be negative. Also they suggested using some progressive approaches of

Soviet pedagogical school while introducing interactive methods, in particular, differentiated treatment of different pupils based on the differences in their personalities.

c) Placement of the laid off teachers in the schools of remote and border villages

The lack of qualified teachers in the schools of remote and border villages is a persistent problem existing from Soviet times. After independence the situation did not improve, and became even worse because of emigration and worsened economic conditions. The widespread layoffs of teachers resulted from the process of optimization, as well as problems with employment of newly graduated specialists from pedagogical higher educational institutions prompted Armenian government to develop and implement procedures regulating the placement of such specialists in the schools of remote and border villages.

On September 25, 2003 Armenian Government adopted the Decision N1412-N regulating the issues of placement of teachers in such village schools. This measure was also included in the Education and Science Ministry's PRSP implementation plan and its official goal was to improve the quality of education. The Project Team got acquainted and analyzed this Decision during the desk research of the Project implementation. In particular, according to this Decision, the school where the teacher is placed receives additional funding from the state budget to cover certain expenses of such teacher. These expenses include:

- a) expenses for the transportation of personal belongings of the teacher to the new place of residence – 15000 Drams,
- b) reimbursement of travel costs from the village to the place of permanent residence of the teacher – 4 times a year,
- c) renting a house or apartment – 10000 Drams per month,
- d) other expenses – 5000 Drams.

By August 2004, according to the official written demands from Marzpetarans, there were 571 vacancies in the schools, among them 382 – in the schools of the remote and border villages. The Marzpetarans filled 164 vacancies out of these 382, placed in such schools teachers laid off as a result of optimization. The Armenian Ministry of Education and Science in its turn placed 108 teachers (34 in Shirak Marz), among them 14 – with personal schedule¹⁴. Forty-one teachers placed

¹⁴ According to the mentioned Decision N1412-N graduate students of pedagogical institutions with good academic standing also can be placed in such schools and continue their studies based on an individual schedule.

during 2003-04 academic year stayed in their schools for the next 2004-05 academic year. By December 20, 2004 there were still vacancies for 407 teachers (among them – 75 in Shirak Marz).

As before, the vacancies mainly are in rural areas, whereas in urban areas, especially after optimization, there are many unemployed teachers. As the experts from the Ministry of Education and Science argue, implementation of correct policies in this area could lead to the solution of this problem. However, both the schools and Marzpetarans, as they mention, still do not fully understand the urgency and importance of this problem. There were many cases when the demand submitted by Marzpetaran or school is not justified. In other instances they submit demand to replace the working local teacher with non-pedagogical education with another from outside with pedagogical education, which is prohibited.

Focus group discussions with teachers revealed that in many cases the teachers who were placed in the schools of remote and border villages, were not properly or correctly informed about the benefit package they are entitled. Mainly such teachers were thinking that the relevant governmental entities should resolve their housing problems in their new places of assignment, whereas the Decision N1412-N only provides 10000 Drams reimbursement for monthly rent. Finding appropriate housing is under the teacher's responsibility. This situation is especially problematic in the villages with irregular transportation, which forces the teachers to stay in their new placements (in many cases the teachers prefer to travel every day from their place of residence to their new schools, rather than stay there).

Some teachers claimed that they were promised a one-time 300 USD compensation, if they transfer to the new placement alone, and 500 USD – in the case of transfer with their families, but they did not receive these sums. Teachers transferred to the villages with severe weather conditions, especially in the northern part of the Marz (Amasia and Ashotsk regions), with the most severe winters in Armenia complained that the government should also allocate some money for their medical treatment, as such weather conditions caused health problems.

At the same time, everywhere it was accepted that with few exceptions, the newcomers definitely had a positive contribution to the improvement of education quality in their schools, as they were high qualified specialists in their subjects. The parents also expressed the same opinion, though there were concerns that if these teachers, especially the younger ones, came temporarily, then their departure could negatively affect on the pupils' desire to study. Another problem mentioned by some parents is that those new teachers who decided not to stay in their new placements, but rather

travel every day to school from their place of residence, heavily rely on the regularity of the bus schedule, and sometimes come late or not either because of the transportation. The principals expressed the same positive opinion on the improvement of the education quality connected with the arrival of new teachers. The only potential problem mentioned by some of them, which was similar to the one mentioned by some parents, is that younger teachers hardly would stay and their departure could disrupt the teaching process. Thus, it is desirable to send older teachers, as they assess their chances to find a new job far lower, than younger teachers. It should be also noted that the principals did not mention the above misunderstandings noted by teachers (for example, arranging housing for the newcomers).

d) “Best Teacher of Year” and “Best Principal of Year” annual contests

The purpose of the “Best Teacher of Year” annual contest is to encourage those teachers, who have deep knowledge of their subject, creatively use it in their everyday work and disseminate their professional experience among other teachers. The goal of this measure officially declared by the Ministry of Education and Science is to promote the social status of teacher. “Best Principal of Year” contest is aimed to encourage those principals, who apply modern methods of school management in their work and disseminate their experience. Besides that there is also the “Best Class-Master of Year” contest, which has not been monitored in this Project, as it would require forming an additional focus group from class-masters in each school.

The contests took place through several stages with the final stage in October 2004. The Prime Minister of Armenia awarded the winners of the “Best Teacher of Year” and “Best Class-Master of Year” with cars. Teachers who won in five different nominations were also awarded with valuable presents. Now there are taking place the same contests for 2005. Special prize for the winner of the “Best Principal of Year” will be awarded this year. At the same time, as the desk research revealed, the teachers were not aware enough of how to participate in the contest, as well as about the criteria and mechanisms of selection of the winners.

During the focus group discussions with teachers they were asked only about the “Best Teacher of the Year” contest. First of all it appeared that only teachers in Gyumri participated in this contest. Teachers from other places either only heard about that (mainly from TV), or even were not aware of that. This picture confirmed the initial finding on the lack of awareness among most of the teachers found during the desk research. However, this topic generated interesting discussions

among the teachers in many selected schools. In general, most of the teachers, especially those from Gyumri, were positive about the idea of conducting such contest.

Among the arguments supporting this idea was that such contest would enhance competition among the teachers, which in its turn could improve the education quality and efficiency. It would also stimulate the teachers for self-education. Interestingly, the teachers did not explicitly link this contest with its declared goal – enhancement of the teacher's social status. In the opinion of teachers, their social status and respect would enhance, if their salaries would substantially increase (up to at least 300 USD). Teachers mentioned the layouts of teachers having non-pedagogical higher education as another positive impact on the social status of teacher.

At the same time, a minor part of the teachers argued that such contest could damage more, than help. Usually they were bringing two arguments. First, instead of creating fair competition, the contest could disturb the teachers in the school by publicly “sorting” them into good and bad teachers. Second, a more serious argument was that there is a high risk that such contests will not be fair, and the winners will be those, who will either bribe the contest commission, or have good connections with authorities.

The parents were not asked about this measure. From the interviews with the school principals it became evident that similar to the case of the “Best Teacher of the Year” contest only principals from Gyumri schools among the selected schools participated in the “Best Principal of the Year” contest. In some cases the principals of non-participating schools explained their non-participation by the fact that too much paperwork was required for participation, in other cases – by skepticism that such contests were fair and they would win. Actually, these principals gave the same explanations regarding the non-participation of their teachers to the contest on the “Best Teacher of the Year”. Meanwhile, in some schools local contests for the best teacher have been organized.

Similar to the teachers some principals linked these contests with the quality of education, rather than promoting the social status of the pedagogues. Others (among those, who did not participate) could not evaluate these events, because of their non-participation. Though there were opinions that such contests could have positive effects, a significant number of principals mentioned controversial nature of this measure. From one hand, it could provide additional stimuli for teachers to improve their professional level. On the other hand, the remaining teachers, who did not win the contest, could become jealous and impede the performance of the contest winner-teacher, and even entail to the cleavages inside the school.

e) Establishment of computerized classes and establishment of Internet connection in the schools

Though this measure is also included among PRSP measures to be implemented by the governmental bodies, in 2004 it was implemented only with the support of non-governmental organizations. The official goal of this measure is the improvement of quality and effectiveness of education.

As the desk research revealed, by January 1, 2005 in about 350 schools of Armenia computer classes have been established with the assistance of Project Harmony, a US NGO implementing projects in NIS countries, as well as other NGOs and individual sponsors. Computers, installed with the support of Project Harmony, have been connected to Internet. The same organization also provided the expenses on the maintenance of the computers, salaries of the operators (2 persons in each school) and Internet connection. Starting from 2005, the financing of this measure is planned to carry out from the state budget. The estimated volume of financing was 21 bln. 560 mln. Drams, from which 4 bln. 54 mln. will be provided by World Bank.

Information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science on the computer classes and Internet connection in all selected schools was proven to be correct. Only in some schools the computers are not still connected to Internet. In addition, in some schools there are computers donated by organizations other than Project Harmony, individual donors and even political parties. The general opinion expressed by the teachers on this measure was that the pupils are now computer literate, which will give them advantages in their future job search. Due to Internet they can have now more information on everything, including the subjects they study in the schools. The computer develops abilities to think logically, expands the worldview and makes children mature. In general, all pupils manifest great interest in computers and Internet, which is also positive. Another positive aspect mentioned by teachers is that it can provide the teachers with additional teaching materials, which could improve the effectiveness of education. All these positive aspects indirectly enhance the quality of education.

However, a substantial number of teachers cautioned about the negative effects of computerization. In fact, almost all teachers agreed that the pupils now become even more “disconnected” from textbooks and books. But not all teachers consider this as negative phenomenon, arguing that pupils could get more instructional materials on a given subject from Internet, rather than from textbook.

As one teacher noted “...for example, now we do not have chemistry lab and cannot perform chemical experiments, but through Internet we can find instructional presentations of such experiments.” Another negative effect mentioned by teachers was that Internet gives more information, than helps pupils think and find answers to their questions. All answers you can find in Internet, so why to think and try to reach the answer by yourself.

This measure has been discussed with parents as well. They confirmed the information provided by teachers about the existence of computers and Internet in their children’s schools. Interestingly, none of the parents assessed the effect of computerization on the quality and effectiveness of education. In some schools, certain parents, mainly out of record, complained that both the insufficient number of computers and wrong organization of their utilization do not allow their children to use them effectively.

The opinions of principals were unanimously positive. All principals gave the same information on this topic as the teachers and parents about the existence of computers and Internet. Also, unlike the teachers, none of them expressed any concerns about the possible negative effects from computerization.

f) Provision of desks and chairs to schools

According to desk research in 2004 the Ministry of Education and Science clarified with the relevant departments of the Marzpetarans the amounts of desks and chairs to be allocated to schools. More than 3944 mln. Drams will be allocated for this purpose for 2004-06. In 2004 the provision of 2000 desks and chairs to the schools of Kotayk Marz has been funded from state budget. The schools of other Marzes received desks and chairs from the Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF). In particular, according to the desk research 10 schools from the selected schools received desks and chairs from ASIF. The official goal of this measure is to improve the quality of education.

Focus group discussions and interviews confirmed the receipt of new desks and chairs by all 10 selected schools. However, in 1-2 cases it was unclear when did these schools receive them and by whom. The teachers of the overwhelming majority of the schools were very positive about this measure. As they mentioned, new desks and chairs had both positive esthetical (they are more nice looking) and physiological (the pupil can freely move on such chairs and his/her spine is not crooked) effects, which in its turn definitely had positive impact on the quality of education. The teachers also noted that this measure should not be considered as the major one in the improvement

of the education quality. As one teacher noted “Of course, the genetics play great role and the lazy child stays lazy, but for all of us it is really a pleasure to teach in such a well-furnished school.” Only in one school the teachers were not so happy with new furniture (“They are as nice looking, as the school programs developed by the Ministry (of Education and Science), or in other words they simply have no quality.”), though they also noted that the new one is still better, than the old one.

This topic was also discussed with the parents. In general, which was, to some extent foreseeable, the parents did not devote much time to this topic. Very few of them were aware about this measure, and most of them were positive. Only in one school the parents claimed that the old chairs and desks were better, than the new ones. Similarly, the parents were passive in evaluating the impact of the desks and chairs on the quality of education. Most of those who expressed their opinions on this issue were positive, and only in 2-3 cases few parents argued that they did not see any link between this measure and the quality of education.

The picture in the case of principals was close to that of teachers. Some minor differences between the opinions and level of awareness of teachers and principals, (but not in evaluating the impact of this measure on the quality of education), however, existed. In one case, it appeared from the interview with the principal that a French Armenian individual sponsor, not ASIF, purchased the desks and chairs for the school. In two other cases, it appeared that the school received desks and chairs from two different sources, one of which – from ASIF, and, the desks and chairs received from ASIF were of lower quality, than those received from other, foreign sources. Finally, the principal of one school, though expressed the same opinion as his teachers about the positive esthetical effect from new desks and chairs, made serious reservations about their quality, claiming even that they are hazardous to the children’s health.

g) Repair and construction of school buildings and reconstruction of school heating systems

The improvement of the physical conditions of school buildings and reconstruction of school heating systems are among the priorities of public secondary education measures of PRSP. According to the information received during the desk research, initially about 1 bln. Drams were allocated from state budget for this purpose. From this amount 27 mln. were allocated for the repair works in two schools of Shirak Marz.

On January 11, 2004 after the amendments to the “Law on 2004 State Budget of the Republic of Armenia” entered into effect, more than 7 bln. Drams additional funds were allocated to science and

education from which more than 6.7 bln. – to the public secondary education. This amount was distributed among Marzpetarans and Office of the mayor of Yerevan. In particular, Shirak Marz received more than 1.92 bln. Drams, which allowed building 4 new schools, carry out major repair works in 9 schools and reconstruct the heating systems in 7 schools. Besides the government, ASIF also is involved in these activities. In 2004 through the projects co-financed by ASIF 16 new schools were constructed, and major repair works were carried out in 148 schools. Other international organizations and individual donors also contributed in the implementation of this activity. This measure is also officially aimed at the improvement of education quality. For 2005-06 it is planned to spend almost 3 bln. Drams from state budget for this purpose.

According to information received from the Ministry of Education and Science and Department of Financial-Economic and Social Development of Shirak Marzpetaran, this measure has been implemented in 6 schools among the schools involved in this Project (School N19 of Gyumri, School N1 of the town of Maralik and schools of the villages of Saratak, Poqr Mantash, Aghin and Arapi). In all mentioned schools the participants of focus groups and interviewees confirmed the fact of implementation of this measure in their schools.

Obviously, all participants mentioned that new or repaired school buildings or reconstructed heating systems positively affected on the teaching process, and particularly, on the quality of education, though among the parents there were opinions that those pupils who are lazy, will remain lazy, even if there would be ideal conditions.

Regarding this measure the Project Team was more interested in the quality of construction and repair works. Teachers and principals were more satisfied from the quality of construction or repair works, than the parents, though the teachers and principals in some schools mentioned the low quality of repair works or construction. In fact, members of the Project Team witnessed that during their visits to these schools. The parents appeared to be more sincere and mentioned that, though now the physical conditions are better than before, there are many deficiencies in the works. Some parents even argued that the reason was corruption, as part of the funding was “recoiled” to the authorities, as a result of which the school did not receive the whole amount needed to carry out the works in full volume.

In Arapi village school, teachers and parents argued that instead of repairing the current building, it would be better to build a new one. The point was that the initial school building was destroyed during 1988 earthquake, and for a long time the school was placed in a number of small

constructions (so called, “domiks”). Later, after the village kindergarten was dissolved, the school moved to that building, which then, in 2004, underwent major repair works. Obviously, the building initially serving as kindergarten would not fit for school needs, and, thus, it would be better to build a building, which will fit to school needs. In Saratak village school it was mentioned that though the boiler-house was repaired and the village is supplied with gas, because of some constructive or design problems of the boiler-house, they were not able to use it for heating during the last winter.

h) Transfer of school governance to the governance through school boards

Transfer of the school governance to the governance through school boards was tended to involve all stakeholders of the school, primarily parents and teachers, into the process of the school governance and, by that, decentralize the system of governance. It could also enhance the transparency and accountability in the school management.

The Decision N444 of the Armenian Government from April 23, 2002 adopted the schedule of the transfer to the governance through school boards. According to that Decision the establishment of school boards had to be implemented in three stages. During each stage school boards were established in a certain number of schools, and by December 31, 2004 this process had to be completed. The desk research confirmed the completion of this process. However, as various studies, including the above-mentioned project carried out by CRD/TI Armenia previously, revealed that for different reasons school boards still remain inefficient, most of them exist only on paper and, in general, do not perform the functions they are endowed with.

Strengthening the system of school boards is also included in the list of PRSP measures in secondary education area. Its goal is to achieve decentralization of the system of school governance. Already in 2002-04 during the implementation of the mentioned above Decision N444, ASIF carried out training of school principals and members of school boards to make them more familiar with the concept of school board. These training activities are planned to be continued in 2005, and they will also be funded by ASIF. For 2006-08 Armenian Government plans to fund training of 200 school principals and 1200 members of school boards.

From CRD/TI Armenia’s previous study it was revealed that because of the delay in the implementation of the Decision N444 in Shirak Marz, the formation of the school boards there started only at the end of 2003, and most of the schools of the Marz formed their school boards

during 2004. In fact, only in 4 out of 19 schools involved in the Project, the school boards were established before 2004. Apparently, one should not expect having really functioning boards in such a short period of time, especially considering many other factors impeding its performance. In this respect, the major purpose for the Project Team to monitor the performance of school boards was to reveal, if the teachers and parents are aware of the existence of the school boards and knew something about their functions. It was also interesting to find out the attitudes of the principals towards the school boards. The only exception was School N3 of the town of Artik, which has school board since 1999, as all 7 schools of that town. Together with 50 other schools of Armenia from other Marzes and Yerevan these 7 schools were included in the list of schools, where the school boards were introduced as an experiment to evaluate how they will perform. Later, based on the results of this experiment, the above-mentioned Decision N444 was adopted. In the case of School N3 the Project Team tried to evaluate in a more detail the performance of its school board.

The focus group discussions with teachers revealed that they were aware of the existence of school boards. Most of them knew that the school boards approve the school budgets. However, the analysis of data from the focus group discussions sometimes brings to a conclusion that many teachers were confusing the school boards with other structures related to school, such as pedagogical councils, parental councils or even pupil councils. For example, in the School N3 of the town of Artik the teachers claimed that their board was functioning since 1993, whereas officially, as it has been mentioned already the school boards in the schools of the town of Artik were established in 1999. Also, a deeper analysis of the statements of teachers made the Project Team members to think that only those teachers were actively discussing these issues, who were either members of the school boards or pedagogical councils. Another observation was that many teachers were more discussing functions of the school board in general, rather than the functions their school boards specifically perform.

In most cases, however, the teachers mentioned that the school boards are new institutes in their schools and more time is needed to make them functional. Another argument they were bringing to justify the weakness of the school boards was that the school budgets are too small and it completely is spent on the teachers' salaries and payments for utilities and heating. As a result, nothing is left to allocate for other needs in which the school board could have saying. On the other hand, because of the widespread poverty among population, it is very difficult to raise extra-budgetary funds, which could become a prospective area of application of the powers of the school boards. As one teacher mentioned "...the current situation does not create opportunities for the school boards to express its opinion on the distribution of financial means or controlling their use."

In some cases the teachers perceived the potential importance and power of the school boards, as “...they can select the principal and dismiss him/her, which means that they can do everything”. Also there were opinions that members of the school board representing the teachers in reality did not represent their interests.

Many teachers argued that the current system of the public secondary education management is too hierarchical to allow the school boards to perform its functions, and in many schools teachers were skeptical about the future of the school boards. Another criticism, especially in the schools of the remote villages, was that they have never seen those members of the board who were appointed by Marzpetaran, and in many cases their absence made impossible to hold board meetings because of the absence of quorum¹⁵. Finally, there was an opinion that the establishment of boards allowed the authorities now to govern over the schools indirectly through the boards, thus, creating an imitation of “decentralization”. The true decentralization will occur, as many teachers argued, if the number of representatives of teachers and parents will increase.

The level of awareness on the school boards among the parents was much lower (except in 2-3 cases), than among teachers. In general, even those parents, who have heard something about the existence of the school boards in their schools, accepted that they did not know what the boards are doing. The overall opinion of the parents about the boards was that they did not give anything to school and are artificial structures. There was an interesting opinion among some parents in villages, that such boards are not even needed, as in the villages everybody knows everyone and, if needed, they could come together and help the school.

Most of the principals also mentioned that the boards still are very passive. They gave different explanations for such situation. One explanation was that because the board members are not paid they have no incentives to work seriously. Another explanation was that generally because of poverty and mentality the parents and teachers are not very eager or able to get involved in the school governance issues. The functioning of the board is impeded also because the members appointed by Marzpetarans as a rule do not visit the village schools where they are members of the board and, consequently, the board meetings are not held. In general, the boards are not proactive, they wait until the principals will ask them to discuss and approve the budget, etc.

¹⁵ Depending on the size of the school, its board consists of 5 (schools with less than 600 pupils), 7 (schools with 601 to 1200 pupils) and 9 (schools with more than 1201 pupils) members. These members represent the school’s pedagogical and parental councils, and the relevant governmental entity to which the school is accountable. For example, in the case

Regarding the decentralization, which is the official objective for the establishment of school boards, they, actually, depend from Marzpetarans through the members appointed by the latter to the boards. In general, the principals' opinion was that the governance through boards made the situation worse because the Model Charter of the School Board does not clarify the rights and duties of their members. Also, the training courses organized for the board members were not efficient. Another deficiency of the boards in the sense of decentralization was that they have no real power to appoint or dismiss the principals. It still *de-facto* remains the prerogative of Marzpetaran. However, the principals argued that, if the boards would perform their functions, the decentralization would become possible.

i) Expansion of the process of rationalization of the education sector

The process of rationalization of the education sector started in 2003 and continued in 2004. The process was carried out both on the intra- and inter-school levels. At the intra-school level the rationalization was carried out through the optimization of the pupil/teacher and pupil/non-teacher ratios in order to achieve optimal workload of teachers and increase their remuneration, as well as increasing the sizes of classes. At the inter-school level the rationalization was carried out through the merger of 2-3 adjacent schools or change of their type. This process took place mainly in the cities and towns, with high density of population and schools located closely one to another. The inter-school rationalization was not applied to the schools located in remote and isolated settlements or settlements having strategic importance (such as settlements located on the state borders) for the country.

During the 2003-04 academic year the process of rationalization at the inter-school level implemented by the Armenian government was completed. The intra-school optimization continued, which was mainly occurring because of the continuing decline of the number of pupils, which requires decrease in the numbers of teachers and school staff in order to maintain the officially defined pupil/teacher and pupil/non-teacher ratios. During the process of rationalization the workload of teachers changed twice. First it increased from 18 to 20 hours a week, and later from January 1, 2005 – to 22 hours a week. Currently as a result of optimization the pupil/teacher ratio reached 13:1 and the average density of the class reached up to 16.2 pupils.

The implementation of rationalization entailed to mass layoffs of teachers and other members of school staff, which created serious social tension and protests inside the Armenian society. In order to soften its negative social consequences Armenian Government included the sub-program “School Staff Optimization and Social Support” within the framework of the “Education Quality and Correspondence” loan program. It is aimed to develop and implement policies supporting the teachers laid out as a result of rationalization.

The official objective of this measure also included in PRSP is to increase the efficiency of the public secondary education efficiency. During the focus group discussions with teachers and interviews with principals the issues of rationalization have been actively discussed already in connection with the increase of teachers’ salaries. There was a prevailing opinion both among the teachers and principals that the increase of salaries and rationalization were connected. The reason was that Armenian government had an obligation to international donor organizations to increase the teachers’ salary, and it decided to achieve this goal through decreasing the number of teachers and giving the released amounts to the remaining teachers.

It should be also mentioned that the participants of discussions argued that rationalization not only had an impact on the effectiveness of the education system, but also on its quality. According to teachers, the impact of rationalization on the quality of education was mixed, more on negative side. Teachers from the schools located in the remote villages mentioned one positive effect from rationalization. For decades these schools, as it had been already mentioned, had a serious problem of shortage of qualified teachers. As a result of optimization, many teachers who lost their jobs in the urban areas, where its scale was far bigger, than in the villages, came to these schools, and, by that the problem shortage was resolved in many such schools. Another positive effect of rationalization on the quality of education was that in many, though not all cases specialists replaced non-specialists. Sharp economic decline and mass emigration in Armenia at the beginning of 1990s promoted a substantial flow of non-specialists, who lost their jobs during that period, into schools to fill the jobs of those teachers who emigrated from the country. Though there some of them later became good teachers, their majority, having no special education, was not able to provide education at a sufficient level of quality. The rationalization replaced them with specialists, which was definitely a positive phenomenon.

However, the prevailing majority of teachers argued that the negative consequences of rationalization were far stronger, than the positive ones. Most frequently they were mentioning the negative effect of the increased class sizes. As many teachers mentioned, the quality of education

declined in the higher educational institutions as well, and their graduates do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to replace old teachers. Some teachers even argued that considering the fact that this generation of pupils is more problematic (they are lazier and less disciplined), older teachers could deal with them more successfully, than their younger colleagues. They were confident that strictness is the best method to control the class, while young teachers care less about that. In some cases, the replacement of an experienced teacher with no special pedagogical education by an inexperienced young specialist with such education brought negative effects, as the non-specialist was effectively using his/her experience in teaching, whereas the young one with no experience was not able to apply his/her knowledge effectively.

Another widespread complaint connected with rationalization was the increase of the teacher's workload. Having insufficient financial means the teacher is not able to receive qualified medical treatment or good nutrition in the case of sickness or go somewhere during the school vacations. Thus, he/she cannot effectively cope with exhaustion connected with the increased workload in the classrooms with the increased density. Such negative effects not only led to the decline of the quality of education, but also discredited the teacher's status. As a teacher from Gyumri noted "... it makes no sense to talk about the improvement of the quality of education, as after teaching 22 hours of classes, he/she becomes so tired, that is not able to maintain high quality, plus the increase of the number of pupils in classes...". It should be mentioned that the teacher also must check his/her pupils' homework and class work, which he/she does at home, and it becomes clear why there were so many complaints of being exhausted. Some teachers link this exhaustion with low salaries, claiming that with such salaries they cannot get enough means to overcome their exhaustion ("...if we would receive 300 USD or more salaries, then we would be able to buy more and better food and medicine, we could then afford to go somewhere during our vacations").

Frequently the teachers complain that before increasing the pupil/teacher ratio, the authorities should consider how the classrooms of Armenian schools are fitted to such increase. As one teacher noted, "If the density of classes is to be increased, then the classrooms should become bigger. But in this case there is no increase in the size of the classrooms, which causes many diseases and, obviously, decreases the quality of education". The classrooms are small, and after a short period from the start of the lesson, the pupils, especially in elementary classes, become sleepy, inattentive and tired because of "... lack of air". The situation aggravates in winter, especially in the schools, where the classrooms are heated with ovens using heating oil with bad smell and as a rule not enough to maintain normal air temperature.

The picture was almost the same in the case of parents. Their opinions do not differ much from those of teachers. Many parents also mentioned that as a result of the increase of the class sizes, the teachers became unable to impartially grade many pupils, as it is more difficult for them to devote enough time to everybody to understand the real level of their knowledge. Some parents from remote villages complained that there are teachers, who frequently skip the classes because of transportation problems. Also, they will be hardly affiliated to the schools using every opportunity to find another job in their hometown and not come every day to these remote schools. The government should allocate more money to create more incentives for teachers to stay permanently in their new placements.

The principals, generally, share the same opinion with teachers. They were more stressing on the fact that the rationalization was carried out without setting specific, strict and differentiated criteria. In this connection, they were complaining that the criterion of being a specialist was not always correct when a young inexperienced teacher was replacing an experienced teacher with no special pedagogical education. The same criticism was regarding the pension-age good teachers, who should not be forced to retire.

Among the specific factors the principals (similar to teachers) more frequently mentioned the increase of the sizes of classes and the workload of teachers negatively affecting on the quality of education. Actually, some principals argued that the rise in taking private lessons by pupils to a large extent is a consequence of this enlargement, as working with larger number of pupils in the classroom with increased workload decreases the efficiency of the teacher's work. Many principals mentioned that not always the layouts or replacements occurred as a result of optimization brought to the increase of the quality of education. For example, a less experienced and weaker teacher replaced a teacher who was required to retire because of her/his age¹⁶. Another similar example is when a teacher with much less teaching experience, but with higher pedagogical education, replaces an experienced and good teacher, but with higher non-pedagogical education¹⁷.

At the same time, compared with teachers, the principals were trying to analyze rationalization from the standpoint of efficiency of educational process. They understand that there were certain problems in the schools, which were resolved due to rationalization. Among these problems they mentioned the presence of a large number low-qualified teachers (in the village schools) unequal

¹⁶ Before the initiation of the process of optimization, the school administration and relevant governmental bodies frequently were keeping the pension-age teachers in the schools, especially in rural areas, where there is a chronic shortage of qualified teachers.

workloads of teachers in the same school, waste of state funds for keeping teachers and other school staff with low workload, etc. They also understand that having very limited state budget, Armenia cannot afford having many teachers, considering the continuing decline of the number of pupils. However, the negative consequences of rationalization on the quality of education are more significant than its positive effects. The two negative effects most frequently stated by the principals (and the teachers as well) were overcrowded classes and too large workloads on teachers, which exhaust them and bring to the decline of the quality of education.

j) Donor-funded projects not directly related to PRSP

From the middle of 1990s international organizations, as well as some foreign governments have initiated projects aimed to support the Armenian education sector, which appeared in the difficult conditions as a result of sharp economic decline after the breakdown of Soviet Union. In many cases the projects were implemented by governmental agencies, schools or local NGOs funded by donors.

There were also instances, when the local NGOs or international organizations supplemented the efforts undertaken by the government. Two such examples had already been discussed in this publication. One was the computerization of the schools, which is implemented in the framework of the “Armenia School Connectivity Project” since 2001. The project is funded by the Bureau of Education Assistance of the US Department of State and implemented by Project Harmony NGO. After the adoption of PRSP, the computerization of schools was declared as one of the PRSP measures in education sector, and the Armenian Government selected Project Harmony to implement this measure in 2004. Starting from 2005, computerization is mainly funded from state budget supported by the World Bank.

Another example was organization of training courses. In 2004 a number of training courses included by the Ministry of Education and Science in its 2004 plan were implemented through donor assistance (see the section on carrying out training courses). As mentioned in that section, “Junior Achievements” NGO, UNICEF, IREX, AED and the World Bank were involved or funded various training courses included by the Ministry of Education and Science in the PRSP measures.

¹⁷ One of the requirements of optimization was to keep in the schools as much specialists with pedagogical education, as possible, and first of all the mentioned above teachers were laid off.

Almost in all schools involved in the Project there have been implemented donor-funded projects. In addition, the above-mentioned training courses and computerization, the donors sponsored a number of other activities as well. In particular, donor funding was substantial in school construction, major repair works of school buildings, reconstruction of heating systems, as well as provision of desks and chairs carried out by ASIF and Hayastan All-Armenian Fund. There were also instances of individual sponsorship, for example, by French-Armenian businessmen Poghosian brothers, who sponsored the repair works and provision of chairs and desks to School N1 of the town of Maralik. Open Society Institute Armenia Assistance Foundation, Armenian Caritas (an international NGO, affiliated to Catholic Relief Services), World Vision, UNHCR, British Council and others also carried out or sponsored projects in the secondary education sector of Shirak Marz.

During focus group discussions and interviews donor-funded projects were also discussed. These questions concerned only those projects, which were not included in PRSP measures determined by the Armenian Government. The major purpose for such distinction was to reveal the impact of such projects, having no direct connection with PRSP official measures, on the schools and their possible contribution to the achievement of PRSP goals in education sector.

The participants of focus group discussions and interviews gave some information about such projects, but did not evaluate them. Teachers and parents mainly mentioned projects of humanitarian nature (UN Food for Education Program, World Vision and Armenian Caritas), through which pupils (mostly of elementary classes) were receiving lunch in the schools. The general impression was that almost all other projects carried out by donors or through their funding were programs of food provision to pupils. The only exception was the new project initiated in 2004 by Armenian Caritas, aimed at the strengthening of parental councils and evaluated positively by the participants.

CONCLUSIONS

- Focus group discussions with teachers and parents revealed that that these crucial groups of stakeholders though have heard something about PRSP, but were not aware of the contents of its education-related measures. The conversations of the Project Director with the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as teachers in Yerevan revealed that Yerevan teachers are more aware of the contents of secondary education measures of PRSP, than their colleagues in Marzes. Meanwhile, the principals of schools were more or less aware of them.
- The discussions and interviews revealed a substantial number of complaints and major criticism from all participating groups. Many teachers and principals directly said that the relevant authorities never showed any interest to their opinions. This is an indication of the fact that policy-making process in the given sector remains non-participative in Armenia, and in many cases the relevant policies do not reflect the real situation in schools.
- Prior to January 2004, when the implementation of PRSP started, all measures monitored in the framework of the present Project, were included in the Annual Action Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science. Since 2004, they are determined as PRSP measures in public secondary education area, which should imply relevant changes in the strategies and methods of their implementation to make more focused towards the achievement of the goals formulated for the PRSP education sector. However, the analysis of the Project results show that for most measures such changes did not occur. This could substantially reduce the effectiveness of PRSP implementation.
- Not all PRSP measures serve to the achievement of their officially declared goals. For example, the goal of the increase of the teachers' salaries is the improvement of the quality of education. However, considering the fact that even the current salary of teachers is about 50,000 Drams (around \$110) is below the minimal level (\$200), which, in the opinion of teachers and principals, could really stimulate the teachers, any effect from this measure is hard to expect. The biggest issue, however, remains the effect of rationalization. In the opinion of the overwhelming majority of all participating groups, this measure, mainly, with some exceptions, had its negative effect on the quality of education. The increase of the pupil/teacher ratio, the sizes of the classes and workload of teachers were widely seen as counterproductive.
- Though, official goals/objectives of most PRSP measures were defined correctly, still their implementation in 2004 was not effective. Construction and repair works in many cases

were of low quality, training courses, especially conducted by state institutions often were not fitted to new realities and had serious logistical shortcomings. Compensation received by teachers sent to the schools of remote villages was not always adequate.

- The awareness of the teachers and parents on the donor-funded projects was rather low. Most of them mentioned only those projects, which provide nutrition to the elementary grades pupils or some other material benefits to schools (computers, copy machines, furniture, etc.). Rather disappointing was the fact that they either did not mention other types of donor-funded projects, such as those aimed at monitoring or training or did not perceive them as donor-funded. In many cases they were thinking that the training organized by “Junior Achievements” NGO was not a donor-funded project. As a rule, people believe that donors can give only humanitarian or material aid.

The Project Team refrained to provide any recommendations at this stage, as CRD/TI Armenia is planning to implement a similar project aimed at monitoring PRSP measures and donor-funded projects for 2005. That will provide a more complete picture on the situation with their implementation and allow developing more justified recommendations.

APPENDIX 1

A. List of PRSP Measures in the Public Secondary Education Sphere Monitored in the Project

N	Name of the PRSP Measure	Goal/ Objective	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Responsible Implementing Agency	Period of Implementation
1.	<i>Increase of teachers' salaries</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality of Education</i>	<i>In 2006 the teachers will receive \$90 equivalent salary</i>		<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Finance and Economy</i>	<i>Continuous</i>
2.	<i>Organization of training and qualification improvement courses for teachers</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality of Education</i>	<i>35,000 teachers are trained</i>	<i>Number of Trained Teachers</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Project Implementation Units, National Institute of Education</i>	<i>2004-07</i>
3.	<i>Placement of teachers in the schools of remote and border villages</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality of Education</i>	<i>Vacancies in the schools of the remote and border villages are filled</i>	<i>Number of teachers sent to such schools</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science</i>	<i>Continuous, starting from 2004</i>
4.	<i>“Best Teacher of Year” and “Best Principal of Year” annual contests</i>	<i>Increase of the Teachers' Social Status</i>	<i>Best teachers and principals are awarded with prizes</i>	<i>Number of participating teachers and principals</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science</i>	<i>Continuous</i>

5.	<i>Establishment of computerized classes and establishment of Internet connection in the schools</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality and Effectiveness of Education</i>	<i>Public schools have necessary technical means</i>	<i>Pupil/computer ratio</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Project Implementation Unit</i>	<i>2004-07</i>
6.	<i>Provision of desks and chairs to schools</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality of Education</i>	<i>Schools are fully provided with desks and chairs</i>	<i>Number of desks and chairs provided to schools</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Armenian Social Investment Fund</i>	<i>2004-06</i>
7.	<i>Repair and construction of school buildings and reconstruction of school heating systems</i>	<i>Increase of the Quality of Education</i>	<i>School buildings are repaired; Heating systems repaired</i>	<i>Number of repaired school buildings; Number of schools with repaired heating systems</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Urban Development</i>	<i>2004-06, continuous</i>
8.	<i>Transfer of school governance to the governance through school boards</i>	<i>Decentralization of the school governance</i>	<i>School boards are established in all schools</i>	<i>Number of schools transferred to the new system of governance; Number trained members of</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science, Project Implementation Unit, National Institute of Education</i>	<i>2004-05</i>

				<i>school boards and principals</i>		
9.	<i>Expansion of the process of rationalization of the education sector</i>	<i>Increase of the Effectiveness of Education</i>	<i>Indicators of the public education system are optimized</i>	<i>Pupil/teacher ratio, pupil/non-teacher ratio, average workload of teachers, class size</i>	<i>Ministry of Education and Science</i>	<i>2004-06</i>

B. Donor-Funded Projects Started, Completed Or In Process by 2004

<i>Title of the Project</i>	<i>Donor Organization</i>	<i>Implementing Organization</i>	<i>Project Site(s)</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Outcome*</i>
Development of the Community School	Open Society Institute – Armenia Assistance Foundation	Gyumri N1 Base College, Gyumri N1 Academic Educational Complex, Schools N5, N15 and N25 of Gyumri	Gyumri N1 Base College, Gyumri N1 Academic Educational Complex, Schools N5, N15 and N25 of Gyumri	Development of the community school model to serve the community population and pupils of the schools located in the community	In the mentioned schools lectures on telecommunication and information technologies topics, as well as roundtables on gender, civic education and human rights issues have been organized.

					A school newspaper has been created
Legal Channel – Interactive Teaching on Human Rights Protection**	Open Society Institute – Armenia Assistance Foundation	“Krtutyan Asparez” local NGO	31 schools of Gyumri, schools of the villages of Azatan, Akhuryan, Marmashen, Hovuni and Beniamin	Establish the model of “school ombudsman” institute in 33 public secondary schools using roundtables and other interactive methods. Involve in the implementation of the “School Ombudsman” component pupils of the 3 special secondary schools of Gyumri as well. Increase awareness of target groups on the national and international	Lectures on the topics on human rights, and, in particular, children’s rights have been organized in the mentioned schools. Roundtables attended by the ombudsperson of the Republic of Armenia have also been organized. In all schools elections of the “School Ombudsman” have been held followed by the elections of the Shirak Marz schools’ ombudsman. 14 pupils who attended all lectures and roundtables established

				<p>legal mechanisms on human rights protection</p>	<p>“Association of Pupils’ Ombudsmen”. In the course of the implementation of the project the participants were informed about the obligations of Armenia as a member of the Council of Europe, the course of their fulfillment, as well as the perspectives of the constitutional amendments.</p>
<p>Set of subjects on law</p>	<p>USAID</p>	<p>“Junior Achievements of Armenia” NGO</p>	<p>All schools of Gyumri, Schools N1 and N2 of the town of Maralik, Schools N1, N3 and N4 of the town of Artik, schools of the villages of</p>	<p>Training of teachers to teach the set of subjects on law</p>	<p>Teachers of 50 schools and colleges of Shirak Marz have been trained. The schools received relevant instructional brochures on these subjects. Teachers were</p>

			Anushavan, Ashotsk, Aregnadem, Nor Kyanq, Meghrashen, Saralandj, Kamo, Vahramaberd , Poqr Mantash, Bagravan, Aghin, Voskehask, School N1 and college of the village of Akhuryan		introduced to new teaching methods.
Armenia School Connectivity Project***	US Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs	Project Harmony	Schools N1 and N31 of Gyumri, School N3 of the town of Artik, school of the villages of Saratak, Bagravan, Metc Sepasar, Gyullibu- lagh, Schools N1 and N2 of the village of Akhuryan	Establish computer classes in schools	Schools were provided with computers, computer classes were established and most of the computers were connected to Internet
Food	World Vision	World Vision	Schools N11,	Provision of	Eligible pupils

Assistance Program ^{*,**}			N37, N41 and N42 of Gyumri, schools of the villages of Hovuni and Marmashen	food for free to orphans, disabled children and children from poor families	from 6 schools received free lunches
Strengthening of Parental Councils [*]	USAID	Armenian Caritas	Schools N1, N11, N7, N15, and N17 of Gyumri, schools of the villages of Getq, Poqrashen, Lernut, Torosgyugh, Zuygaghbyur, Krasar, Sizavet, Bandivan and Garnaritch	Providing modern equipment to the parental councils, training the members of the councils in developing business plans	Members of parental councils received skills to develop business plans and propose them to donor organizations
World Food Program ^{*,***}	UNHCR	UNHCR	Schools N1 and N2 of the village of Akhuryan, School N1 of the town of Maralik, schools of the villages of Saratak,	Provision of nutrition for free to the pupils of elementary classes	Pupils of the 1-3 classes once a day receive free lunch

			Bagravan, Gyullibulagh, Karmaravan and Poqrashen		
Friendship with Schools [*]	Armenian Caritas	Armenian Caritas	Schools of the villages of Karmravan, Dzorashen, Tavshut, Sizavet, Bandivan and Garnaritch	Assist the schools to solve their financial problems	Small grants are provided to projects that will enable to generate extra- budgetary funds to schools

Notes. ^{*} - The mentioned projects are still in the process of implementation and their outcomes are intermediary outcomes.

^{**} - Projects were not discussed during focus groups and interviews, as they have not been implemented in the schools selected in this Project.

^{***} - Only the selected schools are mentioned in the Table, though they have been implemented in other schools of the Marz as well.

APPENDIX 2

Schools Selected for Monitoring of PRSP Measures and Donor-Funded Projects

Region	School
City of Gyumri	Schools N1, N19 and N31
Amasia region	Schools of the villages of Aregnadem, Garnaritch and Gyullibulagh
Ashotsk region	Schools of the villages of Karmravan, Metc Sepasar and Torosgyugh
Akhuryan region	Schools N1 and N2 of the village of Akhuryan, schools of the villages of Arapi and Poqrashen
Ani region	School N1 of the town of Maralik, schools of the villages of Aghin and Bagravan
Artik region	School N3 of the town of Artik, schools of the villages of Poqr Mantash and Saratak