

# **Communication in the reform process. Shift of perceptions and attitudes.**

Strategies applied, Lessons learned

# Context and role of communication

## 2010- 3 years after the start of the reform:

Number of children reduced only by a thousand (objective: 50% by 2012, out of 11000 in 2007);

- Out of 67 institutions, only 4 are closed/reorganized with the support of NGOs; 3 of them – by P4EC;
- Auxiliary schools not touched by the reform: prejudices – children with SEN; school is non-inclusive, unwilling to accept children with learning delay. Staff of residential institutions unwilling to change. Placement done without GK commission.
- Level of awareness/public readiness for the reform remained at the level of 2007/2008 when the TACIS project closed.
- Government's ownership for the reform – evasive, lacking coordination, common vision, lacking communication strategies/actions.
- 3 raions set for intervention, having 7 residential institutions different as groups of children and subordination (to LPA, to CPA), and 500 children in placement.

# Approaches to communication

- Continuity of the message “Call the future home” renewed to strengthen the messages: transforming ideas into stories and introducing optimistic and happy-end ideas: *Child – home – Family*;
- Produce the Strategy and develop the Campaign based on analysis of public and professional opinion, in order to allow correct targeting, taking into consideration the socio-political context;
- Shift the interest of decision-makers from political and party to the main interest of the child, through active involvement into communication activities;
- Stimulate interaction between national and local decision-makers, horizontally and vertically, in mixed formulas (ME+MLSPF+residential school director) within media events, in order to induce and generate a single voice, according to the principle: different people, one voice;
- Involve decision-makers, opinion leaders as speakers/agents of the reform;
- Harmonize communication and strong interaction with other components: training, reorganization, child participation, services development, funds retargeting, inclusion.

# Preparing to communication: Determination of attitudes and perceptions

**Qualitative research:** Fălești, Ungheni, Călărași, Centre (Chișinău), South (Cahul), and North (Bălți). Participants: decision-makers, specialists, institution staff, opinion leaders, general public.

## Results:

Problems of families continue to go worse: poverty, migration, mentality, phenomenon of social laziness undermine the family; The future of the family is uncertain...

School: doesn't involve into solving problems of children from families in difficulty; the community, the business environment are indifferent; Family is considered the only responsible for the difficulties it faces;

Placing a child into institution is still considered “a convenient” solution. Attitudes/perceptions of certain specialists about the family show that there is still need of awareness raising, information, training;

In declarations, institution directors do not object, but indirectly many of them express strong resilience to the institutional reform;

The voice of the child is considered important, but impossible to be taken into account;

Lack of relation between CPA and LPA, accordingly, misunderstanding or wrong understanding of problems.

# Preparing the communication: Decisions – communication tactics

- Communication campaign **should be proactive, positively mobilizing, encouraging/motivating** of all stakeholders, having **diversified topics**: from the promotion of family values and needs to raise children in families – to the promotion of success models of returning children to families, placing children into other family-based environment, school accepting/integration, regardless of disability, including promotion/education of confidence for institutions.
- General promotion of **success cases of the reform**, using at the same time arguments to outscore resilience and involve relevant actors into the process of new services/system edification.
- Use audio and visual channels with national coverage as main communication tools: public TV (editorial policy excludes sensations, but focuses on information, education of the population). Apart from informative programs, debates should be produced, involving actors from relevant ministries, LPAs, beneficiaries.

# Preparing the communication: the strategy

## Target groups:

- Central authorities
- Decision-makers, specialists, social assistants, staff of institutions
- General public, children and adults

## General objective of communication:

Promotion of the residential child care system reform and redirection of the population's preferences from residential child care to family care.

## Specific objectives:

- Create a common vision and approach among central and local authorities regarding the child care residential system reform, and develop alternative family-and-community based social services.
- Create a positive perception of the general public for the residential system reform and need of raising children in families or family-based environment.

**Slogan: THE FUTURE STARTS IN THE FAMILY**

# Preparing the communication: tools

## Creation of the mass media support group

- Training on topics related to the system reform, service development
- Establishment and consolidation of relations with media partners

## Development of concepts

- Weekly radio programs, national channel
- TV program once in two months, national channel
- Audio and video spots
- Monthly newsletter for internal communication within the system
- Magazine once in two months, for the general public and specialists in the area
- Materials in printed press, if necessary

## Additional

Determining the list of supporters, opponents or possible opponents, risk reduction strategy

# Campaign: Creation of common vision among decision-makers

- Identify and train “spokespersons” of the reform/Opinion leaders among decision-makers from ministries, LPAs (social assistance, education, finance), including directors of residential institutions. Train them in communication, topics established in promotion strategies.
- Involve opinion leaders in mixed format within radio and TV programs (ME+MLSPF, ME+SAFPD, MLSPF+MF, ME+institutions directors+SAFPD, etc.).
- Use the Reform steering committee, coordination of activities, including in communication, organize joint meetings with LPA representatives.
- Extend practices of the National Steering Committee in pilot raions, through joint meetings of interdepartmental coordination.
- Study visits abroad, workshops organized periodically outside pilot regions, in order to consolidate inter-personal communication, debate on problematic issues, and create common positions and visions.
- Support communication units in the development of strategies and communication plans, organization of activities



# Campaign: Communication actions

- Produce and broadcast **3 audio and video clips**: main characters tell the story of reintegration of several children from auxiliary school (coming back home, to school, to the community). Additionally, broadcast **3 clips produced in TACIS project**.
- Produce and broadcast **over 80 radio** and **over 50 TV** periodical issues (weekly, monthly). (In the first stage, during the reform re/launch, debate programs, where viewers also can express opinion on the debated issues. Along with the building of the ministries' ownership to continue the reform, TV programs easily passed to another format, focused on the promotion of success cases, with specialists offering deeper descriptions of the reform processes).
- Monthly newsletter “The future begins in the family”.
- The magazine “The Child and the Family”.

# Results: assessment of shift of perceptions

## Qualitative and quantitative survey

- The qualitative survey covered the project's pilot raions and the ministries in charge with child protection, including 40 specialists, social assistants and service providers, and 6 decision local and national makers.
- The national survey sample was 1054 respondents over 18 years of age, from 12 territorial administrative units and 74 communities. The sample is representative for the adult population of the Republic of Moldova, including Transnistria, with a maximum  $\pm 3,0\%$  margin of error.

# Results: shift of perceptions

## Qualitative survey data, pilot regions and CPA:

- Perception of a positive change in child protection: services, procedures, involvement of more stakeholders; Perception of the importance of the prevention work.
- A generally shared opinion – alternative forms are the recommended ones, institutionalization of children is no longer a solution. Separation of children from families can occur only in severe cases, when there is major risk to the child's life and integrity.
- Central and local decision makers admit that educational inclusion of children with SEN, including of those from auxiliary schools, is a necessity.
- CPA representatives became aware of the need of communication and awareness-raising about children's problems, most state strategies and policies are accompanied by communication components.
- Where the communication activities (spots, leaflets, programs) were accompanied by active information/promotion of alternative services, deinstitutionalization, in discussions with different specialists, community members – the attitude to the children who had been reintegrated or placed into substitute families changed. They became accepted and helped.
- Factors that led to children's separation from families remained unchanged: migration, poverty, unemployment, alcoholism.

# Results: shift of perceptions

- **Quantitative survey, national level data** indicate certain progress in the shift of perceptions and attitudes, but not as big as in the pilot areas.
- 88% of the respondents consider that it is mostly the family that should raise and educate the child, and only 3% believe that this is the duty of the state;
- As for helpful services for a child growing up and educated in a family in difficulty, 36% of respondents consider these beneficiaries need cash benefits, 31% opt for community support services (kindergarten, day care centre, after-school program), 17% believe this is family support service provided by the social assistant, and only 7% suggest residential care as a solution.
- 62% of respondents believe there is no excuse for child abandonment, and only 4% consider these parents should be understood; 60% consider that residential institution has negative and very negative effect on children, while 13% believe this is positive effect.
- Asked if they think baby homes and residential schools should be closed, over 60% answered negatively, while 22% said they should be closed but other solutions should be sought. Interesting is that the majority of those 60% are from urban area.
- Answering the questions what solutions the state and the community provide for families in difficulty, 23% mentioned cash payments, 5% suggested residential facilities, 3% - social assistance, 2% - employment, 0.2% - Foster Care.

# Lessons Learned

- Communication efforts, lacking actions that support practical implementation of the reform, successful cases and positive practices, do not become credible and sustainable.
- The communication component was as important as training, child participation, services development, finance retargeting. Such approach helped to ensure that the reform planning and implementation at the local level is based on complex analysis, having also a margin of flexibility to adjust to changes emerging in the process.
- Capacity building of the opinion leaders in the system, as promoters of the reform, ensures effectiveness and sustainability and reduces resilience. Besides, inevitable resilience to the reform should be seen as a learning possibility for all stakeholders.
- A reform project can be successfully implemented by an organization whose mission and vision is identified with the object of the reform, that is, has ownership and shared objectives.

# Recommendations

- Continuing the stimulation of the decision-makers, within joint activities, should distance from political and party interests, and concentrated around the child.
- Continue to involve opinion leaders as reform speakers/agents. At the same time, diversify the “reform’s speakers”: residential schools directors, parents, children, alternative services providers, etc.
- Continue to use audio and video channels with national coverage, as the main media platform – to consolidate the message at the national level, about the irreversible nature of the reform. Involving channels visualized in urban area (Publica TV, PRO TV), to change the perception identified in the survey of residential schools mentality.
- Produce electronic newsletter and distribute in various governmental networks, to target more persons.
- Create a broad information platform involving all reform stakeholders (NGOs) in order to amplify the reform message and reach massive coverage.