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IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

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HASMIK YUMUSHAGHJYAN

YEREVAN, ARMENIA

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SIGNATURE PAGE

Faculty Advisor

Date

Dean

Date

American University of Armenia

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Abstract

Education is recognized as a basic human right. It is closely linked to virtually all dimensions of development - human, economic, and social. It is universally acknowledged as an essential element in the process of national development. The fundamental purpose of investment in education is to empower people with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to improve their quality of life, enhance their productivity and their capacity to learn new skills, and enable them to participate more fully in the development process.

The purpose of this study is to observe the role of the United Nations, as an international organization, in the progress of education in Armenia. The study will try to find whether UN is aiming to have an impact on the progress of education in Armenia through its programs and examine its implementation mechanisms. The ways of cooperation between the government of the Republic of Armenia and the United Nations, for the progress of education in Armenia will also be studied. To give a more detailed picture of the issue, the paper will compare the activities implemented by the United Nations in the Republic of Armenia and its regional neighbors; Azerbaijan and Georgia. Finally, the paper will analyze the possible shortcomings and differences in the activities carried by the United Nations in the South Caucasus region, and at the end give recommendations.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BoH – Bridge of Hope

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science

RoA – Republic of Armenia

TACADA – Technical Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

UN – United Nations

UNDPI – United Nations Department of Public Information

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

UNITWIN – University Twinning and Networking Program

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

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Introduction

Education is recognized as a basic human right. It is closely linked to virtually all dimensions of development—human, economic, and social. It is universally acknowledged as an essential element in the process of national development. The fundamental purpose of investment in education is to empower people with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to improve their quality of life, enhance their productivity and their capacity to learn new skills, and enable them to participate more fully in the development process (ADB, 2003).

Article 7 of the 1990 World Declaration on “Education for All” observes, that national, regional, and local educational authorities have a unique obligation to provide basic education for all. To help achieve the goal of education for all, the Declaration suggests that new and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary: partnerships among all sub-sectors and forms of education, partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, etc (UNESCO, 1990).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to observe the role of the United Nations, as an international organization, in the progress of education in Armenia. The study will try to find whether UN is aiming to have an impact on the progress of education in Armenia through its programs and examine the implementation mechanisms. The ways of cooperation between the government of the Republic of Armenia and the United Nations, for the progress of education in Armenia will also be studied. To give a more detailed picture of the issue, the paper will compare the activities implemented by the United Nations in the Republic of Armenia and its regional neighbors; Azerbaijan and Georgia. Finally, the paper will analyze the possible shortcomings and differences in the activities carried by the United Nations in the South Caucasus region, and at the end give recommendations.

Since 1992, UN - as an international organization, has initiated a number of other programs and activates to support the development and progress of Armenia. In 1992, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched its Chairs in several universities of Armenia. The main goal of the Chairs was to advance research, training and program development in higher education, by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders. From 1995 Armenia became one of the 126 countries where this program is launched, with the aim to improve the system of high educational legislation and reforms in Armenia through various national and international activities, as well as to implement activities which shall promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation activities (UNESCO, 2009).

The study of afore mentioned programs of the UN in the field of education will help to answer the research questions of the paper, which are as follows:

1. RQ 1. What are the mechanisms that the United Nations uses to contribute the progress of education in Armenia?
2. RQ 2. How does the government of Armenia collaborate with the UN to have a positive impact on the progress of education in Armenia?
3. RQ 3. What activities does the UN carry out to support the progress of education in the South Caucasus?
4. RQ 4. What are the shortcomings of the UN activities aimed at the progress of education in Armenia (studied in comparative analyses with its regional neighbors Georgia and Azerbaijan)?

Literature Review

While the right to education – like all human rights – is universal and inalienable, several conventions have preserved it in the international law, thereby placing binding commitments on States which ratify the conventions. Provisions on the right to a quality education appears in such treaties as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The right to education can only be realized in a political and economic environment that acknowledges the importance of transparent, participatory and accountable processes, as well as broad-based collaboration both across government and in a wider society. It needs a long-term strategic commitment to the provision of adequate resources, development of cross-departmental structures, engagement with the energies, capacities of parents and local communities, and partnership with non-governmental organizations (MoES, 2000).

When Armenia became a member of the UN in 1992, a number of programs and activities were launched for the progress of education in Armenia by the UN. In order to improve the primary school enrolment in Armenia, significant attention was required, especially with regards to education quality and efficiency. With this aim the government of Armenia has launched numerous large scale reform efforts in an attempt to improve the education system. These efforts include:

- State investment in education has increased during the recent years (see Appendix C)

- In 2006, the government added a ninth year to compulsory schooling. According to the agenda of the government, the transition to the new school system will be complete by 2012 (Webpage: www.gov.am).
- The Ministry of Education developed a new curriculum, which includes a mandatory life skills segment from grades 1 to 9. In 2006 State Standards for Secondary Education were developed, which laid a bases for gradual introduction of new subject standards, syllabi and textbooks.
- The government invested in improving management and efficiency of the education system, with special focus on capacity development and an Education Management Information System (EMIS).
- The MoES installed a new assessment system to help monitor educational quality and to encourage objective evaluation of students.
- The government declared its intent to better enforce compulsory education laws and to ensure that all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender and income level are assured access to good quality education at all levels (UNICEF, 2008).

Moreover, starting from 1992, a number of the UN joint initiatives and programs with the RA government have been launched to have an impact on the development of education. The target goal of the programs all over the world, as well as Armenia, was to reflect the country's specific development needs and priorities in the sphere of education. In Armenia, education is stated as one of the preconditions of sustainable human development, and the development of this sphere is one of the top priorities of the country (Government of Armenia, 2010).

In order to ensure universally accessible and good quality, high standard education and increase in the efficiency of the education sphere, strategic programs aimed at the reform of this sector and its sub-sectors were developed in Armenia such as; achieving inclusive education and Education for All, creating a special classes aimed at awareness raising of pupils about specific topics on, and advancing research and training programs for the students. Strategies and concepts for the development of preschool, general secondary school, vocational education and higher education have been approved by the Government and are currently in the implementation stage. Nevertheless, one of the biggest challenges in the sector is the harmonization and linkage of these sub-sectoral policies and strategies, especially at the secondary, vocational and higher education levels (UNDAF, 2010).

In order to increase the accessibility and quality of education, the enlargement of public spending on education was envisaged in the country's pre-crisis development programs. It was expected to increase steadily the share of public expenditures in education in the growing GDP and to reach the benchmark 4% of GDP in 2015. However, one of the biggest challenges of the program was the improvement of the quality of education, which required the development and introduction of a unified system for knowledge assessment in all levels of education. Moreover, the biggest goal of this program has been to ensure that, by 2015, every child will be able to complete a full course of high quality basic schooling (UNDP, 2010).

Another program initiated by the UN, which is continuously having its contribution to the progress of education in Armenia, is the Model UN simulation for young students. After becoming a member of the UN, Armenia undertook the process of dissemination of UN values by presenting them to the public. One of the activities that guided this process since 2000 has been the UN Model (UNDPI, 2000).

The UN Model Conference is a simulation of the UN General Assembly, where the participants play roles of delegates of the UN member states and bring their own solutions to the issues of global concern. The simulation enables young people to be directly involved in the decision-making process, thus getting an opportunity to voice their own opinions about and perceptions of the issues that are of global concern (UNDPI, 2001). Thus, young students become aware about what is a respect for human rights, how to protect the environment, fight disease, continue development, and work to reduce poverty. In this way Armenian youth had a unique opportunity not only to learn more about the functioning of the UN and its values, but also to improve its negotiation, communication and consensus-building skills, which will help them to be more active participants in their society.

Moreover, as usually the working language of the simulation is English, the students are able to practice their foreign language and have speeches using the sole official language. Furthermore, since 2009, Model UN has been organized not only for the students from Yerevan, but also its regions. The UN Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Armenian UN Association, the “Center of Organizing Youth Activities” of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and the International Organization for Migration, organized the first series of Model UN Conferences in 2010, which were opened in Ijevan, Armenia. Thereafter, five more conferences were organized in other regions of Armenia, enabling the youngsters from around Armenia benefit from the program.

According to Armine Halajyan Model UN Conferences initiated by UNDPPI and organized in Armenia is their success story. “Youth participants to these conferences have benefited from them in more ways than one. They not only learned about the UN, studied the rules and procedures of its bodies and main forums, but also attained good diplomatic,

decision-making and negotiation skills, gained knowledge in leadership and management. They also applied their knowledge of foreign languages because the majority of materials that they used during their research and preparation for the conferences were not in Armenian. As of now, since 2000, roughly speaking, over 2000 young people have participated in this role-plays as delegates of UN Member States” (Armine Halajyan, 2011).

Besides, Mrs. Halajyan also noted, that UNDPI has initiated other programs and activities with the aim to have a positive impact on the progress of youth education in Armenia. These programs are:

1. Organizing educational outreaches for teachers and students, about United Nations in general, human right in particular, peace mandate of UN, and about UN presence in Armenia. It is important to highlight the fact, that this program does not have a time frame, but is always ongoing.
2. Organizing leadership and management trainings for youth members of National Minorities in Armenia, which has been carried in 2010.
3. Finally, the students and young graduates from universities are always enabling with the chance to pass their academic internship or in general internship in UN Office, Armenia (particularly, the UN Department of Public Information), where they can gain skills and learn about the United Nations Organization. Very often they become the partners of UNDPI, or UN staff members in different agencies of the UN Armenia Office (Armine Halajyan, 2011).

From 1995 another big initiative was launched by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), aimed at the development of higher education in Armenia by setting its Chairs in some of the universities of Armenia. The program

was aimed at advancing research, training and program development in higher education, by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders.

From 1995-2009 UNESCO Chairs program was launched in a number of universities of Armenia, such as: Yerevan State University, Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov, Armenian State Pedagogical University, National Institute of Education of Armenia, and Life Sciences International Postgraduate Educational Center. With the help of this program, co-operative and integrated system of research, training and collaboration between high-level, internationally recognized researchers and the local scientific communities was promoted in the universities of Armenia (UNESCO, 2009).

Methodology

The methodology of the study has been chosen in a way to ensure reliability of data and plurality of opinions. For these purpose, the data were collected in two ways.

First, in-depth interviews have been conducted to have a clear picture of the activities UN has carried out as well as future plans, aimed at having a having a positive impact on the progress of education in Armenia. There were seven interviews with purposefully selected topics. In order to provide a diversity of approaches, representatives and experts from of UN agencies (UNDPI, UNICEF, and UNESCO) and experts from the Ministry of Education and Science and special Centers were selected as interviewees (see Appendix B).

Each interview lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded in order not to omit any comment or opinion. The instrument of the interviews was semi-structured, i.e. during the interview some of the questions were pre-planned, open-ended questions, however,

additional questions were also asked to probe the necessary information and to direct the conversation in the right way. There were eight questions prepared beforehand (See Appendix A). The interviews were conducted either in Armenian or English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Later the responses were translated and inputted for the purpose of the analyses. The results were divided into logical groups to see the trends in the answers and to have a general understanding of the opinions of the interviewees.

The second method is through secondary data analyzes. For this purpose, books, reports, publications and journals were reviewed. Some theoretical materials were also used to provide the general understanding of the universal criteria of education in the developed states. Besides, in order to look at a bigger picture of UN activities for the progress of education, the situation in the South Caucasus region has been reviewed. Based on this review, a comparative study has been done to find the differences and shortcomings of the UN activities in this region.

Finding 1: Education for All/Inclusive Education

Concerned with the quality of education in their countries, in 1990 the representatives of 155 countries signed the World Declaration on Education for All in Thailand. The Declaration has been an attempt to raise the participating countries' awareness about the importance of education in order to identify common international education issues and join efforts to solve them (UNESCO, 1990). The specific goals of the participating countries were identified as follows:

- Expand early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- Provide free and compulsory primary education for all

- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Improve the quality of education

In Armenia, the first official information about the Declaration on Education for All was received in the beginning of 1999, and over the past years, political and social transformations in the country have had their impact on the system of education, causing the increase of many indicators of increase in the quality improvement of education sector. However, no special strategy for Education for All goals achievement or an Action Plan has been developed in Armenia. The main official document for improving education in the Republic of Armenia has been the State Program for Educational Development for the period of 2001-2005. If we look at the Armenian reality, we can see that clear advances have been made with respect to the provision of quality and inclusive education mainly in terms of policies, programs, strategies and practices towards one which aims to guarantee the learning and participation of all. Education for All goals and the main State program objectives have common areas, especially, in the field of quality improvement and equity of access to primary, secondary and tertiary education (Agranovitch M., 2006).

In 1994 another big step toward Education for All was taken during the World Congress on Special Educational Needs Education in Salamanca (Spain), which was the first policy bringing children with disabilities to the fore, and offering a clear outline of Inclusive Education as the vehicle for the strategies outlined in the World Declaration on Education for All. Therefore, since the mid 1990's the global trend in the field of education has been to implement high quality education to all children with entering into education. The Salamanca Statement envisioned a new educational reform as the necessary condition to providing Inclusive Education for all children, stating that:

“All children should be educated, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children,.... and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups....the term ‘special education needs’ refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties...at some time during their schooling” (Salamanca 1994, 6).

In Armenia no special strategy or an action plan was developed since 2000, when UNICEF initiated support projects designed to increase awareness about the educational rights and needs of children with special needs, and ensure them equal access and quality educational opportunities within general education settings. Since then, and in collaboration with governmental agencies and various national and international NGO’s (Bridge of Hope, Mission East, and Open Society Institute), UNICEF has worked towards reforming the special education system in conformity with international requirements, as well as national, regional, and local reform efforts.

With regards to Inclusive Education launched by UNICEF, there are many NGOs supporting and working towards creating equal opportunities and improving the conditions for children with disabilities, so that they can achieve their own goals free from physical and attitudinal barriers. It is worth mentioning the Bridge of Hope NGO, has established 3 community-based centers in the Tavush region (Dilijan, Ijevan, and Berd). The aim of these centers is to provide psychosocial rehabilitation services to children with disabilities and their families, as well as to non-disabled children living in poverty. Thus, they also support the development of Inclusive Education practices in the regions and provide in-service training to teachers from regular schools to prepare them to teach children with disabilities. The overall objectives of the NGO, is to support in providing access to education and equal opportunities for children and youth with disabilities and other educational needs. The involvement of

‘Bridge of Hope’ NGO in carrying and implementing the Inclusive Education has been a big step, without the help of which international organizations like UNICEF could not handle and achieve success in inclusive education (Webpage: www.bridgeofhope.am).

However, in 2002 for the first time in Armenian history, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Armenian government started a new program with the aim to give chance to disabled children to get education together with other children. Of course, one can think that there are some cases when disabled children are utmost unable to be educated together with other children and they need special care, nevertheless during the interview with Armine Ter-Ghevondyan (UNICEF), it became clear that the key goal of the program has been to help the children who at least have the minimum requirements to be taught together with other children. This aim was planned to achieve through closing the special schools and enabling the children to attend general schools (Armine Ter-Ghevondyan, 2011).

It was also noted that although Inclusive Education programs in the Republic of Armenia have the potential to become effective and efficient, additional efforts must be undertaken with a clear national vision for educational reform, and with the collaboration of all interested stakeholders. Inclusive Education reform encompasses all aspects of children’s lives, both inside and outside of the school walls. The interview also raised important issues, such as the fact that Inclusive Education systemic reform is not exclusive to the Ministry of Education and Science and requires a collaboration at all levels of governance. However, it became evident that with the help of this program a number of children who were stagnating in special schools now have a chance to be integrated and taught in general schools (Armine Ter-Ghevondyan, 2011).

In 2005 the Government of Armenia adopted the concept of Inclusive Education. In June of 2005 the Law on Education of Persons with Special Education Needs was passed and Inclusive Education was included in the draft Education Development National Program for 2008-2015 (webpage: www.parliament.am).

The RA government has been very cooperative during the period and during the interview, Ruben Stepanyan (Ministry of Education and Science of the RoA) highlighted that since 2005, the program had its success actively collaborating with UNICEF, and now a number of policies and practices have been developed, such as: the closure of several special schools and the integration of children into general education; the conversion of the closed special schools into Child Care Centers schools; the development of Community Centers that support parents and local authorities involved in education; the institution of several Inclusive Schools throughout the Republic of Armenia (Ruben Stepanyan, 2011).

During the study, in-depth interview has also been conducted with an expert from the Assessment and Testing Center, established in Armenia, Lilit Asryan. The Center has been created with the decision of RA government in 2005 with the central goal to assess and evaluate the learning skills, knowledge and abilities of pupils and students in the institutions of Armenia.

Mrs. Lilit Asryan evaluated the current state of Inclusive Education in Armenia, as successful. She highlighted that although the developed states have passed to Inclusive Education much earlier, with the initiative of UNICEF Armenia has reached clear success in this short period of 6 years. According to Mrs. Asryan, this success is made especially in terms of integrating disabled pupils to general schools, thus breaking the stereotype that they should be kept in separate special schools. She also noted that they conduct free trainings and

seminars for teachers in Yerevan and marzes to make them be more professional and ready to deal with disabled pupils. One of the achievements highlighted by Mrs. Aseryan, is the fact that they know a number of cases and examples when the rest of the pupils in the classroom support and bestead the disabled children, thus becoming friends and evincing contribution to their learning.

One of the biggest shortcomings highlighted, is that sometimes the schools and teacher without deep understanding and feeling the gravity of inclusion, simply turn to inclusive education. However, as Mrs. Asryan assured, this is a long process and requires time and willingness to join the process. The first schools with inclusive education already are more proficient, have developed methods, realize the primary and secondary needs of children, evince proper individual approach to each child and implement socialization in the school. Speaking about the results of the program, Mrs. Aseryan stressed, that inclusive education enables the new generation be more human oriented, without discrimination of abilities and attitudes.

To summarize the results of interviews with the UNICEF evaluation of Inclusive Education policies shows, it should be noted that, during the short period of 6 years since the implementation of the first efforts, great progress has been accomplished, with respect to changing societal attitudes and expectations regarding children with special educational needs, and ensuring their desegregation and access to general education. However, the program also has its limitations because of the weaknesses in the current educational provisions, which include:

- Culture of the schools is often not welcoming to children with disabilities
- Roles and responsibilities of school staff are not well defined

- Links between inclusive pre-schools and schools are too weak
- Continuous professional development for teachers and staff is almost not-existent
- Referral, assessment, and support services require further technical improvement
- Accountability of students with special educational needs emphasize only the financial and administrative aspects, and ignores children achievements (Frederica, 2009).

To address this limitations and shortcomings of program, the government (particularly the Ministry of Education and Science) and local and international NGOs have their piece of work to do, as some need to be address in the state level and some in institutional.

Finding 2: Life Skills for Pupils

The Life Skills project was funded by UNICEF since its inception in 1997-2005. The project was one of several educational initiatives in the Republic of Armenia that had attempted to fill in some identical gaps in the school curriculum. In particular, Life Skills focus was on the development of a separate subject in schools, which would concentrate in giving the pupils appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes about such important topics, as: personal health and safety, presentation of self, communication skills, conflict resolution, respect, rights and responsibilities, environmental awareness and protection, and preparation for emergencies. The topics were conducted for grades 1-9 (UNICEF, 2005).

Pilot project involving 16 schools, UNICEF has steered the Life Skills project through the current phase in which 400 schools across the country participate in this program. During this long-term program, UNICEF provided funding and the Ministry of Education and Science provided administrative and logistical project support and workspace for the curriculum development team (Ruben Stepanyan, 2011).

With the aim to have teachers who would not lead these courses in the Soviet style they used to lead, effective and sufficient trainings for teachers have been critical to the success of Life Skills program. And as a result of trainings, the classes were held in round tables, where the students and teachers were able to directly discuss different topics. As discussed in the UNICEF evaluation report of the project, the three major educational results of this reform that have been achieved are as follows:

1. contributing to the democratization of Armenian citizens of all ages,
2. providing an education that is competitive in the current international system, and
3. bringing about the humanization of education, that is, promoting a child-centered learning environment and providing children with skills for everyday life as citizens of their country and the world.

Among the key findings of the program is assumed the considerable support for earlier documentation that highlighted the program's success, and its popularity, in project schools. It also became clear, that Life Skills has gained significant respect among decision makers in the Ministry of Education and Science and in other key educational projects. Although recently substantially reduced in size, the Life Skills working group continues to function effectively as a support team. Moreover, the Group's expertise is repeatedly called upon by other projects and agencies.

Moreover, in its recent policy document, the National Curriculum for General Education, the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science included Life Skills in the Primary and Middle School curriculum and advocated for the teaching philosophy and learning methods that the project espoused. Thereafter, the methods and materials developed by the project have been used as models by many other educational organizations and initiatives.

After the interview and discussions with Ruben Stepanyan, it became clear, that the project evaluation showed a positive impact on both the teachers and the pupils. Thus, the launching of this kind of program can be viewed as resulting to the progress of education in Armenia and raising the awareness of pupils.

Finding 3: *UNESCO Chairs in Universities*

From 1995, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), started another big initiative, aimed at the development of education in Armenia by setting its Chairs in some of the universities of Armenia. As Stella Melkonyan (UNESCO) highlighted, the aim of the program was to advance research, training and program development in higher education, by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders. From 1995 Armenia became one of the 126 countries where this program was launched. The primary goal of the program has been to advance research and training by establishing UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN (University Twinning and Networking Program) Networks in institutions of higher education (UNESCO, 2009). From 1995-2009, with different goals, the program has been launched in a number of universities in Armenia, such as:

- *Yerevan State University*, with the objective to develop and implement activities which shall promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation activities in the field of art history.
- *Life Sciences International Postgraduate Educational Center*, with the aim to promote co-operative research, advanced training, and exchange of information in

medical genetics, environmental sciences, and to facilitate collaboration between high-level, internationally recognized researchers and the local scientific community.

- ***Yerevan State Linguistic University after V.Brusov***, with the aim to promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation in the field of human rights and democracy. The program also aimed at facilitating the collaboration between high-level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the institute and other institutions in the Republic of Armenia.
- ***National Institute of Education of Armenia***, with the aim to improve the system of High Educational legislation and reforms in Armenia through various national and international activities, as well as to develop research, practice and cooperation related to the field of Education Planning and Management.
- ***Armenian State Pedagogical University***, with the aim to promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation in the field of higher education. The program in this university also aimed at serving as a means of facilitating collaboration between high-level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the University and other institutions in the Central and Eastern Europe region (UNESCO, 2009).

Thus, the program enables the universities to advance research, training and program development by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders. UNESCO Chairs Program also provides the academic community with the opportunity to become affiliated with UNESCO, and to contribute directly to the implementation of UNESCO's strategic objectives, as well as to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Comparative Analysis

After becoming independent in 1991, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan confronted with socioeconomic challenges, very similar to ones that other former soviet countries faced. The economic crisis badly affected funding of education, social transformation requested to reform structure and content of education. As a result of instability across the region, children often have serious gaps in their learning and skills that follow them into adulthood. Such children often have difficulty integrating, leading to further exclusion both in the classroom and in wider society. After dramatic drop in early nineties, and especially in the beginning of the 21st century, one could find out some progress in main educational indicators, such as a higher enrolment rate in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary schools (See Appendix D/E). In all three states the rise could be seen in the enrolment rates from 2005 to 2007, especially in participation in education at primary and general education levels.

According to UNESCO, after becoming independent a progress is seen in the South Caucasus region especially in the field of quality improvement and equity of access to primary, secondary and tertiary education. In Azerbaijan the progress in pre-primary and general education levels was reached due to active government policy in social sphere. Presidential decrees dedicated to education reforms have been of great significance in the areas, such as teaching and learning content, teacher education, teacher training, education research, education infrastructure, education financing and other spheres, which were implemented during the last years and are envisaged for the future. In Georgia the progress has been made as a result of government support of the EFA program that allowed identifying the main problems and international support in educational system development (Agranovitch M., 2006).

Azerbaijan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 and currently is embarking upon a variety of measures, most notably setting up inclusive education. According to UNICEF, there are about 16,000 children registered as having some sort of disability in Azerbaijan and about 6,000 of these children receive education in special schools and 11,000 receive a home education, which is about 0.2 percent of the total population of Azerbaijan (see Appendix F). One of the reasons of such picture in Azerbaijan identified by UNICEF is the fact that the majority of disabled children continue to get education at special segregated schools or at home, which in turn leads to their marginalization in the future.

The situation of inclusive education in Georgia is the same, as the number of children with disabilities is 10,722 and only 28 per cent of the children live in 22 special institutions, and the percentage of disabled children is again 0.2 percent of the total population (see Appendix F). Until recently, there have been few alternatives to the institutionalized care or special education for disabled children in Georgia, as there is currently no policy for special or inclusive education in general education. Disabled children remain isolated from the society and have been deprived of their right to receive education. Moreover, Georgian society continues to stigmatize disabled children. UNICEF is currently cooperating with the Ministry of Education to promote inclusive education for children with various disabilities by providing technical assistance to the reform process and teachers from several kindergartens and schools have been trained on inclusive education (Frederica, 2009).

In Armenia the situation is quite similar to that of Azerbaijan and Georgia, as according to the statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, there are about 8,113 children with

disabilities living in the Republic of Armenia, which comprises approximately 0.26 percent of the total population (See Appendix F).

However, in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Science and UNICEF, there are certain results of inclusive education reform. In Georgia, for example, a new law on education is foreseen to protect the rights of disabled children to education. The Georgian Institute of Teachers Training is actively involved in the process of introducing inclusive education, while the expert group already prepared a teachers' manual focusing on methods of teaching mathematics. Similar manuals are currently being developed for teachers working with second and third grade students. In Armenia, the results of the program include; the closure of several special schools and the integration of children into general education; the conversion of the closed special schools into Child Care Centers schools; the development of Community Centers that support parents and local authorities involved in education; the institution of several Inclusive Schools throughout the Republic of Armenia. UNESCO Chairs program is the one that is launched in 126 countries, including the South Caucasus region. The aim of the program was to advance research, training and program development in higher education by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders by establishing UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks in institutions of higher education. Starting from 1995, there are UNESCO Chairs in 9 institutions of Georgia and 5 in Armenian universities. In Azerbaijan the Chairs were set a little later, in 1997. Till now, there is only one host institution of UNESCO Chairs in Azerbaijan, which is the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (UNESCO, 2009).

So far, the results of the program showed that creation of UNESCO Chairs in the universities were useful in all three countries for establishing new teaching programs, generating new ideas through reflection and research, and facilitating the enrichment of existing university programs. The results were reached through establishing new teaching programs, generating new ideas through reflection and research, and facilitating the enrichment of existing university programs. And because of the nature and flexibility of UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Program, universities can now more readily and with greater autonomy respond to the demands for new learning and research, in a world undergoing rapid economic, social and technological change.

Recognizing the critical importance of the life skills, currently there are 164 nations committed to Education for All. These countries have also included life skills as an essential learning outcome for all adolescents and young people. Today, life skills education is offered as part of the formal school curriculum in at least 70 developing countries, including the South Caucasus. Since 2008, Azerbaijan has introduced life skills education as an optional subject within the primary school curriculum, addressing topics on health, nutrition, gender, human rights, peace and tolerance, environmental sustainability, personal development and interpersonal communication. Older students learn about sexual and reproductive health issues and drug abuse.

In Azerbaijan, the Life Skills is introduced as a separate subject at schools. At the stage of elementary education the subject mainly includes information about human rights and liberties, moral ethical values, nature, etc. The subject includes such areas as; human rights, moral maturity, ethical maturity, freedom of conscience, economical awareness, healthy life style, ways to be protected from accidents and disasters, etc. However, there is no progress

reported by UNICEF, thus showing no results of the program or advance in the educational sector of Azerbaijan.

As to Georgia, the situation is again better from that of Azerbaijan, as the program started since 2000, when UNICEF invited experts from a British NGO and TACADA to Georgia to facilitate the integration of a new interdisciplinary course named 'Life Skills' into the Georgian school curriculum. Working together on the program concept, syllabus and course outline Georgian experts, including medical professionals and psychologists, set up an initiative group whose members were offered special training courses regarding the program concept and curriculum. The purpose of the initiative group was to facilitate and establish the integration of the new Life Skills discipline into the Georgian curriculum. The methodological manual and training module was designed to train 270 teachers as well as to facilitate the integration of the new discipline in schools. Pilot lessons were held in 17 schools in Tbilisi along with other regions of Georgia (UNICEF, 2010).

If we try to compare the Life Skills program in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, we can see that especially in Armenia and Georgia the program reached its goal, as in Georgia it is included in the national training curriculum, and in Armenia, it is on its way to get included in the national educational curriculum. Moreover, in Azerbaijan, the program started quite later than in Armenia and Georgia, and the results are not so evident yet. The results in Armenia and Georgia can be sufficient at this moment, and it is because of the active involvement of UNICEF and the governments, particularly the Ministries of Education and Science, which have played a significant role in the creation, realization and stabilizing of the program.

Conclusion and recommendations

Education is aimed at improving personality, mental and physical skills of the children, through preparing them to take an active role in the community. With this regard, international organizations launch various programs and initiatives to contribute to the progress of education in the countries, where the situation needs to be improved. The United Nations, being an organization working on a broad range of fundamental issues, (i.e. sustainable development, governance, economic and social development, etc.) strives to achieve its goal of a safer world with healthy and intelligent generation.

The study of this paper was centered on finding whether UN is aiming to have its contribution for the progress of education in Armenia and what are its mechanisms in achieving it. The research and interviews with experts in the field showed that the mechanisms of UN in impacting the progress of education in Armenia are the long-term programs and initiatives. The number of programs is numerous and the paper concentrated only on four successful programs, which are on their way to have a significant contribution or already have impact on the progress of education in Armenia. These programs are: Inclusive Education, Life Skills, UNESCO Chairs in the higher education, and achieving the Education for All goals.

The paper was also aiming to find the way the government of Armenia collaborates with the UN to have a positive impact on the progress of education in Armenia. After interviewing experts from the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia and doing a deep research it became clear, that the Ministry is very active (in terms of logistic, administrative support, or financial support) in all four programs initiated by international the United Nations.

The study showed that the UN develops and implements similar policies in all three countries of the South Caucasus. However, the results achieved by the programs differ due to

various reasons, such as the timeline when the programs were launched, as well as the willingness and involvement of the governments of each county to insure their continuation and improvement.

If we look at the Armenian case, the government involvement and activeness in the Life Skills and UNESCO Chairs programs was sufficient. However, in order to consolidate achievements of Inclusive Education program, there is still a clear need to train teachers and students of the biggest teacher training University, the State Pedagogical University in inclusive education theory and practice. A special program should be prepared programs for both general education and special education, and which would enable the new general teachers to meet special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. With this regard, the government should create a specific and mandatory course in all departments of Pedagogical universities, so that the teachers would be aware of how to deal with disabled children, how to get other children used to them and make them feel themselves as part of the classroom/society. With respect to Education for All goals achievement, special strategies or an action plan should be developed by the government to follow the steps for achieving the education for all goals.

Life Skills program and UNESCO Chairs program were also a big step toward educating and advancing the knowledge and skills of both pupils and students. UNESCO Chairs program enables the students of five universities in Armenia, nine in Georgia, and one in Azerbaijan to advance research, through training and program development by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge.

The Life Skills program started since 1995 and was one of several educational initiatives in Armenia that had attempted to fill in some identical gaps in the school curriculum. With the success of the program, separate subject was developed in schools, which concentrated in giving the pupils appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes about such important topics. Currently there are 400 schools across the country participating in this program. However, it would be more effective to include the Life Skills subject in the National Curriculum for General Education, so that each schools of Armenia would give equal opportunities to its pupils to become aware of and have deeper understanding of important life issues.

Finally, the paper analyzed the possible shortcomings and differences in the activities carried by the United Nations in the South Caucasus region, and tried to compare the present status and results of the programs. To conclude to insure the further progress in education sector of Armenia the recommendations of the paper are:

- To UN: There need to be a more vibrant partnership between the UN agencies and local NGOs and the RA Government aimed at achieving common goals. Each should not launch activities with different missions, but the mission should be one and all sectors should concentrate on that particular goal to achieve viable results.
- To UN: UN agencies should be more dynamic and launch such long term programs aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as thus the programs turn into reforms and result to the development of each country in the region.
- To UN: After launching the programs more careful attention is needed from UN agencies. Often the reforms and programs require consistent work after carrying the program and not fully trust it to other institutions.

- To the RA Government: Government should develop a concept paper or an action plan for “Education for All” goals achievement to ensure that all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender and income level can benefit from free and compulsory primary education for all.
- With Regards to Inclusive Education: Continuous professional development should be ensured for teachers and staff who provide Inclusive Education. The teachers should be sufficiently trained and to be able to deal with disabled children and make them become integrated with the rest of the class.
- With regards to Life Skills: Decisions should take place between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Life Skills experts, to identify a detailed implementation plan for Life Skills in the National Curriculum of Armenian schools. Thus, not only the pupils of 400 schools would benefit from the program, but also the rest of the schools across Armenia.

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6. Have you had any support/assistance from public sector in launching the projects/programs related to youth or education in Armenia?

Yes _____

No _____

7. What kind of support/assistance was that?

8. What would be your recommendations to the government of the RA regarding the support/assistance of programs your department launches?

Thank You a lot, the information you provided will help me to better understand and evaluate the activities promoted by United Nations Office in Armenia.

Appendix B

List of Interviewees:

Anahit Hayrapetyan - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), External Relations Coordinator

Armine Halajyan - UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI), Officer-in-Charge

Armine Ter-Ghevondyan - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Education Project Assistant

Lilit Asryan – Assessment and Testing Center, Deputy Director

Maria Dotsenko - United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), Representative

Ruben Stepanyan - Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), Head of Development Program and Input Department

Stella Melkonyan - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Representative of Education Department

Appendix C

GDP and State budget expenditures for Education

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Increase, 2007 to 2002, %
GDP	1362.5	1654.6	1907.9	2,244	2,244	2,244	150.9
Total budget expenditures	261.3	385.2	377.6	469.0	566.8	655.6	64.7
Education and Science	29,455	34,915	42,061	61,657	82,283	92,359	213.6
Pct of GDP	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.7	2.7	2.7	0.5
Pct of the total budget	11.3	9.1	11.1	13.1	14.5	14.1	2.8

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economy of Armenia, www.mfe.am

Appendix D

Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary School Enrolment in the South Caucasus (2005)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment	33%	21%	43%
Net Enrolment in Primary School	79%	85%	93%
Net Enrolment in Secondary School	84%	78%	81%
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment	28%	15%	46%

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008; Innocenti Research Centre

Appendix E

Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary School Enrolment in the South Caucasus (2007)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment	33%	24%	41%
Net Enrolment in Primary School	85%	95%	94%
Net Enrolment in Secondary School	85%	83%	82%
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment	34%	15%	37%

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, 2010

Appendix F

	Total Population in 2010	Number of disabled children in 2010	Percentage of disabled children to the total population
Armenia	2,967,975	16,000	0.26
Azerbaijan	4,633,107	8,000	0.2
Georgia	7,627,495	10,722	0.2

Source: UNICEF Sub regional profile in the South Caucasus 2010