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**“My School - Empowered Citizens Enhancing Accountability of the
Education Reform and Quality of Education in Moldova”**

Global Partnership for Social Accountability, World Bank

Final evaluation study

Developed for Expert-Grup

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The study was developed under the aegis of the Institute for Public Policy for Expert-Grup Moldova

Authors:

Ionela Costachi, master, researcher, Institute for Public Policy, Republic of Moldova

Aliona Cristei, master, researcher, Institute for Public Policy, Republic of Moldova

Daniela Terzi-Barbaroșie, psychologist, Psychological Center” SINESIS”, Chișinău

The data and opinions in this study belong to the respondents. The findings and recommendations belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the World Bank.

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List of Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
EG	Independent Think-Tank Expert Grup
GPSA	Global Partnership for Social Accountability
LPA	Local Public Administration
MECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODRA	Open Data Readiness Assessment Report
SAT	Social Accountability Tools
SIME	Education Management Information System
SEN	Special education needs
WBG	World Bank

Executive Summary

The present evaluation report, carried out in the last year of the project implementation, presents the main outcomes and the impact of the social accountability tools in the beneficiary schools. At the same time, the evaluation analyzed the extent to which the results of the "My School" project validate the theory of change promoted by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability and its adaptation to the context of education and governance in the Republic of Moldova.

The evaluation methodology included two components: a) analysis of the project documentation and reported progress; b) research study, combining qualitative and quantitative methods of sociological research: survey among pupils and teachers, content analysis of the legal framework, in-depth interview, group discussion and case study method. The sample included a predetermined target group, whose opinions were considered to be primordial for this study. Thus, the target group included pupils, active and passive in the school life, teachers, school managers, parents, local partners in CSOs, representatives of LPA, Education Departments, Ministry of Education, experts.

"My School" project aimed at empowering central and local educational actors to play a more active role in the life and development of schools and the sector in general, and to increase the level of accountability of decision-makers at school, as well as at policy level. This was done through the use of social accountability tools: the School Report card, the independent budget analysis and public hearings on school budgets, implemented with the support of local partners - agents of change.

The evaluation analysis highlights some general conclusions on the specific researched dimensions:

1. The results and impact of implementing social accountability tools

At system level: Raising public awareness of problems in the education system in general, and aspects of schools' financial autonomy in particular; increasing the media attention on financial transparency in the education system issue; Transpose elements of the social accountability tools in policy documents as feasible instruments in ensuring the transparency of local school budgets; increasing the transparency level of the education sector management, and in the context of the financial autonomy of the school institutions;

At community level: Build more informed and more involved communities in the school's life, acting as precursors for increasing civic engagement of citizens; increasing the role of civil society organizations (local partners) in promoting and implementing change at community level, becoming agents of change, a source of support and information for their partners in school institutions;

At the level of social actors: Increasing the capacities of the actors involved and contributing to their personal development in terms of needs analysis skills, communication and conflict management skills, public speaking skills, the use of financial and digital data; changing the attitudes and behaviors of pupils, parents, teachers and representatives of the LPA and the community on the culture of dialogue and transparency, individual and group participation and accountability on reforms in the field of education and the quality of educational services;

At school level: Using the data collected through the social responsibility tools for a complex comparative analysis to be provided to parents and pupils; technical support, improvement of the physical comfort and the psychological climate in the school - factors influencing pupils' school success and the professional

performance of teachers; improving managers' financial management skills, and more efficient use of budget resources.

2. Unintended outcomes

Positive results: Developing internal information / transparency mechanisms; application of digital technologies in communication with parents; using social accountability tools to solve other school problems; solving budget deficit problems as a result of efficient budget distribution; applying the public hearing tool by schools that were not part of the "My School" project; the lack of use of informal payments made by parents for the benefit of the school; increasing the level of cooperation and exchange of experience with LPAs; facilitate school administration to raise funds and additional projects.

Negative results: Low engagement of vulnerable groups; gender gaps in information and participation; the non-use of social accountability tools / abandoning local budget transparency practices; public hearings led to conflicts between school administration and parents; beneficiaries do not perceive social accountability tools as an interdependent and complete cycle.

3. Validation of the GPSA theory of change in the education and governance context of the Republic of Moldova

The results and impact of the project justify the validation of GPSA theory in the given context.

Component 1 – Environment for enabling Social Accountability in Moldova: Increased awareness of social accountability tools; changing the attitudes and behaviors of pupils, parents, teachers and LPA representatives and the community on the culture of dialogue and transparency, individual and group participation and accountability for the education sector reform;

Component 2 - Facilitate the implementation of social accountability tools: Enhance partnerships at local level between various community actors and increase the role of civil society organizations (local partners) in promoting and implementing change at community level, becoming agents of change, a source of support and information for partners in school institutions;

Component 3 - Integrating findings and information into the policy and budget dialogue: Applying consultation tools, collecting proposals on budget allocation; institutionalizing public hearings as a feasible tool to ensure the transparency of local school budgets;

Component 4: Dissemination of knowledge - Exchange of experience gained within the project among school managers; Creating the Project Ambassadors Network;

4. Sustainability issues

Variables supporting sustainability: lack of additional funding for implementing social accountability tools, changes in school financial management; commitment undertaken by school managers and locally formed educational coalitions; raising the awareness of the community about the importance of involving parents, pupils, community members through capacity building activities; changes in cultural and gender norms, beliefs about active and participatory citizenship; prioritizing needs, planning and dispute resolution, identifying solutions and finding consensus, clarifying obligations, monitoring the activities undertaken, reporting; increasing the employability of citizens in decision-making processes at school level.

Risks to sustainability: Lack of institutionalization of social accountability tools; human factor; population migration; language barriers and financial terminology; Political factor / political orientation at the LPA level, Education departments, and level of central authorities, financial deficit of schools; continuous decrease of the number of students enrolled in educational institutions affecting the financial sustainability of school institutions, lack of parents and students' skills to understand information presented at public hearings;

5. Based on the findings, we propose the following general recommendations:

- Institutionalization of social accountability tools at the educational system level,
- Including financial management courses, conflict management in the curriculum for teachers and managers;
- Use of social accountability tools in other school activities: Pupils Counseling, Parent Associations;
- Training for parents on methods of engaging in the school life, education aspects;
- Increasing the level of cooperation of key stakeholders in solving daily school problems; Developing partnerships with LPA, Parent Association, CSOs, etc;
- Implementation of social accountability tools in all general education institutions and other levels of the education system: pre-school institutions, vocational-technical institutions, higher education institutions;
- Implementation of ODRA recommendations.

Introduction

The Project “My School” - Empowered Citizens Enhancing Accountability of the Education Reform and Quality of Education in Moldova” is an initiative of the Independent Think Tank in Moldova Expert-Grup during December 2013 – December 2018. The project was financed by the world Bank Group through the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), with the informational support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova.

“My School” was designed in order to empower educational stakeholders at the central and local levels to play a more active role both in the life and development of schools and educational sector reforms. The project aimed at increasing the accountability of decision makers at the school and policy levels. In this regard, Expert-Grup implemented a series of social accountability tools that allow the educational stakeholders (pupils, parents, teachers, school managers, local and central public authorities) to engage in a constructive dialogue about the quality of educational services provided by school, the budgets at the schools’ and central level, as well as the policies and reforms in the educational sector. This concept is rooted in the theory of change of GPSA at the global level. Thus, it envisages the support to organizations (grantees) in their application of political economy approach to their social accountability strategies, provides knowledge and learning opportunities and supports the collaboration with the GPSA global partners, in order to ensure a constructive engagement with decision makers and strong collaboration between CSOs and state accountability institutions.¹

The project “My School” had the following specific objectives:

- Facilitate engagement of local stakeholders in approximately 100 schools using social accountability tools and promoting a dialogue on school budgets;
- Facilitate the flow of information from users of education services to local and national authorities;
- Promote the use of three new social accountability tools into formal education budgetary processes;
- Inform the public about the impact of wider economic and financial conditions on the educational sector and reforms (e.g., current situation, availability of budgetary resources, forecast);
- Support the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and other policy stakeholders in improving the quality of data to better support and evidence-based policymaking process.

In this respect, this report, developed in the final year of implementation, presents the results of the final project evaluation and its contribution to the development objectives.

The evaluation started with the following specific research questions:

1. Did the project’s strategy contribute to the intended outcomes and impacts? If so, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances?
2. What unintended outcomes (positive and negative) were produced, including spillover effects?

¹ GPSA Results Framework, 2015,

https://www.thegpsa.org/sa/Data/gpsa/files/field/documents/gpsa_revised_results_framework_10december2015.pdf

3. To what extent do the results validate the GPSA's theory of change and its adaption to the Moldovan Education and Governance contexts through My School?
4. To what extent have My School's lessons informed WBG country and sector dialogues, operations and strategies?
5. Under what conditions will the results be sustainable? What is the risk that the outcomes achieved will not be sustainable?

The answer to these questions will allow the development of impact analysis based on project's intended results, the changes with regards to project's beneficiaries and system, and will identify the necessary conditions to ensure the sustainability of the results.

Evaluation methodology

The study's objective is to evaluate, based on a comprehensive methodology, the impact of My School project, highlighting the efficiency and sustainability of social accountability tools developed and adapted to the local context of the Republic of Moldova.

The specific objectives are:

- Analyze the practice of applying social accountability tools by identifying the success factors and the lessons learned;
- Evaluate the legal and educational policy framework with regards to transparency and social accountability of local actors in the education sector;
- Identify the main problems and social risks associated with the sustainability of the social accountability tools implemented in pilot schools;
- Evaluate the level of involvement and cooperation of direct and indirect beneficiaries of education in streamlining the distribution of school budgets;
- Develop practical recommendations to ensure continuity of social accountability tools after project completion.

The final evaluation was based on a complex methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods of sociological research. Thus, the following research methods were used to ensure data triangulation: questionnaire survey among pupils and teachers, content analysis of the legal framework, in-depth interview, group interview and case study method.

The study was based on a representative sample of the schools involved in the project and included evaluation of 20 schools out of a total of 100 schools benefiting from the My School project. The main selection indicators were: the geographical location of the school (North, Center, South), the residence environment (urban, rural), the school dimension (evaluated according to the number of students), the level of economic development of the community (deprivation index of small localities) and teaching language (Romanian, Russian).

The quantitative study included conducting a survey among pupils and teachers from selected pilot schools. Pupils were randomly selected based on the step procedure, while respecting gender and age quota. Thus, secondary level school pupils (8th and 9th grade) and high school level students (10th and 12th

grade) were involved. The total volume of the sample is 313 pupils and 200 teachers (see Table 1, Table 2).

Table 1. Sample Structure, Survey among pupils, N = 313

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Sex	Masculine	134	42,8%
	Feminine	179	57,2%
Age group	10-14 y/o	77	24,6%
	15-19 y/o	236	75,4%
Number of household members	0-2 members	16	5,1%
	3-4 members	190	60,7%
	More than 5 members	107	34,2%
Vulnerability category	Children with special education needs (SEN)	5	1,6%
	Children without special education needs (SEN)	308	98,4%
Geographical location	North	119	38%
	Centre	111	35,5%
	South	83	26,5%

The sample of pupils is relatively proportional in terms of gender and geographical location, comprising of 42.8% of boys and 57.2% of girls. Depending on the age, we observe that the highest share is represented by pupils aged between 15-19 y/o, who are part of the high school level education system. It needs to be mentioned that the number of children with SEN is under-represented in the quantitative study, as the involvement of these categories require specific selection techniques. Therefore, this category has been implicitly researched through qualitative research methods (see Table 3).

The structure of the sample of teachers is characterized by a higher share of women, men being under-represented in the educational system of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, the quantitative research included only 6% of men and 94% of women surveyed. Teachers' age distribution included predominantly middle-aged and elderly teachers. The sample is proportional to the geographical area (North, Center, South) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sample Structure, Survey among teachers, N = 200

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Sex	Masculine	12	6,0%
	Feminine	188	94,0%
Age group	Up to 25 y/o	7	3,5%
	26-40 y/o	64	32,0%
	41-55 y/o	91	45,5%
	More than 55 y/o	38	19,0%
Work experience	Up to 10 years	36	18,9%
	11-25 years	67	35,3%
	More than 25 years	87	45,8%
Teacher grade	Without grade	2	1,4%
	Level I grade	18	12,2%
	Level II grade	127	86,4%
Language of communication	Romanian	191	95,5%
	Russian	9	4,5%
Geographical location	North	74	37,0%
	Centre	66	33,0%
	South	60	30,0%

The qualitative study included a comprehensive methodology, using the method of in-depth interview, group discussion and the case study method. The sample was predetermined, comprising of target groups, whose opinions were primordial for this study.

Thus, the **target group** of the study was:

- School managers: director / director, deputy of the school;
- Teachers;
- Parents in the community with children in the education system, including members of the Parents and Teachers' Associations; Parents whose children are with SEN;
- Students active in participating in formal educational processes within the school;
- Students who do not participate in school life, including pupils from vulnerable groups (ESN, families with many children, poor families, families of alcoholics, families with parents living abroad, etc.);
- Representatives of the Education Departments at the second level of public administration;
- Representatives of the LPA (mayor, deputy mayor on social issues);
- Representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research;
- Representatives of local civil society partners directly involved in the implementation of the My School project;
- Representatives of the My School implementation team.

Table 3. Characteristics of the qualitative research

Interviewees Category	Method	Number of interviews	Interviewee Code
School manager	In-depth interview, study case	20	I_Manager
Representatives of the Education Departments at the second level of public administration	In-depth interview	8	I_Dep_Educ_
Representatives of LPA	In-depth interview	4	I_LPA
Representatives of CSOs partners	In-depth interview, study case	4	I_Local_Partner
Representatives of MECR	In-depth interview	1	I_Expert
Parents who live abroad	In-depth interview	1	I_Parent
Parents with children in the education system	Group discussion	4	GD_Parents
Active pupils	Group discussion	5	GD_Pupils_active
Passive pupils, including from vulnerable groups	Group discussion	5	GD_Pupils_passive
Representatives of the My School implementation team	In-depth interview	1	I_Implementation_Team

A total of 14 group discussions and 38 in-depth interviews with key actors in the field were conducted (see Table 3). Additionally, two case studies have been developed that highlight the best impact practices of using social accountability tools. Both the quantitative study and the qualitative study were conducted on the same sample of schools. The collection period was: October-November 2018.

To support the research, the evaluation team conducted content analysis of the legal framework and policy documents, as well as project documentation from World Bank, including the conceptual and GPSA the evaluation framework. Additionally, we analyzed all project's implementation progress reports.

It should be noted that the present evaluation is limited with regards to the existence of a baseline study, which would have allowed a more accurate analysis of the results achieved.

Context – social, economic, political

The economic, social and political context in the Republic of Moldova in which the "My School" project was implemented during the period 2013-2018 reflects factors that influence the situation in the education sector, as well as the social-economic situation of direct beneficiaries of the system. The level of citizens' engagement in SATs also depends on the factors affecting the development of the country. Some of these factors have been identified by project beneficiaries as causes to the lack of community involvement.

- **Continuous migration of the population** - according to national censuses carried out in the main destination countries chosen by Moldovan emigrants in 2011, about 584 thousand Moldovans (about 16% of the population) lived abroad, compared to 357 thousand in 2001.² This data only includes one aspect of migration because external migration takes many forms and the state's ability to implement an efficient migration management system is limited. Thus, the number of children living in single-parent families will increase substantially, also due to migration.
- **Demographic decline** - according to UNFPA data, Moldova is experiencing a decline in population, ranking among the top 3 countries in the world that are experiencing this phenomenon. According to demographic experts, the country is depopulated without visible signs of recovery.³ The stable population declined by 1% between 2006 and 2016. The decline is even more steep if it is to be considered that the real number of the population in Moldova may be lower than the official estimates. With a relatively high mortality rate (11.2 per thousand over two decades - 1996-2016) and a relatively low life expectancy (67.5 years for men and 75.5 years for women), the birth rate is the main reason behind the aging of the population. The population of pensioners grew by 23% in one decade.⁴
- **Economic situation** - During 2016-2018, the Moldovan economy had an equivocal evolution. Although GDP has risen by about 4.5%, there are some concerns about the quality of this growth, which, in the medium term, may lead to moderation in the economic rhythm.⁵ Moreover, the period 2013-2014 was marked by massive bank fraud, which led to a loss of 12% of Moldova's GDP.⁶ In 2015, the country's economy contracted, and public debt rose to 47% of GDP.
- **Governance system** - According to World Bank Governance Indicators (WGI), Moldova's ranking of corruption control fell from position 33 in 2018 to position 17 in 2015.⁷ The governance system of the Republic of Moldova is characterized by corruption, obscure interests on the act governance, which directly affects the transparency, participation and accountability of decision-makers in the governing act.

² Gagauz, Stratan, Buciuceanu-Vrabie .i al.ii, „Analiza situa.iei popula.iei în Republica Moldova”, INCE, Chisinau, 2016.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Expert-Grup, "Raport de stare a Țării", 19.10.2018

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Expert-Grup, "MEGA XIV: Economia "culege roadele" fraudei bancare (T2-2016)", 06.04.2016

⁷ Kaufmann D., A.Kraay, and M.Mastruzzi, World Wide Governance Indicators

- **Political situation** - since 2009, the political situation in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by political instability, being governed by a series of coalitions that formed the Government. During the implementation of the project, 3 Ministers of Education took office. This fact influenced the course of the project, each minister having its own mandate and objectives, so the project team faced an interrupted communication with the decision maker, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. The year 2016 was marked by presidential elections and the implementation of budgetary austerity measures, which significantly affected the course of activities in all governance sectors. In 2017, MECR was without leadership for period then the reorganization of the ministry was started, with the education and culture portfolio being merged.

Legal regulatory framework

The legal regulatory context in which SATs were implemented within My school Project included:

- Approval of the new Education Code;
- Approval of the "Education-2020" Strategy;
- Implementation of the new financing mechanism for the general education institutions;
- Education Management Information System (SIME);
- The Global Social Responsibility Partnership (GPSA) within the World Bank Group.

Changes in the regulation of the education sector provided the necessary premises for a multidimensional approach to the project's intervention: social accountability tools to empower the beneficiaries and actors of the education system (pupils, parents, teachers, school managers, members of the community) in setting the school's development priorities; and participatory budget planning, in order to streamline the use of financial resources of the educational institutions. Both the provisions of the new Education Code and the new School Financing Mechanism provide more responsibilities to school managers in terms of budget management, more opportunities for school partners and the community to actively engage in the school life, including in the consultation of school budgets.

At this stage, it should be noted that at the initial stage of project implementation, the draft Code of Education was under discussion and the implementation team participated in its finalization. Therefore, a few other documents deriving from the provisions of the Education Code regulating the new approach of school governance, were elaborated and subsequently approved.

The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova

The Education Code⁸ establishes a greater role of the Parent-School Partnerships in school management and quality assurance in education institutions. The governance of the education system is based on a series of principles of democratic participation. The concept of partnership in the education system is stipulated in Article 8 of the Code, in the context of establishing a social dialogue and partnerships of educational institutions with other institutions, trade unions, the business environment, civil society, the media. At the same time, the notions of participation and responsibility of the community are stipulated as a fundamental principle of education, and concerns the actors of the community, parents and other

⁸ Oficial monitor, nr. 319-324 of 24.10.2014, art. 634

interested social actors (Article 7). Therefore, the new law on education makes the quality of educational services conditional on the active participation of both direct and indirect beneficiaries as well as community members in the development of institutions.

Selective provisions:

- *Pupils* have the right to express their opinions, beliefs and ideas freely; to have access to information, to be elected to the governing bodies of the educational institution and to participate in the evaluation and promotion of the quality of education, to claim their legal rights, to form associations or organizations whose purpose is to defend their interests and adhere to them and to establish student self-governing bodies (Article 136);
- *Parents*, or other legal representatives of children / pupils, have the right to participate in the development of the institution the educational institution; to demand respect for the rights and freedoms of the child in the educational institution, to elect and to be elected in the administrative and consultative bodies of the educational institution; to set up philanthropic parents' associations, with the main purpose of contributing to the development of the educational institution (Article 138). They have the obligation to ensure the education of the child in the family, to participate in extracurricular activities and self-training, to cooperate with the educational institution and to contribute to the achievement of the educational objectives (Article 138);
- *Teaching staff* has the right to choose and be elected in the governing, administrative and advisory bodies of the educational institution; to associate in trade union and professional organizations; (Article 134);
- *Management staff* has the obligation to ensure the quality of the educational process by respecting the national educational standards and the National Curriculum; to respect the rights of children, students and pupils; to create optimum conditions for developing the individual potential of the child, pupil and student; to work with family and community; to discuss with pupils and students, individually and in groups, about their emotional / physical / physical well-being at home / in the family and institution (Article 135).
- *The evaluation of the teaching and management staff* also foresee aspects of the partnership between the beneficiaries and the actors of the education system, so the internal evaluation of the teachers in the general education is done annually based on an evaluation methodology that obligatorily foresees the consultation of the pupils' parents and other teachers in that education institution (Article 45). The internal and external evaluation is based on participative and deliberative principles of conceiving strategies and actions for the development of school institutions.
- *The introduction of the School Administration Board* (Article 49), with a decision-making role, consists of: director, a deputy director, a delegated representative of the public administration in the first level administrative-territorial unit, three parents' representatives, delegates from the General Parents Meeting, two teachers' representatives, the Teachers' Council delegate, and a

student representative delegated by Pupils Council. The School Board has the competence to participate in (selective): evaluation of the school manager, approval of the budget, selection of the school manager, approval of the institution's development plan, management of financial resources from other sources than the budget. The School Board also actively participates in establishing the school's development objectives, in consultation with stakeholders.

The Education Code provided the necessary policy framework to implement the social accountability mechanism. Thus, the more participatory the methods used by the School Board, the more the decisions taken will correspond to the expectations and needs of the direct and indirect beneficiaries. Although the Code provides for mobilization and consultation activities of the representatives of the school communities in order to respect the principle of public accountability, it did not foresee any mechanism for their organization and implementation.

Education 2020 Strategy

The Education 2020 Strategy⁹ is the document that defines the development priorities, objectives and tasks of the educational sector in the Republic of Moldova. This vision document contains several provisions on the participation of pupils, parents, community in the development, taking and implementation of decisions in the education sector. Participation practices do not differ from those stipulated in the Education Code, so the strategy provides a framework for operationalization and institutionalization of the participation mechanisms of parents and community in the school life.

The specific objective 7 of the Strategy stipulates (selective):

- Empowering society to ensure quality education by diversifying forms of community and family involvement in decision-making;
- Developing mechanisms for motivating the community and family to participate in the decision-making process and to solve school problems;
- Increasing pupils' participation in the decision-making process, including the development, implementation and evaluation of educational policies;
- Developing and institutionalizing mechanisms to consult all children without discrimination at all levels of education in line with international child participation standards;
- Developing programs to support community initiatives to address educational issues;
- Revising the initial and continuing training curricula of managerial and teaching staff;
- Encouraging the establishment and support of pupils' councils at the local, rayonal and national levels, as a platform for communication and educational policy assessment;

Education partnerships are also mentioned, including by promoting dialogue with civil society and the business community to establish areas of common interest and to address educational and community issues. Thus, in the strategy's view, increased satisfaction with the educational process, increased commitment to learning, conscious decision-making and civic skills are the personal benefits of children who participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of educational policies. Moreover, the involvement of children, young people, parents, civil society organizations and other social partners

⁹ Official Monitor nr. 345-351 of 21.11.2014, art. 1014.

in the decision-making process contributes to the development of quality, transparent, educational policies based on the real needs of different categories of children.

Thus, the "Education-2020 Strategy" offers the strategic direction and the governance vision of school institutions based on participatory tools, quality control, leadership responsibilities. As with the Education Code, the Strategy does not contain provisions on the mechanisms for implementing the specific objectives of participatory governance methods. At the same time, the Strategy mentions the need to institutionalize child consultation mechanisms and train decision makers to facilitate participation. (Council of Europe, Child and Youth Participation in the Republic of Moldova, 2013).

The new funding mechanism for general education institutions

The new funding mechanism for primary and secondary general education institutions, piloted since 2013 and enforced on 08.10.2014¹⁰, includes financing on standard cost-based per pupil. In the context of the financial autonomy of educational institutions, the new method of funding allows the administrations of educational institutions to plan the distribution and use of financial resources according to the needs of the school. Modifying the school financing formula aimed at balancing the expenses per student, simplifying and strengthening the budget forecasting process, increasing transparency in school financing and expanding school autonomy. An obvious effect of this intervention is the reconceptualization of the role of institutional management. Thus, the school manager is also responsible for managing the budget, human resources, budgetary and strategic planning of the school.

Education Management Information System (SIME)

In the educational system of the Republic of Moldova, the data are collected and centralized at the level of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. At the same time, the Ministry's limited capacity to systematically process and analyze data, reduces its use in substantiating educational policies. Implemented with the support of the World Bank, the Education Management Information System (SIME) was developed in order to automate the processes of collecting, updating and storing data on general education in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the skills of processing, interpretation of results and their use are limited throughout the educational system. In this respect, an identified opportunity is the complex analysis of the availability of data in the education sector, which could be used for school analysis.

Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) within the World Bank Group

The Social Accountability Concept is rooted in Theory of Change of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability. GPSA aims (1) to increase constructive engagement between civil society actors and governmental decision-makers within the country where the beneficiaries want to improve services; and (2) facilitate collaboration between social responsibility initiatives of civil society actors and State institutions for overseeing actors in the country where beneficiaries wish to improve services.¹¹ These are the two main outcomes of the theory of GPSA change: constructive engagement with decision makers and collaboration between civil society organizations and state responsibility institutions. GPSA seeks to

¹⁰ Government Decision nr. 868 of 10.10.2014 „privind finanțarea în bază de cost standard per elev a instituțiilor de învățământ primar și secundar general sin subordinea autorităților publice locale de nivelul al doilea”, published on 24.10.2014 in the Official Monitor nr. 319-324, art.930

¹¹ GPSA Results Framework, 2015,

https://www.thegpsa.org/sa/Data/gpsa/files/field/documents/gpsa_revised_results_framework_10december2015.pdf

support citizens in having a more articulated voice, providing help for governors to listen, and providing support to state agencies to act on the basis of feedback from citizens. This is done by providing support to organizations (beneficiaries) in applying political economy approach to their social responsibility strategies, providing knowledge and learning opportunities, and supporting collaboration with the GPSA Global Partners.

Evaluation components

I. Did the project's strategy contribute to the intended outcomes and impacts? If so, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances?

The strategic objective of this initiative is to empower Moldovan citizens to engage local, regional and national authorities in the development of evidence-based policies and budget dialogue regarding educational reform, quality of service and development priorities of general education (1) and to enable an environment in which social accountability initiatives thrive and develop (2).

The evaluation provided sufficient data to estimate the positive and negative, intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect effects on project beneficiaries and other social actors. Identifying the causes that produced these effects through direct interaction with recipients and judicious analysis of records and resources, as well as the time allocated for decisions and actions, allows for the accurate formulation of the findings.

Their relevance and usefulness should be seen in the context of the effectiveness and sustainability of subsequent commitments on such strategies, but also their use for advocacy efforts regarding the SATs in public sector policies and cross-sectoral approaches.

Choosing a participatory approach to quantitative and qualitative research is based on the belief that social actors are best placed to judge about the processes they were involved in and the results that have affected, in some way or not, their lives.

In general, all categories of respondents: pupils, teachers, school managers, parents, LPA representatives and community partners highlighted important changes during and after the project. Nevertheless, during the interviews and group discussions, each group of social actors has touched different aspects of these changes.

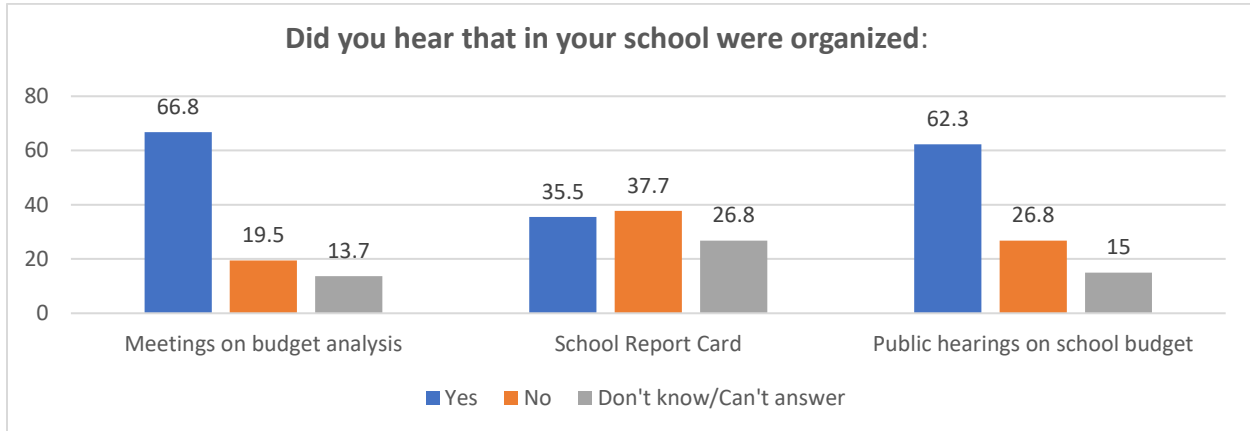
The degree and sources of information

The quantitative research has pointed that, generally, *pupils* have a high degree of information about SATs (84.3%), the most known tool being meetings on budget analysis and public hearings on school budget.

Thus, when requested to answer the question " **Did you hear that in your school were organized?...**", most of the respondents chose these two answers - 66.8% and 62.3% of the pupils respectively - while the Tool "School Report Card" has an almost equal number of students who have heard about this instrument and are not familiar with it.

As group discussions have shown, this ambiguous quantitative data may be caused by the fact that school managers, teachers and pupils use different terminology for this tool ("fiche", "questionnaire", "test regarding the"). For this reason, it is possible that respondents didn't necessarily understand the exact SATs the description refers to.

Figure 1. Degree of information regarding the Social Accountability Tools, %



The information shared by pupils during group discussions highlighted certain aspects of familiarity with these tools. Thus, pupils who usually engage in school activities (commonly referred to as "active students") and / or those in the Pupils Council have easily distinguished the tools and have expressed their opinions about them. However, the pupils' opinion is that although the budget discussions are interesting to them, too detailed information is not useful, some of the information being vague for them.

"Both this year and last year, there was a meeting with the teachers, pupils, director and we discussed various problems related to the schools and some issues about the budget. Half of the meeting we were all together, and then we gathered in small groups and discussed our opinions, and then we all came back together and presented our views with everybody" GD_Pupils_active_6

The implementation of SATs in schools does not seem to be associated with any idea of a project, which is also explained by the fact that the pupils who were present at the start of the project - have already graduated high school. Meanwhile, the implementation of the tools continues, which is perceived by pupils as an internal practice in the school.

In the group discussions with pupils generically called "passive", it was also underlined the that information is distributed equally, without discrimination.

It should be noted that pupils in both groups appreciated the positive effect of social accountability tools on parents' involvement in school life, which implicitly for them means, in their lives.

"My parents are now very involved, perhaps because I am already in high school, but maybe because it is good at school too, a lot of information is being analyzed, everything is developing, from year to year we have better conditions" GD_Pupils_passive_5

The degree of pupils' participation in school activities, their motivation to engage in activities, and their awareness of the utility of social accountability tools have increased.

"We also want to learn, so we could even organize fundraising campaigns to do something at school or in the village" GD_Pupils_passive_6

The quantitative research highlighted the fact that the majority of students, who knew about social accountability tools (70.8%), received this information from their class master during the class meetings with pupils. Another important source of information about SATs and activities is the informative panels in all the schools visited: 45.1% of the students also opted for this answer.

School meetings is another way in which some pupils (39%) learned about the implementation of the tools, 22.7% of pupils said they learned this from a colleague in school and only 17% said the information was placed on the website of the institution (webpage or Facebook profile, etc.). The small percentage of those who chose this option may be explained by the small number of schools that have a functional web page, especially in rural areas.

In group discussions, the active students showed satisfaction about the way the information is distributed in school, and even how it flows from manager to teacher and then to pupils and parents.

"We were invited by the teacher, but I also saw the information on the school informative panel. Parents were also announced. I participated because I was curious to find out how school money is spent, how much money the school owns" GD_Pupils_active_4

"During the Pupils' Council, all head of classes gather and discuss schools' and pupils' problems. Then, the head of class informs us about the public hearing, he/she has all the information" GD_Pupils_active_5

"We talked at home about it, parents told me what expenses are being spent in school, about the renovation of the school, for example" GD_Pupils_passive_1

The group discussions in rural schools, the communication between pupils was highlighted.

"I do not look at the information panel, I would like teachers or colleagues to tell me" GD_Pupils_passive_1

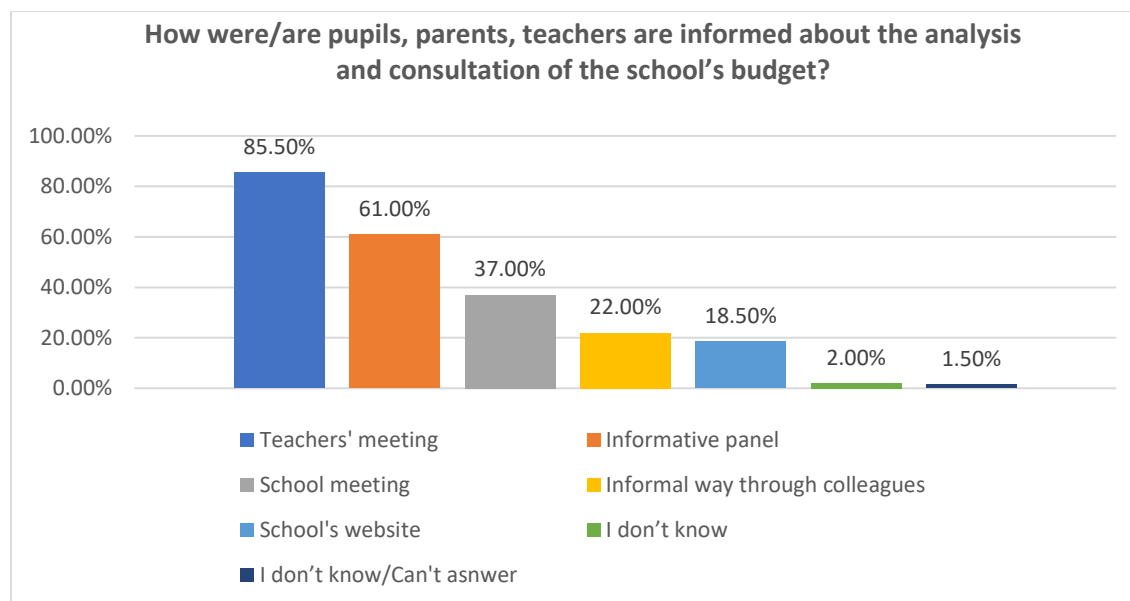
"The teacher and the head of class informs us, but I don't care about the budget" GD_Pupils_passive_2

In some discussions with passive students, there were separate opinions about not inviting them to certain activities in school.

"I would attend, but no one invites me. Nobody comes to ask me. (...) Others participate because they learn well, and personal teachers tell them, but nobody tells me" GD_Pupils_passive_2

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire reported the following sources of information:

Figure 2. Sources of information, Teachers' opinion, %



The School managers predominantly rely on the fact that the teacher will provide parents and students with the information about meetings that take place or other important data. At the same time, school managers are obliged to place information about school budget on the school's informative panel. Some school managers have emphasized the importance of intense communication between parents through social networks, and their self-organization abilities for certain actions and initiatives.

"Right now, at the beginning of the year, we had a meeting with the Parents Committee and they had the initiative to come up with a project – The Careful Parent. I don't know the details that I don't want to be involved yet, but I know they formed a group on Viber and they are busy talking about this" I_Manager_17

All school managers present during in-depth interviews have confirmed that they are informing LPAs representatives about the upcoming public hearings on budgets, or public consultations. Even though they don't participate, the rayonal representatives always willing to get involved when the manager and the accountant have questions about certain budget lines. In most cases analyzed in research, this collaboration is tight and confers managers insurance. In rural areas, the relationship with LPA is closer, given that usually there is only one gymnasium / lyceum in the locality.

Asked to answer the question "Who is mostly involved in the organization of *school public hearing on budgets*, teachers have mentioned the following educational actors:

- ✓ School administration (84.5%); School manager (80%); Teachers (62%); Parents (50.5%); School Board (34%); Pupils (31%); Pupils' Council (24%); Local NGOs (7.5%)

As far as the "School Report Card" is concerned, teachers have answered the following:

- ✓ School Administration (65%); School manager (53%); Teachers (44.5%); Parents (35%); Pupils (23.5%); School Board (22.5%); Pupils' Council (19%); Local NGOs (7%)

A relatively large number of teachers (44.5%) chose the answer "I don't know / I can't answer".

Also, teachers were asked to answer the question of "Who is responsible for organizing the public hearing of the school budget", and the results were the following:

- ✓ School administration (65.5%); School manager (65%); Teachers (56.5%); Parents (54%); Pupils (32.5%); Pupils' Council (23.5%); School Board (22.5%); Local NGOs (10%).

Therefore, we can notice that there is a share ownership of the organization process of the Social Accountability Tools, hence every direct and indirect beneficiary feels that it is part of the process.

Attitudes and perceptions about the Social Responsibility Tools

Both the quantitative and qualitative research assessed pupils' attitudes towards social accountability tools implemented in the school. Therefore, 81.8% of the respondents said they had a positive opinion about SATs, while only 1.6% expressed a negative opinion, the rest of the respondents choosing the option "I don't have an opinion / I don't care" (9.6%) or "I don't know / Can't answer", 7%).

The share of teachers who have a positive opinion about the implementation of social accountability tools is higher than that of pupils, representing 97%. Only 0.5% have a negative opinion about SATs, the other 2.55% is distributed among the answers "I don't have an opinion / I don't care" (1%) or "I don't know / Can't answer" (1.5%)

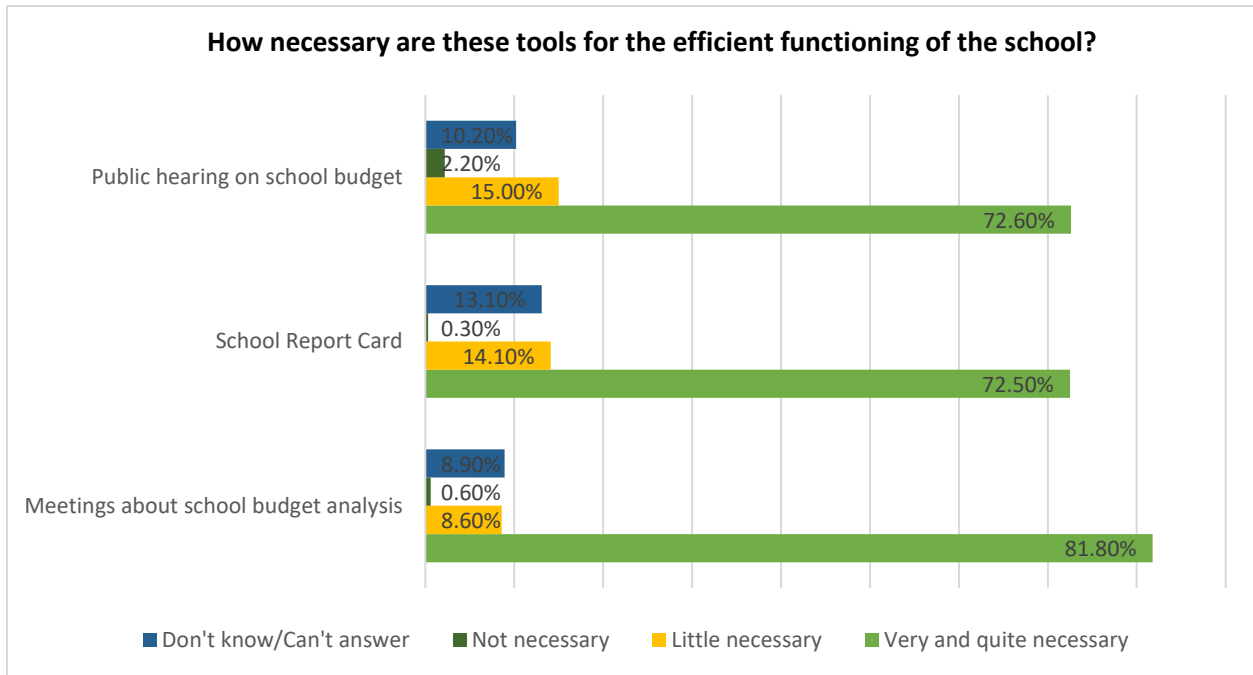
Group discussions with pupils pointed to a high interest in SATs.

"We participate in budget discussions, and sometimes at public hearings, we have questions for managers, or we have proposals, and then she or the accountant explains what and how is possible to organize our idea, the parents who come to the hearings explain everything to us, or parents tell me wat home what is being discussed" GD_Pupils_active_4

"I think it good that the budget is discussed. Maybe it would be good for the people in the village to do the same thing at the town hall, but maybe they don't know it can ask information and assist at meetings" GD_Pupils_active_6

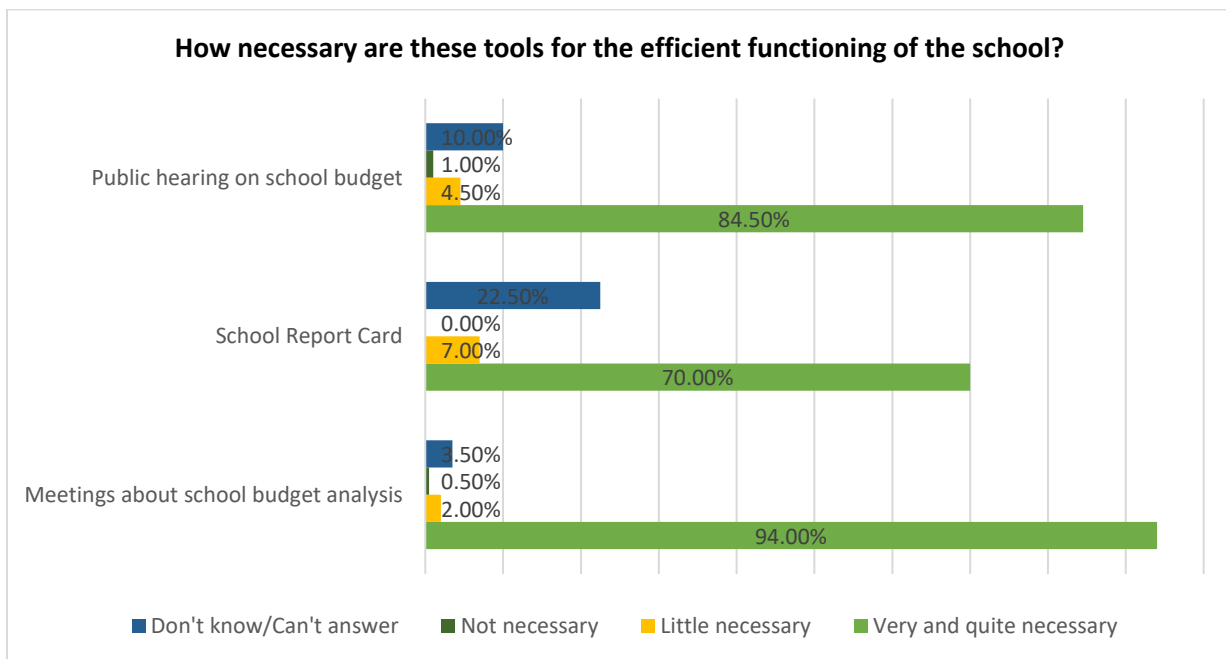
Pupils with little interest in SATs explained that they are not concerned about the financial issues related to the school and this information is not interesting to them, but to their parents.

Figure 3. Perception about the necessity of Social Accountability Tools, Pupils' opinion, %



The data provided by the quantitative research shows that students appreciate school budget analysis meetings as being "very and quite necessary" to a greater extent (81.8%) than the School Report Card and the public hearings of the budget (72.55% and 72.6%).

Figure 4. Perception about the necessity of Social Accountability Tools, Teachers' opinion, %



Compared to pupils, teachers consider more than students (94% versus 81.8%) that the meetings on school budget analysis are "very and quite necessary", as well as public hearings of the school budget (84.5% versus 72.6%). In terms of the opinion of pupils and teachers about the School Report Card, they almost share the same positive view (70% and 72.5% respectively).

Both managers who have been recently involved in SATs, as well as those with experience, appreciate to a greater extent the "public hearing" tool. They appreciate the impact made on parents and on the relationship based on trust established immediately after the first interactions related to school budget, with evidence and data.

All schools use the School Report Card, or at least the information provided by this instrument. Additionally to adjusting the School Report Card to their participatory needs, managers use surveys on parents, teachers and pupils and discuss the findings during sub grouped meetings. They take urgent and important decisions based on the information they have and later present them to joint sessions.

Often, this mapping of problems and needs, increases responsibility and accountability of the parents, LPSAs and the community.

"For example, I implemented questionnaires to evaluate the problems in the school and then, unexpectedly, one of the parents said that he will buy several taps and change the old ones that were broken. Also, with the parents' support, we have hot water in the school. Due to pupils' initiative, we have now a modern sanitary block. With their support, we received LPA's financial support. And I'm glad it was the pupils' initiative" I_Manager_17

In other schools, managers have developed brochures, guides, or leaflets to tell parents in advance about what is going on, and this has favored genuine interaction between parents and school.

"I have developed a guide at first. It was useful for parents to understand the information discussed at the public hearing - budget, budget categories, how money is distributed, purchases, etc. I think they were all satisfied. I think it is the director's responsibility to pass on the information so that it can allow good and effective communication between parents and school" I_Ex_Manager_13

"From discussions with directors, I noticed that they continue to use the questionnaires, but some of them have adapted them to their school, because they were difficult to comprehend" I_Local_Partner_3

Practices and role of participation

The research also explored the pupils' and teachers' view on participation. Thus, 62% of pupils perceive as important their participation and teacher's perceive important pupils' and parents' participation in proportion of 91.5%.

They were also asked about the participation of marginalized groups and, in general, their answers confirmed the lack of any discrimination, as well as affirmative measures to increase the participation of certain social groups of pupils in participatory processes in schools.

During group discussions, it was also found that there is a certain problem of communication between children, according to various socio-demographic and economic criteria.

"There are many passive children in our school. Perhaps because of the economic situation in the family, perhaps because they are disinterested, perhaps because their parents left"; "They think they do not matter in school, and their opinion does not matter. But that's not true, that's their opinion" GD_Pupils_active_1

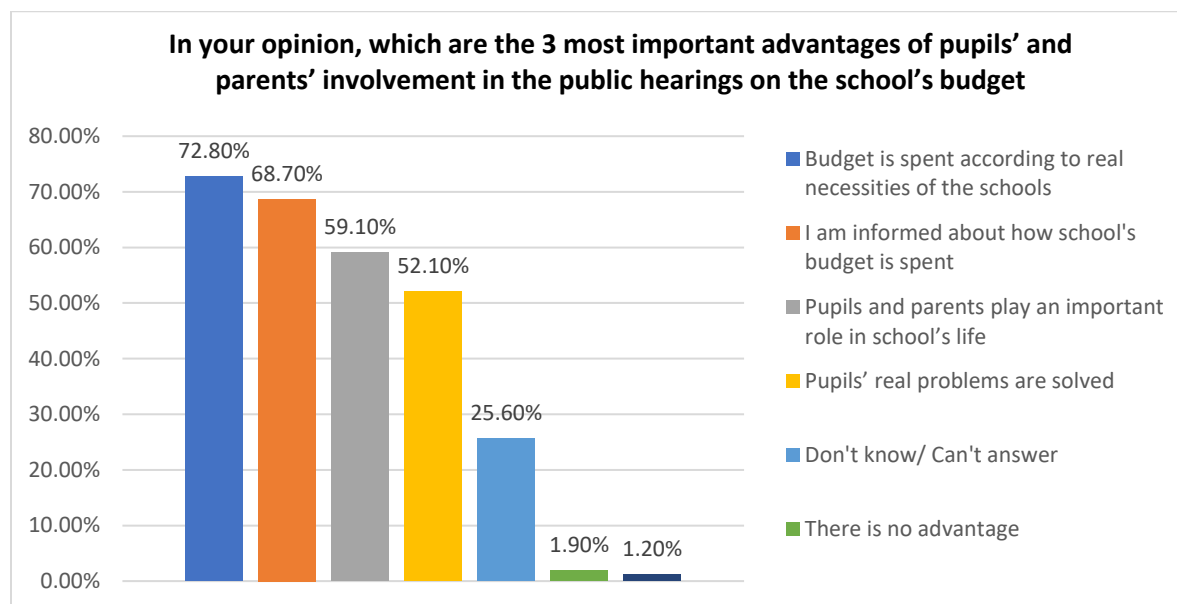
In group discussions, students were asked to express their opinion on the purpose of participating in school life, and their answers were mainly based on the argument of "primary beneficiaries of education" and personal development.

"Yes, it is good to discuss the budget of the school. We know better what we want to change at school and what we need "DG_Elevi_activi_4

"For me it's interesting to get involved because I can now say my opinion. But if I participate - I want to be then information if the problem I mentioned was solved. For example, we complained about problems with the bus driver, but I did not see any action taken towards this" GD_Pupils_active_1

Both quantitative and qualitative research also examined the main advantages of pupils' and parents' participation.

Figure 5. Main advantages of parents' and pupils' participation at public hearings on school budget, pupils' opinion, %

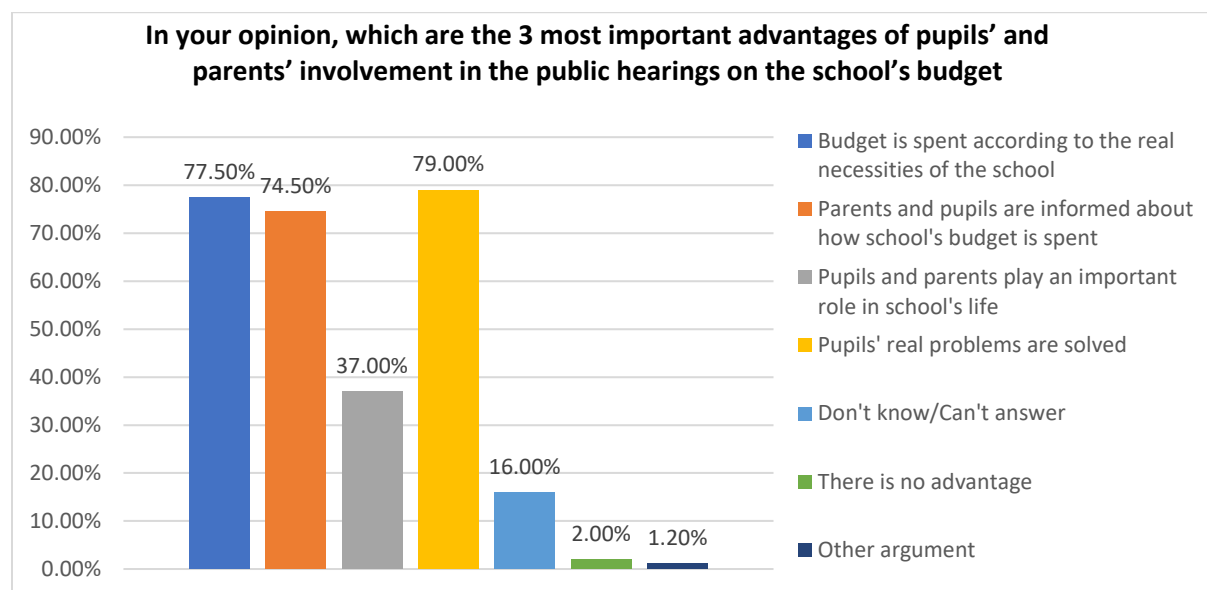


Most pupils (72.8%) consider the consultations and public hearings about the school budget advantageous because "money is spent according to the needs of the school", they are informed about the way school's budget is spent (68.7%) and that pupils' and parents' play an active role in the school's life (59.1%).

Compared to the students, the three advantages in the order of their share, expressed by the teachers who participated in the research, are the following:

- ✓ "Pupils' real problems are solved" (79%); "Money is spent according to the school's needs" (77.5%); "Students and parents are informed about school needs / how money is spent" (74.5%)

Figure 6. Main advantages of parents' and pupils' participation at public hearings on school budget, teachers' opinion, %



Group discussions have better elucidated the pupils' views on the benefits of participation. Both groups of pupils consider budgetary transparency as a link between them and the management of the school and teachers. This is seen through mutual openness and improvement of attitudes towards teachers and school managers. At the same time, pupils have other expectations from these instruments as regards to some financial autonomy.

"The atmosphere has become very good in our school, the teachers are friendly", "Mrs. Mayor comes very often to visit, interacts with us, we don't feel a difference or distance" GD_Pupils_active_4

"We should have a budget line that we can totally manage. We'll consult all children and we'll decide for something good for everyone" GD_Pupils_active_4

Parents who participated in the group discussions highlighted the great contribution of social accountability tools both to their personal experience and to Parents' Association.

"We know where and what is being done, how money is spent. Even if the same information is displayed on the informative panel, one might not understand everything. But the public hearing explains it all"; "Parents are happy to participate, they communicate with other parents, we got to know more people in the community, built relationships for the school." "The attitude towards the parents is different, and the parents' towards the director and towards LPA." "Our children feel more confident, feel good to be involved" GD_Parents_3

Considering the frequency of mass-media negative coverage of corruption in schools, the implementation of social accountability tools led to an increase in parents 'and pupils' confidence in the correctness of internal school management processes.

Parents who participated in group discussions have signaled that parent involvement has increased significantly. This is particularly observed in rural areas, traditionally characterized by a lower rate of parental participation, due to over demand of household activities and outdated rules on the exclusive role of the school in child education.

School managers appreciate the value of all social accountability tools. They emphasize particularly an important aspect in the community's solidarity with school issues, the emergence of a collaborative spirit towards the mutual benefits of the entire community through the quality of education.

"After the public hearings, the festive hall was full of parents (they had previously received personalized invitations and brochures with explanations of budget and the public hearing), representatives from the LPA and from the Educational Department, even the Mayor - everyone was pleased, but especially us"
I_Manager_16

"Before the project, we didn't have activities involving parents: The Parents' Council was not functional, they met occasionally to discuss festivities. Parents. Had a big barrier that limited their participation"
I_Manager_14

Parents also highlight the importance of social accountability tools in increasing their level of engagement in the school.

The level of social inclusion of children with special educational needs increased during the project in some schools. Managers managed, through SATs, to increase the community awareness on the needs of children with SENs and to allocate the money needed for certain initiatives in this respect.

Parents interviewed noted that women traditionally participate more actively in school-related activities. Fathers' participation was estimated to be between 5% and 20% of the total number of parents attending school for meetings or activities.

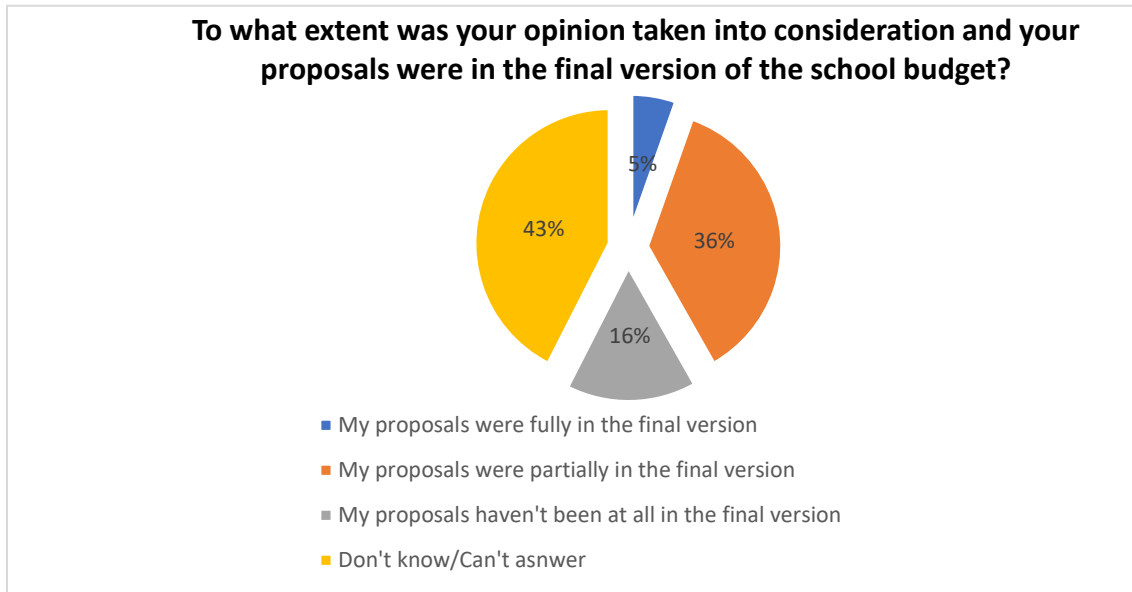
"Of course, women are more involved than men. Most of the men that do get involved are those who have children boys at school. Perhaps because they are more reserved to express their point of view ... "
GD_Parents_3

Pupils, respondents in quantitative research participated in a lesser share (36.1%) in public hearings on the school budget. According to them, girls participated more actively than boys (18.5% versus 1.9%). In this process, 47.9% believe that both girls and boys participated equally in this kind of participatory meetings.

Conversations on this topic also took place in discussion groups. Most of the students felt that it was understandable that girls were more involved in participatory activities because they "learn better", "are more kind," "teachers communicate easier with them." A couple of boys from Pupils' Councils explained that they participate less, because this subject is not interesting to them. "Boys are more interested in sports".

Teachers were also asked if they ever attended the public hearing on the school's budget, and 92.5% responded affirmatively. When asked to assess who participated more actively, teachers responded that more women than men were involved in this process (58.5% versus 1.5%), and 36% of teachers responded that both genders participate, equally or implicitly.

Figure 7. Pupils' perception about the results of their participation at public hearings, %



Pupils evaluated in a smaller share (5%) than teachers (26%) that their proposals "were fully found in the final budget of the school". The share of pupils who consider their proposals "not found at all in the final version of the school budget" is much higher than that of teachers (13% versus 3%).

In an attempt to elucidate the reasons why some pupils lack enough motivation to participate in the discussions about the school's budget, they mentioned that sometimes don't have the opportunity to express their opinions during these meetings. The practice of some schools to hold separate meetings with pupils and then joint meetings with teachers and parents is welcome in this respect. Otherwise, the lack of self-confidence or the lack of public speaking skills could jeopardize pupils' plenary attendance.

"We would like trainings where we could talk about our rights in terms of budgeting, debates, to have arguments" [GD_Pupils_active_5](#)

In order to assess pupils' subjective perceptions about the impact of social accountability tools on other aspects of school life, respondents to the questionnaires were asked to assess to what extent the application of these tools changed the relationship at school / relationships with parents, teachers, school managers.

Pupils participating in group discussions confirmed quantitative data by positive examples and shared their own observations on the dynamics of relationships between various social actors.

Pupils have greatly appreciated the openness of teachers and increased psychological comfort in relation to them, as well as trusting relationships between parents and teachers, parents and school manager.

"Our relationship and communication with the teachers and the director are free, we always say everything, as it is, as if they were our parents. Teachers often ask our opinion, we are here as in a family" [GD_Pupils_active_5](#)

Teachers had also been asked to what extent they have felt over the past few years that their relationship with parents has improved. Thus, 74.5% of teachers believe that their relationship with pupils' parents "has improved greatly" and 22% said the relationship "remained the same".

Both pupils and teachers who participated in quantitative research had been asked to give their views on who they think they are currently making decisions about the school budget. Thus, 64% of the teachers and 39.3% of the pupils consider that the decisions about how the money is spent are taken by all those mentioned in the question, namely: the school manager, the pupils' Council and the Parents Association. However, the number of pupils who chose "Don't know/Can't answer" is very high (81.5%).

The share of teachers who think that this is done by the school manager is 28.5%, compared to 34.8% of the pupils. Another significant difference is the choice of the option "Pupils' Council": only 3.5% of teachers perceive this, as compared to 15.3% of pupils.

Parents who participated in the group discussions highlighted the fact that public hearings changed the mentality of more reserved parents and improved the attitudes of those who were skeptical.

"Now parents know that the school has money, and how is this money spent. Previously we talked a lot, but no one knew what was happening. Now it is transparent, the situation is clear, and we can ask questions about the allocation of the budgets. People are not gossiping anymore on this issue"
GD_Parents_4

The managers of the interviewed institutions intend to continue implementing social accountability tools, but some of them mention the need for parental and community-wide training on participatory approaches to decision-making. Local managers and partners in the civil society are optimistic about SATs sustainability by arguing that once teachers, parents and pupils understand the benefits of participation, they will no longer accept making others take decisions in their place.

"I believe public hearings should be organized at the city hall and in all institutions. People only gain from this" I_Manager_16

"It would be useful to have trainings on communication and conflict resolution. We have tense situations and we need to know how to solve them and find solutions. And trainings on the budget, but especially on participation - how parents could get involved more, be more active in school life and the community in general" I_Local_Partner_15

"I think the practice of public hearings must be institutionalized. Introduce it in the school manager's terms of reference. It's a good thing for everyone. Or be in the strategic plan of the institution, to introduce "annual organization of public hearings on budget management" and then all will do them" I_Manager_21

Both school managers and representatives of NGOs and LPAs have highlighted the need for technical support, additional to the informational and school development resources. In some situations, the school budget has a deficit and under such circumstances, some school managers don't consider public hearings as a priority. They explain their decision through poor parenting and worries more important than consulting a scanty budget.

Transposition of social accountability practices into public policy documents

Following the documentation process, the evaluation team found that the project's efforts in institutionalizing social accountability instruments materialized to a certain extent, thus contributing to the strategic objective of the initiative. My School implementation team contributed with expertise and consultations to the development of a series of public policy documents during 2013-2018.

These policy proposals have either directly transposed social accountability tools or mention certain elements and practices, including aspects of open data in education. Unfortunately, we find that although the documents were approved under the laws in force, most of them have not been transposed into national policy documents, so they are still pending. It remains at the discretion of the central public authorities to publish them in the Official Monitor, thus including them in an enforced regulatory framework.

- **Regulation (framework) on the Organization and Functioning of the General Education Institution Administration Board, Order No. 77 of 20.02.2015¹²**, which provides for the powers of the Board (selective):
 - organizes public hearings;
 - participates in drafting the school's budget, ensuring transparency of the process, including by organizing public hearings;
 - approves the development plan of the educational institution;
 - manages financial resources from sources other than budget resources, ensuring transparent and fair use of funds;
 - organizes the School Report Card, in which they request the community opinion on service satisfaction and development priorities of the institution;
 - during the budgetary year, the School Board, in partnership with the local authorities, organizes at least a public hearing for the community, prior to the budget approval for the next budget year, to ensure a participatory budgeting process. (Article 41)

- **Regulation (model) on organization and functioning of primary and secondary education institutions, first and second cycle**, No. 235, of 25.03.2016¹³, which provides clearer responsibilities for (selective):
 - Manager of the institution: coordinates the elaboration of the annual managerial project and institution development program, ensures the enforcement of the Teachers' Council and School Board's decisions, establishes the internal data collection mechanism in the Education Management Information System (SIME); presents activity reports during public hearings with the participation of teachers, School Board, parents, pupils (Article 100);
 - Parents: support educational partnerships, participate in meetings, community programs, supports the leadership of the School Institution (Art 213-220)

¹² https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ordinul_77_din_20_februarie_2015.pdf

¹³ https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/regulament_organizare_si_functionare_institutii_invatamint_gene.pdf

- **Professional Competence Standards for managerial staff in general education**¹⁴, which provides "community and partnerships" as a standard of professional competence;
- **Professional Competence Standards for teachers in general education**¹⁵, which provides "educational partnerships" as a standard of professional competence;
- **Tools and instruments for consulting the opinion of pupils, parents and teachers**¹⁶ on the quality of educational services provided by general education institutions (National School Inspectorate, 2017) - Questionnaire / group interview for pupils (grades I-IV, V-IX, X-XII) , parents (grades I-IV, V-IX, X-XII), teachers;
- **Methodology of internal evaluation of teachers in general education** (National School Inspectorate, 2016): Standard on ensuring collaboration and respect with the family and community, developing partnerships; Evaluation indicator: communication with family members, family involvement and community members in streamlining the educational process;
- **Methodology for the evaluation of managerial staff in general education** (National School Inspectorate, 2017): Standard and indicators providing for participatory aspects in the process of organizing and developing the general education institution; organizing consultations with teachers, parents and pupils in developing the strategic development project of the institution; apply questionnaires / surveys in the planning and management of the financial and material resources; develop partnerships to ensure the progress of the general education and the community;
- **Methodology for self-evaluation of general education institutions** (National School Inspectorate, 2016): Standards: The educational institution develops community partnerships; The administration of the educational institution collaborates with the pupils' parents, the local public authority and the other institutions with legal responsibilities; Teachers collaborate with pupils' parents, local public authority; Children participate in decision-making on all aspects of school life; The administration of the educational institution has defined, in the strategic plan and operational development plan, mechanisms to ensure pupils' participation in problem solving and decision-making that directly target their school life; elaborated tools that ensure enforcement of pupils' opinions, initiatives, suggestions in the decision-making process concerning the aspects of their school life (questionnaires, surveys).

¹⁴ Aprobat la ședința Consiliului Național pentru Curriculum, PV nr. 10 din 22.06.2012, prin Ordinul Ministrului Educației nr. 623 din 28.08.2016

¹⁵ Aprobat la ședința Consiliului Național pentru Curriculum, PV nr. 10 din 22.06.2012, prin Ordinul Ministrului Educației nr. 623 din 28.08.2016

¹⁶ http://isn.edu.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/repere_consultarea_opinieii_0.pdf

Case study (1): Educational institution

The School X joined the project in the third year of the My School project. The school’s management works with great enthusiasm towards increasing the transparency of its work and budget and expresses its explicit commitment to continue implementing social accountability tools. It is interesting that the school management promotes the SATs in different ways, among parents and teachers, LPAs and NGO partners, finding their applicability in various contexts.

"I organized a practical exercise with the parents and they found it enjoyable: we organized a meeting and formed a couple of groups of parents, where we explained information about the budget and decentralization. And I gave each group the task of managing a certain budget, all differently, according to budget categories, similar to those we have for the school. It was a very difficult task for them, but they enjoyed this simulation very much. Above all, they understood how important the SATs are (budget consultation), how difficult it is to manage the budget according to the needs and the legal framework. This simulation has helped me to explain them, in an understandable manner, the concept of SATs"
I_Manager_19

Analysis of the major factors that ensure the smooth running and continuity of the activities within the project

(analysis based on Chart 1, independent variables):

Capacities at the school level	
The manager:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is energetic; - has great enthusiasm about the applicability of social accountability tools (e.g. the thesis for managerial degree touched upon this topic); - has strong beliefs about the purpose of pupils’ participation ("Students are the main actors in the learning process, not us. It is from them that we have to find out what is good to change, what they want"); - advanced public speaking skills; - ensures the flow of relevant information on all projects (eg the Deputy Director and other teachers have solid information on social accountability tools and share similar views on participation);
Financial Management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is appropriate and relevant to the needs of pupils and teachers;
Participation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parents often have initiatives to improve student conditions ("Some parents came up with the proposal to limit the access of transport near the school. Of course, I agreed. They went to the city hall and they took all the necessary steps, so in a few days I had everything done!").
System structure	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The institution has collaborative relationships with LPA, City Hall. The institution is often visited by the mayor; - The implementation of SATs is not the responsibility of a single person or unit within the school. All teachers are aware of them and can advise on the budget - The institution is committed to continuing to implement social accountability tools, even if there is no internal regulation to do so.

"Every year we continue organize public hearings on the budget. We like it, the pupils and teachers like it, they see its utility. They all need a lot but if they know the budget, they are limited to the basic needs" I_Manager_19

Community participation

- The institution has multiple collaborations with different NGOs and other high schools in the region, either based on collaborative memoranda, in joint projects or initiatives on topics of common interest where they also apply the SATs;
- A high level of involvement of pupils in extracurricular activities (summer camps, participation outside the country) has been initiated and maintained on various themes such as human rights, multiculturalism, cultural heritage, etc.
- Participation in the "My School" project is considered as a great achievement for the institution's CV, which increases the chances for partnerships and projects.

Case study (2): Local partnership between the school and CSO

During the last 10 years, the Association for Democratic Cooperation and Dialogue "Dialog" from Cahul district, intensively collaborates with the institutions from the educational system in the rayon. The CSO provided informational and technical support to school managers to obtain funding, grants and institutional projects. The organization's activities aim at promoting civic activism, good governance and transparency, an open society and European integration.

During 2013-2018, the CSO collaborated with all pilot institutions in the South region of the country. In addition to the informational and technical support provided, the Association also helped develop a partnership with public institutions in the community. This also influenced the recent appointment as Mayor of Cahul City of the Association's former executive director.

The human qualities, the social responsibility, the enthusiasm for the activity of the associative sector marked LPAs availability towards the CSOs and their projects/activities. Moreover, personal relationships, trust in the organizational and problem-solving skills led to a strong connection between the school and the LPA. The mayor personally participates in public hearings, meetings, school competitions; identifies funds for building renovation and solves the specific problems of schools. Based on school's experience in applying SATs, the former executive director implemented public hearing on city hall's budget, as a social accountability tool.

Currently, the LPA promotes My School project and supports the schools that are part of this project. The Mayor's experience in the associative sector has led to the creation of an effective partnership between the LPA, the associative sector, the school, the business environment. Relationships based on friendship and respect among managers, and even parents in school, have led to the continuous involvement of LPA in school activities.

II. What unintended outcomes were produced, including spillover effects?

School managers adjusted the use of SATs to the local needs, local context and the issues specific to their community. Given the various characteristics of the pupils and parents, namely the level of education, the financial situation in the household, school managers found it necessary to use different strategies to increase their engagement during public hearings on the school budget. The evaluation team has assessed a variety of situations, that allowed to identify a series of unintended positive effects of the My School project, which have a direct impact on the beneficiaries the education system, and on the quality of education in general.

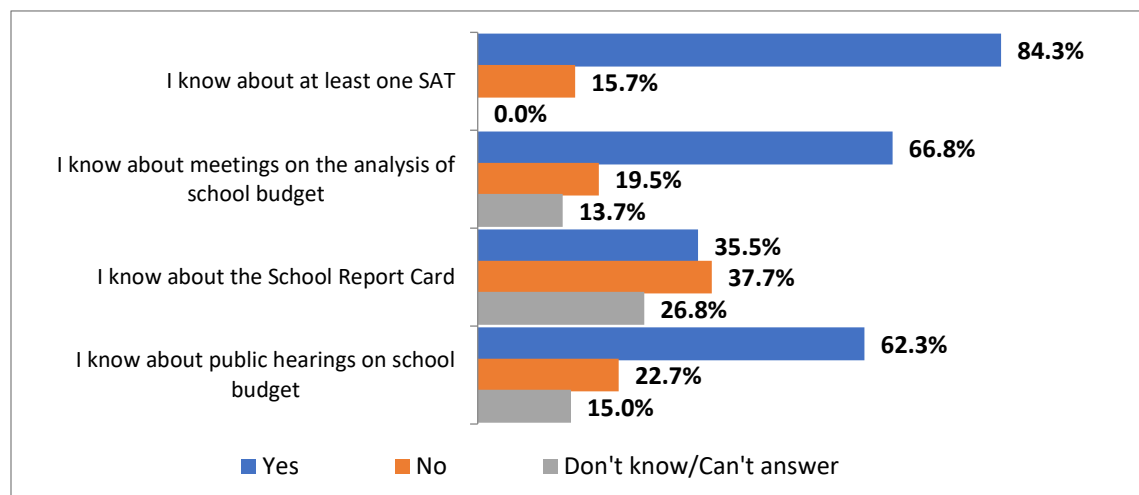
Positive effects

Emergence of mechanisms that ensure information flow and transparency

The Qualitative research allowed to identify at local level various ways of informing pupils and parents, including those who are migrants living abroad. The information channels and methods have been adapted and improved during project implementation. Some schools have developed internal information mechanisms. Thus, information is provided at different levels, with responsibilities shared by both teachers, pupils (Pupils Council) and parents (Parents Association).

The high level of knowledge about the SATs applied in schools was reached due to these mechanisms. Thus, even if a considerable part of the pupils directly involved in public hearings are no longer in school / have graduated from school, the pupils' knowledge about SATs is extensive. The share of pupils who at the time of the evaluation were informed about at least one accountability tool implemented in their school is about 80%.

Figure 8. Information level about SATs, pupils' opinion %



Use of digital technologies in communication with parents

Another unintended result of the project is the use of digital technologies to inform and engage parents that are currently migrants and leave outside of the Republic of Moldova. Their participation in school's life in general and in consulting the school's budget is a challenge for school managers. The issue of emigration and children with migrant parents is felt by all school managers, their share accounting for almost 70% of parents. However, maintaining a relationship with this category of beneficiaries is considered difficult and irrelevant by most of school managers.

An exception is the manager of a school in the village Salcuta, which has managed to use digital technologies to communicate and keep migrant parents informed about the events taking place in school and the current needs of their children. The positive effects produced following the communication with this category of parents are, among others: increased awareness of the need for remote engagement, increased trust in teachers, consolidation of the parents' group regardless of physical distance, solving and sponsoring activities within the school.

"Approximately 70% of the children in school have either one or both parents abroad. I have a communication network with parents online, including Viber, Facebook, Messenger. They are so happy to connect with us, that even the deputy director and teachers talk to them. There are 6 parents from 6 different countries. I connected the telephone to a large screen and I could see the joy on their faces. The school needs them, even if from far distance. This is a way to ensure that their participation in the school's life when they are back in Moldova. One of the parents sent football balls after they felt important, that a whole village at the meeting saw him on the screen telling us what he thinks about certain problems in school. The broken communication link with parents represent one of the greatest problems in our education system" I_Manager_6

Use of Social Accountability Tools to solve other issues within the school

Both the questionnaires and public consultations of the budget are widely used for purposes, such as: identifying pupils' problems and intervention priorities, assessing the degree of satisfaction / dissatisfaction with certain changes in school, clarifying student preferences with reference to certain school interventions, etc. The continuous use of these tools allows pupils to engage more, to perceive differently their role in the school's life, to volunteer in other activities. In many cases, the practice of SATs is used by pupils when applying for mini grants for young people in the community. The experience gained within the My School project is used to develop new project ideas.

Resolve the budgetary deficit issues as an effect of efficient financial management and use of resources

The training and experience gained within the project has helped to streamline the way public funds are allocated from the school budget. Thus, following the participation in My School project, some schools that have been in a budget deficit have been able to obtain a budget surplus.

An efficient budget management has allowed redirecting money for activities that have a direct impact on the quality of education. Among these are the acquisition of technical equipment, used directly in the learning process, the continuous training of teachers. A positive example in this case is the Hyperion High School, in Gura Galbenei village, where the school manager managed to buy laptops for all teachers in the

school, and these were used in the teaching-learning process. The funds were obtained through the efficient management of the school budget.

An efficient use of resources helped reduce the social pressure on teachers regarding the school expenditures, fact stated by each second questioned teacher (42.5%).

Implementation of SATs in schools outside the My School project

Dissemination of good practice and exchange of experience among school managers has broadened the scope of social accountability tools. Hence, schools outside the official My School Project implemented SATs with the support of the Local Partner of the CSO. A special case is represented by the high school in Răzeni village, which, on its own initiative, organized the public hearing of the budget, even if the school was not part of the project at that time.

"There were cases when schools decided to apply SATs outside the project, this is the case of the school in Răzeni, Ialoveni. They heard about this initiative and they also wanted to implement it. And we provided mentoring and support even if they were not part of the project, and in the next year they applied and became officially part of the project" I_Local_partner_2

Abolish the use of additional funds made by parents to the school

The abolition of Parents Associations in favor of the creation of parents' initiative groups is another positive effect of this project. Solving budget deficit problems and the emergence of surplus money in school budgets has contributed to the abandonment of informal payments made by parents to cover for the school's needs. Effective school budget management has excluded the need for informal / formal payments collected from parents.

"Following My School Project, I told parents that I don't need their financial contribution for the association anymore. What I need is a more active engagement in the school's life. For example, together with parents we cleaned the entire school following renovation. In the year when My School project started, parents helped me empty all the basements that were hardened with cement, and that meant digging a mine in the ground and now we have a clean and useful basements" I_Manager_6

Increased level of cooperation with LPA (village and rayonal level)

The project also helped to increase the cooperation of the school with the local structures in the community, engaging representatives of LPA, local NGOs, representatives of the rayonal council, school managers from neighboring localities, etc. The experience of public hearings was appreciated positively by all actors involved in this process. Even if some schools have distanced themselves from the LPA due to the transition to financial autonomy (Mayors considering that schools are no longer a City Hall's responsibility), the presence of the actors in the public hearings has led to an improvement in the relations between school and LPA. School has become a factor of change at the local level.

Moreover, the presence of rayonal councilors at public hearings facilitated the access of mini-grants from the rayonal council's budget, and other additional sources of funding.

"This practice united the local actors, they socialized, met, discussed, because everyone was embarrassed to go public and say something, and they met in small groups of parents" I_APL_3

Access to additional funds from other projects

At the time of the evaluation, all schools were actively involved in the implementation of institutional development projects / investment grants / renovation of school buildings, etc. The beneficiary schools in the North area of the country were directly supported by the local partner (Dacia Center) based on mini grants. The other schools have used the experiences of My School project to win new investment grants. Thus, skills acquired in budget planning, management and consultation have increased their chances to obtain new grants and investment projects.

"All the information from My School project was also used in other projects. We are currently implementing 4 projects related to other topics. This project has allowed us to increase the donors' trust in our activity, because we are transparent and open" I_Manager_11

"I believe that because of My School project we have succeeded in getting other projects, because we have shown by clear example, not just in writing, that we are transparent and involve the whole community" I_Manager_4

Negative effects

The low participation of vulnerable groups due to the lack of specific mechanisms for addressing these categories of beneficiaries and the lack of affirmative action. Even if the information about SATs and the related activities concerned all, all those willing to participate, the vulnerable categories were under-represented in the public hearing meetings, among others.

Gender disparities in information and participation. Information strategies had a different impact on girls and boys. Although the initial intention was to reach a proportional gender engagement, the research found that the level of information and awareness of girls (56.8%) is higher than that of boys (43.2%). The lower level of information and awareness led, in turn, to a lower involvement of boys in this process.

Relinquishing of SATs / lack of durability. A share of schools abandoned implementing the SATs after graduating the My School project. Although the share of these schools is very small, however, we find that these situations are characteristic to schools where the management changed (either the school manager or the person assigned with implementation of My School project).

In some cases, especially in small schools with a poor budgetary condition, public hearings have led to ***quarrels and conflicts between school manager and parents.*** The community's expectations were to solve financial problems by supplementing funds, not by increasing participation. In addition, the lack of conflict resolution skills, leadership and management abilities, the SATs had a negative effect on the general social environment with the school.

Beneficiaries do not perceive social accountability tools as an interdependent and complete cycle. Most school communities (school managers, parents, pupils) perceived the three social accountability tools as one, focusing on public hearings. Although the participants have benefited from information and capacity building trainings in using the three social accountability tools separately, both the budget analysis practices and the school report card are conducted in an adjusted form. Most beneficiaries only refer to public hearings when they talk about social accountability tools.

III. To what extent do the results validate the GPSA’s theory of change and its adaption to the Moldovan Education and Governance contexts through My School?

My School Project objective was: to create a network of "agents of change" that is capable of engaging in constructive discussions with decision makers and increase their accountability at school, local and central government level (1); and to enable the emergence of an environment for civic involvement in the education sector, providing a functional framework for constructive interaction between the beneficiaries of educational services (organizations, pupils, parents) and the institutions responsible for providing services (school institutions, local and central public authorities) (2), which favors the improvement of educational services by increasing transparency, participation and accountability.

Thus, the evaluation team identified a series of results obtained by the My School Project and their impact. This allows to conclude that the results validate the GPSAs theory of change and its adaptation to the Moldovan Education and Governance sector. This judgement is also supported by the complex evaluation of project documentation and the impact research conducted.

Table 4. Synthesis table of My School Project results

<i>Component 1: Building an environment enabling sustainable social accountability in Moldova</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a national coalition between CSOs, minister, local public authorities, schools, parents, pupils, school managers, WB, that engaged in the process of social accountability to improve educational services in Moldova; • Identified and trained 5 CSOs to empower them to become “actors of change” in implementing the Social Accountability Tools in schools and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the decision-makers; • Established coalitions at the school level between school managers, LPAs’ representatives, pupils’ representatives, teachers and parents’ representatives, other interested parties, who implemented the social accountability tools to monitor the quality of educational services;
<i>Component 2: Applying social accountability tools to empower local and regional stakeholders to increase policy accountability</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented 3 social accountability tools – School Report Card, independent school budget analysis, public hearings; • Organized 100 public hearings where community members discussed school’s problems and created the necessary premises to solve them; • 1416 school board members received training on the functioning and organization of the school, the social accountability tools, communication with stakeholders; • 29,930 people were directly involved in appreciating the quality of educational services; • 16000 citizens (pupils, parents, teachers, authorities) were involved in school budget discussions; • Contributed to the change in perception of school in the context of the financial autonomy of school institutions through the need for partnerships for effective administration; • Increased the level of accountability of decision-makers at different levels (school management, public and central authorities) and beneficiaries (pupils, parents, community);
<i>Component 3: Integrating social accountability with policy and budget dialogue</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent analysis of school budgets; • Capacity building trainings of various stakeholders on middle-term budgetary framework; • Drafting policy documents, including in the education sector, containing information about the financial management of schools;
<i>Component 4: Disseminating knowledge about applying social accountability tools</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of the success stories with partners; • Dissemination of the lessons learned; • Dissemination of impact and success among school community members, thus increasing the prestige of participation in the project.

Table 5. Synthesis table of My School Project impact

<i>General – Social Accountability Tools</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigate the risks associated with decentralization policies, namely financial autonomy; • Empowers and motivates the educational community to participate in the process of decision and policy -making; • Distributes social responsibilities between the beneficiaries of the education system and its actors; • Leads to finding new ways of obtaining, expanding and supporting results at the school, community and system level; • Provides information and lessons from better informed and evidence-based decision and policy making; • Provides the opportunity for personal and professional empowerment of the education system’s beneficiaries and actors; • Mitigate the negative effects associated with political instability, the vision of development of central or local policy makers; • Modifies organizational culture at school level, so members of school communities are accustomed to applying social accountability tools and require their application; • Contribute to improving educational services at school level, thus positively influencing the quality of education at national level.
<i>Component 1: Building an environment enabling sustainable social accountability in Moldova</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness and knowledge levels of Social Accountability tools, deriving from developed internal information / transparency mechanisms; • Changed attitudes and behaviors of pupils, parents, teachers, school managers, LPAs’ representatives and the community on the culture of dialogue and transparency, individual and group participation and responsibility on reforms in the education field and the quality of educational services • Adjusted and adapted instruments to the local context; • Transferability of the Social accountability tools - used in other contexts than that of the school (Pupils council, Parents Association); • Increased participation of local actors in school life, including migrant parents/ Application of digital technologies in communication with parents; • Increased engagement of all actors in the community / partnerships created between school and LPAs, CSOs and business environment;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened the financial management skills of school managers, and more efficient use of budgetary resources; • Solved budget deficit problems as a result of efficient budget distribution; • Facilitated friendly relations between teachers and pupils; • Abolished Parents Associations and informal money collection; • Increased level of transparency in the administration of the education sector; • Improved physical comfort and psychological climate in the school - factors that influence pupils' school achievement and the professional performance of teachers; • Improved the financial management skills of school managers, and more efficient use of budget resources; • Changed organizational culture at school level, so the beneficiaries of the education system have acquired an intrinsic motivation to request the organization of public hearings;
<p><i>Component 2: Applying social accountability tools to empower local and regional stakeholders to increase policy accountability</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of stronger, better informed and engaged, acting as precursors for high civic engagement of citizens at the community level; • Intensified local partnerships between various community actors (CSOs, business environment, Parent Associations, church communities); • Applied Social Accountability Tools in LPAs (public hearing of the local budget); • Increased mass-media attention on the education sector problems related to financial transparency; increasing the visibility of the project strategy, of the national, local partners and participating schools in the project; • Expanded access at Community level, which facilitated the involvement of all interested actors; • Increased role of civil society organizations (local partners) in promoting and implementing changes at community level, becoming agents of change, a source of support and information for partners in the school institutions;
<p><i>Component 3: Integrating social accountability with policy and budget dialogue</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement level of the community actors in school and local budget distribution. Applying consultation tools, collecting proposals on budget distribution; • Institutionalization of Social Accountability Tools to ensure the transparency of local schools' budgets in the Regulation of School Administration Boards (pending);
<p><i>Component 4: Disseminating knowledge about applying social accountability tools</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of public hearings by other schools that were not part of My School project; • Exchange of experience gained within the project between school managers during public events, round tables, meetings; • Established partnerships between educational institutions in order to promote the project strategy; • Established Ambassadors Network aiming at dissemination of Social Accountability Tools practice, experience and lessons learned; • Facilitate the administration of the school to attract funds and additional projects

Selection, Support, Implementation and Adaptation of My School Project

The evaluation team analyzed the way in which the selection, support, implementation and adaptation of the My School project contributed to the achievement of the reported results

The findings are based on the analysis of project documentation, interviews with project management, representatives of local and central public authorities, project partners and beneficiaries, and questionnaires applied by the evaluation team.

Selection

- *Objectives - realistic, feasible and adjusted to the needs of the education sector reform*

At the end of the 5 years of implementation, it can be noticed that the objectives of the intervention proposed by the "My School" project were realistic and adjusted to the contextual needs of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova. Both the developments of the educational reforms and the participation of Expert-Grup in the public consultations of the Education Code enabled the proper identification of the need for long-term intervention, correlated with the tool promoted by the Global Partnership for Social Responsibility. Due to the cyclical nature of project's implementation, the realization of the objectives was feasible and realistic in the established terms.

- *Criteria for selecting schools, local partners, members of the Advisory Council - relevant*

The criteria for selecting schools (functional Pupils' Council, functional School Administration Board, increased interest in the implementation of social accountability tools: public hearings, independent analyzes of the budgets of educational institutions, reporting cards) allowed the selection of schools interested in the project, thus minimizing the risk of failure. The deliberative aspect of participation has increased the attractiveness of the project and has emphasized the beneficiaries' personal interest of participation.

The criteria for selecting local partners (increased activity at the local level, including in educational projects and a high degree of popularity and authority at local level) allowed the achievement of the planned results, as they were responsible for ensuring effective collaboration with schools. Their extensive work on educational projects, human resources, specific knowledge of the school institutions / communities in the region contributed to successful social partnerships at the local level.

The selection of members of the project's Advisory Board has facilitated wider information on social accountability tools and their popularization. At the same time, the existence of an Advisory Board with public authority representatives did not facilitate the overcoming of the crisis situations.

- *Instruments used - relevant*

The project implementation team used a range of tools to ensure effective communication between all project partners. These tools have been adjusted over the last 5 years, thus responding to both the partners' efforts and the obvious needs identified during implementation.

Tools: online self-evaluation questionnaires with regional partners, online questionnaires for participation with school managers, regular meetings with regional partners, Consultative Council of the project, MECR, separate discussions with school managers and accountants after public hearings to collect opinions,

round tables both between the project team and partners, as well as between school managers for exchange of experience, planning and reflection meetings.

Support

- *Logistics and material support*

All beneficiaries appreciated the high methodological quality of the materials, the clarity, utility and relevance of the information and support guides. An aspect that has been mentioned both by local partners and project beneficiaries is the desire to receive more methodological and promotional materials: the public hearings guide, leaflets, brochures, school report card template. The beneficiaries also mentioned the lack of stationery materials of the same quality as the one they received in order to implement social accountability tools as qualitative as during the project participation.

One aspect mentioned by the interviewed beneficiaries is the planning period for the social accountability instruments, which was inconsistent with the school year and the budgetary planning process. This aspect was improved by the implementation team, thus adjusting the timetable of activities.

- *Methodological support*

Both methodologies and action plans reflect coherence and clarity. The teams and experts who conducted the training sessions were highly appreciated by the project beneficiaries. Both training activities on the application of social accountability tools and seminars on issues related to the management and functioning of a School Administration Board have been considered useful, necessary and welcome by project beneficiaries.

The guidelines on collecting school statistics were mentioned as a need for increasing the capacity of school managers in analyzing and interpreting data in the education system. Most respondents highlighted the lack of capacity in collecting, interpreting and analyzing school budget data. Thus, the responsibility of conducting budget analysis was perceived from beginning as a project's prerogative.

The absolute majority of school managers highlighted the utility and effectiveness of seminars on issues related to financial management, budget and organization of the School Administration Board. School managers also mentioned that the notion of public hearing was new for them, and the public hearing guide was very useful and beneficial.

During discussions, the project's beneficiaries revealed the difficulty encountered by participants to answer the surveys /participation sheet distributed by partners. Thus, both parents and pupils had difficulties in understanding the notions, concepts, questions and, therefore, providing accurate answers. The project team responded to these requests by improving the tools used, so adjustments the content were made yearly.

Since the project materials were initially available only in Romanian and English, the schools with teaching in Russian language had limited access because of the language barrier. It was not until 2017 that all materials on social accountability tools were translated into Russian, so few Russian-teaching schools participated in the project.

Almost univocally, the participants of evaluation interviews or discussion groups highlighted the usefulness of the mini-guide on the participation sheet, the mini-guide for public hearings, and the mini-

guide for independent budget analysis. At the same time, it was almost univocally mentioned their complexity and the difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries in understanding the proposed material.

Implementation

- *Relationship with project partners*

The support provided by the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture through the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation provided the framework for project implementation. At the same time, the MECR's engagement level varied over the five years of implementation due to the political factor and the administration reform. The ministry officials responded positively to the work done by the project team and provided the necessary data for the smooth running of activities. Despite implementation's team lobbying, deficiencies are observed in the transposition of social accountability instruments / elements into public policy documents. The project implementation team successfully adjusted the changes within the project management team and to the changes in the structure of the ministry. It had also implemented constructive cooperation strategies with the partners to ensure the successful implementation of the projects.

Representatives of partner organizations have highlighted the successful collaboration with the implementation team. Both methodological guidance, collaboration and communication have been effective and constructive. The application of self-evaluation questionnaires allowed the structured and organized identification of bottlenecks, difficulties encountered by local partners. The project implementation team responded to the partners' first year implementation efforts to have several meetings / meetings / joint events in which they could share their experience and discuss the problems they face. Thus, the frequency and form of communication (online, in person, by phone, email) with local partners has intensified during implementation period. Although at the beginning of the project local partners were not confident about their level of knowledge and information about social accountability tools, at the end of the project, they felt very confident and capable of using them.

The relationship with local public authorities during the implementation of the project was constructive and functional. The results of the interviews show an increased interest in the projects' intended purpose and activities. They responded to the project, partners and schools' requests and respected their obligations.

- *Transparency, visibility and representativeness*

Both the project's results and the information obtained from the interviews and discussions in the evaluation process demonstrate a high degree of transparency, visibility and representativeness of the activities.

Local coalitions at local level have a high degree of representativeness, comprising of representatives of all stakeholder categories. The deliberate nature of public hearings has led to an active and numerous participations from communities, so people who were not direct beneficiaries of school institutions, but simple members of communities were engaged.

"Simple people came from the village. They were curious, they never heard about such events being organized before, and it was interesting to see how money was spent in school. They don't have children in school, no relatives, nothing" I_Manager_4

In addition to the results registered in terms of popularity and visibility of the project, including the launch and use of the www.scoalamea.md site, the beneficiaries mentioned that the project gained prestige in the educational community of Moldova. The success stories, the frequent promotion of materials about the participating schools and their results, represented a motivating factor for the entire community. The project team has managed to engage the society in a constructive dialogue about the schools' needs, their role in community development, and about the education reform. Moreover, the schools became popular institutions within the community, due to their increased participation and transparency.

At the same time, the documentation process revealed that the implementation team ensured the visibility of the project both locally and internationally. Thus, some members of the Implementation Team participated in various thematic events and conferences in the field of social accountability. Furthermore, the members of the implementation team were invited to present the SATs, namely participatory budgeting, as a useful practice that can be replicated at rayonal level or in other institutions.

Adaptation

The evaluation process reveals a high level of adaptability of the project team to the approaches and feedback received from beneficiaries and partners. Thus, the project responded positively to the needs and difficulties encountered both by local partners in the implementation of the undertaken activities, as well as by the central partners. The "learning by doing" principle allowed to overcome the difficult situations encountered. The evaluation team identified a selection of situations that have been successfully overcome by adaptation: changes in the MECR management and running of the activities in the event of a faulty communication with the new team; planning activities to match the school year and public hearings to match the budget cycle; lack of materials in Russian; the complexity of applied questionnaires and mini-guides, the lack of general information on the stages of the budgetary process in education; diversifying forms of communication with partners and beneficiaries.

The regular assessment of the perception of the quality of education has allowed monitoring of the perception of the beneficiaries of the education system about the services they receive.

At the same time, following the evaluation of the project documentation, as well as the discussions and in-depth interviews with the project beneficiaries and partners, we identified several **limitations** during the implementation process:

- The lack of a risk management mechanism, so the project was affected by the political instability in Moldova, which generated the change of the MECR leadership by 3 times, the implementation of budgetary austerity measures; also, the project management has been changed during implementation. A complex risk assessment would have allowed identification of measures to mitigate the risks;
- The social inclusion aspect was omitted, so vulnerable categories were under-represented in the application of social accountability instruments, and the interests of these categories were underrepresented;
- The gender aspect was omitted, which influenced gender discrepancies in the level of information and participation. Although gender-disaggregated information was initially practiced, this tool was subsequently canceled;
- The accessibility issue in two languages was initially omitted, so the access of Russian-teaching schools was from the start limited.

IV. To what extent My School's lessons informed WBG Country and sector dialogues, operations and strategies?

The project provided information on World Bank operations in Moldova and the dialogue and strategies in the education sector to a relatively large extent, especially on the components directly targeting the implemented measures.

Information mechanisms used: progress reports, ODRA, policy papers aimed at quantitative data analysis in the education sector, quantitative and qualitative analysis based on the findings of SATs implementation.

Open data in education

In terms of open data in the education sector, the project has strengthened the use of data provided by the Information Management System in Education (SIME), has helped to improve access and has boosted the diversification of publicly available data types. At the same time, the project intervention measures included processing, interpreting and analyzing data available from the educational system. This helped the capacity needs assessment of the actors in the education sector. As both school managers and LPAs can use open data to streamline school management, their capacities to interpret such data is essential. This was also highlighted by the central authorities, thus they supported SIME and the use of data in the development of evidence-based policy interventions.

The Open Data Readiness Assessment (ODRA) reports, which include the comprehensive assessment of the availability of open data in the education sector, have provided information on the opening of data at different levels of the education sector, including intervention recommendations. The reports were regularly presented to the ministry and project partners. At the same time, a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations has not been applied, which to some extent has not encouraged decision-makers to assume certain implementing responsibilities.

The project has produced a series of recommendations to improve open data in education, and despite a lot of information and lobbying efforts, a limited number of recommendations have been implemented. The only implemented recommendation is the increase of the capacities of the E-transformation and Department within the MECR, namely appointing new staff, to modify the head of department's job description with the mention of the obligation to open the data and to repeatedly approve the Ministerial Order of the Open Data Catalog.

The set of actions selectively includes: designating a person at the level of the ministry responsible for open data; public engagement in relation to opening data in the sector; the inclusion of open data measures in the ministry's action plans and activity reports; capacity building of the ICT Department; developing a quality control system for open data and services provided; development and approval of personal data protection policy in education; Audit of data available in the sector; developing a data management methodology, called "Open data development in the education sector", which will include aspects of collection, processing, control, approval, publication; developing a training plan for all actors involved in collecting data in the education sector; publishing reports on open data in education; developing a mechanism for identifying and recording data by authorities, including in the education sector; developing a mechanism for identifying, monitoring and evaluating data requests from society,

civil society organizations, the media, the private sector. The recommendations also concern the Open Data Ecosystem, Data Opening Funding, the Center for Information Technologies and Communications in Education.

The methodological framework in collecting, processing and analyzing open data is essential to ensure transparency and evidence-based policy making. Empowering beneficiaries and actors in the education sector in collecting, processing and interpreting data is also essential in implementing social accountability tools. Despite the availability of data in the education sector, its beneficiaries face difficulties in using them in decision and policy making.

Thus, we **recommend** including progress indicators in terms of open data in education (legal, normative and capacitive framework), in the context of Objective 3A "Increasing the efficiency and quality of primary and secondary education", Focus Area 3, the Country Partnership Area of the Bank World 2018-2021 in country and sector development strategies.

Stimulating citizens' participation

The project team has been able to thoroughly inform about the use of social accountability tools for participatory governance in education. Thus, progress indicators within the WB Partnership Framework include participatory decision-making and improving the quality of public debate, measured as number of school communities supported by WBs in implementing social accountability tools. The large number of beneficiaries and participants in the implementation of social accountability instruments, exceeding the project's objective, demonstrates its relevance, utility and necessity in stimulating citizen participation in the governance process. Also, the principle of participatory governance of school institutions is seen as a minimum quality standard of education, which demonstrates the successful implementation of social accountability tools.

The findings deriving from the application of social accountability tools (School Report Card, Independent School Budget Analysis, Public Hearing) can serve as factual support for the projects implemented by the WB in Moldova, development strategies and operations. Information on the use of educational resources and infrastructure, the satisfaction level of the education sector beneficiaries in relation to the quality of educational services, the use of educational services and the participation of the community in their realization serve as conclusive evidence to assess the progress achieved in this sector. The example in the education sector could serve as an example for other areas and levels of governance, since citizen participation is a horizontally applied aspect of public service governance.

We recommend the complex use of the lessons and findings identified following the application of social accountability tools. The Qualitative tools (questionnaires, public hearings) and qualitative tools (report sheet, independent budget analysis) allow to identify the problems, needs and realities of the educational system at different levels of participation: school (pupils, parents, teachers, managers), LPA (finance and education department), central and regulatory authorities (ministry, school inspectorate). These findings could substantiate the World Bank's projects in education and public governance, ensuring their relevance and adjustment to the situation of the Republic of Moldova. Monitoring of progress and / or lack thereof on certain key dimensions (implementation of sector-specific methodological recommendations, participatory budgeting processes, evaluation, approval of certain key regulatory documents that allow the application of social accountability tools, etc.) could serve as collaboration conditionalities with the central authorities of the sector.

The My School project team used several opportunities to collect data from the educational system:

- Trainings on the medium-term budgetary framework;
- Participation of EG experts in the Working Group on drafting the concept of remuneration in general education institutions and the working group on self-evaluation in school management;
- Participation of EG experts in the Working Group initiated by the National School Inspectorate on drafting the questionnaires for pupils, parents in the process of evaluation school and teacher evaluation;
- Trainings on management of public finances in education, budget planning and implementation based on the priorities of the school institutions;
- Participation of EG experts in the Working Group on drafting the concept of remuneration in general education institutions, which focused on employment issues in the educational system and the reduced interest in the education sector;
- Participation of EG experts in the discussions on the public procurement process in schools and kindergartens in Chisinau, in collaboration with MECR, the Municipal Department for Education and Youth in Chisinau, experts, representatives of the National Agency for Food Security, the Public Procurement Agency, the National Institute Standardization;
- The findings from the applied questionnaires reveal information on: the need for curricular improvement, school textbooks, teaching methods; digitizing educational content, developing a set of recommended extracurricular educational activities; aspects of children's health.

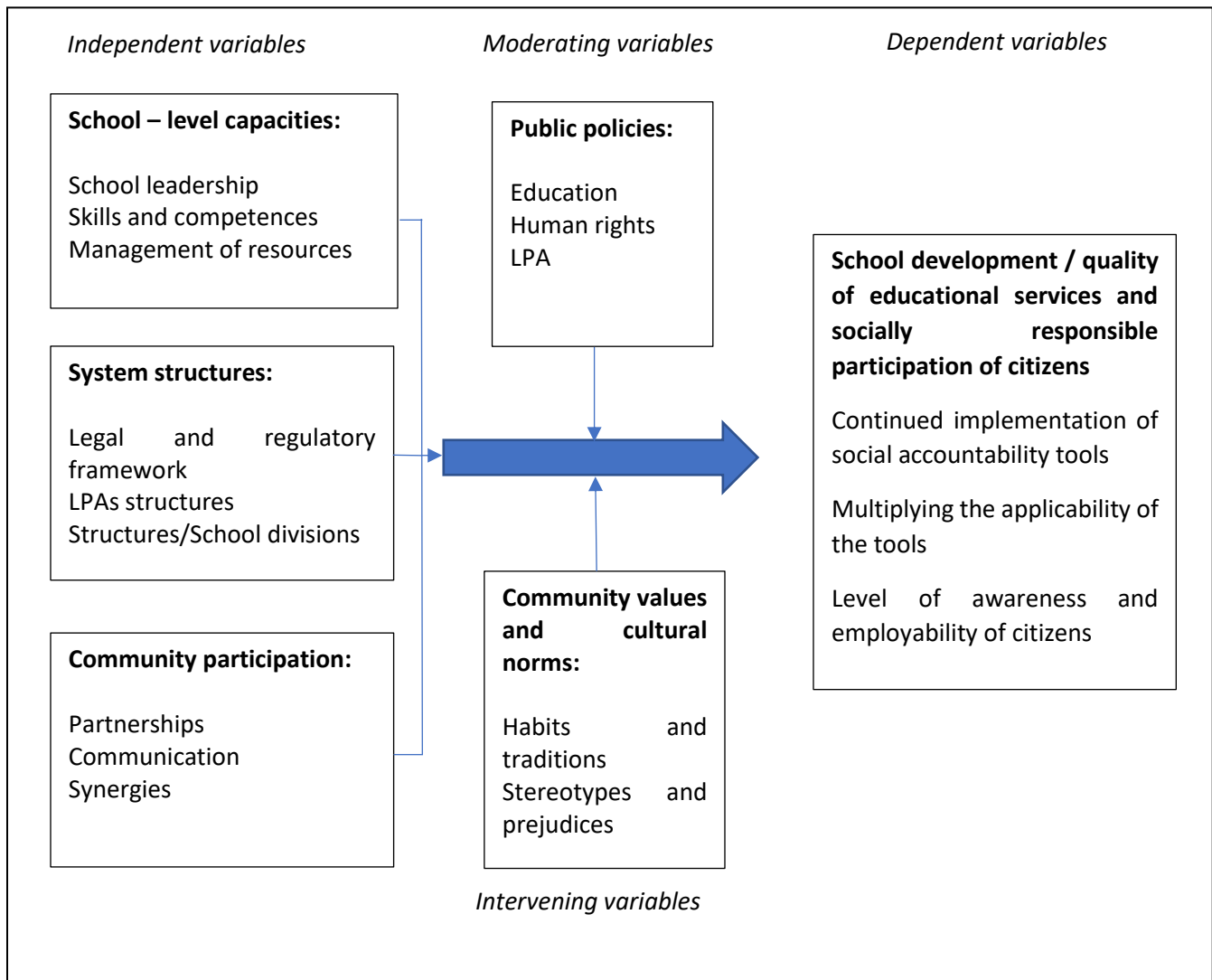
Thus, WBG strategies and dialogues could be better informed by establishing mechanisms for transmitting the identified complex and multidimensional information. The My School project intersects with the Education Reform Project on several issues, but it is recommended to establish a collaborative framework, ensuring complementarity, adjustment and more effective communication, thus improving the way and quality of interventions.

V. Under what conditions will the results be sustainable? What is the risk that the outcomes achieved will not be sustainable?

Factors affecting sustainability

The aspects researched in this study have highlighted the interference factors that influence the sustainability of the project through. Based on the conceptual framework developed in the present research, four variables have been identified as basic: independent variables, dependent variables, moderating variables and intervening variables.

Chart 1. Variables influencing the project's sustainability



The sustainability of the project is based on: (1) maintaining the achieved results, (2) continuing and expanding the processes initiated within the project, (3) streamlining the resources and (4) human capacities.

The research shows that the sustainability of the "My School" project is clearly distinguished by four aspects:

Financial aspect: Both during the implementation of the project and after the end of the project, the implementation of social accountability tools does not require financial coverage from school funds. Funding activities related to the implementation of SATs (e.g. web site, supplies for public hearings, etc.) will be made from own funds, the main sources being: school budget, local budget, participation fees, sponsorships, identifying new funding sources (projects, fundraising), etc. The project also facilitated changes in the financial management of schools by distributing resources according to the needs of schools (infrastructure and better working conditions, teacher training courses, etc.), labor remuneration

and distribution of benefits (salaries, bonuses and bonuses etc.), which will continue after the end of the project.

Institutional aspect: The participating schools expressed their commitment to continue implementing SATs after the project's completion. As direct results are mentioned: improved performance as a result of the experience gained during the project implementation (brochures, training, exchange of good practice, partnership with local partners of the project, supervision by Expert-Grup, etc.) trust relationships with parents and children, local partnerships, public image, financial and public speaking skills, etc. Thus, schools intend to institutionalize at school level the implementation of social accountability tools. A *national policy framework* would foster local institutionalization and strengthen the implementation mechanisms (digitization, educational software applications, timing, centralization of data at local / district / national level, inclusion of participatory mechanism in initial and ongoing training of school managers, and evaluation of their performance, extending the mandate of the Pupils Council, etc.). The project has also helped to improve the experience of participating schools in the implementation of projects with a high degree of ownership and without material benefits, creating additional institutional value by investing in human capital (direct and indirect beneficiaries, the community as a whole) and in the functioning of internal educational processes, which ensures quality education in its entirety.

Human and social capital aspect: maintaining a high level of community participation, employability of citizens and social inclusion (migrants, vulnerable groups, etc.) through the following factors:

- increase the awareness of the community about the importance of engaging parents, pupils, community members through capacity building activities;
- increase transparency and legitimacy;
- improve dialogue, reduce conflicts, manage expectations and build confidence;
- contribute to changes in cultural and gender norms; to beliefs about active and participatory citizenship;
- align local objectives with national sustainable development objectives;
- plenary exercise of human rights (e.g. free association, expression of opinions and reunion);
- prioritize needs, plan and dispute resolution, identify solutions and find consensus, clarify obligations, monitor the activities undertaken, report on the results, etc.

An integrated approach to socially responsible participation: Through the results and experience gained during the project, the participatory approach will be integrated into local processes. The engagement of citizens in decision-making processes is increased by ensuring the transferability of instruments and good practices in other areas, as well as identifying possible synergies with other local and national initiatives (e.g. the eGovernment initiatives, the LPA decentralization reform). By continuing and developing similar initiatives, expanding their target groups (numerically, geographically, levels of education, etc.) as well as target fields, will strengthen the democratic mechanisms with active citizenship involvement and social responsibility.

Risks affecting sustainability

The qualitative study identifies several risks that directly affect the sustainability of the results obtained in the project.

The lack of institutionalization of social accountability tools creates prerequisites for school managers to abandon implementing the SATs and does not allow replication of practices throughout the school system. Although the project team has made continuous efforts in promoting their institutionalization, the *Framework Regulation on the organization and functioning of the School Administration Board of general education institutions approved by Order No 77 of 20.02.2015*, which includes the SATs mechanism, is still not published in the Official Monitor. Thus, in the absence of a durable vision for the application of social accountability tools, it is up to a few actors in the local coalitions formed to use them.

The human factor has identified as one of the most important element of SATs durability. In the absence of institutionalization of social accountability tools, the continuity of engaging parents and pupils through public hearings, school budget analysis sessions, depends exclusively on the interest and competencies of the school manager who has been involved in the project. Changing the school manager is crucial in this respect and may cause interruption or even abandonment of the practices gained in the project. The research shows that most of the participating school managers didn't exchanged their experience and practices with their successors. Most current directors who have recently been appointed are unaware of the benefits of the tools and do not apply the social accountability tools developed within the project. At the same time, a mechanism for transferring the practice of social accountability instruments from one administration to another was not institutionalized.

"The former manager didn't inform me about this project. The only thing I learned was that there is a participation certificate in My School Project in the School Museum. I know very little about this and I didn't have a chance to talk with her about this topic" I_Manager_7

"I'm sorry I didn't continue doing it, maybe I didn't understand correctly. I understood the former manager travelled to Chisinau and the project was over. I haven't been involved in these activities at all and I didn't know that we need to continue" I_Manager_1

Migration of the population. Rural communities in the Republic of Moldova are more and more affected by the phenomenon of labor migration. In some schools, the share of pupils with one or both parents abroad, reaches 70%, which negatively affects the level of engagement and participation of parents and pupils in the school life, including the distribution and management of the school budget. The difficulties of distance communication and the inability to use digital communication technologies with migrant parents meant that this category of beneficiaries was excluded in activities carried out within the school. The interest of the guardians /legal carers (grandparents, aunts, neighbors) is very low. In this situation, the low level of parents and pupils' engagement of parents and pupils questions the effectiveness of the school-family partnership.

Language and financial terminology barrier. The low level of education prevents the active participation of parents, particularly of older parents. Even though school managers have provided information support to familiarize parents with financial terminology, many parents have hesitated to express their views at public hearings, considering they are not competent enough. The lack of IT skills has created difficulties in completing the proposed surveys on how to efficiently distribute the school budget. Most parents were unable to fill in online questionnaires and they required the help of teachers. For this reason, this tool has

been adapted to the specific needs of parents, the questionnaires were distributed in paper form, and the content was presented in a local-specific language.

In some localities, the level of LPA engagement is quite low, thus causing difficulties in the cooperation with the community actors, including the civil society organizations. **The political factor / political affiliation** of the officials and representatives of the Education Department may negatively influence the sustainability of developed instruments. Schools that have different political views than those of LPA/Education Department representatives are under constant pressure.

The political factor at central government level can also influence the sustainability of social accountability tools. During the 5 years of project implementation, the partners at the central authority had different opinion, attitudes and level of engagement in the promotion of SATs in policy and sector dialogues.

The financial deficit and the inability for providing transport for pupils and parents in neighboring communities create access barriers for these categories. At the same time, we find a low level of engagement of vulnerable groups, which are under-represented through the project's activities. The low level of involvement is determined by the lack of interest, the fear of exposing one's own opinion, the marginalization of children with special education needs.

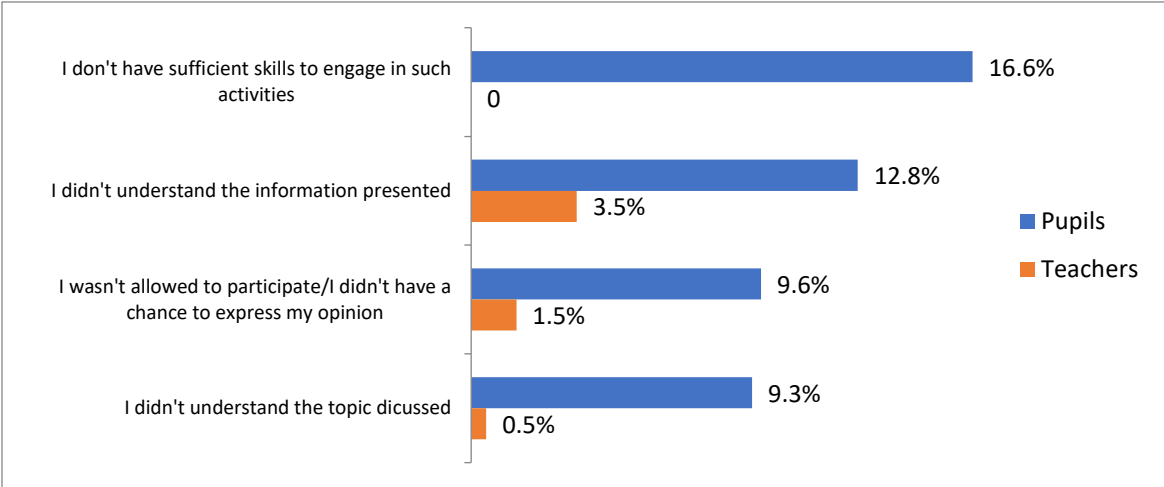
The continuing decrease in the number of pupils in the education system has particularly affected the economic situation of institutions with large educational buildings. The costs allocated to the maintenance of school buildings contribute to increasing the budget deficit and limits the allocation of resources for capacity training, the acquisition of technology for the training process, etc.

The quantitative study has allowed us to elucidate **other** problems encountered in the implementation of social accountability tools:

- 16% of pupils say they have had problems attending public hearings because they don't have the skills required for this kind of activity;
- 12% of pupils mention that they didn't understand what was discussed during the public hearings;
- 9% of pupils mentioned they were not given the opportunity to say their opinion during the public hearings;

The perpetuation of these situations discourages the participation of pupils and parents, without whom, the school-family-community partnership can't be achieved.

Figure 9. Problems faced by pupils and teachers in the implementation of social accountability tools



According to school managers, the lack of conflict resolution skills, the way sensitive topics for parents and students must be addressed, and the impossibility to ensure the psychological comfort during the public hearing sessions can cause multiple sustainability risks. Regretfully, many school managers don't possess skills in these areas.

In order to eliminate the above-mentioned social risks, several activities are needed, including: training on the financial concepts of budget analysis (46.3%), development of engagement strategies of underrepresented groups (vulnerable groups, social groups belonging to minorities, migrant parents (30%)), simplification of the procedure for organizing public hearings and adjusting it to local needs (29.1%), diversification of information sources, etc.

Conclusions

General:

- Evaluation of the multitude of factors and social actors involved in piloting Social Accountability Tools has generated complementary explanations for the quantitative research;
- In addition to main results, the Applied Methodology also focused on the processes, which ensured the consideration of the voices of those whose lives have positively changed during the project activities and after its completion;
- Thus, the views of social actors from different groups, concrete people, with their own story of the impact, comprise the most valuable lessons learned of the project and arguments for other initiatives in this direction.

Specific – National level

- Raising public awareness about the problems in the education system in general, and aspects of school's autonomous financial management in particular;
- Increasing the media attention on the problems of financial transparency in the education system;
- Increasing the visibility of the project strategy, the national, local partners, schools participating partners in the project, resulting in indirect positive effects on the respective schools (donor emergence, media visibility, competitiveness at local level and increase of the number of pupils, etc.);
- Transposing elements provided by social accountability tools (public hearings, questionnaires) as a feasible tool to ensure the transparency of local school budgets in the Regulation on School Administration Boards (in process);
- Increasing the level of transparency in the administration of the education sector, and in the context of the financial autonomy of the school institutions;
- Provide support to central authorities in transposing the provisions of national public policy documents that include aspects of participation (Education Code, Education 2020 Strategy).

Specific – Community level

- Consolidating more informed and more involved communities in school activity as precursors for high civic engagement of citizens in the community;
- Coverage and wide access at Community level, which has facilitated the participation of all social actors. In some cases, parent involvement was beyond management's expectations, resulting in unintended, immediate and long-lasting effects;
- Intensify partnerships at local level between various community actors (NGOs, business environment, Parent Associations, church communities);
- Increasing the role of civil society organizations (local partners) in promoting and implementing changes at community level, as to become agents of change, a source of support and information for partners in school institutions.

Specific – Social actors' level

- Increasing the capacities of the actors involved and contributing to their personal development, in terms of skills analysis, communication and conflict resolution abilities, public speaking, the use of financial and digital data and their accessible access to parents;

- Changing the attitudes and behaviors of pupils, parents, teachers and LPA' representatives and the community regarding the culture of dialogue and transparency, personal and group participation and responsibility for the reform process in the field of educational services;

Specific – School level

- Maintaining a high interest in applying the social accountability tools and improving the efficiency of the School Administration Board through better representation and the use of tools to map and prioritize school needs;
- Identifying other sources of funding for school initiatives. In some cases, it remains a desideratum;
- Using of the data collected in the School Report Card for an exhaustive comparative analysis to present relevant information to parents and pupils;
- Improving the technical resources, the physical comfort and the psychological climate in the school - factors influencing the pupils' school success and professional performance of the teachers;
- Strengthening the financial management skills of school managers, and more efficient use of budgetary resources;
- Changing the organizational culture at school level, so the beneficiaries of the education system have acquired an intrinsic motivation to request the organization of public hearings.

Recommendations

Participation aspects

- Institutionalization of mechanisms for informing and engaging pupils within the school by applying affirmative measures for pupils from disadvantaged families and students with ESCs;
- Diversification of the sources of information for pupils and parents by using online resources;
- Research ways of engaging migrant parents and enabling school managers to communicate and collaborate with them remotely. Exchange of good practices with institutions that have promoted distance communication initiatives with migrant parents;
- Develop strategies for more active engagement of boys in school's activities;

Visibility aspects

- Disseminate the successful practices and ensure the sustainability of the Social Accountability Tools. Organize public events/roundtables to discuss the positive effects of participation and the benefits of the My School project;
- Facilitate the exchange of experience between schools in different geographical areas, promoting best practices for participation;

Educational system level

- Institutionalization of Social Accountability Tools at the education system level (MECR, National School Inspectorate), with a direct mention of the SAT mechanism of engagement and participation of pupils, parents and community actors;

- Mention in the legal framework / Education Code of the concrete ways of ensuring the transparency of the school budget;
- Modernizing curricula for teacher and managerial school staff by including the following courses: financial management, conflict management, public communication strategies, among others;
- Increase the budget level for continuous professional training activities, involvement of teachers in social mobility / travel / educational exchange;
- Assess the opportunity to implement Social Accountability Tools in other levels of the education system: pre-school institutions, vocational-technical institutions, higher education institutions;

Local coalitions level

- Expand the use of questionnaires, public hearings, budget information (SATs) in other school activities: Pupils Council activity, public audience of Parents Association's budgets;
- Increase the level of cooperation between key actors in solving daily school problems; Developing partnerships with LPA, Parents' Association, CSOs;
- Facilitate the exclusions of all formal and informal collections of funds and encouraging parents to engage in voluntary activities;
- Increase the level of parents' knowledge about the need to participate in analyzing and distributing the school budget;
- Provide training for pupils, parents and teachers on the subject of school budget and financial indicators used; Organizing summer schools for pupils;
- Conduct trainings for parents on issues of engaging in school life, education issues, leadership;
- Promote the use of Social Accountability Tools in local public administration institutions;

Project implementation level

- Develop a risk management mechanism related to the political and social instability in Moldova;
- Involve and consult partners at the writing stage of the project and programming the activities;
- Introduce elements of social inclusion, thus ensuring the representation of vulnerable categories;
- Introduce the gender indicator, thus providing a proper representation in participation;
- Develop a gender-specific monitoring mechanism and special inclusion that will allow adaptation of the lessons learned and outcomes;
- Develop a better and more complex system of collaboration with WBG country and sector dialogues, to facilitate the WB's projects impact in the education sector particularly, and in the country generally.