

Georgia: Parental Informal Payments in Schools

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Abstract

The share of Georgia's public expenditure for education has increased by several times in recent years. Nevertheless, public funds are insufficient to cover basic education-related needs. Funds are lacking for equipment, teaching materials, and classroom facilities. Teachers' salaries are below the national average income. Supplementary contributions are widely considered to play an important compensatory in sustaining schools.

The major policy task in Georgia is to facilitate the effective and efficient functioning of this compensatory mechanism. At the same time, it is important to reduce the burden placed on parents as the main source of additional funding.

Recent education reforms have helped pave the way for the fulfillment of the above tasks. The new measures include: transforming schools to independent entities, with their own bank accounts and the ability to attract other financial resources; allowing local governments to contribute for capital investment in schools; establishing boards of trustees comprised of students, teachers, and parents to approve school budgets and monitor spending and the election of principals.

However, these innovations have not yet become functional. Schools have yet to diversify their sources of income. Contributions from local governments and businesses are still low. The majority of parents note that the assistance they render to schools is mandatory due to the pressure of those in their environment and the general unsatisfactory conditions at schools. Moreover, contributions are inefficiently managed. Parents make additional contributions as a matter of routine without being informed of the purposes to which the contributions and spent.

The government should help schools use the opportunities provided by the new legislation. This can be achieved through raising awareness about legal ways to attract voluntary contributions, participatory budgeting, building skills of key agents (principals, boards of trustees), analyzing tendencies, and disseminating best practices.

1. Introduction

The study was carried out jointly by the International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management and BCG (Business Consulting Group) between December 2006 and May 2007. The study represented the first effort in Georgia to describe the phenomenon of parental supplementary contributions to schooling and is intended to serve as a baseline for understanding the impact of recent important changes in school financial management in Georgia. The reforms of the general education system began in 2005. Among the most important changes are:

- Introducing per capita financing (money follows the student) with three different coefficients for schools in urban, rural and mountainous areas;

- Transforming schools to independent entities with their own bank accounts and a right to attract additional financial resources and secure income from entrepreneurial activities.
- Establishing boards of trustees to participate in budget planning and oversee spending.

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- Do parents, teachers and principals consider the amount provided by the voucher sufficient to cover expenses related to the implementation of the state curriculum? What do parents describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the voucher system?
- How do members of the school community (principals, teachers, parents) and experts assess the impact of recent attempts to diversify sources of school income and improve the way parental contributions are represented in budgetary processes?

2. Background / context

Box 1. Socio-economic Data (The World Bank, CIA)

Currency: lari, GEL per USD – 1.7 (2007)

GDP (USD billions): 1996 – 3.1, 2005 – 6.4, 2006 – 7.7

GDP annual growth: 2005 – 9.6, 2006 – 9.4

GNI per capita (USD): 1995 – 510, 2000 – 700, 2006 – 1580

Population below poverty line: 31% (2006)

Unemployment, total (% of total labor force): 2005 – 13.8

Public education spending (% of GDP): 1995 – 7.7, 2000 – 2.2, 2006 – 3.1

Public education spending (% of government spending): 13.1

Ratio of pupils to teacher (primary level): 2006 – 14.5

Ratio of pupils to teacher (secondary level): 2006 – 9.1

Sources: The World Bank, <http://go.worldbank.org/LJW2UB0SIQ>;
CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

2.1. Socio-economic background

Of all post-socialist transition economies, Georgia is second only to Moldova in the severity of the transformational recession that it suffered in the early 1990s.¹ Although Georgia has recently enjoyed steady GDP growth, the legacy of the first decade of transition still hampers development. Georgia remains one of the most highly indebted countries in CIS. In 2005, total external debt stood at USD 2

¹ IMF World Economic Outlook database

billion. Public and publicly guaranteed debt service obligations were USD 159 million, or about 36 percent of government revenue. The payments required to maintain this debt constrict the amount of funds available for other purposes, including education.

Table 1. Macro-economic indicators and consolidated education budget (government data)

	2005	2006
Nominal GDP (GEL million)	11592 (6859 USD)	13080 (7740 USD)
Average annual inflation (%)	8.0%	5.0%
Real GDP growth (%)	9.3%	7.5%
Consolidated government expenditure as % of GDP	25.1%	26.6%
MoES expenditure as % of GDP	0.7%	2.6%
MoES expenditure as % of consolidated govt exp	2.8%	9.8%
Total MoES budget (GEL million)	80.9 (47.9 USD)	340.5 (201.5 USD)

Source: MTEF (Government of Georgia 2006)

According to the State Department of Statistics, in 2005 average household income was 303.5 GEL (USD 179.5). In 2006, the unemployment rate was 13.6 percent. Nearly 40 percent of the population was below the subsistence minimum GEL 107.5 (USD 63).

2.2. School system and governance (including the legal status of informal payments)

According to national law, the government guarantees a twelve-year general education for all citizens. General education in Georgia consists of primary, basic, and upper secondary stages. It is regulated by the Law of Georgia on General Education. Primary (first through sixth) and basic (seventh through ninth) education are compulsory.

In 2005, schools were designated as autonomous legal entities of public law (LEPL). This shifted budgetary authority from local governments to the schools themselves.

The new law on general education (2005) outlines significant changes in school governance. One of the more noteworthy developments is the overall reorganization of the governance of general education. The basic governance structure now consists of a pedagogical council, board of trustees, directorate, and a disciplinary committee managed by students (The law on general education, chapter VI. Principles of management of general educational institution). Boards of Trustees (BOTs) are composed of elected teachers and parents (minimum 6 and maximum 12 representatives of parents and pedagogical council in total), a student representative, and in some cases a local-government nominee. They boards approve the budget, provide oversight, and advise school management.

BOTs evaluate submissions and then elect by majority vote candidates for principal. The MoES chooses among a maximum of three candidates through open competition (Clause 42. Rule of elections of a director).²

Teachers are appointed by school directors on the basis of the open competition. In the event of a violation of contractual terms on the part of the teacher, BOTs may demand the school director cancel

² Such elections were held in February - June 2007 for the first time in Georgia.

the teacher’s contract.³ Such matters fall under the responsibility of disciplinary committees appointed by the BOTS. These committees consist of equal numbers of teachers, parents and secondary level pupils (Clause 37. Board of trustees).

Schools are funded through student vouchers. Capital expenditure are paid for by state and/or local management bodies.⁴

Schools have the authority to attract alternative financial resources, so long as these additional incomes and expenditures are reflected in the school budget. Each school has an independent bank account with corresponding seal (Clause 51. Funding of general educational institution).

A pupil, parent, or teacher has the right to seek voluntary, charitable contributions. A school must take all reasonable measures to prevent extortion of financial or other resources (Clause 14. Freedom of expression). Financial activities at the school level are overseen by Boards of Trustees. BOTs also approve school budgets and elect school principals.

Table 2. Distribution of schools and students by urban/rural areas

		Urban Districts	Rural districts Rural	Rural districts Mountainous
Number of schools	2528 ⁵	765	1122	641
Number of students	632 111	349 704	212 985	69 422

Source: MoES, 2007 b

2.3. Financial situation

The budget for general education is GEL 269 million. General education accounts for 80% of the overall education budget. The essence of the new school financing model is explained below:

New *per capita* financing principle of ‘money follows the student’ has been introduced in Georgia in 2005. The initial amount of the voucher is GEL 220 (approx. 120 USD) per student (2006). The voucher formula varies only according to the location of the school (highest for those in highlands, lowest for those in cities): city schools get 100 percent of the voucher, village schools 150 percent and those in mountainous areas 180 percent. Vouchers cover current but not capital expenditures. Small schools can receive an extra amount per pupil from the central budget, and extra educational and teaching services and special educational curricula can be financed locally.

³ In 2006, by the initiative of the teacher professional development center a professional ethics code for teachers was elaborated. (Students were actively involved in preparing the draft version).

⁴ Capital expenditures include the purchase of capital assets, strategic and specific stocks, goods, land plots, non-material assets; purchase of buildings and constructions, machinery and equipment, furniture, transport and other principal means, capital repairs, building, and reconstruction.

⁵ In the process of optimization , the number of public schools has been decreased in 2007.

The lump-sum amount received from the MoES (paid into the school's own bank account) can be spent in any way that school management, approved by the Board, decides, subject only to a minimum salary rate for teachers, depending on their qualifications, experience and the size of their class.

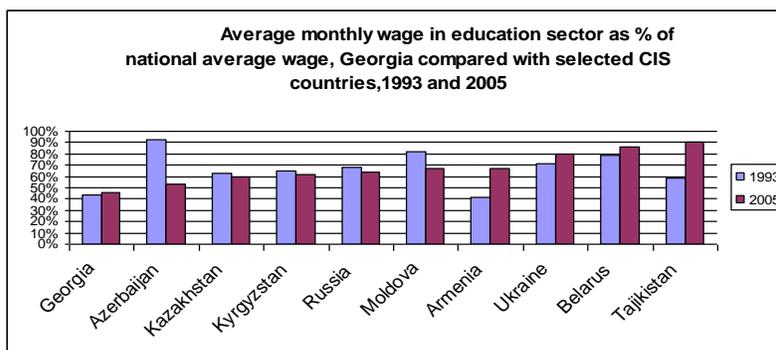
The new formula-funded, autonomous-school model is intended to build in incentives for schools to increase the efficiency with which they use their funds and the quality of the education that they provide. There are worries that smaller schools do not receive enough funding under this system to enable them to survive. However, it is the function of formula funding to draw attention to such schools: as is already happening, extra allocations can then be made to those schools where the cost of closure exceeds the expected benefit. (WB, 2006)

2.4. Other relevant contextual factors

2.4.1. Teacher Salaries

The decree of the Minister of Education and Science of October 2005 sets GEL 115 (approx. USD 70) as the base teacher salary (Decree #576, 2005). This amounts to approximately 50% of the national average wage.⁶ Figure 1 shows that Georgia is the lowest among CIS countries in this respect. It is not surprising that schools find it difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers.

Figure 1. Average monthly wage in education sector as % of national average wage, Georgia compared with selected CIS countries, 1993 and 2005



2.4.2. National Entrance Examinations

In 2005, the unified entrance examinations were introduced in Georgia. Standardized tests are used across a range of subjects. The process is administered by the National Assessment and Examination Center (established in 2004) under the governance of MoES. Transparency International (together with the American Councils for International Education) monitored the examination process. They reported that the 2006 testing process was well organized and transparent. Test takers, parents and administrators felt confident that the new process would help eliminate corruption in university admission (Transparency International, 2006). Since state grants to higher education students are now

⁶ In December 2007, the minimal salary of teachers was increased to GEL 165.

awarded according to test scores, school grades are currently considered as a less likely cause of corruption in schools. The number of students receiving state grants doubled in 2006 from the previous year, thanks to the shift to a sliding scale rather than 100% state grant system. In addition, social grants are awarded to students from mountainous areas, conflict regions, minority ethnic groups, families of people killed in wars, and internally displaced families.

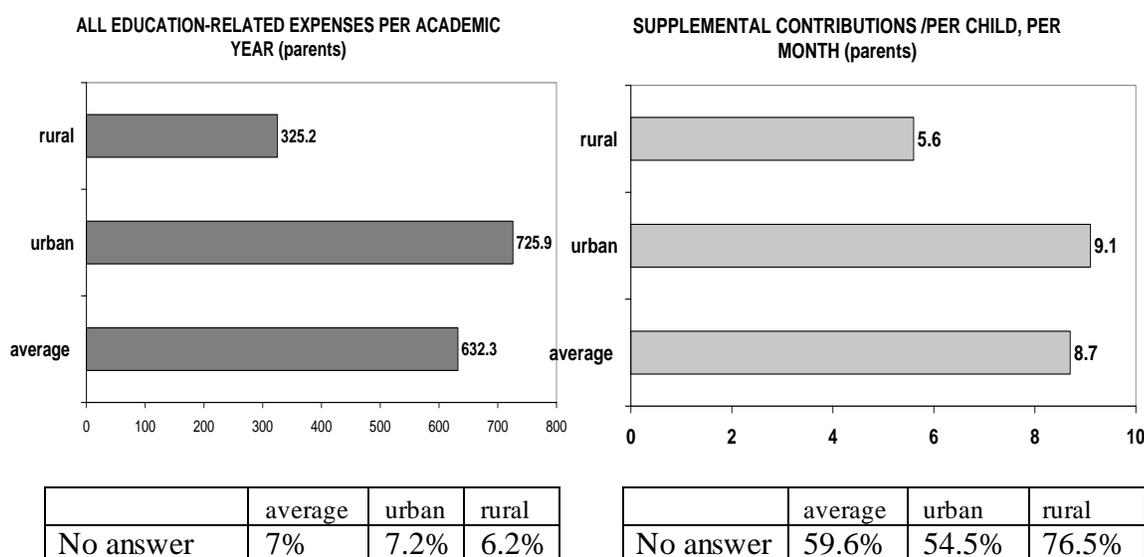
3. Findings

3.1. Real (Private) Cost of Informal Payments for Public Schooling

Parental expenses related to education average GEL 633 per year, or 27% of the average income of the parents interviewed. This includes both supplemental contributions for schooling as well as essential expenses such as clothes, stationery, and transportation. Slightly more than half of parents (55.7%) deny making supplemental contributions to schools. They do not consider their contributions to their children’s education as supplemental. Forty percent of parents state that up to 10% of total education-related expenses come as supplemental contributions. Forty-five percent state that they pay money on average once a month.

Urban and rural schools differ considerably by the overall amount contributed by parents as well as other supplemental sources. In the city, parents spend on average GEL 726 per child annually. However, parents in rural schools contribute less than half (GEL 325) as much as parents in urban schools. On average, parents estimate monthly supplemental contributions to be GEL 8.7 per student (GEL 9.1 in urban and GEL 5.6 in rural areas (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Education related expenses and supplemental contributions to schooling⁷



⁷ The average is calculated from the responses indicate concrete figures. Others (55.7%) said there are no supplemental contributions, while 3.7% could not answer.

This gap between rural and urban parental contributions can be explained by the lower financial capacity of rural populations and their closer personal ties to the school community. There is a large difference in the responses of principals of urban and rural schools. Only one out of twenty-three rural principals reported receiving supplemental contribution for schooling. About one third of urban principals stated that the parental contributions were common.

3.2. Reasons for Parental Contributions

Though recent education reforms have significantly improved the situation with school funding, there is still much left undone. In spite of numerous efforts of MoES (infrastructure development, computerization of schools), many components of school life are still inadequately funded. Schools still require external support. Until diverse revenue streams are secured, the burden falls most heavily on parents. Some schools have managed to attract additional resources through one time grants from private parties. There have been cases of assistance offered by local authorities and the central government, but this is not a regular practice.

Box 2. Voucher system as perceived by parents

Pros

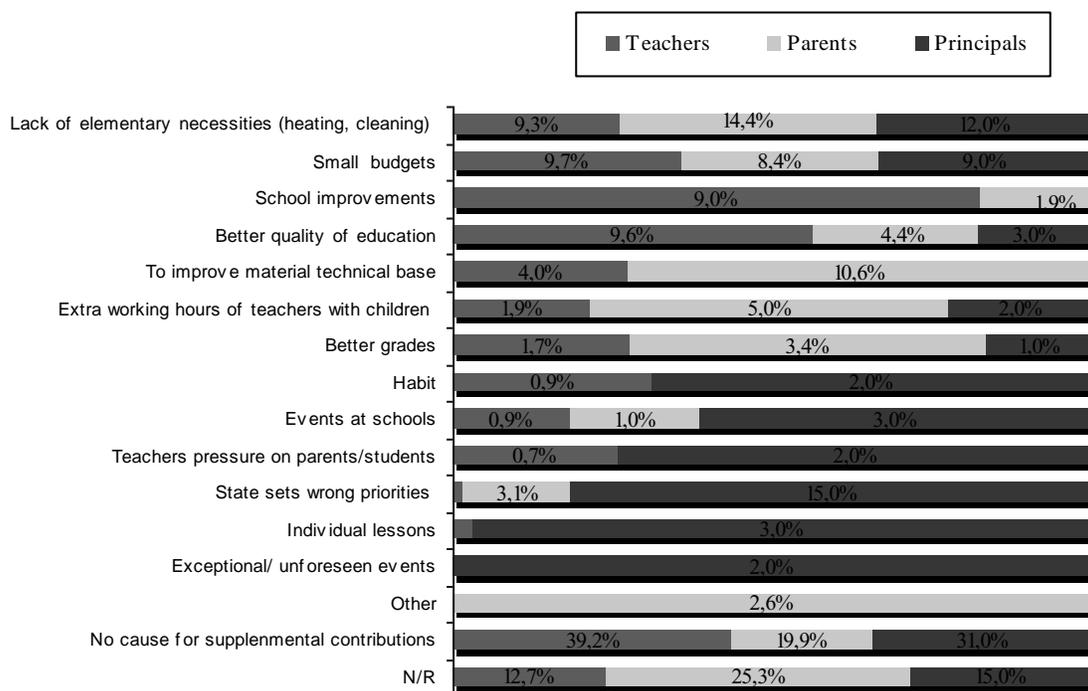
- It definitely improves the school's material and technical base;
- Ensures timely payment of teachers salaries;
- Schools have their own budget;
- In order to attract more students and funds, schools have to be more competitive;
- This automatically implies improvement of quality.

Cons

- The largest portion of the amount is spent to cover utility expenses and administrative costs;
- The amount is not sufficient to pay optimum salaries to teachers or technical staff, purchase equipment, or organize cultural events;
- It is impossible to use funds to improve the material and technical base;
- Schools with small enrollments must reduce the staff and release funds.

Twenty percent of parents agree that supplemental contributions made by parents represent an important source of revenue for schools. A considerable percentage of teachers share the same position (14.4%). Principals are less inclined to agree with the statement though. Out of the 100 principals interviewed, 35 state that it is necessary for schools to collect supplemental contributions from parents to meet budgetary requirements.

Figure 3. Causes of parental contributions



3.3. Additional Contributions – Compulsory vs. Voluntary

As noted earlier, schools rely primarily upon parents for the mobilization of extra funds. It can be said that *“parents help schools to survive in most of the cases.”*

The majority of teachers and parents disagree with the statement: “School principals put pressure on teachers to collect some money from the parents for school needs.” The majority of teachers state that school administration does not require collecting money from parents. Only 4.4% of teachers say that they must collect money monthly from students for school supplies and maintenance. Only 4.5% of parents report experiencing pressure from teachers. However, **62% of parents note that the assistance they have rendered to schools is not voluntary, but mandated by the general pressing environment and unsatisfactory conditions at schools.**

Responses in focus-group discussions indicate that parental payments can resemble mandatory taxes more than voluntary contributions. Students who do not pay may be “black-listed”:

Collecting money by schools has been announced illegal, though this money is still collected for different needs being called contributions. In fact, the unlawfulness has been legalized. I believe the money I give my child to pay for a cleaning service is not a contribution but a fee I pay monthly.

On the other hand, even without teachers’ requests, most parents deem it obligatory to collect money for certain needs: “We do not live in prosperity to give money for the school needs voluntarily, though

I have to. The school is not forcing but the entire situation, my consciousness and atmosphere are forcing.”

As experts explain, though the contribution is described as voluntary, it is assumed to be mandatory. This tactic is employed to mobilize funds from parents: “If it is an entirely voluntary process, the schools will not be able to mobilize the resources they really need.”

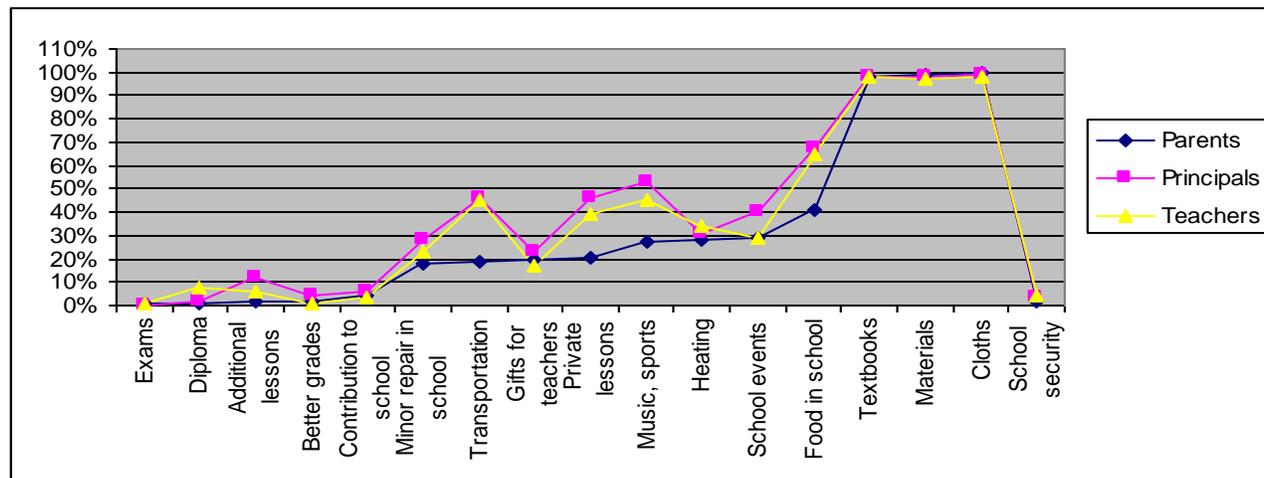
Parents mentioned that MoES actively fights the practice of informal payments. Restrictions provided by the law significantly reduced the cases of extortion at schools. However, some experts say that the restrictions and regulations imposed by the state are not strict enough to fully eliminate the practice: “This might be a strategic approach as the state failed to provide sufficient funding for schools .and these inputs really help schools to function.”

3.4. Types of private contributions

Respondents listed many different types of parental contributions to schooling. These responses can be divided in two major groups – formal (documented) and informal (undocumented). While formal contributions are legal, informal contributions can be either legal or illegal, depending on whether they are extortive or made for private gain.

Informal payments (both legal and illegal) represent a particular interest for this study. The survey shows that about half of parents make informal contributions to schools and up to 30% of all parents are involved in at least one form of illegal activity.

Figure 4. Percent of parents who pay at least once a year /responses of parents, teachers and principals



Twenty percent of parents pay for gifts. Parents note that two things differentiate gifts from bribes: (1) Severe control and prohibitory measures from the Ministry of Education, and (2) low financial capabilities of parents. Some respondents even say that presenting gifts “is considered as a shameful practice, it happens on personal/individual level; presents are rarely made on behalf of the class.” Nineteen percent of parents say they pay for minor repairs in schools. Principals report that 30% of

parents pay for repairs. According to parents, heating and school events (27-29%) are the next largest recipients of contributions.

As indicated by Figure 4, parents report rarely paying for better grades (2%). This is probably linked with the introduction of the national entrance examinations. Students are now admitted to higher education institutions on the basis of exam scores. School grades do not play a role.

Parents say that supplemental payments are rare for exams and diplomas (1%). Principals agree. However, teachers state that up to 8% of parents pay for diplomas. This may indicate the existence of corrupt deals between parents and principals. In focus-group discussions, parents mentioned the problem of low attendance rates in secondary education as well as the practice of making illegal payments to principals in exchange for diplomas:

In the 11th grade, some of my child's class mates do not attend classes as they are totally focused on tutoring and do not want to "waste time". I think they must be barred from school by rule but they do not face any problem in this regard.

A great number of 11th grade students do not attend classes at schools. We do not notice how they put money in the principal's pockets but I will not be astounded if parents give bribes not only to school principals but to the whole staff.

Twenty-one percent of parents pay for private tutoring. Nearly half of them noted that they have requested private lessons from classroom teachers. Teachers and principals stated that approximately 40% of parents paid for private lessons. Both experts and parents cite cases in which teachers require students to take private lessons, offered by the same teacher, in order to receive better explanation. Survey results indicate that teachers do not practice extra group lessons at schools, but rather coach the students as tutors. During open discussion the parents blame the problem on low teacher salaries, though they still disapprove of it:

Although teacher's salaries are low, extortion has no justification and schools cannot be used as mechanisms for making money.

...Many would have avoided such practice if they were offered better salaries.

3.5. Administration of Additional Contributions

Parents were given a list of specific needs. They were then asked to indicate whom they pay for each needs. Those who did in fact make payments stated that they were most often directed to a group of parents, rather than teachers or principals. In this system, a group of parents plays a role of an intermediary link.

However, the responses concerning who was power over parental contributions are ambiguous. Respondents in all three groups tended to believe that they have no power over how their contributions are spent (77% of teachers; 80% of principals, and 83% of parents). Given this degree of agreement, we conclude no one group has much influence over parental contributions. A vast majority of parents (90.3%), teachers (95.3%) and principals (97%) responded that principals do not have power over parental contributions. Only 5% of principals and 7% of parents agree with the statements that teachers

have power over parental contributions. This suggests that respondents simply do not know who administers parental contributions.

3.6. Informal Payments and Education Quality

The survey suggests that additional inputs can lead to controversial results. They can facilitate improvements in school infrastructure, equipment, material resources, and educational processes. However, if these inputs are seen as a form of extortion, parents may feel less loyal to schools.

Neither teachers (97%) nor principals (96%) believe that a student's academic success depends on his or her parents making a contribution. Eighty percent of parents share this belief. Most parents are sure that their children's teachers make decisions in the best interest of the child (91.5%) and that school principals are fair and honest (83%).

Twenty percent of principals state that schools cannot provide quality education without receiving parental contributions. Twenty-three percent state that parental contributions hinder the education process.

3.7. Perceived Remedies to the Problem of Illegal Informal Payments

Additional inputs made by parents have mixed effects. On the one hand, additional inputs facilitate the basic school functions and activities. They also provide an avenue for parental participation and control over school services.

On the other hand, additional inputs present considerable problems. First, they are not entirely voluntary. These payments can be a heavy burden for the considerable portion of the population which is low income. Second, schools may give preferential treatment to students whose parents make contributions. For these reasons, the practice of accepting and administering additional inputs should be improved. As one interviewee stated, "We emphasize the rule of law in schools and preach civil awareness in the classroom and at the same time make corrupt deals."

Experts believe that there is still much to be done to overcome the problem of illegal informal payments, including the following:

- In-depth analysis of the problem;
- Enforcing the guiding principles of ethical teacher behavior;
- Launching public awareness campaigns against the practice of mandatory informal payments;
- Raising public awareness about legal mechanisms for voluntary contributions and participatory budgeting.

One respondent describes the problem as such:

The development of the practice of formalized contributions requires both mental shift and improvement of the financial situation. Today the majority of population is in extreme poverty and cannot assist schools with money. Those who can make contributions are not psychologically ready for that. Stakeholders are not

frequently aware of the exact purpose of payments and mechanisms of spending as they are not sufficiently involved in school budgetary processes.

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

4.1. Main findings

Public funds are insufficient to cover the basic costs of education.

- Numerous components of school life lack sufficient funding. There is currently not enough money to adequately fund teacher salaries or the implementation of the state curriculum;
- Teacher salaries are low (about a third of the national average). Parents believe that this negatively influences job performance. Twenty-one percent of parents pay for private tutoring. Almost half of them state that they have requested private coaching from classroom teachers. Twenty percent of parents present gifts to teachers.

Most alternative mechanisms for attracting additional resources are not being utilized, leaving the bulk of the burden on parents.

- Contributions by businesses, local governments, and others are minimal. Twenty percent of principals state that parental contributions are required in order to supply a quality education. Sixty-two percent of parents note that their contributions are mandatory. Environmental pressure and unsatisfactory conditions at schools require them to make payments.

Budgetary processes are not well organized at a school level. Thus, there is no way to ensure the proper use of additional financial resources.

- Payment procedures are informal, chaotic, and vague. Teachers, parents and principals differ in their understandings of the process by which supplemental contributions are accepted and administered. Parents are often unaware of the purposes to which the contributions are put. They are unlikely to inquire, as they have the impression that the contributions are mandatory.
- Boards of trustees do not yet fully internalize and exercise their rights and responsibilities. Participatory planning does not yet work in practice. The school community is not fully aware of the opportunities provided by the new legislation.

4.2. Policy Implications

Although educational spending has consistently increased, the school system is still underfinanced.

The main task of government is to ensure the financial sustainability of the school system. This requires that supplemental contributions become an effective compensatory mechanism. At the same time, parents can no longer be the main sources of additional funding. Schools must diversify their sources of income and improve budgetary processes,

With this aim, MoES has introduced a range of promising structural and legislative changes but, due to the pace of the reform, the information extensively flows from top to down in a very short period of

time and school communities cannot process it at once. New structures, systems and mechanisms of school financial management have not yet become functional.

4.3. Recommendations

MoES should intensify efforts to:

- Build the fundraising and development skills principals and Boards of Trustees.
 - Current training and consultation programs offered by the Ministry of Education and Science are generic. Training and consultation programs should be tailored to the specific needs of schools. Resource centers can play a key role in gathering and structuring information about school needs and problems.
 - A concrete strategy for sequencing training should emerge from such analysis.
- Raise the awareness of school communities on legal mechanisms of voluntary additional contributions and participatory budgeting.
 - The role of resource centers is again very important. Resource centers can be equipped to consult schools on these issues. The emphasis should be not just on listing different legal mechanisms, but providing examples of legal alternatives to some illegal practices.
 - In parallel to consultations, certain thematic publications can be disseminated in schools.
- Analyze trends and progress in the diversification and growth of alternative income streams. Gather, analyze, and distribute information about best practices for spending existing resources.
 - Create a single form for analyzing school budgets with regard to (a) the effectiveness of attracting additional resources and (b) the efficiency of spending. This will serve as a guideline for identifying best practices across schools.
 - Establish fixed intervals for periodic assessment and make the results available to all through annual reports.

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