

Project Completion Assessment

FIGHTING ACADEMIC CORRUPTION: Tiraspol State University, Chisinau Campus

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1. Project Background

The PTF funded project at Tiraspol State University took place in the 2008-2009 school year. Tiraspol State University was located in the Break-away region of Transnistria but moved to Chisinau during the short Civil war in 1992. The project was continued for a second year at Taraclia State University with monitoring to continue at Tiraspol State University.

2. Project completion assessment

The country visit included the assessment of three PTF funded projects with the overall goals of the assessment as follows:

- a. To verify the accomplishments and conclusions set out in the completion reports.
- b. To assess the sustainability of the institutions and processes set up under the projects and recommend measures to ensure continued sustainability
- c. To assess the potential for a national anticorruption program in the education sector based on the experience of the three projects and outline main elements of such a program.
- d. To assess the capacity of the CSOs involved in the three projects and recommend measures to strengthen them to play a role in a national program.
- e. To compile "lessons from experience" to be used for other projects in Moldova and in countries

3. Tiraspol State University Activities

The original project objectives and activities included a range of objectives and activities to reduce the extent of corruption at Tiraspol State University. This included both addressing the low salaries of professors through by developing a scheme of transparent financing of universities and raising the awareness of corruption through seminars. In addition, th

eporject developed a curriculum or a class on corruption and an honor code for students.

4. Limitations

In regards to assessing the activities at Tiraspol State University, the PCA for this report is limited in the fact that the project took place over one year prior to the country visit. The PCA will focus on the long term results and sustainability of the project and presume that the meetings and classes took place as described in the progress reports.

The students interviewed at Tiraspol SU, were students contracted to help paint the building during the summer months. For this, they were guaranteed a spot in the dormitory, and received room, board, and stipend. An administrator at the university stated that these students are not serious students and are not representative of the student body.

5. List of respondents

	Stefan Iiventa	Secretary of senate and anticorruption council	
	Igor Codreanu,	Dean	
	6 students, 1-3 year	Telecentru bloc	
	7 2-3 year	Central bloc	

	students 2 graduates		
		rector	
		Central for combatera corruption and ecoonimic crime	
	Denis Zdeara	Jurist, MOE	
	Aliona	TSU	
	Mircea Esanu	UNDP	

f. Overview of corruption in Moldova and in schools university.

Corruption is a widespread issue in Moldova, a number of organizations including UNDP, USAID, OSCE have worked on the issue. Specific work in schools and universities does not seem to have been an emphasis.

Education in Moldova, according to a Transparency International report, is among the most corrupt institutions in Moldova. This may reflect the fact a broad spectrum of the population has contact with schools and universities while a smaller proportion of the population has regular contact with other public institutions.

Corruption in schools takes many forms. Sometimes it is a direct request from a teacher asking for money in exchange for grades. Most of the time it is more hidden. A teacher may encourage parents to enroll students in extra lessons for a fee, or give students poor grades until they do. Because the state does not fund schools well, school administrators rely on parents

to subsidize the school budget. A very large sum of money crosses the director's desk. Some of the money collected goes through a parent organization and some accounting; some of it does not. Parents have complained that not all money goes to the intended purpose. Staff at the CCECC mention that now teachers are selling things such as Mary Kay cosmetics, and those who buy more get better grades. Or, teachers publish a small text and require it for the class, collecting money from students.

The situation is exacerbated by the wide disparities in income. Teachers can earn as little as 100 euros a month. Many parents work abroad and earn much more.

There is no end to the blame game. Some blame parents for sending money to schools "with noble intentions" according to an official at the CCECC of helping the school. Some say parents feel bad about leaving their children behind while they are abroad working so send money to children at home and attempt to help their children by buying grades from teachers. (There seems to be a consensus that students with parents abroad are asked for more money than students with parents in country, at least in rural areas.) Some blame students for being lazy and unwilling to study. Some blame teachers for extorting money from students.

When asked, students and instructors described corruption as the exchange of money for grades.

At TSU corruption is considered to be at a lower level than at some of the other universities. According to both students and staff interviewed, TSU students are mostly from rural areas, in general come from less well-off families, and go on to be teachers. Because of the lack of funds, there is less money for corruption. Students and staff are also quick to point out, with some justification, that thousands of euros get lost at the national level, but teachers are held to account for "100 lei" bribes and gifts of flowers.

g. Project activities and evaluations.

Seminars and round table discussions anti-corruption council

ID provided evidence that these activities took place. They took pictures and presented sign-in sheets from the various gatherings. In addition, minutes from the meetings are on file. (get more in Taraclia)

ID and professors at developed a course on corruption. This was further developed in the Taraclia SU phase of the project and has resulted in a curriculum that all students will take at that university. Andrei B, a consultant working with Institute for Democracy, authored a reader in both Russian and Romanian to be used for the course. Two of the students interviewed had taken the course two years previously. Although they said the course was worthwhile and should be offered again, they had little distinct memory from it. Other students who had not taken the course said that it should be an optional course at the university. Levanta, who taught the course, said that it was worthwhile and the students had been interested in it. At the CCCEC, staff have attended and lead various activities and mentioned that students are interested in the topic of corruption.

These claims are challenged by the plagiarism that takes place in universities. A respondent at the CCCEC noted that students at an anti-corruption workshop at Tarclia had copied the material prepared for the activity. If this is the effort students put into their learning and these activities, these courses will have limited benefit. The material for the course, the reader, according to another respondent, is somewhat simplistic. However, according to the respondent, it is appropriate for students who have not had such courses are who have not participated in anti-corruption activities and is a reasonable place to start.

The course is a survey of the origins and causes of corruption, the fight against corruption in Moldova, and the fight against corruption in other countries. Unfortunately the chapter on other countries does not include other countries in Eastern Europe, or other developing countries.

Anti corruption box:

This seemed to have mixed effect. According to a professor, there seems to have been some complaints coming from students, which were investigated by the university administration. Andrei B. even noted that officials at the MOE proposed using such boxes in other universities. Also, it is important to have a method through which students can voice their concern without fear of retribution. Perhaps an anti-corruption box is not the best way to provide this support.

The students with whom I talked did not indicate that the boxes were an important part of university life. Only one student indicated that she and a few

colleagues had placed something in the box, and this was not specifically about corruption. Other students did not have any experience with it.

More direct criticism of the box came from a dean who compared the boxes with the time of Stalin when undocumented accusations could lead to someone's execution. Obviously this is a bit dramatic. He also stated that some students had accused older professor of making sexual advances. Accusations, given to target, he considered a bad joke.

Using tips from the box is difficult. S. Levinta, secretary of the anticorruption council at TSU, did indicate that if only a 2-3 complaints about an event or a professor were found in the box, there was no grounds for action. Only when 5-6 complaints, of 25 students, were there more reason for action.

Andrei B. suggested that the anti-corruption box is something that works against instructors and indirectly administrators. It is a method for students to voice their complaints and problems. This may account for the negative attitude of the dean. The box was broken into at the university. Andrei B interpreted that as an indication that instructors saw it as a threat, but no one know who broke the lock.

Regardless, based on the small sample of students it does not seem to be effective, although it might have been earlier in the project.

Exam regulations

These consisted primarily of requiring all exams to be written and to keep the exams on file for two years. This would allow students to appeal any grade received. (ask Alione about how often this has happened)

In addition, the university requires two tests to be given during the course of the semester. This allows an auditor to compare the tests to the exam, if there is a large discrepancy, this may be a sign of corruption, that someone paid for the grade.

Any oral tests are required to have at least five people present.

Despite Moldova having a tradition of oral exams, the written exam system seems to accepted, protested at times, and does provide some concrete content to appeal any grade.

Honor code

The honor code has been drafted and accepted by the university senate. None of the students interviewed had read the honor code, but many had heard of it.

According to representatives from ID, when the code was presented to students, students asked why instructors were not presented with a code as well.

The honor code seems to be a departure from the topic of corruption as defined by ID and members of the university community who focus on corruption as an exchange of money for a grade. The honor code includes many regulations that address significant concerns in the Moldovan school system included plagiarism, copying from other students, getting help from students and teachers during exams, and absences. The honor code address issues much beyond the exchange of money for grades referred to as corruption.

This could be a useful tool if it were promoted, for example on the first day of the semester, and enforced, professors do not accept papers that are plagiarized. I do not like the idea of grading or punishing students for attendance, but methods such as short quizzes administered on a regular basis in class might be one way to encourage attendance.

Transparent ways of financing universities.

This consisted of two components. First the anti-corruption council was to oversee the university budget.

The second piece involved the use of funds received by the university from students studying based on contracts. There are two classification of students at university. The first study "on the budget," and the state pays the tuition. The second is based on a contract and the student, or parents, pay tuition. The amount of tuition can vary significantly from university to university and from department to department. In addition, some universities have a large percentage of students on contract, and some a much smaller amount. Finally, this percentage can change from year to year.

It is suggested that 30% of the amount collected by paid as a supplement to instructors' salary. Because the amount collected varies from year to year, this results in an uncertain subsidy to instructors.

Surveys

Some attempts were made to develop a sense of trust in carrying out the survey. Students proctored the surveys conducted by university staff, and an individual unaffiliated with the university conducted the surveys for ID. During the surveys, students were allowed to socialize, or even take the survey home to complete it. Moldovan students are loathe to work independently, and this raises some doubt to the unique response found on each survey.

Legislation

According to a former secretary of the Anti-corruption Alliance, there is some “very good” legislation on the books regarding corruption. This same gentleman also pointed out that this same legislation has not been effective in reducing corruption. Although it is important to work in the domain of national legislation, without execution, any efforts here will have limited benefit.

8. Recommendations:

As noted above, fighting corruption when salaries are low and differences in income are great is very difficult. The advice from most of those interviewed regarding future work consisted of raising awareness of corruption. Although this is important, the benefits will be limited.

- h. Instead of focusing on the exchange of money for grades, the topic of corruption should be expanded to include the academic integrity. This notion is included in the honor codes, but does not seem to be emphasized in the project activities. A woman at the CCECC noted that students at Tarascan SU simply plagiarized material during an activity designed to raise awareness of corruption. If this is the work of the students, plagiarizing instead of developing their own thoughts, any activity or coursework is of limited value. I would even suggest that the anticorruption course include the topic of academic integrity as well.
- i. Stronger use of honor codes that include academic integrity. These could be strongly promoted, for example have students sign a document, perhaps as part of the anticorruption class, perhaps with any class. Instructors and administrators too should sign this and be obligated to enforce it. One respondent even suggested that included in the code, or with its implementation, there should be a mechanism for investigating any breach of the code.
- j. More objective exam procedures is a common recommendation for anticorruption activities. The procedures developed for the project are reasonable and seem readily accepted. They are not a failsafe method, but they can be useful.
- k. Recourse for students: I focus on student here because they have the least authority in any ‘exchange’ although they are not necessarily innocent. A corruption campaign must have some way of reporting corruption that protects the individual from retribution. Although a dean said it is the administration’s obligation “to protect” students, this is not necessarily a reliable method since they too are implicated in corruption. The anti-corruption boxes may have served this purpose for a while, but no longer does so at least not from the perspective of the students interviewed. The national commission may do so and can be a useful tool. It faces two major challenges. First, students must be aware of the

commission and aware of its goals. And, second, it needs to earn the trust of students and instructors, in terms of protecting those who ask for assistance and in terms of effectiveness in monitoring and investigating cases of corruption. It is difficult to do both, especially when many 'victims' benefit from the corrupt exchange.