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### 04 SES 02 A, Enquiring about National Systems of Inclusive Education

Paper Session

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## Contribution

### **Consultancy In Action: Implementing The ICF-CY Within The New Practices In Special Education Needs Assessment In Armenia**

Over the last decade, with the help of UNICEF, international organizations and the civil society, the Armenian government has been developing efforts to reform the education system and promote inclusive education by expanding the network of inclusive schools and increasing budgetary allocations to children with special education needs. As a next major step the Ministry of Education plans to gradually transform special schools into resources centres supporting inclusive education. Accordingly with the new spectrum of challenges, there was an overall dissatisfaction with special education needs assessment process. Children's assessment was primarily summative, heavily based on medical diagnosis, and was used to determine the eligibility to receive inclusive education support (increased per-capita funding) or to direct the child to a special school based on the parent's choice. It did not have enough formative elements to help the teachers with the individual education planning (UNICEF, 2012). The identified need was then to review the special education needs assessment and individual planning procedure based on the best international practice and aligned with the framework provided by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, version for children and youth, ICF-CY (WHO, 2007). To achieve this aim the UNICEF Armenia engaged the team from Porto Polytechnic Institute with experience in the evaluation of special education policies and, specifically in the use of ICF-CY as reference in children's assessment, eligibility and intervention processes (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2013a, 2013b) which mission was to support the local team of experts from the Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment Centre, responsible for the assessment of children's special education needs in Armenia. The consultants' role was driven by two expected outcomes: (1) a revised package of tools and methodology for special education needs assessment; (2) an effective methodology for the definition of Individual Education Plans based on the children's assessment.

The literature is clear in highlighting the importance of looking carefully at processes beneath the implementation of changes in educational systems and not leaving it to the motivation and skill of people who will adopt changes (e.g. Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Levin, 2010). Therefore, understanding the process of consultancy, developed within an international partnership, is an important part of understanding exactly what works in the implementation of changes in policies? frameworks, institutions? philosophy and professionals? daily practices.

This paper aims to describe the process of this consultancy project, taking the position that the interaction of Portuguese consultants with local expert group and the engagement of UNICEF as an advocate for children?s rights and a provider of policy advice was an instrumental part fostering changes in special educational needs assessment in Armenia educational system.

## **Method**

This consultancy project was developed between February and October of 2013, and implied 4 in-site visits and an ongoing scaffolding process established between the consultants and the local team of experts. In-site visits aimed at providing background information, observing real context assessment practices and discussing with the local team experts the action plan for the toolkit and assessment procedures revision. Besides the local team experts with approximately 15 members, the in-site visits also counted with the participation of professionals working at schools, university professors dedicated to the inclusive education field and the professional staff of the Ministry of Education and Science. During all the process, reciprocal communication exchanges were ensured via virtual supports such as email and dropbox. The consultancy project was build-upon three cornerstones - a stepwise and cumulative work, a scaffolding support and a close relationship - monitored through a continuous exchange. It encompassed five steps: (1) analysing Armenian assessment procedures - analysis of Armenian toolkit and assessment procedures in light of international guidelines; analysis of international literature and pilot documented experiences using the ICF-CY in educational contexts; (2) building a common knowledge and language - the preparation and conduction of a workshop on special education needs assessment and individual education planning; and provision of an action plan for the toolkit and assessment revision process; (3) mapping the existing toolkit in ICF-CY categories and identifying missing targets, with reference to age group developmental code sets; (4) selecting and developing assessment tools - revision of the literature about assessment tools; matching the information provided by a set of tools and the ICF-CY domains; reciprocal process of feedback on questionnaires development and tools adjustments; (5) guiding the validation process - case studies to analyse the revised toolkit and assessment procedures implementation; translation of assessment results into students functioning profiles; monitoring of IEPs development based on the assessment results.

## **Expected Outcomes**

The intended outcomes of this consultancy project were achieved by the development of an assessment toolkit and a procedural manual for guiding the special education needs assessment process. In the final in-site visit a group discussion was conducted to evaluate the consultancy project. From this, ?collaboration based on a truly and respectful reciprocal exchange? emerged as the key element for facilitating the development of a successful partnership. Indeed, comments from all actors reflect a well succeeded process grounded in three main influential factors: the quality - knowledge and continuous support from the consultants; the close relationship established between local expert team and consultants; and the support provided by the UNICEF Armenia in the mediation between the local team experts and Portuguese?s consultants. This paper provides a structure to consider through the provision of consultancy or assistance for the implementation of changes in

the special education field, at professional, institutional and political levels. The presentation will discuss the importance of establishing a meaningful and contributory partnership in which the experiences of intended adopters of changes are valued and used as the point of departure for acquiring knowledge and developing new practices. Furthermore, it will also be discussed the implementation of knowledge dissemination strategies.

## References

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