

UN ACTIVITIES IN ARMENIA: EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVE

REPORT on the sociological survey results

The Report sums up the results of the sociological survey conducted in February-July 2002 on the initiative of the DPI Yerevan Office and with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and other UN Agencies in Armenia. Surveyed were teachers of 3 new academic subjects (Human Rights, Civic Education and State & Law) recently included in the high school curricula.

The major goals of the survey were to identify the degree to which teachers are aware of and knowledgeable about UN activities in Armenia and to provide recommendations to increase efficiency of a number of aspects of those activities.

The publication is intended for UN employees and for representatives of NGOs, educational institutions and mass media. The survey may be of interest to the officials of the RoA Ministry of Education and Science as well as to those NGOs and other UN partners that work closely with the target group.

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The Report team wishes to emphasize that opinions, conclusions and recommendations presented in the Report reflect the position of the team and that full responsibility for the opinions, conclusions and recommendations contained in the Report rests solely and exclusively with the authors.

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Yerevan, October 2002

INTRODUCTION

(Program of the Survey and substantiation of the sample)

The Survey UN activities in Armenia: educators' perspective the results of which are presented in the Report was designed as a theoretical and applied study. It aimed not only to formulate theoretical conclusions about the efficiency of various aspects of the UN activities but also to find ways for perfecting the communication between the UN and high schools.

The Survey set primarily two major goals: first, to identify the degree to which teachers are knowledgeable about the UN activities and, second, to identify ways to enhance the efficiency of the operation of the UN office in Armenia.

The target group of the Survey was teachers who teach Human Rights, Civic Education and State & Law academic subjects in the 8th-10th grades of comprehensive schools in Armenia.

The Survey was conducted in February-July 2002.

The program of the Survey included the following objectives:

1. To identify the degree to which those teachers are knowledgeable about the UN activities in Armenia;
2. To identify their attitudes to and evaluation of the UN activities;

3. To identify the efficiency of the communications between the UN office and high schools;
4. To identify the relative efficiency of the means and forms of the UN informational, training and publication activities;
5. To identify the degree to which the teachers are knowledgeable about human rights;
6. To provide (on the basis of the analysis of the obtained results) suggestions and recommendations for enhancing the efficiency of a number of aspects of the UN activities that target, inter alia, the said socio-demographic group.

In the course of the study the teachers of the above-mentioned disciplines were interviewed through the method of formalized poll with the use of unified tools. The latter were grounded in a specially designed questionnaire consisting of 38 questions broken down into 3 groups of (1) General information about the evaluation of UN activities in Armenia, (2) communication of the UN with high schools and (3) teachers' knowledge about human rights.

The total number of teachers in the target group is 3,047. The sample included 550 teachers, i.e. 18% of the universe of the target group population. A quota sample that reproduces the structure of the universe of the target population as quotas (proportions) of distribution of the features under study was used as a methodology for selecting the sample.

A three-stage sample was used in the survey to ensure that it is qualitatively representative. At the first stage the sample was selected on a regional basis. 10 regions (marz) and the city of Yerevan were selected.

At the second stage the sample was selected in such a way as to ensure the adequate proportional representation of the teachers from the target group:

Marz/region	Number of respondents	Marz/region	Number of respondents
1. Yerevan	84	7. Vayots Dzor	18
2. Armavir	59	8. Lori	60
3. Ararat	56	9. Tavush	34
4. Aragatsotn	49	10. Syunik	32
5. Gegharkunik	53	11. Kotayk	50
6. Shirak	55		

At the third stage a purposeful random selection of respondents was made in each region. In terms of gender and age, the sample in general corresponds the universe of the target population.

Socio-demographic description of the sampled population: Percentage of the total number of the respondents

age		sex	
up to 30	53	male	23
30-50 age	40	female	77
above 50	7		

The survey has been conducted and the Report has been prepared by the following team:

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PART I

Teachers of the newly introduced subjects were specially selected as a target group. The role of a teacher is usually important in the process of person's primary socialization, especially in a transition society. It is teachers that train the young generations (actually, the first generations to live in a post-authoritarian, democratic society) for new social roles and for new social conditions. In our view, teachers who teach Human Rights, Civic Education and State & Law academic subjects have a special role, since knowledge and skills that they transfer are key for citizenry in a democracy.

One of the formidable challenges for a transition society is consolidation of democracy, i.e. irreversibility of democratic reforms and changes and the transition to a participatory democracy.

True democratic society is unthinkable without a viable civil society with a broad social basis of active, responsible, well-informed and socially competent citizens who take an active part in social and political life and are involved in decision-making. Civil society is still very weak in the post-Soviet space and citizens are, as a rule, passive and inert and alienated from real political processes, first of all, from the making of decisions important for the society, and they become an easy prey of political and other manipulations during the elections.

The school can be the most efficient institution for developing skills of citizen participation and responsibility and of active stance rooted in appropriate knowledge. The role of teachers who teach civics-related subjects can hardly be overestimated because the future of this society is, in a sense, in their hands. Not only do they transmit knowledge and develop skills but also in the course of the academic process they transmit ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, stereotypes, etc. that reflect the entire range of social relations, first of all, the power relations. It is the so-called "cultural capital", which is transmitted, as a rule, via the "hidden curriculum". And civic knowledge and skills that students will have upon entering independent, adult life are predicated, to a large extent, on what values, attitudes, perceptions and ideas and in what specific context and how have been presented to those students.

Of course, the very fact that the indoctrination in the spirit of vulgarized, overly simplified Marxism during the Soviet times and the subsequent total de-ideologization of the first independent years (as a natural reaction to the former) that was accompanied by almost a complete lack of a unified and consistent system of value and other norms and ideas are being gradually replaced by a new world outlook based on democratic norms, principles and values.

Introduction of those three disciplines is a result of both the awareness of pressing societal needs and the restoration of the educative component of the education system which cannot properly function without that important social function. The nation came finally to the realization that no society can exist without grounding itself in values shared by the majority of its members and in common ideals and principles.

In a democracy school train active and responsible citizens primarily by promoting critical thinking and developing the appropriate skills. It means, first of all, interactive, discussion-based style of teaching and learning which emphasizes a critical search and internalizing of truths, principles and beliefs rather than passive learning of a set of petrified of truisms. It also means numerous open-ended questions and spirited debates that develop skills of expressing one's ideas consistently, logically and calmly and an ability to listen to other opinions with due respect. The textbooks of those subjects are oriented (albeit, to a varying degree) to that end and they encourage teachers to move along those lines.

As model roles and opinion leaders, teachers have to play a major role in that process. Colleges and universities have yet to prepare teachers of those disciplines. At present Junior Achievement of Armenia and (in regard to human rights) Armenian Constitutional Right-Protective Center (in Vanadzor) in close cooperation with the UN agencies perform the function of training those teachers.

The teachers are in need not only of retraining and of getting new knowledge but also of a tremendous amount of materials. In that respect the UN office can (and, in our view, should) play a key role. The matter concerns not only the issues of democracy, civil society and information technologies that affect the trajectory of development of the global civilization at the beginning of the new millennium. Practically all aspects of the UN activities are relevant for the themes addressed in those innovative disciplines. Teachers need to have first-hand knowledge about the UN experience as well as about the approaches and principles of that organization so as to be able to teach better and to raise socially active and responsible citizens that have critical thinking. And that category of teachers should get a support from the UN agencies since in reality it is the teachers who undertake the task of advocacy, promotion and

implementation of the UN ideals, principles and norms into everyday practices of the present-day Armenian society (to a much greater extent than NGOs even though the UN agencies place, for obvious reasons, a special emphasis on cooperation with them).

This category of teachers was selected as a target group for the survey, given social significance and importance of their mission. Among the major goals of the survey were a degree to which they are knowledgeable about the UN activities in Armenia, their evaluation of those activities, a degree of use and channels of obtaining the UN materials and the motivation to be better informed and to cooperate with UN.

Drawing on the replies given by the respondents to a number of questions of the questionnaire it is possible to get a general idea about how well the respondents are informed about the activities of the UN office in Armenia and what kind of information they possess.

First of all, a keen interest of the surveyed group of teachers in the UN activities, materials and events in Armenia has to be noted. The overwhelming majority of respondents are quite well-informed about the mandate and mission of the UN as a whole and of its individual agencies as well as about some aspects of their activities in Armenia. Many respondents took part (in different forms) in a number of programs implemented by UN agencies in one or more regions or countrywide.

The survey has identified a pattern: the better teachers are informed, the more they are interested to get more knowledge and information about UN, the more they use and want to get the UN materials and the more they are inclined to evaluate more positively the UN activities.

It has also been revealed that participation in the UN programs results in the respondents being better informed and evaluating higher the contribution of the UN agencies towards the solution of socio-economic, political and other problems of our society, in their having stronger motivation to collaborate with UN, to take part in new programs and to get new materials and information about UN.

It makes sense for the UN agencies to formulate their policies and to map out their strategies in such a way so as to tap into the available potential of qualification, motivation and goodwill.

The survey has discovered that most teachers make an extensive use of the UN materials when teaching the three innovative courses. The survey results testify unequivocally about a still growing demand of the respondents for the UN materials that is far from being fully met. It has also been found out that those materials play an important role in adequate conceptualization of the principal issues covered by syllabi of those disciplines (which are in most cases the same as the key issues addressed by UN), in more detailed treatment of those issues and in provision of illustrations as well as in stimulation of students' interest in the UN activities.

The survey results demonstrate that those materials and information are channeled mainly through UN. It is obvious that in future, too, teachers will rely and depend on UN as a primary source.

The specific features of a transition period that this country is going through dictates the necessity of closer contacts of the UN agencies with teachers (especially with the teachers of the above-mentioned disciplines) and of special efforts at providing the latter on a permanent basis with the UN materials and with information about the UN activities (including the activities in Armenia).

What strategies could be efficient in this situation? First of all, special emphasis should be made on preparation and publication of the UN materials and materials about UN. Those materials should be of the highest possible quality both in terms of content and of the printing quality so that they could be used for more than one purpose, viz. as reference books, teaching guides and teaching materials and aids. Clarity and maximum consistency are among important criteria that those publications must meet. Good organization of the material is an important precondition for their successful use for teaching purposes.

When preparing the materials (with the exception of translations), it should be borne in mind which social groups they are designed for primarily. So far that factor has virtually been ignored in most cases. The UN publications (including those produced by the UN office in Armenia) are intended for the general public (the mass readership, so to speak) or are narrowly professional and can be used only by interested and expert users. Sure enough, such an approach is legitimate and, as a rule, is quite productive. At the same time the effectiveness and efficacy of those publications could be raised dramatically, if a social group(s) that they are primarily targeting is (are) determined and if the selection and presentation of the materials are done taking into consideration the interests, needs and professional and educational levels of the group(s).

It is clear that such a strategy requires close cooperation and coordination of efforts. Therefore we recommended that the UN agencies establish an ad hoc or even a permanent group that would coordinate the production and dissemination of publications.

Since the selection of the UN materials that has been disseminated this year by DPI among schoolteachers proved to be extremely popular, the initiative of DPI to publish the Collection of the UN

materials and a set of brochures on human rights (including the UN Charter, Millennium Declaration and international legal instruments on human rights) as well as the translation and publication of the Basic Facts about the UN in Armenian should be welcomed. Of course, quite a few copies of those publications should be sent to school libraries.

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The survey has provided good grounds to contend that the present-day Armenian society is living through a contradictory and painful period of radical transformation of the existing legal culture. It should be borne in mind, however, that this process has reached the majority of the Armenian population or that it has been going on at the same speed and intensity among various segments of the society and in urban and rural areas. The survey results have shown that only those teachers that teach or are going to teach those subjects are quite knowledgeable and interested. The transition period of the present-day Armenian legal culture inevitably brings about its internal inconsistencies and coexistence of mutually exclusive tendencies. On the one hand, an ordinary person feels no less vulnerable vis-a-vis the Government and civil servants than during the Soviet period but, on the other hand, he or she is trying to be more knowledgeable about his or her rights and to actively master the new legal tools for the defense of those rights. However, it is most unfortunate that weak civil society, the growing adaptation stress caused by serious drawbacks of the economic reforms and the survival-oriented strategies on a mass scale quite often give rise to a situation when the human rights issue is pushed to the periphery of the public mind.

This English-language publication is an abridged version. The full text of the Report has been published in Armenian and Russian.

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