



## Improving the Integrity of School Exams in Moldova

<b>CBO:</b>	Community Association ‘Soarta’ (SOARTA)
<b>Years:</b>	2009 – 2010
<b>Country:</b>	12 lyceums in Soroca District, Moldova
<b>Amount:</b>	\$ 25,000 USD
<b>Sector:</b>	Social Services: Controlling Corruption in Delivery of Social Services: Education

<b>Corruption Problem:</b>	Lack of Integrity in the Education Sector and Corrupt Practices in School Exams Lead to Substandard Education Outcomes.
<b>Tools employed:</b>	Advocacy, Citizen Monitoring, Public Hearing, Awareness Raising, Survey, Community Mobilization, Information Hotline, Constructive Engagement

The Moldovan Community Association ‘Soarta’ (SOARTA) implemented a citizen-led anti-corruption project in the Soroca District in North-East Moldova, aimed at curbing corruption in 12 secondary schools, promoting ethical conduct and institutional reforms during examinations. The project focused on High school graduation exams that serve for students’ registration in university and was successful in bringing varied stakeholders together, offering a viable route for increased integrity to combat corruption and enhance the quality of education system outcomes in Moldova.

### Corruption Problem Addressed

The education system in Moldova is riddled with corruption and, according to Transparency International Moldova, among the most corrupt sectors within the country. A ready explanation for the prevalence of corrupt practices is the incentive system that rewards students, teachers and school administrators alike for upholding extortion and embezzlement.

**Teachers** are generally underpaid in comparison to the salaries Moldovan’s can secure when seeking work outside the country. Officials therefore

undertake to make up for the perceived or factual injustice by extorting bribes from students in return for attested scholarly success.

**Students** know that money will buy better grades and that bribing teachers is in fact the only means for obtaining good grades, including securing their admission to college. Commonly, students also realize that they have to exert less effort studying.

Due to insufficient budgets allocated to maintain schools, **administrators** regularly ask parents for “school maintenance subsidies”. SOARTA research indicates that these are partly administered through correct accounting procedures and partly vanish into the pockets of administrators.

Some parents finance the request for supplemental payments for a host of reasons. These include adhering to a perceived cultural norm, guilt, or fear of positioning their child insufficiently well. The poor are most often not able to bribe teachers.

Despite the gamed system, there are teachers, students and parents who do not adhere to corrupt practices.

## Actions Taken by SOARTA

SOARTA implemented a host of project activities, intended to bring the envisioned change toward more integrity, stimulating and then institutionalizing behavior change. Concretely, SOARTA

- raised awareness through public forums and workshops; provided a complaint hotline and information on recourse for contesting exam results.
- conducted surveys and built the capacity of parent groups, ministry personnel and experts to monitor the examination process (including teachers' behavior and students' exam results), both during ordinary exams and baccalaureate exams.
- developed, in cooperation with other stakeholders, three sets of recommendations for the Rayon Educational Direction (the local branch of the Ministry of Education [Moe]), including supporting the development and adoption of three codes of ethics (CoE) on academic integrity – applicable to teachers, students and parents.
- developed two regulations to involve citizens and parents in the decision-making process in local educational institutions.
- lobbied for disciplinary action for both soliciting as well as giving bribes and established a constructive relationship with the Soroca District Council, the MoE, the Directia, parents, student associations and school administrators.

## Impact and Results Achieved

- ✓ The project created awareness of students, parents and teachers regarding appeals

procedures and resulted in an increase of students contesting examination results.

- ✓ The evaluation of the surveys highlight that – over the project phase – students have taken an interest in the project and have started to publicly discuss, in-depth and without fear of censure, on the scope of corrupt practices before, during and after exams.
- ✓ The superintendent of the Soroca District reported an increase in parents calling to inquire about teacher behavior.
- ✓ The proposed CoEs were accepted by all stakeholders. The Ministry of Education agreed that the CoEs could become an official part of the high school education system in the district, the only district in Moldova to have such codes. The formal approval of a new CoE was given in May 2012. The District Council and Education Directorate subsequently also accepted the CoE. A last step is for the high schools to adopt and implement the codes. Due to the concerted effort, all schools are likely to continue the reforms begun.
- ✓ An Education Ethics Committee was established within the Soroca District Council, with 5 members, including SOARTA, to oversee and guide anti-corruption efforts in the education sector.

## Sustainability and Replication

Whereas the one-year project cycle was too short to observe long-term impacts at the level of education outcomes, the project succeeded in setting the agenda, identifying and implementing actions to institutionalize behaviour change and has turned successful advocacy on the policy level into actionable recommendations on the level of individual schools.

In the current second phase, SOARTA is giving special emphasis to (1) preparing an eight-month



program of activities for the original 12 schools to consolidate the results of the first project; (2) carrying out a detailed baseline survey to establish additional and refined measures of corruption to increase its ability to measure, (3) agreeing with the MoE on the expansion of the project to other districts, and (4) assessing interest among other districts in working with SOARTA.

SOARTA is thus preparing the ground for continued constructive engagement, helping communities and policy makers to implement measures to counter corrupt practices and thereby aims to prevent further distortion of education outcomes in Moldova.

## **Documentation**

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at [www.ptfund.org](http://www.ptfund.org) under the “Where-we-work” tab

Various project outputs, including recommendations, the different agreed-upon codes for ethical behaviour and other material can be accessed at <http://www.soarta.md/indexen.php?cat=41&rub=Projects&rubnum=303&lang=en&user=guest>

The SOARTA website is accessible at <http://www.soarta.md/indexro.php>

For further information, please contact [director.soarta@gmail.com](mailto:director.soarta@gmail.com)

PTF can be contacted at [info@ptfund.org](mailto:info@ptfund.org)