Master's Capstone Projects   Center for International Education

2005

Preparing the Field for Implementing "Monitoring Learning Achievement" project in Tajikistan, Central Asia

Larissa Savitskaya
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Master's Thesis

Preparing the Field for Implementing
"Monitoring Learning Achievement" project
in Tajikistan, Central Asia

Larissa Savitskaya
Center for International Education
University of Massachusetts
May 2005

Preamble

This master's thesis reflects my field experience on implementation of the "Monitoring Learning Achievement" (MLA) project in Tajikistan. It encompasses the first stage of the project – preparation. It took place in February –March 2005 in cooperation of the Ministry of Education with UNICEF Tajikistan.

The document covers:
1. Tajikistan overview
2. Discussion of key terms, definitions and concepts
3. Framework for MLA
4. Intended mission goal and expected outcomes
5. Exploration of national capacities
6. Methodological assistance
7. MLA workshop
8. NADO component
9. Posing a few questions
10. Strategic recommendations

The master's thesis explores the first stage of the implementation: field visit, reflections and recommendations on follow up.

Academic advisor is Prof. Gretchen Rossman, Center for International Education.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
CARE	CARE International
EFA	Education For All
GTZ	German Development Bank
IISTT	Institute for In-Service Teacher Training
IO (IO's)	International Organization (s)
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
MLA-1	Monitoring Leaning Achievement in primary schools
MLA-2	Monitoring Leaning Achievement in secondary schools
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education of Tajikistan
MoHC	Ministry of Health Care
NADO	Non-Attendance and Drop-Outs
NGO (NGO's)	Non-Governmental Organization ('s)
NTF	National Task Force
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SC-UK	Save The Children - UK
TTU	Teacher Trade Union
UNCED	United Nations Conference for Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF TJ	Country Office of the United Nations Children's Fund in Tajikistan
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program

NOTE

Prikaz	(Order) National document that confirms involvement of the Ministry of Education in a project, stipulates activities, authorize responsible staff members and defines the timetable within the project.

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Key documents for MLA project in Tajikistan

Attachment 2: Preliminary Timetable

A copy of Power Point Presentation is attached that was presented for CIE group in May 2005. It contains a number of photos from the field as well as it summarizes the master project.

Acknowledgements

meeting local people, experts and professionals from all over the world, learning about educational systems and local educational issues, exposing to local culture and languages. It is always an honor for me.

This is to thank UNICEF Tajikistan for the interest in MLA and also for my professional involvement in it through giving me a wonderful opportunity to be in the field as well as for an honor to facilitate MLA implementation in Tajikistan in 2005.

And finally, it is to thank my lovely daughter, Alenka, my mom and sister for the on-going support of my lasting journeys and initiatives and "helping hands and open hearts" in sharing and bearing all the consequences.

Executive Summary

The Ministry of Education of Tajikistan showed the commitment to conduct Monitoring of Learning Achievement project in 2005.

The country has already accumulated certain experience in student assessment projects. Implementation of MLA-2002 and a few other student assessments by local and international organizations have generated some national expertise and good appreciation of the monitoring exercise in the education sector.

My field visit was organized with the purpose to assist the Ministry of Education to plan and conduct MLA in 2005. The project was initiated by the Institute for In-Service Teacher Training with UNICEF technical support.

This mission is the first part of three stages to assist the MoE. It was mainly focused on exploration of available capacities, creation of National Task Force (NTF) and provision with necessary training for the NTF by organizing MLA intensive workshop. The main outcomes were planned as: a) composed and trained NTF; b) developed MLA instruments; c) piloted MLA instruments.

Due to the important political processes, which took place during the first mission, two out of three above mentioned outcomes were achieved. Piloting the instruments was not possible to organize during the 1st stage. It is planned for the 2nd stage (preliminary as April-May 2005).

Due to the obvious delays in the planned activities and the scope of work, which still shall be done by the NTF, main field work and data collection in the current academic year, which is over by the end of May, is not recommended.

MLA is pre-designed to serve country-needs, but never vice versa. That is why it is very crucial to spend enough time to indicate national position, priorities in terms of quality of education and to link strategic national goals to the MLA design. These shall be the cornerstones in MLA goals and expected outcomes for Tajikistan as for any other country.

The work on indication national monitoring priorities has been started and MLA moves forward. The NTF is already composed. National Prikaz is filed with the Ministry of Education, which committed to undertake the project in 2005. The preliminary timetable and estimated budget are prepared and shall be agreed by the NTF. Partner organizations expressed the intention to cooperate in various forms (overall support, exchange of expertise/experts and co-sharing). Most of the MLA documents were prepared in part, but some were fully completed in order to protocol major decisions during the project planning. Still, in addition some work needs to be done as follow up:

- Piloting, editing and final polishing of MLA instruments.
- Creation and training of solid data analysis team.
- Careful consideration of the national sampling plan to get reliable data, which can be generalized later.
- Designing of various formats for national reporting and dissemination of findings as well as careful planning of comparative analysis with MLA-2002 and with other student assessments.

Some work can be done during Summer 2005. The rest may be planned for September 2005-January 2006 (please see attached Preliminary Timetable).

This document is to explore the main points, achievements and concerns, and therefore, inform about the status of MLA project in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan overview

Introduction to the settings

This part introduces Tajikistan: its location, statistics and indicators; it shortly describes educational system, a few schools in particular; touches local Constitution and intentions to provide quality education in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan is located in the Central Asian region. Its geographical area is 143,000 square km, and nine-tenths of the land is mountainous, with the Pamir Mountains in the east. Due to heavy-mountainous landscape, the country often experiences earthquakes; transportation system is insufficient and it is difficult to reach some places throughout the year and many places in winter session. Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China.

The population is 6.4 million people, with 73% living in rural areas. 50% are females. 41% are children of 0-14 y.o, only 5.6% are 60y.o and older. The capital is Dushanbe with the population of 0.6 mln people (Tajikistan-2003: Reaching Millennium Development Goals). Tajikistan is a multi-ethnic country with the Tajiks in majority (65%), 25 % Uzbek, 3 % Russian and 7 % other nationalities, like Tatars, Kyrgyz and Koreans (UNDP Tajikistan, www.undp.tj/tj). National language is Tajik, an Indo-European language related to Farsi (Persian). However, modern Tajik is written in the Cyrillic script that was introduced in 1940. Now, Arabic script has been introduced in small portions in schools. The creator of ancient Tajik literature was Rudaki, the ingenious work of Avicenna, and Tajik-Persian classic names are Firdausi, Omar Khayam, Rumi, Saadi, Khafiz, Dzhami, and others. Iranians and Tajiks easily

comprehend each other verbally, with, of course, differences in scripting. Majority religions are Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a Muslim 5%. Interestingly enough, Tajik language spoken in Pamir region is different from the Tajik language spoken in the rest of the country. Uzbek and Russian languages are used as well. Russian is common for official communication, as well as in the capital and some urban settings, even though Russian population is less than 3% as of now due to intensive migration after collapsing Soviet Union system.

On September 9 in 1991, Tajikistan became an independent state. Civil war in 1991-1993 has interrupted the processes of development in the country. Official peace between the government and opposition was documented only in 1997. The President Imomali Rahmonov has been sending a "peace-keeping" message to the nation since.

Even though the country has rich natural resources like gold, silver, uranium, water and cotton, Tajikistan is poorest among post-Soviet countries and 80% of its population lives in below the poverty line (WB, Tajikistan Country Brief, 2002). The situation was not much better during Soviet time either, where "in 1989 Tajikistan had the lowest mean per capita income amongst the Soviet republics, substantially below 50% of the mean income in Russia, and the highest proportion of population in poverty" (ADB, 2000 as cited by Silova, 2002, p. 65). The civil war of 1991-1993 had inputted to the severe economic decline: poverty, unemployment, destruction of infrastructures, reduced social care and basic services in education and health.

Local currency is Tajik Somoni ($1 = TJS 3.0 as of April 21, 2005).

Security is still the issue. This is how U.S State Department describes security situation as of now (in the capital):

> *Dushanbe is a high threat post, but the security situation is continuing to improve, and employees may now move within the cities of Dushanbe and Khojand without restriction. In some parts of the country, employees and visitors are required to travel in armored vehicles with DS-trained bodyguards. Emergency response within Tajikistan is extremely unreliable and cannot be depended on whether the emergency involves a crime or medical emergency (http://foia.state.gov/MMS/postrpt/pr_view_all.asp?CntryID=143)*

Education system in Tajikistan

In Tajikistan, the principle of equality and equal opportunities of men and women is guaranteed in Article 17 of the Constitution: "Everyone is equal before the Law and court. The state guarantees the rights and freedom of each individual, irrespective of his nationality, race, sex, language, creed, political convictions, education, social property position. A man and woman are equal" (as cited in UNESCO/EFA 2000 Assessment: Tajikistan Country Report).

Estimated adult literacy rate is 99.5 percent, but Tajikistan's education system has suffered a lot since independence: it ranked 112 out of 173 countries on the UN Development Program's Human Development Index for 2002 (www.undp.tj/tj).

Some emergent issues in education may be immediately observed through the statistics presented by UNICEF (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Tajikistan_statistics.html): enrollment, gender, attendance, attrition rates, etc.

Adult literacy rate,male (2000)	100
Adult literacy rate,female (2000)	99
Primary school enrolment ratio,**gross,male** (1998-2002)	109
Primary school enrolment ratio, **gross,female** (1998-2002)	104
Primary school enrolment ratio, **net,male**(1998-2002)	100
Primary school enrolment ratio, **net,female** (1998-2002)	95
% of net primary school attendance, male,(1996-2003)	79
% of net primary school attendance, female,(1996-2003)	81
% of primary school entrants reaching grade 5,admin data (1998-2001)	97
% of primary school entrants reaching grade 5,survey data (1997-2003)	94
Secondary school enrolment ratio, **gross, male** (1998-2002)	90
Secondary school enrolment ratio, **gross, female** (1998-2002)	74

In post-conflict Tajikistan, the burning are issues of orphans, homeless children, refugee and street children, and therefore, boarding schools and orphanages are operating together with regular schools. According to EFA 2000 Assessment data, "in the last two years more than 10 boarding schools for orphans have opened. However ... as statistical data testify, 30,700 orphans are registered in 24 regions of Khatlon area alone... It would require the creation of more than 150 boarding schools (200 students each), which is impossible under the current economic conditions". After civil war, "55,000 children were orphaned and 26,000 women were widowed, losing the main breadwinner of the family and therefore forced to become the head of household. Another 195,000 people fled to other CIS countries (LS - looking for jobs and earnings). According to assessments done by the IMF and WB, about 20% of schools were destroyed and plundered: more than 130 school buildings require rehabilitation and complete re-equipping, education-visual grants, and means of training. 126 destroyed schools must be replaced with construction of new school buildings to accommodate 20,000 pupils. The war had drastically an effect on children's psychology; behavior of the children, weaked skills of the peace resolution of conflicts has changed. Practically all children require special treatment" (EFA 2000 Assessment). Same source states that "in 1997 - 98 academic years in Khatlon area 4,190 children refugees of school age were entered into schools, with special programs aimed at recuperating the lost study time and experience, while also helping them reintegrate into the student body".

System of education in Tajikistan includes pre-school education (kindergarden), primary education 1-4 grades, middle schooling 5-9 grades, high schooling 10-11 grades, higher education – university, lyceums, etc. Languages of instructions in schools are 5 national languages: Tajik, Uzbek, Russian, Kyrgyz and Turkmen.

According to the report on Reaching Millennium Development Goals in Tajikistan, enrollment in basic education (1-9 grades) has been continuously declining after the collapse of Soviet system: 94.3% in 1989, 88.4% in 2000. It has been increased for the last 2 years. Risk group are girls: 37.3% girls has graduated in 2001 from high school (11th grade) compare to 63.3% boys (same source, p.22).

Average teacher salary is low and Ahtam Jurakhonov shares his story, "who is a teacher with a university diploma. But with only a teacher's salary, he said he could not afford to feed his family and was forced to quit his job. "Teachers receive 30 somonies [about

$10] a month. I have four children and old parents to support. I had to come to the job market," and leave the school, he told (News.Somoni.Com - Latest news from TJ).

With the vision to improve situation Tajikistani government works toward progress and development in the country. It has signed a number of cornerstone developmental documents, including Poverty reduction Strategy with World Bank in 2002, Millennium Development Goals in 2000, National Plan of Action for EFA has been already drafted with UNICEF support, Declaration of Political Rights for Women, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, etc.

School profile

This section reflects my observations of 2 schools only during field visit. Therefore, it may not be considered as a typical school profile in Tajikistan.

The school trip was quite difficult to organize as all my days were heavily scheduled with the meetings in Dushanbe. I specifically asked to visit a couple of schools outside of the capital, preferable in rural area, knowing that Dushanbe' schools might have different profile than many rural and even urban schools around Tajikistan.

It was a sunny Friday, beginning of March, whole-day trip. We were 5 in a UNICEF jeep: UNICEF education assistant, an intern from Boston University, a researcher from London School of Economics, driver and me. It took us a couple of hours to get to the first school. We were expected: the director was around, classes were prepared to greet us, best cabinets were shown as well. It was good example of hospitality in the best Central Asian traditions.

My intention was to observe as much as I can (or allowed to), talk to students, teachers, and other school staff, visit classes randomly and to see various facilities: kitchen, toilets, learning centers, library, etc. – just to get a sense what a Tajik school today is about. Therefore, I appreciated all the preliminary arrangements, which were done for our visit, and I limited my curiosity for many other things to respect the preparation and the protocol as UNICEF representative, not a free-lance researcher.

It looked like, and as I found out later, the schools are used to be seen by various externals. The schools were under UNICEF developmental project, so UNICEF consultants, researchers and staff visit them regularly. Simultaneously, during such visits the schools have reported to UNICEF on the related activities. The relationships seem very welcoming and comfortable for both sides.

We were shown a couple of classes in each school, mostly primary school classes. In the first school, I asked to see any secondary school classe as well, but it was morning time, and they were not in the school yet (even though I saw a good group of students on the school yard –sitting and, most probably, getting some heat from a sunny day).

Non-attendance and drop out is a huge problem to Tajikistan in now days. There is no national statistics on it, except annual official reports from schools and through small scale projects by local and international partners. No recent national research and data on attendance as well as the reasons behind it like cotton picking, severe winter with no or limited heating capacities at schools, poverty and absence of clothes, especially winter clothes, etc. are available yet.

International organizations support and promote school attendance by various interventions. One of them is food supply programs, which are implemented by WFP and CARE Int. In the framework of these programs, mostly primary school children of all grades are feed, sometimes together with primary school teachers, and even administration.

The situation with attendance is worse for secondary and high school, where a very limited number of classes are actually present, and number of students per class is much smaller. In one of the schools we visited, 8th grade class was just 2 students with 1 teacher; all were reading something, looking in separate books.

School buildings were constructed in Soviet time according to standard plan: mostly for around 1500 students. In reality, it was around 600 registered students in one of the schools and around 900 students in another. Most of the space is empty, then…and school looks like a very empty and abandoned facility.

School buildings were not renovated since 1980s; most of corridors' windows are broken or absent, floors sometimes have huge holes. But everything is extremely clean and neat. Children sweep outside the school all the time, but no garbage or disposal containers are seen around to keep it clean for longer.

In one primary class we visited, children would sit by 3, even though desks are for 2 students only. I saw no new books in any visited classes, however, the Ministry of Education, WB and OSI had mentioned about production of new books in Tajikistan. They must be on their way to the schools… All books I saw on the student desks were old, sometimes without cover, sometimes just the parts of tired textbooks, and they are mostly shared by students. The first rows would have a complete set: notebook, pen or pencil, book or part of book. Last row students would hardly have anything on their desks… Children stand up and greet you in chorus together with the teacher. They will also greet you separately, when you walk in a corridor. To greet them back, you put your right hand near your heart and make a small head bow with cheerful "Assalom", which is "Hello" in Tajik. You do return them a smile as they cheer to you all the time. And if they go in a row, you greet each one, as each of them greets you!

One 9th grade math class was shown to us: all children traditionally stood up; all were silent; the director made an introduction about us. I saw a neat dense writing of math formulas on the blackboard, at the same time, all books and notebooks were closed on both students' and teacher desks. Most probably the blackboard was not used during this class yet …

We also saw the toilets – a separate facility outside of school: white limed and with colorful drawing and a sanitary/hygiene message – for washing hands and keeping place clean. Unfortunately, I could not find any water inside in order to wash my hands… These facilities were constructed recently, as originally constructed toilets inside the schools do not work for years, and were re-constructed for classrooms and kitchens.

Leaving the field, I felt that I saw huge destructed buildings with limited water, electricity and heating, students with scarce of books and necessary stationeries. But these schools are full of cheerful children, dedicated teachers and honored directors – it gave an optimistic feeling of upcoming schools improvements in the near future in Tajikistan.

Discussion of key terms, definitions and concepts

This part is to indicate and discuss a number of key concepts and introduce importantly related terms and definitions.

Quality of education

Quality is neither a simple, nor a definitely clear term: "quality of education is difficult to capture" (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004, p.96). It varies by context and the times: understanding the quality in one context will not be the same in another context. "What is traditional in one (education) system may be regarded as eccentric in another" (Jaworski& Phillips, 1999, p.23). It changes over the borders, reflects local needs and is dictated by the times. Discussion about the quality is stimulating and provoking among educators that emphasizes its burning significance all over the world.

The World Conference on Education for All brought the importance of education quality as the "results and the process of learning, but not only access to education". EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004 states that "there is considerable debate about the concept of quality of education and how it should be measured. Several proxies are generally used to measure quality that are all far from satisfactory..." (p. 285). This is the reality.

Simple idea written by Smith (2003) may offer a good approach to define it: quality is "what matters" (p. 351) within a certain context. Even though it sounds simple, one shall ask complicated questions like "matter for whom?", "how much it matters?" and so on. There is an endless list of questions rather than clarifying answers. However, this should not be a barrier to discuss quality; it shall be stimulation for ever-ending conversation among educators to try to define what quality is for a particular country, period and level of education.

Even though understanding differs around the world, various actors try to find common issues to deal with quality and enrich each other: "despite the different contexts, there are many common elements in the pursuit of a quality education, which should equip all people, women and men, to be fully participating members of their own communities and

also citizens of the world. Understood like this, quality education requires us to redefine the parameters of education in such a way as to cover certain basic knowledge, values, competencies and behaviors that are specifically attuned to globalization but reflect the beauty and richness of our diversity expressed in different forms of belief, spirituality, culture, and language. The challenge is to develop education systems that balance local, national and global aspirations in the context of our common humanity" (Ministerial Round Table, 32nd UNESCO General Conference, 2003).

According to UNICEF (http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_quality.html), "quality education is a key to overcoming poverty in a single generation. Quality education is fundamental in creating a future for human security, community development and national progress. It is an enormous challenge. It is also an immense opportunity". UNICEF has developed a framework for quality in education and presented its five dimensions (same web-source):

"1. What students bring to learning. Does the child have a positive, gender-sensitive early childhood experience within the family, the community and pre-schooling institution? How different is the language of the home from the language of the school? Has the child been affected by emergencies, abuse, daily labour or HIV/AIDS? Has the child been sufficiently oriented to the rhythm of schooling? What experiences do girl learners bring to school and what particular challenges do they face?
2. Environments. Are they healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive? What is required to create healthy, safe, protective and stimulating learning environments that enable girls to achieve?
3. Content of education. Are the curricula and materials relevant? Do children acquire basic skills, especially in literacy, numeracy, life-skills and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, peace, or other national and local priorities? How does the content of curriculum and learning materials include or exclude girls?
4. Processes. Do trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools? Do teachers make skilful assessments that facilitate learning and reduce disparities? What processes of teaching and learning and support for learning achievement – from the communities, parents, supervisors, and teachers – enhance or undermine girls' learning achievement?
5. Outcomes. Do they encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are they linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society? What outcomes of basic education do we expect for girls? How can we document how well girls are learning, and what pathways are opened up for further learning and fulfillment of their potential."

Locally, understanding of quality varies as well. "The findings indicate that the established norms of education quality in Hong Kong's secondary schools are to provide … both internal development and external accountability. If it can be accepted that education quality reflects the overall performance of school members and that the

organizational level can be indicated by the satisfaction perception, and performance of students, teachers, and principals, then the findings of the studies can provide the comprehensive information needed to develop the schools further" (Cheng, Y.C. & Ming, W., 1999).

Guimaraes de Castro (1999) examines national system in Brazil and states that "quality was demanded by society" and "the greatest challenge for Brazil will be to eliminate the quality deficit now", because "the effectiveness of a process involving education, equity, and sustained development depends on the expansion of the education being offered".

West-Burnham&Brent (1994) discusses quality through 1988 National Education Reform Act in United Kingdom: "concepts that define quality are that it is defined by customer needs, defined in terms of fitness for purpose, achieved through continuous improvement, managed through prevention, and measurable. In the educational context, quality is holistic; it stresses values, the customer, and continuous improvement; and uses a range of techniques for evaluation" (West-Burnham&Brent, 1994).

For many countries, girls' education is important element of quality education in addition to a fundamental right: "girls shall receive the basic quality education and take their rightful place as equal partners in development" (United Nations' Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Millenium Assembly, http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_bigpicture.html). No doubts that development depends on girls' education as "an educated girl tends to marry later and have fewer children. The children she does have will be more likely to survive; they will be better nourished and better educated. She will be more productive at home and better paid in the workplace. She will be better able to protect herself against HIV/AIDS and to assume a more active role in social, economic and political decision-making throughout her life" (http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.html). Quality in education will add quality in the development.

However, there are some barriers to it like gender discrimination, family poverty (work force, home help), legal frameworks (pregnancy, fee), less care in a childhood and different gender expectations in a society, issues of safety and security in and around school, real benefit from schooling is irrelevant to the realities of some countries, etc. (http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_barriers.html).

Monitoring, assessments and evaluation

Terms "monitoring" and "evaluation" symbolize two separate processes, even though they are often used together to describe similar activities. As cited by Bakewell (2003, p. 6-7), monitoring is the systematic and continuous assessment of the process of work over time to check and adjust work methodologically; evaluation is the periodic, or even one-time, assessment of the relevance, efficiency and impact of the project according to stated objectives.

According to Keeves (1997), evaluation is usually applied to programs, curricular and organizational situation and "involves making comparisons with a standard, or against criteria or with other program, curricular and organizational situation" (as cited by Fiske, 2000, p.9). By Patton evaluation is "to judge merit or worth, to improve programs or generate the knowledge" (as cited by CHE, 2004, p.6) whereas monitoring is to check whether "a program is achieving its targets or outcomes" (CHE, 2004, p.7). Basically, for the simplicity to understand both terms, CHE proposes that, monitoring shall answer *how many* and *who* did what in a project, but evaluation shall tell *how well* they did it.

UNICEF operates with the following definitions of various levels of assessment (http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_quality.html): *"Classroom-based assessment* occurs simultaneously with learning and is designed to improve the students' ability to learn. Literacy, numeracy and life skills can all be assessed at the classroom level. *School level assessment* in some countries uses students' test results as an evaluation of individual schools. Rewards are sometimes given to schools with good results and action plans are developed to correct problems identified by the tests. *External public examinations* are used to select students for higher levels of education. *National and international assessments of achievement* are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of education systems or of nations rather than the achievement of individual students".

Increased attention to measure, assess, monitor and evaluate quality of education is dictated by international and local agendas. "What means to evaluate an educational system? And what are main challenges?" (Ferrer, 1998, p.24):

a) "Designing and implementing quality assurance system that embraces all levels of the system from the national to school level is enormous undertaking" (Smith, 2003, p.361).

b) "Among the factors that contribute to the qualitative improvement of education, the evaluation of the educational system and its components undoubtedly stand out. In effect, any measures taken to improve education activity have to found on accurate, comparative and balanced information" (Ferrer, 1998, p.23).

c) "By offering a means of both obtaining and disseminating (various) information, evaluation provides a powerful tool of knowledge, measurement, democratic debate and ultimately change (Delors, 1996 as cited by Ferrer, 1998, p. 23).

National vs. international assessments

There is an on-going debate about pluses and minuses of national vs. international assessments. "The main advantage of international assessments over national assessments is that they give some indication of where students in a country stand relative to students in other countries. They also show the extent to which the treatment of common curriculum areas differs across countries, which may lead a country to reassess its curriculum policy "(Kellaghan, 2004, p.10).

Baker (1997) discusses criticism of the international studies: "it goes to the heart of the matter by asking whether valid cross-national comparisons of school outcomes are ever possible. Although most comparative researchers assume valid comparisons can be made, the obvious organizational and cultural differences across countries often lead many people to question that basic assumption" (p. 295-300).

In general, assessment through testing is a very sensitive issue and always criticized: "no one wants to watch sausage, legislation or international test items being made (Bracey, 1997 as cited by Holiday, 1999, p.34). Other challenges are presented below:

1. "International comparisons are simply unmanageable because of critical variables affecting student performances including different languages, social norms, national prides, ethical standards, political systems, educational goals, and school curricula" (Holliday, 1999, p. 34).

2. "Because schooling differs across countries, don't international studies like SIMS and TIMSS end up trying to compare "apples and oranges"? (Baker, 1997, p. 295-300)

3. These assessments can not control cultural differences: Japan students usually do well in comparison tests, but they send more time on schoolwork throughout the year and less on extra-curriculum activities and working part-time job than US students, but US school policy should not be changed because of reported data (Holliday, 1999, p. 36).

4. "It is difficult to design an assessment procedure that will adequately measure the outcomes of a variety of curricula" (Kellaghan, 2004, p.10).

5. "The concern for test bias is also expressed in terms of testing across different education systems. Can valid assessments be designed to compare across different curricular contents and varying emphases?" (Baker, 1997, p.295-300)

6. "Norwegian kids bested the rest of the world in physics. The question is: Why didn't they do even better? After all, they had been studying physics for three years" (Bracey, 1998, p.24).

7. Not all stakeholders can have good use of the results from international assessments. Holliday (1999, p.34-37) argues that reports such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) "say little to teachers because initial reactions to the studies are often premature at best and perhaps do more damage than good to the education system in general".

After that pessimistic consideration, the question is "what is the future of international studies, and what impact will (international tests) have on the debate about quality in education? (In USA), TIMSS is so ambitious in scope - and so costly - that, as many federal officials regularly warn us, a study of its kind will not be seen again for a long time" (Baker, 1997, p.295-300).

The positive thing about international assessments, that good policy implications are developed and introduced: "In TIMSS study, Japanese pupils scored amongst the highest in the study, but they did not like the subject, and this has lead to much debate in Japan" (Jaworski&Phillips, 1999, p. 27). At the same time they inform countries about issues in world education, so the country may do some preventive work locally as well as strengthen unique national features. Here, the cost of participation in international assessment compare to national expenses will play decisive play together with other considerations.

I guess, a nation shall decide what information and data are needed in its economic, political and social situation, and then decide about engagement in either type of assessment as "one of the most fruitful ways is home-grown ides and initiatives" (Ferrer, 1998, p.24), so locals shall speak out.

A couple of thoughts about national monitoring systems

What, how and why do countries measure? "National systems will always need to monitor levels of performance for planning and accountability" (Gipps, 1998, p.33) among other purposes like improving teaching and learning; increasing enrollment; re-allocation of resources, etc. It is important that "students and their achievements should not be the only objects of school evaluation" (Nevo, 1998, p.79). However, "among all the types of assessment, the most frequent and pervasive is that which focuses on the learners ... to determine how much they know (knowledge), how efficiently they perform (skills), what convictions they hold (values, attitudes), and how much potential they have for further learning (aptitudes)" (Cummings, 2003, p. 193). There are many factors that influence students' knowledge and skills. "Who knows what cultural and social factors affect these data? Such factors often come to light only by accident" (Bracey, 1998, p.19).

Exactly what kind of data shall be collected through monitoring? There is no simple answer to it: "what data should be collected in national and international assessment studies can be answered in various ways" (Plomp, 1998, p.54). It depends... on a country, its needs and the point of time. For example, studying national curriculum for primary education, Wang (1990) found that "educational policy variables had little association with learning outcomes, whereas classroom/psychological variables (e.g. classroom management, quantity of instruction, classroom climate, peer group influence) were more important" (as cited Campbell&Kyriakides, 2000, p.13). Collected and analyzed data shall be aimed to show the situation holistically: "comparisons of means may show that pupils in urban area outperformed those in rural areas, but they will not tell us whether this disparity is due to the geographical location or whether it can be explained by related conditions: poorer families, less educated parents, limited school resources" (Fiske, 2000, p. 49).

Capacity building

So, who is going to design, collect and analyze data and how often it shall be done? Only capable national team (or teams) may answer these and many other questions, related to provision of data on quality education nationally. Questions like:

- ➢ Who are in the team?
- ➢ What their daily activities and job responsibilities?
- ➢ What are bounds between group members?
- ➢ What is the existing hierarchy between group members and their organizations?
- ➢ What are power dynamics among team members?
- ➢ What is the role, responsibilities and authorities of funding agencies?
- ➢ … and so on.

shall be considered first.

The process of participation is to be organized: from passive participation through increasing and active to the ownership and empowerment (World Bank as cited by Bakewell, 2003, p. 13). The most desirable participation model is the latest, where "stakeholders play a key role" in it. However, level of participation does not directly depend on desires and vision of project planners. Local capacities shall be at least found, then either developed or strengthen.

For the MLA project, usual practice is to find local capacities during the first stage, then to compose several working teams and then strengthen capacity through joint work, intensive workshops, and project implementation and so on. The task of the MLA is to see what are local capacity as of now, how well and productive they work together, and what other help might be needed to continue strengthen and enlarge national capacity to gain "critical mass" in national expertise. It is also about expanding existing capacities, so there is an expectation that new stakeholders will join the process constantly. They would find their belonging to the monitoring and evaluation practices: NGOs, pedagogical and analytical resources, mass media, etc. This shall be national focus and concern, if we are talking about national monitoring culture. Various stakeholders bring diverse perspectives – it is a good pledge for sustainable interest in and support of the process, where school improvement research examines the processes for schools to be

changed by individuals "who want to make schools, and therefore the educational system, better" ((Tashakkori&Teddlie, p.678-679).

According to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, capacity building "encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, based on an understanding of environment potentials and limits and of needs perceived by the people of the country concerned" (UNCED, 1992, Chapter 37).

UNDP sees capacity building as "the sum of efforts needed to nurture, enhance and utilize the skills of people and institutions to progress towards sustainable development" (http://www.undp.org/seed/cap21/whatis.html). Known as Capacity 21, it "stresses:

- multi-sectoral approaches that are nationally developed and executed;
- the involvement of all members of society;
- the creation of a body of experience and expertise in capacity building and sustainable development" (same source).

The mechanism for creation and strengthening local capacities is seen by Counterpart International through a partnership, which give locals "access to: knowledge and skills; innovative and proven methodologies; networking and funding opportunities; replicable models for addressing community needs and managing resources; options for organizational management and governance; and strategies for advocacy, government relations and public outreach" (as cited by Global Development Research Center, http://www.gdrc.org/uem/capacity-define.html)

Global Forum for Health Research (2000) defines capacity building as "the ability to define problems, set objectives and priorities, build sustainable institutions and organizations, and identify solutions to key national ... problems" (Reddy, Taylor & Sifunda, 2002, p.92). May be the capacity is simply the "ability of a local government to do what it wants to do" (Gargan, 1981, p. 649).

In any case, "capacity building should result in improved decision-making and efficiency in service delivery (Sitthi-Amorn, 2000 as cited by Reddy, Taylor & Sifunda, 2002, p.92).

Framework for MLA

Quality of education is one of the world's concerns. The EFA conference participants in 1990 called upon decision-makers in all countries to set education goals with primary reference to the quality parameters.

The EFA Assessment 2000 revealed that, despite important efforts accomplished in many countries, there are still challenges mainly in terms of quality of education. The EFA assessment 2000 was based on 18 indicators recommended by the EFA Forum Secretariat. One of these indicators has to report on the level of school learning achievements, for instance, the percentage of children who had reached the fourth grade of primary school and who mastered number of basic competencies defined at the national level (indicator 15). This indicator is not available in all countries; one of the reasons is lack of or poor statistics.

Data on learning achievements provides a country with valuable conclusions about the effectiveness of learning processes and helps greatly in informative decision-making on every level of national education system. Lack or weakness of information on children's achievements at school and their determinants may lead decision makers to unsuitable recommendations and policies and, one of the consequences is the misuse of the poor resources.

Still, single efforts in collecting necessary data do not allow defining the trends, but the systematic monitoring of learning achievements does.

There was a great interest in survey assessments on school achievements at regional and international levels since. The International Evaluation Association (IEA), in developed countries, undertook a number of surveys on student performance like TIMSS. Recently, similar surveys were done in developing countries with emphasis on the reinforcement of national and regional capacities to assess learning achievements. This is the case of *Laboratorio* project in Latino-American countries; the MLA was developed in seventy different countries from all over the world; PASEC for French speaking African countries (Sub-Sahara region); SACMEQ was for South African countries; PISA was conducted for OCDE countries; etc.

Recent assessments of learning achievements in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children are acquiring only a fraction of knowledge and skills they are expected to master. To emphasize the importance of education quality, there is the EFA Goal # 6:

> *"improving all aspects of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills".*

"Monitoring Learning Achievement" (MLA) is a joint project of UNESCO/UNICEF that was launched in 1992 as a response to the EFA call to fill the gap in data and information on the quality of education. MLA projects are world-wide studies on learning achievements, covering more than 70 countries.

Data collected through the MLA provides not only with information on actual learning achievements, but with the factors influencing those achievements: personal characteristics of learners, teachers, home, community and school environment, as well as specifics of teaching/learning process.

The project is unusual, because it collects data on academic achievements in key subject areas together with the information on life skills as health, nutrition, sanitation, environment and safe behavior.

Intended mission goal and expected outcomes

In order to plan and implement MLA in Tajikistan this year, the assistance to local Ministry of Education was arranged for ten weeks (4+3+3 weeks during February - July 2005) with the major task to help the MoE throughout all the phases of the MLA-2005, i.e. the preparation phase, implementation phase and conducting analysis of the gathered data.

In total, the assistance covers:
1. Methodological assistance;
2. Delivery of capacity building workshop;
3. Preparing MLA/NADO instruments;
4. Implementing of and reporting on MLA/NADO;
5. Final report and presentation to partners.

Preliminary timetable included the following stages:

February	– preparatory stage
March	– piloting instruments
April	– trainings, data collection
May	– data coding, scoring, input, cleaning, tabulation
June - July	– continue data analysis, reports writing
August	– publishing, dissemination, conferences, etc.

The first stage, February-March 2005, intended to be focused on the 3 above mentioned tasks through the delivery of the following:

- National Task Force/Coordinating Team is trained;
- Pre-final set of MLA instruments is developed;
- Pilot testing manual is developed;
- Plan of action and field implementation plan (including timetable and list of schools) is prepared;
- MLA-2005 instruments are piloted;
- Final set of MLA instruments is produced.

Exploring national capacities for monitoring quality of education

Being implemented all over the world, MLA came to the Central Asian region in 1999. Since, the first phase of the project (MLA-I) was already implemented in all Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). It focuses on learning achievements of 4th graders in numeracy, literacy and life skills. The second phase (MLA-2) focuses on learning achievements of 8th/9th graders in mathematics and science with the elements of life skills. As of now, the MLA-2 is implemented in Kyrgyzstan only. Other countries plan to implement MLA-2 in the near future. Tajikistan is planning implementation of both MLA in 2005.

A number of sub-regional intensive workshops have been held in the region with the purpose to build national and regional capacities to facilitate process of preparation and implementation of the MLA projects. During these regional workshops, sets of MLA instruments and methodological recommendations were developed. These intellectual products are available for the countries and used as valuable assets for national MLA projects and other student assessments.

Tajikistan together with other Central Asian countries has already gained some experience in the MLA. In particular:

1. Ministry of education of Tajikistan has delegated national experts for participation in the regional MLA workshops (Almaty 1999, Almaty 2002, Bishkek 2002, Almaty 2004).
2. Set of regional instruments (questionnaires and tests) are developed, piloted and used by Central Asian countries during 1999-2004, including Tajikistan. All tools attempt to reflect regional and national specifics.
3. Tajikistan has implemented MLA-1 in 2001-2002 (accumulated expertise, available results, participating agencies, etc.)

Together with the MLA expertise, Tajikistan has accumulated assessment experience in other student assessments:

1. Improvement of Basic Education in Tajikistan, conducted by Aga Khan Foundation (AKF);
2. Strengthening Basic Education in Tajikistan, conducted by German Development Bank (GTZ);

3. Student Assessment project, conducted by World Bank (WB);
4. Other small scale projects are done by CARE International, Save the Children UK, USAID PEAKS, WFP, etc.

Also, Tajikistan developed and implemented a few projects, addressing issues of Non-Attendance and Drop-Outs (NADO). One of them was integrated in the MLA-2002 with technical assistance of UNICEF and UNESCO. Others were conducted by CARE International, World Food Programs, Save the Children UK, USAID PEAKS, etc. Interestingly enough, local NGOs also were engaged in the similar projects, like NGO "Puls", "Manizha", "Panorama", which conducted small scale projects ordered by SOROS Foundation, World Bank, etc.

Even though, the country gained some valuable experience in student assessment and possesses national expertise within the Ministry of Education, local NGOs and international organisations, the continuity in involving assessment experts is sometimes questionable. The situation features by availability of separated experts among various organisations, but not the centre(s) of accumulated expertise in student assessment and/or a centre to monitor education quality. It is complicated by the fact that there is no separate department within the MoE that would be responsible for monitoring quality of education through regular data collection, analysis and interpretation and that can own the MLA project in the future in its best way.

Anyway, the reality dictates the necessity to improve the quality of education. "The government of Tajikistan has made a commitment to improve the level of education and has identified the education sector as the priority. The international community, on the other hand, is demonstrating its willingness to support the government in its attempts to improve the situation in the education sector" (UNICEF Tajikistan).

As on of the main goals of the MLA project is to reinforce country's national capacity in monitoring quality of basic educational programs and to establish a mechanism for systematic monitoring, the initial step is to explore what existing expertise is available in the country at the moment.

Available experts have to be linked together through National Task Force (NTF) that is a "nuclear" center of monitoring. It is in charge of coordination and implementation of MLA activities. An important step in building and strengthening national capacities is the critical mass approach, where a critical mass of people (policy-makers, planners, administrators, evaluators, curriculum and tests developers, researchers and front-line practitioners) are involved to monitor the quality of their basic educational programs on a continuous basis.

The NTF oversees the collection, analysis and reporting of data and is responsible for project budgeting, accountability and quality control. The National Task Force is also to generate discussion of the country's situational context, priorities, needs and MLA project outcomes in consultation with UNICEF/UNESCO and other educational stakeholders. The NTF is to select and appoint various technical and expert committees to implement the MLA project.

To undertake these tasks and to implement MLA successfully, it is crucially important to create capable NTF, train the members and provide them with on-going support throughout all the stages. At the same time, it is no less important to delegate and authorize the committees to implement various activities independently with appreciated use of local knowledge and expertise. This approach is blended with participatory action research and is to facilitate the ownership and increase confidence among the national experts and organizations.

As the first step, it was necessary to find out about existing national capacities in monitoring quality education and to include these organizations, people and expertise in the NTF and its committees. For that purpose, a number of exploratory meetings were held with key educational stakeholders during the 1st Stage of the field visit.

All the meetings took place in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, where the most of head quarters are located. The meetings were organized with 3 categories of stakeholders:
1. International organizations (IO's);
2. Ministry of Education and related institutions;
3. Local research NGOs.

Meetings with international partners were intended to cover, or actually uncover:

   a) an interest in monitoring quality of education (through the mission, mandate);
   b) student assessment projects, which were implemented by the organization in Tajikistan (scale, developed instruments, sample plans, software used for data analysis, composition of analytic groups, limitations/restrictions of the projects, best practices/successful stages, post-project issues like usage of findings nationally, continuation of the projects);
   c) recommendation on availability and use of existing national capacities;
   d) potential involvement and co-participation in the MLA (people, resources, expertise, capacities, costs, etc).

The meetings with local stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Pedagogical and Research Institutions and NGOs) were to explore:

   a) the need and importance of monitoring of quality of education (Education Law, Education For All, Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Reduce Strategic Paper, etc);
   b) student assessments, which were implemented by local partners (involvement in the project, gained experience and expertise, level of project ownership, level of usage of findings nationally, sustainability, etc.);
   c) recommendations on existing capacities (structures, organizations and bodies, which can implement separate stages of the project, ownership);
   d) potential involvement in the MLA (structures, expertise, capacities, etc);

Together with these groups of stakeholders, there were organized meetings with two groups of experts, which were involved in MLA-2002. They are NGO" Education Fund" that was responsible for the MLA-2002 and headed by ex-Deputy Minister of Education; and the Teacher Trade Union representatives, who were involved in piloting, tests administration/tests grading and data collection. The main goal of these meetings was to reflect on MLA experience generated nationally. Also, it was necessary to see if the same group can undertake the task or part of it again.

Characteristics of the National Task Force (NTF)

The National Task Force was officially appointed by the Prikaz of the Ministry of Education. In addition to the experts which are included in the Prikaz, representatives of at least 3 NGOs and 4 International Organizations will participate in the work of NTF. Such inclusion was initiated by UNICEF and agreed by the MoE in order to balance and compliment the expertise, provided through the Ministry of Education.

Even though, Prikaz is not available yet and NTF analysis is limited, some ideas about the NTF composition are presented here. Most of the NTF members from the MoE are experts in curriculum and textbooks development, academicians, administrators and teachers. NGOs intended to represent the expertise of survey planning and implementation, instruments development. There was limited expertise in tests development. International organizations are to provide the expertise in the instruments development, sampling and data analysis. National Statistical Agency is to bring the experts (statisticians, analysts) to the NTF as well. As of now, NTF still needs the experts in sampling, tests development, tests piloting, data entry, coding, and data analysis, who will continue the work systematically up to the end of MLA project.

Looking for the required expertise among local NGOs

There were meetings with at least 4 local NGO's, which have the experience in educational projects. Three of them have agreed to participate in MLA; one has decided to withdraw due to other research commitments during coming months. As almost all meetings were relatively short, up to 2-4 hours, and in most cases there were single meetings per agency, so the most obvious strengths and weakness are explored only, and they might differ from the vision and experience of other investigators.

Methodological assistance

Goal: to train and help capacity building with MLA methodological background and present conceptual, methodological and analytical frameworks of the MLA project, based on MLA practices to the Coordinating Team of the Ministry of Education.

MLA methodology was presented in several ways: a) verbally during introductory meetings; b) visually through the presentations; c) provision with key documents.

The following documents were developed and/or presented to the participants during MLA Workshop:
1. Agenda, objectives and expected outcomes for each working group
2. List of participants
3. MLA Presentation
4. Draft Project Proposal
5. UNICEF vision of quality of education
6. MLA Working Document
7. Sample instruments from different tests
8. National reports (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan –MLA-1/2)

MLA Project Proposal – the 17-pages document in Russian presents: MLA goals, objectives and expected outcomes, MLA framework for sample and instruments development, data analysis, indicators and variables, brief about MLA experience in the Central Asian region, information on creation of the National Task Force, Technical Committees, their roles and responsibilities. It has to be reviewed and finalized accordingly by the NTF as it is to stipulate MLA design and implementation.

MLA Working Document is to explore in details: Justification and overview of the MLA project; Learning domains and indicators for MLA; Sampling framework; Data analysis framework; Planning the project (working groups, timetable and budget templates).

Separate documents were prepared to introduce the importance of creation of the National Task Force: a) Composition of National Task Force; b) Recommended Technical Committees, their expert composition and tasks specifications.

Also, the "library" of country instruments from various assessments (AKF, WB, CARE, GTZ, MLA-2002) were made available for the participants. Even though, some instruments were not always presented in its complete/final/all languages sets, they were seen as a great help for initial consideration.

Together with methodological assistance, National Task Force was briefed about major international assessments and local experience in evaluation (World Bank, AKF, GTZ, WFP, CARE International).

Other materials are recommended to assist the NTF:

1. **Recommendations for hiring interviewers**. As the interviewers network was already selected by the MoE (Teacher Trade Union network), the recommendations for hiring interviewers shall be mainly focused on the skills and qualities necessary for data collection and testing to look among TTU rather then on hiring: interviewing techniques, specifics to interview children, administering tests vs. questionnaires, etc.

2. **Piloting guidelines**. During MLA-2002, no data analysis was involved during piloting stage, only focus group discussions with target groups. The guideline on understanding piloting, its procedures and value shall be presented.

3. **Recommendations on data analysis**. Data analysis shall be considered not only as a technical task, but more as an analytic exercise, which is linked to the conclusion and recommendations to improve quality of education and certain policy implications. Also, the issues of comparative analysis with MLA-2002 as well as other student assessments are to be discussed.

4. **Recommendations on report writing**, formats of the report (leaflets, posters, graphs, diagrams, etc.) and ways of dissemination of the findings are essential part of MLA planning. The documents from which national and international communities shall greatly benefit in terms of data, findings and recommendations shall be carefully pre-planned.

5. **M&E element for MLA.** The M&E system is not integrated yet in a full scale: each country does its own M&E exercise for the MLA. Tajikistan shall think about one as well.

Intensive MLA workshop for the National Task

Goals:

1. Prepare National Task Force to undertake MLA project in both stages, MLA-1 (4th grade) and MLA-2 (9th grade), in 2005.
2. Develop key documents and MLA instruments for further implementation of the project.

Objectives:

1. Indicate and develop major concepts in monitoring quality education (quality of education and its components for Tajikistan, basic learning competencies, minimum mastery level, desired mastery level, monitoring/assessment/evaluation/ examinations, etc.).
2. Define learning domains for each testing subject in the framework of National Curriculum.
3. Develop the indicators for monitoring of quality education.
4. Develop tests and questionnaires for MLA project, both stages:

	MLA-1	**MLA-2**
Tests		
	Numeracy	Mathematics with Life Skills
	Literacy	Science with Life Skills
	Life Skills	
Questionnaires		
	4th grade Student	9th grade Student
	Primary Teacher	Science Teachers
	Principal	Principal (same)
	Parent of the 4th grade student	-

5. Develop Working Groups' recommendations on the tests administration.
6. Develop sampling criteria.
7. Confirm composition of the National task Force, Technical Committees, their Terms of References, timetable, budget.
8. Develop MLA timetable and estimated budget.

The program was recommended for 5 full-working days with full-staffed working groups.

It is extremely important to link major educational priorities and national focuses to the development of monitoring instruments, otherwise, MLA will provide with the data which do not exactly match with national data needs.

The following materials were recommended to be used to develop MLA instruments and be provided with for the MLA workshop:

- Tests and questionnaires developed for the similar projects in Tajikistan by partner organizations
- Nationally developed tests
- MLA-2002 instruments
- MLA instruments from Central Asia (for MLA-2)
- National Curriculums for primary and secondary education
- Textbooks and methodological manuals in key subject area (tested by MLA)
- Major education policy documents, including MDG, PRSP, EFA national plan, etc.

Duration of 4 days only, 9-12 March 2005, was agreed for the MLA workshop among NTF, which started next day after the National holiday and continued through the Saturday, which is not working day in the MoE. The initially prepared program had to be adapted and sometimes changed accordingly due to the ad hoc circumstances: absence of people, lack of rooms and difficulties among some participants to understand and produce in Tajik language.

The major challenges of the workshop were:
1. Shortage of participants was complicated by part-time participation of some participants.
2. High-level status of the majority of participants made full-time participation almost impossible. However, many have worked almost full-time.
3. The expertise of some participants was duplicated rather then complementing each other's.
4. It was unclear who the Project Coordinator is. The appointed person within the Ministry of Education shall take the authority, responsibility and initiative for during and after the workshop.

5. Logistic issues: number of rooms provided for the workshop was much less than proposed. Only 2 rooms were available for the 1st and 2nd days. 2 more rooms were added later. Total 8 groups were planned for the workshops.
6. Using Tuckman's model for Group Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing, it is necessary to say that the majority of groups did not have a luxury of time for all the stages – to form the group, to storm ideas, to norm activities and finally to perform productively. However, all groups did their hard to complete the tasks.

The good news is that the following was achieved:
1. National Task Force was established;
2. Steering and Technical Committees were composed (core members);
3. Groups were brought together for learning about MLA, planning and working on MLA' initial stages;
4. Groups were introduced to the roles and responsibilities of each group;
5. NTF has learned about MLA philosophy, methodology, stages and expected outcomes;
6. NTF was engaged into the discussion about a) Data ownership; b) Monitoring culture; c) National monitoring capacities; d) Critical "mass approach"; e) Dissemination of MLA results; f) using MLA results for education policy' implications to improve quality of education.

Due to the un-controllable circumstances[1], not all objectives were reached or were not reached in full, even though all were undertaken. For example, it was impossible to organise a separate group to discuss and plan NADO component in MLA-2005 due to the shortage of participants; it still has to be done in the most urgent timeframe with relevant expert group.

---

[1] National elections were done on February 27, 2005 in Tajikistan, the process of re-appointment within the Ministry of Education and its institutions took place for a few weeks. This un-controllable circumstance has resulted in some obvious difficulties to complete the amount of preliminary planned work. Key participants had to be on their working places, rather than in the workshop, as the new Minister scheduled introductory meetings with them. Another un-controllable circumstance was the absence of National Prikaz up to the end of the workshop, which created some type of uncertainty among some members. Also, the composition of National Task Force and Technical Committees did not exactly match with the recommended composition of expertise, proposed in the MLA Project Proposal.

Due to incomplete composition of at least 3 groups out of 8 proposed, the products require significant improvement:

    a. Sampling design lacks information about school specifics in Tajikistan due to the absolute absence of the representative from School Department of the Ministry of Education during the workshop (the person was in the business trip).

    b. Questionnaires for teachers (primary school teacher – MLA-1; secondary school science and math teachers - MLA-2) were not developed;

    c. Life Skills Test (MLA-1) needs significant improvement as the major development took place during 1.5 days only.

    d. Key MLA documents (Final Project Document, Timetable, Budget, distribution of responsibilities), which stipulate major decisions for further MLA implementation, were not developed yet.

Some urgent issues to follow after the workshop are:

1. Finalise development of the instruments, using Group reports from the workshop before the piloting.

2. Pilot the instruments on different groups of students, teachers and parents. During piloting, the MLA methodology shall be tested as well.

3. Piloted and translated documents are to be shared with the partners for professional feedback and final polishing.

4. NTF groups are to be critically re-considered and filled with necessary local experts.

5. Key documents are to be produced and shared among NTF members and partners (list is attached).

At the end of the workshop, participants had an opportunity to exchange group ideas and recommendations. It was a full plenary session of about 3 hours intensive presentations and debate on the produced instruments, next steps and general recommendations, which are reflected in the Closing Session Minutes. The participants have expressed their hopes for continuation of work to improve MLA instruments and conduct major field work together with data analysis and report writing.

NADO component

The NADO (Non-Attendance and Drop Out) component shall be an integral part of the monitoring quality of education as it addresses the key national issue - non-attendance and drop outs in schools, especially among girls.

The NADO component is not new for national surveys. MLA-2002 had a separate researching part especially on NADO issues, with qualitative focus. Partner organizations also have an interest and experience in addressing NADO issues through research (Save The Children UK, World Bank, CARE International, World Food Program, German Development Bank). Local research NGOs have some experience (Puls, Panorama, Manizha). Based on the results of these surveys, some NADO data and reasons behind it were discovered.

However, there is still a need to develop a simple and workable scheme to monitor NADO component nationally with certain periodicity (i.e., one a semester) to address the issue on the national level.

With this purpose, NADO component was discussed with colleagues from USAID PEAKS, Save The Children–UK, CARE International, WFP and some local agencies. The idea of quantitative methodology seems attractive for the partners, some ideas are expressed in the draft proposal, which was given for UNICEF earlier (attached). It has to be considered by separate NADO group and added/improved to ensure regular collection of NADO data nationally.

A special working group session was planned during the MLA workshop. However, due to the absence of the main NTF body and due to the intense 4-days schedule of regular 5-days workshop, it was impossible to conduct the brain-storm discussion.

Focusing on cost-effectiveness, it is important to consider inclusion of NADO component in the MLA -2005, with major focus on quantitative data (simple head count and inclusion of specific questions in the questionnaires (student, parent, and teacher, principal). Deeper analysis can be provided by developing qualitative element: focus groups, deep interviews and case studies during summer. Also, division of NA and DO survey components may be suggested.

Posing a few questions

This part is composed as FAQ (frequently asked questions) to indicate major aspects of the 1st stage.

Why MLA?

- MLA is to develop and strengthen national capacities;
- MLA uses "critical mass" approach in preparation the national expertise cohort for various assessment projects;
- MLA is to improve national systems for monitoring quality of education;
- MLA is NOT to assess pure academic knowledge only, but academic knowledge with life skills (nutrition, safe behavior, sanitation, etc.);
- MLA intends to uncover and address existing disparities in the country (gender, urban/rural, state language/other languages, etc.);
- MLA analyses not only the level of student achievement, but more specifically the differences in learning achievements for various groups of students;
- MLA is looking for the factors, explaining those differences;
- MLA provides with the databases for informative decision-making;
- MLA promotes creation of monitoring culture at all levels of educational decisions;
- MLA unites national multidisciplinary teams in long-term partnership (teachers, inspectors, policy-makers, civil forces, etc.)
- MLA links local reality with development of educational policies and practices;
- MLA has a simple and workable approach within affordable budget;
- MLA uses international approach, but focuses and addresses local burning issues to improve quality of education.

Why MLA in Tajikistan in 2005?

1. There is no national baseline study in Tajikistan at this point. There are a number of small scale studies, which represent separate rayons or types of schools. It is a strong need to have reliable data on current issues in the education sector that can be addressed nationally. The need was expressed by the Ministry of Education and international donor organizations.

2. International partners are interested in measuring their projects' effects. Comparing their pilot schools results with national cohort might be one way of measuring them.

3. It will be interesting to see the change between MLA-2002 and MLA-2005 as rapid changes in many sectors, including education, took place.

What are some issues in the capacity building?

1. Exploring capacity is a very time-demanding task, which usually takes a lot of time, meetings and follow-ups. During the 1st stage of current mission, it was 43 meetings, which were devoted to mapping local capacities and the composition of National Task Force. Due to the time constraints and some un-controllable difficulties, the time for composing and training NTF was limited. It affected the process and expected outcomes at this point.

2. Re-appointments within the Ministry of Education make it difficult to involve already trained personnel from the related projects. At the same time, same group of key experts is involved in various working groups: PRSP, Education Reforms, EFA, so their active participation in MLA is questionable due to other commitments.

3. Absence of a separate center for student assessment/ monitoring quality of education within the Ministry of Education complicates the task of capacity building and owning the project, but there is rather a training of separate people and organizations. It seriously questions the sustainability and ownership of the project in particular and monitoring culture in general.

4. Previous projects attracted regional (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia) and international expertise (Europe, USA) for separate activities (like sampling, data analysis, tests validation, etc.) rather than local ones. Therefore, local expertise in sampling design, data analysis and interpretation is limited.

<u>What are some of the issues with the local research NGOs?</u>

    i. Political considerations (some recommended agencies were not involved);

   ii. Timeframe (agencies do plan their project long time in advance, so participation in a nation-wide survey is questionable due to other research commitments);

  iii. The agency expertise equals the person's expertise, so in case if another person was sent to participate, the expertise is different.

What were the key meetings?

1. Orientation with UNICEF Tajikistan
2. Meetings with the First Deputy Minister of Education/EFA Coordinator/MLA National Coordinator
3. Round-table with International Organizations
4. Official meetings with the Ministry of Education and potential members of National Task Force
5. MLA workshop
6. School visits (2-hours drive from Dushanbe)
7. "Recruiting" meetings with potential MLA partners (please, see attached "Exploring capacities")

What are the key decisions for MLA project made during these key meetings?

All decisions are to be noted in the minutes of the respected meetings.

1. Meetings with the Ministry of Education
   a. Tajikistan will implement MLA in 2005;
   b. MLA shall be implemented in both phases, for primary and secondary schools. MLA-2 shall be in 9th grade, not the 8th grade;
   c. National Task Force will be composed by the MoE. UNICEF may recommend certain local experts to be included in the NTF. NGOs and international organizations may input by expertise as well;
   d. UNICEF will provide necessary methodology and technical expertise;
   e. MLA workshop will take no more that 4 days;
   f. Nation-wide sampling plan shall be designed for data generalization;
   g. All instruments are to be produced in national language (Tajik) during the workshop. Translation of all documents will be done next.
2. Round-table with International Organizations
   a. MLA is a good framework to have a national baseline study on learning achievements;
   b. Schemes for cooperation and co-participation are to be discussed separately with each partner;
   c. Regular update shall be in place (monthly update through the list-serve is acceptable).
3. MLA workshop (9-12 March, 2005)
   The workshop does not have any decision-making authority. Therefore, here are presented the recommendations only, which are to be considered by the Steering Committee of the NTF.
   a. Some instruments are not ready for use, so additional work has to be done to improve them;
   b. Instruments developers shall be included in the later stage to ensure consistency of participation and expertise;
   c. Linguistic expertise is need for the most of instruments;
   d. Sample of 200 schools is considered as an adequate number for national survey (budget, capacity, transportation and time constrains).

What are some concerns?

1. The country is at the after civil war stage. However, there is no Peace Building/Peace Keeping notion during discussions on Life Skills or Curriculum. Some joint work with Child Protection Office at UNICEF TJ is recommended.

2. The concept of quality of education was not discussed properly due to the participants' absence during 1st session of the workshop. Actually, almost whole discussion of key concepts was missing in the workshop due to uncontrollable circumstances.

3. The issues of "Per Capita Financing" in terms of school management are to be included in the instruments as it is current national priority. They were not yet.

4. There is no solid focus on girls' education in the current version of the instruments. This is to be developed accordingly.

5. Project indicators are not developed yet. There is a lack of understanding and lack of linking between instruments development and data analysis stages. The group on data analysis is still not identified and not appointed. This creates the difficulty in the consistent vision of the final product – analyzed and interpreted data in accordance with the major indicators and the goals of the MLA project in Tajikistan.

6. It was not possible to get MLA-2002 questionnaires in Tajik language. The instruments were partially delivered by local agency (tests in Tajik only), and Kyrgyz agency (questionnaires in Russian and Uzbek).

7. There are methodologies of testing minimum mastery level, which were developed nationally, like dictation in the primary school shall be done by the class teacher. They were not exactly incorporated into MLA-1 and MLA-2: the project shall benefit from national elaborations and innovations.

8. There are no national sampling plans, which would be used for MLA. Therefore, it is crucially important to develop national sampling criteria and compose nation-wide sampling plan for MLA-2005. The sampling design which was used in the MLA-2002 is a matter of concern due to its size and criteria. The need, and the Ministry request, is to ensure the generalization of the results and provide with reliable national data.

9. Clear scheme of coordination, reporting and accountability between committees shall be developed by NTF and Steering Committee.

What were the ways for cooperation among MLA partners as of now?

Sharing experts and expertise

- 2 survey specialists from CARE International have participated during the workshop;
- GTZ consultant shared his views and ideas about national assessment and provided a critical feedback on MLA instruments, which were used in Tajikistan in 2002;
- USAID PEAKS have constantly inputted by the ideas and expert feedback on sampling, instruments development and organization of the field work. Good support on the instruments' piloting is already agreed.
- SAVE THE CHILDREN UK may support in the filed work, preparing the field and piloting the instruments;
- Aga Khan Foundation offered assistance with design of the databases required for data entry, monitoring of quality of data entry and data analysis.
- All partners have shared by the instruments, which were used for their student assessment projects as well as final reports.

Cost sharing:

- CARE International may participate in cost-sharing the MLA-2005;
- USAID PEAKS has expressed the intention to cost-share piloting stage;
- World Bank plans to conduct student assessment next academic year (May 2006), some negotiations may help to involve their funding in current MLA.

Capacity training:

- World Bank and GTZ may be involved in the training for data entry and data analysis.

What expertise is recommended to provide NTF with as of now?

Project planning

As the project planning shall be done by the Steering Committee, which is already formed, project planning does not need any special or additional expertise. Some budgeting expertise shall be sought with the UNICEF education team.

Sampling

As most from sampling group are statisticians, not surveyors, so the concepts of sampling are not the operational terms in their daily activities. Some sampling expertise might help through cooperation with local surveyors and USAID PEAKS.

Instruments development

Local test developers shall give a critical review on the developed tests. Local researchers shall give a critical review on the developed questionnaires.

Piloting Instruments

Training on piloting is the essential part. Composition of piloting team, tests developers+interviewers, is crucial.

Field preparation and interviewers training

Selection of interviewers among Teacher Trade Union members and their training is the essential part.

Database preparation/Data entry/Data coding/Data analysis

Solid training on data entry, check entry quality, data analysis is the essential part.

Data interpretation/ Report writing/ Dissemination of the findings

Those who will do data interpretation shall attend separate sessions on data analysis. Subject specialists shall produce meaningful analysis of all tests results in key testing areas. Based on those findings, policy developers shall propose national recommendations. Therefore, subject specialists, who are able to analyze and interpret the tests data, are the required experts for this task. Same groups shall produce final report, leaflets, and posters.

How partners will follow MLA progress?

1. This is one of the attempts to consolidate local efforts in student assessment area among international partners. It is beneficial, but challenging task due to variety of missions and terms of reference of every organization in the country. Still, a list-serve for monthly partners' updates on MLA progress was created. The partners show the interest.

2. During the meetings with international and local partners, a number of recommendations were received. There were made the best efforts to consider/discuss/incorporate those recommendations in the MLA planning. The partners were updated on it accordingly.

What wasn't done yet?

1. National curriculum is published in local language only (Tajik); it is not available in English or Russian. It creates difficulty to incorporate it into MLA planning, so the consideration and the level of inclusion is solely with local experts.

2. As the NTF was composed partly as of now, missing groups (field/interviewers, data analysis, reporting groups) were not briefed about the MLA, and therefore MLA was not discussed in terms of local adaptations and national peculiarities with those groups.

3. It was not possible, but intended, to meet with the following experts groups during the 1st stage: National Statistical Agency; Institute for Strategic Research; Pedagogical Research Institute; Central Laboratory on Demography.

Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

The 1st visit had an exploratory nature, with some developmental elements.

The most of the objectives were achieved, including some strategic objectives like launching of the MLA, creation of the NTF and consolidation partners efforts. The exploration of possibilities and opportunities as well as mapping local capacities was the main focus for the 1st visit.

As in any project, there were a number of issues which arose during the visit: controllable and un-controllable.

Together with UNICEF education team, the most issues were addressed.

Still, some issues are to be re-addressed during the follow up stages, like complementing NTF by necessary expertise, timeframe for the main data collection and creation of data analysis team.

By the end of May 2005 (current school year), it is advised to complete the piloting of instruments.

Summer time of 2005 is recommended for translation and polishing of the instruments as well as for training solid data analysis team.

Main field work is recommended for October 2005 with some field preparation in September. The first month of the school year (September) is not recommended for data collection as children are back from long 3-month summer holidays and might show a slight different tests results than in October, after 4 weeks of refreshing classes.

October is still a cotton pick period, and collecting data during this time seems, however, reasonable to address non-attendance issues as well.

Students of 5th grades shall be tested and surveyed for MLA-1 (assessing learning achievements with life skills as a result of primary education).

Students of 10th grades shall be tested and surveyed for MLA-2 (assessing learning achievement with life skills as a result of secondary education). According to the recent statistics on *gross enrollment ratios* on participation in primary and secondary education (UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005), the total secondary (5-9) and post-secondary (10-11) school population in Tajikistan (regardless of age) seems almost 20% less than primary school population, especially among girls. The assumption is that the MLA-2 among 10th graders will find a reduced cohort of graduates from secondary schools. Those, who do not continue at the high-school level, will be out of secondary school national assessment in this scenario. This shall be taken into consideration during MLA-2 data interpretation and generalization of findings about secondary education and its quality in Tajikistan.

The following materials are recommended to assist the NTF:

- Recommendations for hiring interviewers.
- Piloting guidelines.
- Recommendation on data analysis.
- Recommendation on report writing/Dissemination of Findings.
- M&E element for MLA.

Again, the main focus is on the strengthening of national capacities. Therefore, it is expected that more work is to be done by the National Task Force, and more initiative shall be taken by the MLA Project Coordinator and her/his project team.

International partners shall be continuously informed to ensure clarity for long-term participation and cooperation.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Monitoring of learning achievement needs to be a regular and systematic procedure to collect national data and provide MoE with them for informative decision-making to address national issues in education sector, especially in the period of transition and rapid changes in the country like Tajikistan these days.

2. International partners are to continue consolidate, not duplicate, their efforts in supporting national collection of data. Each year, different organization might be major supporter of the survey according to their already planned activities for the next 5 years; others are to provide additional support and expertise.

3. Student Assessment surveys are to be with the focus on national capacity building, it's strengthening and re-enforcement up to the point of ownership and empowering by the Ministry of Education and local partners. Creation of separate structure/department within the MoE with primary mission to design and conduct student assessment/monitoring quality of education might be strongly recommended.

4. Composition and expertise of technical committees should match with their Terms of References and expected outcomes for MLA. Key national education leaders may not be the best choice for the tasks, which require full-time dedication during certain stages (tests development, piloting, etc.). They would be the best match for National Steering Committee, where strategic decisions have to be made at the national level. Experts, like doctoral students, teachers, and researchers from National Pedagogical Institute, National research Institute and Pedagogical Academy are the better match for developmental tasks.

5. There shall be accumulation and appreciation of the already involved specialists and experts in MLA. Experts, who participated in the instruments development, should be involved into piloting and finalization of instruments, as well as some of them shall be involved in data interpretation and report writing, especially on subject themes (math, science, literacy).

6. Involved from the beginning persons shall input their portions for the final report by writing, which shall consist of the at least 2 volumes: technical report and report on presentation of the findings. The last one shall disaggregate findings in the format of small reports and leaflets for various target groups. In technical report, each technical committee shall report on the process of their work and final results (sampling plan, instruments, field work, and data analysis). These people shall be "incentive-ly" budgeted for the reporting stage.

Literature:

1. Baker, D. (1997). Surviving TIMSS: or, everything you blissfully forgot about international comparisons. *Phi Delta Kappan, 79 (4), p. 295-300*

2. Bakewell, O. (2003). *Sharpening the development process: a practical guide to monitoring and evaluation.* (Guide #1). UK, INTRAC: Oxford.

3. Bracey, G. (1998). The best of TIMSS, the worst of TIMSS. *The Education Digest, 64 (2).* p.19-24.

4. Campbell, R. & Kyriakides, L. (2000). The national curriculum and standards in primary schools: A comparative perspective. *Comparative Education, 36 (4).* 383-395. Oxford

5. Cheng, Y.C.& Ming, W. (1999). *Education quality profile: the case of Hong Kong secondary schools.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).

6. Communique'. (October 3-4, 2003). *"On quality of education": Ministerial round table,* UNESCO 32nd General Conference. Information document. UNESCO

7. Council on Higher Education. (2004). *Towards a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of South African higher education.* Discussion document. South Africa, Pretoria.

8. Cummings, W. (2003). *The institutions of education: a comparative study of educational development in the six core nations.* United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press

9. Ferrer, A. (1998). The evaluation of education systems: the view at the end of the 1990s: introduction to the open file. *Prospects, 28 (1).* UNESCO, Paris

10. Fiske, E. (2000). *Education for all: status and trends, 2000.* International Consultative Forum on EFA. UNESCO: Paris.

11. Holliday, W. (1999). Questioning the TIMSS: why international comparison studies say nothing to teachers. *The science teacher. 66 (1).* p.34 Wilson Education Abstracts

12. Gargan, J. Consideration of Local Government Capacity. *Public Administration Review. 41 (6).* p. 649. Washington

13. Gipps, C. (1998). Student assessment and learning for a changing society. *Prospects, 28 (1).* UNESCO, Paris

14. Guimaraes de Castro, M. N. (1999). *Education of the 21st century: the challenge of quality and equity.*

15. Jaworski, B. & Phillips, D. (1999). *Comparing standards internationally: research and practice in mathematics and beyond.* United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press

16. Johnson, B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2004). Mixed method research: a research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14-24.

17. Kellaghan, T. (2004). *Public examinations, national and international assessments, and educational policy.* Educational Research Centre, St Patrick's College, Dublin

18. Nevo, D. (1998). Dialogue evaluation: a possible contribution of evaluation to school improvement. *Prospects, 28 (1).* UNESCO, Paris

19. Plomp, T. (1998). The potential of international comparative studies to monitor the quality of education. *Prospects, 28 (1).* UNESCO, Paris

20. Reddy, P., Taylor, S., & Sifunda, S. (2002). Research capacity building and collaboration between South African and American partners: the adaptation of an intervention model for HIV/AIDS prevention in corrections research. *AIDS Education and Prevention. 14(5).* p. 92. Wilson

21. Silova, I. (2002). The right to quality education: creating child-friendly schools in Central Asia. UNICEF, Almaty

22. Smith, W. & Ngoma-Maema, W. Y. (2003). Education for all in South Africa: Developing a national system for quality assurance. *Comparative Education, 39 (3). Oxford*

23. Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2003). The past and future of mixed methods research: from data triangulation to mixed model designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (p. 671-702). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

24. UN Tajikistan. (2003). Tajikistan-2003: Reaching Millennium Development Goals.

25. UNESCO. (2004). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004. Paris

26. UNESCO. (2000). EFA Assessment Country Reports. Paris

27. UNESCO. (2004). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004. Paris

28. UNESCO. 2005. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. Paris

29. West-Burnham, J. & Brent, D. (1994). *Quality management as a response to educational change.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994)

30. World Bank. (2002). Tajikistan Country Brief.

Web-resources:

31. http://www.gdrc.org/uem/capacity-define.html

32. http://foia.state.gov/MMS/postrpt/pr_view_all.asp?CntryID=143

33. http://news.somoni.com/bycat.php?viewCat=3&id=773

34. http://www.undp.org/seed/cap21/whatis.html

35. www.undp.tj/tj

36. http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/tajikistan/rapport_2_1.html

37. http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation

38. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Tajikistan_statistics.html

ATTACHMENT 1

Key Documents for MLA project in Tajikistan
(to be available for National Task Force as of April 1st, 2005)

1. Agreed minutes of key meetings:
    a. Round-table with IO's (22 February 2005)
    b. Launching MLA meeting with MoE (3 March 2005)
    c. 2nd meeting with MoE on organization of the workshop (7 March 2005)
    d. MLA Workshop (9-12 March 2005)
2. Documents from National Task Force
    a. National Prikaz about implementation of MLA in Tajikistan in 2005
    b. Finalized Project Proposal for implementation of MLA (reflecting major decisions: MLA-1/MLA-2, testing languages, scale of survey, etc.)
    c. Final List of MLA National Task Force (working groups, group leaders, group tasks and timetables)
    d. General timetable and distribution of responsibilities (National Task Force, UNICEF, IO's)
    e. Estimated budget
3. MLA draft instruments in Tajik (and Russian or English for review)

	MLA-1	MLA-2
Tests		
	Numeracy	Mathematics with Life Skills
	Literacy	Science with Life Skills
	Life Skills	
Questionnaires		
	Student	Student
	Teacher	Teacher
	Principal	Principal (same)
	Parent	

4. Working Groups' recommendations from the workshop (9-12 March 2005)

TIMETABLE for MLA Tajikistan 2005

Phase I	Launching of the Workshop	National and Partner's	March'05	April'05	May'05	June-July_August'05	September'05	October'05	November'05	December'05	January'06
	1- National workshop		9-12 March 2005								
	(Design, Sample plan, Development of Instruments)	resource people (Care International, World Bank, GTZ, local NGOs)									
	2- Piloting of MLA instruments			18-29 April 2005							
	(Finalization of sampling, Piloting, Finalization and Translation of Instruments)	Pre-piloting by USAID PEAKS, Save the Children UK			X	X					
Phase II	**Field Testing and Collection of Data**										
a.	Training of Field Coordinators						X				
b.	Production of Instruments						X				
c.	Field Preparation							X			
d.	Final Administration and Data Collection							X			
Phase III	**Coding, Scoring, Entering, Cleaning, Tabulation**								X		
Phase IV	**Data Analysis and Report Writing**										
a.	Trainings in Data Analysis (Statistical Analysis. Interpretation of Results) and Report Writing	Series of trainings in Data analysis by GZT, World Bank				X-X-X					
b.	Workshop (Review of Data and Agreement on Report Format)								X		
c.	Statistical Analysis of Data and Reporting	Joint review of data with GZT, World Bank							X	X	
Phase V	**National Seminar on the Findings and implications of the Project**										
a.	Publication of national report and thematic leaflets										X
b.	National Seminar on the Findings and Implications of the Project										X
c.	International Reporting										X

EFA -> Quality Education for All

Monitoring
Learning Achievement (MLA)

Tajikistan
Central Asia

Larissa Savitskaya

Master's Thesis
CIE, UMASS
KAZAKHSTAN

Tajikistan overview

* Population – 6.4 mln; * 85% - Muslims; * Independents State (1991); * Civil War (1992-1997)

Education in Tajikistan

- Constitution – equal rights
- Literacy rate - 99.5% (2002)
- UNDP HDR - #112 (from 173)
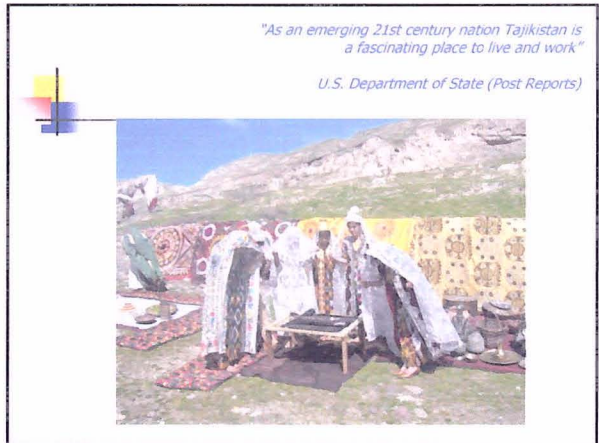- Orphans, homeless, refugees, street children
BUT
- Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
- Millennium Development Goals
- National Plan of Action for EFA
- Declaration of Political Rights for Women, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

School Profile
(based on a couple of visited schools only)

The Mandate –
Jomtien 1990
Dakar 2000

Jomtien – World Declaration on Education for All 1990
... *whether people actually learn*
... *whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills and values.*

Article 4: Focusing on Learning Acquisition

Framework of Action on Education for All (EFA) 2000
... *quality of education*
... *achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.*

EFA Goal N° 6

Surveys of Learning Outcomes
(since 1992)

Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) I & II (1992-2005)

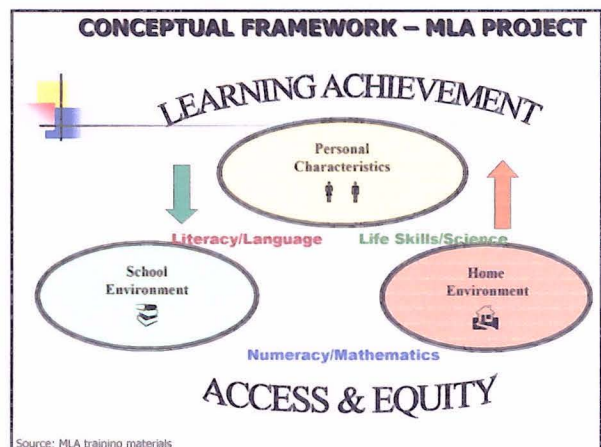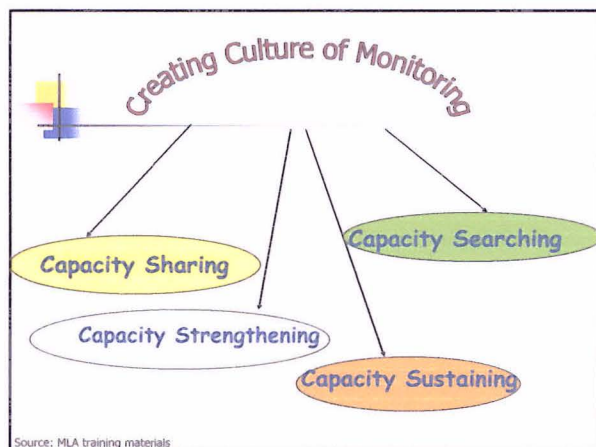Latin American Educational Quality Assessment Laboratory (Laboratorio)

Programme of Educational Systems Analysis (PASEC)

Surveys

OECD / Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

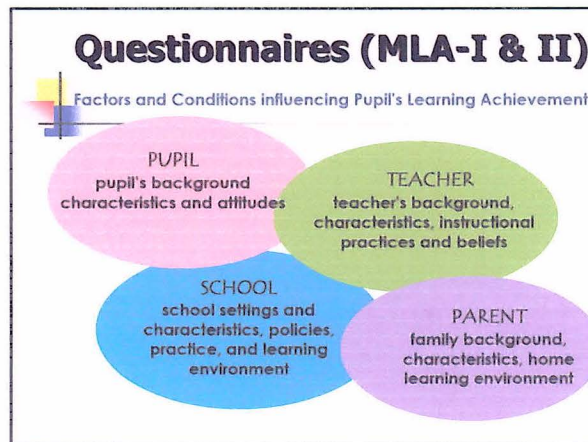Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ)

Third International Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS)

Source: MLA training materials

Creating Culture of Monitoring

Capacity Sharing

Capacity Searching

Capacity Strengthening

Capacity Sustaining

Source: MLA training materials

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – MLA PROJECT

LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT

Personal Characteristics

Literacy/Language

Life Skills/Science

School Environment

Home Environment

Numeracy/Mathematics

ACCESS & EQUITY

Source: MLA training materials

4

Monitoring Learning Achievement

MLA-1

end of primary school – 4th grade

- *Tests in Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills*

MLA-2

end of secondary school – 8th /9th grades

- *Tests in Mathematics and Science with Life Skills*

Questionnaires (MLA-I & II)

Factors and Conditions influencing Pupil's Learning Achievement

PUPIL
pupil's background characteristics and attitudes

TEACHER
teacher's background, characteristics, instructional practices and beliefs

SCHOOL
school settings and characteristics, policies, practice, and learning environment

PARENT
family background, characteristics, home learning environment

---

What has been done regionally on MLA

Almaty, Kazakhstan (1999)
- Launching MLA-1
- Development of MLA-1 instruments

Almaty, Kazakhstan (2002)
- Launching MLA-2
- Development of MLA-2 instruments

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (2002)
- Piloting of MLA-2 instruments

Almaty, Kazakhstan (2004)
- Results and Lessons Learned from MLA-1 and MLA-2
- Reinforce MLA in the region

- MLA-1 was implemented in:
  - Kazakhstan (1999),
  - Kyrgyzstan (1999),
  - Uzbekistan (2000),
  - Tajikistan (2002)

- MLA-2 was implemented in:
  - Kyrgyzstan (2002-2003)

- MLA-1 and MLA-2
  - Tajikistan (2005)

WHY MLA?

- national capacities;
- monitoring culture;
- life skills (nutrition, safe behavior, sanitation, etc.);
- disparities (gender, urban/rural, state language/other languages, etc.);
- factors, explaining the differences;
- databases for informative decision-making;
- national multidisciplinary teams;
- simple and workable approach - affordable budget.

Policy changes in Kyrgyzstan (MLA-2003)

- New courses (Life Skills);
- Role of principals re-considered;
- Modifications in "Concept of Financing in Education", "Law About Education"; "Concept for Education Reform by 2010"
- National Plan of Action for EFA;
- State Program "Aiyl Mektebi".

Why MLA in Tajikistan in 2005?

- data on quality of education
- no national baseline study
- interest in measuring donors projects' effects
- comparative analysis

Planned activities for February-March 2005

- National Task Force;
- Pre-final set of MLA instruments;
- Plan of action;
- Piloting of instruments.

What were the key meetings?

- Meetings with the First Deputy Minister of Education
- Round-table with International Organizations
- Official meetings with National Task Force
- MLA workshop (4 days)
- School visits (2-hours drive from Dushanbe)
- "Recruiting" partners and NTF (43 meetings)

Good news

- Interest from key stakeholders

- Other student assessments (IBET, SBET, Student Assessment)

- Utilization of MLA instruments

- Second MLA (2002)

MLA-2005 Partners

- Initiated by Institute for In-service Teacher Training

  Ministry of Education, Teacher Trade Union, Pedagogical Academy,.

  UNICEF, World Bank, USAID, Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children UK/USA, OSI/Soros Foundation, ADB, GTZ, UNESCO, ...
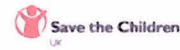
CO-SHARING AND CO-PARTICIPATION

- National Task Force/Technical Committees

- Sharing costs, expertise and experts

- Sharing instruments

- Sharing network

- Sharing knowledge about "locality"

Challenges

1. No monitoring unit within MoE

2. Lack of ownership and data use

3. Availability of statistical capacities and expertise

4. National scale of the study

5. Involvement of pre-trained professionals

6. Multi-side agreement

Creating National Task Force

- *Steering Committee*
- *Project Coordinator and the Project Office*
- *Technical Committees*

What are some concerns to be re-addressed?

- Peace Building/Peace Keeping notion
- Key operational concepts (quality of education)
- Life Skills – understanding, integration
- Gender-sensitive instruments
- Local innovations
- National sampling plans
- Scheme of coordination, reporting and accountability between committees

Strategic Recommendations

- Regular and systematic monitoring; separate monitoring unit within MoE
- Keep focus on
  - *Capacity building with national counterparts*
  - *Clear communication with MoE*
  - *Ownership by the MoE*
  - *Inter-agency coordination*
- Composition of technical committees, appreciation of trained experts, use of local knowledge
- IO's: consolidate, not duplicate efforts Partnership between locals (MoE<->local research, NGOs, etc)
- Utilization and operationalization of data
- Policy implications; shortened cycle ...

Next Steps

- Finalise the instruments and methodology
- Update and share with the partners (list-serve)
- NTF groups: critical re-consideration
- Key documents, key decisions